

A Patristic Commentary



THE BOOK OF Amos

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A COMMENTARY ON

THE BOOK OF AMOS

By
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AN INTRODUCTION

Amos:

(1) 'Amos' is a Hebrew word, meaning (A bearer of burden), or (a burden); As according to the Jewish tradition, the prophet Amos was slow of speech and slow of tongue. And his name, as well, conforms with the goal of his book, which is to reveal the heavy burden of sin, un-endurable and unacceptable to God, whoever the sinner may be; He who will punish both the Jews and the Gentiles for their sins.

(2) Amos is considered the first of the 'Writing prophets'; He wrote his prophecies in a poetic, sweet, and simple way; albeit being less eloquent than that of 'Joel'. His book came loaded with homologies; And having lived in an agricultural atmosphere, very close to the wilderness; it was also loaded with portraits drawn from the life of the dwellers of villages, on one side, and of the wilderness on the other.

(3) From his talk (1: 1; 7: 10), it is evident that he was a contemporary of the reigns of Uzziah king of Judah, and of Jeroboam the second son of Joash, king of Israel; before the famed earthquake (1: 1; 5: 9), to which the prophet Zechariah referred 300 years later (Zechariah 14: 5). Most probably he prophesied around the year 760 B.C.; a contemporary of the prophets Hosea (in the last years of his life); of the early ministry of the prophet Isaiah; And in his days, as well, the prophet Jonah the son of Amittai prophesied in Israel (2 Kings 14: 25) ¹.

(4) He lived in Tekoa, about 12 miles south of Jerusalem, a member of a poor unknown family, who humbly described himself: "*I am no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I am a herdsman, and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel'*" (Amos 7: 14, 15).

(5) Although he was raised in Tekoa – in the kingdom of Judah – yet he went to Bethel, where the main temple of the north kingdom of Israel has been. His prophecies about the devastation of that kingdom because of its sins stirred up Amaziah, the chief priest of Bethel, who reported him to Jeroboam the second, king of Israel, as a traitor; and ordered him to leave town. He probably wrote his book after going back to his home town Tekoa².

The circumstances around him:

(1) On the political side, the prophet Amos has been a contemporary of Jeroboam the second, the grandson of Jahu the great leader who killed the evil queen Jezabel and her descendants. Jeroboam was famed for his power and might, that caused his kingdom

¹ J. H. Raven: *O.T. Introduction* N.Y., 1910, P. 219.

² *Ibid.*, 218.

to extend and flourish. At the same time 'Uzziah' king of Judah, famed, as well for his power and success, his kingdom was also well established.

As another support on the political side; The kingdom of Aram (Syria), at that time, was preoccupied with, and exhausted by war against Assyria; Israel got back much of her land that Aram has previously taken by force. And Assyria, during the days of Amos, peacefully coexisted with Egypt, and no longer carried out attacks against it, going through Israel, killing and plundering its people.

(2) That political stability and prosperity of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, led to the flourishing of their foreign trade, that extended to Damascus; leading to a rise in the economic level of the two kingdoms; and, at the same time, to the appearance of two categories of people: an extremely rich category of traders; and an extremely poor one of farmers, who moaned under the great cruelty and oppression of the rich category.

As Amos was raised among those poor people, practicing a life of deprivation and intense poverty; and, at the same time, watching from afar, the intense riches lived by the other category; his prophecies came like a social revolution against injustice, oppression, and corruption; It was difficult and painful for him to see the rich lying on ivory beds, while his poor brethren were sold for a pair of sandals!

That great social and wealth gap, led, as well, to bitter corruption, as is clear in Amos' prophecies, that revealed horrible portraits of adultery, deception, bribes, and lies, etc.

(3) That enormous wealth of the rich, made them practice the worship of God, as mere offerings of money and sacrifices to the temple; As though God could be bought by their money, or bribed by their offerings... Something that created a break between the rite and the spirit; The life of worship became too far from the practical spiritual behavior; And the sacrifices lost their theological and spiritual concept.

(4) That political stability, together with the enormous wealth, also led to a sort of fanatic nationalism without a spirit; that made them assume that Jehovah is a God, special for them, who shows partiality for them at the expense of the Gentiles; whatever their evil is. That is why this prophet came to confirm that God is the "God of all", who do not endure sin, whoever the one who commits it, whether a Jew or a Gentile; and presenting salvation, "*all the Gentiles are called by His name*" (Amos 9: 12).

Attributes of the prophet Amos:

This book reveals the following aspects of the attributes of this prophet:

(1) His humility: Responding to a question by Amaziah the chief priest of Bethel about his true identity, he said: "*I was no prophet, nor a son of a prophet, but I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock*" (Amos 7: 14, 15); not ashamed to reveal his lowly and humble profession.

(2) His courage: Before Amaziah, with such high authority and power, because of his connection to the king, Amos remained faithful to his mission; He never faltered nor feared him, but testified to the truth, prophesied about the devastation of his house, and spoke the word of God, faithfully, and without any compliment or flattery.

(3) His wisdom: He spoke, not only to the rulers and the elite, but to all categories of the people, for the sake of the penitence of all.

(4) His job as a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit, gave him the chance of a life of contemplation; that led him to portray the atmosphere in which he lived, with a flaring spirit and a serious and faithful heart.

Themes of the book of Amos:

Beside proclaiming the judgment of God on Israel because of their corruption, this book also reveals God's justice in His condemnation of all the Gentiles that follow lead. Yet, at the same time it presents reproach and threat, it opens the doors of hope before all.

1- Judgment of the Gentiles	1 – 2
2- Sermons to Israel	3 – 6
3- Visions and the promises of salvation	7 – 9

THE FIRST SECTION

**JUDGMENT OF THE GENTILES, AND
OF ISRAEL**

(Chapters 1 and 2)

- 1- Judgment of the neighboring Gentile nations**
- 2- Judgment of Judah and Israel**

Chapter 1
Chapter 2

This book, being as a whole, addressed to Israel because of mixing the worship of the true God with idol worship; beside the level of iniquities and oppression they have reached; That is why, it proclaimed to Israel, by talking about the sins of the neighboring Gentile nations, and those of the kingdom of Judah, that the Holy God does not endure sin, whatever would be its source.

The following is a list of names of those Gentile nations, and the foremost sin of each:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1- Syria (Aram) | :Pride (the human ego) |
| 2- Palestine | :Slavery trade (love of the world) |
| 3- Phoenicia (Tyre) | :Breaking the covenant of brotherhood (1 Kings 5: |
| 1-12) | |
| 4- Edom | :Hatred and love of bloodshed |
| 5- The Emmonites | :Cruelty, because of greed |
| 6- The Moabites | Ferocity (Robbing the bones of the king of Edom) |
| 7- Judah | Disregard of the divine commandment |
| 8- Israel | :Falling into idolatry and its iniquities |
| | Diversion from the true spirit of the rite of worship |
| | Oppression and tyranny |
| | Denial of God who cares for them. |

CHAPTER 1

JUDGMENT OF THE NEIGHBORING GENTILE NATIONS

In preparation for talking about the judgment on Israel, God proclaimed the judgment of the neighboring Gentile nations; to confirm the extent of His detest for evil, and His non-partiality to one nation at the expense of another; or to a person at the expense of another.

1- Introduction	1 – 2
2- Judgment on Damascus	3 – 5
3- Judgment on Gaza	6 – 8
4- Judgment on Tyre	9 – 10
5- Judgment on Edom	11 – 12
6- Judgment on the Ammonites	13 – 15

1- INTRODUCTION:

“The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake”(Amos 1: 1)

The prophet Amos did not feel ashamed of proclaiming his profession as a herdsman in Tekoa, and a tender of sycamore fruit; which is only done by the lowly and the needy. Not mentioning his father’s name is because he belonged to a poor unknown family.

By saying: *“The words of Amos which he saw”*, and not which he heard or said; He confirms that the words he is proclaiming, are not his own, but are the fruit of divine visions and proclamations through the Holy Spirit.

He told about the location of his hometown, and the date of his prophetic work; which we mentioned in the introduction.

“And he said: ‘The Lord roars from Zion, and utters His voice from Jerusalem; The pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of the Carmel withers’” (Amos 1: 2)

That is how he began his prophecy; Dwelling in Tekoa, on the rim of the wilderness, has probably provided him with an experience of the roar of the lion that brings terror to the hearts of the herdsmen, and of the farmers. Amos likened the wrath of God over sin to a roaring lion, saying: *“A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?”* (Amos 3: 8). And said that the lion’s roar does not come from void, or emerge without cause: *“Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?”* (Amos 3: 4)

The prophets Hosea and Joel spoke of God – blessed is His name – as a Lion that the earth and heavens will shake when He roars; and everyone will realize that He is the shelter and the stronghold of His people; That He dwells among them in the mountain of His sanctuary in Jerusalem, that no alien would ever pass through it again (Joel 3: 16, 17); ... And that when He roars, He shall gather His people from Egypt and Assyria, and let them dwell in their own houses (Hosea 11: 11, 12).

Here, however, the prophet Amos sees the Holy God as Lion, lying in Zion, roaring with His voice, because of the sins of Israel, Judah, and all the neighboring Gentile nations; and because He does not endure seeing the sin coming close to His

sanctuary and surrounding it. When He roars, the foundations of sin will shake, and the works of the old man will be destroyed; Fire will come out of His mouth, to burn up all its palaces, and to scatter its being.

When the Lion roars, the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of the Carmel, the most fertile land, withers; And all will realize that the voice of the Lord will dry up everything set upon evil, and will destroy all the fruits of corruption.

The word of God is not set upon complimenting, flattering, or faltering between the good and the evil; But is set upon the destruction of evil to set the good in its place; Or is set upon the crucifixion of the old man, to proclaim the resurrection of the New Man. The Lion, coming out from the tribe of Judah has proclaimed this, by saying: *“No one puts a piece of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved”* (Matthew 9: 16, 17). And according to St. Ambrose: [The Lord commands us not to mingle the new with the old; And the apostle instructs us not to put on a new garment over an old one; but to take off the old garment and put on the new one, that *“we shall not be found naked”* (2 Corinthians 5: 2-4)¹].

Jacob was aware of that when he blessed his son Judah, from whose seed the Lion who will roar against the sin, and who will terrify death, is to come; saying: *“You are a lion’s cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness – which dares rouse him up?”* (Genesis 49: 9). He saw him, crouching like a lion on the cross, roaring on the sin that corrupted the human life, killing His prey – the devil and his works – and granting sanctification to humanity, turning it into the holy Zion and Jerusalem.

Actually, Amos’ prophecy, as a whole, is a roar of the Lion from Zion; It starts by terrifying chastisements: fire burning up palaces, destroying strongholds, and scattering the inhabitants, whether of the Jews or of the Gentiles; ... Yet, not to remain ruins with no dwellers, but to open wide the doors of hope, by the end of the prophecy. In place of the palaces, *“On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of olds”*; He will dwell in its midst, and *“All the Gentiles are called by His name”* (Amos 9: 11, 12). He breaks down and builds up; He uproots and plants; He destroys the old man, to set the new man in us instead! That is the roar of the Lion from Zion, His voice from the holy Jerusalem!

2- JUDGMENT ON DAMASCUS:

In the judgment on the Gentiles and on Judah, Amos followed the same pattern to proclaim that the Author of the judgment is “God Himself”; Their three and four transgressions; Not turning away the punishment; And on sending a burning fire; ... Yet each nation, had her one or more specific transgression.

At the beginning of every judgment he says: *“Thus says the Lord ...”* (Amos 1: 3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2: 1, 4, 6). Even if not all nations worship Him, Yet He is God of the whole earth, Judges all, condemns all, and also cares for all!

¹ القديس أمبروسيوس: تفسير لو 5: 27 الخ (ترجمة مدام عايدة حنا بسطا).

As to His talk about their three and four transgressions; These two figures refer here to several concepts; of which are the following:

(1) The figure 3 refers to the human soul, being created according to the image and likeness of the Trinity; Whereas the figure 4 refers to the body, being taken from the earth with its four directions (east, west, north, and south). It is as though God judges us on our mental sins (like pride and hate); and on our physical sins (like the love of luxury, gluttony, and carnal lusts). And according to St. Augustine: [Because sins could be committed by the mind or will alone, or together with the works of the body, to be seen ... Namely, three as the nature of the soul; and four because of the body; Man being formed of both¹].

(2) According to **St. Jerome**, the three and four transgressions, mean the sin, having evolved into its third and fourth generation; turning from being merely a thought in the mind, to be proclaimed through the speech, then translated into action, and finally turns into a habit. God, as it is written: *“is longsuffering, and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children in the third and fourth generation”* (Numbers 14: 18). This means that God does not punish us on our thoughts on the spot, but on the evil works, and the sinful habits coming from them; according to the words that came on the mouth of Amos: *“For the three transgression and the four of so and so city...”* (Amos 1: 3)².

Commenting again on those three and four transgressions, **St. Jerome** says they are:

- a- Thinking of evil (the first transgression)
- b- Doing the evil (the second transgression).
- c- Not repenting; namely, continuing to do it (the third transgression)
- d- Preaching it (the fourth transgression)

He says: [It is as though the Lord says: You accepted evil, and I forgave you; You did it, and I forgave you; You did not repent it, and I still forgave you; Are you going to preach it as well?! That is what the book means concerning the three and four transgressions³].

These are the tree and the four transgressions, that He will not turn away its punishment; but will send a fire of His wrath to devour the palaces of their evil. Although He does not endure sin, Yet He loves the sinners! This fire is probably the natural fruit of the sin, the consuming fire; God will let man harvest the fruit of his work; embrace the fire of his sin; to consume his palaces of vanity, that bear shining, yet temporary glitter.

That is concerning the Gentile nations as a whole; Now let us talk about each of them:

Damascus, the capital of Syria (Aram). From which Israel lived about a whole century in a state of terror; And some of the contemporaries of Amos lived through the wars brought up against Israel by Hazael king of Aram and his son Ben-Hadad (2 Kings 8: 7-15. 28-29; 10: 32-33; 13: 3-7, 22-25); Gilead, east of the Jordan, and north of Syria, has been the stage of those wars. The prophet Elisha, seeing, by the eye of prophecy, how bitter and fierce they will be, he wept ; And when Hazael -- before he took over the

¹ Ser. On N.T. Lessons. Ser. 1: 34.

² Ep. 130: 8.

³ On Ps. Ho 1; Comm. On Amos 1: 5.

kingdom – asked him why he weeps, he answered: *“Because I see the evil that you will do to the children of Israel: Their strongholds you will set on fire, their young men you will kill with the sword, and you will dash their children, and rip open their women with child”* (2 kings 8: 12).

As to the fruits of this ferocity:

(1) God sent a fire into the house of Hazael, that devoured the palaces of Ben-Hadad (4). If that king and his son thought that they could destroy and take over the kingdom of God; God with the fire of His justice returned the fire of their evil over their palaces, the center of their authority, the location of their plots, and the place of their security.

In bitterness I say that our inner Hazael is nothing but our human ‘ego’, which occupies the heart as her palace; And, together with the evil it produces (Ben-Hadad), it makes war against our energies, talents, and potentials, to the account of evil; instead of letting God reign over the heart, and of working as a tool of righteousness by God. ... While assuming that it is able to reign, to have authority, and to dwell securely in its inner palace, the ‘ego’ actually bring upon itself a fire that would consume its potentials, and make it lose all its authority.

Let is then deliver our inner palace to our Lord Jesus, instead of delivering it to Hazael and to Ben-Hadad, to make it their dwelling place, and the center of their kingdom. Let the Lord proclaim in it His Kingdom, so strongly, that no fire of evil, especially that of the ‘ego’, would be able to approach; being flared by the heavenly fire of the Holy Spirit Himself, Who conforms it day to day, so that it may eventually reach the full measure of the stature of Christ; And who sets forth with it from glory to glory, to bring it forth in Jesus Christ, into the bosom of the Father, where it will forever settle.

Let us deliver our palace to the heavenly King with His fiery Spirit, to keep Hazael and his son Ben-Hadad from dwelling in it.

(2) God broke down the strongholds surrounding Damascus; ... Not that man would live with no strongholds; But, instead of the strongholds made of stone, he would find in the Lord Himself, his stronghold and the refuge of his life. ... When there are those human arms of stone, man would lean on them; That is why the Lord destroys them, to grant us instead the eternal arms, and we would say: *“I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold”* (Psalm 18: 1, 2).

Let the mortal stony walls of Damascus be destroyed; that the Lord would provide us with Himself, the Rock of Ages, a Stony Wall to which the serpent could never approach, to deceive us while we are inside it. We would enter into it and find comfort; A fiery divine wall would surround us, and flare our depths, to become like the heavenly creatures, like *“His ministers, the flames of fire”* (Psalm 104: 4).

(3) The valley of Aven – also called the valley of vanity, or the valley of idols – turned into a ruin with no inhabitants. With evil working in man, he assumes that he has acquired the human wisdom, that makes him rich at the expense of others; to find out that he has acquired in his heart a valley of vanity, or a center of idol worship. By evil, he actually purchases a void; and by malice, he acquires a deprivation! That is the portion of the wicked about whom the Psalmist said: *“They shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb”* (Psalm 37: 2).

(4) Every great (who holds the scepter) from 'Beth Eden' (the house of gladness and rejoice) will die. Man, through his preoccupation with temporal pleasures, will lose everything great and strong in him.

(5) The people of Syria (the Aramites) shall go captive to Kir in the kingdom of Mady. This was historically realized as it came in (2 Kings 16:9; Isaiah 22: 5, 6).

Who are those Aramites, inhabitants of Jerusalem, on whom Hazeiel and his son Ben-Hadad reign, but the energies of man, his potentials, and his mental (mind) and physical talents?! When Hazeiel ; namely, the 'ego' reigns on them, they would turn into servitude, and would work to the account of the kingdom of Mady.... Man would lose his energies, not to live without any, but to live with energies dedicated to evil, and deviated from their exalted mission... Man, with all his potentials, would work to the account, and at the service of the devil; Instead of having them exalted by the Holy Spirit, to work to the account of the Kingdom of God.

In short, the fruit of what Hazeiel and his son Ben-Hadad have done; namely, of pride, and self-esteem, is that man's inner palace; and his stronghold in which he found refuge, would be destroyed; Would lose every greatness and strength, as in Beth Eden; Would acquire deprivation in Beth Eden, or house of gladness and rejoice; And all his energies would be captivated to the account of the devil! In other words, he would lose his authority (his palace), his peace (his strongholds), and his gladness (in Beth Eden).

That is what God meant by the judgment of Damascus So that when man realizes the extent of complete deprivation and utter devastation, he has reached; he would take refuge in God alone, which would restore to him, double as what he lost, on an exalted heavenly level.

3- JUDGMENT OF GAZA:

Gaza was the capital of the Philistines in those days, whose transgression was their abuse of the children of Judah who resorted to their land from the face of Sennacherib the king of Assyria. They took them captives and sold them as slaves to the Edomites, the worst of their enemies; with the intention to wipe away the name of Israel, according to the words of the Psalmist: "*Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more*" (Psalm 83: 4). That is why the fire returned over them to devour the palaces of their main cities: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron.

St. Augustine believes that the word Philistines means (those fallen through drinking wine)¹; and refers to the souls drunkards by the love of the world and its pleasures. While **St. Jerome** interprets this name as (death by an intoxicating drink); believing that it refers to those who drink the cup of seduction of the devil, as a poison for the fast perdition and fall of the soul².

4- JUDGMENT OF TYRE:

Phoenicia and its capital Tyre, used to boast a mighty fleet and a huge trade, on an international level. Disregarding the covenant of brotherhood between their king Hiram and king Solomon (1 Kings 5: 1-12; 9: 10-14), and delivering up the whole Israeli captivity, who resorted to their land, to their enemy Edom; God allowed for their palaces

¹ On Ps. 83: 5.

² حزقيال، 1981، ص 174، 175.

to be devoured by fire, which was literally realized when Nebuchadnezzar put it under siege, and took it over in the sixth century B.C.

Both **St. Augustine**¹ and **St. Jerome**², believe that the word 'Tyre' means affliction or tribulation; That is why what came concerning Tyre in the book of Ezekiel (Chapter 28), refers to the devil who bring men forth into tribulations and Satanic temptations.

5- JUDGMENT OF EDMON:

Edom was Esau the brother of Jacob. The Edomites took an adversary position against the children of Israel (Jacob) as they were crossing the wilderness, denying them the right of passage through their territory (Numbers 20: 14-21). They often gloated on Israel's misfortunes; And sometimes attacked them³.

The word 'Edom' is derived from 'Adam', meaning (a bloody man) or (an earthly man)⁴; and refers to love of bloodshed for the sake of earthly benefits.

For being flared with the fire of evil and that of the love of bloodshed; God returned the fire over Edom to burn down the palaces of his main province 'Teman' (Teman was a tribe named after the firstborn of Eliphaz the son of Esau, and the land where he dwelt) (Genesis 26: 11, 15, 42). It is located north of Edom (Ezekiel 25: 13); its inhabitants were known for their wisdom (Jeremiah 49: 7, 13)⁵.

'Bozrah', whose palaces were also burned, was also a city in the land of Edom (Isaiah 34: 6; 63: 1). The word 'Bozrah' in Hebrew means a fortress or a sheep-hold. It was utterly devastated as prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 49: 13)... If 'Bozrah' represents the fortress of Teman in Edom; Evil would burn up its goods, destroy its possibilities, and turn it into ruins.

6- JUDGMENT ON THE AMMONITES:

In our study of the book of Ezekiel we saw that the Ammonites were the descendants of 'Ben Ammi' the son of 'Lot' (Genesis 19: 38); a hard-hearted race, who used to offer their own children as sacrifices to the god Milcom (1 Kings 11: 5-33); and were continuously at war against the children of Israel⁶.

The Ammonites, representing ferocity based on greed; "***ripped open the women with a child in Gilead, that they might enlarge their territory***" (Amos 1: 13). A horrible portrait of how greed corrupts the heart of man and his natural compassion for the sake of earthly profit; and transforms him into a wild animal with no compassion on weak women and helpless fetuses.

Their natural fruit would be that the walls of their capital 'Rabbah' would be kindled by fire, its palaces would be devoured; would turn into a field of battle and tempest; and their king and princes will be captivated. And if the word 'Rabbah' means (great), he who treat others with cruelty and destroy them for the sake of his earthly personal profit, and to become the greatest and richest of all, will soon have his walls destroyed, his palaces burnt down, his inner life turn into a bitter battle field; will lose his

¹ Pl 25: 240.

² On Ps. 83: 5.

⁴ On Ps. 83: 5.

⁵ New Westminster DICT., of Bible, p. 929.

³ حزقيال ص 173 - 174.

⁶ حزقيال ص 169 - 171.

true peace, and his thought, heart, and all his energies will be captivated by his enemy. When he assumes that he has got everything through his might, he will find himself in an utter void, and a complete loss, even of his life, peace, and potentials.

CHAPTER 2

JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

In this chapter he resumes his talk about the judgment of the Gentile nations around Judah and Israel; then talks about the judgment of Judah, and finally talks in more detail about the judgment of Israel, which is the main issue,

1- Judgment of Moab	1 – 3
2- Judgment of Judah	4 – 5
3- Judgment of Israel	16 – 16

1- JUDGMENT OF MOAB:

In our study of the book of Ezekiel, we saw that ‘Moab’ was a descendant of the son of ‘Lot’ by his older daughter. He was called ‘Moab’ on account of that his mother got him from her father; as the word ‘Moab’ means (from the father)¹. **St. Jerome** believes that the older daughter, by getting her father drunk, sleeping with him to give birth to her son ‘Moab’; She refers to Satan and all those who rebel against, and not think of God, their Father². While **St. Augustine** believes that the children of Moab refer to those who use the law in a wrong unlawful and offensive way; the way the older daughter of ‘Lot’ did, who used her father the wrong way³.

The crime of Moab was that he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime; which, although looking as some minor offense, yet God hates sin whatever its magnitude is in our eyes. The amazing thing is that, although those bones belonged to a king adversary to the people of God; Yet God does not like ferocity or violence, even if directed to dead adversaries.

The fruit of that ferocity was to send a fire upon Moab, devouring the palaces of its most fortified city ‘Kerioth’, most probably its capital (Kherbet El Rabbah, 14 miles south of the river Arnon); To turn Moab into a battle field, consumed with tumult, with shouting and trumpet sound; To cut off the judge from its midst, to become deprived of justice and wisdom; And that all its princes are to be slain.

What Moab did to the dead bones, with a wicked soul and a cruel heart, would return upon its cities, princes, and people!

2- JUDGMENT OF JUDAH:

If the word ‘Judah’ means (confession); those who were committed to proclaim their faith and to confess it through abiding to the divine commandment, ***“have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies led them astray, lies after which their fathers walked”*** (Amos 2: 4).

Instead of confessing the truth, they accepted vanity, and walked behind lies!

It is painful to see the fire devour the palaces of Jerusalem. If the word ‘Jerusalem’ means (vision of God); Going astray from the commandment of God, and walking behind lies, would corrupt the inner insight, and deprive it of the vision of God. Hence the Lord says: ***“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”*** (Matthew 5: 8). And as **St. Augustine** says: [Let us purify our hearts by faith, to be qualified for the

¹ حزقيال ص 169 - 171.

² On Ps. Hom. 34.

³ On Ps. Hom. 83: 5.

indescribable unseen vision¹]. ...All what the holy books present, are to purify the inner insight from what may deprive it from seeing God. The physical eye is created to see the temporal light; And in case some foreign body enters into it, it would disturb its clarity and interfere with its ability to see that light. The same way with the heart's eye, If it is disturbed or wounded, it would not dare or be able to see the light of righteousness ... Now, what would disturb the clarity of your heart's eye, and even blind it, other than the lust, the meanness, the iniquity, and the pleasure of the world²?!

3- JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL:

Before presenting any sermons to Israel, he revealed to them three aspects of the secret behind their judgment.

- (1) The oppression they practice (6 – 8).
- (2) Paying back the goods of God with denial (9 – 12).
- (3) Their falling together under judgment (13 – 16).

(1) The Oppression they practice: (verses 6 – 8)

“Thus says the Lord: ‘For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of sandals’” (Amos 2: 6)

This is probably the first written charge addressed by a ‘Writing Prophet’ against Israel, in the name of the Lord Himself: *“That they sell the righteous for silver”*. Who is this righteous sold for silver, but the Lord Christ, who is alone righteous and with no sin, who was sold by the traitor Judas for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave (Matthew 27: 5; Luke 22: 5); The Lord who purchased us, not with gold or silver, but with His precious blood?!; The Lord who presented His life to redeem a slave; And the slave who sold His Lord for silver; about whom the prophet Zechariah bitterly said: *“And the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter – that princely price they set on Me”* (Zechariah 11: 12, 13) !!!

It is the sin of all the generations; Israel sells the Lord for thirty pieces of silver; The silver of this world being in her eyes more exalted than the life with the Lord; And the temporal things are evaluated more valuable than the divine!

What does he mean by selling the poor for a pair of sandals (Amos 2: 6)?! ... Who is that ‘poor’, sold for a pair of sandals?! But the Lord Christ, who presents Himself to us through the poor, the suffering, and the needy?! God commanded His prophet Moses to take off his sandals to be qualified to tread unto the divine sanctuaries, to behold the secrets of God, to enter with Him into an amiable debate, and to be given the shepherding task (Exodus 3). For the same reason, the Lord commanded His disciples not to wear sandals (Matthew 10: 10); so as not to be among those bound to the earth; but, through lifting their hearts up to heaven, they could draw with them every heart by the Holy Spirit, to where Christ sits. But man, instead of taking off his sandals to live in heaven, and to exalt to divine levels, he foolishly sells the poor (Christ Himself) for a pair of sandals; preferring being connected to the earthlies, and walking in the temporals, to living in the heavenlies, and being liberated from the sandals.

¹ In Ioan 5: 8.

² خواطر فيلسوف في الحياة الروحية (الخوري يوحنا الحلو) بيروت 1970، ص 291، 292.

The scholar Origen¹ believes that the sandals refer to the dead temporal life, and to the love of vain appearances. Like making the sandals and the drums that give loud and empty sound, from the skin of dead animals; So is selling the Lord Christ, with His eternal glory, for the sake of the dead temporal life; Or for acquiring vain temporal honor, that has the shining appearance, with no inner serious work.

The Lord then came to reveal strange examples of transgressions committed by the Israelites, in which the most horrible defilement were mixed with oppression; which are:

a- ***“They who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth”*** (Amos 2: 7). Not only have they no compassion upon their poor brethren, but they cruelly oppress them, and trample their heads by their feet in the dust of the earth.

Whose head are they trampling by their feet into the dust of the earth, but that of the Lord Christ Himself, the Head of the whole church?! They despise Him and insult His precious salvation; About whom the apostle Paul says: *“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God under foot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?!”* (Hebrew 10: 29).

Despising the poor and insulting him, we are actually despising his Head, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. That is why **St. John Chrysostom** says: [How great is the stature of the poor, being considered as equivalent to a dwelling place of the Lord, where He can hide! The poor may appear as the one who stretches his hand to beg, Yet it is God Himself who receives your alms!] And on the tongue of the Lord, he also says: ‘You heard that I am clothed with light as a robe; Yet when you clothe a naked poor, I, Myself, would feel the warmth, and reward you for the cover! ²

b- ***“and push the afflicted out of the way”*** (Amos 2: 7) They do not stop at being negative, disregarding the poor and the afflicted; but if they happen to see him approaching an open way for his salvation, they would close it in his face; They actually work to the account of the kingdom of oppression!

c- ***“A man and his father go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name”*** (Amos 2: 7). What a horrible portrait of iniquity, for man and his father to partake of the sin of adultery with the same girl! And as said by **St. Basil the Great** in his letter to Diodorius: [There is no mention in the law of that particular transgression; as such a horrible thing is unimaginable, and does not need to be warned against!; According to the words of the apostle Paul: *“Fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints”* (Ephesians 5: 3) ³].

d- ***“They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god”*** (Amos 2: 8). They not only go to the heathen altars, and partake of the banquets of their temples; but they mix their uncleanness with cruelty; While pretending piety, they lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge from the poor who are unable to pay their debts; and they drink the wine of those condemned and could not pay the fines put on them.!! They pretend to worship, using the clothes and wine of the poor, who cannot acquire the necessities of life.

¹ للمؤلف: الخروج، 1981، ص 31، 32.

² للمؤلف: الحب والعطاء، 1970، ص 43.

³ Ep. 160: 3.

(2) Paying back the goods of God with denial: (verses 9 – 12)

By mentioning several examples of the bitter transgressions of the children of Israel, mixed with oppression and cruelty; he intends to confirm that they are without excuse; Instead of paying back the multitude of God's good, through living a holy life, they walk in denial.

“Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before you, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and was as strong as the oaks. Yet I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. Also it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorites I raised up some of your sons as prophets, and some of your young men as Nazirites. Is it not so, O children of Israel”, Says the Lord. But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying, ‘Do not prophesy’” (Amos 2: 9-12)

It is the perpetual story of man; God, in every generation presents salvation, and proclaims His exalted divine love for man; Yet man, in the foolishness of his heart pays this love back with denial.

Historically, God paved the way for the Israelites in the old; As the Amorites, their enemies, were giants like cedars, and as strong as oaks, God destroyed their fruit above, and uprooted them from beneath. Then He set forth, carrying His people as though on the wings of His exalted love, caring for them all along forty years through the wilderness, until He delivered to them the land of the Amorites. As a further sign of His love, He raised some of their sons as prophets, and some of their young men as Nazirites, consecrated by His name! Yet, they paid back His love with hatred, and God's gifts with denial and rebellion. They gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets not to utter the word of God. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [God made it a point to show that the Israelites are worthy of greater judgment; on account of that they transgressed after been given such great gifts¹].

Mentioning giving the Nazirites wine to drink, before commanding the prophets not to utter the word of God; is because drinking wine refers to man's loss of balance and wisdom; And to minister to God while intoxicated with wine, would lead to the corruption of the house of God, and the loss of its peace. And as said by **St. Jerome**: [Aaron and the other priests were commanded to refrain from drinking wine or any other intoxicating drink before entering into the temple, lest they die; That teaches us that those who minister in the church without reverence would die²]. If commanding the prophets to stop testifying to God, by proclaiming the word of prophecy, is a serious sin, It would be more so for those who enter the house of God; and not only refrain from uttering the truth, but non-reverently distort the truth, corrupts God's sanctuaries, and hinder the spiritual work.

What God did with Israel, He has done, and is still doing with each of us. The Amorite He destroyed before us is the devil who had authority for so long; Whom, being a giant like the cedar, and as strong as the oaks, we used to fear. But the Lord, with His cross, destroyed his authority, and by preaching Him, saw him fall like lightening from heaven (Luke 10: 18). God brought us forth, as though from the land of servitude, bearing us by His Holy Spirit, to inherit the land possessed for so long by the Amorite. Coming to

¹ On Priesthood 6: 11.

² Adv. Javinian 2: 15.

be kings and priests of the Lord, I wish we do not do like the Israelites, drink the wine of this world, and stop the Spirit of prophecy and of the testimony to the Lord.

(3) Their falling together under judgment: (verses 13 – 16)

To confirm to them, that having sinned, there is no possibility of escaping punishment; The Lord began by saying: *“Behold, I am weighed down by you, as a cart is weighed down that is full of sheaves”* (Amos 2: 13). God who carries the whole world by His might, groans because of our sins and iniquities, that weighs down on Him like a cart full of sheaves, to say: *“I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble for Me. I am weary of hearing them; I am weary of bearing them”* (Isaiah 1; !3, 14). Seeing His people’s apostasy, He bitterly says: *“My heart churns within Me”* (Hosea 11: 8).

I wish we are not like a cart full of the sheaves of evil, that weighs down the soul and heart of our Redeemer and Heavenly Father; and makes Him say: *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death ... O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me”* (Matthew 26: 38, 39). I wish that the fiery chariot of God, that carries His heavenly nature, would work in us; so as not to present a heavy burden that weighs Him down; but to fly high by the Holy Spirit of God, soaring to the heavenly places, from glory to glory with no hindrance.

I wish, instead of being like a cart full of sheaves of evil, that hinders the salvation work of God, we would become like a light and swift cloud that carries the Lord to come to Egypt to establish an altar in its midst (Isaiah 19).

“Therefore flight shall perish from the swift; and the strong shall not retain their strength, Nor shall the mighty deliver himself; He shall not stand who handles the bow; The swift of foot shall not deliver himself, Nor shall he who rides a horse, deliver himself. The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day’, says the Lord” (Amos 2: 14-19)

What a tough and difficult situation; No one whatever are his wisdom or his potentials, can flee from the judgment; Flight shall perish from the swift; namely, he who thinks of himself as clever, would not be able to deliver himself. On that day, when man falls under the heavy weight of his sins, his mental potentials to swift action, his strong body, his reputation of heroism, the bow in his hand, the horse he rides, or the mighty heart by which he is known; would not be enough to deliver him ... He will not only be unable to flee, but he would stand naked; as he is found not clothed by Christ, our righteousness!

I wish we acquire Jesus Christ within us; I wish we are clothed and be covered only by Him; I wish we enter and take refuge into Him: I wish we hold His cross as a bow, that would never fail: I wish our legs become strengthened to walk along the way of truth, and to have the possibility to set forth, as though by a heavenly chariot, and to have our hearts strengthened by Him; So that the day of the Lord would turn into a day of joy and conquest. Only Jesus is our strength, victory, spiritual weapon, eternal garment, glory and joy, that would never be taken away from us.

In the old, the work of the law has been to proclaim the vanity of all our human potentials for salvation; Not to live destroyed, but to receive our Christ as the source of our salvation.

The Psalmist looking around him for help among the rulers, and finding out how weak they are; he says: *“Do not put your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom*

there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish” (Psalm 146: 3). Finding no possibility of salvation even in his own parents, he bitterly says: *“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me”* (Psalm 27: 10); And finding no help among humans, he says: *“I said in my haste, all men are liars”* (Psalm 116: 11).

Thinking of himself as mighty and of possibilities, man is rebuked by the Lord, saying: *“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches”* (Jeremiah 9: 23); And in case he leans on his horses, he hears: *“A horse is a vain hope for safety”* (Psalm 33: 17); and, *“you said, ‘No, for we flee on horses’, ... We shall ride on swift horses’;... Therefore those who pursue you shall be (more) swift”* (Isaiah 30: 16).

Let us receive God Himself ; He is our salvation, wisdom, riches, strength, and everything for us.

THE SECOND SECTION

SERMONS TO ISRAEL

(Chapters 3 to 8)

Sermon 1: To the children of Israel (Chapter 3)

Sermon 2: To the cows of Bashan (Chapter 4)

Sermon 3: A lamentation on the house of Israel

Addressed to the virgin of Israel (Chapter 5: 1-17)

The first group of woes (Chapter 5: 18-27)

Against those who anticipate the day of the Lord without preparation.

The second group of woes (Chapter 6)

Against those who walk loosely in pride and haughtiness.

These sermons and the two groups of woes, are in essence, a call to repentance; exposing a multitude of the sins of the children of Israel – that, unfortunately are still committed by some believers in the New Testament – They reveal our weaknesses in our life with God, and our behavior and dealing with our brethren, and even with ourselves.; And they reveal, as well, God’s inevitable chastisement on us because of our sins, and to provoke us to return to Him ... Hence the repetition of certain phrases, like: “*Yet, you have not returned to Me*” (Amos 4: 11); “*Seek the Lord and live*” (Amos 5: 4, 6); “*Seek good and not evil*” (Amos 5: 14); “*Hate evil, love good; Establish justice in the gate*” (Amos 5: 15).

CHAPTER 3

THE FIRST SERMON TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

In this sermon, God presents a justification for judging His people:

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1- God punishes them on account of that they are His own people | 1 – 2 |
| 2- God does not punish without reason | 3 – 8 |
| 3- God will let the Gentiles testify against His people | 9 – 11 |
| 4- None of them will escape | 12 – 15 |

1- GOD PUNISHES THEM ON ACCOUNT OF THAT THEY ARE HIS OWN PEOPLE:

“Hear the word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities’”(Amos 3: 1, 2)

It is as though, with this introduction, God calls them to His tribunal, proclaims that He has the jurisdiction to try them, on account of being the whole tribe or family He brought up from the land of Egypt; rescued; cared for; called by His name; And has known of all the families of the earth. Yet this love and care, do not imply that He should close His eyes on their transgressions; but would rather put on them more responsibility; as He would never have fellowship with transgressors. He knew them, and they knew Him; as it is written *“In Judah, God is known”* (Psalm 76: 1); And the Lord Himself says: *“That servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed to him, they will ask the more”* (Luke 12: 47, 48). The more our knowledge is of God’s will, of His secrets, and of His exalted works of love; the more we shall be asked; and the greater will be our responsibility before Him than others; according to the words of St. Cyril the Great: [As far as he, who knows the will of his Master and ignore it, and does not do what befit it, the crime would be unquestionable¹].

2- GOD DOES NOT PUNISH WITHOUT REASON:

God, having the proper jurisdiction, called His people to trial before Him; And roars like a Lion, a sign that they are worthy of judgment. To reveal that He would not seek this trial for His people without reason, He enters with them into a mutual debate, to clarify the secrets of His trial, And He provides the evidence through the following seven questions:

“Can two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”

“Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?”

“Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?”

“Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it?”

“Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing?”

“Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?”

¹ In Luke, Ser. 93.

“Does disaster befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?” (Amos 3: 3 – 6)

If the answer to these seven questions is in the negative, He goes on to say: ***“Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?”*** (Amos 3: 7, 8)

If this talk revealed that this trial is not a fantasy, but is something very serious; and a matter of fact, realized not without cause; as the transgressions of those people have gone too far against the Holy God, as well as against themselves; These seven questions revealed as well, the following important and serious aspects that concern the relationship of God with His people; because of which this trial is being held:

(1) The need for a new covenant, as is clear from the first question, saying: “Can two walk together unless they have a prior appointment and agreement? ... Definitely not! How then can God walk together with His people, when the later has broken the covenant? About this, the Lord says: *“If by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, Then I will also walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins”* (Leviticus 26: 23, 24) That is why, there was an urgent need for setting a new covenant, by which God reconcile with His people; according to His proclamation to the prophet Jeremiah, saying: *“Behold, the day are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke,... . But this is the covenant ... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people”* (Jeremiah 31: 31-33).

That promise was realized on the Great Thursday, when the Lord Christ offered us His body and blood, as a new covenant, in which we encounter the Father, by uniting with Him in His Son, the crucified Jesus; By which we enjoy the body broken, and the blood shed, for the sake of our salvation; A new covenant, by which our sonhood to the Father and His fatherhood to us, are confirmed, through our union in the body of His only-begotten Son. Yes indeed, in Jesus Christ, the slain, we encounter the Father, and walk together with Him; having an agreement in the thought of His Son, and His eternal covenant.

(2) God proclaims that in this trial: In His justice, He will know no slothfulness; He will forsake us to the evil which we freely acquired for ourselves; ... He will be roaring like a lion in the thicket, where humanity is like a barren wilderness without fruit; We shall become a prey to be devoured; And He will be like a young lion which gets hold of the prey to take a portion of it; And there is no escape from the roaring lion or from the young lion, except by resorting to the cross, to encounter the Lion coming from the tribe of Judah, roaring, not on us, but on our sins, not to devour us, but to destroy the devil, our enemy! Let us then flee from the roaring divine wrath, because of our acceptance of the enemy; Let us flee to God our Savior, who will redeem us from that enemy!

(3) By presenting to us the parable of the bird which falls in a snare; or the snare that is taken up because it caught a bird; The Lord tends to proclaim that, in the trial, we are like a bird fallen in a snare; can we be saved on our own? By my Redeemer: *“I will say of the Lord, ‘He shall deliver (me) from the snare of the fowler, and from the perilous pestilence’”* (Psalm 91: 3); and, *“Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the*

fowler; the snare is broken, and we have escaped; Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124: 7, 8).

St. Jerome says: [What is the snare that is broken? The apostle says: "*The Lord will crush Satan under your feet shortly*" (Romans 16: 20); And, "... *that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil*" (2 Timothy 2: 26). There you see that Satan is the (fowler) who seeks to catch our souls to perdition, by a multitude of snares and deceptions of all kinds. As long as we are in state of grace, our souls are safe; but once we play with sin, our souls will get disturbed, and we would be like a ship in a storm, struck by mighty waves¹. He also says: Like the Lord who casts His net and catches a huge number of fish; And like His disciples, being fishermen, who gather those who receive faith in Him, and bring them over to Him; In the same way, the devil has his own hosts of demons, submitted to him, who set snares to catch and bring men over to him².

And **St. Augustine**, telling us the secret of our escape from the snare, says: [Because the Lord is in the soul, it escapes like a bird from a snare; ... Let the Lord be in you, to save you even from bigger threats, ... Be sure that the snare will be broken; ... And as the pleasures of the present life will not last long, but will eventually come to their ultimate end; I wish we would not be disturbed by them; So that when the snare is broken, we would joyfully say: "*The snare is broken, and we have escaped*". And in order not to assume that this could be done on your own, You should look for Him who works on saving you, and say: "*Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth*"³.

(4) "*Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?*". As we are in a perpetual state of spiritual war, as long as we are in this world, The enemy will not stop his attempts to snatch us from the Kingdom of God, to bring us over to that of his darkness. The Lord keeps on sending His ministers all the time to blow the trumpet of the gospel, until the ultimate conquest is realized. The apostle Paul says: "*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Ephesians 6: 10-12).

St. Augustine says: [Let us look at two enemies: the one we see, and the one we do not see; Man we can see, but the devil we cannot. Therefore, let us love the first, and be aware of the second; Let us pray for man, and pray against the devil]. And to explain this, he says: [We suffer from men who offend us, as being vessels of the devil, used by him, and as his tools, he moves them to his account⁴].

(5) "*Does disaster (evil) befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?*". By that, the Lord proclaims that He allows for the trial for the sake of chastisement.

Many Fathers, commenting on the word 'evil' that came here, and in many other similar instances; discern between two different kinds of evil: the evil by nature, contrary to virtue and goodness; and that which causes pain or anguish, and is counted by us as

¹ On Ps. Hom. 20.

² Ibid 51.

³ On Ps. 124.

⁴ Ibid 56.

‘evil’. As confirmed by **St. John Chrysostom**¹, as well as by father **John of Damascus**: [These words do not mean that God is the source of evil; As the word ‘evil’ is used in two ways: It may mean evil by nature, which is contrary to virtue, and is against the will of God; Or may mean what, according to our senses, we consider evil, because it may cause us sorrow and anguish; although it may actually be a sign of salvation, whose source, according to the Holy Book, is God Himself²]. And **father Theodore** says: [By His divine ordinance, God talks to humans, according to their own language and human feelings. A physician, cutting or burning human members to save a patient’s life, His actions may be considered by some people as a kind of evil³].

(6) God proclaims that when He allows for judgment or chastisement, “***He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets***”. In all the books of the prophets, we can see that God does not deal in a dictator’s way; but often enters into debates with His beloved subjects; And because of man’s weakness, He sometimes repeats what He says several times, in order that he would comprehend what are behind God’s exalted ordinances, as much as he can endure.

God loves man, and sometimes talks to him like man-to-man. When He intended to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah by fire, He said: “*Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do*” (Genesis 18: 17), He even allowed Abraham to ask Him: “*Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ... Shall not the Judge of the earth do what is just?*”. He did not get angry, but completed the debate as though with a friend and an equal!! ... In several occasions the Lord says: “Let us contend together” ... He intends to debate with man, to “*proclaim His secret counsel to the upright who fear Him*” (Proverb 3: 32); and “*The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant*” (Psalm 25: 14).

(7) Finally, God admonishes them, saying: “***A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?***” (8). If God in His love proclaims His secret counsel to His prophets, How could they, in their turn, afford not to proclaim to the people, the roar of the Lion, who comes out of His tribe, to let them all fear Him and prepare themselves for His encounter?! The work of the prophets is to carry the divine message, even if it appears as a burning fire or sounds as the roar of a lion; in order for all to fear God and to return to Him; the goal of the prophets is to utter their prophecies, as a preliminary preparation for the ultimate coming of the Lord.

St. Augustine in a nice commentary on, “*A lion has roared! Who will not fear?*”, says: [As man can tame a lion, and fears it no more; Yet, he cannot tame himself; So let him deliver himself to God alone, the Tamer of the souls! ... If man – the image of God – can tame the fierce souls; Can God not tame His own image⁴?! ... Let us the deliver ourselves into His hands, as He, alone, can tame them.

3- GOD WILL LET THE GENTILES TESTIFY AGAINST HIS PEOPLE:

God intended to let their heathen neighbors: the rich of Ashdod in Palestine (Assyria in the Septuagint version), and the rich of Egypt, those near and far; come to attend the trial. It is as though, not finding among His own people, righteous men to

¹ That demons do not govern the world 5; In Matt. 22: 5.

² Expos. Of Orthodox Faith, 19.

³ Cassian: Conf. 6: 6.

⁴ Ser. On N.T. Lessons 5: 3.

arbitrate between Him and His vineyard; God resorted to strangers, to judge, if there is any injustice in His ordinance toward His people. And by calling them, God intends as well, to let them get in touch with His holy Person; And to learn, that if He is judging His own people on their sins, How could He be impartial toward the strangers?! ... Namely, by their presence, they may reconsider their own position toward Him!

The horror of the transgressions practiced inside Samaria – the capital of Israel – has reached an extent beyond the endurance of the Holy God; that even the Gentiles would testify that the smell of evil has reached them! ... What bitterness! ... Instead of having the children of the Kingdom testify against the wicked, and judge them, The wicked, themselves, became witnesses against the people of God; having seen the great tumult in their midst, and the disturbance, instead of the exalted glory of the heavenly life; and the oppression instead of justice and righteousness; and how they have turned into storehouses of violence and robbery, that they do not know how to do right any more. ... About His people, the Lord say to the Gentiles: “***Assemble on the mountains of Samaria; See great tumults in her midst, and the oppressed within her. For they do not know to do right; ... who store up violence and robbery in their palaces***” (Amos 3: 9, 10)

That is why God surrounds her with anguish from every side, and takes away her authority and honor.

Israel that was supposed to be like salt to reform others, became corrupted and “*lost its flavor, good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men*” (Matthew 5: 13). Israel, who in the eyes of God, was like the high priest who intercedes on behalf the heathen nations; if he errs, who will intercede on his behalf? ... It was befitting for Israel to be the role model for the Gentiles on salvation; but now, having forsaken faith, what will be his destiny?!

All this would bring forth terror to the hearts of Christians and to those of their priests in particular; as the more our responsibility becomes, the more severe our punishment would be when we err. As **St. John Chrysostom** says: [If others fall, they will probably be forgiven; But if the teacher falls, he will have no excuse, and will fall under the most severe punishment¹.

4- NONE OF THEM WILL ESCAPE:

God, in His judgment of His people, gave an amazing analogy; That if He, being the Shepherd who searches for every lost sheep among His flock, and takes it out of the mouth of a lion, even if nothing remains of it, more than two legs, or even a piece of an ear ...; That same exalted care, and amazing love, would make Him search for His people wherever they are, and allow for their captivation, for the sake of chastisement.

The feelings of many fathers have been so shaken before that exalted shepherding love of God; that **St. Basil the Great** says in one of his messages to his congregation: [Strive to rise from your fall down on the ground; and remember that you have a Good Shepherd who searches for you, to save you from the mouth of the lion who devoured you; even if nothing of you remain, more than two legs or a piece of an ear; ... Remember God’s mercies, He who heals you by oil and wine; Never despair of salvation²!

¹ In Matt. Hom. 15: 11.

² Ep. 44: 2.

The Lord, who in His love, snatches us out of the lion's mouth; Will take out the children of Israel from their land, wherever they are, "***who dwell in Samaria***" (Amos 3: 12); Will follow up their steps, even if they escape to Damascus; and even if they hide "*in the corner of a bed*"; to bring them over to the land of captivity.

He punishes, not for punishment sake, but for two reasons: To wipe out idolatry; And to destroy the life of luxury and looseness: "*I will visit destruction on the altars of Bethel; and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground; I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house; The houses of ivory shall perish*", Says the Lord" (Amos 3: 14, 15).

CHAPTER 4

THE SECOND SERMON TO THE COWS OF BASHAN

The Lord directs His talk to the children of Israel, calling them ‘the fat cows of Bashan’ which, on the mountains of Samaria; are not just browsing at the expense of others, but are crushing them as well; That is why they are worthy of chastisement; a continuous chastisement, and in diverse ways, until they seek salvation; whatever the sacrifices they offer.

1- The oppressive cows of Bashan	1 – 2
2- Rejection of the worship going hand in hand with oppression	4 – 5
3- Diverse ways of chastisements	6 – 11
4- The shining of salvation	12 – 13

1- THE OPPRESSIVE COWS OF BASHAN:

“Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘Bring wine, let us drink’” (Amos 4: 1)

‘Bashan’, a Hebrew name meaning (a flat or level land), refers to the land that belonged to half the tribe of Manasseh (Deuteronomy 3: 13), in the Land of Canaan, East of the Jordan, between the mountain of Harmod and Gilead; A very fertile land, with plenty of water; Mentioned more than 60 times in the Holy Book; Known for its fatlings herds (Psalm 22: 12; Hezekiel 39: 18); And famed for their evergreen forests of oaks (Isaiah 2: 13; Hezekiel 27: 6; Zechariah 11: 2), up to our present day¹.

Here, the Lord likens the people of Israel, known for their oppression of the poor, and crushing the needy: to the fat and strong cows of Bashan, that browse on rich pastures. The extremely rich and the elite among the people, instead of helping the miserable and the oppressed, They crushed them more by oppression and tyranny; that the rich became more rich, and the poor became more poor and miserable.

Those rich people used to go to their equally oppressive peers, and say: *“Bring wine, let us drink”*, in extravagant banquets, packed with pleasures and evil lusts; mixing their drinks with the tears of the poor and the oppressed; according to the words of the wise Solomon: *“Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun; And look! The tears of the oppressed, But they have no comforter – On the side of their oppressors there was power”* (Ecclesiastes 4: 1).

Some believe² that the cows of Bashan, here, are the Israeli women who got fat and more violent, because of the multitude of banquets, and of their life of excessive luxury. Those who live in Samaria used to demand from their husbands – their masters or their ‘Baals’ – to realize for them what the greater ‘Baal’ demands! And as the worship of ‘Baal’ was mainly set upon drinking wine in an excessive way, Those other ‘Baals’ used to provide their women with as much wine. It is as though, those ‘cows of Bashan’, as a result of their persuasion of their husbands to provide them with their mortal pleasures,

¹ New Westminster Dict. Of the Bible, p. 94, 95. حزقيال ص 182.

² Jerome Biblical Comm., P. 248.

especially the incessant drinking of wine, were accordingly responsible for the oppression of the poor and the needy.

“The Lord God has sworn by His holiness, ‘Behold, the day shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. Through breaches in the wall you shall leave, each one straight ahead of her, And you shall be flung out into Harmon’, says the Lord” (Amos 4: 2, 3)

What would God do to those oppressive cows?!

(1) The Lord has sworn by His holiness, because what those cows of Bashan have done with His poor and needy children, that He will take them away with fishhooks; As the Lord said to Sennacherib the king of Assyria on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah: *“Because your rage against Me and your tumult have come up to My ears, Therefore I will put My hook in your nose, and My bridle in your lips, And I will turn you back by the way which you came”* (Isaiah 37: 29; 2 Kings 19: 28).

It seems that the hook that were normally put in the nose of the violent wild animal to draw it along, were also used with the human captives, including the kings, to humiliate them, the way the king of Assyria did with Menasseh king of Judah (2 Chronicles 33: 11)¹. If the cows of Bashan, for the sake of their own pleasures, have been stirred up against the poor, God will draw them captives with fishhooks in their noses, without honor, authority, or power!

The world, with its pleasures, would turn man into a fierce and wild animal, who assumes that no one could escape from its fangs and claws; to find himself eventually drawn in humiliation, to taste the bitterness of his oppression.

(2) The punishment does not stop at the cows of Bashan, but would extend to their posterity, to be drawn with fishhooks as well! Man in his foolishness would bring loss and perdition over himself, as well as over his children.

If the children of Israel represent the human soul, Their women, namely, the cows of Bashan, represent the body, that would in humiliation, fall together with the soul, and be destroyed; Whereas the children represent the talents, that would fall down and be lost, together with man’s spirit, body, and energies, because of sin. On the contrary, the righteous will have his souls exulted, his body sanctified, and his talents grown; according to the words of the Psalmist: *“Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed, who fears the Lord”* (Psalm 128: 3, 4). He will be blessed, together with his wife, and children; namely, his soul, body, and talents.

(3) Each cow will leave through breaches in the wall, straight ahead, to be flung out into the fortress, the palace, or ‘Harmon’, (according to the Greek text). The breaches in the wall might have happened in the walls, when the cows of Bashan, in their oppression and defilement, refused to stay within the walls of the divine commandment; Namely, they left through the breaches in the walls, to keep away from the commandment, and set forth toward the palace or fortress they have built for themselves by their own hands, hoping it will protect them; the way man did in the old, when he built the tower of Babel to hide in it from the face of God.

If the Greek text mentioned ‘Harmon’ instead of fortress; the breaches here probably mean that the cows of Bashan that oppressed the poor will fall into captivity

¹ New Westminster Dict. P 403.

when the walls of Samaria are broken and destroyed; will find no escape, but will be taken into captivity as though to the slaughter house¹; and led by the enemy into Harmon, there to stay in humiliation.

2- REJECTION OF THE WORSHIP GOING HAND IN HAND WITH OPPRESSION:

The children of Israel may assume that these warnings do not concern them; As they go to Bethel to offer sacrifices; present tithes without delay, and burn offerings of thanksgiving to God ... In their own eyes, they love God!

How simple it is for man to deceive himself, and deal with his evil, not by repentance and returning to God, but by carrying out some formalities of worship; through which they deprive the ecclesiastical rites of their spirit, through separating them from the practical life of faith; and through distorting the offerings and gifts, by presenting them without the heart.

“Come to Bethel and transgress; At Gilgal multiply transgression” (Amos 4: 4)

God says this mockingly; as, while committing all wickedness and oppressions, they keep on filling the sanctuaries, pretending to be people of religion and spirituality; They go to the sanctuaries, yet unsanctified; they go to the house of God, and do not return to God Himself! ... He is as though saying to them, [Transgress, and multiply transgression; ... If going frequently to the sanctuaries is to cover up your hidden evil, You are actually adding to it, and treating the wounds with more dangerous wounds].

“Bring your sacrifices every morning, Your tithes every three days” (Amos 4: 4)

The Jew was committed to offer an annual sacrifice (1 Samuel 1: 3, 7, 21); and to present the accounts of his tithes every three years (Deuteronomy 14: 28; 26: 12). Even if the oppressor offers a sacrifice every morning, instead of every year; and gives his tithes every three days instead of every three years, It would not be well-received by God ... who is not to be bribed by offerings and gifts, but seeks the spirit of giving, and the inner fruit of the heart, more than He seeks the gift itself. And as the apostle Paul says to the Philippians, with love: *“You sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account”* (Philippians 4: 16, 17). For this same reason, the apostle warns us against giving without love, saying: *“Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13: 3).

“Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven. Proclaim and announce the freewill offerings. For so you love to do, O people of Israel’, says the Lord God” (Amos 4: 5)

As though He says: By coming to My house and My sanctuaries to offer sacrifices, and present tithes, you offend Me; because you offer leaven and freewill offerings to My house. ... Offering leaven was prohibited by the law: *“No grain offering that you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for you must not turn any leaven or honey into smoke as an offering by fire to the Lord”* (Leviticus 2: 11). As leaven refer to evil that spreads like leaven in the dough; Therefore, by offering sacrifices of thanksgiving to God, that carry their evil with it; they actually provoke Him to anger.

¹ Ibid P. 365.

In the Septuagint version it came as: “***They read the law outside, and call for public meetings***”. He probably means that, pretending to be religious, they discuss and debate the divine law with non-believers with great enthusiasm, and in public meetings. Yet they do not carry the law in their hearts, nor have a true relationship with God. That is the most serious portrait of religion, when it concentrates on showing off enthusiasm without an inner true life! And on partaking of collective worship and religious celebrations, without a hidden relationship with God in the soul, or in the secret place! ... That is what the people of Israel loved to do, as the Lord says.

3- DIVERSE WAYS OF CHASTISEMENTS:

He mentioned the diverse chastisements under which He allowed them to fall, from which they did not profit; and each time He admonishes them, saying: “***Yet you have not returned to Me, says the Lord***” (6, 8, 9, 10, 11). This shows that chastisement in the eyes of God, are not for the sake of revenge, but for love..., He longs to see man return to Him.

If the past chastisements, although many and diverse, did not realize their goal, because of the hardness of man’s heart; He is committed to present chastisement of more cruel nature, in order for man to wake up, acknowledge God, and prepare himself to meet Him: “***And because I will do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, O Israel***” (Amos 4: 12). This phrase is probably the key of the Book of Amos, or even of the whole Holy Book; Namely, that everything God does to His people, whether good or bad, gentle or firm, He does to let them prepare themselves to meet their God who descends to dwell in them, and to sanctify them as His own people!

What are the chastisement that God allowed to come upon His people?

“***I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places; Yet you have not returned to Me***”(Amos 4: 6). Their teeth became clean because nothing ever enter their mouth to be chewed and eaten! In the Septuagint version it came: Their teeth became non-functioning, like someone unemployed of no benefit for himself or to others.

Saying, “***I gave you***”, refers to the fact that all the natural calamities that cause famines, and make their teeth clean because of no use, do not happen haphazardly, but according to an elaborate divine plan, and a high exalted ordinance as a divine ‘gift’. God gives the goods, as He gives the anguish, the temptations, and the famines. By His love, He treats us with compassion and satisfies us; And by His wisdom He chastens us with deprivations to make us return to Him.

The temptations and chastisements, He allows, reveal the work of sin in us, and its hidden evil; as it brings about:

(1) Famines: “***lack of bread in all your places***” (Amos 4: 6); probably referring to the famine which happened in the days of the prophet Elisha and lasted seven years (2 Kings 8: 1). Sin also causes a spiritual famine, a need of spiritual bread in man’s inner life; no satisfaction, and a great void that could only be filled by the Lord Himself, the Bread coming down from heaven (John 6).

(2) Spiritual draught: “***I also withheld the rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city. One field would be rained upon, and the field on which it did not rain withered. So two or three cities wandered to one city to drink water, and were not satisfied***”(Amos 4: 7, 8)

Forsaking the fountain of living water (Jeremiah 2: 13); namely Christ the Savior, the soul is deprived of the rain of the Holy Spirit, to remain in a state of draught! Two cities close to each other; one is dampened by the rain of the Spirit, while the other dries up; Two parts or fields of one city, one is dampened by the grace of the Spirit, and the other stays dry! In the world we find some hearts, opened to the fiery gift of the Spirit, to flare by it, and to bear the divine nature; And we find other hearts, shut up on themselves, to live in dryness, dead in Spirit, with nothing but barrenness and perdition! And as said by the Lord on the mouth of the prophet Isaiah: *“Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; Behold, My servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; Behold, My servants shall rejoice, but you shall be ashamed; Behold, My servants shall sing, for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and wail for grief of spirit”* (Isaiah 65: 13, 14).

What are those two or three cities that wandered to another city to drink water, and were not satisfied, but the foolish virgins who seek oil from the wise ones, lest their lamps would go out; to hear them say: *“No, lest there should not be enough for us and you”* (Matthew 25: 9); and to end up being denied an entrance to the wedding, and the door shut up in their faces..

(3) Damaging pests like blight, mildew, and locusts, would devour the fruits of the soul, corrupt its inner garden, and destroy its vineyards and fig trees .. Which we have already discussed in detail in our study of the book of Joel.

If the soul is the inner garden or paradise, with its spiritual vineyards and fig trees, that bring gladness to God; Sin, on the other hand, is like pests that turn that garden into a wilderness, and the fruit trees into a desert.

(4) A plague would infects the soul as well as the body, to turn man into an invalid, helplessly lying on his bed, unable to do any work; and in need of the Savior, the true Physician of the soul.

(5) Their young men would be killed with the sword; namely, man’s talents (his children) and his energies would be destroyed.

(6) Their horses would be captivated: If the horses refer to strength and might; By committing sin, man would lose his authority over himself, and would turn into a captive with no strength nor freedom to work.

(7) The stench of their camps would come up into their nostrils ... Instead of the sweet fragrance of Christ, that brings gladness to God the

Father and rejoicing to the heavenly creatures; A stench would come up from man’s inner self, as though from a dead body! He would be in need to hear the voice of the Lord Jesus, saying: *“Lazarus, come forth!”*, so that the dead man in him would come out of his tomb, carrying, the fragrance of life, instead of the stench of the dead,

(8) Destruction by earthquakes and volcanoes: ***“I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah; and you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning”*** (11) Instead of being destroyed by earthquakes and volcanoes with their devastating fire, we are in need for the Lord to come to us as though on a swift cloud, to destroy our inner idols, to burn our evil, and to set in the midst of our hearts an altar for Himself; as is said by the prophet Isaiah: *“Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst; ... In that day there will be an altar in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border”* (Isaiah 19 1, 19).

Those were the divine chastisements that exposed the work of sin in the heart; and in man as a whole; with the goal of: “*Prepare to meet your God, O Israel*”(Amos 4: 12)

4- THE SHINING OF SALVATION:

The chastisements of God exposed our corrupt condition; the way the surgeon, with his scalpel, opens up a wound to expose the corruption hidden within. Now, how would the wound be bandaged, and our condition be reformed. How would the saying “*Prepare to meet your God*” be realized? The answer lies in the divine words: “*For Lo, the One who forms the mountains, creates the wind (the spirit), reveals His thoughts (His Christ) to mortals, makes the morning darkness, who treads on the heights of the earth – The Lord, the God of hosts is His name*” (Amos 4: 13)

The Lord of Glory says: “*What king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousands*” (Luke 14: 31). And the Psalmist says: “*O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty like You, O Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them. You have broken Rahab in pieces, as one who is slain; you have scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm. The heavens are Yours, The earth also is Yours; The world and all its fullness, You have founded them*” (Psalm 89: 8-11). If the kings and the armies during war take refuge in the mountains, God, being the Maker of mountains, and the founder of the entire world, does not take refuge in mountains. Entering into contention against God, Israel should know who God is, and what His potentials are, or else he should reconcile with him!

He says: “*He created the wind*”; and in the Septuagint version: “*He created the spirit*”; The Creator of the wind, for which the leader of a battle cares, is God Himself.

He makes the dawn (the morning darkness), by sending the dense clouds to cover the earth and to conceal the light. He treads the high places of the earth ... He is Jehovah, the incomprehensible and the unutterable! That is Your God, whom you are committed to prepare to meet, O Israel; not for contention, but for reconciliation!

In the Septuagint version it came as: “*He who forms the thunder, and creates the spirit, who declares to man his Christ*”. Many fathers, like **St. Augustine**¹ believe that this text bears an obvious prophecy about the Messianic era; And that the new Israel should prepare to encounter with his God through the declaration of the Father about His Christ to man, to receive Him as the secret of reconciliation between the Father and man.

Some heretics, on account of the words “*He creates the spirit*”, attempted to use this text to claim that the Holy Spirit is created, Yet many fathers, like **St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa**, rebutted their claim by saying: [We should realize that the prophet, when he speaks about forming the thunder, is referring to the creation of another spirit altogether,; and not to the Holy Spirit. As the name ‘thunder’, in the Hebrew language, was given to the gospel.;Those in whom the unshaken faith in the gospel is founded, cross over from the body to the spirit, according to the words of the Lord: “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*” (John 3: 6). It is God who founds the sound of the gospel, and makes man a spirit (spiritually). To him who is born of the Spirit and becomes a spirit, Christ is proclaimed, according to the

¹ City of Gof 18: 28.

words of the apostle: “*No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit*” (1 Corinthians 12: 3)¹.

That is the secret of the encounter of the new Israel; That God founds the thunder; namely, sends to us the word of preaching that thunders in the soul, and creates in us the spiritual nature instead of the carnal life; that Christ, the Lord of Glory, is proclaimed in us by His Holy Spirit.

By that, the prophet has turned the mind of Israel, from the cruel chastisements - that failed to bring them back to God, but have only exposed their weakness and the work of sin in them – to the Savior Messiah, proclaimed by the Father to man, to receive Him by the Holy Spirit, a Redeemer and a Savior.

¹ *On the Faith (to Simplicius).*

CHAPTER 5

THE THIRD SERMON A LAMENTATION ON THE VIRGIN OF ISRAEL AND THE FIRST GROUP OF WOES

In this third and last sermon He addresses His talk to the children of Israel, as a lamentation on the fallen virgin of Israel, showing her miserable condition, and presenting the way to life instead of the death that prevailed on her. This chapter includes a group of woes (verses 18-27); although some consider the verses 10 to 17, as being woes as well. Anyway this whole chapter and the following one, are one sermon for the fallen virgin of Israel.

1- The fallen virgin of Israe	11 – 3
2- Seek the Lord and not the ido	14 – 9
3- Oppression in the courts of justice	10 – 15
4- Wailing and mourning	16 – 17
5- The first group of woes:	
a- Desiring the day of the Lord	18 – 20
b- The formal worship	21 – 24
c- Mixing the worship of the Lord with idol worship	25 – 27

1- THE FALLEN VIRGIN OF ISRAEL:

He starts the third sermon by a lamentation on the virgin of Israel:

“Hear the word which I take up against you, this lamentation, O house of Israel: The virgin of Israel has fallen; she shall rise no more. She lies forsaken on her land; there is no one to raise her up. For thus says the Lord God: ‘The city that goes out by a thousand, shall have a hundred left. And that which goes out by a hundred, shall have ten left to the house of Israel’”(Amos 5: 1-3)

The words in our hands are a lamentation set by the Lord Himself, to describe with sadness, the condition reached by the virgin of Israel. By calling her ‘a virgin’, He probably proclaims that this lamentation on the dead, is said on the virgin of Israel who is like a bride who died in the prime of her life, a virgin who has not yet enjoyed the married life. She is the virgin whom the Lord expected to be His perpetual bride; But, because she chose the way of spiritual death, she lost her life before having the chance to enjoy the union with her Groom.

God probably called her ‘the virgin of Israel’, as a sign that, up till that moment, she was the virgin, who was never defeated nor fallen into captivity ... But through her evil, she has lost her virginity, and even her whole life. Being His virgin bride, God has jealousy on her. The apostle Paul bore the spirit of his Lord when he said: *“I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11: 2-3).

The virgin of Israel has fallen from what she should be as a virgin for the Lord, bearing His holiness and splendor. She, unfortunately has fallen, and shall rise no more, on account that she rejected her Groom’s chastisement, for the sake of her return to Him. Leaning upon herself or upon others, she has no one to raise her up. She lies forsaken on

her land, She did not go out to fight an external battle, but was defeated within herself, because of her inner weakness; according to the words of the Lord Himself: “*A man’s foes will be those of his own household*” (Matthew 10: 36). We fall in our inner Jerusalem when we abide to the ‘ego’, and live for ourselves and not for the Lord who loves us.

Falling in her inner battle because of the ‘ego’ that seeks what is for herself and not what is for the others; the soul of man would have much to lose; If she goes out by a thousand, she shall have a hundred left; and if she goes out by a hundred, she shall have only ten left. She would lose much, and a few faithful remnants would remain kept with God; that remnant amounting to one tenth is in the eyes of God so dear and valuable to keep for the sake of His faithfulness toward His believers. We saw that more clearly in our study of the Book of Ezekiel in more than one location¹.

God would not forget the hundred for the sake of the thousand; nor the ten for the sake of the hundred. He has not forgotten Lot and his two daughters for the sake of the entire region of Sodom and Gomorrah; Nor has He forgotten Noah and his family for the sake of the corruption of the whole world.

2- SEEK THE LORD AND NOT THE IDOL:

Presenting a lamentation on the virgin of Israel, He did not stop at that sorrowful description, but revealed the way to safety through resorting to God, the source of life, and forsaking the idol worship; saying: “***Seek Me and live; But do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba***” (Amos 5: 4, 5)

The people in those days bore the outer appearances of religion; Although they used to go out to worship in the holy places, yet it seems that worshipping God got mixed with idol worship, especially in the main locations in Israel, like Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba; Or that their worship probably turned into mere formalities to pacify their conscience, by offering much to God at those locations; Yet, as they did not seek Him by their hearts, nor keep His commandments in their life and behavior, As I said before, the rite separated from the spiritual life, and their worship turned into a cover for their evil way of life.

By seeking the holy places, Our first and last goal should be the life by and with God: “*Seek Me and live*”. Notice that the word “*seek*”, does not mean just asking with the mouth, but extends to having a true inner longing toward God, the Secret of our true life. And As **St. Augustine** says, talking to God: [How should I seek You, O My Lord? ... Seeking You, I seek the happy life; ... By seeking You, my soul lives; as my body lives by my soul, and my soul lives by You²!

Those locations which were previously holy, became offense through idol worship; Hence He says: “***For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing***”(Amos 5: 5)

When the Samaritan woman said to the Lord Jesus: “*Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship*”. Jesus said to her: “*Believe Me, the hour is coming when you will, neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem worship the father; ... God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*” (John4: 21, 24).

¹ Confession 10: 20.

² حزقيال ص 85.

We do not deny that God finds pleasure in the holy place, that man, in love, dedicate to be places to worship Him; Yet His pleasure is for the sake of man who is sanctified by them! Even in a consecrated church, the heart of man rises beyond all the frontiers of place or time, to set forth to eternity, to find the Spirit of God raising him up to heaven itself. In a previous work, I dealt with the building of the church, and its concept and relationship to the inner life of the soul of man, as well as to the heavenly and liturgical¹ life. In case the house of God loses its spiritual concept, and man confines himself to the dust and earth, the house of God would turn into a hindrance, rather than a secret of setting forth of the soul to heaven!

The Lord says: ***“Seek God and live”*** (6). That is the ultimate goal of our whole worship, to encounter our Lord Jesus, and to seek Him with our whole heart, as the secret of our life. Then the Lord threatens: ***“Lest He breaks out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, with no one to quench it in Bethel”*** (Amos 5: 6)

Many tribes of Israel used to bless the children of Joseph, because the mountain of Bethel was among their portion (Joshua 16: 1, 2). But that mountain, if misused, would turn into a burning fire. Likewise, the priesthood, which gives man huge spiritual and shepherding possibilities, if misused, would turn into a weapon for perdition! ... And why should we talk about Bethel and the priesthood, When the Lord Christ Himself, the secret of salvation for many, says that His coming has become the secret of judgment for those who deny Him: *“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin; If I have not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father”* (John 15: 22, 24). And as the apostle Paul said about the Lord Christ: *“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life”* (2 Corinthians 2: 15, 16).

We come back to Israel to find him mixing the worship of the living God with idol worship; and to find Bethel turning into perdition for the house of Joseph; Here He means all Israel coming to Bethel, whose life is flared with the fire of evil with no one to quench it!; have turned the truth into the bitterness of oppression, and have corrupted the heavenly righteousness by casting it to the ground. ***“You who turn justice to wormwood, and cast righteousness to the ground”***(Amos 5: 7)

Like the wormwood, an extremely bitter herb, which no man can endure, When the truth that would bring pleasure to the heart of God and man, turns into iniquity, it would turn into the contrary, it would become as bitter as wormwood. So are those with great energies and talents; When they are sanctified by the spirit of the truth, mixed with love and humility, they would testify to the truth, and would present by the Holy Spirit, glorified works, testified to by the generations, and held fast by heaven. But in case they go astray, they would not just become negative, but would turn into bitter wormwood in the mouth of God and His church; and would turn into tools for destruction instead for edification. They would ***“cast righteousness to the ground”***, as their thought bears a fatal earthly nature, without knowing it.

¹ راجع سلسلة "الكنيسة بيت الله" بالعربية والإنجليزية - 15 جزءًا.

Therefore, Let the Lord Himself be, all the time, the subject of our seeking, to live, and not to turn into wormwood, or to cast righteousness to the ground. ... But Who is this Lord whom we should seek?

“The One who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns the shadow of death into morning, and darkens day into night; Who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth; The Lord is His name. He flashes destruction on the stronghold, and brings the fortified city to ruin” (Amos 5: 8, 9)

(1) The One who made the Pleiades and Orion; two groups of celestial bodies or stars that were well known in the old. If Israel were diverted to worship the stars, the true God is the Maker of all the stars; He is the One whom they should seek.

In the Septuagint version, it came that God is the One who created things, and who can also change them. And **St. John Chrysostom** had a very bold interpretation; He believes that God, the Creator, trains us, His children, on creative life; saying: [Although God has given us a body from the earth, Yet to carry it with us to heaven; Yes it is indeed an earthly body, Yet it should be turned into a heavenly one It is as though God says to us: ‘I have created heaven and earth, and have given you the authority to create. Turn your earth into heaven, as that is within the authority I granted you!’] Being the One who create and change things (8), as He describes Himself, He gave man a like authority; as though He is an Artist Father who teaches His art to His son! “I created your body beautiful, and gave you the authority to do better! If you are not able to create man, Yet by the Holy Spirit, you can make him righteous and acceptable to God; ... I have formed the matter; So you should adorn the will! See how much I love you, and grant you authority to do great things? See how great the honor I am giving you¹!].

(2) God, whom we seek, turns the shadow of death (the night) into morning, and darkens the day as night. He is not only the Maker of heaven and earth from naught, but He can also make changes: He changes the night to day, and the day to night.

What is the night, or what He called the ‘shadow of death’, that He changed to morning, but the realization of the prophecies of the Old Testament; and turning the shadows of the law as man was fallen under death, as though in the night into the joyful day of His coming, when we were enlightened by His divine light; according to the words of the prophet: *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined”*? (Isaiah 9: 2).

Let us then present to Him our night, to turn it into day; Let us deliver to Him all our labor and sorrow, to shine on us, and they would turn into spiritual joy, exalted peace, and an unutterable glorious rejoice.

As to the day that darkens to become night, It reminds us of the divine work during the time of crucifixion, when the midday turned into darkness because of our sins, carried on the shoulders of our Redeemer. That is the exalted work of the Lord, bearing our sins in Him; He who knows no sin.

What is the day that turns into darkness, but the day of the wicked, who live in the luxuries and pleasures of life, assuming that the joy of the world will never come to an end, and the pleasures shall forever endure...; But in His love, and through His seemingly cruel chastisements, God turns their day into night, to keep them from being bound to the day of the world, and its pleasures.

¹ In 1 Tim. Hom. 15.

(3) He calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth... He turns the waters of the sea into clouds that cover the face of the earth and drop rain on it. ... In our study of the book of Joel (2: 23), we saw how the early and the late rain, refer to the grace of the Holy Spirit working in the children of God. God, whom we seek, is the Creator, who changes our life through the coming of the Savior Messiah; He who gives the fruit through the water of the Holy Spirit; according to the words of the Lord Himself: *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will Flow Rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified”* (John 7: 37-39).

Even though we are earth, Yet the water of the Holy Spirit would turn us into a cheerful paradise of God, bearing in us the fruit of His Spirit.

(4) God, whom we seek, His name is ‘Jehovah’. Having presented Himself to us as a Creator, a Re-newer of our nature through the work of salvation of the Lord Christ, and the Grantor of the fruit in us by the Holy Spirit, has brought us over to His secrets ... He is ‘Jehovah’; namely, the Incomprehensible ‘Being’... Even though He got very close to us through His salvation work, and through sending His Holy Spirit; Yet He remains the God who could not be approached in the perfection of His essence. We have already dealt with the concept of the name of God ‘Jehovah’, in our study of the Book of Exodus (Chapter 3).

(5) God, whom we seek, is He ***“Who flashes destruction on the stronghold, and brings the fortified city to ruin”*** (9); ... who strengthens the one robbed, to charge against the stronghold of his strong oppressor, to restore his robbed right. He is the God who supports the oppressed soul and grants it conquest.

3- OPPRESSION IN THE COURTS OF JUSTICE:

The courts of justice for the Jews were held in a public place at the city gate (Deuteronomy 22: 15; Isaiah 29: 21), presided by a judge or a prophet, who rebukes the oppressor and supports the oppressed; But unfortunately, those courts of justice turned into courts of oppression, about which He says:

“They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly. Therefore, because you tread down the poor, and take grain taxes from him; Though you have built houses of hewn stones, Yet you shall not dwell in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, But you shall not drink wine from them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins. You afflict the just and take bribes. You divert the poor from justice at the gate” (Amos 5: 10-12)

Those were painful portraits of the oppression that prevailed upon the courts of justice. On one aspect, those elders used to show partiality toward the oppressors at the expense of the truth; And instead of rebuking the oppressors, they hate the one who rebukes or warns them, and abhor him who speaks uprightly, for his words might hurt the rich oppressors. And on another aspect, instead of raising the poor from the trash, they tread him down under their feet, and seek a bribe from him; And in case he has no money, he was committed to give up his grain, and stay hungry together with his household. Even though the law prohibited paying interest on food (Deuteronomy 23: 19), they robbed the food of the poor to build for themselves houses of hewn stones, that would never provide them with security; and to plant for themselves pleasant vineyards,

that would never provide them with wine to drink. ... They afflicted the just and took bribes, prohibited by the law (Exodus 21: 30; Numbers 35: 31).

And as oppression increased beyond limits in the courts of justice, it was said: ***“Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time”*** (Amos 5: 13)

Realizing that nothing would be of benefit to defend the poor, man would keep silent; not out of cowardice or fear of the oppressors, but for the sake of wisdom, so as not to waste his time or energy in vain. **St. Basil the Great**, in his work on the Holy Spirit wrote: [Because the evangelic ordinances have been utterly mixed over, because of the chaos prevailing in those days; that the rush toward leadership positions became unimaginably great, by those who love appearances, and giving orders; I chose to keep silent rather than to talk; because no human voice could be loud enough to be heard in such big noise¹.

The prudent should keep silent in such evil times; and only talks what would be of benefit; following the lead of God Himself, who presents of His divine secrets, only what we can endure to hear or to comprehend; Who keeps His secrets concealed, until we acquire the spiritual ear that is able to listen and to comprehend His secrets in an edifying way. Of the words of **St. Clement of Alexandria**: [By saying: *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”* (Matthew 11: 15), the Lord proclaims that hearing and comprehending are not for everyone. To demonstrate that the holy words are concealed, the prophet David writes: *“He made darkness His secret place. His canopy around Him was dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies. From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire”* (Psalm 18: 11, 12)².

Although the silence of the prudent in the evil time, is in itself, a testimony of truth against oppression and tyranny; Yet the Lord demands the return to Him, through the return of those unjust judges or elders from their oppression in their court of justice at the gates; saying: ***“Seek good and not evil, that you may live; So the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken”*** (Amos 5: 14)

It is as though He says to them: [If you boast that the Lord God of hosts is with you and in your midst; the sign of this would be the practical behavior through seeking the good and rejecting the evil; By that you may live by the Lord who dwells in your midst!

Because Israel assumed that having been elected as His people, God would spare them any punishment, and would dwell in their midst, whatever their behavior may be! God corrects their wrong concepts, by proclaiming that choosing them from among all the peoples of the earth, increases their responsibility, and makes their falling under punishment in case they err, more probable (Amos 3: 2). Here He confirms that His dwelling in their midst will not happen, except through seeking good and not evil in their life and in their judgment. Finally He proclaims that choosing them makes them like grain in a sieve in the hands of God; He would treat them elaborately, and punish them harshly, yet *“Not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground”* (Amos 9: 7-10).

At the beginning of the sermon He said to them: *“Seek the Lord”*. Here, He declare their commitment to seek Him through their practical behavior: ***“Hate evil, Love good; Establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph”*** (Amos 5: 15)

¹ On the Spirit 77, 78.

² Strom. 6: 15.

Israel will be subjected to bitter chastisements; Some of them will die, some will be killed by the sword, and some will be captivated; But God will not forget the remnant who stay faithful to Him; If they hold fast to the truth, love good, and hate evil, He will have compassion on them, and will proclaim His dwelling in their midst.

4- WAILING AND MOURNING:

He ends the lamentation by proclaiming that God will pass through in their midst; Yet, not as the Secret of their life, but to punish and chastise them. The entire nation of Israel will turn into a place for wailing and mourning; As everyone will become in a state of death; And the presence of God will be for sorrow and not for joy.

Here, he presents an actual portrait of the ancient oriental customs of grief, where they used to hire professional lamenters to wail during the procedures of funerals.

5- THE FIRST GROUP OF WOES:

As actually a part of the third sermon, God proclaims woe to people because of three things:

(1) Desiring the day of the Lord:

“Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord? It will be darkness and not light! It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him. Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the Lord darkness and not light?”(Amos 5: 18-20)

Although God is Light, and His day is light in itself; Yet, to the spiritually blind, who is not able to behold the light, It would be darkness! And as said by **St. Basil**: [The day of the Lord is darkness to those who deserve the darkness¹].

As the day of the Lord, in the mind of the Jews, meant God’s proclamation of His power, and His conquest in His people against their enemies; It was a day of joy and celebration of victory, a day of boasting over the Gentiles. Yet, as the people got confused by their multitude of iniquities, and their transgressions without repentance, it turned into a Day of Judgment and bitterness.

Nobody can escape judgment; As he who does, would be like a man fleeing from a lion, to encounter a bear. Or like one who took refuge in his house, leaned his hand on the wall, and got bit by a serpent.

(2) The formal worship: That was a clear line, common to most of the writings of the prophets; As while committing evil, Israel went to the holy places for collective worship, to present sacrifices and offerings, and to celebrate feasts. God is not deceived by the outer appearances of worship, but seeks the heart first (See Mark 12: 33). ... In bitterness He rebukes them saying: *“I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream”*(Amos 5: 21-24)

He rejects the superficial worship, not mixed with inner love. He referred all their worship to them, and not to Himself; calling them, *“Your feast, Your burnt offerings”*, Although, in case He finds pleasure in them, He would call them ‘His feasts, His Sabbaths, and His burnt offerings!’ He does not endure their praises and songs, calling

¹ Hexameron 2.

them *“the noise of your songs”*; And according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal”* (1 Corinthians 13: 1).

In order for their worship to be well received, He says: *“Let truth (justice) run down like water, and righteous (alms) like a mighty stream”*... Namely, let your life be mixed with justice and the love of giving, instead of cruelty and oppression.

(3) Mixing the worship of the Lord with idol worship:

“Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried Sikkuth your king, and Chiun your idols, The star of your gods, which you made for yourselves. Therefore, I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus’, says the Lord whose name is the God of hosts”(Amos 5: 25-27)

The prophets used to consider the period of wandering in the wilderness as the best period lived by Israel, as far as their relationship with God is concerned (Hosea 2: 26; Jeremiah 2: 1-3); having been an ideal period, during which God sustained Israel in a unique and an exalted way. During that period, as it was difficult for them to offer sacrifices in the wilderness, God did not put as much weight on offering sacrifices, as on keeping the divine commandments; they actually did not make the Passover until they crossed over into Canaan.

Yet they mixed the worship of God with idol worship; They carried with them the tent of Molok or Malkom, the god of the Ammonites, as though their own god; They used to heat its arms red hot, then put their children on them amid the beats of drums; And they also worshipped a group of stars. Thus, the way they had themselves captivated to idol worship, God humiliated them by getting captivated under the authority of idol worshippers; to Assyria, far beyond Damascus (Aram); ... Having carried idolatry in their hearts, God allowed them to be carried captives by the idol worshippers.

CHAPTER 6

THE SECOND GROUP OF WOES

This group of woes, representing the final part of the third sermon, include woes by God to Israel for:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|
| 1- Their deceiving sense of security | 1 – 7 |
| 2- Their arrogant life | 8 – 11 |
| 3- Their rejoicing in vanity | 12 – 14 |

1- THEIR DECEIVING SENSE OF SECURITY:

“Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and feel secure in Mount Samaria, the notable persons of the foremost nation, to whom the house of Israel comes” (Amos 6: 1)

He probably presents the woe to the great, the elite, and all the civil and religious leaderships in Judah and Israel, who were at ease and were feeling secure in Zion and Samaria, leading a spoiled and loose life; Especially as having been counted the notables of the foremost and the firstborn of the nations!

Zion was known for their towers and bulwarks; according to the Psalmist, who says: *“Walk about Zion, and go all around her. Count her towers; Mark well her bulwarks; Consider her palaces; That you may tell it to generations following”* (Psalm 48: 12, 13). It embraced the thrones of the house of David (Psalm 122: 5). As to Mount Samaria, it became the center of the religious life in the Northern Kingdom. The notable persons in those two regions felt at ease and secure; having got in their hands both the civil and the religious power, feared by the Gentiles, and to them came the house of Israel.

This is the state of the soul that takes refuge in someone other than God; feels secure because of her temporal success or her religious reputation; and feels at ease, seeing everyone look at her with honor and admiration; It foolishly feels at ease and secure, instead of the perpetual strife and growth in the Lord!

To provoke the people of Zion and Mount Samaria to repentance, he presents to them examples of great cities of the old, that perished, after having been well famed for a long time; As ‘Calneh’ that was built by Nemrud in the land of Shinar (Genesis 10: 11), then utterly destroyed; ‘Hamath’ in Syria, whose gods, Sennacherib boasted wiping out (2 Kings 18: 34; and ‘Gath’ of the Philistines, that was lately destroyed by Hazael (2 Kings 12: 17) ... Are Zion and Mount Samaria better than those cities; Or are her territories greater than theirs?!

It is indeed befitting of us to take a lesson from what befall the others. If sin has caused the destruction of great men, and slothfulness has corrupted kingdoms, It is befitting of us to reject sin, and to stop walking slothfully; lest we become a lesson to others as well!

Israel never took a lesson from what happened to the nations around her; nor cared for God’s threats and warnings; indulging in her oppression, even in the courts of justice; counting chastisement far from being applied to her: *“Woe to you who put off the evil day, and bring near a reign of violence”* (Amos 6: 3)

That life of evil and violence, and of not caring for the warnings of God, was supported by leading a life of pleasures and lusts; For which God rebukes them, saying:

“Who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall” (Amos 6: 4)

They know no spiritual strife or seriousness. Instead of putting on sackcloth on account of their sins, they stretch on their beds of ivory; And instead of fasting and humiliating themselves, they eat gluttonously. As the apostle Paul says about some evil teachers: *“For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly”* (Romans 16: 18); and, *“Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – which set their minds on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven”* (Philippians 3: 19, 20).

They live for the sake of their own belly, and walk as earthly men, seeking temporal pleasures. ***“Who chant to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on musical instruments”*** (Amos 6: 5). In their distorted minds, they imagined themselves chanting like David on the sound of the harp, and improvising on musical instruments; But far from it; For David chanted divine and heavenly praises; while theirs were corrupt songs accompanied with equally corrupt music of their own composition!

During their fun, they probably sung some religious songs, not for worshipping, as much as for scoffing; like the Babylonians who asked the children of Israel in captivity to sing one of the songs of Zion; to which they said in response: ***“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land!”***. Whereas those people, sung the lord’s songs amid their fun and drinking wine, in an atmosphere foreign from the Lord

Corruption prevailed on their whole life, whether when sleeping, eating, drinking wine, having fun, or anointing themselves with the best anointments: ***“Who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the best anointments”*** (Amos 6: 6)

St. Clement of Alexandria, commenting on these verses, says: [The Holy Spirit, on the tongue of the prophet Amos, proclaims the misery of the rich for the sake of their life of luxury¹; Those who, according to **the scholar Tertullian**: have indeed found their comfort, honor, and glory, in their riches; against which the psalm warns us, saying: *“Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; For when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his splendor shall not descend with him”* (Psalm 49: 16, 17); And, *“If riches increase, Do not set your heart on them”* (Psalm 62: 10); And here, on the tongue of prophet Amos, the Lord utters woe against the rich who sets his heart on pleasures²].

St. John Chrysostom says: [See how God judges the rich, not on their greed, but merely on their extravagance: Behold, You eat with gluttony, while Christ does not have the necessities; You eat cakes, while Christ does not have the bare bread; You drink the wine of Thasian, and you deny Christ a cup of cold water through the thirsty; You lie on a smooth embroidered bed, while he dies of cold! ³]

The Lord goes on describing those people who lead such a loose and idle life, by saying: ***“But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph”*** (Amos 6: 6)

“Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives; And those who recline at banquets shall be removed” (Amos 6: 7)

What is such sin that makes them worthy of being the first to go captive, and to be removed from the the banquets, at which they reclined?

¹ Paed. 2: 2.

² Adv. Marc. 4: 15.

³ In Matt. Hom. 48: 8.

‘Joseph’, probably refers to Israel as a whole; It is as though those notable men, had their hearts drawn toward a life of luxury and fun, away from the affliction, through which Israel is passing; the same way those in prosperity, forget the grieves and sorrows of the church. “*The affliction of Joseph*” reminds us of the chief cupbearer who got his job back and stood before Pharaoh, forgetting all about Joseph in his prison (Genesis 40: 21, 23). It is a horrible portrait that reveals the selfishness of man, who when, living in comfort, forgets all about those who suffer and are in need, and cuts himself off from his fellowship of the holy congregation!

Many fathers connect this expression: “*not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*”, with what came in Micah 1: 11: “*The inhabitant of Zaanan does not go out to mourn on the place close by* – (according to the Septuagint version)”; saying that, although what has befallen Israel (Joseph), and the neighbors of Zaanana, are allowed by God for the sake of their chastisement; Yet, if we refrain from partaking of their grief, It will be counted as a sin on our part. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [Although they are justly chastened, Yet, it is not befitting of you to gloat on their suffering! God wants you to show compassion on them. If we, being sinners, when we punish one of our servants, we get angry to see another one laughing, and pour our wrath on that scoffer; How much more would God do in such a situation¹?! He who says on the mouth of His prophet Hezekiel: “*I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies*”. Therefore, you should follow the lead of your Lord; As he who acquires such a good grief, gathers for himself a great profit²!

2- THEIR ARROGANT LIFE:

God, uttering woe on Israel, who has fallen in pride, says: “***The Lord has sworn by Himself; The Lord of hosts says: I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his palaces; Therefore I will deliver up the city, and all that is in it***” (Amos 6: 8)

He will deliver the city He loved and called His name on it, with all its palaces, and all that is in it, because of its vain pride and haughtiness. He abhors it and delivers it to chastisement with a vow, for all to believe that His verdict is irreversible.

St. John El-Dargi says: [Pride is the work of the devil; a denial of God, a despise of men, a mother of condemnation, a sign of a barren mind, an alienation from God’s help, a fountain of wrath, a door to hypocrisy, a help for the demons, a keeper of sins, a kinship of the cruelty of heart, an ignorance of compassion, a bitter auditor, an unjust judge, an adversary to God, and the origin of blasphemy]. And he also says: [Wherever there is a fall, there, pride has been dwelling; Because the presence of one is a warning of the dwelling of the other³].

Having fallen into the deadly pride, God kept chasing them with successive chastisements; If only ten remained in a house, they shall die! To give a portrait of their state, He shows an uncle carrying the body of his niece; when it is expected that man carries the bodies of his father or uncle, and makes a burning to honor them (Jeremiah 34: 5; 2 Chronicles 16: 14; 21: 19). Asking whether there is anyone left in the house, and finding out that all are dead, his heart frets against the Lord (Proverbs 19: 3), and dare not mention the name of the Lord. So would be the devastation over the houses of Israel that

¹ In Matt. Hom. 79: 4.

² Conc. Stat. hom. 18: 9.

³ يوحنا السلمي: السلم إلى الله (تعريب رهينة دير مارجرجس الحرف، 1980)، 23: 1، 4.

no one remains to mention the name of the Lord. It is amazing how the Lord would break the great house into bits, and the little house into pieces; how He destroys, and more violently so, the great before the little, on account of its increasing pride!

3-THEIR REJOICING IN VANITY:

The third cause for their fall under woe, is: “*You who rejoice over Lo Debar, who say, ‘Have we not taken Karnaim for ourselves, by our own strength?’*” (Amos 6: 13)

Amid their spoiled life of luxury, they rejoice, leaning upon their own strength, as though nothing would ever befall them, or that anything said to them in the form of warning, was nothing but vain words; ... The secret of their failure, is that they shut on themselves all ways of escape; He says: “*Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen? Yet, you have turned justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood*” (Amos 6: 12)

It is as though the Lord says to them: I have sent to you My prophets carrying warnings for the sake of your repentance and your returning to Me, to find out that your hearts have turned into rocks, on which no horse can run, or oxen can plow; You have turned the ordinances into poison and bitterness; You have taken the benefit away from the righteousness and truth! ... Then He ends His sermon by saying: “*I will raise up a nation against you O house of Israel, They will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath to the valley of the Arabah*” (Amos 6: 14)

He will raise up nations to afflict them, from all sides: from the North (the entrance of Hamath), and from the South (the Valley of the Arabah), south of the Dead Sea.

THE THIRD SECTION

VISIONS AND A PROMISE OF SALVATION

(Chapters 7 to 9)

Vision (1) The plague of the locusts	Chapter 7
Vision (2) The plague of the destructive fire	Chapter 7
Vision (3) The vision of the plumb line	Chapter 7
The provocation of Amaziah the priest	Chapter 7
Vision (4) A basket of summer fruit	Chapter 8
Vision (5) The altar and the enjoyment of Salvation	Chapter 9

CHAPTER 7

THE FIRST THREE VISIONS AND THE OPPOSITION OF THE PRIEST OF BETHEL

In this chapter, the prophet presents to us the three visions shown to him by the Lord, for the sake of warning Israel against their transgressions. And he ends the chapter by the complaint of Amaziah the priest of Bethel to the king against Amos, and the prophet's response to his provocation .

1- The vision of the locusts	1 – 3
2- The vision of the destructive fire	4 – 6
3- The vision of the plumb line	7 – 9
4- The provocation of Amaziah the priest	10 – 11
5- Expelling Amos from Samaria	12 – 13
6- The response of Amos	14 – 17

1- THE VISION OF THE LOCUSTS:

God had previously threatened Israel by the prophet Amos, that He will send locusts to devour their vineyards, their fig trees, and their olive trees (Amos 4: 9). Now He shows his prophet His plan, in which justice and mercy are mixed together; While chastening, He shows compassion; And while planning, He was anticipating a word of intercession from the prophet to cease his chastisement (3).

The Lord sends locusts, He sets by Himself (1); As whether using locusts or enemies, He does not entrust anyone to chasten His children; But His hand would remain the one acting, while His eyes would stay concentrated on them, the way a Potter cares for the object he puts in the furnace for a certain time. He sets swarms of locusts, yet in their early stages as worms, to appear at the beginning of the late crop, after the king's mowings; namely, after the first crop which was to be given as a tax to the king. He did not allow the locusts to devour the plant before the first crop, to let the people live on what they have already gathered as a tax for the king, and not to die of hunger. While chastening, He does not allow for perdition; according to the words of the Psalmist: "*Oh, do not forsake me utterly*" (Psalm 119: 8). In His chastisement, God may seem as though He has forsaken us, Yet that would only be for some time, until we return to Him, then He would return to us.

The prophet Amos humbly interceded on behalf of Israel, saying: "*O Lord God, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, for he is small!*" (Amos 7: 2)

That was Jacob about whom God said: "*I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his palaces*" (Amos 6: 8). Once the prophet interceded on his behalf, and said that he is too small to endure the chastisement, the Lord relented and ceased. That does not imply a change of thought, but rather a change of position.

God, even in the most bitter moments of our chastisement, longs to hear the voice of Amos in us, humbly interceding on our behalf, proclaiming that we are small and in need of Him; He would then lift up His chastisement, and embrace us.

Some scholars believe that the attacks of locusts refer to the attacks by Aram, Assyria, or others, against Israel.

2- THE VISION OF THE DESTRUCTIVE FIRE:

In the first time, God chastened with great compassion; But because Israel did not repent their transgression, He came back to chasten more cruelly; no more in secret, but in a public way: ***“The Lord God called for judgment by fire”*** (Amos 7: 4). And is said by the prophet Isaiah: *“For behold, the Lord will come with fire and with chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and His sword, the Lord will judge all flesh; And the slain of the Lord shall be many”* (Isaiah 66: 15, 16); Who also said: *“The Lord stands up to plead, And stands to judge the people”* (Isaiah 3: 13); And as said by Jeremiah: *“Therefore I will yet bring charges against you, says the Lord; And against your children’s children I will bring charges”* (Jeremiah 2: 9); And by Hosea: *“The Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land”* (Hosea 4: 1).

God calls for a public judgment, not to avenge, according to our human concept; But that, through the fire of chastisement, He would bring the wicked back from his evil ways; and burn his transgressions, to make him return to Him and to enjoy His love.

In the first chastisement, only a part of the crop was destroyed; but this time, Chastening more firmly; God deprives them of water and food; His fire would consume the great deep and devour the territory; to make them feel the need for someone to satisfy their need of water and food, and to find them both in God.

At his time as well, God would anticipate an intercession from His prophet to forgive His people!

3- THE VISION OF THE PLUMB LINE:

The Lord stood on the wall with a plumb line in His hand (a tool to examine the straightness of a wall). Measuring the kingdom of Israel with His divine plumb line, He said: ***“I will not pass by them anymore”*** (8); namely, (I will no longer spare them).

It was befitting of the Jewish church to become a wall of faith in the Messiah; But having rejected that mission, and having denied her Savior, as revealed by God’s plumb line; She deserved to be destroyed. ... This applies to those who are entrusted for a mission of spiritual leadership, if they are found unfaithful in being like a wall to support others in their spiritual strife, they become worthy of destruction.

The Lord says through Isaiah: ***“I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plummet”*** (Isaiah 28: 17). ... When the prophet David defeated Moab, he forced them to the ground, with two lines he measured off, with one line those to be put to death, and with another those to be kept alive (2 Samuel 8: 2); ... And when Manasseh king of Judah did evil, God said: *“I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down”* (2 Kings 21: 13).

Using a plumb line probably means that God presents His divine chastisements, elaborately, and within certain measures, according to how far we endure, and how much edification we need; although it must be preceded by the destruction of what has gone astray inside us.

Then the prophet goes on to say: ***“The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste. I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam”*** (Amos 7: 9)

What does he mean by all these forms of destruction? ... Having been used to find refuge in the high places, to count the sanctuaries as their strongholds, and their present

king as their support; Their high places would become desolate, the sanctuaries shall be laid waste, and their king Jeroboam, together with all his household, will be slain by the sword!

In the days of the early Patriarch fathers, the high places were considered most convenient to build altars, to offer sacrifices to the Lord; probably for their high elevation, in man's attempt, in his relationship with God, to raise him above the earthly and temporal things. ... But through mixing with the Gentiles, as the Jews set their heathen altars on the high places; The prophets of God started to fight against the use of high places for worship, on account of that they were symbols of idolatry; And because there was already a temple in Jerusalem, to offer sacrifices to the Lord.

Mentioning "*the high places of Isaac*" (9), was probably on account of that the word "*Isaac*" means (laughing); As though they would be a laughing stock and a mockery of the Gentiles, because of the destruction that would befall them.

As to the sword that is risen against the house of Jeroboam, It was that of Assyria.

4- THE PROVOCATION OF AMAZIAH THE PRIEST:

Israel with their king, leaderships, priests, and people, Instead of offering repentance, the way the people of Nineveh did when they heard the rebuke of the prophet Jonah; Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, provoked Jeroboam king of Israel, against the prophet Amos, saying: "*Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to hear all his words. For thus Amos has said: 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive from their own land'*" (Amos 7: 10, 11)

As the heart of Amaziah the priest of Bethel has gone astray from the ministry to temporal positions, to earthly glories, and to the love of the world; There is no wonder that, instead of carrying out his mission as a priest, he turned the truth into wormwood; and the prophecies of Amos into a conspiracy against the king. He counted the words of the prophet, not as a message for repentance and edification, but as a provocation of the people against the king and his men; as a national treason!

He says to the king: "*The land is not able to hear his words*", in an attempt to convince the king that the people are all against the prophet, and that his mission is no more endured by anyone. That was always the way of the devil in every era, to convince man that the words of God are unacceptable, and the preaching of the gospel is unendurable, nor practical, in an attempt to lead them astray from the work of God, and to bring them out of the circle of the cross!

He says: "*The land is not able to hear all his words*" Yes indeed, having been, himself, land and not heaven, Amaziah the priest could not bear the words of the prophet; A carnal man of dust, walking with an earthly mind, cannot receive what is God's, and cannot endure the heavenly life!

When the Lord Christ talked about His holy body and blood, presented as the secret of eternal life, Many of His disciples said: "*This is a hard saying, who can understand it,... And from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more*" (John 6: 60, 66).

5- EXPELLING AMOS FROM SAMARIA:

“Then Amaziah said to Amos: ‘Go, you seer! Flee to the land of Judah, There eat bread, and there prophesy. But never again prophesy at Bethel, For it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is the royal residence” (Amos 7: 12, 13)

Amaziah thought that Amos is a prophet to earn bread; But Amos was not such a prophet; Prophecy for him was not a job for a living; but he was a tool in the hand of God, his Creator. No wonder that the priest expelled the prophet, who by his simplicity, faithfulness, and courage, revealed his secret and exposed his life.

St. Jerome says: [Why was Amos expelled from Samaria? Surely, as it is in many other cases, on account of being a spiritual surgeon who amputates the members corrupt with sin, and provokes men to repentance. For the same reason the apostle Paul says to the Galatians: *“Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”* (Galatians 4: 16)¹].

Although Amos was not officially a prophet, taught in the school of prophets, or through inheritance; ... Yet, in the eyes of God, he was more faithful, and far better than the one with official authority – the priest of Bethel. That is why **St. Jerome**, in one of his messages, says: [Not all bishops are truly bishops. If you look at Peter, Consider as well Judas; And if you look at Stephen, Consider as well Nicodemus, the angel of the church of Ephesus, who was judged by the Lord Himself in the Book of Revelation (2: 6), because of his fantasies. Therefore, *“Let a man examine himself”* (1 Corinthians 11: 28); As the clerical rank does not make a Christian out of you²!].

6- THE RESPONSE OF AMOS:

In humility, yet with courage, Amos said to Amaziah: ***“I am no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, But I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock. And the Lord said to me, ‘Go prophesy to my people Israel’”*** (Amos 7: 14, 15)

Humbly, Amos did not deny his lowly old job as a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit; And bravely proclaimed that it is the Lord who called him as he followed the flock to prophesy to His people Israel ... To some, he might not be a prophet, having not been taught in the school of prophets, Nor being the son of a prophet; But he responded to a divine call from God; and was committed to work according to it

St. John Chrysostom says: [He did not say that, to boast that he is called to prophesy by God Himself, But to mute those who accused him of being a false prophet, and to confirm that he says nothing on his own³].

And **St. Gregory the Nazianzen**, speaking about the Holy Spirit who worked in Amos to set him a prophet, says: [This Spirit, being the whole wisdom and love, made out of David, a herdsman a Psalmist who, by his psalms, could drive away the evil spirits (1 Samuel 16: 23); and made out of Amos, also a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit, a prophet of God⁴].

Finally, the prophet Amos, could not keep silent, but daringly proclaimed to Amaziah the priest: ***“Thus says the Lord: ‘Your wife shall be a harlot in the city; Your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword; Your land shall be divided by survey line;***

¹ Ep. 40: 1.

² Ep. 14: 9.

³ In 2 Cor. Hom. 24:3.

⁴ On Pentecost 14.

You shall die in a defiled land; And Israel shall surely be led away captive from his own land’” (Amos 7: 17)

All of which have been literally realized, with the captivation of Israel by Assyria.

How bitter it would be when a priest is forsaken by the Lord; ... When his body is corrupted like Amaziah’s woman who became a harlot; ... When his talents and energies are scattered, like Amaziah’s sons and daughters, who fell by the sword; ... When, instead of inheriting, he would lose what he already has, and strangers would divide his land, to become in disgrace; ... And when, because of him, the church would be captivated, and many of its members would fall and be offended!

CHAPTER 8

THE FOURTH VISION A BASKET OF SUMMER FRUIT

In this vision, God proclaims His haste to put His threat of devastation into effect; revealing the bitter fruit of sin, which are gathered in a basket, and presented as mourning, wailing, famine, and death.

1- A basket of bitter fruit	1 -3
2- A trial of the oppressors	4 – 10
3- A famine of hearing the words of the Lord	11 – 14

1- A BASKET OF BITTER FRUIT:

God showed His prophet a basket of fruit; It came in Hebrew as (of fruit of the late summer or fall); Not joyful fruit, but those of sin, which became too ripe to be left uneaten, as the dark winter was close by.

God provided them with many chances to repent their sins and to return to him; sometimes through proclamations, or through gifts, and some other times through warnings and threats He chastened, then forgave; But now, they have prepared themselves for perdition: *“The end has come upon My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore”* (Amos 8: 2)

Even now, He does not forget they are ‘His own people’; although their end has come because of their persistence on evil. *“The songs of the temple shall be wailing in that day’, says the Lord God – Many dead bodies everywhere; They shall throw them out in silence”* (Amos 8: 3)

Although the temple became a ruin before their eyes, yet they kept silent, and cried no more; because their anguish became too much to endure; or they lost the energy to cry because of the multitude of the dead; Or for fear, lest the enemy would hear them cry, and come to kill those who remained alive.

Even though God is very longsuffering, yet, according to the apostle: *“Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds”* (Romans 2: 4-6).

In His love, God anticipates a sign to return to us; He longs to dwell in us and to bring us over into His glories. But if we hold fast to rejection, and we keep on walking in evil, our sins would be ripe enough to be gathered in a basket of bitter fruit, hated by God. Although we are His children, yet our end would come; Our sonhood to Him would turn into a secret of suffering to the soul, and a testimony for judgment; ... And instead of the songs of joy, there would be wailing and mourning. The temple would become empty, and everything in it would come to an end. Let us then return to Him, that He would return to us; and to establish inside us His joyful paradise instead of that sorrowful-looking basket of bitter fruit.

2- A TRIAL OF THE OPPRESSORS:

The prophet gives us a horrible portrait of the conditions of oppression and corruption, in which Israel lived at that time; whose features are:

(1) ***“Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, and make the poor of the land fail”*** (Amos 8: 4) They intend to destroy the poor with every possible way; to swallow the needy in their bellies, or tread upon them with their feet; to the account of their own riches and pleasure.

When the ‘ego’ swells up, man thinks of himself as being the center of the world, all work to his account, and all perish for the sake of his happiness; Whereas about Jesus, the Lord of Glory, it is said: *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich”* (2 Corinthians 8: 9). Carrying Him in us, we become rich by Him; ... And as a sign of our riches, we accept to become poor together with Him, so that our brethren in Christ who dwells in us, would become rich; We long to be enslaved, for them to be liberated in Him; to die, that they would enjoy life with Him; And to forsake everything, that they would acquire Him as the secret of their riches. That is the way our teacher the apostle Paul walked, by the Spirit of His Lord, when he said: *“For though I am free of all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more”* (1 Corinthians 9: 19); And, *“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake”* (2 Corinthians 4: 5).

(2) ***“Saying: ‘When will the new moon be past; that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade our wheat?’”*** (Amos 8: 5). In a literal way, they used to consummate the law; by not working on the new moon and on every Sabbath, as though they are religious and God-lovers; Yet those days would be so heavy to endure, that they wished them to pass quickly, to resume their trade and material profits! In their own eyes, and in those of others, they seemed as though righteous, and keepers of the days of feasts and Sabbaths; but their hearts were actually far from being holy; according to the words of the Scripture: *“With their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain”* (Hezekiel 33: 31)

It is a painful portrait of the soul that so turned into earth, to feel that the day of the Lord is heavy to endure, and the worshipping rites are too long and without benefit; while spending most of its time rejoicing in the material gains.

(3) ***“Making the ephah small and the shekel large, and cheating with dishonest scales”*** (Amos 8: 5)

Namely, they rob their customers in both buying and selling to their own account; forgetting what is written: *“A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight”* (Proverbs 11: 1).

(4) ***“Buying the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat”*** (Amos 8: 6). In our study of the second chapter, the Lord says: *“They sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals”* (Amos 2: 6); And we saw how they sell the Lord Himself for the sake of profit, and how they despise Him in the person of the poor and the needy, for a pair of sandals, that He commanded Moses to take off (Exodus 3); and His disciples not to acquire (Mathew 10: 9).

They buy the poor for silver; As the poor became so miserable, that they sell themselves and their children as slaves to the rich, that they may eat and live; Something that enraged Nehemiah later on (See Nehemiah 5: 6).

By selling the sweepings with the wheat, they are uproot love, and breaking the law, that says, the sweepings should be left for the poor who cannot afford to buy the wheat: *“When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it, it shall be for the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands”* (Deuteronomy 24: 19).

Having reached such a bitter status, Israel, the people of God, have fallen under the firm trial, about which the prophet says: *“The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: ‘Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall the land not tremble for this, and everyone mourn who dwells in it? All of it shall swell like the River, heave and subside like the River of Egypt. And it shall come to pass on that day’, says the Lord God, ‘That I will make the sun go down at noon, And I will darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feast into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day’* (Amos 8: 7-10)

Despite all the oppression and transgressions done by Israel, that made God swear never to forget any of their wicked works; that *“He will not pass by them anymore”*, Yet He still has for them a special soft feeling, to say: *“I swear by the pride of Jacob”* ... We are His children of whom He is proud, and for their salvation He longs.

Before the oppression of those people, the land trembled as though by an earthquake, and heaved and subsided like the River Nile of Egypt; The sun went down at noon; The earth darkened in broad daylight; Feasts turned into mourning, and songs into lamentation; Sackcloth was brought on every waist, and baldness on every head; ... Like mourning for an only son.

It is a natural fruit to be tasted by everyone whose cup is filled with evil: ... His earth, namely his body that provides him with pleasure, would tremble before God, and would lose all its vitality; All his senses and feelings would loose every gladness, and would enter into a state of despair and murmuring; His life would tremble as though by an earthquake, and would heave and subside like the River of Egypt; ...,The Sun of Righteousness would set on him, to loose every enlightenment he used to enjoy; ... His inner land would turn into a darkness of ignorance; He would loose every sense of spiritual joy; His inner feasts would turn into mourning; Instead of songs he would utter lamentation; And instead of the inner spiritual adornment, he would in disgrace, be clothed by sackcloth, and his head would become bald, as though mourning for an only son, namely his only soul!

It is amazing how that bitter fruit was carried by the Lord Christ Himself for our sake, when he bowed His back on the cross; when *“The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53: 6). When that prophesy has been literally realized; *“the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, the rocks were split, the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised”* (Matthew 27: 51, 52). The earth trembled, and so did hell and the sun disappear at noon, *“from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land”* (Matthew 27: 45). From that day on, the feasts of the Jews turned into mourning and their songs into lamentations; They lost the temple; They were scattered all over the land; And, having lost their position as the people of God, they became as though mourning for an only son.

Many fathers (like **father Lectantius**¹, the scholar **Tertullian**, and **St. Erinaos**), saw in those words a straightforward prophecy about what actually happened during the sufferings of the Lord Christ.

St. Erinaos says: [It was clearly proclaimed that darkness would prevail over all the land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour; after which their feasts, according to the law, and their songs, would turn into mourning and lamentation, as they are delivered to the Gentiles²]. With the same sense, **the Scholar Tertullian** says: [You have been captivated and scattered after the sufferings of Christ, as previously proclaimed by the Holy Spirit³]; and also says: [According to Isaiah: "*I clothe the heavens with darkness*" (Isaiah 50: 3); The day about which Amos writes: "*It shall come to pass on that day, says the Lord God, that I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight*" (Amos 8: 9). At noon of that day, the veil of the temple was torn in two "*when the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city...*" (Ezekiel 11: 22, 23); When "*The daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers*" (Isaiah 1: 8) ⁴].

Introducing a spiritual concept in our daily life of the eclipse of the sun and the dwelling of darkness on earth, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [It seems to me that it is not just the earth, but even the nature of the weather, were looking down with grief; ... The rays of the sun became darker, not because of any change of its elements, but rather because the eyes of men were so dimmed by grief, to be unable to see them clearly; ... Which the prophet means by saying: "*I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight*". So he says, not on account that there was an eclipse of the sun, or a disappearance of daylight, as much as because those in grief cannot recognize the light of day because of the blindness that prevailed on their eyes⁵. ... We are in need of God to lift up from us the darkness of sin, that our eyes would be enlightened by His Holy Spirit, to be able to recognize the Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of righteousness, and to enjoy His splendor in us.

As to turning the feasts into mourning and the songs into lamentation, That is the natural work of sin; While repentance would give us the contrary, by Jesus Christ, to whom we would return, and in Him we would find our feast, truly joyful. And as said by **St. Gregory the wonder maker**: [It is our duty to keep that feast filling the whole world with joy and gladness; Let us keep it with psalms, praise, and spiritual songs ... As our Lord has confirmed to us that, through the fruit of repentance, He will turn our grief into joy⁶].

3- A FAMINE OF HEARING THE WORDS OF THE LORD:

The fruit of sin is destruction on every side: a destruction of the body, with the trembling of the earth, and the mourning of its inhabitant (8); a destruction of the soul, with its loss of light, and turning into a state of depression and incessant lamentation; And finally a destruction of the spirit, with the loss of the spiritual food for man; "***Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land,***

¹ *Divine Instil. 4: 19; Epitome of Div. Inst. 46.*

² *Adv. Haer. 4: 33: 12.*

³ *An Answer to Jews, 10.*

⁴ *Adv. Marc. 4: 43.*

⁵ *Conc. Statues 2: 6.*

⁶ *Four Homilies, 2 (on the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary).*

Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. ... In that day the fair virgins and strong young men shall faint from thirst” (Amos 8: 11, 13)

That is what God threatens the wicked, to enter into a state of hunger and thirst, not of food and drink, but of hearing the words of the Lord, the Giver of life; Wandering from one sea to another – the sea here, with its raging waves, refers to the world – Namely, seeking the satisfaction for their souls from one teacher to another, from teachers, who are themselves deprived of the spiritual satisfaction and the true peace; searching in vain, all over the world, from North to South, and from East to West, until all their talents, energies, and potentials -- the fair virgins and strong young men -- would wither with spiritual thirst! They will reap the sin of Samaria, who swear and say: ‘***As your god lives O Dan, And ‘as the way of Beersheba lives’; They shall fall and never rise again***’ (Amos 8: 14).

It is such a horrible famine, the soul seeks a spiritual satisfaction, and would never find it; Not that God has deprived her of it, but because of her increasing transgressions, and her lack of desire for repentance, she would lose the possibility of reaching the word of God as the bread of life.

I wish therefore, that we perpetually enjoy the word of the Lord, about which He Himself says: “*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life*” (John 6: 63); And **St. John Chrysostom** says: [The word of God is food, adornment, and security for the soul; And not listening to it, is famine and deprivation¹].

St. Gregory Bishop of Nyssa² believes that, while God threatens the wicked of a famine, but not of food, and of thirst, but not of water; On the other side, He grants His children in paradise, fruition that are befitting of His promises; Not material fruits and material water, but the bread and the fountain of life.

That is the living bread on which we are committed to feed, get satisfied, and provide it to our hungry brethren; like the grain that Joseph provided to his father, brothers, and even to strangers. In this sense, **St. Gregory the Neanzan**³ called St. Basil ‘The second Joseph’; who saved Egypt as well, from famine, by his wise ordinance. By providing the bread of angels, to feed the souls, hungry for God; He provided inexhaustible food that remains forever to give life.

Speaking to a delegation coming to Egypt with a load of grain, **St. Gregory the Neanzan** said: [You have brought with you a cure, not for the famine of bread and the thirst of water; As that sort of famine and thirst are relatively not horrible, and their treatment is not impossible; But you brought a cure for the famine of hearing the word of God, which is truly more serious, and its treatment extremely difficult, because of the increasing evil, and the rarity of faithful listeners in the present time⁴].

Therefore, Let us return to the Lord, and not remain in such a famine, wandering from a sea to another, that would end up making the fair virgins and the strong men wither with spiritual thirst.

As we said before, the fair virgins and the strong men, refer to the senses provided to us by God, good and fair; which, in case we become deprived of the word of God,

¹ In Matt. Hom 2: 10.

² On the Making of Man 19.

³ Panegyric on S. Basil 36.

⁴ Oration 34: 2.

would wither and turn ugly and evil, with no adornment, by which they would be worthy of enjoying the eternal wedding (Matthew 25). Through deprivation of the word of God, the wise virgins in us would turn into foolish virgins, who by their carnal thoughts would lose their light.

CHAPTER 9

VISION OF THE ALTAR AND THE ENJOYMENT OF SALVATION

In this chapter the prophet saw the lord standing by the altar to chastise, and nobody, wherever he is, will ever escape from His chastisements. Yet the remnant faithful to Him will be kept, and not the smallest grain of them will fall to the ground. Finally the prophet ends his prophecy by opening wide the door of hope before all peoples and nations to enter into the new tabernacle of David in the Messianic era.

1- The vision of the altar	1 – 4
2- The features of the Chastiser Himself	5 – 6
3- The salvation of the faithful remnant	7 – 10
4- The Messianic era	11 – 15

1- THE VISION OF THE ALTAR:

The introduction to this vision, not saying: *“The Lord showed me”*, came to be different from the previous visions. It so seem that the prophet dared to enter into the house of the Lord, to see the Lord, Himself, standing at the altar, to proclaim the dispute from it, and not through the cherubim or the seat of mercy. He came to seek His justice for the sake of His sanctuaries which are treaded upon; That the altar, instead of being the way for reconciliation between God and men, has become the cause of God’s wrath over His people who defiled His sanctuaries, the way the house of Eli did, about whom the Lord said: *“I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever”* (1 Samuel 3: 14).

The Lord probably proclaimed the last of the visions on the altar which was defiled, before He destroys it and depart from it; As he more clearly proclaimed to the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 10). It was not possible for the Lord to dwell where man persists on evil¹.

Some scholars believe that the vision here does not concern the altar of the lord in His temple in Jerusalem, but concerns the one in Bethel where the Northern kingdom worshipped, and where they mixed the worship of God with idol worship².

Anyway, the following decree of destruction was issued: ***“Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword. He who flees from them shall not get away, And he who escapes from them shall not be delivered”***(Amos 9: 1)

By the doorpost, He probably refers to the chief priest of Bethel, or to the High priest in the temple of Jerusalem; And by the thresholds, the great, the counselors, and the pervert religious leaders, and all the wicked people who would perish, and none of them would get away. So God starts by the religious leaders; As those with higher honor, or have greater responsibility, would be the first to be judged. In the parable of the talents, the Lord started settling account with the one who owed Him the greatest number of talents, followed by the one with less, and ended up by the one with the least number of talents (Matthew 18: 34). That is why St. **John Chrysostom** used often to rebuke

¹ حزقيال ص 87، 88.

² Jerome Biblical Commentary, p. 252.

himself, saying: [I wonder if there will ever be a bishop saved!]; And as also said by **the scholar Origen**: [The Judgment will start by God's household¹].

That does not imply that fleeing from responsibility is the way to salvation; but fleeing from evil; As it is written: *"Evil pursues sinners, But to the righteous, good shall be repaid"* (Proverbs 13: 21). Evil pursues the sinners wherever they are; Whether they are occupying the first places in the church or the last ones; As, according to the Lord: *"Though they dig into Sheol, from there shall My hand take them; Though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down"* (Amos 9: 2)

By 'Sheol' or the pit, He probably refers to the place of the dead (Isaiah 14: 9); For even though they are dead with the body, Yet they would be followed by the fruit of their sins; Death would not be able to save them from what they have committed. And by saying "heaven", He means to refer to the contrary (Job 11: 8); As though He is saying that, wherever they go they will not escape judgment. By 'Sheol' He may also refer to the deadly despair, and by climbing up to heaven, He probably refers to haughtiness; Namely, that neither despair or haughtiness would protect man from God's wrath on his evil.

"And though they hide themselves on the top of the Carmel, From there, I will search out and take them" (Amos 9: 3)

The top of the Carmel, being known for its dense forests and dark caves, became a symbol of where a fugitive could not be found; ... Yet God's hand will search out and take him.

"Though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, From there I will command the sea-serpent, and it shall bite them" (Amos 9: 3). If the sea refers to the world with its raging waves, and the possibility of drawing man down to perish in its deeps; Leviathan, the fleeing serpent (Isaiah 27: 1), refers to the devil with his authority over those drowned in the love of the world and its lusts; Having delivered himself to the world, and having his heart drawn into its deeps, man would be chastened by God, through delivering him to the serpent, namely to the devil, to taste the bitterness of what he has committed. Having chosen evil, God would not commit him to return against his will, but would forsake him to the evil one, to be chastened in bitterness, in hope that he would eventually return and repent.

"Though they go into captivity before their enemies, From there I will command the sword, And it shall slay them" (Amos 9: 4). Some may probably wonder, how it would be possible for man to go into captivity before his enemies by his own free will, that the Lord command the sword to slay him?! Actually. Although captivity, as a historical fact, used to happen by force, yet, as a fact of faith, it occurs through man's free will, who, by his wickedness, may deliver himself into captivity. What happened to Israel and Judah on the hands of Assyria and Babylon, was only a fruit of their transgressions and arrogance along the years. God sent them many prophets to warn them in several ways; and when they did not heed His warnings, He allowed for their chastisement. It is a painful portrait that happens in our life, when God warns us by several ways, But our persistence on evil would lead us to fall into the captivity of the devil and his cruel servitude; And the Lord would allow for us to be chastised in a foreign country!

2- THE FEATURES OF THE CHASTIZER HIMSELF:

¹ In Matt. Hom 14: 10.

Every time the Lord threatens His people, He declares His identity, to confirm to them that He is capable of realizing what He threatens. Now, while doing that, He confirms that, while chastening the wicked, He would not disregard the faithful remnant, whatever its number or size are.

“The Lord God of hosts, He who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell there mourn; All of it shall swell like the river, and subside like the River of Egypt” (Amos 9: 5)

It was written about the Lord that *“He touches the hills, and they smoke”* (Psalms 104: 32; 144: 5). He who thinks of himself as well established as a hill, would not endure to get in touch with the Lord Himself; And he who remains as earth, and who walks according to the earthly things, would be touched by the Lord of hosts, to melt like water! ... Those who dwell on the earth, are the senses and energies of man, that would mourn, when the body loses its holiness and its being, before God’s wrath and justice, and when all swell like a river or like a flood, and subside like the River of Egypt; Namely, when man, with all his energies, would be in a state of complete loss.

“Who builds His upper chambers in the heavens, and founds His vaults upon the earth; who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the surface of the earth – the Lord is His name” (Amos 9: 6)

He confirms to the children of Israel that they cannot escape from His chastisements; If He touches them as earth, they would melt like water, and all who dwell there would mourn. And at the same time, by building His upper chambers in the heavens, He is capable of casting down on them large hailstones from heaven to kill them, As He has already done to the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the mountains in the days of Joshua (Joshua 10: 11).

Having, in their evil, worshipped the stars; He, in heaven would manipulate the stars to fight them: as it was written: *“The stars from their courses fought against Sisera”* (Judges 5: 20).

And by saying: *“Who builds His upper chambers in the heavens”* (6), He opens the doors of hope before them. If, being earth, they fear that the Lord of hosts would touch them, and they melt; They should then become heaven, so that He would be glad to dwell among them, and they would rejoice. That is what the Lord Christ did, when by His ascension, He granted us the possibility of ascending by Him, to become heaven for Him, and He would be in us. And as said by **the scholar Tertullian**: [Now, Christ is preparing that ascension for us; As, according to Amos, *“He builds His upper chambers in the heavens”* for Himself and His people¹]. And he says: [Now, there is a door prepared by Christ, through which He presents glory to us; About which Amos says: *“He builds His upper chambers in the heavens”*; Surely, not just for Himself, but for His people together with Him. He says: *“You shall surely clothe yourself with them all as an ornament, and bind them on you as a bride does”* (Isaiah 49: 18). As the Spirit soars in the high chambers of heaven, *“They fly like a cloud, and like doves to their roosts”* (See Isaiah 60: 8) ².

Let us therefore be in Christ ascending to heaven, to dwell securely in heaven; so as to live the rest of the days of our sojourn on earth to the account of the Lord Christ;

¹ Adv. Marc 5: 10.

² Ibid 3: 2.

according to His words: “*He founds His vaults upon the earth*”; Namely, as a congregation gathering together for His sake; fighting to His account against the devil; and as spiritual soldiers fighting and working to the account of the kingdom of the Lord. **St. Cyprian** said: [I intended to fight bravely, putting in my mind His ‘Sacramentum’, and carrying the two weapons: the consecration and the faith¹]; And **St. John Chrysostom** said: [Like the seal put on the soldiers, it will be the seal of the Holy Spirit on the believers²].

Finally, He turns the sea water into clouds and rain, to pour over the earth, as a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit, the rain that turns our barren earth into a spiritual paradise of the Lord.

3- THE SALVATION OF THE FAITHFUL REMNANT:

After the Lord revealed Himself as the One capable of chastising us, of lifting us to heaven, and of consecrating us to work to the account of His kingdom, through the Messiah, ascending to heaven, in His upper chambers; And through the Holy Spirit who pours upon the earth to grant it the power to produce fruition -- He speaks here about His care and support for the faithful remnant, up to the end.

Again, He supports His promises, as well as His threats, by practical examples, experienced by the world in its relationship to God; in order to show how He has saved nations from servitude or captivity in the past, and as an evidence of His care for the faithful remnant; saying: “*Are you not like the people of Ethiopia to Me, O children of Israel?, says the Lord*” (Amos 9: 7)

If I have saved the idol-worshipping Ethiopians – in those days – from servitude, Shall I not care to save you?! Not to confine the prophecies to bitter visions, He, together with proclaiming His great firmness, He confirms that they mean to Him more than all; So Why should they not return to Him?! How amazing is the love of God, even during the bitter-most moments of His chastisement!

He reminds them again of the fact that He has saved them from the servitude of the Pharaoh of Egypt; the people of Philistine from Caphtor (most probably the island of Crete)³; and the Syrians from Kir. If He cares for all mankind, How could He not care for the faithful remnant of Israel?! In a beautiful and assuring phrase, He says: “*For surely I will command, And I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, As grain is sifted in a sieve; Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground*”(Amos 9: 9)

If many has become like chaff, the sieve will cast them to the ground which they loved; But not the smallest grain of wheat shall fall to the ground from the sieve of the Lord; He will keep them in His hand, and no one will snatch them from Him; And He will bring them up together with Him to His heavenly temple, rejoicing in them for the sake of their faithfulness.

4- THE MESSIANIC ERA:

Like all the rest of the prophets of the Old Testament who shined with the spiritual joy upon the people, and opened before them the door of hope through the Messiah the Son of David, who will come to establish His spiritual kingdom, that will

¹ *De Lapsis* 13.

² *PG* 61: 418.

³ *Jerome Com.*, p. 252.

embrace the new Israel out of all the nations, tongues and peoples; Every prophet revealed certain aspects of that blessed era.

Now, What are the features of the Messianic era, according to the prophet Amos?

(1) Raising up the tabernacle of David: ***“On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of the old”*** (Amos 9: 11)

In the book of Ezekiel, As all the concentration was on the departure of the glory of the Lord from His house, that was defiled by the abominations that entered into it; That is why, proclaiming the reform to come in the Messianic era, He presented it to us as the new temple of the Lord (Chapters 40 to 48), with certain symbolic features that reveal the work of the Messiah in our life, not through the destruction of the temple of our old man, to set the new man. But here, in the book of Amos, with the destruction of the palaces of Israel and Judah, and those of the surrounding nations, burning them with fire; Instead of those palaces, the Lord Christ, presents to us the tabernacle of David, raising it after falling down; He raises it; being Himself risen from the dead, to raise us up together with Him; He repairs its damages, raises up its ruins, and rebuilds it by His Holy Spirit as the days of the age of ages; that death would not be able to defeat.

The main feature of the Messianic era which we enjoy is that of the resurrection; the inner life raised in Him became ours, we live it, that when the Lord comes with His body, our bodies would also be raised, and the soul together with the body would enjoy the eternal resurrection.

Father Methodeus believes that in this phrase, there is a confirmation of the resurrection of the body; and responds to those who deny the resurrection of the body, by saying: [The expression ‘Raise’ or ‘Resurrect’, does not apply to what is not fallen, but to what is fallen to rise again; according to the words of the prophet: *“I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down”* (11). Now the tabernacle of the soul, so much beloved, is fallen down and sunken in the dust of the earth (Daniel 12: 2). The fallen down is not the one who is not dead, but who is dead. It is the body that dies, whereas the soul is eternal! Now, If the soul is eternal, while the body is the lifeless corpse; He who believes in a resurrection, but not of the body, denies the resurrection altogether; As he who is risen is the one who is fallen down, and not the one who is up; According to what is written: *“When men fall down, do they not get up? When a man turns away, does he not return?”* (Jeremiah 8: 4) ¹.

(2) Opening the door before all the Gentiles; As He says: ***“That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name’, says the Lord who does these things”*** (Amos 9: 12)

This phrase, according to **St. Erinaos**², confirms that the door will be opened before the Gentiles who will be called by the name of the Lord.

If the word ‘Edom’ means (of the dust) or (of the blood), the risen tabernacle of David, namely the church of the New Testament, will inherit Edom, to turn him from dust to heaven, and from the love of blood-shedding to the meekness of Christ. The church received the heathens in her bosom, cleansed them, and sanctified them in the Lord, as spiritual vessels, heavenly and angelic

¹ On Resurr. 1: 12.

² Adv. Haer. 3: 12: 14.

(3) An abundance of grace without limits; saying: ***“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; The mountains shall drip with sweet wine”*** (Amos 9: 13)

It is as though the crop will be so abundant that some of it would remain, that the plowman in the next year would find a blessing set before him. The same would be with the treader of grapes in the winepress; who will find a blessing of sweet wine set before him in the next season.

A sign of blessing would be that the believers, having become like well established mountains and hills, will drip with new wine and will flow with blessing (13); the same expression we read in the book of Joel (3: 18).

(4) An era of spiritual freedom, when man is set free from the captivity of the devil and the sin; to have inside him holy cities instead of the waste ruins brought about by evil; And vineyards of the Holy Spirit would be planted, to produce the fruit of joy; And the heart would be transformed into a divine garden, made by the Lord Himself; saying:

“I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from Them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given Them’, says the Lord your God” (Amos 9: 14, 15)

A joyful portrait of the church of Christ, the garden that brings gladness to the heart of God, and makes the heavenly creature rejoice by her spiritual edification, her fruitful plantations, her joyful wine, and her unshakable abidance forever.

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