

A Patristic Commentary



THE BOOK OF Numbers

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*A COMMENTARY ON
THE FOURTH BOOK OF MOSES CALLED*

NUMBERS

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AN INTRODUCTION

The nomenclature of this book as “The book of Numbers” came according to the Septuagint version, based on what came in the first and the twenty-sixth chapters, both including a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel: the first was taken in the second year of their exodus from the land of Egypt (Chapter 1); and the second was taken after about thirty-nine years, in the plains of Moab (Chapter 26). This nomenclature led many to disregard studying this book, on the assumption that it is just a book of census of the people of Israel. But the Hebrew version came to give this book the name “Bemidbar”, namely (In the wilderness), which expresses more accurately the topic of this book; as the book of the travels of the people of Israel in the wilderness.

Contents of the book:

This book came as a consummation of the first three books of Moses; to tell us the story of the children of Israel in their maze in the wilderness of Sinai, their arrival to Moab, to the border of the promised land.

They remained about one year in Sinai, during which they were delivered the Mosaic laws that regulate their spiritual life concerning worship and behavior, as well as their daily social life. Then they moved toward the north to Canaan. Reaching Kadesh, the king of Edom refused to let them pass through his land (Chapter 20); And the king of Arad fought against them, and overcame them at first, then was defeated by them afterward. Then, because of their continuous murmuring and grumbling, God allowed for them to remain lost in a maze in the wilderness for several years.

Hearing their news, Balak king of Moab hired Balaam the magician to curse them; But God turned his words into blessing, and a promise of conquest on their enemies. Finally, that magician counseled the king of Moab to use the Midianite women to put offense before the Israeli men, which he did, causing them to go astray from God, and be defeated; But eventually they prevailed again. And according to the divine instructions concerning the division of the promised land, the land east of the Jordan River, that belonged to the defeated Midianites, was designated to the two tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh.

Features of the book:

1- If the book has provided us with the stages and some of the events of the wandering of the people in the wilderness, yet, its main

goal is parading the work of God with man, to prepare him for the entrance into the promised land. If the book of Exodus came to describe how man set forth, and was liberated from the captivity of bondage through the precious blood (the Passover lamb), heading toward the higher Jerusalem, after crossing over through the holy baptism (the Red Sea); The present book describes a serious stage in the life of man; namely, that of the incessant strife, supported by the divine grace dwelling in him, to bring him forth to the heavenly places.

2- This book came to bear a mixture of the divine statutes and the events of the journey across the wilderness; by which God intends to confirm to us, that “the divine commandment” is the helper for the soul in her journey toward the higher Jerusalem; ... that her life should be melded to the commandment; ... and that her work should be connected to the living word of God, who supports her in her sojourn, and keeps her holy for Him.

3- This book demonstrates God’s care for His people in the wilderness of this world; shading over them as a cloud by day, and providing them with light by night.

4- As much as this book proclaimed the love of God for man, and his care for all his spiritual, psychological, and material needs, It revealed, as well, man's soul, ever murmuring without reason; and portrayed man's perpetual stubbornness and opposition to God; paying God's love back with dryness and grumbling; For which, God had to chastise them by denying them the entrance into the promised land, Yet He realized His promise in their children.

The Psalmist summarized this book by saying on the Lord's tongue: "For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'It is a people who go astray in their heart, and they do not know My ways'. So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest'" (psalm 95: 10, 11). For which the apostle Paul counsels us, saying: "Therefore, while the promise of entering His rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it" (Hebrew 4: 1).

5- It exposed the horror of sin; that it is always condemned, and that he who practices it will fall under chastisement, even if he is a prophet like Moses, or a high priest like Aaron, who were denied the entrance into the promised land (Chapter 20); or a prophetess like Miriam, who became a leper for some time (Chapter 12); or rebels among the Levites like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, whom the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up (Chapter 16); or among the congregation who were bit by the fiery serpents (Chapter 21) ... Yet God gives healing through faith (the bronze serpent), mixed with strife. Through all that, God remains faithful and abiding to His promise, despite the faults of men, whatever their spiritual status is.

6- The beginning of the book concentrated on establishing the sound system of priesthood, on cutting off the opponents, together with designating the work of every category of priesthood: the high priest; the priests; and the Levites (the children of Kohath, of Gershon, and of Merari); intending to confirm our need for the priestly work of the Lord Christ, working in His priests, if they are sanctified in the Lord, and are committed to their duties.

7- This book demonstrates the power of intercession; as "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5: 16). We see how the prophet Moses, as a minister to his people, perpetually stands interceding for them; and how Aaron prays for their sake; This is the work of the priest; saying together with the prophet Samuel: "As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12: 23).

Divisions of the book:

1- Preparations for the travel across the wilderness

Chapter 1 to 10: 10

2- From Sinai to Moab

Chapter 10: 11 to Chapter 21

3- The event of Balaam

Chapter 22 to Chapter 25

4- Preparation for entering Canaan

Chapter 26 to Chapter 36

THE FIRST DIVISION

**PREPARATION FOR THE TRAVEL
ACROSS THE WILDERNESS**

(Chapter 1 to Chapter 10: 10)

CHAPTER 1

THE CENSUS OF THE PEOPLE

Having brought the people out of the land of bondage, God set Himself a king over them (1 Samuel 12: 12), not to submit them, but to care for them, and for all their spiritual, psychological, and social needs. He provided them with His divine constitution, mentioned in the book of the Levites, in the first month, of the second year of the exodus; namely, in the second year of His reign over them, And directly after this, He issued His divine decree to take a census of all those who are able to go to war in Israel.

1- The divine decree to take the census 1 – 4.

2- Appointing the heads of the tribes 5 – 16.

3- Exemption of the Levites 17 – 54.

1- THE DIVINE DECREE TO TAKE THE CENSUS:

“The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: ‘Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every name individually;” (1, 2).

The Lord, taking upon Himself the leadership of the people as a King to ordain all their affairs, issued His royal decree to His servant ‘Moses the prophet’, in the tabernacle of meeting, as His royal palace. This census came after the first one carried out to collect the contribution of all in the expenses of building the tabernacle of meeting (Exodus 38: 25, 26), which was not recorded by their families and according to their fathers’ houses like this census.

Was this census necessary?

Moses was committed by a divine command to consummate this census; although the Holy Scripture tells us how God firmly rebuked and punished the prophet David for taking a similar census (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21); on account of the fact that David’s intention by so doing, was to satisfy the pride of his heart, through proclaiming the human possibilities he had under his authority, before himself and before the others; something that saddens God’s heart, and keeps His grace from working in the life of man; and in particular it is that of the spiritual leaders. The present census, however, did not involve anything of the sort, neither in Moses’ heart, nor in that of Aaron; but it came according to a divine command, to realize divine goals, of which are the following:

1- God probably intended to proclaim to the children of Abraham, that they are harvesting the fruits of their father’s faith and obedience; and consequently, His promises to him are realized in them: “Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south” (Genesis 28: 14). He intended for them to be committed to walk according to the spirit of their father, to enjoy an abundance of the divine promises.

2- If God was called “The Shepherd of Israel” (Psalm 80: 1); Taking a census of them is a confirmation of His care for every single individual, that no one of them would perish. He intends to write their names in the book of life, to bring them all into the higher Jerusalem, and to enjoy the new land. He takes a census of His saintly children to let them enjoy the glory; Or according to the scholar Origen: [In case you need a proof that the number of the saints is counted before God; listen to the words

of the prophet David, saying: “He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name” (Psalm 147: 4). The Savior did not only fix the number of the disciples he has chosen, but also said that “the very hairs of their heads are all numbered“ (Matthew 10: 30). In this He does not talk about the hair that we cut off and cast in the trash, or that which falls off with old age; but He means hair like that of Samson, through which he bore the power of the Holy Spirit (Judges 16) ... By that I mean the power of the spirit and the mind, emerging from the power of will and understanding; symbolized by the heads of the disciples¹] ... He counts their spiritual potentials, to support them with the spiritual understanding, and help them with His Holy Spirit.

3- God’s command to carry out this census was intended to discern between the authentic Israelite and the stranger; Not that God prefers one over another; but in order to bring us over from the state of sojourn from God to closeness to Him; to make every believer sure that he belongs to the people of God, and that he is a member in the heavenly household; according to the words of the apostle Paul: “You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God “; As a serious stroke by which the devil destroys many, is to make them doubt that the divine promise is theirs, as well, and that they are the children of God, for whom He cares. That is why the wicked often say: “The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see” (Ezekiel 9: 9). Feeling that he has become earth, has nothing more in heaven, that God has forsaken him, and sees him no more, the wicked increases his evil, and falls in despair.

4- This census revealed the way God works; being “not the author of disorder, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14: 33), and how He is particulate, that everything His people do in the wilderness, should be orderly, not only as far as the rites of worship – sacrifices and prayers -- are concerned; but even in how they walk in the wilderness; designating a certain location for each tribe where they may camp, in relation to that of the tabernacle of meeting, wherever it goes, as we shall see. It is as though God requests from His believers, as well, to live by the spirit of wisdom and order in their study of the Holy Book, fasting, prayers, and their strife in virtues and behavior. Faith confirms that man should walk with order and spirit, albeit not to become enslaved to extreme dryness and non-flexibility. He confirms that believers should work by the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, without having their life turn into dry and lifeless routine; according to the words of the apostle: “We exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly” (1 Thessalonians 5: 14); and, “Let everything be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14: 40).

5- This census probably motivated the people to get interested in their genealogy, until the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God comes, to make sure of His Person, that He is of the seed of David as promised. Once the Messiah came to the world, a Savior of mankind, the records of genealogy came to an end, and no one cared any more from which tribe he is.

When did this census take place?

The Holy Book fixed the date of this census by “the first day of the second month, in the second year after the children of Israel have come out of the land of Egypt” (1). That was not without goal; as it was the intention of God to record His children after they pass through six spiritual stages, to get qualified for the honor of being referred to as children of God, whose names are written in the book of life; These stages are:

¹ *Origin: in Num, hom 1.*

- a- Their dissension from Satan (Pharaoh), getting free of his servitude, and forsaking him, who submits and corrupts the soul.
- b- Their enjoyment of the holy baptism (crossing over the Red Sea).
- c- Their struggle against the devil (war against Amalek).
- d- Their enjoyment of the heavenly word of God, as nourishment for their souls (the Manna), and quenching their thirst from the Rock (the Lord Christ).
- e- Acquiring the virtuous life through God dwelling in them (the tabernacle of meeting in their midst).
- f- Their enjoyment of the perpetual union with God through the holy sacrifice (the sacrifices and offerings), and the divine commandment (the law).

Concerning this, the scholar **Origen** says: [No census was taken at the time of exodus from the land of Egypt, because Pharaoh was still chasing them. And no census was taken after crossing over the Red Sea, and reaching the wilderness; on account of that the children of Israel have not yet passed through temptation, have not been attacked by enemies, nor have made war and prevailed against Amalek; As one conquest is not enough for them to reach perfection. ... Although the tabernacle of meeting has been erected, yet they were still not ready for census. But once the law was given to Moses, and the ways of offering the sacrifices, and of purification, and the statutes of sanctification, were given, the divine command to take a census of the congregation was issued¹].

The benefits of the census:

God fixed certain criteria for those who are to be included in the list of census, that carried the following spiritual concepts:

- a- Males and not females (2)
- b- From 20 years old and above (3)
- c- Those who are able to go to war (3)
- d- Those who belong to the people of Israel, (and not strangers)
- e- The Levites are exempted from the census (47).

a- Numbering the males and not the females, is not preference of one gender over another; but, on a literal concept, this census was intended as a list of those who are able to go to war, which is the job of men and not of women. On a spiritual concept, though, the commandment to all believers: men, women, elders, youth, and children, was: “Be on your guard; Stand firm in the faith, be men (of courage), be strong” (1 Corinthians 16: 13); Yet it does not bear the literal sense, but implies the commitment of every believer toward maturity and spiritual strife against sin and evil, like a man of war, who bears the responsibility, and knows no idleness. About that the scholar **Origen** says: [As long as any of us has the character of feminine inability or slothfulness, we are unworthy to be counted before God in the pure and holy book of numbers²].

b- Counting those from 20 years of age and above, implies that the believer would have gone beyond the spiritual infancy, and set forth toward spiritual maturity. And as said by the scholar **Origen**: [The present text teaches me that in case I have surpassed the stage of infancy, namely, has no more childish thoughts: “When I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13: 11); and became a young man capable of overcoming the wicked one (1 John 2: 13), I appear worthy to be included among those who are described as “walking strongly” ... and to be

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

included in the divine census. But if any of us still has faltering physical thoughts, he would be unworthy to be written in the pure and holy book of numbers¹].

Commenting on what the gospel of St. Matthew says, concerning the feeding of the multitudes: “Those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children” (Matthew 14: 21), the Scholar **Origen**² says: [The women and children were spiritually put aside, having been unworthy to be counted; As it is befitting of those who are to enjoy that divine blessing, to be men, and “to sit on the grass” (Matthew 14: 19), which is a symbol of the flesh “All flesh is grass” (Isaiah 40: 6)[Namely, to submit their flesh under their spiritually strong and mature souls].

c- Able to go to war. It is not only a matter of age, but those to be counted should be spiritually strong, able to confront Satan and his tricks, to the account of the kingdom of God.

d- Belonging to the people of God. It does not stop at age and possibility (strength), but he should be sanctified; obtained the sonhood to God by His Spirit, and the reference to the holy family; having the Father as his Father, and the church as his mother; and striving, Canonically, by the Spirit of God working in him, as a member in the holy body of Christ. About this the scholar **Origen**³ says: [Many are those who have the strength, yet are still not worthy of being recorded in the divine census, on account of that they did not accept the spiritual reference to God in His holy church. The Greek, for example, used to have the strength according to the philosophical mind to the account of the human glory. The Chaldeans used to have the strength in the astrological studies; yet, not caring for the spiritual life, they got the knowledge that puffs off, as long as it is without the spirit. The Egyptians used to have the human wisdom, yet far from God ... We, not only need to enjoy those possibilities, but to have them through our reference to the holy body of Christ.

e- Concerning the exemption of the Levites, we shall come back to it at the end of the present chapter.

2- APPOINTING THE HEADS OF THE TRIBES:

For the census to be carried out on the hands of Moses and Aaron, heads of the tribes should be chosen to support them in this task. This was done through a divine heavenly decree; first to relieve the prophet Moses of the burden of thinking about whom suits which task; and secondly to close the door before any probable struggle among the congregation to get the positions of leadership.

Choosing those heads reveals God’s care to confirm the role of the people (or the laymen) in the life of the church. It is not for the prophet, for the high priest, nor for the Levites, to take upon themselves the role of running the affairs alone; But the congregation are committed to work along with them, under the leadership of the divine commandment by the Spirit of God.

God, in appointing the heads of the tribes, chose men who carry names with certain meanings. He chose for example, those who see God as their Father (Aliab); their Rock (Alisor); their reward (Nathaneel); those who hold fast to Him, and put in Him all their hope. Some names came to proclaim human relationship; Some, although they see the wicked as brothers, yet they do not lean on them (Achirah); while they see in the righteous, brothers who would help them (Achiazar); And also those who are aware of the devil, being like a deceptive serpent ... The following list includes the meanings of the names of the heads of the tribes:

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Origin: Comm. Matt. 11: 3.*

³ *In Num., hom 1.*

Name of tribe	Meaning	Head of the tribe	Meaning
1- Reuben	A son of vision	Elizur	God is A Rock (Wall)
2- Simon	A listener	Shelumiel	God is peace
3- Judah	A confession	Nahshon	A serpent or snake
4- Issachar	A reward	Nethaneel	God's gift
5- Zebulun	A dwelling place	Eliab	God is Father
6- Ephraim	An increasing fruition	Elishama	God hearkens
7- Manasseh	He forgets	Gamaliel	God is my Reward
8- Benjamin	Son of the right hand	Abidan	The Father judges
9- Dan	Judges	Ahiezer	The helper brother
10- Asher	happy	Pagiel	God encountered me
11- Gad	hardened	Eliasaph	God adds
12- Naphtali	spacious	Ahira	The evil brother

It is amazing that the names concerning our relationship with God are the majority (nine names); As God demands from us to concentrate our sight on Him as our Father, who would encounter, help, listen to, and reward us.... etc. As to our relationship with the brethren, they are only two names: 'The helper brother', namely the righteous man who supports us through the fellowship of love that binds us together; And 'The evil brother', whom we are committed to endure with a spacious heart. Concerning our relationship with the devil, it is only one name, with which our mind should be preoccupied, yet not be disturbed by him, as he became, as far as we are concerned, without authority.

It is to be noticed that the names of the heads of the tribes, came conforming and in harmony with those of the tribes themselves; For the tribe of Reuben, Elizur was chosen; who should have a clear vision, and spiritual knowledge; Reuben, whose name means (the son of vision), would find 'Elizur', as his head, namely, would find his God as his Rock or his Wall, in whom he would find refuge against all wars of the enemy Satan.

Who takes refuge in the tribe of Simon, namely, he who becomes obedient and a listener to God, will encounter its head 'Shelumiel' (God is peace). ... He who listens to God will enjoy the divine peace which nobody can take away from him. Obedience to the divine commandment is the secret of our true peace.

To Judah (the confession), 'Nahshon' (the serpent) was chosen as head; As he who believes in the Lord Christ and confesses Him, will tread upon the ancient serpent under his feet.

Whoever finds a portion in the tribe of Issachar (the reward), will submit to 'Nethaneel' (God's gift), realizing that every reward he enjoys, is not the fruit of self-righteousness, but it is a free gift from God, presented to us in the worthiness of the precious Blood.

Let us flee to the tribe of Zebulun (the dwelling place); that God would dwell in us and we abide in Him, by which we would encounter the head 'Eliab' (God is Father); namely, would discover the fatherhood of God.

For Ephraim (the increasing fruition), Elishama (God hearkens) was chosen as a head; as though the increasing fruition of the Spirit in the life of believers, is the fruit of God's hearkening their supplications. ... For Manasseh (he forgets), 'Gamaliel' (God is my reward) was chosen; Forgetting the glory and pleasures of this world, man will find God, Himself, as his reward. ... For Benjamin (the son of the right hand), 'Abidan' (the father is in debt) is chosen; as though we cannot enter into the eternal kingdom of God, nor enjoy sitting on the right hand of God, unless we receive the divine Judge as our Father; Namely, through enjoying our sonhood to Him. ... For Dan (judges), 'Ahiezer' (the helper brother) was chosen; as though by judging oneself, man will find a brother helper..... For Asher (happy), 'Pagiél' (God encountered me), was chosen; as there is no true happiness for the human soul, except through encountering Him.... For Gad (hardened), Eliasaph (God adds) was chosen; As, by being serious in his life, and hardened within himself, God will add to the believer, grace over grace; namely, he will grow more in the Spirit. ... And finally for Naphtali (spacious), 'Ahira' (the evil brother) was chosen; As the spacious heart would bear the wicked as brethren, and would accommodate them by his love.

The census started by the children of Leah, then those of Rachel, followed by those of the two maidservants, without a commitment to their order of birth; As though God intended to confirm that the divine glories are not given according to age, but to the spiritual growth, and the practical union with God.

The census of Judah, out of whom the Lord Christ is to come according to the flesh, came to surpass all the other tribes, As he was to be at the head of the procession toward the east, as we shall see; As though the Lord Christ is the Leader of our procession toward the higher Jerusalem.

3- EXEMPTION OF THE LEVITES:

The census did not cover the tribe of the Levites, separated for ministering and carrying the tabernacle of the testimony (47-51). Representing the spiritual aspect of the congregation, they are exempted, not to live idle, doing no work, but to be dedicated only to the spiritual work; to minister to the congregation, to sanctify them, and to guard the camp spiritually. By that what is Caesar's would be given to Caesar, And to God is given what is His.

CHAPTER 2

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CAMP

After the consummation of the census as commanded by God Himself, God introduced a special and very elaborate organization for the camp, by which the congregation of Israel are committed when they set their tents, as well as in when they break camp to walk in the wilderness.

1- The organization and the standards	1 - 2
2- The front of the procession (the east)	3 - 9
3- The right wing (the south)	10 - 16
4- The center of the procession	17
5- The rear end of the procession (the west)	18 - 24
6- The left wing (the north)	25 - 31
7- The consummation of the organization	32 – 34

1- THE ORGANIZATION AND THE STANDARDS:

The tribes, with the exception of the tribe of the Levites, were divided into four divisions, each called ‘a camp’, formed of three tribes under the leadership of a certain tribe, by whose name the camp is called. Taking into consideration, that the tribe of Joseph was divided into two tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh, to complete the number to twelve, after the exemption of the tribe of the Levites.

The first division is called the camp of ‘Judah’, located at the front of the procession; followed when breaking camp by the southern division (the right wing) – the camp of Reuben. After them the center itself will break camp, the tribe of the Levites, the ministers and bearers of the tabernacle, who set their tents all around the tabernacle. Then the rear end of the procession, the western camp, or the camp of Ephraim, will break camp. And finally, the left or the northern wing – the camp of Dan will break camp.

Commenting on this organization of the camp, **the scholar Origen** says: [In the book of Numbers I find a great topic for meditation: in the distribution and gathering of the tribes, in the discernment of ranks, and in the organization of the camps. For me, they constitute great secrets, thanks to the apostle Paul who sowed in us the seeds of the spiritual interpretation¹].

In this organization, the following are to be noticed:

(1) The general scene of the camp as a whole represents a cross moving toward the promised land: In the center of which there is the tabernacle of meeting, surrounded by the priests and the Levites, arranged in turn, in the form of a smaller cross around it. While the rest of the tribes are arranged to form a huge cross embracing about two million individuals – men, women, children, and elders – To the east the camp of Judah, To the west the camp of Ephraim, To the south the camp Reuben, and to the north the camp of Dan. That moving cross represents the holy church, the body of the crucified Christ, perpetually moving ahead, setting forth from the land of bondage, toward the higher Jerusalem, bearing inside her the cross of the Lord Himself who grants her the power of resurrection.

Although while looking at that scene, he did not talk about the cross, In such a great order, **the scholar Origen** saw a symbol of the exalted order of the church on the great day of the Lord, saying: [Let us look into the meaning of the secrets of the numbers and the different locations referred to; Let us meditate in the moments of the ultimate coming of Christ, on the great day of the Lord, when the living survivors on

¹ *Ibid* 1: 3.

the earth, “*will by no means precede those who are asleep*” (1 Thessalonians 4: 15), but all will be caught up together in the clouds by the Spirit, to meet the Lord in the air. By that, we can realize the corruption of this earthly place, which is the dwelling place of the dead; ... We shall be taken over to selected locations; according to the words of the Lord: “*In My Father’s house, are many mansions*” (John 14: 2). Those mansions or glories are given according to the worthiness of the works of man, as confirmed by the apostle Paul who says concerning the resurrection: “*Each one in his own order*” (1 Corinthians 15: 23); The name of each to be written according to his spiritual stature, works, and nature: One to be included in the tribe of Reuben, being like Reuben in his behavior, nature, works, and ways of life; And another to be included in the tribe of Simon, because he likens him in his obedience¹; And a third one to be included in the tribe of Levi, having consummated well his priestly duties; And another to be included in the tribe of Judah, for the sake of his royal emotions. Therefore, according to the words of the apostle, in the resurrection there are diverse ranks, whose portrait appears clearly in the book of Numbers, where the tabernacle is located in the center of the camp among the congregation²].

(2) In the scene of the camp, by such divine ordinance, **the scholar Origen** sees a living portrait of the church of the New Covenant, which is also committed to walk with such a spirit of decency and order, not only in her worship, but in her behavior; And the soul of the believer, as well, should bear a like organization befitting to her, being a member in the holy church. Organization extends as well to the life and behavior of the priests, who should live as ministers to God, flaring with fire.

It is as though organization here is not just an essential work to which we are committed, but is a life with activity, within, as well as without; in the congregation as a whole, as well as in that of every individual member; whether a priest or a layman.

The scholar Origen says: [*“The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ‘Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard under ensigns of his father’s house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting’*” (1, 2). So Moses instructed everyone in the camp to do according to God’s command. The apostle Paul says: “*Let all things be done decently and in order*” (1 Corinthians 14: 40). Does not this show that the spirit by which Moses spoke concerning the order in the camp, is the same by which the apostle Paul did concerning the order in the church?! As Moses, the minister of the law did concerning keeping the order in the camp, the apostle Paul, the minister of the gospel, intended for the Christian to be committed to order, not only in his personal behavior, but even in his attire; as he says to women: “*In like manner, the women should adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation*” (1 Timothy 2: 9).

Moses and Paul, not only mean the commitment to order as far as behavior and attire are concerned, but to ‘the order of the soul’ as well.

It often happens that someone with lowly thoughts, who finds pleasure in material things, who could craftily gain a high priestly rank, and reside over the pulpit of teaching; while he, who is free of temporal things, and who “*judges all things spiritually, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one*” (1 Corinthians 2: 15), only occupies the first rank of priesthood, or is even counted as a layman among the congregation. Such a thing is an insult to the teachings of the law and the gospel, and is contradictory to proper order.

¹ لأن كلمة "شمعون" تعني "مستمع" أو "طائع".

² *Ibid.*

So are we, when we become too preoccupied with eating and drinking and with other temporal things, to give God just an hour or two every week to go to church to pray and to listen to the word of God; By so doing, we do not care for the teaching saying: “*Everyone will camp by his own standard (according to his own rank)*”; or the one saying: “*Let all things be done decently and in order*”; or head the order set by the Lord Himself, to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; Nor believe His promise that all those things will be added ... (Matthew 6: 33).

Do you think that all those who are called ‘priests’, and boast of their reference to priesthood, walk according to what is befitting of their ranks?! And that the deacons walk according to theirs?! Then why do we hear sometimes those who blaspheme, saying: [Look at this bishop, at that priest or at that deacon!], but because they see the minister of God not doing his job properly, or walking contrary to what is befitting to his holy rank?! The same thing could be said concerning the virgins, the monks, and all those given certain responsibilities in the church. ... If they are fulfilling their commitment as they should do, would Moses address them, saying: “Let everyone walk according to his rank (by his own standard)?! He who knows his rank, and comprehends what is befitting to it, would weigh his actions, and would put in order, his words, behavior, and even his attire, according to what is befitting to his specific rank, so as not to hear the Lord saying: “*Because of you, My name is blasphemed by the nations*”¹.

The scholar Origen also believes that organization should touch our life as children of God, and should touch as well, the life of the church, to live according to the mind of Christ Jesus.

(3) The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: “***Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblem (the ensign) of his father’s house***” (2). What are those standards and ensigns, beside which every believer should camp, but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; where we should sit at the footstool of the Crucified; and not go astray, in our spiritual strife, from our true spiritual goal, which is to encounter the Lord of glory Himself, and to exist, with, and in Him.

By that ensign – the cross of the Lord – all the brethren will gather together in a life of fellowship and love; where each of them would feel his membership with his brother in the same Head – our Lord Jesus Christ.

Historically, some believe that each tribe had its own standard; Each camp, constituting three tribes, therefore, had three standards; each tribe gathers by its own, so that ever man knows and keeps his position in the procession. They say that every standard carried a precious stone designated to the specific tribe; by that, the congregation as a whole likened the breast plate of the high priest, on which twelve precious stones were fixed, in four rows, each includes three stones (Exodus 39: 10-14), on which are engraved the names of the tribes; so that their names would appear in the presence of the Lord in the holy of holies, on the breast of the high priest. The whole congregation in the Old Covenant represented the holy church that became like precious stones on the breast of the Lord of glory Jesus Christ, the Greatest High Priest, and the Bishop of our souls, who brings us over into the bosom of His Father, and there we exist in, and by Him, forever².

Some believe that each of the four camps had its own standard: That of the camp of Judah carried the ensign of the lion; that of Reuben carried the ensign of

¹ *Ibid* 2: 1.

² راجع تفسيرنا للصدريّة في كتابنا "سفر الخروج"، 1980، أصحاب 39.

man; that of Ephraim carried the ensign of the calf; and that of Dan carried the ensign of the eagle. Through the symbol, we see what the prophet Ezekiel saw: the fiery chariot of God, or the fiery Cherubim carrying the divine throne; As though the congregation became the holy chariot of God, likening the Cherubim¹.

According to the book of Joshua, the closest distance between the tabernacle and the tents, was 2000 cubits; namely 1000 yards – a little more than one mile.

(4) **The scholar Origen** believes that the standard by which every man is committed to stand, symbolizes the sign that distinguishes the soul of a believer from that of another. The same way every face and voice has its own features, so every soul has; he says: [Meditating in the meaning of: “*Everyone camps by his standard*”; I believe that the ensigns are the features that distinguish one man from another. Although all men are basically alike, yet there are certain features that distinguish one from another. By such features Peter was distinguished from Paul. ... Sometimes, there would be no need for someone to appear to recognize the ensign that distinguishes him; but he could be distinguished by invisible features, like the voice and the vibrations of the larynx, ... I believe that the souls, likewise, have features that distinguish them; Some have sweet, delicate, quiet, and peaceful features; And others have disturbing, boasting, rough, violent, and angry features; You could find an alert, wise, prudent, and active soul; Or an idle, slothful, and lazy one. I assure you that, as there are differences between the features of faces, there are as well differences between the features of human souls.

To clarify the differences between the signs of the souls, I present the following comparison: Although the spirits of Peter and Paul, both tend toward purity; Yet the purity of Paul requires disciplining his body and bringing him into subjection in fear (1Corinthians 9: 27); while that of Peter bears no such fear. Likewise justice, wisdom, and all virtues, have different features for Paul than for Peter. ... Although the virtues that we enjoy, and are granted by the Spirit of God, are the same, yet there are personal human differences among them.

Understanding that all what the law include, constitute “*a shadow of the good things to come*” (Hebrew 10: 1), In the moment of resurrection, there are differences between the worthiness of men, as “*One star differs from another star in glory*” (1 Corinthians 15: 41). Concerning the good works, we may be able to cross over from a lesser sign (of the soul) to an exalted one, then to one more exalted, until we become equal to the most splendid stars. The human nature can grow in this life, not only to reach the glory of stars, but even to the splendor of the sun; as it is written: “*The righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (Matthew 13: 43)²].

(5) “**God said to Moses: ‘Everyone shall camp by his own standard, beside the ensign of his father’s house’**” (2). Therefore, every believer was committed to encounter his brethren by his standard in his earthly house; namely the tribe to which he is referred. We, on the other hand, have got in the holy baptism, a new Father, the heavenly Father. Sitting at the footstool of the Crucified, He brings us forth into the bosom of His Father, who became our Father.

The front of the procession (the east):

We said that the procession took the form of a cross, in the center of which is the tabernacle, surrounded by the priests and the Levites, in the form of a smaller

¹ راجع تفسير المركبة النارية في كتابنا: سفر حزقيال، 1981، أصحاح 1.

² *Ibid* 2: 2.

cross; Then the four camps, one on each side, whose order according to the progress of walking are:

Name of the tribe	Number of people	Name of the head	Name of the mother
A- The camp of Judah (the east) – The front of the procession:			
Judah	74, 600	Nahshon	Leah
Issachar	54, 400	Nethaneel	Leah
Zebulun	57, 400	Eliab	Leah
B- The camp of Reuben (the South):			
Reuben	46, 500	Elizur	Leah
Simon	59, 300	Shelumiel	Leah
Gad	45, 650	Eliasaph	Zelpha, Leah's slave
* The Levites (Center of the camp):			
Levi	22, 000 (not included with them)		Leah
C- The camp of Ephraim:			
Ephraim	40, 500	Elishama	Rachel
Manasseh	32, 200	Gamaliel	Rachel
Benjamin	35, 400	Abidan	Rachel
D- The camp of Dan:			
Dan	62, 700	Ahiezer	Belha, Rachel's slave
Asher	41, 500	Pagiel	Zelpha, Leah's slave
Naphtali	53, 400	Ahira	Belha, Rachel's slave

In this order it is to be noticed:

(1) The local leaderships came at the front: Nahshon, head of the camp of Judah; Elizur, head of the camp of Reuben; Elishama, head of the camp of Ephraim; and Ahiezer, head of the camp of Dan. This was not by mere chance, but carried the secret of the strength of the camp that took the shape of the cross.

As a head, Judah received the leadership; and as **the scholar Origen** says: [Locating the tribe of Judah – the royal tribe – in the east, is on account of that the Lord Christ, arising from the tribe of Judah (Hebrew 7: 14)¹, appears to lead us toward the kingdom of light. Choosing 'Nahshon' (meaning the serpent) to be the head of that tribe, is because the secret of the cross is that of crushing the ancient serpent, according to the promise of God to Eve, that her offspring will strike the serpent's head (Genesis 3: 15).

As to the right arm of the cross, it is represented by the camp of Reuben under the leadership of 'Elizur' (meaning God is Rock or Wall). If by the cross the head of the serpent is crushed, it is so that the believers would enter into God, as a Rock or a Wall for their protection. ... The left arm of the cross is represented by the camp of Dan under the leadership of 'Ahiezer' (meaning the helper brother). It is as though, on the cross, the Lord stretches His hands: By the right hand, to proclaim, that in Him is our salvation as a Rock to us; And by His left hand, to grant us the spirit of fellowship with each other in Him. ... The right arm proclaims our relationship with God; while

¹ *Ibid* 2: 2.

the left arm proclaims our relationship with each other, namely, with mankind. ... The base of the cross is represented by the camp of Ephraim under the leadership of 'Elishama' (meaning God hearkens). It is as though the foundation of the cross is that the Father hearkens to us in His Son, and receives our love, obedience, and offerings in Jesus Christ the beloved Son.

In short, the church, having become the camp of God or the body of the crucified Lord, finds in her Head -- Christ the King, the Conqueror of the serpent; ... the Right arm, the Rock in whom we find refuge; ... the left arm the brotherly love; ... and at His footstool, she sits to listen to the Father, who, as well receives and listens to her.

(2) The camp bore a symbolic portrait of the higher Jerusalem, as seen by St. John (Revelation 21); having three gates on each side; as though there is no entering into it except through faith in the Holy Trinity. Wherever you go, you will find three tribes together in one camp, although each tribe has its own features. And as said by **the scholar Origen**: [In the four divisions we find the figure 3; as, it is only by the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that the inhabitants of the four corners of the world, are numbered; those who call the name of God, and who "*sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*". These are undisputable facts¹].

3- THE RIGHT WING (THE SOUTH):

In putting the order of the camp, the closely related tribes, were, as much as possible, located close to each other. In the front we find: Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, the children of Leah; ... In the right wing; Reuben, Simon, and Gad, the first two children of Leah, and the third of Zelphah, Leah's slave; ... To the west: Ephraim, Manasseh, the children of Joseph, and Benjamin, of Rachel; ... To the north: Dan, Naphtali, and Asher, the children of the two slave girls.

4- THE CENTER OF THE PROCESSION:

If this people became a holy nation, having received the faith in the living God; The tribe of Levi, the holy tribe, completely dedicated to the spiritual work, for ministering and carrying the tabernacle, surrounded the tabernacle on all sides in the middle of the congregation. It is as though they were a symbol of the Lord Christ the only begotten Son who dwelt among men, to bring them into His holy sanctuaries, to enjoy the bosom of His Father; interceding for them by His precious blood through the sacrifice of His cross.

Commenting on this, **the scholar Origen** says: [The Levites settled down in their midst, around the tabernacle of God, on account of that they were closer to God ... It so seems that the children of Levi have formed a circle all around it in the middle of the people of Israel; yet mixing and intermingling with all the others. ... Let us then look for the tabernacle of God, where Jesus entered to prepare the way for us (Hebrew 6: 20; 9: 24; 7: 25); and to appear before the face of God to intercede for us²].

5- THE REAR OF THE PROCESSION (THE WEST):

The camp of Ephraim, that, in breaking camp, comes directly after the Levites.

6- THE LEFT WING (THE NORTH):

The camp of Dan, the last to break camp.

7- THE CONCLUSION OF THE ORGANIZATION:

¹ *Ibid* 2: 2.

² *Ibid* hom 3.

At the end of his talk, he confirmed that what God commanded Moses and Aaron, have been already realized.

CHAPTER 3

THE LEVITES ARE A RANSOM FOR THE PEOPLE

Not counting the tribe of Levi together with the other tribes, as men of war, does not mean relieving them of work or walking with an aristocratic and a haughty spirit; but their commitment to spiritual work instead of the firstborn of the people. The divine inspiration dedicated several chapters to talk about them, which starts by punishing some with death for their wickedness.

1- Punishing the wicked among the Levites	1 - 4
2- The Levites dedicated instead of the firstborn	5 - 13
3- Division of labor	14 - 38
4- Census of the Levites commanded	39 - 43
5- Taking redemption money on the excess	44 - 51

1- PUNISHING THE WICKED AMONG THE LEVITES:

Two of the sons of Aaron – Nadab and Abihu – fell into offering profane fire before the Lord, died without children, and were replaced by their younger brothers: Eleazar and Ithamar, who ministered as priests under the oversight of Aaron their father.

The word ‘Nadab’ means (honorable), and: ‘Abihu’ means (he is my father). Despite the sweetness of their names, and having been among the very few whom God allowed to ascend the Mount of Sinai (Exodus 24: 1); and dedicated as priests for the Lord (Exodus 28: 1); Yet they fell under the wrath of God, and the curse, and lost even their temporal life, on account that they broke the commandment (Leviticus 10: 1-7; Numbers 26: 6). Having started by the Spirit, but consummated by the flesh, their names, title, and even their reference to Aaron, or being chosen by the Lord for priesthood, ... etc. did not intercede for them; But, on the contrary, all these things were the secret of judging them. As the more divine gifte man enjoys, the more he enters under the yoke of responsibility, and the more will be sought of him.

Some believe that, because they were probably drunk when they did that; God forbids the priests entering into the tabernacle of meeting after drinking wine (Leviticus 10: 9). While others believe that the secret of their perversion was that they ministered according to their own will without consulting their father. Because of that the Lord commanded the Levites to stand before Aaron to minister to him, like what their younger brothers did (4 and 5). Namely, the priests and the Levites became ministers with the spirit of discipleship. He probably intended, since the beginning of the history of the Mosaic priesthood, to proclaim the seriousness of the priestly task, if it is mixed with the spirit of pride, and self-esteem, and with walking according to personal will without discipleship. I also say, how much the church in every era need the likeness of Aaron who bears the spirit of fatherhood, not only for the congregation, but for the priests as well, who would become disciples to the Lord Himself under his hands!

Finally, the Levites, actually representing the role of the deacons, used to slay the sacrifices, while the priests splatter the blood, and burn the fat; They used to prepare the incense, and the priest offer it before the Lord. The deacon helps the priest in all his spiritual ministry, as well as in his shepherding task.

2- THE LEVITES DEDICATED INSTEAD OF THE FIRSTBORN:

How sweet is this divine phrase saying that the Levites are “*given entirely to Him from among the children of Israel*” (9). God, in His love for man, intends to

enter into perpetual give and take dealings with him. As God proclaims His love for us by giving, He gives us the chance to pay back His love with love, and taking from our hands. Having given the people of Israel their existence and life; and having brought them out of the land of bondage, they have all become in debt to Him with their whole life; And He let them exchange His love through receiving this tribe as a gift from the people to the Lord! In every era, God perpetually proclaims that He is in need of, and thirsty for man's gift to Him; not out of lack of the divine possibilities, but for the sake of entering with man into a relationship of mutual love. He refuses to give without taking; lest man would feel the littleness of soul, and the inability of expressing his love for God.

In the previous books of the holy Scripture, He often talks about the firstfruit, the tithes, and the vows; Now He proclaims that He would receive the firstfruit of the people, through receiving the tribe of Levi as a gift from the people to Him. ... Why was that specific tribe chosen instead of the firstfruit of the people? And what is meant by considering them the firstfruit of the people?

Why was the tribe of Levi chosen instead of the firstfruit of the people?

“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine’” (11-13).

‘Levi’ was not the firstborn of Jacob, but the third son after Reuben and Simon. By choosing him, God intended from the beginning, to confirm to His people that the firstborn status is not according to the flesh, namely, to the age, but according to readiness and worthiness. The Lord Christ, came as the Firstborn of all mankind, although incarnated at the fullness of time; And by His coming, the first Adam lost his firstborn status, having brought death upon humanity instead of blessing. The same way, Levi surpassed his two brothers: Reuben and Simon; The second Adam – the Lord Christ – surpassed the first Adam; And He surpassed, as well as the prophet Moses, the receiver of the law, and the first leader of the people. The Lord became the firstborn of the believing humanity, being the only-begotten Son, beloved by the Father.

Commenting on this, **the scholar Origen** says: [That teaches us that those who were considered firstborn before God, were not the firstborn according to the flesh, but were chosen by God, based on their readiness and worthiness. This is what happened with Jacob, the second son, who was counted by God as the firstborn, and gained the blessings of the firstborn status (Genesis 27: 11), because his father Jacob became blind by a divine allowance, and because of the readiness of his heart, as seen by God; as it is said: *“(For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls); ... it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated’”* (Roman 9: 11; Malachi 1: 2, 3). That is how the Levites were chosen and counted as firstborn¹].

We have already dealt with the firstborn as a symbol of the Lord Christ, the Firstborn; and how the commandment of the firstborn came as the first commandment directly after the exodus of the people of Israel (Exodus 13: 1)² ... Here, it is noticed that God talks about the Levites, that they were His firstborns, taken from among the children of Israel (11). He received them as a gift from the people.

¹ *Ibid* 3: 1.

² راجع تفسيرنا لسفر الخروج، أصحاب 13.

The firstborn status of the Lord Christ differs from that of men. In the old, when Jacob enjoyed the firstborn status, he deprived his brother Esau of it. And when Levi became firstborn, Reuben lost his ... The Lord Christ, on the other hand, by coming to the world a Firstborn, He opened the door before all mankind to enjoy the firstborn status through Him, or through uniting with Him. He established 'the church of the firstborn', and counted His believers as firstborn ... We are not like Esau, who become sad and cried, because Jacob took his firstborn status by deception; but we rather rejoice and exalt because our Jesus opened before us the door of the firstborn status.

Finally, the Lord's saying: "*I Myself have taken the Levites ... instead of every firstborn; ... I am the Lord*"; reveals the position of the minister as a redemption for those ministered; he is received by the Lord instead of the firstborn to minister the people of God, to bear their labors, sufferings, and weaknesses; to bring them over, in Christ Jesus, into the divine bosom; ... He is a redemption, desires to die, that all may live.

3- DIVISION OF LABOR:

God divided the children of Levi into three ranks beside the priests; and designated their specific tasks and locations. . They surrounded, as we said, the tabernacle on all sides: On the east were Aaron and his priests with the prophet Moses; On the south (the right wing) dwelt the sons of Kohath; On the north (the left wing) dwelt the sons of Merari; and on the west (the base) dwelt the sons of Gershon. That was the smaller cross surrounding the tabernacle, located at the center of the whole congregation, that in turn form a huge cross.

Here we see at the head of the cross (the east), Moses, Aaron and his priests, a reference to Christ, the Head of the church, the Word of God, (symbolized by Moses, the receiver of the Law), and Aaron (the high priest); In other words, through the cross, we get in touch with the Lord Christ who provided us with the divine commandment, inscribed with practical love through the precious blood; and His atonement intercession through His eternal priesthood. ... The base of the cross, is dwelt by the sons of Gershon; namely, the sons of the (discarded), the (exiled), or the (stranger). As the cross became "*to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness*" (1 Corinthians 1: 23). ... The right wing was dwelt by the sons of Kohath, namely, the sons of the "assembly", where the animosity is destroyed, and the fellowship with God and men would be realized; The heavenlies would be united to the earthlies; And the nations and peoples would gather together. ... And the left wing, was dwelt by the sons of Merari, a reference to the myrrh or bitterness endured by the Lord for our sake.

The labor among the three ranks of the Levites was divided as follows:

(1) **The sons of Gershon:** Although Gershon was the firstborn of Levi, yet his order of things came after Kohath, who got the priority according to the readiness and worthiness of his heart, and not according to the order of birth. The sons of Gershon were not considered as priests, but assistants, whose duties were guarding the tabernacle with its covering, the screen of the door of the tabernacle of meeting, the screen of the door of the court ... etc. They counted 7500 males; and to them two carts and two oxen were given to help them break camp. They were divided into two families: the Libnites and the Shimites, and were given thirteen cities in the promised land (Joshua 21).

(2) **The sons of Kohath:** From them came Moses and Aaron, who got the priesthood together with his sons; and to whom all the others worked as assistants. They had the priority over the other ranks, their duties included keeping charge of the

ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered, the screens, and all the work related to them, all of which during camp break up, they would carry on their shoulders, after the priests cover them up; that is why they were not given carts and oxen. They numbered 8600 males, and divided into four families: the Amramites, the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites. The Kohathite sons of Aaron were given in Canaan thirteen cities (Joshua 21: 4); and ten cities to the rest of the Kohathites (Joshua 21: 5, 21). They were among the groups separated by David for praising God (1 Chronicles 25, 26); and those who helped in bringing the Ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15: 5); They got much honor and wealth.

(3) **The sons of Merari:** They were committed to guarding the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, pillars, sockets, utensils, and all the work related to them, ... etc. And as those things were heavy, they were given four carts and eight oxen . They numbered 6200 males, and were divided into two families: the Mahlites, and the Mushites. In Canaan, they were given twelve cities (Joshua 21: 7; 34: 40; 1 Chronicles 6: 63; 77: 81).

The scholar Origen¹ sees in these three ranks, together with Aaron and his priests, a portrait of the four heavenly ranks; As according to the epistle of the apostle Paul to the Hebrews: “*You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels*” (Hebrews 12: 22, 23). According to him, heaven includes four ranks: (the Mount of Zion; the heavenly city of the living God, Jerusalem; thousands of thousands of angels; and the church of the newborns, whose names are written in heaven). ... He says: [Be diligent, and with all your strength, strive to get a place in the church of the newborn, whose names are written in heaven; And if you cannot, be content with a lesser rank ... And in case you cannot come close to the thousands of thousands of the angels, or ascend up to that rank, you will, at least manage to reach the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; And if you still cannot reach that goal, try, at least, to head toward the Mount of Zion, to get saved (Genesis 19: 17)²].

4- CENSUS OF THE LEVITES COMMANDED:

According to a census commanded by God of the firstborn males of the children of the Levites from a month old and above; they numbered a little more than 22, 000. According to the scholar Origen the figure 22 represents the number of the Hebrew letters; as well as the number of the early fathers from Adam to Jacob, the father of the tribes. And as the figure 1000 refers to the heavenly or the spiritual life; So the Levites, by their count, represent the spiritual language (22 letters), through their diligent ministry to all the tribes, to become worthy of having their names written in heaven. As they represent all the letters, nobody will find an excuse for not having his name written; And on another aspect, they represent the spiritual fathers from whose seeds came the people of God.

5- TAKING REDEMPTION MONEY ON THE EXCESS:

Counting the actual number of the newborn of the people in general; As they were found to be 22, 273; namely 273 persons in excess of the count of the Levites, they were committed to present five shekles for each one individually, to be given to Aaron and his children.

This number (22, 273) probably represent those who were born in the wilderness after the exodus; While the excess (273), refers to the nine months that a

¹ In Num., hom 3..

² Ibid.

fetus live in his mother's womb ($9 \times 30 = 270$), plus three days symbolizing the resurrection from the dead, as we saw in our commentary on the book of Exodus¹. It is as though those redeemed represent the multitude of mankind who came to the world after being formed in the womb, and enjoyed the resurrection together with the Lord Christ; namely, those born physically and spiritually. According to **the scholar Origen**²: the figure 273 is the product of adding 270 plus 3; saying that the fetus remains nine months in the womb, and in most cases is born on the third day of the tenth month.

As to the five sheckels that are paid as a redemption, it refers to the sanctification of the five senses, for all to become like the wise virgins, who enter into the wedding together with the Groom, to the everlasting joy (Matthew 25),

¹ راجع للمؤلف: سفر الخروج 1981.

² *In Num., hom 4.*

CHAPTER 4

ORGANIZING THE MINISTRY OF THE LEVITES

After talking about the Levites in general, he came back to confirm, in some detail, the duties of each of the three ranks' the age at which they start their work; and taking a census of each rank.

- 1- The age of ministering by the Levites 3, 23
- 2- Organizing the ministry among the Levites 4 - 33
- 3- Carrying the tabernacle of meeting with all its furnishings 5 ... etc.
- 4- Covering the divine furnishings of the sanctuary 5 ... etc

1- THE AGE OF MINISTERING BY THE LEVITES:

The inspiration in this chapter confirmed the age of ministering by the Levites, seven times (verses; 3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47), to be between thirty and fifty years of age. Although, counting them as firstborns before the Lord, begins from one month old and above; yet as far as work is concerned, it requires the age when they become capable of executing the orders given to them, presenting to God the best years of their life.

Because the age of thirty for the Jews is the age of maturity and manhood; the priest or the prophet does not start his ministry before reaching this age. In most cases, they are raised around the tabernacle or the temple, helping in some works; namely they learn as disciples; until they reach the right age to start bearing the responsibility of ministry.

If the working days of the week are six days; it would be fitting of the minister of the lord to have his five senses sanctified all the days of his work ($6 \times 5 = 30$); As the figure 30 refers to the life of inner sanctification. The figure 50, though, has its own sanctity in both the Old and the New Testaments; as it refers to amnesty, and to the liberation from debt or from sin. In the Old Testament, on the fiftieth year, namely, the year of the Jubilee, a general and whole amnesty is declared, in which slaves are set free, pawned land is regained, and debtors are forgiven their debts; to become for everyone a year of rest.... On the fiftieth day, the Holy Spirit dwelt upon the disciples in the upper room, to grant the church a heavenly nature, freedom from sin, and with the power to set forth toward the heavenlies. ... And when the Lord presented the parable for the forgiveness of debts, He said: Someone had two debtors, one for fifty, and another for five hundred; and he forgave both. ... And when Abraham, the father of fathers started interceding for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and to seek from the Lord to forgive them, he asked: "*Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; ... will you not forgive it for them?*" (Genesis 18: 24). ... So this figure came in the holy book to represent the state of amnesty. Once the Levites reach this age, they are released of their ministry on earth, to get ready to set forth to the ministry of the heavenly temple. They come out from the down payment, to enjoy the perfection of glory.

In verse 8: 24, the Levites are committed to start work when they are 25 years of age, to spend five years as disciples before starting their proper ministry at thirty years of age. **The scholar Origen** believes that the figure 25 refers to the complete sanctification¹, as the figure 5 refers to the five senses ($5 \times 5 = 25$).... And in the days of the prophet David, as the work in the temple was increasing, the Levites were committed to start work, once they reach twenty years of age (1 Chronicles 23: 24; Ezra 3: 8); Yet they were to remain ten years as disciples until they reach 30 years of

¹ In Num., hom 5..

age.... St. John the Baptist started His preaching ministry at 30 years of age; So did the Lord Christ. ... And in the New Covenant, the apostle Paul requested that the minister should not be a novice in faith (1 Timothy 3: 6); as priesthood requires maturity, wisdom, and steadfastness; And he also demanded that they should be first proved (1 Timothy 3: 10).

2- ORGANIZING THE MINISTRY AMONG THE LEVITES:

In this chapter, God appears as the Head of the church, responsible for the ministry, for all its ordinances; and for the organization of the labor among the ministers He appointed and called for ministry. He fixed the task of every category, so as not to be slothful in carrying it out. When they prepare to break camp, Aaron the high priest and his sons (the priests), cover the holy furnishings of the sanctuary by covers, the material of which God Himself designated. Once the priests finish covering the sanctuary and all its furnishings; then the sons of Kohath come to carry them on their shoulders. God warned against the entry of the later to see those holy furnishings nor to touch them before they are covered, lest they die; saying to Moses and Aaron: ***“Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites, but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things; ... they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die”*** (18 -20).

God also fixed what to be carried by the sons of Gershon, and what to be carried by the sons of Merari ... Thus, everyone is committed to know his task in the church, and not to boast over others, of the responsibilities given to him; nor to have his soul belittled, on account of those given to others; Doing his part faithfully and with the gladness of heart, he will be crowned, and the whole work will be perfectly done. It is not important for man to be a bishop, priest, deacon, or a layman; but to be found faithful in the position designated for him by God. The apostle Paul says: *“There are differences of ministries, but the same God; And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all”* (1 Corinthians 12: 5, 6). Concerning this **St. John Chrysostom** says: [In case you are given a smaller responsibility, it will be for your own good; Therefore do not be sad, as though you are despised; because God does not do this for you, because you are less important than the others, but your own benefit; as it would be harmful for someone to be given a task beyond his possibilities¹]. About this, the spiritual elder says: [Do not count the one who utters spiritual talks, great, just for the sake of the exaltation of his understanding; Nor the one who teaches children, as being of limited understanding; as there are diversities of talents, yet the Spirit is one, doing in all according to His will; and giving to each flock, on the hands of its shepherd, the pasture that suits it. Therefore he who interprets the holy Scripture should not become puffed up above him who is a beginner in faith²].

3- CARRYING THE TABERNACLE AND ITS FURNISHINGS:

We already talked about the division of this task on the sons of Kohath, Gershon, and Merari.

Commenting on the holy items in the tabernacle: the ark of the covenant, the lampstand, the holy table, the altar of incense ... etc, **the scholar Origen** says that all these refer to the categories of the saints; And on being carried on the shoulders of the sons of Kohath, that this refers to those saints being carried on the shoulders of the angels.; saying: [We should understand the tabernacle to symbolize the congregation

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، 1965، ص 770.
² المرجع السابق، ص 775.

of the saints included in the covenant of God; among whom there are those who are more worthy, who rose up in righteousness, to be called 'a lampstand'; These, no doubt, refer to the apostles who shine because of their closeness to God; ... Others are called 'the holy table', carrying the bread of God that renews and fills the hungry soul (Matthew 5: 6); ... Others are called 'the altar of incense', being preoccupied day and night, with worshipping God in prayers and fasting; not seeking for themselves alone but for all the people. ... To whom those secrets were delivered are called 'the ark of the testimony'; as having such sure confidence, they can offer prayers, and supplications, to reconcile God to men; and would hasten to the golden altar to beseech to God to forgive the disobedience of the people.... And those who are found worthy of having an abundance of knowledge of God, would become 'cherubs'; as the word 'cherub' means (an abundance of knowledge).

All those we talked about through a diversity of symbols, should, I believe, be worthy to be carried on the shoulders of the angels, who are sent by God to minister to those who are to inherit the salvation (Hebrew 1: 4). On breaking camp, to head for the promised land, the angels support, carry on their shoulders, and bear on their hands, those who truly live as saints in the holy of holies. Before such scene the prophet said by the Spirit: "*He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways; They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone*" (Psalm 91: 11, 12)¹].

4- COVERING THE DIVINE FURNISHINGS OF THE SANCTUARY:

a- Referring to the believers, the holy furnishings stay uncovered inside the sanctuaries; But to be carried, they should be covered. It is befitting of the believers to live in a secret life, open their hearts to God, live with Him with an uncovered face, and talk to Him with a daring and unhindered friendship. But with men, on the other hand, they should conceal their hidden life; as confirmed by the Lord Himself, saying: "*Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven ... But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly*" (Matthew 6: 1, 6).

God Does not object to the collective worship, unless it is done to get vain glory, and "*to be seen*" (Matthew 6: 1).... The early church had fellowship in collective worship, "*continuing daily with one accord in the temple*" (Acts 2: 46), raising psalms, praises, and supplications, beside having communion in the sacrament of Eucharist in churches. But it is befitting of the believer, even in his collective worship, to enter into a hidden relationship with God, not to be felt even by the one standing next to him. Concerning this, **St. Augustine** says: [Beware not to walk with righteousness, just for the sake of this goal; nor to concentrate your interest on how people look at you²]. And father Isaac, the disciple of **St. Anthony**, has a nice commentary on the hidden prayer, in which he says: [We pray with the doors shut, when we pray with closed lips in complete silence and in utter quiescence, to Him who seeks the hearts and not the words. And we pray in secret, when we hide our request, coming out of our hearts and minds, and reveal them only to God; so that they are not known by the adversary forces (the devils). We should pray in utter silence, not only to avoid disturbing those around us, but also to hide our requests

¹ In Num., hom 5.

² للمؤلف: الموعدة على الجبل للقديس أغسطينوس، طبعة 1981، ص 162.

from our enemies who watch us, particularly at the times of prayers. By that we keep the commandment, saying: “Keep the doors of your mouth shut, even from her who shares your bed¹].

b- God warned the Levites who are not priests against touching those holy items, or even looking at them; As He does not want anyone to know the holiness of our relationship with Him, other than His priests who support us by their guidance and prayers.

c- **The scholar Origen** believes that covering the holy items by the priests before being carried by the sons of Kohath, is a symbol of the work of the priest who, although He knows and understands the secrets of God’s wisdom, yet he does not present them to the weak, the way they are; lest they perish; but would present them according to their endurance².

d- **The scholar Origen** also sees in this concern, a portrait of how men of the Old Covenant have been; Although there were those who carried the divine holy items on their shoulders, yet they were covered and concealed through the shadows and symbols; But the true sons of Aaron; namely men of the New Covenant, have discovered the truth and knew its secrets; knew the true Passover, the new Sabbath, and the new circumcision³;... Concerning this the prophet Isaiah says: “...He will destroy ... the veil that is spread over all nations“ (Isaiah 25: 6, 7).

e- The covers bear beautiful meanings: For example, on the ark of the testimony is put a covering of badger skins, on which a cloth all of blue (6) is spread;... As the ark of the testimony symbolizes the crucified Lord Christ; Even if He appears in weakness, hidden behind the skin, yet, in truth He is powerful, and all heavenly (blue). ... On the table of showbread -- also symbolizing the Lord Jesus, the bread of life presented to humanity -- they spread a blue cloth heavenly), and cover it with a scarlet cloth (a sign of the blood), then with another cover of badger skins. The Lord as the heavenly bread, presents Himself to us, broken for our sake (scarlet), hidden from the human eyes, to be seen as weak bread (the badger skins).

I do not intend here to repeat what I already said, concerning the golden lampstand and the golden altar; except that each of them are to be covered by a blue cloth, covered in turn by a covering of badger skins. The bronze altar, alone, shall be covered by a scarlet cloth (royal), then covered by a covering of badger skins. Referring to the sacrifice of the cross, the bronze altar, is the royal throne through which the Lord reigns on the hearts of His believers.

Finally, the book did not refer to a cover for the bronze laver (basin) that refers to the font of baptism; on account of that it should be seen by all, and that all humanity should hasten toward it.

¹ للمؤلف: مناظرات يوحنا كاسيان 9 : 34.

² *In Num., hom 4.*

³ *Ibid 5.*

CHAPTER 5

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE CAMP

After setting the tabernacle of meeting in the middle of the camp; designating the location of every tribe; and the tasks of the Levites; God proclaims that the whole camp should be sanctified, on the general, the individual, and the family level.

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1- Purging the camp as a whole | 1 - 4 |
| 2- Purging every individual believer | 5 - 10 |
| 3- Purging every family (the law of jealousy) | 11 – 29 |

1- PURGING THE CAMP AS A WHOLE:

“And the Lord spoke to Moses saying: I command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a dead body. You shall put out both male and female, you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell” (1-3).

By setting the tabernacle in the midst of the camp, the Lord dwells among His people. But, being Holy, He does not dwell where there are defilement and sin. God’s presence means putting out every corruption and defilement *“For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?!”* (2 Corinthians 6: 14).

If the church is lenient with the sinners, yet she is not as such with the sin; She does not endure the existence of evil in the life of her children. The apostle says: *“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.... I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world, ...For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside, God judges. Therefore put away from yourselves that wicked person”* (1 Corinthians 5: 6-13).

Although we do not have to judge those outside, yet, we are committed very firmly to purify the church on the inside, that none of her members bears a leaven of corruption. Concerning this **St. Abba Shenouda the Archmandrite** says: [There are things we see as good, while they are not so in the sight of God. We are used to cover the shortcomings of one another inside the holy places. God did not plant in the paradise good and bad trees, but planted only good ones; He did not plant fruitless trees, or trees that produce bad fruits; From this you should know, O beloved brethren, that the house of God should not embrace both good and wicked people, the same the outside world does. ... I know that all the earth is the Lord’s; Yet if His house is like the rest of the earth, What would then be the privilege of His house?! ... If, while being a priest, I do evil the way the wicked of the earth do, I should not then be called a priest; We often commit sin, and we do not know how to judge ourselves!¹].

The Lord demanded that the congregation should purge the camp of every leper, of everyone who has a discharge, and of whoever becomes defiled by a dead body; which are all considered as defilements according to the Mosaic law; being things that refer to the fruit of sin in man’s life. But once the Holy Lord Christ came incarnate, and dwelt among us, He purged the lepers, healed the woman with a flow of blood, and touched the coffin to raise the dead. That Holy One came, poured His

¹ عظة وارادة في الساعة الحادية عشر من يوم الإثنين من البسخة المقدسة.

holiness into us, to scatter the leprosy of sin, to stop the flow of blood, and to raise us from the eternal death.

2- PURGING EVERY INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER:

The purity of the camp as a whole, is set upon the purity of every member in it, by presenting a true and practical repentance. He commands the sinner:

a- To confess the sin he has done (7).

b- To make restitution for his trespass in full value plus one fifth of it, and to give it to the one he has wronged.

c- To offer an atonement sacrifice. If we retribute to our brethren what we have robbed them plus one fifth of it, in order to reconcile with them; How would we give back to the Lord His due, except through the atonement sacrifice of the cross?!

3- PURGING EVERY FAMILY:

The sanctification extends, as well, to every family, being the holy church of the household. Caring for sanctifying and purging the household of marital treason; the Lord looks at adultery as the most horrible sin, through which the home collapses, and both the man and the woman lose their unity in the Lord.

In case the adulteress woman confesses her sin, she will be divorced and will lose her alimony. But if she does not confess, she will be made to drink the holy water which the priest put in an earthen vessel, and adds to it some of the dust that is on the floor of her house, that will turn the water bitter; she will drink it with her head uncovered. If she has gone astray and defiled herself while under her husband's authority, the holy water will make her belly swell and her thighs rot; namely, she will have some kind of paralysis, and will become disgraced before everyone. Whereas if she is pure and innocent, and has not defiled herself, then she shall be free, may conceive children, and get glory. That is "*the law of jealousy*".

God cared for the sanctification of the household, being a smaller portrait of the congregation as a whole, not based on a foundation of covering up sin, but upon true holiness. Either the sinner confesses his adultery, the household collapses, and the sinner presents a repentance to God; Or he may attempt to cover up his sin, and he would be exposed by God, would go through physical and mental sufferings, and socially collapse, beside his everlasting perdition. It is amazing how God took it thing upon Himself, to give comfort to the harmed and the innocent party. But the man, together with his wife have to approach God in His church, and to bring the offering required of her: "***one-tenth of an ephah of barely meal; he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, because it is a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering***" (15). He shall not pour oil on it because it is an offering of bitterness, as she caused her man to get bitter. Not confessing her sin, in case she is guilty, she will be exposed and disgraced, and no oil would heal her wound, and no frankincense (prayer) would intercede on her behalf! That will apply to any man who covers up his sin; he will never succeed.

Yes, we are indeed in great need in our marital problems, to approach God in His church with the contrition of heart, each of us confess his sins, and offer our bitter souls as an offering to Him ... Once we cast our troubles on God, we shall stop doubting one another!

In this law, the dust refers to death, that will turn the water bitter; and the water refers to the word of God. The word of God will become the secret of life to life, and of death to death. It will expose the soul, in case it is haughty and defiled, to enter under death, curse, and bitterness. Whereas if it is pure as the bride of Christ, sanctified in Him, it will bear glory, and conceive the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and will have a multitude of virtues. Hence the words of the Psalmist: "*Search me, O God,*

and know my heart; Try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139: 23, 24).

CHAPTER 6

THE NAZIRITE TO THE LORD

After proclaiming the commitment to sanctification on the general, personal, and the family level, He introduced a law concerning those who consecrate their lives dedicated to the Lord; namely, the Nazirites.

- 1- The Nazirite to the Lord 1 - 2
- 2- The characteristics and commitments of the Nazirite 3 - 8
- 3- Purging a Nazirite who touches a dead body 9 - 12
- 4- Fulfillment of the days of separation of a Nazirite 13 - 21
- 5- The priestly blessing to the people 22 - 26

1- THE NAZIRITE TO THE LORD:

“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When either a man or a woman consecrates an offering to take a vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the Lord ...’ (1, 2). ... In order for us to understand the law of the Nazirite, we shall introduce here a simplified idea of the Nazirite to the Lord, as was followed by the Jews in the old days.

The word ‘Nazirite’ is derived of the Hebrew verb, meaning (consecrate) or (dedicate). In the book of Genesis, while blessing his sons, Jacob asked for the sake of his son Joseph, to have *“the blessings of heaven above, and blessings of the deep that lies beneath”*; ... and called him as *“set apart from his brothers”* (Genesis 49: 26); as though his heart was dedicated to the Lord. And in the lamentations of Jeremiah, he called the men of Judah and Jerusalem by this name *“Nazirites”* to rebuke them, saying: *“Her Nazirites were brighter than snow and whiter than milk ... Now their appearance is blacker than soot”* (Lamentations 4: 7, 8). It is as though their Nazirite, who is supposed to be pure, was found to be darker than soot; And instead of having his heart dedicated to the divine light, he delivered it to the darkness of sin.

This title was particularly given to those who dedicate their time to God, according to a vow made before the Lord. Some of those were vowed from their mothers’ wombs, and remained all the days of their life as Nazirites to the Lord. Of those are Samson (Judges 13: 5), Samuel (1 Samuel 1: 11), and John the Baptist (Luke 1: 15); and some others were vowed for a certain period of time. Up to this day, vowing the children for a certain time is still common in the East among our Catholic brethren. The homes of virgins, which appeared in the early church, and were developed until the appearance of the movement of monasticism with all its forms, came from the idea of taking a vow of a Nazirite to separate oneself to the Lord, longing to dedicate all his or her energies to worship, forsaking, by his or her own free will, the temporal pleasures allowed by God, and every blood relationship, in order to be only preoccupied with God, the subject of his love.

What came in this chapter does not concern the Nazirites for their lifelong, but for a limited period of time.

2- THE CHARACTERISTICS AND COMMITMENTS OF THE NAZIRITE:

As a **“Nazirite to the Lord”**, he should:

a- Dedicates his life with all its energies to God and His worship. In the Old Covenant, the Nazirite mostly spent his time in studying the law, and practicing the rites of worship, and the works of love toward other people; As though the foundation of the vow to be a Nazirite, is the preoccupation of man with God, His commandment, and ministering to Him in his brethren.

b- Forsake the pleasures of the world; The Nazirite was forbidden, not only to drink wine and hard liquor, but ***“he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink, neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin”*** (3, 4).

Father Methodeus believes that the grapevine is of two kinds; sanctified and evil; The Nazirite, drinks from the juice of God’s grapevine, and is committed to stop drinking the juice of the evil grapevine; saying: [This means that he, who dedicate his life to the Lord, and offers it to Him, should not take from the fruit of evil, that may cause drunkenness and distraction of the mind¹].

As the wine Corrupts the mind of man and makes him lose his balance, the Nazirite has, not only to keep away from drinking wine altogether, but also from any thing related to it, He should not drink even the fresh juice of grapes, raisins or eats its seeds or skin; For God’s sake, he should, with his complete free will, forsake even what God allowed, not as something unclean or defiled, but in order to care only for the other food, saying with the Lord Christ: ***“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work”*** (John 4: 34).

The Lord considered him who gives wine to a Nazirite, as putting an offense or temptation before him (See Amos 2: 11). God commanded them not to drink wine, lest they get drunk and forget the divine commandment (Proverbs 31: 5; Isaiah 28: 7).

The Jews thought of the Lord Christ as a Nazirite, but when they saw him turn water into wine in the wedding at Qana of Galilee, and partake of the banquets of sinners, they accused Him of being a “gluttonous man and a winebibber” (Matthew 11:19); when He intended to draw their attention to the spiritual concept of the dedication, away from the deadly letter and the formalities of the law.

c- Forsake any temporal glory. The apostle says: ***“Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?!”*** (1 Corinthians 11: 14). Yet, God demands from the Nazirite: ***“No razor shall come upon his head, until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. Then he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow”*** (5); on account of the fact that by this he would be forsaking his temporal prestige, and any preoccupation with body needs, giving his soul the chance to be preoccupied instead with the heavenlies and their glories. When the Jews attempted to set the Lord Christ an earthly King, He concealed Himself from their sight.

d- Not to become preoccupied with any blood relationships. God demands from the Nazirite not to grieve for the departure of his relatives according to the flesh; saying: ***“He shall not make himself unclean for them when they die, because his separation to God is on his head”*** (7). By this He intends to lift the Nazirite above the physical relationships, to make him see all people as his brethren and his family, and care for their souls and their eternity. That is why the Lord said to him who sought his permission to bury his father before following Him: ***“Let the dead bury their own dead; but you go and preach the kingdom of God”*** (Luke 9: 60). And when He was told: ***“Look, Your mother and brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak to you’, ... He stretched out His hand toward His disciples, and said: ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother’”*** (Mathew 12: 47-50). By that, He did not reject the blood relationships, but intended to lift us up, to see all believers as fellow members in the

¹ Fr. Methodius: *Banquet of The Ten Virgins*, 5: 4.

heavenly family; so that the spiritual fellowship would overshadow every physical relationship.

3- PURGING A NAZIRIE WHO TOUCHES A DEAD BODY:

As death is connected to sin, being one of its fruition; touching a dead body, according to the Jewish law is counted as a defilement, against which a Nazirite is warned; even if the dead is a prophet or a saint. “ *if anyone dies very suddenly beside him, and he defiled his consecrated head, then he shall shave his head on the seventh day; then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting; ... and the priest will make atonement for him; ... But the former days shall be lost, because his separation was defiled*” (9-12).

Although what happened is sudden, and for no fault on the part of the Nazirite; yet God intends to show how much He hates defilement and loves holiness and purity. Defilement, even if it happens suddenly and unwillingly, yet it brings man back to where he was; and he has to begin anew after losing the past days of his strife. ... Doing wrong by resorting to Egypt (Genesis 12), our father Abraham had to restart his journey anew from the location he set his tent between Bethel and Ai, and where he built the altar in the first place (Genesis 13: 3, 4). Abraham lost that part of his life, because he went astray from the course set for him by God, and after so much labor, he had to start again. Indeed, delivering oneself to weakness, even for once, would make man lose much of the divine blessings which he enjoyed, would turn his life lukewarm; and with much labor, he will have to start anew.

4- FULFILLMENT OF THE DAYS OF SEPARATION OF A NAZIRITE:

As we said, the talk here concerns the Nazirite, separated for a limited period, which, according to the Telmud, is a minimum of thirty days, even if man vows a lesser period. Yet, in the book of Acts (21:27), we read that the apostle Paul vowed a period of only seven days.

Fulfilling the days of his separation, the Nazirite has to go through a certain rite, that reveals the spiritual foundation on which our life is built in, and dedicated to Jesus Christ. Its fulfillment in truth, will only be when we take off our earthly tent, and enter into the comfort of the bosom of the Father. ... This rite is as follows:

a- He has to present a burnt offering, a sin offering, and a peace offering; things representing integral concepts of the secrets of the cross¹; Namely, our vows and strife in this world would not be well received, nor be consummated, except through the atonement sacrifice of the cross.

b- The Nazirite presents another unlimited offering, “*whatever else his hand is able to provide*” (21). It is as though the atonement sacrifice of the Lord Christ has to meld with our own offering as much as we can provide; by that, God’s love is bound to our love for Him; and His free work with our own strife. He left the door of the gift open, for our heart to get wider and wider every day, through the giving love with no limits.

c- To regain his honor, not on a temporal worldly basis, but the honor of the fellowship of the eternal glories, the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head, ... and shall take the hair and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering; That refers to the tears of those who strive, that the Lord Christ will wipe out by His own hands on the last day, to turn their labor and strife into the secret of an eternal exalted peace in the glorified Jesus Christ.

¹ كنيسة مارجرس باسيورتج: دراسات في الكتاب المقدس " 3 سفر اللاويين، تفسير أصحابات 1-7 (أرجو في الرب أن أعيد شرحها بتوسع).

d- “*After that, the Nazirite may drink wine*” (20) as a symbol of the enjoyment of joy and gladness, instead of the labors and sufferings we received in this world for the sake of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The rite of fulfillment of the days of our consecration, would be consummated, when we come out of this world, hiding in the free sacrifice of the cross, presenting our strife that we practiced by His divine grace; Then God will wipe out our tears, and fill our life with the everlasting joy.

In truth, this rite would not be fulfilled in us, except because the Lord Christ, our Head, has fulfilled it on an exalted divine level; When for our sake, He became a Nazirite, delivered His life in complete obedience to His Father. ... He did not present outer offerings and sacrifices, but delivered His own life, presenting His body and blood given as a sacrifice of love to the Father for our sake. In this sacrifice, we find the fire of divine love flaring through the sacrifice of true peace. ... If every Nazirite is committed to present an offering as much as his possibilities can provide; The Lord presented His own life, which alone, is received by the Father; By presenting His unlimited divine possibilities, all of us became accepted by the Father through Him. ... Shaving the head of the Nazirite, refers to the perfect freedom granted to us by that divine Nazirite through the fire of His cross; ... Drinking wine at the end, refers to His comforting Holy Spirit that He grants us in His holy church, who will fill our life with joy and peace, even in the most bitter moments of repentance.

5- THE PRIESTLY BLESSING TO THE PEOPLE:

God consummated His talk about the Nazirite, by revealing the secret of blessing enjoyed by the people through His priests. For fear that the Nazirite would probably fall into pride, on the assumption that he is better than his brethren, God clarified that even the blessing that dwells upon the people through the priests is not just a gift from God Himself, presented by the Holy Trinity; And the priests are only tools to ask God three times for the Holy Trinity to bless the people. ... God spoke to Moses saying:

“Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you; And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace”.

By this, the Lord confirms that it is He who blesses, and not the priests, whatever their ranks are. He is the One who keeps; the One who gives mercy; and the one who grants peace.

CHAPTER 7

THE OFFERINGS OF THE PEOPLE

Once the tabernacle, all the furnishings, the altar, and its utensils, were anointed and sanctified, the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel, the heads of their fathers' houses brought collective offerings, in the name of the congregation as a whole before the Lord. And when the altar was anointed, every leader in his turn offered a dedication offering for the altar in the name of his respective tribe.

1- The collective offering **1 - 9**

2- The offering of every tribe **10 – 89**

1- THE COLLECTIVE OFFERING:

After the anointment of the tabernacle, the altar, and all the furnishings, the twelve leaders of the tribes of Israel, with one spirit, came to offer six covered carts, each with two oxen. The sons of Gershon received two carts with four oxen; and the sons of Merari received four carts with eight oxen to use in carrying the pillars of the tabernacle ... As to the sons of Kohath, they received nothing, as they carry the holy items on their own shoulders.

In this concern, the following are to be noticed:

(1) A collective offering in the name of the congregation as a whole was presented before each tribe present its offering. If God wishes to have a personal relationship with every single member of the congregation; yet it is not to be an individual or isolated offering, but one that should have its origin through a collective spirit or through the spirit of fellowship that binds the church together as one body. That is what the Old and the New Testaments concentrated on: Encountering with God through a hidden personal relationship, through the spirit of collective fellowship.

(2) The sons of Gershon and Merari received their needs for their ministry from the tabernacle, and not from the hands of the leaders of the tribes; so that the minister would not feel that he works for any human, or in need of anyone, whatever their religious rank, or their material possibilities are. He works as a witness to the Lord Himself, and to His account, and not to the account of men.

(3) The sons of Kohath received no carts nor oxen, despite their higher rank among the Levites, as they carried the holy items on their own shoulders. Yet the gift granted to them is actually greater than any other, having themselves become a holy cart to carry the sacred secrets. So is God's great gift to us, to become, by His fiery Holy Spirit, a divine chariot, or a cherubim, to carry God inside us.

(4) The number of carts to carry the tabernacle and its furnishings is six, the same number of the working week days; referring to our commitment to continuous work and perpetual spiritual strife as long as we are in this world; carrying the holies of God, along the wilderness of this world, heading toward the high Jerusalem, to enter into the seventh day, namely the true Sabbath, our complete comfort in our lord Jesus Christ.... As to the twelve oxen, they refer to the kingdom of God on earth¹.

2- THE OFFERING OF EVERY TRIBE:

If God seeks in us the spirit of fellowship and unity, Yet He, as well, rejoices in our personal relationship with Him. Hence He gave the chance to every tribe to present an offering in its name on a day of its own. In these offerings it is noticed:

(1) The leaders of the tribes presented gracious gifts, as expression of the joy of all for God's work with them.

¹ راجع للمؤلف: سفر الخروج 1981.

(2) Although every tribe had its own turn, yet the offerings came equal, so that no tribe can boast on another, nor any member may despise or belittle himself for being unable to match the offerings of others ... Receiving equal gifts from all, God proclaims the equality of all of us in His sight, and His impartiality toward everyone.

(3) The tribe of Judah preceded the rest of the tribes in giving; as it carries the symbol of the Lord Christ; who, by offering Himself a gift of love and obedience to the Father; In him the gifts of all believers were accepted.

(4) Talking much about the optional gifts, repeating the same words to describe the kind of offering from every tribe; and at the end, presenting a total account of the offerings as a whole; the book proclaims God's joy for the love that fills the hearts of His children for Him. As a father, he rejoices in His children's gifts, being a sign of their true sonhood to Him; and He confirmed His acceptance of those gifts in His talk to His servant Moses from between the two cherubim.

(5) The offerings of each tribe were as such:

- a- One silver platter of about 60 oz., to put the meat on it.
- b- One silver bowl of about 35 oz., for drinks, or in which to drain the blood of sacrifices.
- c- A gold pan (or spoon) of 5 oz., probably for use on the altar of incense.
- d- One young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering.
- e- One kid of the goats as a sin offering. Amid the joy and gladness, man should not forget his enjoyment of the forgiveness of his sins through the holy sacrifice.
- f- Two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year, as a sacrifice of peace offering. The secret of our true joy, is to find in the slain Jesus Christ, a sanctification of our five senses and all our inner energies.

So was the contribution of every tribe in those offerings and sacrifices. Every time incense was offered, the gold pans testifies to their need of praying to God; and the silver bowl testifies to their need of the precious blood to purge them.

CHAPTER 8

THE DEDICATION OF THE LEVITES

The divine inspiration binds between the lighting of the golden lampstand, and the dedication and cleansing of the Levites; Namely, God intends to proclaim that his ministers are heavenly lampstands giving light to the whole world.

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1- The lighting of the golden lampstand | 1 – 4 |
| 2- The dedication of the Levites | 5 – 22 |
| 3- The duration of ministry of the Levites | 23 - 26 |

1- THE LIGHTING THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND:

For the first time, Aaron the high priest, himself, carries out the arrangement and the lighting of the seven lamps of the lamstand, according to God's command. This rite comes directly before the dedication of the Levites, to confirm the truth of their ministry; that it is not merely carrying the tabernacle and helping the priests with the manual work, but to get enlightened by the Lord Christ the greatest High Priest, then to give light in their turn to their brethren (Matthew 5: 15).

The lampstand with its seven lamps, refer to the perfect work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church (Revelation 4: 5); particularly concerning the seven holy Sacraments. It is as though the ministers of God, being enlightened by the Lord Christ through His fiery Holy Spirit, turn into heavenly lamps filled with the oil of grace, perpetually flaring day and night, burning the evil out, and giving light to souls.

In this lampstand, the work of the Holy Book is bound to the crucified Lord Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the ministers; It is the custom with the Jews, that the priest lights the lamp in the middle from the fire of the altar; Then from it the rest of the lamps are lighted. Those lamps were made out of the old garments of the priests. ... If the golden lampstand refers to the Holy Book, which is the Lamp that gives light to the souls; The true minister hides in the Holy Book or in the divine commandment; that it is not he, who gives light, but it is the word of God, that lightens the way in the minister's life, as well as in the life of those ministered. The priest lights the lamp in the middle from the fire of the altar; as though this enlightenment in the life of those ministered, would be realized by Christ Jesus the Highest Priest, who enflames our inner hearts by the fire of His Holy Spirit, through the fire of the cross or the altar; As the Spirit takes from what is Christ's and tells us. In our midst He carries the fire of the cross that burns evil, and grants an incessant enlightenment; And by that the other lamps around, would draw light from the one in the middle.

The flaming fire in our heart, like the lamp in the middle, is the fire of the Holy Spirit that proclaims the glory of Christ and His work, being the Center of the Holy Book with its two Testaments, to grace us with the divine secrets in Jesus Christ.

Finally, the threads of the lamps, are made from the old garments of the priests. If the garments refer to the body, the lamps refer to the labor through which the priests and the ministers go, until their bodies are torn and worn-out.... Yet, in themselves, they are worth nothing more than some valueless old garments; but when the priest enflame them ny the fire of the Spirit set forth to us through the sacrifice, these worn-out garments will turn into the secret of enlightenment to many.

2- THE DEDICATION OF THE LEVITES:

The book of Leviticus (chapter 8), includes the rite of the dedication of the priests. Here the rite of the dedication of the Levites is mentioned, in which the work of God Himself appears in consecrating these souls, to become worthy of His holy ministry. For this a sacrifice of sin and a burnt offering are offered to the Lord as an atonement for them (12). "*Aaron and his sons offer them as though a wave offering to*

the Lord” (13). It is God Himself who accepts them as a gift from the people, and He Himself who prepares them to minister in His house.

Of this rite, the Levites themselves, beside the prophet Moses, the high priest Aaron, and all the congregation (namely their laymen leaders) will partake. Everyone of them has his own role, work, and responsibility in this rite. As far as the Levites are concerned, they will shave their whole body, and wash their clothes (7); a sign of their commitment to a pure holy life. Applying a razor on their bodies refers to taking off every defilement from themselves; And washing their clothes, as a symbol of the body, is a sign of purification. Then the prophet Moses, the receiver of the law, and the representative of the divine commandment, “*will sprinkle water of purification on them*” (7); as though the secret of purification of the ministers, is their being bound to the word of God that would expose their sins, and support them to repentance. ... Aaron carries out a main role in this rite, as he and his sons receive the Levites as a gift from the people to God; and God in turn appoints them as assistants to the priests (19). As to the congregation (namely their leaders); they will lay their hands on the Levites (10); as though, whatever the people will do, the ministers will bear its responsibility before God. On another aspect, they are as though, giving the Levites as a gift from the people to God by their hands; like when a child gives a gift to his own father.

The book of Numbers tried to confirm that the ministers of God are not only a gift from God to minister to, and to care for His people; but they are as well, a gift from the people to God, who will receive them as the firstfruit of the people, and because of them, all will be blessed. That is why no Pope, bishop, a priest, or a deacon, should be ordained without the presence of the people. ... As the people should present themselves to God, and present the one to be ordained, as a gift of love to God; then to receive him from the hands of God as a gift to His people.

In this, I see a symbolic portrait of the true Minister “the Lord Christ”, who is the Gift of the Father to mankind for their salvation; And at the same time, He is a sacrifice of love, presented to the Father in the name of mankind, that He accepts as a sign of His pleasure in us.... In the secret of the Eucharist, God receives the offerings of His people through the cross. And the people receive from the Father the body and blood of His Son, as a secret of unity with Him, and a sanctification to them. It is the sign of mutual love, in whom the Father encounters mankind; and He Himself would be the Offering of every party to the other.

3- THE DURATION OF THE MINISTRY OF THE LEVITES:

We have already dealt with this point and its symbolic meaning in our talk in the fourth chapter.

CHAPTER 9

THE DIVINE LEADERSHIP

If God has set Moses a prophet; Aaron a high priest; and ordained priests and Levites, yet the real leadership was in the hands of God working through His ministers. Hence, although God granted the congregation His laws and statutes, and set for them His ministers, yet, as we shall see in this chapter, they would always go back to God in everything big or small, being the true Shepherd of His people.

1- Keeping the Passover in the second year 1 - 5

2- The situation of those who are not well prepared for the Passover

6 - 14

3- God as the Leader of every spiritual movement 15 - 23

1- KEEPING THE PASSOVER IN THE SECOND YEAR:

The divine command was issued to the prophet Moses at the beginning of the second year, before doing the census, to keep the Passover, being the first feast after their exodus. Keeping it, had a special importance; on account of the fact that the first Passover, directly held before the crossing over, has been kept in a haste, to get out of the Land of Egypt; something that made their children not aware of its rite or significance. That, beside the fact that the events of the exodus, and what preceded it of signs and wonders, then what followed it, of crossing over the Red Sea, and the perdition of Pharaoh and his army ... etc. might have made the lamb of the Passover, to appear just as a regular part among those multitude of events. God, therefore, intended to underscore the importance of the role of Passover, before they set forth on their journey in the wilderness; so that this issue would keep preoccupying their minds, even in the promised land, until the coming of the true Passover who is to be slain for our sake.

We have already dealt with the connection of the symbolic Passover with all its rites, to the true Passover.

He intended to underscore that the Passover is not a past event, which happened and done with; but is a current event; he who declines from keeping it, shall be cut off from among his people (13).

2- THE SITUATION OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT WELL PREPARED FOR KEEPING THE PASSOVER:

A new problem came by; namely, what would be done with those who were defiled by a dead body of a man; or were far away on a journey? Moses responded to their enquiry by saying: “*Stand still, that I may hear what the Lord will command concerning you*” (8). By so doing, the prophet Moses intended to confirm that, in anything big or small, he always seek the counsel of God – which is the secret of the strength of the church, and of every one of its members, to seek the counsel of God and not that of men.

God did not deny those who were defiled by the dead body of a man, or who were far away on a journey, of keeping the Passover, but gave them the chance to practice it on the second month instead of the first. But he who declines from keeping it without a reason, would be cut off from among the people of God.

3- GOD IS THE LEADER OF EVERY SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT:

God did not leave His people confused in the wilderness, nor even under human leadership; but took over leading them by Himself; to tell them when to encamp and when to break camp. He used to appear to them as a cloud by day, and as a pillar of fire by night. In case the cloud settles down on the tabernacle of meeting,

they would remain encamped, and when it is taken up, they would journey to where it would go.

CHAPTER 10

(verses 1 to 10)

THE LANGUAGE OF TRUMPETS

God commanded the prophet Moses to make two silver trumpets to use them for calling the assembly; for directing the movements of the camp; and on the days of the appointed feasts. Trumpets were the language by which the priests tell the congregation what they have to do. By certain tunes, the leaders would know that they are invited to a meeting; and by another tune the whole congregation would know that they are called. There was a certain tune for telling the camp of Judah to start moving, and the direction they should take; and another for the camp of Reuben; and so on. And there was a special tune for going to war, different from that for celebrating a feast.

Trumpets were made of silver, because silver refers to the word of God, according to the words of the Psalmist, saying: "*The words of God are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times*" (Psalm 12: 6).

That is the language of the priests, by which they utter the word of God all the time, to exhort the children of God to meet with the spirit of fellowship, or to provoke them to strive, walking along the wilderness of this world; It is the secret of their conquest in their spiritual war; and is the secret of their joy and the exultation of their hearts in their extended and incessant feast.

Talking about those two trumpets, **St. Jerome** says: [In the book of Numbers we read about two kinds of trumpets: A long silver one, and a horn, according to what came in the psalm: "*With trumpets and the sound of a horn*" (Psalm 98: 6). The long trumpet refers to the word of God and His true promises, like silver, pure of any dross, tried and purified seven times (Psalm 12: 6). While the horn represents the man of God; as it refers in the Holy Book to kingdom and authority: "*(The Lord) has raised up a horn of salvation for us*" (Luke 1: 69)¹].

And talking about the importance of the trumpets in the Old Covenant, **Pope Athanasius the apostolic** says: [Hearing what the law says about revering the trumpets, we should not think of it as something of little importance; because it is actually amazing and terrifying. Their sound makes one alert and awe struck, more than any other sound or instrument; It was the way they were taught, as they were still like babes. And lest it would be taken as something human, their sound were like those that were heard on the mountain (Exodus 19: 16), that made them terrified, before they were given the law to keep²].

To clarify that blowing the trumpets; namely, the words of sermon by the gospel, is something only done by the priests, **St. Ambrose** says: [It was not up for anyone but the priests to blow the trumpet to call for a holy meeting. The ministers of God blow the trumpets, so that those who hear their sound would hasten to come to the tabernacle of meeting, where the glory of God is; to behold the divine works, and be worthy of the divine places which are the inheritance of all³].

In the New Covenant, the church replaced the trumpets by the bells, with which we have already dealt with⁴.

¹ On Ps., hom 25.

² Festal Letters 1: 2.

³ On Belief in the Resurr. 2: 111.

⁴ للمؤلف: الكنيسة بيت الله، 1969، ص 415-418.

THE SECOND DIVISION

FROM SINAI TO MOAB

(Chapter 10:11 to Chapter 21)

CHAPTER 10

(Verses 11 to 36)

THE DEPARTURE FROM SINAI

The journey started from Mount Sinai after God spoke to His servant Moses and gave him the law, and commanded him to build the tabernacle with its furnishings, and in particular the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that represents the divine presence.

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1- The departure of the people | 11 - 28 |
| 2- An Invitation to Moses' father-in-law to go with them | 29 - 32 |
| 3-The ark of the covenant of the Lord precedes them | 33 – 36 |

1- THE DEPARTURE OF THE PEOPLE:

The divine inspiration presents to us a demonstration of God's leadership of His people during that journey; As once the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle of the testimony heading toward the wilderness of Paran; the priests blew the trumpet for the procession to start according to the commandment of the Lord with an elaborate pattern. The whole church set forth in the form of a cross as we have already described; starting by the standard of the camp of Judah, formed of three tribes, every tribe preceded by its leader; then the camp of Reuben in the middle; followed by the camp of Ephraim, and finally the camp of Dan.

2- AN INVITATION TO MOSES' FATHER-IN-LAW TO GO WITH THEM:

Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite: *"We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you'. Come with us and we will treat you well; for the Lord has promised good things to Israel ... Please do not leave, for you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us "* (29-33). The opening of Moses' heart for that man of foreign race to partake of what the Lord has promised to give to His people Israel, was a sign of the acceptance of the Gentiles in the church of the New Covenant to enjoy the promises of God.

We do not hear any response from Hobab, even after repeating the invitation; his silence probably implied his consent; as we shall read about Moses' father-in-law in Canaan (Judges 1: 16; 1 Samuel 15: 6).

Despite the divine confirmations to Moses that God will be the Leader of His people, and will support them in every step they will take, yet we hear Moses say to Hobab: *"Please do not leave us, for you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will be as eyes for us"* (31) ... He intended for him to become eyes for them in the wilderness, although it is God who was leading them!

Although Moses' invitation carried a prophecy and implied a spacious heart and love, yet it also bore a kind of human weakness, a prejudice toward his relatives according to the flesh; something that is difficult to take off from men, even from prophets. It is difficult indeed for the ministers of God – whatever their clerical rank or spiritual stature may be, to forsake the personal factor in their life and ministry; although, I would like here to confirm that Moses in several situations, proved to be free from any personal or family influence, as we shall see in our present study.

3- THE ARK OF THE COVENANT OF THE LORD PRECEDES THEM:

At the start of the journey, “*They departed from the mountain of the Lord on a journey of three days*” (33) It is not possible for us to set forth from the Mount of Sinai toward the promised land, unless we carry in us the power of the resurrection of the Lord. The figure 3, as we previously saw in the book of Exodus refers to the resurrection, without which the procession would be tough, cruel, bitter, and even impossible; Whereas, by the resurrection of the Lord, its labors would turn into joy, and its sufferings would become the source of comfort.

Here, for the first time, the role of the ark of the covenant is demonstrated as a representative of the divine presence preceding the procession, not location-wise, being actually in the center point of the congregation; nor order-wise, as the Kohathites move with it, third in the order of walking, following the camp of Judah, and the camp of Reuben. But, in an unseen way, it moves as a hidden Leader, and the secret of strength and sanctification to the procession.

It is amazing how the divine inspiration tells us: “*When the ark set out, Moses said: ‘Rise up, O Lord! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You’*” (35). As though Moses, at the start of the departure of the ark, saw the power of the resurrection of the Lord. Moving after the camp of Judah and that of Reuben, namely, occupying the third place after the two camps, Moses saw the Lord rising on the third day, scattering the power of Satan, the sin, and the kingdom of darkness. And if we take into consideration, that each camp with its three tribes takes three movements, the order of movement of the ark would rather be in the eighth place (The tribes of the camp of Judah 3 + the tribes of the camp of Reuben 3 + Moses, Aaron, and the priests 1 + the Kohathites, the bearers of the ark of covenant 1 = 8). The Lord Christ has risen on the eighth day of the previous week, namely the beginning of the new week.

The church quoted this prayer to say at the end of the litany of the assemblies of the holy liturgy; As the resurrection of the Lord Christ, the Conqueror of evil, is the secret of the blessing of the congregation and the assemblies

CHAPTER 11

THE PEOPLE COMPLAIN

It was not too long after the leaders of the people presented the offerings of joy to God at the level of the whole congregation and that of each tribe; that the people started to complain, in an apostasy to their old covetousness.

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| 1- The fire of the Lord burns in the camp | 1 - 3 |
| 2- Craving for the meat | 4 - 9 |
| 3- Moses sees the responsibility as too burdensome on him | 10 - 15 |
| 4- Choosing seventy elders | 16 - 25 |
| 5- Eldad and Medad prophesy | 26 - 29 |
| 6- God feeds His people | 30 - 35 |

1- THE FIRE OF THE LORD BURNS IN THE CAMP:

“Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord, for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused” (1). That is the nature of the old man in us; always complaining without real cause. At a time when the Lord presented to them the law; commanded the building of the tabernacle with all its furnishings and utensils, to come to dwell among them; organized the camp; and set for them the rite of dedicating the Levites; when all were exulted, and joyfully brought offerings to the Lord; ... They started to complain, out of the emptiness of heart, whose inner peace became lost by sin, to look for any excuse to murmur and grumble.

If the book of Numbers, as we said before, is “the book of the wilderness”; Yet in the wilderness, where God encounters with man, proclaiming to him His commandment, goodness, and continuous care; ... At the same time, in it, man is exposed before God and before himself with all his inner weaknesses. ... In the wilderness, complaints happened several times: The first time, after crossing over the Red Sea, and directly after singing the praise of conquest to the Lord (Exodus 15: 24); A second time after the Lord turned the bitter water to fresh water (Exodus 16: 3); when they preferred death in the land of bondage, beside the pots of meat, to that divine achievement; And a third time after granting them the free Manna (Exodus 17: 2), etc. ... It is as though each time God grants them a gift, after a short-lived joy; and once they feel the hunger of soul and emptiness of heart, they start to complain. .. This book is actually “the book of exposure of the human weaknesses”, not only in the life of the congregation as a whole, but even in that of the greatest spiritual leader – the great prophet Moses, to whom God Himself testified that he is *“faithful in all My house”* (Numbers 12: 7); in the life of his sister Miriam, who became leper and caused the delay of the procession for one whole week (Numbers 12); in that of Aaron, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, the Levites, beside 120 of the elders of the people (Numbers 16); And of the heathen prophet Balaam (Numbers 22-25) ... I should rather say that the book of Numbers is “the book of the exposure of the wounds of the human nature”; So that all of us would hear what the king of Babylon did: *“You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting”* (Daniel 5: 27).

Yes indeed, How much we are in need for the wilderness, to get in touch with God’s dealings with us; and with the depths of our weaknesses inside us; in order to resort to Him!

Telling us about the fruition of that complaint, the divine inspiration says: *“The fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched”* (1, 2). ... Previously, God used to treat them with

compassion, and gave them what they sought without chastisement; But now, He allowed for the fire to burn in the outskirts of the camp. ... Previously, because of their lack of a long experience with God, He used to treat them like little children; But now, after pouring such great blessings over them, all along the past year; and granting them the grace of His dwelling in their midst, through the holy tabernacle, his anger was aroused against them.

Although the complaint at the start was concealed inside the heart, yet **God who searches the heart and mind heard it (1)**, and allowed for the fire to burn in the outskirts of the camp; ... He intended to reveal in a clear material way, the work of the fire of the inner evil in their souls; ... He intended to expose the weakness, to give the chance for repentance; so that the corruption would not stay hidden inside them without treatment. As to the fire burning in the outskirts of the camp; being the farthest location from the tabernacle; It shows that the farthest man is from God, the wider his heart would open up to evil.

Amid the anguish, Moses' love and faithful care for his people are shown; He cried out to the Lord; the Lord listened to him, and the fire was quenched. Such would be the work of the loving shepherd, to intercede for his flock before the Lord.

Lest the people would forget that event, and would eventually go back to complain, that place was given the name "*Tabirah*", meaning (burning up).

2- CRAVING FOR THE MEAT:

To clarify how the fire of that craving flared in the people, the Lord says: "*Now the mixed multitude (the rabble) who were among them yielded to intense craving*" (4). Those mixed multitude, most probably Egyptians, who came together with them from the land of Egypt (Exodus 12: 38), have stirred up all of them to cry, craving for meat. Those "*mixed multitude*" represent, as well, the foreign thought that crawls into the soul of man and corrupts its depths. ... That is why God kept on commanding the people of Israel, whenever they take over a city, to destroy it completely, as a symbol of not leaving any trace of sin in our minds that may cause the sin to flare up in us anew.

Because those "*mixed multitude*" kept on entering into the life of the church to corrupt her liberty in our Lord Jesus Christ, and to humiliate her by the bondage of sin; the apostle Paul says: "*Because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you*" (Galatians 2: 4, 5). ... We should then follow the lead of the apostle, and not yield submission to their voice even for one hour, lest we may go back to crave for the pots of meat in the land of bondage; but perpetually abide to the liberty of the truth of the gospel.

Talking to us about those "*mixed multitude*", the apostle Jude says: "*For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Jude 4). The goal of those "*mixed multitude*" who crept in unnoticed among the believers, is to corrupt the work of the divine grace in our life, and to bring us over to licentiousness and disbelief.

How much we need to purify ourselves of "*mixed multitude*", both on the level of the holy congregation, lest the bad leaven would corrupt the whole lump; or on the level of every individual member, lest his mind and heart would be corrupted through getting slothful with a foreign thought or sin, that may seem little and of no real importance. Hence the Holy Book warns us, saying: "*Catch the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines*" (Song of Solomon 2: 15).

The “*mixed multitude*” managed to bring back the congregation, through their hearts, to the land of bondage; when God, intending for His people to have a holy life, isolated them from that land with no return. ... But now they weep, saying: “*Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes*” (4-6).

How amazing is man’s denial of God! ... How the people would remember the free fish, which most probably was the little fry given to the slaves; ... How they crave for the cucumber, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; ... and forget the scourges, the whip strokes, the loss of freedom, and the humiliation of making the mud bricks under every kind of pressure! ... The sin remains indeed the object of covetousness for many, despite what it presents of humiliation and bondage!

Amazed by the attitude of those people, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [If, after such cruel bondage, they still covet to return to being slaves under the heavy hands of their tyrant masters, How would they do if they were not treated with such barbarism¹?!].

They did not stop at remembering the past and forgetting its humiliation; but they even looked at God’s gift with scorn, saying: “*Now our whole being is dried up*”. ... This is the way with humanity along all eras, seeking the temporary enjoyment of the body, as though it is the perfection of liberty, and the secret of joy; while seeing God’s gifts as dryness, deprivation, and anguish! ... About this, **St. Jerome** says: [They despised the bread of the angels and mourned over the meat of Egypt; When Moses’ fasting forty days and forty nights on the Mount of Sinai, reveals that man does not live on bread alone, but on the word of God²].

There was nothing wrong in seeking the meat in itself, as much as in despising the gift of God!

3- MOSES SEES THE RESPONSIBILITY AS TOO BURDENSOME ON HIM:

In our talk about the prophet Moses in our commentary on the book of Exodus (Chapter 32), we saw how his shining portrait used to keep God’s wrath from His people. But here we see, how that great among the prophets, in some moments of weakness, accuses God of afflicting and burdening him with what is beyond his endurance; that he wished that God would kill him, to spare him seeing such calamity dwelling on his people. In the moments of his weakness, Moses wrongly assumed that he conceived all those people, begat them, and was committed to sustain them and carry their burden ... As though God is unable to care for His people!

“*Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. So Moses said to the Lord: ‘Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me:’ Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child’, to the land which You swore to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying: ‘Give us meat, that we may eat’. I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now – if I have found favor in Your sight – and do not let me see my wretchedness*” (10-15).

¹ *Conc. Statues* 6: 8.

² *Against Joirnuanus* 2: 15.

Did Moses forget that, if he happen to bear the fatherhood of all those people; and if he was committed to carry them in his bosom; he has actually received this fatherhood as a gift from God, who alone is the Father of all mankind, and who embraces His people?!

Anyway, God graciously accepted from His servant Moses that admonishment, despite what it implied of human weakness; and considered that he uttered it, out of his great love for his children.... Hence God intervened to take away the spirit of complaint from the souls of the people; by giving the prophet Moses the chance to elect seventy elders to support him in his spiritual work; and even got back to commend him, saying: “*Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth*” (Numbers 12: 3).

4- CHOOSING SEVENTY ELDERS:

“The Lord said to Moses: ‘Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, ... that they may stand with you, ... and that they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone’ (16, 17).

God used the moments of weakness in His prophet, to edify the congregation, to set seventy elders to consummate the clerical system; not only through the prophet, the high priest, the priests, the Levites, and the leaders of the tribes; but also by setting seventy elders of laymen, who are to have His Holy Spirit dwell upon them, to partake of the ordinance; Namely, God since the old, intended to confirm the role of the laymen, whether through the leaders of the tribes or the seventy elders.

At the same time, he gave Moses the freedom to choose the seventy elders, he committed him to choose them as true “*elders of the people and officers over them*” (16). An elder is not so described, according to the number of his years, nor by the whiteness of his hair; but by his wisdom and knowledge. Hence **St. Jerome** wrote in one of his epistles, saying: [My beloved brother, Do not count my worthiness according to my number of years; as the whiteness of hair does not imply wisdom, but wisdom is as good as the whiteness of hair; according to the words of Solomon: “*Understanding is gray hair for anyone*” (Wisdom 4: 9). ... Moses was committed to choose the seventy elders to stand with him, not according to their age, but according to their discernment; As Daniel while being just a kid, judged elders, and condemned them for their uncleanness (The story of Susanna)¹].

The Lord said to Moses: “***I will take of the Spirit that is upon you, and I will put the same upon them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone***” (17). ... What did the Lord mean by these words? Some assumed it to imply that Moses has lost some of the splendor of his crown!. But it is God who works in Moses alone, or in him together with seventy elders. ... The work is the same, and would not change; for God is the true Shepherd. If he did not choose those elders, Moses would have labored more, and his crown would have been with more splendor. ... What God was previously doing with the prophet Moses, He will do with Him together with the seventy elders. ... That phrase, therefore does not imply that Moses has lost something of God’s power, or that something was taken away from him, but it rather means that God who granted Moses to work by His Spirit, granted those men, as well, to work together with him by the same Spirit. ... **The scholar Origen** says: [Moses, with the Spirit of God on him, has been like a very shining lamp, from which God shed light upon the seventy other

¹ St. Jerome: Epistle 58: 1.

elders, without causing the source to weaken¹]. **St. Augustine** says that what God meant by His words to Moses, to say to him: [I shall grant them the Holy Spirit as I did grant you²].

Commenting on the dwelling of the Holy Spirit upon the seventy elders, **the scholar Origen** says: [The Holy Spirit, as it came in the Holy Book does not randomly dwell upon anyone, but only upon the saint and the blessed; and on the pure in heart (Matthew 5: 8) who are purified from sin. On the contrary, the Spirit will not dwell upon a body on which sin has authority. Even if the Holy Spirit does dwell in such a body for some time, He would not endure for long, sharing it with the spirit of sin. But at the moment we receive the spirit of sin in us; through the unclean thoughts and defiled desires, the Holy Spirit, filled with grief and anguish (will be driven out of it) – if I dare to use such an expression. Hence the apostle says: “*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*” (Ephesians 4: 30). ... By sin, we grieve the Holy Spirit; and by the good holy life, we set a place for the Holy Spirit to work in us³].

Yet, we cannot accept such a view as it is, particularly in the New Covenant; on account of the fact that, by the Lord Christ – the Representative of humanity – we came to receive the Holy Spirit through the two Sacraments: Baptism and the Meron (the Holy Anointment); Baptism sets us to be a holy temple for the Holy Spirit, And through the Meron He dwells in us and abides in us. ... By the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, from whom the Holy Spirit will not separate, being His own Spirit; we became, as well, a temple for the Holy Spirit, perpetually sanctifying us.... Now, If it so happen that we sin, He will be grieved, but He will never forsake us. According to **St. Felixinus**, the Spirit of God would never forsake the believer, unless he denies faith. He sees the Holy Spirit like a physician who would never despair of healing the patient, but would stay on his side, to support and cure him.

St. Felixinus also says: [No sin, whether by work or by thought is able to destroy the temple of God. Yet there is a difference between sins by work and the denial of God. In case we commit a sin, our faith in God still remaining sound, we would not lose our sonhood to Him; like the son, according to nature who, whatever wrong he does to his father, and however much he provokes his anger, yet that would not deprive him of his right to be called his son].

[Concerning the claim that the Holy Spirit may forsake us because of some sins, and will come back to dwell in us once we repent; This is utterly unacceptable. As, if the Holy Spirit does forsake us, Who will then work in us to repent our sins?! As repentance would not happen without the Holy Spirit; And everything we do, from fasting to watching, to praying, to giving alms, to having heart rebuke, to shedding tears of repentance, to sighing, etc. are all through the power of the Holy Spirit]

[The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, namely, in those who are baptized; Yet He does not keep by force, someone who intends to commit a sin, from doing it, but will instruct him and warn him against falling].

[It is not right, therefore, to claim that the Holy Spirit would forsake the soul when a sin is committed, and would come back with repentance; As that implies that He is weak, and hesitant; and that He stands watching us from afar, waiting for us to repent our sins, and to return to the state of righteousness, to come back to dwell in us. ... Surely, what would be my benefit if the Holy Spirit comes back to dwell in me,

¹ *Origin: in Num., hom 6: 2..*

² *St. Augustin: on the Triniy 5: 15..*

³ *In Num., hom 6: 3...*

when I am already justified; when, at the time of my fall, He did not stand by me, to stretch a hand of help make me stand on my feet?!).

[He who becomes clothed by the Holy Spirit in the water of baptism, will never take Him off, except through the denial of faith; Because, if by faith man is clothed by the Holy Spirit, By denying faith, He will forsake the soul; as faith and denial are adversaries like light and darkness¹].

However, many still believe that the Holy Spirit would never forsake the believer; not only when he sins, but **even** if he denies faith; That is why, in case the later repents, the church, will not repeat his baptism nor his anointment with the Meron. ... Among those who embrace this view is **St. Augustine**².

Going back to the issue of the seventy elders; those, having undoubtedly got some relationship with the prophet Moses, were aware of much of God's work with him; Yet they would not be able to support him nor to accompany him in his work, unless God grant them the power of the Spirit, working in the prophet Moses. As the discipleship, in truth, is not merely to follow the lead of the mentor in his actions and behavior; as much as it is a discipleship to the Lord Himself through the mentor, so that the disciple would bear the Spirit of the Lord Himself working in the mentor.

5- ELDAD AND MEDAD PROPHECY:

Most probably they were brothers; one is called 'Eldad' meaning (whom the Lord loves), and the other called 'Medad' meaning (the beloved). They were chosen by the prophet Moses among the seventy elders, yet, although they remained in the camp and did not go to the tabernacle with the others, the Holy Spirit dwelt upon them, and they prophesied like the others.

By this, God intends to confirm to the people that the Spirit who dwelt upon the elders is a gift from God Himself, and not from Moses; granted even to those who were absent; And to counter the misunderstanding of the divine words: "***He took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders***" (25).

Commenting on this issue, **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says: [Joshua the son of Nun, who was to succeed Moses, came to tell him that the two men who were called and did not come, are prophesying, and asked for his permission to forbid them! Yet Moses declined, on account of that, as the gift was from heaven, he has no authority to forbid them; But on the contrary, he thanks God for it. And being sure that what his loyal assistant said did was not out of envy, he said to him: "*Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!*" (29)³].

The words "*the Lord would put His Spirit upon them*", uttered by Moses were a prophecy of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost. And what happened to Eldad and Medad was a prophecy of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit upon the church of the Gentiles, that was like them, outside the camp; ... God embraced to Himself those who were once outside.

Commenting again on this issue, **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says: [Those present were 68 elders, and they prophesied; while Eldad and Medad, although not present, yet they prophesied as well. ... It is not that the Holy Spirit was divided, but His grace was distributed according to the multitude of vessels, and the volume of the receivers. And it is obvious that it was not the prophet Moses who gave the gift, but the Holy Spirit who worked⁴].

¹ راجع القديس فيلوكسينوس: لا تطفنوا الروح (ترجمة وتعليق د. جورج بباوي، يونيو 1981).
² راجع للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، 1981.

³ Cat. Lect 16: 26.

⁴ Ibid 16: 25.

God probably chose these two elders, specifically, to gain that divine gift, on account that the name of one of them was 'Eldad' meaning (whom God loves), and that of the other was 'Medad' meaning (the beloved); Namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of love, presented by God to His church for the sake of His love for her; She is His beloved, who receives His Spirit to sanctify her, to prepare her to become His heavenly bride, to enter into His eternal secret place, and to partake of His eternal glories.

6- GOD FEEDS HIS PEOPLE:

The prophet Moses found it difficult to believe; when the Lord said to him: *“Then you shall say to the people, ‘Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, ... for the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you’”* (18-20). If the people counted 600,000 men on foot, beside the women, children, and the Levites; How could a multitude of about 2 millions eat meat in the wilderness for a whole month?! Moses said: *“Are there enough flocks and herds to be slaughtered for them? ... Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together to provide enough for them?”* (22). To which God responded, saying: *“Has the Lord’s arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will befall you or not!”* (23). *“Now a wind went out from the Lord and it brought quail from the sea, and left them fluttering ... all around the camp ... above the surface of the ground”* (31). That was how God gave them, and gives us, more than we ask for or we seek, and in a way we do not foresee. He proclaimed that His arm is not shortened; saying on the tongue of the prophet: *“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts”* (Zechariah 4: 6).

The people were given their heart’s desire of meat; but when they fell on it with such disgraceful intense greed¹, *“the wrath of God was aroused against them, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague”* (33); not because of eating meat, but because of the way they ate it; as the Psalmist says: *“He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul”* (Psalm 106: 15).

Before we end this chapter, I should like to mention a commentary by **the scholar Origen** on the inspiration saying: *“So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord”* (24). He says: [As long as Moses was listening to the words of the Lord, and receiving His instructions, he stayed inside, in a more secret retreat. But intending to talk to the multitudes, he cannot stay inside, but as said by the Holy Book, *“he went out”* ... So I think Paul also did; He was inside when he said: *“We speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet nor the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing”* (1 Corinthians 2: 6). See how Paul was inside, watching the secrets of the inner divine wisdom, while receiving those teachings. And when he gets out to the people, listen to what he teaches: *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth”* (Ephesians 4: 29); and, *“Let him who stole steal no longer”* (Ephesians 4: 28)... Those words and the like, are the teachings of the apostle, when he goes out to teach the people, as the prophet Moses did²].

¹ St. Jerome: Epistle 128: 2.

² In Num., hom 6: 1.

CHAPTER 12

MOSES MARRIES AN ETHIOPIAN WOMAN

The prophet Moses who was immensely displeased when he saw the people weep; and daringly admonished God, asking him to relieve him from his ministry; appears very meek when he it comes to his personal life; when his brother Aaron and his sister Miriam spoke against him for he married an Ethiopian woman.

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1- THE JEALOUSY OF AARON AND MIRIAM:

Aaron and Miriam spoke against their brother Moses for he married an Ethiopian woman (1). Some believe that the real reason behind their complaint was, that he probably did not consult them when he chose the seventy elders. Jealousy and envy crawled into their hearts, made them utter the words: ***“Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses; Has He not spoken through us also?”*** (2). And through envy, they found in his marriage to an Ethiopian woman a chance to complain against him.

Commenting on their attitude, **St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa** says: [In their envy they became like a bow that throws, not arrows, but words¹]. And he also says: [Envy is the pain that causes evil; ... It is the father of death; the entrance to sin; the origin of harm; the son of grief; the mother of calamities; the foundation of rebellion; the beginning of disgrace; and the reason why we were driven out of paradise; having taken the form of a serpent to seduce Eve! ... Envy took us away from the tree of life; bared us from the holy garments; and in disgrace, brought us out clothed in fig leaves²]. He said as well: [Envy does not happen because of a calamity that dwelt upon man, but because of something good that came to others. The envious counts his success, not in his enjoyment of good things, but rather in the calamities that dwell upon others³].

If we move on from the envy of Aaron and Miriam to Moses himself; the Holy Book testifies to him, saying: ***“Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth”*** (3). By such great humility, he could confront their envy, and overcome it. Like a deaf person, in silence, he did not open his mouth, not even to admonish them; But, on the contrary, when Miriam fell under chastisement, he interceded for her sake, and cried out to the Lord, saying: ***“Please heal her, O God, I pray”*** (13). This is the secret of Moses' success in his dealings of his people, with their continuous murmuring. In his heart he bore love; and rejected any earthly glory or favor for his person. We saw how, being such a great prophet, through whom God performed a multitude of signs and wonders, he, in an amazing humility, listened to the counsel of 'Jethro', his father-in-law, the heathen priest⁴!

ST. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, expressing the weakness of envy before Moses' humility, says: [Attacking that great man, envy was broken like an earthen vessel cast against a rock; ... he proved to be higher than the reach of the arrows of envy⁵!]. [He not only kept silent, and did not defend himself against those who did

¹ St. Greg. Nys.: Life of Moses 2: 260..

² Ibid 2: 256..

³ Ibid 2: 258.

⁴ للمؤلف: سفر الخروج، 1981، ص 113، 114.

⁵ Ibid 2: 259, 260.

him wrong, but prayed for their sake¹]. [He would not be able to do that, if he is not standing behind God²].

2- GOD DEFENDS HIS SERVANT MOSES:

Having been silent, not just by his lips, but also in his depths, as, in his great humility and longsuffering, he did not defend himself, nor sought from the Lord to restore his honor, God hastened to intervene on his behalf, called the three of them, and said to Aaron and Miriam: ***“If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision, and I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, clearly, not in riddles; and he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?”*** (6-8).

Because of his humility, Moses was worthy of such a great honor, to be counted faithful in all God’s house; that the Lord speaks with him face to face, even plainly, and proclaim to him His glory! Concerning this, **St. Agnatius of Antioch** says: [In humility, Moses said to God: *“I am slow of speech, and slow of tongue”* (Exodus 4: 10). Therefore let us be humble in the spirit to be glorified; *“For whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Luke 14: 11)³].

And **St. Clement the Roman** says: [Moses was called *“the faithful servant in all God’s house”* (Numbers 12: 7; Hebrew 3: 2); ... Although, during his ministry, God punished the land of Egypt with plagues and afflictions, yet he was not overwhelmed by such great honor, but in great humility said to God, before the burning bush: *“Who am I that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?... I am slow of speech, slow of tongue”* (Exodus 3: 11; 4: 10)⁴].

And **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Because of his great humility and meekness, Moses became so accepted and beloved by God, that He spoke with him face to face, like one speaks with his friend⁵]. And according to **St. Basil**: [He was worthy of beholding Him face to face like the angels, and to tell us what God taught him⁶]. And according to **the scholar Tertullian**: [Talking with God face to face was realized in the transfiguration⁷, when Moses and Elijah appeared speaking with the Lord Christ].

Commenting on calling Moses the servant of God (Numbers 1: 7; Hebrew 3: 2), **St. Gregory the Nezienzen** says: [Moses was *“God to Phraoh”* (Exodus 7: 1); yet he was *“God’s servant”*. As the stars that illuminate the night, disappear once the sun rises⁸].

Some may wonder why did Moses marry the Ethiopian woman.

That was a symbolic prophetic action which refers to how God accepts our (Ethiopian) nature!; ... to how He unites with us, who were in the darkness for so long, to bring us over to His divine light, and to the beauty of His nature. That is what we saw in our interpretation of the song saying: *“I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem”* (Song of Solomon 1: 5). About this, the scholar Origen says: [Saying: *“With him I speak face to face, clearly, not in riddles”* (8); this was realized once the Lord Christ came incarnate, and united with our (Ethiopian)

¹ *Ibid* 2: 261.

² *Ibid* 2: 263.

³ *Ad Magn.* 12.

⁴ *Ibid* 17: 5.

⁵ *In Matt.*, hom 78: 4.

⁶ *Hexameron hom* 1: 1.

⁷ *Against Praxeas* 14.

⁸ *Eepis.* 150.

nature! That was the end of the proclamation of the divine law through parables and riddles; It became actuality¹]. And **St Jerome** says: [Your Groom does not treat others with haughtiness and despte; He marries an Ethiopian²!].

Moses' marriage to an Ethiopian woman, refers as well to the Lord Christ' acceptance of His bride, the church of the Gentiles. Referring Miriam's attitude to that of the congregation of Jews, who rejected the Lord Christ, and rejected the entrance of the gentiles into faith; **the scholar Origen** says: [Miriam is the congregation of Jews; complaining, together with Aaron; Namely, the scribes and the Pharisees, who, even today consider it disgraceful, that (our) Moses, does not teach the circumcision of the flesh, keeping the Sabbath, and offering bloody sacrifices; But commands us to have the circumcision of the heart, to forsake sin, and to celebrate the feasts of the unleavened bread of salvation and truth (Ephesians 2: 11; Colossians 2: 9; Romans 2: 29; 1 Corinthians 5: 8); and to celebrate the sacrifices of thanksgiving (Psalm 50: 14); not the animal sacrifices, but the slaying of transgressions³].

The scholar Origen, speaking on the tongue of the church of the Gentiles, to the Jews, says: [I indeed wonder, O daughters of Jerusalem, how you would reproach me because of my dark complexion! Have you forgotten what came in your book, and what Miriam meant when she spoke against Moses for being married to an Ethiopian woman?! ... Do not you know that this was actually realized! ... I am the Ethiopian woman! ... I may be dark because of my bad origin, but now I am beautiful through repentance and faith. ... I have taken for myself the Son of God. ... I received the Word who became flesh (John 1: 14). ... I came to Him, who is "*the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation*" (Colossians 1: 15); He, "*who brings the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person*" (Hebrew 1: 3); and through Him, I became beautiful! ... Will you reproach her, who has forsaken her sin; which is against the law?! ... Do you seek the glory of the law, while acting against it⁴?!].

3- MIRIAM'S LEPROSY:

"So the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and He departed. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became Leprous, as white as snow" (9, 10).

Indeed, how dangerous is speaking against the ministers of God, and particularly if out of envy. As it is befitting of us to choose them after consulting God, and knowing that they are blameless; Yet, once we choose them, it is not up to us to judge them; they have their own superiors to search their behavior; We should not lose the kingdom of heaven on their account. God departed from Aaron and Miriam, and the cloud departed from above the tabernacle; and suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow.

Commenting on this chastisement, **the scholar Origen** says: [You should not despise your neighbor, or open your mouth with evil against him; I do not mean only the saints, but anyone; as I see God's wrath and revenge dwell because of this sin. It came in the psalms: "*You sit and speak against your brother. You slander your own mother's son*" (Psalm 50: 20); and, "*Whoever secretly slander his neighbor, him I will destroy*" (Psalm 101: 5). Therefore, cut this iniquity off by the help of the commandments that came in the Holy Book; as though with "*a sharp two-edged*

¹ *In Num., hom 7.*

² *Ep. 22: 1.*

³ *In Num., hom 6.*

⁴ *Comm. on Cant. 2: 1.*

sword” (Revelation 1: 16). Avoid judging your brethren and slandering the saints; as he who judges his brother and speaks evil against him will become leprous¹].

In the chastisement of Miriam, we notice the following:

a- Leprosy dwelt upon her after the cloud departed from above the tabernacle; as though leprosy, a symbol of sin and its defilement, is the sign of going astray from God, and being deprived of the fellowship with him. That is why **the scholar Origen** warns: [Let us fear the departure of the cloud through our bad talk, unclean actions, and defiled thoughts, for the leprosy of sin would then dwell upon us once God’s grace forsakes us²].

b- Miriam’s sin brought harm on the whole congregation; The cloud departed from above the tabernacle; Leprosy dwelt upon Miriam, who was shut out of the camp for a whole week, and the whole procession ceased to proceed toward the promised land. It is a bitter portrait of man – and in particular the one with responsibility – as his wrong doing would not bring harm on him alone, but would cause a blasphemy upon the holy name of God, stops the procession, and brings offense against many; like a corrupt member that brings harm on all other members of the body.

c- Some may wonder **why did Aaron not fall under the same chastisement?**

To answer this, **St. Erinaos** says: [Being the older brother; adorned with the honor of priesthood; and on account of that the origin and foundation of priesthood was in Aaron; And as leprosy according to the law is defilement; God did not allow for him to have the same chastisement, lest that will hold to all his priestly seed. Yet God awakened his fears, and taught him a lesson through what happened to his sister; by which he was so shaken up, and resorted to Moses, the harmed party, to intercede on her behalf³].

d- Some see in the leprosy of Miriam a symbolic portrait of what happened to the Jews, who, by rejecting faith in the Lord Christ, He took his bride from among the Gentiles (the Ethiopian woman); the cloud departed from them; leprosy of unbelief dwelt on them; and the Spirit of the Lord forsook them. ... Shutting Miriam out of the camp for seven days, then her return, refer to the anticipated return of the Jews to faith in the Lord Christ at the end of time, to enter once again into the new holy tabernacle, and to be saved from the leprosy of unbelief⁴; when they forsake their old holding fast to the letter of the law; according to the words of the apostle Paul: “*hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*” (Romans 11: 25).

d- Commenting on Aaron’s words to the prophet Moses: ‘*Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother’s womb*’” (12), **the scholar Origen** says: [Becoming leprous, Miriam became like a stillborn, namely lifeless fetus in his mother’s womb, a reference to the congregation of the Jews who, on account of their disbelief, became lifeless like a stillborn; until Paul came “to labor in birth for them, until Christ is formed in them” (Galatians 4: 19). ... The old people were in their mother’s womb, namely, in the school of the Jewish temple, yet unable to reach the full term of growth; ... Because of their iniquities, they could not acquire the perfect form by which to come out to life; hence came to be rejected as a lifeless stillborn delivered before its designate time⁵].

¹ *In Num., hom 7: 1.*

² *Ibid 7: 2.*

³ *Fragm. 32.*

⁴ *Origin: in Num, hom. 6. St. Ambrose: Ep. 63: 57.*

⁵ *Ibid 7: 3.*

e- Moses interceded for his sister saying: “*Please heal her, O god, I pray*” (13); to which God answered him: “*If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be ashamed seven days?!*” (14). Spitting here, according to **the scholar Origen**, refers to the fact that, when God’s grace has forsaken those people, they became in shame and disgrace, with no temple nor sacrifice. Commenting on this divine response, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [What God means by this is: If her father sends her out of his presence, Would not she accept the reproach? ...Although I appreciate your brotherly love, humility, and exaltation; Yet, I know the right time to end the chastisement¹].

Anyway, once again, Moses’ good nature was shown in his stand, full of love, by his prayer for her sake; As according to **St. Gregory the Nezianden**: [Moses, who was once commended for killing the Egyptian who oppressed the Israelite; became more commended for his intercession on behalf of his sister, who became leprous because of her complaint against him²].

f- God delayed the healing of Miriam, to teach us not to lean upon the prayers and the intercession of others, without presenting repentance of our own. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Although the prayers of the saints have great power, yet, on condition of our presenting our own repentance, and mending our ways. Even Moses, who once saved his own brother beside 600, 000 men from the wrath of God that was about to dwell on them (Exodus 32); was unable to save his sister³].

4- FROM HAZEROTH TO PARAN:

The scholar Origen believes that ‘Paran’, meaning (the seen mouth), is a reference to the crossing over to the “the divine incarnation”. By healing Miriam from the leprosy of disbelief, the procession resumed going forth on their way to faith in the divine incarnation, as the way to enter the kingdom of heaven.

¹ *Conc. Statues 20: 10.*

² *EP. 77.*

³ *In Matt. Hom 5: 7.*

CHAPTER 13

SPIES SENT INTO CANAAN

Because the people were always complaining, yearning to return to the land of bondage for the sake of its cucumbers, melons, onions ... etc., God intended to draw their hearts to the new land He promised to give them, by revealing the kinds of fruition it produces.

- 1- Choosing men to go spy out the land of Canaan 1 - 16
- 2- The instructions Moses gave them 17 - 20
- 3- Their movements in the land of Canaan 21 - 25
- 4- The report they brought back 26 - 33

1- CHOOSING MEN TO GO SPY OUT THE LAND OF CANAAN:

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, everyone a leader among them’ (1, 2).

If God commanded Moses to send men to spy out the land by themselves, that was according to the request of the people, to whom Moses said: *“Everyone of you came near me and said:’ let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come’. And the plan pleased me well”* (Deuteronomy 1: 22, 23). Although the people should have walked by faith rather than by sight; Yet, knowing their weakness, God responded to their request, and Moses abided to His command. **St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa** notices that, because that issue came after the people fell into the temptation of greed and coveting the food of the land of bondage; God intended to let some of their leaders have a taste of God’s promises. He says: [Moses, himself, with his soul exalted above such covetousness, and dedicated completely to the enjoyment of the inheritance promised by God for those who come out of Egypt (with its spiritual and not the literal concept; namely, those who forsake the love of the world), and head toward the land that flow with milk and honey; chose some men to go, and to tell about the beautiful things of that land¹].

Moses chose twelve men, leaders of the people, that when they taste the fruits of the land, they might be in a position to testify among their brethren, and to present a (deposit) of the blessings granted to them by God. ... It is befitting of the teachers to present, not just theoretical philosophies, doctrines, and words without practical experience; but should present to the people a practical taste of the inner goods of God, that they have personally experienced.

Among those delegates were two prominent men: Hosea, who was later called Joshua (16), and Caleb the son of Jephunneh (6). Moses Called Hosea by the name of Joshua, because ‘Hosea’ means a prayer to (save), while ‘Joshua’ means (Savior); as though by choosing Hosea, Moses, knowing through inspiration that the prayer to consummate salvation is symbolically realized, called him ‘Joshua’, namely ‘Jesus’, who is the true Savior.

According to **St. Jerome**: [He will no more be called ‘Hosea’, but ‘Joshua’, as ‘Jesus’ the (Savior) will lead us from the wilderness of this world to the promised land²]. And according to the **scholar Tertullian**: [Here we find a symbol of the coming things; As Jesus Christ will be the One who bring the next people – us, the Gentiles who were long lost in the wilderness of this world – to the promised land that

¹ St. Greg. Nyssa: *Life of Moses* 2: 265.

² On Ps., hom 10.

flows of milk and honey (Exodus 3: 8), through gaining the everlasting life. That was not realized through the ordinance of the old law; but by Jesus Christ, namely, by the grace of the new law; after we become circumcised by a knife of the “Rock”, namely by the commandments of Christ; who is symbolized by the “Rock” in the Holy Scripture (1 Corinthians 10: 14)¹].

Commenting on the change of Hosea’s name to ‘Joshua’, **St. Augustine** says:[He gave him that new name when he sent him from the wilderness of ‘Paran’ to the land to which he will lead the people; because the true ‘Jesus’ says: “*If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may also be*” (John 14: 3)²].

‘Caleb’, on the other hand, means (heart), namely, he works with all his heart, faithfully and without fear, trusting in the possibilities presented to us by God for victory and conquest, and to enjoy His promises. Commenting on this, **the scholar Origen** says: [About those who will faithfully follow Him, Jesus says: “*Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy*” (Luke 10: 19). He will give the inhabitants of the earth, the conquest on the “*spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*”(Ephesians 6: 12)³].

Joshua and Caleb were, therefore, connected together in entering the promised land. If (Joshua) ‘Jesus’ -- the Lord of glory – is our Leader, there will be no entrance for us into the promised land, unless our heart (Caleb) is serious and faithful. The connection of Joshua to Caleb, is a practical melding of the divine work with the free human will, that accept to work in the inner depths.

2- THE INSTRUCTIONS MOSES GAVE THEM:

We can summarize the instructions given to those men, in two commands: “**Go up**” (17), and “*be of good courage*” (20).

(1) “**Go up this way, ... up to the mountains**” (17) From the mountains they could see the land and its inhabitants. ... In order to testify to the truth, it is befitting of the teachers to taste it, by going from here by their hearts, up on the mountain of the divine commandment; for their souls to soar in the heavenlies, and for their inner insight to open on the new land, its inhabitants, and its glories. By that they would experience the (deposit) of the everlasting inheritance, and would, in their turn, present to their flock, of the goods they have seen and experienced by themselves.... In case the shepherd, together with his flock, stays submerged in the earthly interests, and the daily needs, and do not go up the mountain; How could he manage to draw the hearts of the people of God toward the high places, and present to them the eternities?!

That is probably the reason why God banned the priests and the Levites in the Old Covenant, of having a portion with their brethren in the promised land; so that He, Himself, would be their portion; in order to keep them from getting preoccupied with material and temporal issues, but with Him alone. ... I say with bitterness: How difficult it would be for God to see the priests preoccupied by the material and administrative issues, even by those pertaining to the church! They should follow the lead of the apostles, who left (the ministry of tables) to the deacons, to dedicate themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6: 1-4).

(2) “**Be of good courage, and bring some of the fruit of the land**” (20). ... It should not stop at going up; but the heart of the teacher should be of good courage,

¹ Answer to the Jews 9.

² Reply to Faustus 16: 9.

³ In Num., hom 6.

trusting in hope in the realization of God's promises, tasting the gift of God first in himself, and believing in God who is capable of granting this gift to mankind. Nothing would destroy the spirit of ministry, like the entrance of the spirit of despair into the life of teachers, concerning themselves or their flock. It is befitting of us to behold the strong hand of God, capable of lifting all mankind up toward His holy promises. According to **St. John Chrysostom**: [The shepherd should be of good courage, his will should never fail, nor despair in the salvation of those lost among the flock; He should rather always say to himself: "*God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they will know the truth*" (2 Timothy 2: 25)¹].

3- THEIR MOVEMENTS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN:

"So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath (21). "Then they went up through the south and came to Hebron; ... Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak were there.... Then they came to the valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole; They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs" (22, 23).

a- They went up from **the wilderness of 'Zin'**, a desert region at the south frontier of Canaan (Numbers 34: 3, 4), and Judah (Joshua 15: 1).that include within it Kadesh and Meribah² (Numbers 20: 1; 27: 14; 33: 36; Deuteronomy 32: 51).; and at the frontier of Edom on the west. It either represents a part of the wilderness of paran, or at its frontier near Kadesh³.

We should not confuse the wilderness of 'Zin' – which means for **the scholar Origen** – (a bush or a temptation), and the wilderness of 'Sin', which for him it also means (temptation); While some believe that the later has taken its name from 'sin', the god of the moon. Nowadays, it is most probably 'Debet El-Ramleh', at the foot of the Mount of 'Teh' (the maze) to the south. In that wilderness, God sent down, for the first time, the Manna on the people, when they reached it after crossing over the Red Sea from Elim (Exodus 16: 1) to Rephedim.

b- **'Rehob'**, a Hebrew name meaning (a spacious and wide place); an Aramic town, also called 'Beth Rehob', close to the north territory of Canaan; where war between the men of David and the people of Ammon took place (2 Samuel 10: 8).

Hamath, a town called by the same name nowadays, is located 130 miles north of Damascus, and 30 miles north of Homs. Some believe that saying "*near the entrance of Hamath*" means at the entrance of the way leading to Hamath; probably the long valley embraced between the two chains of the western and eastern mountains of Lebanon, extending to Hamath.

c- **'Hebron'**, a Hebrew name meaning (companionship or bond); called in the old days 'Keriath Arba' (Genesis 23: 2); has been one of the cities of Judah (Joshua 15: 54), built four years before 'Zoan' (Tanis) in Egypt, the city where negotiations were held between Moses and Pharaoh (Psalm 78: 12, 43).

Hebron was there in the days of Abraham, where he settled down some time by the Oaks of Mamre (Genesis 13: 8; 35: 27). There Sarah died, and Abraham purchased from the Hitites, the cave of the field of Machpelah to be a burying place for her (Genesis 23: 20). And in it, as well, Isaac and Jacob sojourned for some time (Genesis 35: 27; 37: 14). In the days of Joshua the son of Nun, its king, Hoham, joined forces with the kings of Jarmuth, Lashish, and Eglon, together with Adoni-

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، ص 671.

² Mckenzie: Dict. Of Bible, p. 953.

³ New Westminster Dict. Of Bible, p. 1024.

Zedek king of Jerusalem, against Joshua, who conquered and killed them (Joshua 10). But some of the escapees came back and rebuilt it, and were found in it after the invasion of Canaan (Joshua 14: 12). Caleb sought to have it as his portion of inheritance (Judges 1: 10, 19-20), But it was given to the priests as one of the cities of refuge (Joshua 20: 7; 21: 10-13; 1 Chronicles 6: 54-57). Hebron was the first throne of David where he reigned for seven and a half years (2 Samuel 1: 1-3; 11: 32; 5: 1-5); In it Abner (the leader of the army) was buried (2 Samuel 3: 32); And in it Absalom rebelled against his father David (2 Samuel 15: 7-10); Rehoboam fortified it (2 Chronicles 11: 5), but it fell during captivity in the hands of the Edomites, then was restored by Judah the Maccabian, before it was burned down by the Romans in the year 68 A.D.

Nowadays it is called El-Khalil, meaning (friend), after Abraham “*the friend of God*” (James 2: 23), elevated 3040 feet above the sea; 19 miles south west of Jerusalem; and in it there are 25 springs of water, and ten large wells with grape yards and fig trees¹.

In the twelfth century A.D., Hebron was a diocese of a Catholic bishop².

d- ‘**Eshcol**’ means a (cluster); and it is not known whether this name was before the time of the prophet Moses, or was give to it after the men brought the cluster of grapes to Joshua. It is a valley north of Hebron, And is still famed for its vineyards.

The men set forth from the wilderness of ‘Zin’ as far as ‘Rehob’ near the entrance of ‘Hamath’, then came to ‘Hebron’, where the three giants the descendants of Anak were; then came to the valley of ‘Eshcol’. ... Symbolically, it is the way taken by every soul intending to cross over to the kingdom of heaven to gain the Lord Christ Himself, as a “Cluster of grapes” that grants life. She starts her way from the wilderness of ‘Zin’, namely, where the temptations and anguish are, not to lead a life of depression and complaint, but to enter into ‘Rehob’, where the temptation turns into comfort; and where the narrow road will become, for the believer, spacious and joyful; to find himself at the entrance of ‘Hamath’, where he will enjoy the divine protection, hidden in his Christ the “Rock of Ages”. Here he enters into ‘Hebron’, namely, the life of “companionship” with God in His Only begotten Son, and with brethren, as well, in our Lord Jesus Christ, that the giant descendents of Anak, namely, the unclean spirits, cannot keep him from crossing over to Eshcol, to carry in his heart the cluster of life.

Therefore, no one can cross over to the valley of Eshcol, except through the temptations mixed with the peace and joy in Christ, where he encounters the descendants of Anak, the opponents of the kingdom of God, and wrestles, not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual hosts of wickedness (Ephesians 6: 12).

In Eshcol, a branch with one cluster of grapes was carried in between two men on a pole, to bring it over to the people, proclaiming the realization of the promises of God. Those two men were Joshua and Caleb; As though the cross, the grantor of life, is carried by our Lord ‘Jesus’ Christ, and, at the same time, is carried by the believer with the heart of ‘Caleb’ full of faithfulness; It is the cross of Jesus Christ the Savior, borne by the believer as a fellowship of the passion of his Lord, to enter together with Him into the power of His resurrection.

Speaking of that cluster carried on a pole, **St, Gregory the bishop of Nyssa** says: [Joshua was one of those who led the good delegation, he who presented a

¹ *New Westminster Dict. Of Bible, p. 375..*

² *Hastings, p. 375.*

trusted and confirmed report; that cluster of grapes, carried on a pole, a proof of the goods of the land, when seen by the prophet Moses, he got a steadfast hope in the things to come.... What was that cluster of grapes, carried on a wooden pole, but the One hanged in the recent days, who shed His blood as a drink that grants salvation to believers?! In another location, Moses spoke about it, saying through the symbol, “*You drank wine the blood of the grapes*” (Deuteronomy 32: 14); meaning by that the saving passions¹].

About that cluster of grapes, as a symbol of the Lord Christ, hanged on the cross, many saintly fathers spoke, like St. Justin the martyr², St. Erinaos³, St. Hypoletus⁴, St. Clement of Alexandria⁵, and the scholar Origen⁶.

St. Augustine says: [The Lord was called “A Cluster of Grapes”, He who was crucified by those He sent, the people of Israel, and brought Him over from the promised land, hanged from a pole, as though crucified⁷].

And **St. Ambrose** says: [God gave Himself the name “A Cluster of Grapes” through the voice of the prophet Moses, when he sent the spies to the valley of grapes according to God’s command. What is this valley but the humility of the body and the fruits of passion?! I believe that He was called “A Cluster”, on account of coming from the vine brought over from Egypt, namely, from the Jewish people, and grew a fruit for the goodness of the world⁸].

Whereas **St. John Chrysostom**, believing that this cluster is a (deposit) of the heavenly life, says: [I wish we do not despise heaven! ... As we were granted fruits from heaven, not a cluster of grapes carried on a pole, but “*the deposit of the Spirit*” (2 Corinthians 1: 22); “*the citizenship of heaven*” (Philippians 3: 20), things that we were taught by Paul and all the apostles, the amazing ‘Vine-dressers’. It is not Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun, who brought over those fruits, but it was Jesus Son of “*The Father of Mercies*” (2 Corinthians 1: 3), the Son of God, who brings over from heaven every virtue and fruits, namely, its praises⁹].

4- THE REPORT THEY BROUGHT BACK:

The men who gave the report were divided into two categories: The great majority could not deny the good things they saw; yet they were terrified by the descendants of Anak, and put terror in the hearts of the congregation, who lost hope and fell down into despair. The report came as such: “*We went to the land where you sent us; It truly flows with milk and honey; and this is its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong, the cities are fortified and very large; Moreover, there we saw the giants, the descendants of Anak there....; and we were grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight*” (27, 28, 33). Whereas the second category of men: Caleb and Joshua said: “*Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it*” (30).

About those two categories of men, **St. Gregory bishop of Nyssa** says: [On one aspect, those who present hope for the good things, present reasons coming from faith, and from the steadfast hope for the goods set up for us; as opposed to the

¹ *Life of Moses* 2: 267, 268.

² *Apol.* 32, *Dial* 54.

³ *Adv. Haer.* 4: 20: 2.

⁴ *De Chr. Et Antichr* 2: 11.

⁵ *Paed.* 2: 2: 9.

⁶ *Comm.. Jer.* 8: 51.

⁷ *On Ps.* 7.

⁸ *Of The Christian Faith* 4: 12 (168).

⁹ *Ad. Ephes., hom* 23.

reasons presented by the adversaries, that despise the good hope, and oppose faith in the-well established things. As for Moses, he did not trust the report of the opponents, but accepted the report that befits the holy land¹].

Indeed the non-believers saw themselves as grasshoppers before the giants, the descendants of Anak; Whereas the believers do not look at themselves and their natural human possibilities, but at God who goes before them; And His Spirit who dwells in them gives them support, to give the grasshoppers the power over the giants – the devil and his spiritual hosts. **The scholar Origen** says: [In case we compare the human nature to that of the devil, we shall find ourselves like grasshoppers before giants; particularly, if our faith is hesitant or weak. But if we follow Jesus (Joshua), believe in Him, and in His words, they will turn into naught before us. ... Indeed, let us listen to what is said: “*If the Lord delights in us, Then He will bring us into this land, ... an exceedingly good land which flows with milk and honey*” (14: 8)²].

¹ *Life of Moses* 2: 266.

² *In Num.*, hom 7.

CHAPTER 14

A DESIRE TO GO BACK TO BONDAGE

All the congregation lifted up their voices and wept that night, yearning to return to the land of bondage, under a leadership other than that of Moses.

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| 1- The people murmur against Moses and Aaron | 1 - 4 |
| 2- Attempts to calm the people down | 5 - 10 |
| 3- God's threats to destroy them | 11 - 12 |
| 4- Moses intercedes on their behalf | 13 - 19 |
| 5- God denies them the entrance into the promised land | 20 - 35 |
| 6- Death of the wicked men who brought the bad report | 36 - 39 |
| 7- The Lord's chastisement on the people | 40 - 45 |

1- THE PEOPLE MURMUR AGAINST MOSES AND AARON:

Because the congregation cared for the report of the wicked men who put in them the spirit of fear, rather than for God's word and promises; their life came to be filled with anxiety, and started to cry the whole night, not to seek God's help and guidance, but murmuring against Moses and Aaron; yearning to return to the land of bondage under a new leadership. They referred their anxiety and disturbance to their leadership, not realizing that what befell them was because of their disbelief. Hence St. John Chrysostom confirms to us that no one can harm man, unless he harms himself¹....Their bitterness was not because of the circumstances around them, nor in their leadership; as much as it was because of the ailment in their inner heart, and of their souls going astray from their Creator.

How hard is man's heart! ... Instead of offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, who liberated them from the land of bondage, and cared for them in the wilderness of this world, to bring them over into the new Canaan, they murmured, saying: *"If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims! Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?!"* (2, 3).

They saw that the solution of their gloomy situation is to forsake the existing leadership, and to set another according to their hearts; *"They said to one another, 'Let us select a leader and return to Egypt'"* (4). They intended to get rid of Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb, by stoning them (10)

Commending the two spies who preferred to utter the truth, even though the price would be, to be stoned to death, rather than to please the congregation at the expense of the truth; St. Ambrose says: [Those two good men preferred the divine glory to their own security², contrary to the wicked ones who preferred their own security to virtue³].

2- ATTEMPTS TO CALM THE PEOPLE DOWN:

There was nothing for Moses and Aaron to do but to fell on their faces before all the assembly of the children of Israel (5), a sign of utter helplessness; and in an attempt to appease the spirit of anger; not only of the rebellious congregation, but of God, whose wrath, they were sure, will dwell upon the later because of their continuous murmuring.... How beautiful indeed is the spirit of humility, which is the

¹ سبق أن ترجمت هذا المقال تحت عنوان "من يقدر أن يؤذيك؟".

² *Duties of the Clergy* 3: 8 (54).

³ *Ibid* 3: 8 (56).

adornment of the shepherd, and through which he can appease the spirit of grumble in his flock; and by which he can intercede before God on their behalf!

Moses and Aaron, mixing their humility with the spirit of wisdom and the power of conviction, introduced Joshua and Caleb, who have tasted the deposit of the divine promise, to testify before the whole assembly, and to say to them: *“The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If God delights in us, then, He will bring us into this land and give it to us, ‘a land which flows with milk and honey’. Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread, their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them”* (7-9).

They testified that the promises of the Lord are rich and true, gives faith to the believing hearts, that the devil cannot take out from us, as long as we hasten to it with hope, without disturbance.

Yet before such humility and testimony, the people grew more stirred up, and sought to have the two faithful witnesses stoned to death.(10). But, to proclaim His support of His faithful men: the prophet Moses, the high priest Aaron, and the two witnesses; *“The glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel”* (10). ... How amazing was that show of the divine support, publicly and openly proclaimed, even when the people unanimous rejection of the adversaries.

3- GOD’S THREATS TO DESTROY THEM:

Having gone so far in their rebellion, God was committed to His threat, saying to Moses: *“How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they”* (11, 12).

As was His custom, God did not put the threat into effect right away; but put the issue before His prophet Moses. ... That reveals the dealings of God with man, whose friendship He always seeks, and to whom He reveals His secrets, and his intentions. That was how God previously did with Abraham, when He intended to punish Sodom and Gomorrah; saying: *“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”* (Genesis 18: 17). ... And by that God presents to us a live concept of shepherding: If God, the Whole Wisdom, and the only Good Shepherd, does not hide His intentions from His ministers; How could man, whatever may be his priestly rank, or his spiritual stature, walk with the individualism of thought, without consulting his brethren and fellows in ministry?!

By putting the issue before Moses, God probably, as well, intended to give him the chance to warn the people, for they might present repentance, and He would then forgive them. Or He intended to give the chance to His prophet to intercede on behalf of his adversaries, and to seek what is theirs, rather than what is his own; that he would be justified more and more.... He has already stood before the Lord when His wrath was about to dwell on the people, and interceded for them, saying: *“Now, if You only forgive their sin – but if not, blot me out of the book that You have written”* (Exodus 32: 32); surpassing by such love, all what he has already done; and was justified in the sight of heaven and earth. It happened so often, that Moses’ life became like holy incense or a perpetual prayer for his people’s sake; and he gained grace in the sight of God, that he listened to him; saying: *“I will also do this thing that you have spoken, for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name”* (Exodus 33: 17). Whenever Moses supplicated before God, God altered his ordinances. ... According to **the scholar Origen**: [God may have His reasons to be

angry with man; Yet man's fervent supplications and prayers, may appease God's wrath, that God may alter the ordinances He has already issued. ,, God's compassion following His wrath, shows Moses' place in God's heart¹].

Moreover, according to **the scholar Origen**, the threats of God bore, as well, a prophecy to be realized by the future coming of the Lord Christ, and His acceptance of another people from the Gentiles, instead of the Jews; He says: [That threat did not come out as a divine wrath, as much as it was a prophecy of God's intention to choose another people from among the nations of the earth; albeit that will not happen through Moses; as the new people will not carry his name but that of Christ²].

4- MOSES INTERCEDED ON THEIR BEHALF:

This book, as well as the book of Exodus, portray Moses as the intercessor for his people's sake before God; saying: ***"Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according of the greatness of Your mercy"*** (19). It is a symbolic portrait of the atoning intercession of the Lord Christ for the iniquities of mankind before the Father through His precious blood; crying out on the cross: *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"* (Luke 23: 34).

In Moses' intercession, he reminds God of the gloating people who, in offense, would say: ***"Because the Lord was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness"*** (16); He also reminds Him of His mercy and longsuffering, saying: ***"And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, 'The Lord 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 to the third and fourth generation'. Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy"*** (17-19). He reminds Him of His own words; As God anticipates the repentance of the father, to forgive them; And in case they do not repent, He would forgive their children; Yet, if the next generations persist as well on not repenting, but walked along the wicked way of their fathers³; Then He would have to chastise!... **St. Jerome** has a beautiful commentary concerning God's longsuffering on humanity; as he sees that God does not punish man on the spot, on His thoughts and intentions; nor punishes the first generation, when they accept that thought for a certain time; But He chastens the third and the fourth generations, when these thoughts turn into actions and customs⁴.

5- GOD DENIES THEM THE ENTRANCE INTO THE PROMISE LAND:

Although God listened to Moses' intercession and did not destroy the people, Yet He denied them the entrance into the promised land; saying to Moses: ***"I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled by the glory of the Lord – because all these men who have seen My glory, and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it"*** (20-23). With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, for the sake of their faith in His promises.

¹ In Num., hom 8: 1.

² Ibid.

³ راجع تفسير سفر الخروج، 1981.

⁴ Epis. 130: 9.

God forgives us our sins once we repent; Yet He chastises; not as wages for the sin, as He has already paid the whole price on the cross; but that, tasting their bitter fruits, we would not return to them. None of us can endure the fruit of his sins as they are, for they are everlasting death; But, for the sake of the abundance of His mercy, He would let some of their consequences bother us for some time, according to our endurance, to make us hate the sin, and realize that “it is very sinful”.

Although God forgives, Yet He chastens!; According to the number of days in which they spied out the land -- forty days -- for each day they shall bear their guilt one year; Namely, forty years will be lost in the wilderness. Some may wonder: Is it not too cruel to chasten man a year for every day?! To this **the scholar Origen** responds, saying: [If man, wounded by a sword for a moment, would suffer great pains in his body and bones, which need a long time to heal, beside further complications that may appear; So it will happen to the soul, when wounded by the sword of sin; or according to the apostle: “*by the fiery darts of the wicked one*” (Ephesians 6: 16).

I wish we can see, in every sin we commit, the pains that the bad words we utter may cause to others! ... Haven't you read: The wounds of a sword are less painful than those of the tongue?! By the tongue, the soul may be wounded; while by the evil thoughts and the unclean covetousness, the soul would be utterly destroyed! ... If we happen to see things as they actually are, and feel the wounds of the soul, we would resist the sin, even to death¹].

Commenting on that chastisement, **the scholar Origen** also says: {If every sinner would suffer a year of anguish for every day of sin, How many years should we suffer for the days we live in sin; when rarely a day passes for us without sin²?!}.

Anyway, having received “the disbelief”, the people tasted its bitter fruition of terror, saying: “***We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we***” (13: 31); beside a condition of loss and deprivation, having been denied the entrance into the promised land (30). They fell under chastisement forty years for the forty days they have spied out the land (34), and came to be under the verdict of death; according to the words of the Lord: “***In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die***” (35). The secret of all this, is that, by their sin they are forsaken by God: “***Because you have turned away from the Lord, the Lord will not be with you***” (43); They have lost the Lord, the secret of their strength, peace, joy, reward, and even their life.

6- DEATH OF THE WICKED MEN WHO BROUGHT THE BAD REPORT:

As the people, in their stage of spiritual infancy, would only believe in what they saw and touch, God allowed for the ten wicked men who brought the bad report, to die by the plague before the Lord (37); for all to know what disbelief would do to them.

7- THE LORD'S CHASTISEMENT ON THE PEOPLE:

The people felt remorse for what they did, and cried bitterly; Yet instead of obeying the Lord, they insisted on going up to the promised land; and despite Moses' warning they persisted on their stubbornness, to perish on the hands of the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt on those mountains.

¹ In Num., hom. 8.

² Ibid.

Indeed, how amazing is man! When the Lord commands him to go up, he gets terrified, and overcome by disbelief; ... And when He warns him against going up, he disobeys and perish!

The Amalekites and the Canaanites attacked them, and drove them back as far as 'Hormah', meaning, (a sacred or a forbidden place); a city not far from Kadesh; taken over later on by the Hebrews (Numbers 21: 3); became a portion of the tribe of Judah, then was given to the tribe of Simon (Judges 1: 17; Joshua 15: 30; 19: 4). It was so dear to the prophet David, when he was a fugitive; that he sent some of the spoils of the war in 'Ziklag' to his friends there (1 Samuel 30: 30).

CHAPTER 15

COMMANDMENTS FOR SANCTIFICATION

Having been defeated by the Amalekites and the Canaanites as far as 'Hormah;', meaning (the sacred place), God presented to them commandments for sanctification; as though, intending to let them forget their fall; not to become slothful, but through the "holy life" that grants them a spiritual conquest; ... He talked to them about:

- 1- Presenting sacrifices and burnt offerings 1 - 21
- 2- A collective burnt offering for a sin unintentionally committed
22 - 26
- 3- An individual sacrifice for an unintentional sin; and for one presumptuously done 27 - 31
- 4- Penalty for violating the Sabbath 32 - 36
- 5- The blue tassel 37 -41

1- PRESENTING SACRIFICES AND BURNT OFFERINGS:

We shall deal with the sacrifices and the burnt offerings, with their details and symbols, in our commentary on the book of 'Leviticus'. But in his talk here, we notice:

(1) He starts His talk to the prophet Moses by saying: *"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you, and you make an offering by fire to the Lord...'"* (1); Then He repeated this phrase again in different words in (17). It is as though God, after declaring their chastisement, by denying them entrance into the promise land; in an attempt to lift up their spirit, and to renew their hope, He intends to confirm to them that what He is going to grant to their children, He is actually giving to them. He did not want them to go on their way with a broken down spirit; nor to think much of their past falls, and their bitterness; as much as to concentrate on the coming spiritual gains, and to anticipate the enjoyment of the faithful promises of God. If their rebellion was the secret behind their present and past collapse, the cure would be in their spiritual worship; Hence He spoke to them about the sacrifices and the burnt offerings.

(2) Here He makes a point, to make it clear to them that He intends to receive the Gentiles as members in the holy church, and partakers, together with them, of their worship and their law; saying: *"One ordinance shall be for you of the congregation and for the stranger who sojourns with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generation; as you are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord. One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you"* (15, 16).

2- LAWS CONCERNING UNINTENTIONAL SIN:

A collective burnt offering is to be presented for a sin unintentionally committed by the congregation as a whole. Although unintentionally committed, yet the whole congregation should offer a sacrifice; first of all to proclaim in a public way the importance of the holy life in the Lord, and the horror of sin, even though unintentionally committed; And to underscore that un-intention actually implies a lack of caring for the commandment on the part of man. For otherwise, he would be preoccupied with it, and would never forget it.

3- LAWS CONCERNING PRESUMPTUOUS SIN:

The Lord discerned between a sin unintentionally committed, and one presumptuously done. The first, although serious, for it implies not caring for the commandment; yet God with compassion allows for offering a sacrifice on it to be

forgiven; so that man would not again forget the divine commandment. ***“But the person who does anything presumptuously, because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken the commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him”*** (30, 31).

4- PENALTY FOR VIOLATING THE SABBATH:

Having drawn the heart of the people to the sacred life through the sacrifice of the cross, clarifying to them the seriousness of sin, even if it is unintentionally committed; on a collective or an individual level; By a practical example, He intended to reveal to them how much he hates sin in general, and the violation of the Sabbath in particular. When they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day, and put him under guard, until they know what should be done to him. The divine ordinance came that ***“the man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him outside the camp”*** (35).

Believing that stoning the man who gathered the sticks was to be an example for the others; like what is going to happen in the future to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1), so that the matter should not happen again; **St. John Chrysostom**¹ says: [A disregard of the law at the beginning, would make it difficult to keep later on. Keeping the Sabbath has indeed its several and great advantages: It would bring compassion and generosity into the household, when all, including the servants, do no work; And, according to the words of the Lord on the tongue of the prophet Ezekiel: *“that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them”* (Ezekiel 20: 12); training them gradually to refrain from evil, and to care for the things pertaining to the Spirit²].

5- THE BLUE TASSEL:

“The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “Tell the children of Israel to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners” (37, 38). As the corners of the garments reach the dust, putting a blue tassel (the color of heaven) on them, would make our thoughts heavenly; even though we live by flesh (the garment) on earth.

¹ In Acts 18.

² In Matt. 39: 3.

CHAPTER 16

TAKING PRIESTHOOD BY FORCE

It did not stop at the collective murmuring of the congregation, but it infiltrated even to some of the Levites and the leaders, who intended to take priesthood by force, accusing Moses and Aaron of “*taking too much upon themselves, and exalting themselves above the congregation of the Lord*” (3).

1- Korah and his company	1 - 3
2- Moses’ reaction	4 - 14
3- The designation of the true priesthood	15 - 19
4- The chastisement of the false claimers	20 - 35
5- The censers of Korah and his company	36 - 40
6- The murmuring of the people	41 – 50

1- KORAH AND HIS FOLLOWERS:

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, intending to take priesthood by force, along with 250 of the leaders of the congregation, men of renown, came to say to Moses and Aaron: “*All the congregation is holy, ... and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?*”(3). They saw in Moses receiving the prophecy, and in Aaron receiving the high priesthood, an exaltation over the holy congregation; And intended for the priesthood to become general, and not shut on a particular tribe, nor on a particular person.

If the common people are struck by the spirit of murmur, mostly for the sake of food and drinks; Those of renown and name, are struck by a more fierce and bitter spirit, namely, ‘pride’. Korah, the son of Kohath, whom God granted the privilege of carrying the most spiritually precious holy items of the tabernacle, was driven by pride to take the priesthood by force; not for the sake of ministering to others, but in thirst for honor, saying to Moses and Aaron: “*Why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the lord?*”, As though his look at priesthood is not that of ministry, but of authority and honor!

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, could manage to stir up 250 of the leaders of the congregation, those of renown; and even to provoke the whole congregation against Moses and Aaron. Unfortunately, the dissenters against the church, are in most cases, men of renown and talents, that lead them astray to destruction instead of edification, and to dissension instead of unity.

The ultimate end of the proud Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, was that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up; to go down alive into the pit. On that, **St. Gregory bishop of Nyssa** comments, saying: [The Holy Book teaches us that the higher man haughtily exalts himself, the lower down the pit he goes! Hence, pride is indisputably identified as an ascension downward¹!]

[in case you see someone exalts himself, and zealously sees himself better than others, and thirsts even for priesthood², Be sure that whom you see is someone falling down to earth by his haughty pride³].

Commenting on the attitude of those men, **St. Clement the Roman** says: [Envy cast Korah, Dathan, and abiram, into hell, because they stirred up a rebellion against Moses the servant of God⁴]. [It is better for man to confess his sins, instead of

¹ *Life on Moses 2: 280.*

² *Ibid 2: 281.*

³ *Ibid 2: 283.*

⁴ *Epis 1: 4: 11, 12.*

hardening his heart against the ministers of God, like those who rebelled against Moses, and their punishment was to be swallowed alive in public by the earth, down to hell¹].

2- MOSES' REACTION:

“When Moses heard it, he fell on his face” (4). Having received his mission from God, he could do nothing without consulting Him in humility and contrition of heart; While the hearts of Korah and his company, exalt with pride. ... Humility discerns the true minister from the false one.

Delivering the whole issue into God's hands, Moses, after warning them against seeking the priesthood (10), requested from them, according to their hearts' desire, to offer incense. Korah, together with the 250 leaders, came forth to offer incense; Whereas Dathan and Abiram, declined to come to meet Moses, accusing him of acting like a prince over them, and of having brought the people of God, not to a land flowing with milk and honey, but to die in the wilderness (12-14).

3- THE DESIGNATION OF THE TRUE PRIESTHOOD:

The prophet Moses, the most humble man, *“was very angry, and said to the Lord, ‘Do not respect their offering, I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them’* (15). In this, Moses was not defending himself, but was jealous on the priesthood of the Lord, to be taken by force, and on the people of God whom they provoked to murmuring.

4- THE CHASTISEMENT OF THE FALSE CLAIMERS:

The congregation got away from the tents of the wicked men: Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, whom the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up, together with up with their households, and with all their goods. As to the 250 leaders, a fire came out of the Lord and consumed them.

Nothing would grieve God's heart like taking His priesthood by force, and stirring up dissension in His church, The chastisement of Korah and his company was one of the most cruel chastisement known, being swallowed up by the earth which opened its mouth to bring them down to join the devils underneath. About that **St. Erinaos** says: [Indeed, as the heretics bring foreign fire to the altar of God; namely. they bring foreign teachings; they are burnt up by fire out of heaven, like what happened to Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron (Leviticus 10: 1, 2). And those who stand against the truth, and provoke others against the church of God; will go down to join those in hell, and will be swallowed by an earthquake, like what happened to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. While those who cause dissension in the church and tear apart its unity, will be punished like Jeroboam (1 Kings 14: 19)²].

Commenting on this episode, while talking about the heretics, and the dissenters, **St. Cyprian** says: Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, knew the same God, known by Moses and Aaron, lived under the same law, had the same faith, supplicated to and worshipped the true God; Yet, once they surpassed the limits of their mission, against Aaron the priest who received the true priesthood; and claimed for themselves the authority to offer the sacrifice, they came under a divine stroke, fell under punishment because of their unbecoming actions, and for offering un-canonical sacrifices against the divine truth; and their early history could not benefit them nor spare them chastisement³.

¹ *Epis 1: 51, 3,4.*

² *Adv. Haer. 4: 16: 2.*

³ *Ep. 75: 8.*

St. Cyprian believes that the harshness and firmness of the divine chastisement was meant to teach those coming after them¹; as it was always the case when a specific new commandment was broken, for the sake of proclaiming to the coming generations the bitterness of breaking it.

St. Cyprian has another commentary on this issue, in which he warns us against murmuring, saying: [It is befitting of us, dear brethren, not to murmur, but, with patience and courage, endure anything that could happen to us; as it is written: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart – These, O God, You will not despise”* (Psalm 51: 17); And as it came in the book of Deuteronomy: *“For the Lord God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul”* (Deuteronomy 13: 3)²].

As to the 250 leaders, having un-worthily burnt incense, they were consumed by a fire from the Lord.

According to **St. Cyprian**, God commanded the congregation to separate themselves from Korah and his rebellious followers, lest by mixing with the wicked, they might fall in evil together with them³].

The earth swallowing the wicked men, together with their wives and children, refers to an utter uprooting of the sin, that corrupts the soul (the men), the body (the women), the energies and talents (the children); through which man would lose everything.

St. Jerome and St. Augustine believe that, because the name ‘Korah’ means (Golgotha or Calvary); Although he died in his sin, together with his wife and children, Yet he has got blessed grandchildren, who, according to **St. Augustine**, were (the sons of the crucified Groom on the Golgotha)⁴; who became a praising choir for the Lord, and their psalms were full of joy. **And St. Jerome** says: [Any psalm referred to the sons of Korah is a joyful psalm, with nothing sad about it. If God punished Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, because of their rebellion against Moses, yet Korah’s grandchildren, who did not follow the lead of their grandfather, were blessed by the eternal joy⁵].

5- THE CENSERS OF KORAH AND HIS COMPANY:

Having chastised the false priests, namely those who attempted to take priesthood by force; yet, considering that the censers which were used to offer incense to His holy name, were sanctified, God commanded the prophet Moses to turn them into hammered plates. and to use them as a covering for the bronze altar According to **the scholar Origen**, The censers refer to the Holy Book, abused by the heretics and the dissenters, who offer despised incense. There is nothing wrong with the censers, nor with the incense; but with those who use them! ... Being made of bronze and not of gold or silver, refers to that they sound the echo of the words without the strength of the Spirit; according to the words of the apostle: *“... have become as sounding brass or a clinging cymbal”* (1 Corinthians 13: 1). By hammering the censers and using them as a covering for the bronze altar, the shine and splendor of the altar would be more pronounced; the evil work would be proclaimed; truth would be separated from vanity; and the sound faith from heresies. He says: [Who would be able to realize the beauty of light, without experiencing the gloom of darkness?! And who can appreciate the sweetness of honey, without tasting something bitter?! ... So it is

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Treat. Of Cyprian 7: 11.*

³ *Epis. 67: 3.*

⁴ *On Ps. 47.*

⁵ *On Ps., hom 16.*

with the glory of the true priest; It would not shine without the punishment of the false ones.... The greatness of the righteous would appear more by comparing him with the others; as it is written about Noah: “*Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation*” (Genesis 6: 9); which means that there is no blameless man in an absolute way; but he is counted “*blameless in his generation*”; namely, compared to others. As for ‘Lot’, the more the corruption of Sodom and Gomorrah increased day after day, the more righteous ‘Lot’ appeared. And in the book in our hands, the greatness and strength of the spirit of the two good delegates: Joshua and Caleb, would not be so pronounced, through which they were rewarded by the Lord, except by comparison to the disgraceful cowardice of the other ten delegates, who brought the bad report about the promised land. ... So I say concerning the censers of the rebels; They should be hammered and used as a covering for the altars; to become a reminder to the coming generations, that no one should be overcome with pride and self-esteem, and claim the worthiness of priesthood without receiving it from God, nor take it by force through bribes, against His will¹].

6- THE MURMURING OF THE PEOPLE:

Once again the people murmured against Moses and Aaron, because of God’s chastisement on those who intended to take the priesthood by force, accusing them of killing the people of the Lord (41); which reveals the extent of the influence of Korah and his company on the congregation as a whole, despite what they saw of a divine chastisement from heaven (fire), and from the earth (opened up its mouth); and reveals as well, the nature of those people, or the nature of man, who – outside the divine grace – is continuously murmuring.

Seeing the whole congregation in that state, the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron: “*Get away from among the congregation, that I may consume them in a moment*” (45). But the two of them fell on their faces before the Lord, and Moses interceded for his people. As the glory of God began to appear, “*Moses said to Aaron: Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the Lord. The plague has begun*” (46).

I do not intend to repeat that this book, revealing the murmuring nature of man, reveals, as well, Moses’ heart flaring with love for his people, and incessantly interceding on their behalf.

In these events, it is to be noticed:

(1) Every time, harm got close to Moses and Aaron, the cloud covered the tabernacle, and the glory of God appeared. According to **the scholar Origen**: [The glory of God would not appear unless they come under persecution and anguish, and unless the danger of death comes close to them. Therefore, do not expect to behold the glory of God while sleeping in comfort! ... Hasn’t the apostle Paul been found worthy to see the glory of God whenever he passed through labors, afflictions, and prisons: ... when three times he beaten with rods; ... was once stoned; ... three times shipwrecked; ... faced perils in the sea, perils of robbers, perils of his own countrymen, and of the Gentiles (2 Corinthians 11: 23-27) ?! The more sufferings are, the more God’s glory appear to those who endure them with courage²].

(2) The intercession of Moses and Aaron for the people, and God’s response to them, refer to the work of the divine word or the commandment (Moses the Receiver of the law), and the work of worship (Aaron the priest) in our life. In Jesus

¹ *Origin: In Num., hom 9: 1.*

² *In Unm., hom 9: 2.*

Christ, the Word of God, and the greater Priest, we enjoy salvation, and the divine wrath would be taken away from us, if we hold fast to His commandments, and practiced the worship as is befitting.

(3) Moses, loving his adversaries and persecutors, asked Aaron the priest to hasten and offer incense in the midst of the congregation for their salvation. It is as though, Moses, representing the era of the law, carried in himself the strength of the gospel, namely, the love for the adversaries (Matthew 5: 44).

(4) Aaron stood between the dead and the living, offering incense, to stop the work of death in the life of the living. ... How happy were those moments lived by Aaron, while standing as a symbol of the Lord Christ the Conqueror of death! ... According to **St. Ambrose**: [How about Aaron?! How happy was he, while standing between the living and the dead, to stop death from advancing from the bodies of the dead to the life of the living¹?!].

(5) Because the incense here, was shown as a symbol of prayers, the prophet Malachi prophesied its offering in the church of the new Covenant; saying: “*In every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering*” (Malachi 1: 11). And St. John saw in the heavenly worship, an angel offering incense in a golden censer (Revelation 8: 3, 4)².

¹ *Duties of the clergy* 2: 4 (11).

² لدراسة البخور والتبخير، راجع كتابنا: الكنيسة بيت الله، 1979، ص 373-380.

CHAPTER 17

AARON'S ROD

Before the murmuring of the people against Moses and Aaron, because of what happened to Korah and his company, who intended to take priesthood by force; God intended by an amazing way, to confirm to the people His choice of Aaron as a high priest, separating him from the false priesthood.

1- A rod for each tribe	1 - 7
2-The fruit of Almond	8 - 9
3- Aaron's rod and the testimony	10 – 13

1- A ROD FOR EACH TRIBE:

God intended to confirm to all that the choice of priests is something concerning Him personally; And as the apostle Paul says: *“No man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was”* (Hebrew 5: 4). According to God's command, Moses took a rod from each tribe, on which he wrote the name of its head; representing the rod of fatherhood for each tribe. Aaron's name was written on the rod of Levi. Having put the twelve rods (including that of Aaron) before the ark of the testimony in the tabernacle, *“Now it came to pass on the next day, ... that the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, has sprouted, put forth buds, produced blossoms, and yielded ripe almonds”* (8). In that amazing episode, it is to be noticed:

(1) The doubts raised by Korah and his company, did not shake Aaron's position concerning priesthood, but made it stronger in the sight of God and men; As, according to **St. John Chrysostom**: [Rebelling against him, they only confirmed his greatness; as the issue of his priesthood is no more questioned, but became more admired¹].

(2) God confirmed His care for choosing the priests by Himself; as according to **St. Ambrose**: [By choosing Aaron a priest, God confirmed that human will has nothing to do with it; but it is the grace of God that has the greatest role. It is not for man to apply for priesthood, (nor even under pressure from men); but should receive it as a call from heaven². Hence the church, in the divine Liturgy, prays saying: [Those who rightly define the word of truth, Grant them, O Lord, to Your church³]. He, who alone, knows the upright hearts, will choose the right man for ministry. ... When God proclaimed to Moses the time of his departure from this world, his last supplication on behalf of his people was: *“Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation”* (Numbers 27: 16). The prophet Moses, of such an advanced age, with his long experience in leadership, and his vast knowledge of the leaders and those of renown, did not dare to suggest a certain name, but left it utterly up to the God of the spirits of all flesh, who is aware of the inner depths of men, to choose according to His divine will!

(3) Aaron, whose rod sprouted, symbolizes the Lord Christ. According to **the scholar Origen**: [Christ is the true greatest High priest; and the only One whose rod, namely, His cross, sprouted, budded, blossomed, and produced fruition for all believers⁴].

(4) Aaron's rod that sprouted, also symbolizes St. Mary, who gave birth to the incarnate God, having provided us with the Fruit of life. By herself, like the rod, she is unable to produce; But, entering in the circle of God's grace, she presented to us the

¹ In Acts, hom. 54.

² Epist. 63: 48.

⁴ In Num., hom 9: 7.

³ القديس الباسيلي.

Holy Son of God, incarnate in her womb. Hence the church praises her in the theotokos of Sunday, saying;

[Indeed, you are greater than Aaron's rod;

You are full of grace;

The rod is a symbol of her virginity;

She conceived with the Son of the Most High – the Word Himself – and gave Him birth without human seed].

By that, Aaron's rod refers to the (catholic) church, in which the Virgin St. Mary represents the most exalted member. The Lord Christ came to dwell in us; We, who were before lifeless dry rods, carried Him as a Fruit of Life inside us. What I say concerning every member of the church, I say it much more, concerning the priest, who bears divine fruits in his ministry, in case he received the priesthood from God, using the divine means in his ministry, and not the human ones.

2- THE FRUIT OF ALMOND:

As the dry rod transformed to a branch bearing leaves, flowers, and fruits of almond; the riches of the exalted grace of God appeared in His church on several aspects, of which are:

(1) It carried a clearly defined testimony to the ordainment of Aaron as a priest, directly from heaven. According to **St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa**: [A single rod became a testimony to the heavenly ordainment; designated from the other rods by a divine sign¹].

(2) That rod, presented a live symbolic portrait of the minister's life; in being, like almond from outside, with a rough wooden cover; Yet on the inside, he bears the sweetness of fatherhood, and the compassion of shepherding, offering spiritual food to his children. According to **St. Ambrose**²: [Aaron's rod, on the outside, was rough wood, but was sweet on the inside]; And according to **St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa**: [It is befitting of us to know the kind of life that characterizes the true priesthood, through the fruit produced by Aaron's rod. By that I mean the upright, dry, and rough kind of life, from outside; Yet, on the inside, it includes, in a hidden and an unseen way, what could be eaten; which would become possible, once it is ripe, when the rough cover is broken up, to expose the soft and sweet inside³].

(3) **The scholar Origen** sees in the fruit of almond produced by Aaron's rod, a reference to the commitment of the priest to interpret the word of God. As the almond is covered by a rough, and bitter outer cover, which dries up and falls down while on the tree; That cover refers to the literal interpretation of the word of God. Being rough, bitter, and of no benefit, it is befitting of us to forsake it, to enter into the depths of the word of God on the inside, and get knowledge of its secrets. According to him, the Jews and the Gnostic heretics, were offended in the Lord Christ, and in the Old Testament, on account that they were committed to the literal interpretation of the word of God.

Following that solid cover of the almond, which we break up, we come to what represents the ethical or behavioral interpretation, by which we practice the life of faithfulness and the body labor, of fasting and prostrating ... etc.; Whereas the inner fruit, represents the spiritual and symbolic interpretation; namely, the entrance to what is beyond the letters, to encounter the lord Christ, the true Food, and the Secret of our life⁴.

¹ *Life of Moses* 2: 284.

² *Epis.* 41: 3.

³ *Life of Moses* 2: 285.

⁴ للتوسع في هذا الأمر راجع كتابنا: آباء مدرسة الإسكندرية، أوريجانوس (الكتاب المقدس)، طبعة 1979.

(4) **St. Ambrose** sees in that rod a portrait of the work of God in the believers in the church of the New Covenant¹; While **the scholar Origen**² sees in it a symbolic portrait of the following four ranks of believers:

a- The dry rod became a juicy branch, namely, it came to bear life; a reference to the acceptance of the Lord Christ; As, by faith, our souls set forth from a state of death to life.

b- It produced leaves, a reference to the new birth, and the grace of God by His Holy Spirit, who presents to us the possibility of the new life in our Lord Jesus Christ through baptism.

c- It blossomed; a reference to the perpetual life of fruition following the new birth in the water of baptism.

d- It produced the fruits of righteousness, not only in his own life, but also in those of others; ... the almond, which is the fruit of testimony to the Lord Christ, and to the preaching work.

The scholar Origen sees these four ranks appear in the talk of St. John the beloved, addressing the believer as: "*I write to you, little children, ... young men, ... fathers*" (1 John 2).

3- AARON'S ROD AND THE TESTIMONY:

Putting Aaron's rod in the ark of testimony, is meant to remind Aaron and his descendants, that the blessings of priesthood they have got, is from God; so as not to get haughty; And to remind, as well, the people of this fact, so as not to murmur. That is beside what that rod carries of prophecy about the divine incarnation from the virgin St. Mary; something that should be perpetually before the sight of the church.

¹ *Conc. Virgins 1: 1.*

² *In Num., hom 9: 7.*

CHAPTER 18

THE DUTIES AND THE RIGHTS OF THE PRIESTS AND THE LEVITES

Having his priesthood been well established, by clearly defined divine confirmations, by making his rod produce almonds; God came back to confirm to Aaron, his sons, and the rest of the tribe of Levi, their commitments, and the limits of their work, beside their rights as ministers to the Lord.

- 1- The responsibilities of the priests 1 - 7
- 2- The sustenance of the priests 8 - 20
- 3- The sustenance of the Levites 21 - 24
- 4- The commitment of the Levites to give tithes 25 - 32

1- THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRIESTS:

As the people fell under chastisement, and 14,700 of them died because of their protesting the perdition of Korah and his company (16: 19); And as God confirmed the choice of the Aaron for priesthood; *“The children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying: Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all utterly die?”* (17: 12, 13). God’s response to their complaint came by proclaiming to them that they are to come near His dwelling place, but through the priests; clarifying the work of the priests and the Levites, and their limitations.

“Then the Lord said to Aaron: ‘You and your sons and your father’s house with you shall bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary’ (1). On a literal aspect, this means that Aaron, his priests, and the Levites, shall bear the responsibility of any defilement that could happen to the sanctuary, through any stranger coming near it. They are committed before God to guard it. But on the shepherding aspect, the high priest, the priests, and the Levites, are the spiritual guardians responsible for any iniquity committed by the people, **who are God’s sanctuary, and His holy dwelling place**. Commenting on this phrase, **the scholar Origen** says: [The blessed one questioned about the iniquities and sins of their subordinates; according to the words of the apostle: *“We who are strong ought to bear the scruples of the weak”* (Romans 15: 1) ¹].

Because in the days of **the scholar Origen**, it so seems that some wrongly assumed that the saints never commit iniquities; The scholar found himself committed to comment on the phrase: *“You shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary”* (1), in some more detail, confirming that the saints are not without iniquity; of which we may quote:

[If the saint, indeed, never commits iniquity; that phrase *“You shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary”* would not be written! And the apostle would not say to the Romans: *“Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food”* (Romans 14: 20); he wrote this to those to whom he said at the beginning of his epistle: *“To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints”* (Romans 1: 7).

The same apostle writes to the Corinthians, saying: *“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints”* (1 Corinthians 1: 2). Now, let us take a look at the sins on which he rebukes those who he calls saints; he writes after this: *“For where there are envy, strife, and division among you, are you not carnal, and behaving like mere men?”* (1 Corinthians 3: 3); And he also says: *“You are already full; you are already rich; you have reigned as*

¹ In Num., hom 10.

kings without us – and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you” (1 Corinthians 4: 8); and, “*Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you*” (1 Corinthians 4: 18); and, “*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you; and such ... is not even named among the Gentiles*” (1 Corinthians 5: 1); Then he admonishes them, saying: “*It is an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another*” (1 Corinthians 6: 7); and, “*If anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol temple,... shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?*” (1 Corinthians 8: 10, 11); and, “*You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons, you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons*” (1 Corinthians 10: 21); and, “*When you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it*” (1 Corinthians 11: 18); and, “*For in eating, each one is taking his own supper ahead of others, and one is hungry and another is drunk*” (1 Corinthians 11: 21); and, because of all these transgressions, “*many are weak and sick among you; ... for if we judge ourselves, we would not be judged*” (1 Corinthians 11: 30, 31)... They even transgressed against faith, “*How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*”(1 Corinthians 15: 12); “*If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins*” (1 Corinthians 15: 17). ... It would be difficult to mention all the quotations that show those who are called saints, are also prone to have their own weaknesses and transgressions, as may be assumed by those who read the Holy Book with a hurried and, slothful, and a superficial way¹].

Bearing the iniquity of the sanctuary, does not imply that the priests and the Levites are responsible only for guarding the tabernacle and its furniture, according to the material concept; but includes their spiritual responsibility toward the congregation, being “a spiritual sanctuary, and a holy temple for God”; He does not just say, “bearing the iniquity”; but “*bearing the iniquity of the sanctuary*”; which implies that the priests are responsible only for the iniquity of the saints, and not for every iniquity committed; which **the scholar Origen** interprets, that the priests are committed to the responsibility toward the sinners who seek holiness, who are counted as saints; are responsible for every transgression they commit; But for those sinners who do not seek holiness, and persist on sinning, the priests are not responsible.

The scholar Origen says that those who study science or philosophy, are counted as scientists or philosophers in the field of their study; not that they have acquired all the details of those fields, but they are persistent in their studies and research, although they err every now and then. So are the saints who aim to acquire the saintly life and persist on it. That is why **the scholar Oorigin** says: [Once man is committed to practical studies in holiness, he, according to his goal and intention, would be called a ‘saint’; But when he commits a sin, he would rather be called a ‘sinner’, until he forsakes his sin²]. And he also say: [The saints, realizing their falls, and aware of their wounds, feel remorse for their sins, and go to thir soiritual guide seeking healing and purification from the Highest Priest, Jesus Christ³].

Therefore, if the priests bear the iniquities of their flock; the people; These in their turn, are committed, in their repentance, to encounter their spiritual fathers seeking their prayers and intercession, for the sake of their enjoyment, by the Holy Spirit, of the holy life.

¹ *Organ: in Num., hom 10.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

God goes on to say to Aaron: “***And you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity associated with your priesthood***” (1). It is as though, all priests are committed to any strange thing done by any one of them. ... If the sin of one member of the congregation has threatened the church of Corinth, and made the apostle hasten to write to them, saying: “*Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump ... I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?! But those who are outside God judges. Therefore, put away from yourselves that wicked person*” (1 Corinthians 5: 7-13).

Although we should not judge those who are outside; But the church is committed to separate any corrupt member of the congregation. ... What, if he is a priest, whatever is his priestly rank?! That is exactly what the Lord meant by saying that Aaron and his sons with him shall bear the iniquity associated with their priesthood. ... If for the sake of the sin of Achan, the whole congregation were counted as transgressors against the covenant of God (Joshua 7: 11); How would it be if the sinner is a priest?! **St. Athanasius the apostolic** says that in case a priest sins with no repentance; For his sake God’s wrath would dwell on all mankind. The priest, being a father of humanity, if he becomes corrupt, according to **St. John Chrysostom**, he will cause all to be destroyed.

The scholar Origen has a beautiful meditation concerning man’s inner life; he says: [Like the priest who works inside the sanctuary, cares for its inner affairs; The believer “*bears the iniquity of his priesthood*”, if he lets something defiled enter into the depths of his soul. He says: The way the priests should watch and care more for what is covered inside the sanctuary behind the veil, that there would be nothing defiled or unclean; The believer should care for his inner man, and his inner heart, to be blameless¹].

The way the high priest and the priests are committed to guard against the entrance of any thing foreign or defiled into the holy of holies, and the sanctuary, including the ark of the covenant with its two cherubs, the altar of incense, the golden lampstand, and the table of showbread, etc. ... If the cherub means (knowledge), it is befitting of the believer not to allow a knowledge defiled with evil to come close to the sanctuary of God in him; But the two cherubs of the Lord should be kept in his heart with their splendor, proclaiming the presence of God in it. ... No foreign incense should be offered on the altar of his heart; and no prayers should be raised by unclean hands, for the prayers of the wicked are abomination before God, while “*the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” (James 5: 16). ... He should, as well, keep the lamp stand of the lord, namely, the Holy Book, in his heart, perpetually lighted by the fiery Holy Spirit, to grant his soul an incessant enlightenment, and his emotions would always be enflamed with the divine love. Find the self in Christ Jesus the Lord diet of bread on the table at the heart of the faces ... etc. As everything in the sanctuary and the holy of holies, are of pure gold, Nothing in it made of bronze, lead, nor any other metal; So the believer should keep his heart according to the heavenly nature (golden), not allowing the love of the world, nor the lusts of the body, and the earthly things, to take over his heart by force.

After speaking to the priests about their commitments, he adds: “***And bring with you your brethren of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be***

¹ *Ibid.*

joined with you and serve you and your sons before the tabernacle of witness” (2). The Levites work together with the high priest and the priests, being consecrated to the Lord, the gift of the people to God, and the grant of God to His people; work in conformity and harmony with the priests; Yet they do not behold nor touch the inner sanctuaries while uncovered, as we have already seen in the previous chapters.

In short, God, intending to designate the work of the ministers in His holy tabernacle, proclaims that the holiness of His ministers is not confined only to their commitment to a holy life in their personal behavior, but extends to their responsibility for the people, and to one another as well; and finally to working in harmony by the same Spirit, the Spirit of closeness of the heart, mind, and spirit; and to support one another through the mutual ministry. The priestly work is not a job, but a fellowship of love and spiritual labor, to guard the holy sanctuary and its furnishings; namely, to keep the souls as holy temples for the Lord.

2- THE SUSTENANCE OF THE PRIESTS:

Having designated His priests to the holy ministry, to bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; Intending to concentrate all their interest on the spiritual work, without getting preoccupied with the material things, even those pertaining to their sustenance; He presented to them all their material needs through the ministry; not as wages for their labor, but to let them be completely dedicated to their work. The apostle Paul says: *“Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of what is offered on the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than anyone should make by boasting void”* (1 Corinthians 9: 13-15).

What God has ordained on the people of firstfruits, and vows, He designated for the priests and the Levites, to let them be dedicated to the spiritual work.

It is amazing how God ends His talk about the topic of the sustenance of the priests by saying to Aaron: ***“You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel”*** (20). He ends His talk about their rights, by confirming that He does not intend to deprive them of the earthly inheritance, as much as to let them enjoy Him as an eternal inheritance. He wishes to enrich and satisfy them, not with mortal earthly things, but with Him, the eternal and the limitless.

In the New Covenant, the priests are called ‘Clergy’, which in Greek means (portion); As though they have chosen the Lord as their portion; Or the Lord has chosen them from among the congregation as His portion. Concerning this, St. Jerome says: [I wish the Clergyman, while ministering the church of Christ, understands first what his title means, so that he can strive to realize it, and to do what he is called for. The priests are called by the title ‘Clergy’, meaning in Greek (portion or inheritance), on account of that they are the Lord’s portion, or that the Lord Himself is their portion; ... They should possess the Lord, and let the Lord possess him; ... As he who acquires the Lord can say together with the prophet David: *“The Lord is the portion of my inheritance”* (Psalm 16: 5); If he acquires any thing else; the Lord would not be his portion¹]. ... The Lord does not intend to deprive them of anything, but to concentrate their whole sight, feelings, and longings, on Him as their portion. I hope to come back to this point, in our study of chapter 26, as all the people of God prepare to get their portions in the promised land (26: 53-56).

¹ *Epis. 52: 5.*

Knowing that the people were still like an infant, as far as the spiritual things are concerned -- even the tribe of Levi, dedicated to His ministry-- He did not start with the previous phrase concerning their deprivation of having a portion in the land, to enjoy God alone; But made it the end of His talk to the priests (20). He started by presenting to them their rights to enjoy what concerns God Himself of firstfruits, offerings, and vows ... etc.; As though He does not seek from them to forsake anything, before presenting to them what they take! He does not take away the earthlies, except as much as He gives, of what satisfy the heart of God, and what concern Him. ... If He deprive them of what the people enjoy of earthly inheritance; He started first by letting them enjoy what He has deprived the people (14), of firstfruits, tithes, vows, and offerings; ... He first gives before He takes away!

He concentrated more on the rights of the priests in the firstfruits; the spiritual concepts of which we have dealt with in more than one location¹. But here we add the following remarks:

(1) At the time of the harvest, the people are committed to present to God, through His priests, the firstfruit of their harvest! It is a joyful portrait of the great day of the Lord; namely, the day of the harvest, when the angels come forth to present to the greatest High Priest, the holy firstfruit -- the souls of the believers.

(2) The Lord says to Aaron: ***“Here, I Myself has also given you charge of My heave offerings” (8)***. But how could they be in charge of the heave offerings of the Lord, when they eat and consume them?! ... It is a symbol of the inconsumable holy firstfruit, namely, “the Lord Christ Himself”, who is the “Firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep”; ... the Firstfruit who approaches the Father as the Firstfruit of mankind to sanctify us; ... And approaches us as the Gift of the Father, to make us firstfruits in Him. This is the inconsumable Firstfruit whom we enjoy; On the contrary, He brings us up from our consumption, namely, our death, to live by and in Him forever.

The church, in her priesthood became committed to bring into effect the divine commandment, saying: *“I have also given you charge of My heave offerings”*; She is committed to be faithful in her charge of the transfiguration of the Lord Christ the Firstfruit, the Heave Offering of God, in the life of the believers.

(3) The Lord commands Aaron not to receive the firstfruit of the unclean animals, but to redeem them; Whereas the clean animals, he should not redeem, but take their firstfruits: ***“they are holy” (17)***; making a condition for the firstfruits to be holy. In the statutes of the church, no offerings would be received from the pagans, nor from the non-repentant wicked; but they are to be used to purchase fuel for the fire! The firstfruits are a symbol of the Holy Christ, whom the Father receives as an Offering of love from mankind, for the sake of their sanctification in Him; according to the words of the Lord: *“For their sakes, I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (John 17: 19)*.

3- SUSTENANCE OF THE LEVITES:

If the priests would enjoy the firstfruits, the Levites would enjoy the tithes; a confirmation that they, as well, are to get the right of God Himself; as they also have no portion in the earthly inheritance.

4- THE COMMITMENT OF THE LEVITES TO GIVE TITHES:

If the Levites enjoy the tithes of the people, They in turn are committed to give one tenth of the tithes they take, to Aaron the priest. By this, God intends to train everyone: congregation, and clergy, on giving. The priest, being committed to present spiritual and heart gifts, and to deliver his whole life to the ministry of his people; He

¹ *Ibid.*

is committed, as well, to material giving, like the rest of his spiritual children. God does not wish to deprive anyone of giving, even the Levites themselves.

Finally, by such a divine ordinance, God intended for the priests and the Levites, two things: While honoring them by enjoying the rights of God of offerings, firstfruits, and tithes; He intends to take away from them, any chance of getting extremely rich, like the pagan priests at that time. While being honored in the Lord, yet they should not confiscate the people's right; hence they, and their children, cannot have a portion in the Promised Land. ... The second thing is that by this, they may live as a closely connected group; The Levites feeling that what they enjoy of earthly gifts, are from God Himself, albeit presented through the holy congregation. And the priests, as well, getting one tenth of the tithes from the Levites, they should have the same feeling. ... It is as though God intends to take away every spirit of haughtiness in both the priests and the Levites over the people; Or of the priests over the Levites. ... By such ordinance, the priesthood would not turn into an aristocratic category, separated from the people; but would be their ministers who work on sanctifying them to the Lord.

CHAPTER 19

THE LAW OF THE RED HEIFER

A response to the complaint of the people that “*Whoever comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die*” (17: 13), came in the previous chapter, and in the one in our hands. In the previous chapter, the Lord declares that it is possible to approach the tabernacle of God through the priesthood and the Levite succession. While here, He reveals the need for purification, without which no one can behold God.

1- The ashes of the red heifer and the water of purification 1 - 10

2- The need to purify whoever touches a dead body 11 - 13

3- The rite of purification 14 – 23

1- THE ASHES OF THE RED HEIFER AND THE WATER OF PURIFICATION:

I do not intend to enter into the details of the sacrifices and the burnt offerings in the Mosaic rite, as a symbol of the aspects of the sacrifice of the cross; I shall leave this topic to our commentary on the book of ‘Leviticus’, if God will. But I wish here to clarify that approaching the dwelling place of the Lord, or the enjoyment of the fellowship with Him, and the abidance in Him, would not be possible except through the sacrifice of the cross, and the entrance into the water of sanctification. In the rite within our hands, God proclaims to Moses and Aaron “*the law of sanctification*”, through the water that purifies man and brings him over from the state of uncleanness to a state of sanctification.

This rite can be summarized as follows:

(1) The holy heifer as a sacrifice of sin (9) is red, a reference to the Lord Christ who presented His blood as an atonement for our sins; about whom the prophet Isaiah says: “*Who is this who comes from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His Apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength? – I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Why is Your Apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone; and from the people was no one with Me*” (Isaiah 63: 1-3). This is the Lord Christ who entered through passion by His own free will, who went through the winepress of the divine wrath for our sake; and bore in His body the wages of our sins, presenting to us the salvation.

(2) “*... without blemish, in which there is no defect, and on which a yoke has never come*” (2). Our Lord Jesus Christ is alone without sin, blameless, and has never fallen under the yoke of any sin; He, who rebuked the Jews, saying: “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8: 46).; And about whom the apostle Paul says: “*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us*” (2 Corinthians 5: 21)., **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Yes, Christ Himself says: “*For their sakes I sanctify Myself*” (John 17: 19); and also says: “*because the ruler of this world is judged*” (John 16: 11); revealing that He who is slain is without sin¹].

(3) “*You shall give it to Eleazar the priest that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him*” (3). As it was not possible to be given to Aaron, because, being the high priest, he does not go outside the camp, so it is given to his son Eleazar. ... The Lord Christ, although he was slain on the Mount of Calvary, outside Jerusalem; yet at the same moment, He was in the holy of holies as the High Priest, not separated from His Father; by His Deity He does not leave His

¹ In 1 Cor., hom 38: 3.

heavens! ... He is on the cross outside the camp for our sake, atoning for our sins, while, at the same time, He is in the bosom of His Father, bringing us over to His righteousness.

The apostle Paul says: *“Therefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore, let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here, we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come”* (Hebrew 13: 12-14).. Going outside the camp is a reference to going outside the temporal city, and longing to set forth to the future one – the high Jerusalem, our mother!

(4) ***“And Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood seven times directly toward the front of the tabernacle of meeting”*** (4). What Eleazar does refers to the priestly work of the Lord Christ, who sanctifies us with His blood, sprinkling the blood on the face of the church, the true tabernacle of meeting, to be sanctified, and to have the daring to lift her face before the Father. Sprinkling the blood seven times, although the slaying happened only once, refers to the perpetual activity of the blood and the sacrifice, which, although it happened only once, yet, being a living and active sacrifice, it works along the generations to bring us over to perfection; as the figure 7 refers to the seven days of the week, as well as to perfection; ... The sacrifice is continuous along the whole week of this world; and active with all its energies to consummate us. ... That is why St. John the beloved saw the Lord Christ, *“a Lamb as though it had been slain”* (Revelation 5: 6); Although He is alive and will never die, yet His blood is incessantly active. ... And in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we are not repeating the sacrifice of the cross again and again; but we enter by the Holy Spirit to the active sacrifice, incessantly set¹.

(5) ***“Then the heifer shall be burned in His sight; its hide; its flesh; its blood; and its offal shall be burned”*** (5). Having been slain, nothing of it shall be seen, but its ashes by which the people are sanctified from sin. ... The Lord Christ, having carried our sins; died for our sake, turning our sins to ashes. ... Burning the hide, the flesh, and the blood, etc., refers to confirming the death of the Lord Christ according to the flesh; so that no one – like Mani – would say that He carried, and went through passion, by an imaginary body!

The priest, casting cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet, into the midst of the fire burning the heifer (6) – the items used in the rite of purifying the lepers (Leviticus 4: 6, 7), refers to mixing the ashes of the sacrifice with what is designated for purification: The wood refers to the cross; the hyssop to the washing; and the scarlet to the blood.

(6) The rite connects between the ashes of the slain heifer, that entered into the passion of the fire up to the end, and the water used in the purification of the congregation from uncleanness (9); As though it is a connection between the sacrifice of the cross and the water of baptism. The apostle says: *“buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him”* (Colossians 2: 12).

(7) ***“And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening”*** (8); ***“And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening”*** (10). The rite intended to confirm to us that our sins have been carried by the Lord Christ; And that, although the sacrifice of the cross is the secret of our purification; yet it carried the sins of the whole world!

¹ راجع للمؤلف: المسيح في سرّ الافخارستيا، 1973، ص 43-63.

2- THE NEED TO PURIFY WHOEVER TOUCHES A DEAD BODY:

“He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean for seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean” (11, 12). According to **St. Augustine**: [The lifeless dead body is not a sin in itself; but refers to the sin of the soul losing righteousness¹]. The death of the body, in the old, has been a symbol of the sin, deadly to the soul, That is why if anyone touched a dead body, even if the dead is a saint or a priest, he would become unclean.

Being unclean for seven days, namely for the whole week, is a symbol that sin would not be purified all the days of our sojourn in this life, without the intervention of those ashes and that water! As no salvation for man from the uncleanness of sin without the sacrifice of the cross, and the renewal in the water of baptism.

The purification is consummated on the third day by this water, connected to the ashes of the slain red heifer, as a reference to the purification by the water of baptism through the resurrection together with the Lord Christ (the third day), by the activity of the cross. He confirms that he who is not purified on the third day will not be purified on the seventh day; As though there is no justification for us unless we unite with the Lord Christ risen from the dead. As to our purification on the seventh day, It refers to the continuity of the work of the resurrection of Christ in our temporal life, and its activity all the days of our sojourn in this world until we cross over to our ultimate resurrection.

Whoever does not accept the resurrection of Christ, will not be purified, will be counted as though he defiled the dwelling place of the Lord; and will be cut off the holy people (13); ... Namely, he who does not carry in him the resurrection of the Lord, as a secret of his justification, would be corrupting his body, the dwelling place of the Lord, his soul would die, and he would not be counted among the children of God.

3- THE RITE OF PURIFICATION:

The rite of purification by these waters is summarized as follows:

(1) ***“When a man dies in a tent, all who come into the tent, and all who are in the tent, shall be unclean seven days” (14).*** Before he talks about the way of purification, he intended first to show the seriousness of the issue; like a surgeon who, before stretching his hand with the scalpel on the body of the patient, would first reveal to him the extent of the corruption that came into his body, so that he would readily accept the hand of the surgeon to cut in his flesh as he deems necessary. The existence of a dead body in a tent makes all those who are in the tent or who come into it, whether they knew of the situation or not, unclean for the duration of seven days; Even if death happens all of a sudden, and they have no responsibility for it. Sin is horrible, (and very sinful!), that the Holy God, being against His nature, do not endure; whatever excuse we may present, as is shown by the necessity for those present, of remaining seven days unclean, namely, all the days of their sojourn; as a sign of their inability of getting purified from it on their own.

(2) ***“And every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean” (15).*** The uncleanness does not stop at persons, but extends to the lifeless creation; the open vessel is counted as unclean. He probably intends to make a sound precaution, lest the deceased died by a contagious disease, which may extend to those around him

¹ *On the good of marriage 23.*

through the vessels he used before his death. From a spiritual aspect, these vessels may represent, as well, the sites of the senses, like the eyes, the tongue, the mouth, ... etc. In case these sites were open wide without the cover of the Holy Spirit to control them, they would be counted as unclean, and could corrupt the life of man.

It is befitting of the believer to strive to keep his senses covered by the Holy Spirit, to keep the uncleanness from infiltrating from those dead of sins, into his soul, his mind, or his body. How much we are in need of the cover of the Holy Spirit to keep our depths safe from the microbes of sin; for which the prophet cries out, saying: *“Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips; Do not incline my heart to any evil thing”* (Psalm 141: 3). **St. John Saba** says: [Set your senses in order, O brother, and beware that through them, death may enter into the inner man. Remember what St. Anthony says: Many have performed great works; but, because they did not do them with discernment, they could not reach the way of God, nor His pure harbor¹].

(3) After demonstrating the horror of sin for those who come into the tent, and those inside it, beside the open vessels; He started to clarify that it infiltrates into us not just through those who die inside the tent, but also through anyone who may be killed with the sword in the desert, or die in an open field, or even through touching a grave or a bone of a dead man.

He who dies inside the tent, most probably dies because of some illness that came into his body, or because of old age. It is a condition of the sin quietly and secretly attacking him, until it kills him; or due to human weakness, a fruit of slothfulness or spiritual frailty or coolness. ... He, who is killed by sword in the desert, is when sin attacks man violently, to make him collapse within moments, while in the top of his activity and vitality; While a bone or a grave refer to the soul that has lived long in the death of sin, to turn man into dry bones scattered in the open field or buried in his grave, with no one to care for about, but, on the contrary all wish to get rid of. This chapter portrays for us the chronic spiritual ailment, deadly to the soul, together with the way of healing it.

(4) *“They shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel”* (17). It is the work of the church; to take the sacrifice of the cross to introduce it for the purification of the unclean, through the live water (in the font of baptism). **St. Justin** says: [If you wish to find a way for the forgiveness of sin, and for the hope of the inheritance of the promised goodness, You will realize that there is no other way, but to get to know this Christ, to get washed in the fountain (baptism), about which Isaiah spoke, for the forgiveness of sin; Then you will start living by holiness²].

“The clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave. The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day” (18, 19). Who is this clean person but the Lord Christ Himself, who works in a hidden way in the water of baptism; He baptizes through the hand of the priest. About this **St. John Chrysostom** says: [He who baptizes is the only-begotten Son of God, and not a person (the priest). If you see the font of baptism, and the hand of the priest touching your head; You must be sure that it is not a man who does that, but the grace of the Holy Spirit that sanctifies the nature of the water, and touches your head, together with the priest’s hand³].

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الإلهي، ص 1032.

² Dial. With Trypho 44.

³ Whitaker: Documents of Baptismal Liturgy, 1970, p. 36, 38.

As to sprinkling the water, it is a reference to the baptism that the Gentiles enjoy, having enjoyed the secret of the new birth. as it came in the prophet Isaiah: “*So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them, they shall see*” (Isaiah 52: 15); And as said by the apostle Paul: “*Let us draw near with a pure heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water*” (Hebrew 10: 22). Namely, baptism enters into the inner depths, to wash the evil conscience, together with the body. That is what the law presently within our hands confirms; The “*clean person*”, whom the apostle calls “*A High Priest over the house of God*” (Hebrew 10: 21), sprinkles purified water over the tent (the body), and all its furnishings (18); namely, over all its energies, instincts, emotions; and over all the souls who were there; for its effect to extends to the hidden souls in the bodies. As according to **the scholar Tertullian**: [The body gets washed for the soul to be purified; ... The body is anointed for the soul to get sanctified; ... The body is crossed by the sign of the cross, for the soul to get strong; ... The body is shadowed by the laying of hands, for the soul to get enlightened by the Holy Spirit¹]. And, commenting on this law, clarifying that the sprinkling of the holy water means salvation; namely, that man enters into the way of salvation; **St. Cyprian** says: [From this it is shown that the sprinkling of water stands on the same level as the washing of salvation; something done in the church, where the faith which man enjoys is; and by which he is soundly ministered; and is consummated by the greatness of the Lord, and by the Truth²].

Finally, He confirms that there would be no enjoyment of the purification on the seventh day, unless man is purified on the third day; namely, unless he unite with the Lord Christ risen from the dead.

¹ *De Ressurr. Carn.* 8.

² *Epit 75 (oxford ed. 69): 12.*

CHAPTER 20

THE WATER OF MARIBAH

The Lord presented the law of purification to those who happen to touch a dead body, a bone, or a grave; Then He talked to us about the death of Miriam and Aaron. He probably intends by this to warn the people, lest because of their love and appreciation for Miriam and Aaron, they would touch their dead bodies or their graves without getting purified on the third and the seventh day. Then He talked about the water of Maribah, to reveal the weaknesses of man, not only on the level of the congregation, but even on the level of Moses, the great among the prophets, and Aaron the high priest. This chapter includes:

- 1- The death of Miriam 1
- 2- The water of Maribah 2 - 13
- 3- The passage through Edom refused 14 - 21
- 4- The death of Aaron 22 - 29

1- THE DEATH OF MIRIAM:

Then the children of Israel came to the wilderness of 'Zin' (namely, the wilderness of the temptation), and where they stayed in Kadesh; and the Holy Book says: "*Miriam died there, and was buried there*" (1). That was all what the Holy Book wrote about the end of the life of Miriam, the prophetess and psalmist, who led the congregation in praising the Lord (Exodus 15). ...She died indeed in the wilderness of 'Zin', where her death was, for the people, a painful and a bitter temptation; having been beloved by many women. Yet she died in Kadesh, namely, in (the sacred place), after a life of strife and labor, to find comfort through entering into the sacred sanctuaries.

The Holy Book did not tell us about Moses' reaction, concerning the departure of his sister, who accompanied him all along the journey; especially that, after a little while, by a command of God, he will strip with his own hands, his brother Aaron of his garments of priesthood, and put them on Eleazar his son on Mount Hor, where Aaron will also die. The Holy Book did not tell us, as well Moses' reaction concerning the departure of His brother and fellow minister, who, together with him, endured the continuous murmuring of the people against both of them. Hoping for the resurrection of the dead, that reverend old prophet was not disturbed by the departure of his own sister and brother, as much as he got disturbed, was grieved, sighed, and to fell on his face, whenever the congregation murmured (6), and eventually came under the wrath and chastisement of God. He is not saddened for the separation of the flesh, but he rather gets burned together with every soul that comes under the death of the deprivation from God, the source of her life.

2- THE WATER OF MARIBAH:

Finding no water, the congregation did not seek from God, but hastened to gather together against Moses and Aaron, and to contend with Moses, saying: "*If only we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! Why have you brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here?! ... It is not a place of grain, of figs, or vines or pomegranates, nor is there any water to drink*" (3-5). Moses and Aaron went to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and there, they fell on their faces, and "*the glory of the Lord appeared to them*" (6). With every anguish and humiliation, God proclaims His glory to them, and their shepherding problems get solved. This time God commanded Moses to **take** the rod, and **speak** to the rock before the eyes of the whole congregation, and it will yield water! But Moses, instead of **speaking** to the rock, he lifted his hand and **struck** the

rock twice with the rod; after he and Aaron said to the congregation: “**Here now, you rebels! Shall we bring water for you out of this rock?!**” (10). Water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank (11).

The fathers looked¹ at the rock which flowed abundantly with water to quench the thirst of men, as the font of baptism that erupted through the rod, namely, through the sacrifice of the cross, to quench the thirst of mankind, and to satisfy its need. St. Paul believes that this rock that followed them is the Lord Christ (1 Corinthians 10: 4). If the rod was the cross; then through the crucified Christ, the fountain of baptism was sanctified.

St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa sees in this rock the secret of repentance, which is counted as a second baptism. Having murmured because they faced perdition through thirst, the congregation were in need of the water of the rock, namely, of repentance, so as not to perish. The St. says: [Having lost their hope in the good things promised to them, while on their way through the wilderness, the congregation fell into thirst. Once again, Moses made water flow for them in the wilderness. This issue is secretly understood, teaching us the secret of repentance. As those who apostatize to the lust of eating, to the covetousness of the flesh, and to the Egyptian pleasures, after having tasted the Rock once, will be deprived of the good things. Then through repentance, they would find the Rock again which they have neglected, and a fountain of water will be opened to them, and they will be satisfied. The Rock gave water to Moses, who believed in the truth of Joshua, and not in the false report of his opponents (the spies). Looking at the (Cluster of grapes), hanged for our sake, and shed His blood; and by the rod, he could bring out the water from the rock again²]. The Saint intends to confirm our need for repentance through our belief in the blood of the Lord Christ that atones for our sins, to enjoy an abundant flow from the Rock that we have neglected; namely, from Christ, whom we did wrong by our falls.

Commenting on that divine work, **St. Ambrose** says: [Is not He good, by whose command, the fluid sea under our feet became solid ground?!; and the solid rock gave water for the thirsty?! ... The works of the true Creator was apparent, when He turned the water into solid ground, and the solid rock into water! It is the work of Christ, as according to the apostle: “*The Rock is Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10: 4)³].

And commenting on the rock that was struck twice, **St. Augustine** says: [Our thirst was quenched through the rock in the wilderness, as “*The Rock is Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10:4)... And it was struck twice by the rod to flow water; as the cross has two boards ... All those things happened therefore as a symbol, proclaimed to us⁴].

In admonishment, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron: “**Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I promised to bring them**” (12). **St. Augustine**⁵ believes that Moses had some doubt from the beginning, when he struck the rock, saying: “**Shall we bring water for you out of this rock?**”(10). And David said in the psalm: “*They angered Him also at the water of strife, so that it went ill with Moses on their account. Because they rebelled against his spirit, so that he spoke*

¹ Tert: De Baptismo 9; St. Hippolut.

See: J. Crehan: *Early Christian Baptism and Creed*, London 1945. p. 172 f.

² *Life of Moses* 2: 369, 270.

³ *Of The Christian Faith* 2: 2 (22).

⁴ *In Ioan*, tr. 28: 9.

⁵ *On Ps.*, 106.

rashly with his lips” (Psalm 106: 32, 33).. Some believe that the Lord commanded them, saying: **“Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water”** (7); and did not command them to **strike** the rock with the rod.

The anger of God was probably aroused on Moses and Aaron, because they struck the rock twice; As the Lord was crucified only once by His own free will for the salvation of mankind, receiving passion with joy; according to the words of the apostle: *“For the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame”* (Hebrew 12: 2). The second stroke brings grief to His heart, being a symbol of a new crucifixion, through the apostasy of the believer from the life of renewal that became his; The apostle says: *“since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame”* (Hebrew 6: 6).

Anyway, Moses and Aaron fell under chastisement, and the whole glorious past of the prophet Moses could not intercede for him. It is as though God warns the ministers of the church and in particular those of exalted rank; that their works, even though they may be great and impressive, yet they will not intercede for them if they happen to fall. Commenting on this issue in his fourth book on priesthood, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Moses, that saint, was far from holding fast to the leadership of the Jews. He supplicated to God to spare him of it, when He first commanded him to receive it (Exodus 4), to the extent that he almost aroused God’s anger. And even after receiving that leadership, he wished for death to get rid of it, saying to the Lord: *“If you treat me like this, please kill me here and now”* (Numbers 11: 15). ... What then? Has that repeated reluctance intercede for him, when he transgressed concerning the water of strife?! Could that bring him forgiveness?! Why then, has he been deprived of entering into the promised land¹?].

3- THE PASSAGE THROUGH EDOM REFUSED:

The Edomites were the descendants of Edom or Esau (Genesis 36: 19); who most probably still bore the old animosity toward the Jews, that dated back to the days of Jacob and his brother Esau, when the first deceived the second into taking his rights as the firstborn ... That is why the Edomites kept on entering into pacts with other nations against Israel. And in the days of captivity, as Judah was destroyed, Edom made use of the situation, and turned the land of Judah into a pasture land for their livestock. We already spoke of Edom in our commentary on the book of Ezekiel².

The prophet Moses sent a message to the king of Edom, asking him with the spirit of brotherhood, binding the two peoples, as descendents of two brothers: Jacob and Esau, saying to him: **“Thus says your brother Israel: ‘You know all the hardship that has befallen us, how our fathers went down to Egypt; and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. When we cried out to the Lord, He heard our voice and sent an angel and brought us up out of Egypt. Now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards; nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the king’s highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand, nor to the left, until we have passed through your territory’”** (14-17).

He talks to him with brotherly spirit, reminding him that both of them go back to one father and one blood;... confirming to him that every brother is in need of his brother;... With the spirit of humility, telling him that he and his fathers have suffered under the Pharaoh of Egypt; ... With the spirit of faith, that God supports him; ... And with the spirit of obedience to his authority, promising to go along the

¹ On Priesthood 4: 1.

² راجع للمؤلف: حزقيال، أصحاب 25.

king's highway, and will not turn aside to the right hand , nor to the left. Nevertheless, despite all that, remembering only the blessing that Jacob has craftily got from Esau, Edom responded with fear and animosity.

We said before that the word 'Edom' meaning (bloody), or (blood-shedder), representing Satan who does not stand the kingdom of God; and is by nature fond of fighting.

Edom, reigning over the hearts, they became his land, and would not allow the kingdom of God to pass through it. Yet the Lord Christ entered through the land of the true Edom – Satan -- after binding and destroying him by the cross, opening in the hearts a royal highway, along which the heavenly procession of victory and conquest would pass; Man's energies, talents, and all his possibilities are transformed into a procession that would pass along the royal highway, perpetually heading toward the high Jerusalem; not turning aside by a right-hand stroke (self-righteousness), nor a left-hand one (covetousness), until he passes through the frontier of time, and enters into eternity. By Jesus Christ, Edom was driven out of our hearts, where he used to reign, and the true evangelic way was opened in us.

St. Clement of Alexandria¹ believes that the royal highway is the way of man who lives by righteousness, not out of compulsion, nor of fear; Namely, not turning aside to the left, nor to the right, for the sake of wages or reward; but setting forth along the king's highway, paved by the King Himself, free of any obstacles or dangerous slopes.

4- DEATH OF AARON:

This chapter started by the departure of Miriam and ended by the departure of Aaron; The former died in Kadesh, namely, crossed over to the divine sanctuaries; and the later set forth to Mount 'Hor', there to die. 'Hor', just meaning (a mountain), God intended for the first high priest to die on a high mountain without a specific name, to proclaim that, in his death, he exalts up, and not plunges down to the lowest reach of the earth, as it happened with Korah and his company. The death of the righteous is an exaltation and ascension; but that of the wicked is a collapse and down-sliding.

Moses and Aaron, together with Eleazar, Aaron's son, ascended to the top of Mount 'Hor", where Moses, by God's command, stripped Aaron of his garment of priesthood, before he dies, and put them on Eleazar his son, as the new high priest; That brought pleasure to both Moses and Aaron; as it was not befitting for Aaron to die wearing the garment of priesthood; lest those garments would be counted as defiled; but to let his son put them on instead of his father. This is a beautiful portrait of the clerical tradition handed from one generation to another without diversion. The role played by Moses, the receiver of the law, in this procedure, refers to the role of the divine commandment or the Holy Book in the tradition. The tradition, delivered along the generations, has to stay evangelic, not separated from the commandment, nor diverted from the spirit of the Holy Book.

St. Cyprian sees in that procedure, a confirmation from God to the people, that the priest, although elected by the Lord, yet it should be in the presence of the people; the Scripture says: ***“They went up to Mount 'Hor' in the sight of all the congregation”*** (27). The Saint says: [We notice how, through a divine authority, the priest should be elected in the presence of the people, in the sight of all the

¹ *On Spiritual Perfection, 73.*

congregation; and be counted as worthy and deserving to minister by the consent and testimony of the congregation¹].

Finally, the death of Aaron, and the transfer of the priesthood to his son, reveals the inadequacy of the Levitical priesthood; as the high priest has a beginning and end, his mission is temporary, and for a certain time, transferred from one generation to another, until the symbol comes to an end, and He who is “*A High Priest over the house of God*” would come (Hebrew 10: 21); “*A high Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens*” (Hebrew 8: 1). The apostle Paul compared between the temporary Priesthood of Aaron, and the eternal priesthood of the Lord Christ, according to order, of Melchizedek, having neither beginning nor end, concerning His deity, capable of interceding by His blood before His Father, to bring us forth to the heavenly sanctuaries, created without a hand; He who became a Priest by an oath, He who is holy, and undefiled, to intercede continuously for the sake of sinners (see Hebrew 7).

¹ *Epist. 67: 4.*

CHAPTER 21

THE WAY TO CONQUEST

Because Edom refused to let Israel pass through their land, Moses had to go, together with his people around the territory of Edom, instead of going through it. It is as though God presented to them a new concept for the conquest over evil, by fleeing away from it. In this chapter God presented other examples of conquest, not only over kings and peoples, but over the fiery serpents, and the inner thirst. He talks here about:

1- The fighting against the king of Arad	1 - 3
2- The bronze serpent	4 - 9
3- Their departure	10 - 15
4- The song of the well	16 - 20
5- The conquest over king Sihon	21 - 30
6- The conquest over Og, king of Bashan	31 - 35

1- THE FIGHTING AGAINST THE KING OF ARAD:

‘Arad’, a Hebrew word meaning (a wild donkey), is a town at the south reaches of Judea (Joshua 12: 14; Judges 1: 6).

If the king of Edom refused to let Israel pass through his land; and the people took a way around Edom, preferring not to oppose evil with evil, but choosing to flee from evil; That was the sound spiritual way of the believer, to overcome his natural tendency toward revenge, preferring to reign and to have authority over his own heart, to overcoming others and reigning over them. The Canaanite king of Arad, who, “like a wild donkey” fought against Israel without even telling them not to pass through his land. He encountered Israel while on the road to Atharim, fought against them, and took some of them prisoners. As the word ‘Atharim’ means (the track); It is as though the king of Arad followed their track to catch up with them, to destroy them before they could enjoy the promised land.

By allowing for their initial defeat, God intended to let the people realize their weakness and human helplessness to have salvation and conquest on their own; And that, once they seek the hand of God, and vow not to take anything for themselves, but to destroy the cities of the enemy and call them ‘Hormah’, namely, (a restricted or forbidden region); That would be a perpetual testimony and a memorial, that every salvation and conquest realized in the future, will be through the power of God. We sometimes hear how God allows even for the saints, sometimes to fall into the slightest and the least of sins, to let it become for them a memorial of their weakness; And when they overcome in their spiritual war, grow in talents, and give fruition in their life and ministry, they would not fall into pride.

According to **father Theophan the hermit**; When man happens to fall into a sin, into which he has not fallen since a long time, and has always conquered, he becomes extremely hurt, which is in itself a sign of the pride of heart; counting himself a perpetual conqueror. That is why, one of the beautiful trainings, suggested for the believers who used to live long in a state of conquest, then fall in a minor sin, according to their human mind; is to mix their tears of repentance, with thanksgiving to God, who revealed to them their weaknesses, and exposed them before their own sight

2- THE BRONZE SERPENT:

Despite their victory over the king of Arad, who came against them like a “wild donkey”; and their testimony to the work of God with them, by calling the place

‘Hormah’; Yet they soon murmured against the Lord and Moses, because they did not pass through the land of Edom, but had to go through a longer and a more tough way, saying: *“Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our souls loathes this worthless bread”* (5). When they murmured before, on account of thirst, God endured and did not admonish them even by one word, but commanded Moses and Aaron to draw water out of rock; But now, having granted them conquest and victory, and after He quenched their thirst from the rock, a second time; when they got on murmuring, He chastised them by sending fiery serpent, biting and killing many of them. When Moses cried out to Him, interceding for their sake, He did not take them away, but commanded him to make a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live (8). He did not take away the temptation right away, but opened a door for salvation out of it; by which He turned their evil into a blessing.

“Out of the eater, came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet” (Judges 14: 14); By that He presented a symbol of His cross; saying: *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3: 14, 15). According to **St. Augustine**: [Christ was slain, so that those bitten by the serpents would look up at Him, lifted up on the cross¹]; And he also says: [The lifted up serpent refers to the death of Christ on the cross; As death came through the serpent; its symbol became the portrait of a serpent. While the serpent’s bite was deadly; The death of the Lord is a life-giver²].

St. Agnatius says: [When the incarnate body of the Word was lifted up, as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, He drew humanity to Himself for the sake of their eternal salvation³]. As it came in the epistle of Barnabas: [Moses made a portrait of Jesus and His necessary passion, toward which the fallen Israelites looked and be restored to life. To teach Israel that their rebellion has delivered them to the grief of death, the Lord sent over them several kinds of fiery serpents to bite and kill them. And although Moses has previously told them: *‘Cursed is the one who makes any carved or molded image’* (Deuteronomy 27: 15); Now he was doing what he warned against; he made a bronze serpent, lifted it up with glory. When the people sought from Moses to intercede for them before God, he instructed them that in case any of them is bitten by a serpent, he should look up at the serpent lifted-up on a tree, with hope that the lifeless serpent would restore him to life and he would be saved on the spot; and so they did. The glory of Jesus is set on this principle; namely, that all things are in and for Him⁴].

According to **St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa**: [The rebellious lusts gave birth to serpents that spit poison to kill those whom they bite; But the receiver of the law turned the real serpents without strength through the image of a serpent ... The cross is the passion, and he who looks up to it, according to the Holy Book, would not be harmed by the pain of lusts. Looking up to the cross, only means that man would put his whole life to death, and become crucified to the world (Galatians 6: 14), and not moved by evil. According to the prophet: *“They have nailed their bodies by the fear of God”*; Nailing would be through controlling the soul, that controls the body ... It is an imitation of the serpent, it is not a true serpent; And as said by the apostle Paul: *“in the likeness of the sinful flesh”* (Romans 8” 3). Sin is the true serpent; And he who

¹ On Ps., 74.

² On Ioan, tr. 12: 11.

³ Ad. Smyrneans 2.

⁴ رسالة برناباس 12: 5-7 (ترجمة المطران إلياس معوض).

flee to the sin, would bear the nature of the serpent... By being liberated from sin, through Him who has taken the likeness of sin, and like us He came to bear the likeness of the serpent ... He did not kill the serpents, but turned their bites nor deadly ... The bites of lusts actually work even in the believers; Yet he who looks up toward Him who is lifted up on the cross, would despise the passion; hence diluting the poison by the fear of the commandment¹].

St. Augustine sees in the bronze serpent, our receiving the fellowship in the passions of Christ and death together with Him; saying: [Whoever looks at the lifted up serpent will be healed of the poison, and would be saved from death. He who comes to the likeness of the death of Christ through faith in Him and in His baptism, will be liberated from sin, justified from death by the resurrection; That is what the Lord Himself means by saying: “*Whoever believes in Me should not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3: 15). Therefore it would not be necessary for the infant to have the likeness of the death of Christ in baptism, unless the poison of the serpent has infiltrated in him²]. As long as the serpents have set forth to all, biting them and spitting their poison in them; All, children and grown-ups, are in need for the holy water of baptism, to get healed from the poison of the serpent through the cross.

3- THEIR DEPARTURE:

If the cross is the way to conquest and victory; It does not take away the war of Satan – the ancient serpent – but nullifies his deadly poison; Hence the sign of the true victory is the departure; namely, the continuous crossing over from a location to another, in order to enjoy new glories through the continuous afflictions, aiming to move on to the new Canaan. The names of the locations toward which they departed are: ‘Oboth’, ‘Ije ABarim’, ‘the Valley of Zered’, then to ‘Arnon’. According to **the scholar Origen**: ‘Oboth’ in Hebrew means (continuous growth); namely, by entering into the experience of the cross, the believer is committed to live in a condition of perpetual and incessant growth. ‘Ije Abarim’ means the (depth of crossing over); as though through the continuous growth, we are committed not to forget our goal, namely, the inner deep moving on from the earthly life to the eternal one.

4- THE SONG OF THE WELL:

As the people moved on, bearing the scars of bites in their bodies, but not the death they entail; they moved on with their bodies carrying the sign of conquest and victory over the bites of the serpents; “*The Lord said to Moses: ‘Gather the people together and I will give them water’*” (16). Here **the scholar Origen**³ wonders, why does God tell Moses to gather the people together to give them water to drink?! When the people, whenever they are thirsty, go by themselves to drink? That is why he confirms that the story if understood by the literal meaning, it would seem of no real importance; but, spiritually, it bears deep secrets.

The inspiration of God says on the tongue of Solomon: “*Drink water from your own cistern, and flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?*” (Proverbs 5: 15, 16)⁴. Which means that your waters are yours alone, no one else should have a portion in it. Everyone of us, symbolically has a well inside him.... We have already seen that the early fathers, Abraham, Isaac. And Jacob, had wells of their own⁵].

¹ *Life of Moses 2: 272, 277.*

² *St. Augustine: On Forgivenness of sins and Baptism 1: 61.*

³ *In Num., hom 12.*

⁵ *In Num., hom 12.*

⁴ الترجمة السبعينية.

In short, every man has inner wells deep in his soul that refers to the knowledge of God in the heart, in the inner man. That is why, when the lord Christ sat at the well in the sixth hour of the day, the moments of the crucifixion, he spoke to the Samaritan woman, namely to the Gentiles, about the inner well, saying to her: *“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give me to drink’, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water”* (John 4: 10). The woman, by her material mind could not surpass the limits of the seen well, the one they proud to inherit from their father Jacob. But the Lord Christ so drew her heart to the inner well, that she left her water-pot at the well, and went her way into the city, carrying deep inside her a living well. This is the work of the lord Christ, to create in His believers wells of living water; saying: *“He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”* (John 7: 38).

And according to **the scholar Origen**, God granted each of us, not just one well, but several wells and rivers of living waters inside us, that refer to the knowledge of the Holy Trinity and to His work in us: [I believe we can understand the knowledge of the Father, as a well; and the knowledge of the Son, as another well; the Son is designated from the Father; saying of Himself: *“I am who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me”* (John 8: 18). And it so seems to me, that we can see a third well in the knowledge of the Holy Spirit; as He is well designated from both the father and the Son; as confirmed by the gospel, saying: *“The Father will give you another Helper ... the Spirit of truth”* (John 14: 16, 17). Therefore, although the designation in the three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – interprets the plural sense of the wells; Yet from these wells there is one spring or fountain¹; where there is oneness in essence and the nature of the Trinity²].

Through faith in the Lord Christ, the Savior, we came to have an inner knowledge through a practical experience that the soul lives with the Holy Trinity; by which she can recognize the Father as being her heavenly Father, the Bishop of her life; The only-begotten Son, as being the eternal groom and the Savior, who carries her in Him to bring her over to the bosom of the Father; And the Holy Spirit, as being the Grantor of the sonhood and the fellowship, who brings us over into the unity with the Lord Christ, to enjoy what is His, His possibilities, as though they are our possibilities. These are the wells, dug by the Holy Spirit deep in us, that in us, rivers of living water would flow. **The scholar Origen** says: [I believe that the words of the Savior to His disciples: *“He who believes in Me”* (John 7: 38), meant that he who drinks from His teachings, will have, not just one well or fountain, but rivers of living water flowing in him. As from the words of God, namely, out of the one well, will emerge limitless wells, fountains, and rivers, in the soul of man created in the image of God³].

These holy rivers that flow in the heart of the believer, according to the Psalmist: will *“clap their hands”* (Psalm 98: 8). The practical divine rivers of knowledge, flowing by the Holy spirit in the heart, praise God, and testify to Him by clapping the hands; namely, by transforming the knowledge into “work”. **St. Augustine** says: [Let these river clap their hands; let them rejoice in the works; let them bless God⁴]. And St. Jerome comments on this phrase, saying: [Let them clap

¹ أمثال 5: 15، 16 (الترجمة السبعينية).

² In Num., hom 12.

³ Ibid.

⁴ On Ps. 98.

their hands; as by the works of the saints, they praise God. The Lord Christ is not praised by words, but by works; He does not care for the voice, but for the work¹].

In us, there are rivers of the knowledge of the Holy Trinity; But unfortunately, it often happens that the devil fills them with dirt. with the worries of temporal life and the earthly lusts; that they become in need of the Holy Spirit Himself to dig them anew, and to take away the dirt foreign to them. **The scholar Origen** says: [Actually, the wells of our souls need Him who will dig, cleanse, and take away from them everything earthy, to reveal the mental thoughts originally created by God, and to present networks of pure water; hence it is written in the Scripture: “*The Philistines had stopp'd up and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham* (Genesis 26: 15). But Isaac, who got the blessing from his father, “*dug the wells again*” (Genesis 26: 18)²].

It is amazing how several holy and blessed matrimonies happened around the wells; as though the goal of the wells of the divine knowledge is to realize the entrance of the soul into unity with the heavenly Groom, the Lord Christ, and the enjoyment of His attributes. **The scholar Origen** says: [At the well, and not at any other place, the servant of Abraham encountered ‘Rebecca’, meaning (compassion or endurance), and she became Isaac’s wife (Genesis 24: 16). And when Jacob came to the land of Mesopotamia, in obedience of His father, he encountered ‘Rachel’ (Genesis 29: 2); As also did Moses when he encountered ‘Zipporah’ at the well (Exodus 2: 15). Therefore, in case you wish to get married to compassion, wisdom, and the other virtues included in the saying of the wisdom “I searched for him to marry him”; be persistent on coming incessantly to these wells, and there, beside the living water, you will certainly find a wife for yourself; As next to the rivers of living water, all the virtues certainly dwell³].

If the wise Solomon advises us to: “*Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well; Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?!*” (Proverbs 5: 15, 16); he invites us to enjoy the inner matrimony, in which the soul encounters her Groom through the inner knowledge of the Holy Trinity. There, you would recognize the salvation works of God, receive the fellowship with Him; and enjoy the attributes of the Lord, not as outer virtues, but as fruition of the Holy Spirit inside the soul. Hence the Lord Christ says: “*But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly*” (Matthew 6: 6). He advises us to open our heart to the Groom in secret; that our left hand would not know what our right hand is doing (Matthew 6: 3); But signs of this fellowship will be revealed to the world, in our behavior, and even in our features; while our depths will stay the secret of a deep love, only felt by the soul.

Going back to the text within our hands, we shall find that God insists on calling Moses to gather the people together to drink from the well; This action carries, in a symbolic way, a call by the law (Moses) to men of the Old Covenant, to recognize the Person of the Savior. **The scholar Origen** says: [The law of God calls you to come to the well, namely, to faith in the Lord Christ, who Himself said: “*Moses wrote about Me*”. There, we would drink from the water of the well, and sing a song for Him; “*For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation*” (Romans 10: 10)⁴].

¹ On Ps., hom. 25.

² In Num., hom 12.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Having drank from the well; namely, having come to know the Person of the Lord Christ through Moses and the prophets, the congregation sang the song of the well, saying: “*Spring up, O well! All of you sing to it – The well the leaders (the noblemen) sank; dug by the nation’s kings; by the scepter, with the staff*” (Numbers 21: 17, 18)¹.

Commenting on this song, **the scholar Origen** says: The leaders (the noblemen) are the prophets who sank the well, covered it by their prophecies about the Lord Christ, and hid it in the depths of the letter; Hence one of the prophets says: “*If you will not hear it, my soul will weep in secret for your pride*” (Jeremiah 13: 17); And another prophet says to the Lord: “*You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues*” (Psalm 31: 20). Therefore, it was the “leaders”, namely, the prophets who dug the well; But the “kings” are the ones who cut through the rocks for it. The leaders, who are less than the kings, dug the wells, but only to a certain depth; while those called kings, stronger and of more understanding, do not only dug in the ground, but cut in the solid rocks to reach more depths and do more elaborate search .. These are the apostles, one of whom says: “*God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God*” (1 Corinthians 2: 10). Through the Holy Spirit they could search the depths of God, and cut their way through the solid rock to of the difficult secrets of knowledge of the well. As to calling the apostles kings, this could be deduced from what is said about the believers in general: “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*” (1 Peter 2: 9) ... For this reason, the Lord was called “*the King of kings*” (Revelation 19: 16)²].

The true well, therefore, which is the Lord Christ the Savior of mankind, has been revealed by the (noblemen) through the law and the prophecies; and more clearly by the disciples and the apostles, through the gospels and the apostolic writings. According to **the scholar Origen**: [The whole Holy Book: the law, the prophecies, the evangelic and the apostolic writings, constitute one well, which could not be dug nor searched, except by kings and noblemen ... who could cleanse the dirt off the well, remove the superficial literality of the inner rock, where the Lord Christ is, to let the spiritual meaning flow³].

Discerning between the true well, dug by the kings and the noblemen, and those dug by the heretics, who produce salty water not fit for drinking, **the scholar Origen** says: [Do you wish to see from the Holy Book, to which well the heretics come? They come to the “many red wells) of the valley of salt, (the Dead Sea).... Where there is sin and iniquity, ... where there would be no exaltation upward, but perpetual descent to the lowly downward places. Every heretic thought and every sin, are found in a valley of salt and bitterness. For what sweetness could be presented by sin?!. ... There is nothing worse for man than to fall into the thoughts of the heretics, or to fall into the bitterness of sin, namely, in (many red wells). As redness is a feature of the fire; If we drink water from those wells, and received the thoughts of the heretics; we receive the bitterness of sins; and prepare in ourselves some material for the fire and some fuel for hell. ... Those who do not intend to drink water from the well dug by the kings and the noblemen, intend to drink from the well in the valley of

¹ الترجمة السبعينية.

² In Num., hom. 12.

³ Ibid.

sin, that is feeding the fire; and to them is said: “*Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks you have kindled*” (Isaiah 50: 11)¹].

Finally, having drunk from the true well, dug by the kings and the noblemen, It is said that “*they departed from the wilderness to Mattanah, from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, and from Bamoth, in the valley that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgeh which looks down on the wasteland*” (18-20).

Commenting on this, **the scholar Origen** says: [These names may seem as names of actual locations, But if we go back to their meanings in the original language, it would present to us a group of secret facts instead of the names of certain locations²].

(1) Setting forth to ‘Mattanah’; If the word ‘Mattanah’, according to **the scholar Origen**, means (their gifts); It would be befitting of the souls that drank from the well, namely, that recognized the Person of the Lord Christ, to whom Moses led through the law and the prophecies, and was proclaimed to us by the disciples and the apostles; to present their gifts and offerings to Him, which actually are His own gifts and offerings; As the Lord says: “*My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, You shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time*” (Numbers 28: 1). ... Drinking from the well is receiving the gift of God; telling us about Himself, and offering His life to us; Then we would pay His love back with our love, by offering our life to Him; The Scripture says: “*What does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*” (Deuteronomy 10: 12). We therefore should present these gifts to Him from our heart, after having known Him, namely, after drinking the knowledge of His compassion from the depths of His well³].

(2) From Mattanah to Nahaliel. The word ‘Nahaliel’ means (from God)⁴. When man presents to God practical love, gifts, and offerings, God will pay him back with divine gifts. When Abraham offered his only son to God, He gave him back alive to him, and presented to him instead a redemption ram. The more spacious our heart becomes by practical love, the more God will fill it up with the hidden fruits of His Holy Spirit, satisfying to the soul.

(3) From Nahaliel to Bamoth, which means (the coming of death); When man longs for crossing over strongly, with victory over death, looking at death as setting forth toward the heavenlies. God says: “*I put to death and I make alive*” (Deuteronomy 32: 39). Yes indeed, He puts to death, then makes alive, for us to live together with Christ; Therefore we should long to reach Bamoth, and hope for that blessed death to dwell soon, to be worthy of living together with Christ⁵.

(4) From Bamoth to the top of Pisgeh, meaning (ascension or the top of the mountain). This is the goal of our journey, to ascend to paradise, to enjoy a good stay on the top of the mountain of perfection, and to enjoy the spiritual joy, saying: “*He raised us up together with Him, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Ephesians 2: 6).

That is the journey: from the well of the divine knowledge in Jesus Christ, the Savior, to offering the gift of our love, and receiving His divine gifts, to ascend to the mountains of His perfection.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

5- THE CONQUEST OVER KING SIHON:

Moses sent a message to Sihon, king of the Amorites, saying: *“Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into the fields or vineyards; we will not drink water from wells, but we will go by the king’s highway until we have passed through the king’s territory”* (22). But Sihon, instead of letting them pass, he came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. Israel defeated him and took possession of his land, and dwelt in the cities of the Amorites, up to Heshbon the capital.

According to **the scholar Origen**, ‘Sihon’ means (haughty) and (a barren tree); And the word ‘Emorites’ is derived from (bitterness). It is as though Sihon refers to Satan the haughty and barren, whose hosts are the bitterness itself.

He says: [King Sihon represents Satan because he is haughty and barren. You should not marvel that I call him a king, when our Lord and Savior, in the gospel, called Satan *“the ruler of this world”* (John 14: 30), *“he comes and has nothing in Me”*; and He said: *“Now the ruler of this world will be cast out”* (John 12: 31). So now, if he, in the gospel, is called the ruler of the whole world, is it too much to compare him with Sihon, king of the Amorites? Not that Satan has created the world; but as there is a multitude of sinners in the world, and he is the ruler of sinners, he is called *“the ruler of the world”*; namely, the ruler of those who have not yet forsaken the world to head toward the Father. By the same meaning, it was said: *“The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one”* (1 John 5: 19). ... What would be our benefit to say that Christ is our Ruler, if we, by our works and behavior, confirm that we are under the authority of Satan?! Do not we clearly know, to which ruler, the adulterer, the abominable, and the oppressor, belong?! Will such a man claim that he is under the authority of Christ, even if he is apparently counted as one?!. When Christ is our Ruler, we shall not commit any abomination, and the lust of oppression would have no place in us. By this meaning, we can say that Christ is the Ruler of virtues; and that Satan is the ruler of evil and oppression¹].

Describing Sihon as ‘haughty’, as a symbol of Satan, is clear from the words of the holy Book itself; As according to **the scholar Origen**: [He (Satan) is the one who said: *“By the strength of my hand I have done it; And by my wisdom, as I am prudent. Also I have removed the boundaries of the people, and have robbed their treasures. So I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people”* (Isaiah 10: 13, 14). And with a haughty spirit he says: *“I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit over the mount of the congregation, on the farthest side of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High”* (Isaiah 14: 13, 14). ... Yes, he is haughty and proud, like his only son, about whom it was written:

“Let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come unless the falling away (the apostasy) comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God” (2 Thessalonians 2: 3, 4). Whoever is haughty or proud would be a son of that haughty spirit, or his disciple, or following his lead; That is why the apostle speaks about some, saying: *“... lest being puffed up with pride, he falls into the same condemnation as the devil”* (1 Timothy 3: 6)²].

The people of Israel sent to Sihon seeking his permission to pass through his land, promising not to turn aside into fields or vineyards, nor drink water from wells,

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

but to go by the king's highway until they have passed through his territory. ... That is the same pledge by which we were committed at baptism; when we denied Satan and all his evil works, his seductions, and his bondage; as though we are saying to him: We shall not turn aside in any of your fields, or any of your vineyards, nor drink water from any of your wells. **The scholar Origen** says: [The believer does not take a drop of the knowledge of Satan – astrology, magic, and likewise of the knowledge opposing the piety to God – But he has his own fountains from which he drinks, the fountains of Israel, and the fountains of salvation, not from the wells of Sihon. He “*will not forsake the fountain of life, and hews for himself broken cisterns that hold no water*” (Jeremiah 2: 13); he proclaims that he goes by the royal highway, the way of Him who said: “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” (John 14: 6); the royal highway about which the prophet said: “*Give the king Your Judgment, O God*” (Psalm 72: 1). It is befitting of us to go by the king's highway, and not to turn aside to a field, nor to any satanic works or thoughts¹].

We previously saw that the believer does not turn aside from the royal highway, to the right nor to the left; not to be swayed by a right-handed stroke (self-esteem), nor by a left-handed one (the sin). And we also saw that going by the royal highway will only mean walking toward God; not out of fear like slaves, nor for the sake of a reward like working hands; but for the sake of God Himself as His children². Hence **St. Gregory the Nezianden** says: [I wish you go by the royal highway, and not to turn aside, to the right nor to the left, but let the Spirit leads you along the straightforward path³].

According to **St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa**, about that royal highway, he says: [The law requires from him who goes by it, not to turn aside to the right or to the left; by the way described by the Lord as being “*narrow and difficult*” (Matthew 7: 14). This teaching shows that virtue is characterized by moderation. Every evil works naturally, either through less virtue or (too much of it; the best is to be seen through the intermediate way between these two close (evils), which is counted as virtue. And so it is in the other things intended for the better life, namely to take the moderate way between too close (evils). ... Wisdom takes the intermediate way between craftiness and simplicity. Neither the wisdom of the serpents, nor the simplicity of the doves are commended, man should not choose one of them and not the other; but it would be a virtue if the two together unite in moderation. ... He who loses chastity is considered as fornicator; Yet he who goes too far in chastity, could be described as “*having his own conscience seared with a hot iron*” (1 Timothy 4: 2). One would deliver himself to his lust without control; and the other would look at matrimony as adultery; Ordinance between these two extremes is counted as moderation⁴].

The believers seek to pass through this world in peace; But Sihon, namely, the proud Satan, would be greatly offended that they do not intend to stay with him, nor to preoccupy themselves with his affairs, or touch any of his possessions, or to drink a drop of water out of his wells; His hatred for them would increase, and his wrath on them would stir-up every bitterness through his hosts, namely, the evil spirits – the Amorites – Hence the Book says: “***Sihon gathered all his people together and went out against Israel***” (23). It is the spiritual war stirred up by the devil against the kingdom of God¹

¹ *Ibid.*

² راجع تفسير الأصحاح السابق.

³ *Panegyric on S. Caesarius, Or. 6: 8.*

⁴ *Life of Moses 2: 287-289.*

The location of this war is ‘Jahaz’, which, according to **the scholar Origen**, means (fulfilling the commandments). Satan would not endure to see us keep the divine commandments, but would gather his evil spirits to war against us. But the battle would end up with the conquest of the believer over Satan, according to the words of the apostle: “*The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly*” (Romans 16: 20); And the Lord Himself confirmed this by saying: “*Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing by any mean will hurt you*” (Luke 10: 19). All those would never hurt us if we enter into “Jahaz”, namely, if we keep the divine commandments.

Some believe that “Jahaz” means (an open or a well-trodden way)¹. It is as though the believers should walk by the spirit of their fathers; along the way they have previously taken; along the already open way, where they enter into war against Satan; But they will prevail; according to what came in the book of Jeremiah: “*Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls*” (Jeremiah 6: 16).

Sihon’s life, representing the proud Satan, came to an end by the sword, namely, the word of God ; according to the words of the apostle: “*The sword of the Spirit which is the word of God*” (Ephesians 6: 17). So when the believer preoccupies himself with the word and commandment of God, the devil will perish together with all his evil tricks.

Sihon was killed by the edge of the sword, and the believers took possession of his entire land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, all the cities, and in particular Heshbon, the capital.

‘Arnon’ is a river separating between the frontier of the Amorites in the north, and the Moabites in the south; which later on, separated between the tribe of Reuben to the north and Moab to the south (Deuteronomy 3: 8; Joshua 13: 16). Arnon was known to have fords (Isaiah 16: 2).

‘Jabbok’ is an eastern branch of the river Jordan, In that location Jacob wrestled with the Lord until dawn, after sending his wives and children across the stream (Genesis 32: 22). Nowadays it is known as the River of Zarqa; that used to represent the western border of the Ammonites, that separate them from the Amorites; and later on from the tribe of Gad. It divides Gilead into two divisions: the southern division belonged to Sihon, then became the possession of Gad; while the northern division, which belonged to Og’s kingdom, was taken by half the tribe of Manasseh (Deuteronomy 2: 36, 37; 3: 12-13, 16; Joshua 12: 2-6).

As to Heshbon, the capital of Sihon king of the Amorites, which was originally taken from the Moabites, was designated by Moses to be the portion of the tribe of Reuben, who rebuilt it (Numbers 31: 37; Joshua 13: 17); became the separating line between the two tribes of Reuben and Gad (Joshua 13: 26); possessed afterwards by Gad; and designated as a city of God, granted to the Levites (Joshua 21: 39; 1 Chronicles 6: 81); It taken over by the Moabites in the days of the prophets Isaiah and Elisha (Isaiah 65: 4; 16: 8-9; Jeremiah 48: 2, 33-34); then later on by Eskanderianus and Herod the great². Nowadays it is some ruins on an isolated hill between Arnon and Jabbok, 6 miles north of the city.

The scholar Origen believes that ‘Arnon’ also means (curses); while ‘Jabbok’ means (struggle); as in it Jacob wrestled with the Lord; As though the kingdom of Satan starts with the curses, and ends with the struggle. Entering into his land, man

¹ *New Westminster Dict. Of Bible. P. 442.*

² *Joseph. Antiq 13: 15; 15: 8, 5.*

gets filled with curses, and stays that way until he gets out of it through his struggle, like Jacob, to have the blessing dwell on him, and to become liberated from the kingdom of the devil; saying: [Sihon's kingdom, the haughty and the barren, starts with curses, and ends at Jabbok, namely, with the struggle. Whoever intends to get out of, and flee from the kingdom of Satan, will have to struggle; and in case he prevails; for him, Jabbok will no longer be a city of Sihon, but will be transferred to Israel¹].

The capital of his kingdom is 'Heshbon', meaning (account). Whoever thinks according to a material and mental account, this thought of his would become the center of the devil's kingdom in his life. Whereas if he is liberated by the Lord, and his accounts become spiritual, he would bear the thought of faith, would "take account of the cost", and this thought of his would become the center of his new life in Christ Jesus; Namely the thought would be transferred from the kingdom of the devil to that of Christ. That is what made **the scholar Origen** say: [The capital of Sihon is called by the name 'Heshbon'? as Heshbon means (thinking), which is the most important part in the kingdom of Satan, the foundation of his might; according to the words of the Lord Christ: "*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man*" (Mark 7: 21-23). That is why that city should be consumed by fire; most probably the fire about which the Savior said: "*I came to send fire on the earth and how I wish it is already kindled*" (Luke 12: 49)²].

"Those who speak in proverbs say: 'Come to Heshbon, let it be built, let the city of Sihon be repaired. For fire went out from Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon; it consumed Ar of Moab, the Lords of the heights of Arnon. Woe to you Moab! You have perished, O people of Shemosh" (27, 28).

Who are they, those who speak in proverbs, who see the fire of the Holy Spirit, kindled by the Lord Christ on the earth on which Sihon has for so long reigned, yearning for rebuilding and repairing it? They are no doubt, the law and the prophets who saw through the symbols, how the kingdom of the devil will be destroyed, to set in its place, the kingdom of Christ with His fiery Holy Spirit. As to those who understand these proverbs, they are men of the New Covenant who realized the truth, and to them was revealed what was before a symbol or riddle. **The scholar Origen** says: [Who spoke in proverbs, but the law and the prophets? As expressed by David the prophet, saying: "*I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old*" (Psalm 78: 2); And by Isaiah, saying: "*The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, 'Read this please', and he says, 'I cannot, for it is sealed'. Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, 'Read this please', and he says, 'I am not literate'" (Isaiah 29: 11, 12). It is a sealed book because it is full of proverbs and riddles.*

Those who speak proverbs say: "*Come to Heshbon, let it be built*". As the first Heshbon fell, struck and burned, it should be rebuilt anew, to build a new Heshbon. How could this be realized? Let me clarify this with an example. If you see a pagan living in disgrace and vain religion, you will say of him without hesitation that he is the city of Heshbon in the kingdom of Sihon, on which reigns the great king with his proud mind. But once this man approaches the new Israel, and becomes a son of the church, and casts from himself every opposition against the words of God, taking the shield of faith (Ephesians 6: 16), In him all the shields of pagan doctrines would be

¹ In Num., hom. 13.

² In Num., hom. 13.

destroyed, and the pride of his mind would be burned by the fire of the truth. By that, it would be said that Heshbon, the city of the king of Sihon is destroyed. Yet it would not be forsaken as a desolate wilderness, having cast from itself the pagan doctrines, but in his heart will be built the good thoughts, the feelings of piety, and the principles of truth; he will be taught the religious rites, and the basics of life, and in him will be set the customs that conform with the law. Then, those who speak in proverbs would truly say one to another: “*Come to Heshbon, let it be built, let the city of Sihon be repaired*”. ... The children of the church, “*Those who speak in proverbs*”, are called as well, because, by the Spirit, they understand the symbols of the law and the riddles. This is what the prophet Jeremiah means in a symbolic talk, when the Lord said to him: “*Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant*” (Jeremiah 1: 9, 10). What does he root out, and what does he destroy? The city of Heshbon that was reigned by king Sihon; the thoughts of disbelief and defilements! And what does he build instead? And what does he plant? The thoughts of Piety and chastity. It has to be no more a city of the Amorites, but become that of the children of Israel (the spiritual)¹].

6- THE CONQUEST OVER OG, KING OF BASHAN:

The scholar Origen comments on this, saying: [Having prevailed against the cities of the Amorites, “*They turned and went up by the way of Bashan*”. But they did not go into it, nor sent messengers, nor sought to be allowed to pass through its land; but they, right away, went into war against ‘Og’, whom they defeated, together with his sons. What is ‘Bashan’? It means (disgrace). He did not send messengers to those people, nor sought permission to pass through their land; as we should have no passage or a way that brings us over to (disgrace); But we should attack it, and always be aware of it. On another aspect, ‘Og’ , king of Bashan, his name meaning (an obstacle) or (diversion); represents the physical interests whose love stands on the way of the soul, and keeps her away from God. That is why, we should declare a war against ‘Og’, namely, against the love of temporal things²].

He also says: [Concerning the kingdom of Heshbon, or the kingdom of Moab, he did not write “*there was no survivor left*” (35); as we probably would need of some of them, for the sake of our struggle or our training; Otherwise “*we would need to go out of the world*” (1 Corinthians 5: 10). As to Bashan, namely the (disgrace), as we are in no need for anything of it; nothing of it should be left living, but all the works of disgrace should be destroyed; as disgrace is not good for any one³].

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

THE THIRD DIVISION

**THE EPISODE
OF
BALAAM**

(Chapter 22 to Chapter 25)

CHAPTER 22

THE STORY OF BALAAM

Having been about to enter into the promised land, Satan found out a new way to fight against the people of God; not through leaders and armies, but through the prophet Balaam; not by seen weapons, but by seeking a curse to dwell on them, so that they would not succeed on their way. That was the last arrow aimed by Satan against them before crossing over the Jordan. The divine inspiration cared to tell this episode with much detail; although it still remains a riddle in the sight of many.

- 1- The person of Balaam the son of Beor 1 - 7
- 2- Balak's first invitation to Balaam 5 - 8
- 3- God comes to Balaam 9 - 14
- 4- Balak tries again to invite Balaam 15 - 21
- 5- Balaam on his way 22 - 35
- 6- The reception of Balaam in Moab 36 - 41

1- THE PERSON OF BALAAM THE SON OF PEOR:

Seeing the danger surrounding him, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, instead of preparing for war, he resorted to send messengers to Balaam to curse the people of Israel for him, perhaps he may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land.

Who was this Balaam? Who were his people? Was he a true prophet or a diviner? Who was speaking to him: Was it God, or a heathen god?

A- As to his race,

It is obvious that he did not belong to the people of God; as he has been dwelling in the region, with a long history of supernatural works, well known to the king who said to him: *"For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed"* (6). And in his talk about the people he wanted him to curse, saying: *"Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth"* (11), it is obvious that Balaam had nothing to do with them.

And when Balaam said to the king: *"Now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days"* (Numbers 24: 14), he is talking about three peoples: the people of Balaam, the people of the king, and the people who are going to deal with the king's people. ... Now, what does Balaam mean by saying "my people"? Balaam most probably belonged to some nations around, like the Midianites, who were nomads wandering in the desert, and on good terms with the Moabites at that time; hence the king of Moab sought the help of their elders; Or Balaam meant by saying "my people", some local congregation among whom he lived in submission and loyalty, because of his exalted reputation and possibilities.

B- Was Balaam a true prophet or a diviner?

Some believe that he was a true prophet, based on the fact that he had some dealings with God, was consulting Him before any of his actions; and on certain expressions by the Holy Book, like: *"God came to Balaam"* (9); *"God said to Balaam"* (12); *"The Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord"* (31); *"Then the Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth"* (23: 16); ... Besides, Balaam uttered five of the most marvelous divine prophecies (Chapters 23, 24).

To those adopting this view, it is not something out of the ordinary for someone of the Gentiles to worship God; like, in the apostolic era, Cornelius who worshipped God with righteousness (Acts 10: 35); As God's grace is not confined to a certain nation; but works in the soul that seeks the Lord with a heart full of faithfulness.

They base their view of the authenticity of his prophecy, on that, if he was a magician or a diviner, Why did God persistently care that he should not curse His people?!; As what comes out of the devil's mouth and his followers', against the children of God, are of no weight nor value. ... As to the fact that Balaam has eventually erred and repeated his error; then ended his life with a major crime, he committed against the God and His children; They believe that the word 'prophet' does not imply a lifelong job; but he could be granted the Spirit of prophecy for a temporary period, to realize a certain divine plan and a heavenly purpose, then be taken away from him. Besides, the prophets, themselves, happened to have their own shortcomings, not only in their personal life, but even in their ministry, like what happened with the prophet Nathan was told by the prophet David of his intention to build a house for the Lord, and he responded on his own accord, saying to him: "*Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you*" (1 Samuel 7: 1-3); But he hastened to correct the situation on the next day, when the Lord proclaimed to him that it is not David, but his son who will build the Lord's house (1 Samuel 7: 4-16).

The early church with her fathers saw in Balaam a magician and a diviner, used by God to realize a divine mission and purpose; As it is not something strange that "*Out of the eater came something to eat; and out of the strong came something sweet*" (Judges 14: 14). In the following is a summary of how the fathers looked at the person of Balaam, and the events that happened around him:

a- **St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa** believes that Balaam was a magician with a satanic power, invited by the king to curse the people; But God intended to show the inability of Satan to harm His children; As even if Satan intends to curse, he is committed to bless; and if he intends to revile, he will find in them no foundation to be reviled. As it happened when the demons were committed to testify to the Lord Christ, that He is the Holy One of God; to utter the truth despite their nature, full of lies. Although God did not want their testimony to Him, yet he allowed it to proclaim the prevalence of the holy life, even over the slanders of the demons.

The saint says: [The king invited the magician to join forces with him against those he wanted to defeat. History tells that Balaam was a diviner who drew his harmful power from the devil to fight the enemies. The king asked him to curse those who live with God; yet the curse turned into a blessing. ... We understand from the past events we came to know from the holy Scripture (about the magicians of Egypt during the ten plagues), that magic has no activity against those who live in virtue; but, on the contrary, those who resort to the divine help will overcome every charge against them. In the history of the gospel, the congregation of demons (the legion) were ready to oppose the authority of the Lord; but once He approached them. He who has the authority on everything, the (legion) confessed His exalted authority, and did not hide the truth that, by His deity, He will punish the sinners in due time. They cried out saying: "*We know who you are – the Holy One of God*"; and, "*Let us alone! Did you come to destroy us?*" (Mark 1:24). That happened before when the satanic power informed Balaam the diviner that the people of God are unconquerable. Any curse against those who live in virtue will turn into a blessing; As, How could he be reviled as greedy, he who owns nothing? Or how could someone be accused of licentiousness, he who lives in seclusion away from everyone? And how could one be accused of extravagance, he who is known to be living in moderation? ... In short, how could someone be blamed for things, he practices what are contrary to them? ... He who walks in virtue leads a blameless life; that, according to the apostle, "*that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of him*)" (Titus 2: 8)... Then, he who is called to curse him would say: "*How shall I curse, whom God*

has not cursed?” Namely, how can I revile him, who left no chance to be reviled?! No evil shall penetrate into his life, because his sight is always on God¹!

God allowed that episode concerning Balaam to happen just before the entrance of the people into the Promised Land, to proclaim that he, who is taking refuge in God ... who is justified by the blood of Christ... Who is enflamed by the Holy Spirit of God, ... being exalted toward the heavenly Jerusalem; Not even the demons could curse him, nor revile him; But in him, the divine light will shine, and to him all will testify. It is probably because of this, that the apostle Paul instructs, in choosing a bishop, that testimonies for the one recommended, should come from inside, as well as from outside.

It is befitting of us not to defend ourselves even against the devil himself; but we should let, instead, our holy life in Jesus Christ testify to us and support us.

b- The Holy book says: *“So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner’s fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam”* (7). They carried with them the wages of the magic and divination, something that Balaam did not reject, but he gave hospitality to the men to bring back word to them (8)².

And in another location we find Balaam requests from Balak to build seven altars for him on the high places of Baal (Numbers 22: 41; 23: 1), to offer sacrifices to Baal; and after offering the sacrifices, he went to a desolate height, perhaps the Lord will come to meet him and speak to him.

In his second prophecy, Balaam says: *“There is no sorcery against Jacob, nor there is any divination against Israel”* (23: 23); As though his possibilities in divination has completely ceased to work.

According to **the scholar Origen**, Balaam was a magician, and intended to practice his divination by magic. But God intervened, not because of his worthiness, but as a proclamation of his care for His people; saying: [Usually, demons would come to Balaam, once he receives the fee of divination; but this time, he saw that the demons escaped, and God came. That is why he said that he is going to ask God, because he sees no more the demons who used to obey him. God came by Himself to encounter Balaam, not because of his worthiness for such an exalted visit, but to drive away the spirits that used to come to him to bring the curse and harm by magic; and to confirm that He is watching over his people].

c- God used to deal with men according to their circumstances, and to speak to them in the language they understand. We hear how, in the temple of Apollo, the priest of the idol proclaimed that the idol he worships declared his helplessness before the incarnate God; something that created an opening for the heathens to receive faith. ... As to Balaam, **the scholar Origen** says that he was so famous that he had many disciples who kept his prophecies in the land of the East, long after his death, from which the Magis came to know about the Lord Christ. Through his prophecy saying, *“A star shall come out of Jacob; A scepter shall rise out of Israel”* (Numbers 24: 17), when they saw the star, they knew that the prophecy has been realized, and became better than the Jewish people, who did not listen to the prophecies within their hands. From the documents left to them by Balaam, those Magis, realizing that the time has come, they hastened to go searching for Him, showing the greatness of their faith by worshipping that infant King³].

¹ *Life of Moses* 2: 292,294-6.

² *In Num., hom. 13.*

³ *Ibid.*

d- **Who was speaking to him; Was it the true God, or was it a heathen god?! I shall leave the answer to this question to the third item dealing with “God comes to Balaam”.**

2- BALAK’S FIRST INVITATION TO BALAAM :

Seeing what happened to the Amorites, Balak, king of Moab was terrified from the people of Israel, and said to the elders of Midian: **“Now this company will lick up all that is around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field” (4).** According to **the scholar Origen:** [Balak used this analogy because, like the ox which uses its tongue as a sickle to cut the grass, that people fight with the mouth and the lips, using weapons of words (worship) and prayers. Knowing this, Balak sent messengers to Balaam to confront the words with words, and the prayers with prayers¹].

Realizing that the secret of strength of this people is not in their material weapons, but in the presence of the Lord in their midst; Instead of preparing an army to fight them, he sent messengers and presented many gifts and promises to persuade Balaam to come and curse them, in order to take away from them the blessing, the secret of their strength. **The scholar Origen** says: [War is threatening you, O king Balak; and 600,000 men are on their way to take over your land, You have to gather your forces and prepare yourself for war while they are still far away ... Yet the king disregarded the imminent danger and put all his hope in the words and curses that Balaam is going to aim like arrows toward the enemy ... What a strange attitude from a king, to resort to divination to defend his country against a mighty enemy²!].

He sent to him a message, saying: **“Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me! Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed” (5, 6).**

According to **the scholar Origen:** [Balaam was famed for his incomparable and harmful magic which bears no blessing, but curses; As wherever demons are called, they would curse and would never bless. As several armies were defeated by the curses of Balaam, the king, through his long experience, was hoping for such a solution that he knows he could not achieve through war and weapons.

I believe that king Balak was aware of the fact that the children of Israel’s conquest over their enemies was not by material weapons, but by prayers, and supplications rather than by iron. ... They did not use weapons against the Pharaoh of Egypt; having been told: **“The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace”** (Exodus 14: 14). And in the battle against Amalek, the weapons could not match the activity of Moses’ prayers: **“When Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed”** (Exodus 17: 11). There is little doubt that Balak heard that it was written: **“The people will hear and be afraid; Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed, The mighty men of Moab, trembling will take hold of them; All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away”** (Exodus 15: 14, 15). Having heard of Moses’ prophecy in his song after crossing over the Red Sea, the king of Moab knew for sure that those people conquer by prayers, and fight their enemies by the words of the mouth and not by the sword; And accordingly, he ponders within himself: If the material weapons

¹ Origin: in Num., hom. 13.

² Ibid.

are incapable to confront the prayers of those people, I have to find for myself some kinds of prayers and supplications that can¹!].

The king hastened to send messengers to balaam to come and curse the people, saying: **“I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed”** (6). According to **the scholar Origen**: I do not think that the king knew that he whom Balaam bless is blessed; But I assume that he so utters to realize his goal through paying him compliment; as magic does not know how to bless, and demons do not know how to do any good! ... Isaac, Jacob, as well as all saints know how to bless, but not the wicked and evildoers²]

3- GOD COMES TO BALAAM:

Balaam told the messengers to lodge by him that night until he seeks the counsel of the Lord to bring back word to them: **“The Lord came to Balaam, ... and said to him, ‘you shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed’”** (9, 12).

Here, many stand confused: Who came to Balaam, and talked to him the word of truth? Was it truly God, Or God has committed Balaam’s gods to utter the truth, even against their will?!

Before entering into discussions, I wish to make it clear that what was proclaimed to Balaam is the word of truth; whether the speaker was God Himself, directly, or via the spirits with whom Balaam was connected. As God intended to reveal His care for His people, that command came from God, whatever the way was. ... Many fathers believe that the speaker was Balaam’s god, whom God used, and not the true God. Among them are: **the scholar Origen, and the saints: Basil, Ambrose, and Gregory bishop of Nyssa.**

St. Gregory bishop of Nyssa says: [Balaam, being a diviner, the Holy Book said that he got the counsel of God³]. So does **St. Ambrose**, who says on the tongue of God: I know how Balaam tried to do with the help of magic against you; But I committed him to do you no harm⁴. **St. Basil** says that the Holy Book, speaking to men in the common language, calls the idols ‘gods’⁵. While the scholar Origen spoke about this point with some detail, I shall try to summarize as follows:

The scholar Origen⁶ believes that when the name of the Lord or God is written in Hebrew as ‘Jehovah’, It would mean the true God Himself. Otherwise, it would be either of the two probabilities. The apostle Paul says: **“For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many Lords); Yet for us, there is only one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live”** (1 Corinthians 8: 5, 6). That is why the scholar Origen doubts the appearance of God Himself to Balaam, having not mentioned the name ‘Jehovah’. Beside the fact that, in the words: **“You shall not go with them, you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed”** (12), as well as in all the other long talks of God to Balaam, he did not say “My people”.

Anyway, the command came from the true God Himself, to Balaam, not to curse the people of God, whether it came directly from Him, or He committed his gods to utter it; It is the exalted care of God for His people.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *On The Holy Trinity.*

⁴ *Epist. 41: 24.*

⁵ *Epist. 139: 6.*

⁶ *In Num., hom., 14.*

4- BALAK TRIES AGAIN TO INVITE BALAAM:

Having refused to go with the messengers of Balak, the later again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable *“princes of Moab”* (14), to say to him: *“I will certainly honor you greatly; and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me”* (17). To this Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak: *“Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God. to do less or more”* (18). It was a strong and a straightforward answer that rebukes believers; The way the Lord Christ Himself said to rebuke us, that the children of this age are wiser than the children of the kingdom; And the way He rebuked the prophet Jonah through a heathen man, saying to him: *“What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God. Perhaps your God will consider us, that we may not perish”* (Jonah 1: 6).

Despite that strong answer, Balaam’s heart, being inclined toward the earthly reward, instead of sticking to what he told them before, he asked them again to lodge by him another night, perhaps the Lord will speak to him; as though he was hoping that God may change His mind! This time, however, the Lord allowed him to go with them, according to his heart’s desire; which He often does, when we persist on our pervert heart requests. ... According to **the scholar Origen**: [It was not easy for that greedy person to reject the benefit. ... What does he hope to hear more from the Lord? ... The Lord said to him: *“If the men came to you, rise and go with them”* (20). He gave him over to his own desire to get benefit, and in him would be realized what is written: *“I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsel”* (Psalm 81: 12); and at the same time for the divine plan to be consummated ... As the lust of material benefit prevailed on his heart, the word of God was not put in his heart, but in his mouth. ... How amazing and great is the word of God; As it is not possible for certain prophecies to reach the Gentiles within the frame of Israel, God used Balaam in whom the Gentiles trusted, to get to know the hidden secrets of Christ, and hence present to them those precious treasures; yet not through the heart and the Spirit, but more through the mouth and words¹].

5- BALAAM ON HIS WAY:

The Lord talked to Balaam according to the desire of his materially diverted heart; or as the prophet Ezekiel says: *“...who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what is what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols”* (Ezekiel 14: 4). He commanded him to go with the men (the princes of Moab); and having done that, *“God’s anger was aroused because he went, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. Now the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back into the road”* (22-23).

The episode of Balaam and his donkey that spoke rebuking him, is both unique and amazing. The secret why God used that dumb animal to rebuke Balaam, has several meanings:

(1) According to **the scholar Origen**: [*“The Lord opened the mouth of the donkey”*](28), so that it would become his judge; By the voice of a dumb animal, he who thought of himself as a wise god, would be ashamed of himself²].

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

(2) The Lord opened the donkey's mouth to say to Balaam: ***“What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?”***(28).

Balaam did not show any sign of wonder at hearing his donkey talk, but answered her, saying: ***“Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now, I would kill you”*** (29); And then he entered into a conversation with the donkey. Because, as a diviner, he used to talk to birds and dumb animals, the Lord rebuked him in the same way. **St. Gregory bishop of Nyssa** says: [History tells us testimonies about the power of divination by watching the birds and receiving counsels from them,... Having been used to receive the counsel of dumb animals under satanic influence, Balaam could interpret the whinnies of his donkey; Hence the Holy Book says clearly what the donkey uttered; and shows that, by listening to the donkey, Balaam knew for sure that those he was hired to curse, were unconquerable¹].

(3) The episode bore symbolic concepts; The angel who appeared to the donkey, and whom Balaam could not see, refers to the angel of the Lord who went before His people (Exodus 32: 34). The donkey refers to the simple church, that was before a carrier of Balaam, whose name means (a vain people)²; a carrier of every vain thing; before the Lord Christ sent His two disciples to untie it and bring it to him to ride (Mark 11: 2), and to bring it over to the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrew 12: 22); By which the words of the prophet were realized, saying: ***“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey”*** (Zechariah 9: 9).

“When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she pushed herself against the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again” (25). Having been shown the truth, she could not stand Balaam any more, so she pushed him against the wall and crushed his foot, to let him forsake her, to be ridden by the Lord Christ, to reign over His church.

6- THE RECEPTION OF BALAAM IN MOAB:

The king himself came to receive him, and in admonishment he said to him: ***“Did I not earnestly send to you, calling for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?”*** (37).

¹ *Life of Moses* 2: 293.

² *In Num., hom. 13; 14.*

CHAPTER 23

THE PROPHECIES OF BALAAM

This chapter speaks of:

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1- Building seven altars | 1 - 6 |
| 2- Balaam's first prophecy | 7 - 10 |
| 3- Changing the location of the altars | 11 - 15 |
| 4- Balaam's second prophecy | 16 - 24 |
| 5- Changing the location of the altars again | 25 - 30 |

1- BUILDING SEVEN ALTARS:

Balak took Balaam and brought him up to the high places of Baal, where he said to him: *“Build seven altars for me here, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams; ... And Balak and Balaam offered a bull and a ram on each altar”* (Numbers 22: 11, and 23: 1). Balaam then went to a desolate height to hear the words of the Lord; and although he built altars on which he offered sacrifices to the demons, Yet, intending to testify to the truth before the Gentiles, even through a diviner, *“The Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth”* (5).

2- BALAAM'S FIRST PROPHECY:

God used that situation to present to the Gentiles five prophecies on Balaam's mouth, that remained on the records of the Gentiles:

The first prophecy: (22: 7 – 10) speaks of the divine incarnation.

The second prophecy: (22: 16 – 24) speaks of the passions and the resurrection of the Lord.

The third prophecy: (23: 1 – 4) speaks of the day of the Pentecost.

The fourth prophecy: (23: 15- 19) speaks of preaching the Lord Christ.

The fifth prophecy: (23: 21 – 25) speaks of acquiring our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those prophecies thus bore a quick parade of the salvation works of God in the fullness of time; from the incarnation of the only-begotten Son, to His passion, death, and resurrection; to the dwelling of the Holy Spirit on the church; the preaching among the Gentiles; and finally to the ultimate goal of our faith, namely, “acquiring the Lord Christ”

The text of the first prophecy is:

“Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram; from the mountains of the east.

‘Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel!’

How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce whom God has not denounced?

For from the tops of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him.

There! A people dwelling alone; not reckoning itself among the nations.

Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number one-fourth of Israel?

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!” (7 – 10).

Before we enter into the symbolic meanings of these words, I want to clarify that the essence of this prophecy, is that Balaam could not curse nor denounce this people; For, ascending to the *“Top of the rocks”*, the Lord Christ Himself, the *“True Rock”*, to look at the people, he saw them, not like any other people; ... he saw in them the secret body of the Lord Christ, with a new nature according to their Creator, that could never be cursed nor denounced; but justified and sanctified in the blood of the Lord Christ. He saw the dust of Jacob, namely, his earthly things, blessed and sanctified; as the believers are sanctified with their Spirit and body; And even their death – in Jesus Christ – became a blessing that Balaam yearns to enjoy.

He says: **“Balak the king of Moab brought me from Aram, from the mountains of the east”** (7). Aram, in Acadian means (the high land); And in the Septuagint version it was called ‘Mesopotania’, namely, Syria. Several Aramic little nations appeared at the same time the nation of Israel took shape; among them ‘Aram-Naharaim’ (Genesis 24: 10), meaning, (Aram between the two rivers) -- Tigris and Euphrates; or as others believe: ‘Khabor and the Euphrates. Also ‘Feddan Aram and the two cities Nasibin, and Raha, famed as centers of Syrian literature were located in that province.

Meditating in this text, **the scholar Origen** sees that Balak brought Balaam up to the land between the two rivers on the mountains to the east; but not to the holy rivers that draw their water from the River of life, according to the word of the Lord: *“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”* (John 7: 38); to the rivers incessantly praising God by the holy works, according to the Psalmist: *“Let the rivers clap their hands”* (Psalm 98: 8); But brought him up to the rivers of Babylon about which is written: *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion”* (Psalm 137: 1). **The scholar Origen** calls them ‘rivers of (lukewarmness), saying: [Brought us up to Babylon, where the rivers of pleasure flow, and where we plunged in the waves of non-chastity ... there we were captivated¹].

He brought him up to the **mountains** ... which mountains? Not the holy mountains, about which is written: *“His foundation is in the holy mountains”* (Psalm 87: 1); not to *“the mountains surround Jerusalem; ... the Lord surrounds His people”* (Psalm 122: 3; 125: 2); but to the *“dark mountains”* (Jeremiah 13: 16); *“the mountains of corruption”*; and *“every high thing that exalt itself against the knowledge of God”* (2 Corinthians 10: 5); Those were the mountains to where Balaam was taken up².

Being **“of the east”**, they also have their shining light; *“as Satan transforms himself into an angel of light”* (2 Corinthians 11: 14); they have the light about which is said: *“The light of the wicked indeed goes out”* (Job 18: 5) ... which is contrary to that of Him who said: *“I am the light of the world”* (John 8: 12). It is from the east, but contrary to the east about whom Zechariah wrote, saying: *“Here is the man whose name is Branch (the East)”* (Zechariah 6: 12)³.

Balak says: **“Come, curse Jacob for me; and come, denounce Israel”** (7). When Jacob received the blessing from his father Isaac, the enemy was so stirred-up against him that he had to flee; and when he wrestled with the Lord, the enemy got more stirred-up. ... The more the soul encounters with God, and the more man strives for the sake of His kingdom, the more intense the spiritual war will be.

Balaam answers, saying: **“How shall I curse whom God has not cursed; and how shall I denounce whom God has not denounced?”** (8). Balaam’s mouth, *“full of cursing, deceit, and oppression”* (Psalm 10: 7); he was waiting for his wages from the king for destroying the innocent; But God *“who alone does great wonders”* (Psalm 136: 4), and who uses even His enemies to bring peace, put His own words instead in Balaam’s mouth, although his heart could not receive them⁴ ...

Some may probably wonder: Does God curse?!

The scholar Origen answers: [I believe that God does, when someone or something need to be cursed: ... We read how God says to the serpent: *“Cursed are*

¹ In Num., hom. 15.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

you among all animals, and among all wild creatures” (Genesis 3: 14); to Adam He says: *“Cursed is the ground because of you”* (Genesis 3: 17); to Cain He says: *“You are cursed from the ground which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand”* (Genesis 4L 11); And in another location He says: *“Cursed will be anyone who makes an idol or casts an image”* (Deuteronomy 27: 15). In the New Testament as well we see such expressions in the gospels, where we hear the Lord say to those on His left hand: *“Depart from Me you cursed into the everlasting fire”* (Matthew 25: 41); and, *“Woe to you, scribes and the Pharisees, hypocrites”* (Matthew 23: 29); and, *“Woe to you who are rich”* (Luke 6: 24). ... Now, how could that be when the commandment given by the apostle says: *“Bless and do not curse”* (Romans 12: 14)?... There is much difference between God and man. God curses because of worthiness to be cursed; His judgment is always right, whether it is on the nature of sin, or on the intention of sinners. Whereas, because man cannot enter into the depths, nor see the intention of another, if he utters a curse, he is doing it outside his right and authority¹].

“For from the tops of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him. There, a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations” (9). If Balak brought him up to (the dark mountains of corruption), to the deceits of the enemy; But God transferred him to the mountains of God, to “the tops of the mountains” and to “the holy hills”; from where he could see the people of God and realize their secrets; Because the (spiritual) Israel is set on the exalted mountains and the high hills; namely, lives a virtuous and a difficult life, that we are not worthy of looking up at, or comprehending them, unless we climb the heights and tops of knowledge; That is why God did not curse him. But it seems to me, that God does not say that about Israel, according to the flesh, as much about him who walks on the earth, while *“his citizenship is in heaven”* (Philippians 3: 20)².

From such high mountains, Belaam saw the children of God; or the church of God, built on the foundation of the Lord Christ, the true Rock.

If we wish to look at the church of God, the new spiritual Israel, let us climb the mountains of the sacred law, and ascend the hills of the prophecies; through which we shall see the Head of the church Himself, the Lord Christ, and through Him we can see His holy church, being His secret body. Hence he says: *“There, a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations”* (9); dwelling in Jesus Christ, bearing the new nature with which it is designated; not reckoned among the nations by the temporal concept; but seen as the one holy church that lives in the heavenlies. That was what Balaam saw: the incarnation clear through the shadows of the law and the prophecies, and the church clear through the incarnation, yet beyond every comprehension.

“Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number one-fourth of Israel?” (10); Or according to the Septuagint Version: *“Who can fully count the seed of Jacob, and the tribes of Israel?”*. **The scholar Origen** says: [That reminds us of the saying: *“Then God brought Abraham outside and said: ‘Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them’; then He said to him: So shall your descendants be’.* Abraham believed the Lord, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15: 5). While Abraham or any other man, an angel or any principalities, can count, neither the stars, nor the descendants of Abraham; It is said about God that *“He counts the number of stars; He calls them all by name”* (Psalm 147: 4); and *“He gave His commands to all stars”*; ... He, alone, can count the dust of Jacob, and can

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

number one-fourth of Israel. ... He alone can truly know who is the true Jacob, and who is the true Israel. ... It is of no significance to Him, who is a Jew, outwardly, or a circumcision in the flesh, *“but he is a Jew who is one inwardly”* (Romans 2: 29); the circumcision of the heart and not of the flesh. God alone can decide by His exalted wisdom. ... Therefore that count or census would not be possible nor holy, unless it is done by a divine decree. Whereas if anyone, even the great prophet David, tends to do it, without it, his behavior would be counted as against the law, and he would fall under accusation and punishment. (2 Samuel 24) ¹.

“Let me die the death of the righteous, and my end be like his” (10). And, according to the Septuagint Version: *“Let me die together with the righteous”*. It is as though Balaam, having seen the holy church of the New Covenant through the divine incarnation, did not only yearn to have fellowship in her, but to enjoy her life through the enjoyment of dying together with the Lord Christ. ... It is as though he realized through the shadow the words of the apostle Paul: *“As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death, therefore we are buried with Him through baptism into death”* (Romans 6: 3, 4); and *“If we died with Him, We shall also live with Him”* (2 Timothy 2: 11). According to **the scholar Origen**: [Concerning this death, Balaam presents an astonishing prophecy, and through the Word of God, he uttered an amazing prayer; seeking to die to death, for God to live²]. And according to **St. Ambrose**: [By the spirit of prophecy, Balaam, yearning to this, and seeing in it the eternal resurrection of humanity; he had no fear to die, knowing that he would rise again; saying: ‘I wish my soul does not die in sin, nor commit an evil, but die in the soul of the righteous, to receive his righteousness in her; As he who dies in Christ, would be a fellow in His grace inside the font (of baptism)³].

Balaam unfortunately did not realize that yearning, having ended his life with a satanic counsel, he presented to Balak, to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to commit sexual immorality, and consequently to fall under the wrath of God (Chapter 25); and he, instead, died by the edge of the sword (Numbers 31: 8, 16). According to **St. Erinaos**: [Balaam the son of Beor was slain by the sword, for he no more uttered according to the Spirit of God, but set another law, namely, the law of immorality, contrary to God’s law (Revelation 2: 14); Having not continued to proclaim the commandment of God, he was no more counted a prophet, but rather a diviner; and received the just reward of his evil counsel⁴].

Although his supplication was not realized in his own life, yet it was realized in that of his disciples – the Magis – who came from the east, received the Lord Christ as a King, and presented to Him gold, incense, and myrrh; confirming His spiritual kingdom, priesthood, and passion. In his person, Balaam prophesied about the Gentiles who accepted to die together with the Lord Christ.

Finally, it was not an easy thing for Balaam to utter such words, and yearn for death, at a time, when death for the Jews, as it was for the Gentiles, was a sign of God’s wrath, and of uncleanness. But his vision, through the spirit of prophecy, of the death of the Lord Christ, made death a yearning, sought by however wish to be justified by the blood of the Lord.

3- CHANGING THE LOCATION OF THE ALTARS:

Balak, not enduring to hear Balaam utter what he did not expect: to hear him blessing instead of cursing; he admonished him saying: ***“What have you done to me? I took***

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Dial. With Heraclides, 171.*

³ *On Belief in the Resurr. 2: 43.*

⁴ *Fragments no. 45.*

you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed them bountifully” (11). Before Balaam persistence on uttering the words that the Lord put in his mouth, Balak took him to another location from which he might see only the outer part of Israel, and not see them all, to curse them from there. So he brought him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgeh, where he built for him seven altars, and offered an ox and a ram on every one of them.

He took him to another location with the hope that God might probably change His mind; an action to which Balaam consented with no hesitation, hoping for the anticipated wages. The strange thing about choosing the new location was that from it he could only see the outer part of Israel, and not all of them. But that could be interpreted that Balak probably thought that Balaam, terrified to see the huge number of the multitude of the people of God, consequently refrained from cursing them, for fear of their retaliation in case it happens that they defeat Balak. He intended for Balaam to act like an ostrich that hides her head in the sand when it sees danger, instead of confronting it or fleeing away.

The field of ‘Zophim’, meaning in Hebrew (field of the onlookers), at the top of ‘Pisgeh’, meaning (a division or a province); the later a part of a series of the mountains of Abarim, at the north-eastern part of the Dead Sea. Having the sea below it, it look down on the wilderness, and at the same time on a great part of the land of Canaan, west of the River Jordan. From there, Moses could see the promised land (Deuteronomy 3: 7; 34: 1-4). Nowadays it is most probably the ‘head of Siagah’.

From that same location where Balaam could look at the wilderness to see only the outer part of the congregation of Israel, and not all of them, to curse them; The prophet Moses looked at the promised land, and his heart opened up to heaven, yearning to cross over to it! ... By the wicked eye, man look at the earthlies, to have his heart get filled with evil, and covets to curse others; While by the simple eye, the believer looks at the heavenlies, to have his heart opened to blessing and peace ... How much we are in need, not to change the locations and circumstances in which we live; but to change and to sanctify the way we look; Instead of concentrating on the world and the temporal things, we rise up toward God and the heavenlies.

4- BALAAM’S SECOND PROPHECY:

If his first prophecy concentrated on the divine incarnation, from which he looked at the new Israel, namely, the church of the New Covenant, that carried a new nature, to become, not a just a nation among the nations, but having His nature and also His blessing; that no man can count except God alone! Now he concentrates on the work of redemption: from the Lord’s passion, to His crucifixion, and His resurrection; saying:

“Rise up, Balak, and hear! Listen to me, son of Zippor!

God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent.

Has He said, and will He not do it, Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it.

He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel.

The Lord his God is with him, And the shout of a king is among them.

God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox.

For there is no sorcery against Jacob, Nor there is any divination against Israel.

It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, Oh, what God has done!

Look, a people rises like a lioness, and lifts itself like a lion.

It shall not lie down until it devours a prey, and drinks the blood of the slain” (18 – 24).

Although this people has been always murmuring, and fallen under very harsh and bitter chastisements during their journey in the wilderness; Yet through the cross and the resurrection, God did not see in His people neither iniquity nor labor, but finds in them the righteousness of Christ, the secret of His comfort, and the place of His pleasure. He brought them out of the land of bondage, to comfort, and granted them the conquest over the hosts of darkness (sorcery and divination); And set them as a holy bride; A wife of the Lion who comes from the tribe of Judah; a lioness that gives birth to strong cubs, ... etc.

Balaam started his second prophecy, concerning the salvation works of the Lord Christ, by saying: *“Rise up, Balak”*; although Balak was standing together with the princes of Moab, by his burnt offering (17). If the word ‘Balak’ means (the destroyer), the call here is directed to the congregation of the Gentiles, that lived long worshipping the idols, to become with all its energies in a state of fall and collapse, and even became a destroyer of the soul and the heart; Hence the call to her to rise up together with the Lord Christ, risen from the dead, and to become no more a destroyer, but to bear the nature of life risen in her.

This is the same call, heard by Saul of Tarsus, who was destroying the church of God: *“Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do”* (Acts 9: 6). The Lord called on man while cast on the ground with a broken soul, to enjoy the resurrection together with Him, to enter into the new city, where he will know how to walk in the Lord. The apostle so enjoyed the power of resurrection, that his preaching words were around the experience of the resurrection; saying: *“Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light”* (Ephesians 5: 14).

“Listen to me, son of Zippor”. If the word ‘Zippor’ means (a sparrow), Balak was like a fallen sparrow, priceless in the sight of men, yet not forgotten before God (Luke 12: 6).

“God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it?! Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?!” (19).

The Lord promised to bless His people; and He is committed to make His promise good. Blessing of His people costs Him much; As He is committed to carry the curse under which they have fallen, bearing the disgrace of the cross on their behalf; Then to rise up and make them rise up together with Him to the blessed new life; to bring them over into the power of His resurrection; that no more iniquity will appear in them, nor labor will be found in them; They will enjoy His righteousness instead of their iniquity, and His comfort instead of their labor.

“The Lord his God is with him; and the shout of a king is among them” (21). He dwelt among His people, and reigned in them with His cross; proclaiming their perfect liberty in, and by Him; Hence He says: ***“God brings them out of Egypt”*** (22). This is the liberty, He granted them a true Passover through bringing them over from the land of bondage to the glorious liberty of the children of God.

That divine crossing-over in the believers’ life happens with swiftness and an exalted power: *“He has the strength like a wild ox”*; a kind of a ‘Jeshurun’ (see Deuteronomy 32: 15), now extinct, that had an exalted swiftness and great power (Numbers 24: 8); Nobody could ever bend his neck under yoke, nor force it to serve man in agricultural labor (Job 39: 9-12). ... This wild ox refers to the Lord Christ risen from the dead, having a horn, the sign of a king (Daniel 8: 22); *“His horns are like the horns of the wild ox. Together with them he shall push the peoples to the end of the earth”* (Deuteronomy 33: 17). The Lord risen from the dead, will reign spiritually over the peoples; and *“of his kingdom there will be no end”* (Luke 1: 33).

And He will destroy all the power of Satan under their feet ***“There is no sorcery against Jacob, nor is there any divination against Israel” (23).***

At the same time God forbids His people to use divination, to reveal the unknown future by means of sorcery, using certain kinds of animals and birds, which are considered by the Book as unclean, not for themselves, but for man’s abuse of them; He gives comfort to His children, that, as long as they are kept in His hand, nobody can use sorcery to harm them.

Having reigned over His people, Satan with all his sorcery cannot prevail on them; The church, like a lioness, would enjoy the resurrection of her Groom, and rise together with Him up to His heavens ... ***“Look, a people rises like a lioness, and lifts itself up like a lion” (24).*** .. This is the portrait of the living church and her strong children, as cubs bearing the strength of their Christ, the victorious Lion.

The scholar Origen says: [The lion and the cub fear no other animal, but all animals submit to them. The same way, the perfect Christian, *“taking up his cross and following Christ”* (Matthew 16: 24), can say: *“The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”* (Galatians 6: 14); can tread over everything under his feet, and conquer everything. He can truly despise everything in the world, following the lead of His Lord, the Lion coming out of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5: 5) ¹].

Balaam ends his second prophecy by saying: ***“It shall not lie down until it devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain” (24).*** This people who became like a bride to the Lion, shall not lie down until it devours a prey; namely, until it takes by force the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 11: 12). It strives all the days of its sojourn until the last breath for the sake of the enjoyment of the kingdom.. As to saying: *“drinks the blood of the slain”*, this cannot bear a literal meaning, the way it is said: *“You drank wine, the blood of the grapes”* (Deuteronomy 32: 14); referring to the enjoyment of the blood of the Lord Christ, slain for our salvation.

If the Lord Christ, on His cross, has devoured Satan as a prey, and destroyed his evil hosts; By uniting with Him, we, likewise, would bear the spirit of conquest over Satan, and all his adversary spirits.

Finally, we notice that, in his first prophecy, Balaam proclaimed the secret of the blessing of this people, that they dwell on the tops of the mighty mountains, that the arrows of the satanic curses would not reach them. They are a unique kind of people (spiritually), who grow and increase spiritually. Whereas in this second prophecy, he confirms the futility to curse it; that he utterly despaired of trying; First of all because God’s promises are steadfast and never change; And secondly, because the people are presently blameless; strong for its past works (exodus from Egypt), and for its present works (rises like a lioness, and lifts itself up like a lion); Consequently, there is no more hope for Balaam.

¹ In Num., hom. 16.

5- CHANGING THE LOCATION OF THE ALTARS AGAIN:

There is nothing left for Balak except to ask Balaam to change the location of the altars again, perhaps it will please God that he may curse them from there. And as **the scholar Origen** says: [The miserable king assumed that the locations were unsuitable for Balaam to practice his sorcery; and did not realize that the situation is utterly beyond that¹].

He took Balaam to the top of 'Peor', meaning, (the top of fornication and pleasures); intending to withdraw his attention from God to those iniquities. It is amazing that this location as the Book indicates "*overlooks the wasteland*" (28); As wherever the temporal pleasures are, there will be the spiritual dryness and the sojourning away from God.

¹ In *Num.*, hom. 17.

CHAPTER 24

THE PROPHECIES OF BALLAM (cont.)

This chapter includes:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| 1- Balaam' third prophecy | 1 – 14 |
| 2- Balaam's fourth prophecy | 15 – 19 |
| 3- Balaam's fifth prophecy | 20 – 25 |

1- BALAAM'S THIRD PROPHECY:

Having brought Balaam up to the 'top of Peor', namely, to (the top of fornications and pleasures), to isolate him from God, and make him utter his own curses, instead of uttering the blessings of the Lord; Balaam, on the contrary, realizing that he could not act on his own, he prophesied for the third time, and under circumstances different from the two previous prophecies, which are:

- a- He did not seek to use sorcery as he used to (1)
- b- He did not withdraw to a desolate place, but headed directly to where the people were encamped (2)
- c- The Spirit of God came upon him, and his eyes were opened to see the situation more clearly (3, 4).

a- Not seeking to use sorcery: He stopped using sorcery; not out of love for God, and faith in Him, but most probably because he realized that his demons are no more incapable of supporting him to utter his curses. "*Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel*" (1). According to **the scholar Origen**: [We may wonder how did Balaam know that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel?! He must have noticed that when he burned his sacrifices, not a single demon nor an adversary force, that used to help him in his evil work, dared to appear beside his burnt offerings¹]. The testimony of the Book, probably proclaims God's longing to bless the new Israel, namely, the church; Or as some believe it to be a prophecy about the return of the Jews from their denial and disbelief in the Lord Christ, at the end of times, to enjoy the spiritual blessing instead of the fanatic Zionism.

b- His withdrawal to see the camp of the holy congregation: Having prophesied before about the incarnation (the first prophecy); then about the events of crucifixion and resurrection (the second prophecy); His eyes, were opened to see the church united to Christ, enjoying the blessing of salvation; and he set forth directly to behold it.

c- The Spirit of God coming upon him: As the following prophecy concerned the day of the Pentecost, the day of the birth of the church, enjoying the salvation by Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit; that is why: "*the Spirit of God came upon him*". But, unfortunately, as the Spirit revealed to him the secrets of God's dealings with humanity, it was only his eyes that were opened, and not his heart; and instead of repenting, he grew more proud and haughty, presented knowledge without humility, and his heart got filled with dryness because of his love for silver.

As to the topic of this prophecy, it includes two things: the people he sees by his physical eyes, as a holy nucleus; And the people he sees by the eyes of prophecy, being the church of the New Covenant, set by the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost, as the body of Jesus Christ.

By his physical eyes, he sees: a people full of beauty "How lovely are your tents Jacob"; ... always fruitful "like valleys that stretch out, like gardens by the

¹ In Unm., hom. 17.

riverside”; ... carrying honor “His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted”; ... full of the power of the past “God brings him from Egypt”; ... in the present “He has strength like a wild ox”; ... in the near future “He shall consume the nations”; ... and finally about his influence on those around, and God’s care for him. This prophecy has actually been realized as the people started to set forth; But has been taken away from them through their denial of the Savior Messiah; And became an inheritance for the new Israel, the church that came from the Gentiles. The following is a simple explanation of this prophecy:

“The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened, the utterance of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, with eyes opened wide” (3-4).

According to **the scholar Origen**: [It is amazing how Balaam would be commended like that ... How would he be with open eyes, he who delivered himself to divination and sorcery?! ... How would he be worthy of such great commendation, to be described as “The spirit of God came upon him”; and “The Lord put a word in his mouth”; something not said even about Moses or any other prophet?! How would he be raised to such an exalted level¹?!].

The words of Balaam describing himself, as “the man whose eyes are opened”, refer to the state of the believer in the church of the New Covenant, before whom the depths of the law are revealed, the truth replaced the shadow, and the prophecies are realized. He now “hears the words of God”, not through letters, but recorded by love on the cross, in the only-begotten Son; and “sees the visions of the Almighty”, not through dreams like Daniel, or symbolic proclamations, but as the apostle says: “We all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3: 18).

By sin, man became open-eyed, as he recognized evil and practiced it; And by our Lord Jesus Christ, he became open-eyed, to recognize the heavenly divine things, and to live it in his daily life. According to **the scholar Origen**: [“The serpent said to Eve: ... For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened” (Genesis 3: 5); So she ate, and, according to the Book: “the eyes of both were opened” (Genesis 3: 7). Yet, there are two kinds of eyes: Eyes that became open by sin; and the eyes of Adam and Eve before they ate the forbidden fruit². The Lord Christ came to open the inner spiritual insight, that was blind; and to make blind the eyes that recognize evil and covet it. That is why He says: “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see would see, and that those who see may be made blind” (John 9: 39). How much we are in need for God to open our eyes to the heavenlies, and to close them to evil!!

Having become open-eyed, Balaam says: **“How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel!” (5)**; And in the Septuagint Version it came as: “How lovely are your dwellings. O Jacob! Your tents, O Israel!”. If the dwelling refers to life of settlement, the tent refers to one of continuous movement. The church, being the secret body of the Lord Christ, is in a state of settlement in the bosom of the Father; and at the same time is continuously moving and growing, setting forth, by the Holy Spirit, from glory to glory; to bring her members over to reach the full measure of the stature of Christ. By the dwellings, he intends to proclaim our entrance into the union with God in His Son Jesus Christ by His Holy Spirit; and our recognition of the

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

secrets of the knowledge of the Holy Trinity, as an experience we live and practice. And by the tents, he intends to confirm that through the state of continuous growth in knowledge, we set forth from an experience to another, and enter into one knowledge after another ... through which “*we reach forward to those things which are ahead*” (Philippians 3: 13); Like nomads, we do not cease to seek more edifying spiritual knowledge, until we come to see Him face to face.

“*Like valleys that stretch out, like gardens by the riverside, like aloes planted by the Lord, like cedars beside the waters; He shall pour waters from his buckets; and his seeds shall be in many waters. His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted*” (6, 7).

What a live portrait of what did happen on the day of the Pentecost; the birthday of the church of Christ, sanctified by the Holy Spirit! He granted her to be well-established as holy ‘dwellings’, and gave her the vitality of continuous growth as ‘tents’ always on the move. Now, Balaam sees her as valleys stretching out without limits, and as gardens always fruitful. In the Septuagint Version it came as: “As shadowed gardens (little forests), by the riverside, as tents set by the Lord, as cedars beside the waters; a Man shall come from his seeds, who will have authority on many nations; His kingdom shall be higher than Gog, and more exalted”.

Here he refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, who makes her like shadowed forests, home for beasts and birds, ... like gardens by the riverside that bring pleasure to man’s heart, and brings back to him the memory of his lost peace, ... like tents set by the Lord, sanctified to move toward her Maker to get comfort in Him,... like cedars high and mighty, ... and like a Man whose authority could not be challenged by Satan and his hosts.

Commenting on this text, **the scholar Origen** says: [Those who become weary on their way, would walk through the shadowed trees, referring to the congregation of the righteous, and the saintly prophets; to have their spirits enjoy the coolness under the shadows of their writings, and through walking according to their teachings. ... In gardens by riverside, bearing the portrait of paradise, where there is the tree of life beside the rivers; namely, the evangelic and apostolic writings. ... Our Savior is “*the River who shall make glad the city of God*” (Psalm 46: 4). ... By the Holy Spirit we shall have, not only a river, but “*a fountain of water springing up in our bellies*” (John 4: 13). ... And the Father says: “*They have forsaken me, the Fountain of living water*”; the source of all those rivers where the children of Israel set up their tents¹].

How beautiful is the church, and how great! God Himself set up her tents by the holy rivers, to drink from the springs of knowledge of the Holy Trinity; to rejoice in the Father “the Fountain of the living water”; in the Son “the River of life”; and in the Holy Spirit, who flows springs of living waters into the soul!

What does setting the tent by the riverside mean, but planting the believers in the holy waters of baptism, where man takes off the old man with every spoiled spot of sin, and becomes clothed with the new man according to the image of His Creator. In the font of baptism he is planted as a member in the body of Christ, becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, and enjoys the right to dwell in the bosom of the Father, being a son of His.

By that, the church turns into shadowed forests where every man’s soul would take refuge, and has comfort under their shadows, from the strokes of the burning suns; and would come to be like gardens by riverside, to call her Groom, saying: “*Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its pleasant fruits*” (Songs 4: 16); and her

¹ *Ibid.*

Groom would joyfully respond, saying: *“I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!”* (Songs 5: 1).

It becomes like cedars beside the waters; And according to **the scholar Origen**: [The cedars here do not bear the evil pride; but, being “the cedars of God”, they would support the branches of the vine, that is brought out of Egypt (Psalm 80: 8), so that her fruit would become ripe, and her shadow would cover the mountains¹].

Having seen by the prophetic eye, the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, and His role in her preaching mission, he says: **“From His seed comes a Man who reigns over many nations”**; The Lord Christ shall come incarnate from the house of Israel, to reign spiritually over many nations through the work of the Holy Spirit in His church. According to **the scholar Origen**: [It is Christ who came from the seed of Israel, according to the flesh. ... As how He reigns over the nations? That needs no explanation, if we read what the Father says to His Son: *“Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession”* (Psalm 2: 8). ... Now, what does *“His king shall be higher than Agag?”* Agag or Gog means (on the top); So let us not take it as indicating a certain people, but to mean that his kingdom will exalt and grow over the high tops. Exalting over the high tops concerns the perfect, and the growth concerns all believers. For the perfect, the kingdom of Christ exalts over the high tops ... That is most probably why the Savior says: *“Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house”* (Matthew 24: 17); warning those who have reached the higher levels of perfection, not to go down from them to the lower levels and lowly places in this world ... As to the growth of his kingdom, It means the increase of churches and the number of believers; as his kingdom will exalt *“till He has put all enemies under His feet; The last enemy that will be destroyed is death”* (1 Corinthians 15: 25)².

The church will therefore grow in two directions: Vertically, through growth of every believer toward perfection to exalt over the tops and to reach the heavenlies; and horizontally, through the extension of the church to draw a multitude to the knowledge of God; namely, through the preaching in the world.

The signs of this preaching is that **“God brought him out of Egypt”**; as though its goal is for the soul to set forth from the land of bondage toward the promised land, the way the old people did. While some believe this phrase to refer to the fleeing of the Lord Christ to the Land of Egypt, to be called back from it, to bring the Gentiles over to the way of faith. And according to **the scholar Origen**: [The Father brought Him from Egypt, then made Him come to Him, to open the way before those from (Egypt) of this world, to ascend toward God³].

He goes on to say: **“He has strength like a wild ox”**; which we saw in our interpretation of the same phrase in the last chapter, that it refers to strong preaching of the lord Christ to reign spiritually to the end of the earth (Deuteronomy 33: 17).

“He shall consume the nations, his enemies; he shall break their bones, and pierce them with his arrows” (8). Through this preaching, the Holy Spirit will consume the evil thoughts in man, that were like the nations opponent to the soul; will break their bones, namely, the body lusts; and will destroy the arrows of evil

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

temptations. By all that, the Holy Spirit will transfer man -- soul and body -- to the holy life, granting him the spirit of conquest and victory.

The topic of preaching is: ***“He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lioness, who will rouse him up? Blessed is he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you”*** (9). Here he talks to both the Groom and the bride, as they are united. The Groom bowed like a Lion on the cross, and with Him his bride laid down; Who will rouse them?! The Lord will rise up by His own authority; having said: *“I have the authority to lay it down, and the authority to take it”*; granting His bride the power of resurrection. By this, the church, working with the possibilities of her Groom, he who blesses her will be blessed by her Groom; and he who curses her will bear the wrath of her Groom.

“Balak’s anger was aroused against Balaam, and struck his hands together” (10), a sign of great frustration and confusion. Not knowing what to do, he could only say: *“Flee to your place; ... The Lord has kept you back from honor!”* (11). Knowing that there is no solution for the situation, Balaam decided to get back to his people; Yet before setting off, he uttered two other prophecies (the fourth and the fifth), without waiting for Balak to ask.

2- BALLAM’S FOURTH PROPHECY:

We said that the first prophecy concentrated more on seeing the new Israel through the incarnation; The second through the crucifixion, and the resurrection; And the third through the Holy Spirit; ... Now he concentrates more on the preaching role of the church; without separating these salvation works from one another. He started his fourth prophecy with the same words he used in the other prophecies; but he adds here an amazing phrase, no other prophet would dare to utter; describing himself as he: *“who knows the knowledge of the Most High”* (16).

Why did he utter such words?! ... Is it because what he saw surpasses every human comprehension, that he did not expect to hear; So he thought of himself as though knew the knowledge of the Most High?! ... Or is it because he came to know the secrets of the only-begotten Son who said: *“... No one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal to him”* (Matthew 11: 27); As though he intends to proclaim that the incarnate and the slain Son revealed to him the secrets of the Father?! ... Or is it because, through prophecy, he has entered into the day of the Pentecost, encountered the Holy Spirit who *“searches all things, yes, the deep things of God”* (1 Colossians 2: 10)?! ... Or is it because, as a human who enjoyed those gifts, and realized those secrets, he intends to distinguish between his past knowledge and his present knowledge; he previously used to use the arts of divination and sorcery, and to depend on the demons, in pretence to know the future; Whereas his present prophecies are the gifts of God, the true knowledge of God, and not those of the deceiving demons. ... Some though, believe that Balaam, as a man, who is not pure-hearted; having enjoyed such gifts of God, he got overcome by pride and self-esteem, instead of humility and the contrition of heart.

He says: ***“I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A star shall come out of Jacob; A scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brows of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult. And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also his enemies, shall be a possession,. While Israel does valiantly. Out of Jacob, One shall have dominion, and destroys the remains of the city”*** (17-19).

According to the Septuagint Version, he says: I shall refer to Him, but not now; I shall bless Him, but he is still not close”. Through the spirit of prophecy, he saw Him, but from far away; as there are still more than 1500 years before He incarnates; he refers to Him from afar until the fullness of time comes (Galatians 4:

4), and approaches the Gentiles. Having understood those words, the ‘Magi’ – his future disciples -- came to bless the Lord, offering their hearts and life together with their gold, incense, and myrrh. Balaam says “I shall bless Him”, but he is still not close; But the time will come when the Lord comes close, and the tongues of the Gentiles will open by the words of praise and of blessings.

As to saying: “*A star shall come out of Jacob; A scepter shall rise out of Israel*”; It carries a prophecy about the Deity and Humanity of the Lord; He is the (heavenly Star) who came incarnate, to reign (scepter) on the hearts of men. And as we said before, this prophecy has been recorded in the books of the east, and through them, the ‘Magi’ recognized the newborn King, when the star appeared to them in the east.

Appearing as a brilliant Star in the hearts of the Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel, “*He shall batter the brows (the borderlands or foreheads) of Moab*”; namely, He shall crush the works and the deceptions of Satan; both the right-hand works (the self-righteousness), and the left-hand works (the iniquities and defilements). Preaching the gospel shall liberate Moab; or according to **the scholar Origen**: [This newborn out of Israel shall crush them, when “*He disarms principalities and powers, and makes a public spectacle of them on the cross*” (Colossians 2: 15); saving the Moabites and leading them to the knowledge of the Lord¹].

“*And destroys the sons of tumult*”; and according to the Septuagint version: “destroy the sons of Sheth”. According to **the scholar Origen**: [After Abel was killed, Eve begat ‘Sheth’, out of whom all mankind came, while the descendants of Cain perished in the great flood.. The descendants of ‘Sheth’, however, having become spoil to the demons; Then, as the Lord came, and the word of preaching the gospel started, He crushed Satan, and captivated those who were under his authority (Ephesians 4: 8). Destroying evil in them, the Lord acquired them as captives of salvation, and brought them over into His heavens. Hence, the scholar Origen says: [I wish I am, as well, a captive of Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3: 1), as the apostle Paul boasts²].

Balaam says: “*Edom shall be a possession, and Seir (Esau) also, his enemies, shall be a possession*” (18). We previously said that Edom and Seir are two names of the same person. If the word ‘Edom’ means ‘a bloody man’, (fond of fighting), and the word “Seir’ means ‘a hairy man’; Edom therefore refers to the human soul, corrupted by sin, to become fond of fighting; And Seir refers to the body covered with hair. By preaching the gospel, God reigns both upon the soul and the body; to take away the old man working in our souls and bodies, and to grant us the new man as an inheritance.

According to **the scholar Origen**, both Edom and Seir refer to man, Edom would refer to the blood (the body), and Seir to the hair. He comments, saying: [Edom is the body that works against the Spirit (Galatians 5: 17); But with the coming of Christ, as the body became submitted to the Spirit through the hope of resurrection, the body, as well, will get the inheritance. And as both the soul and the body were enemies of the Spirit, both of them will have a portion of the inheritance to come³].

As to saying: “*Israel does valiantly*” (18); Having submitted, soul and body, to the work of the Holy Spirit, and having become an inheritance to the Lord, the believer shall become a valiant man of war, whom no devil can oppose. He will no

¹ In Num., hom. 18.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

more fight his own body and feelings; but all of them will take part in fighting the sin; And the body that was a burden upon the soul, will turn into its helper.

That is why Balaam goes on to say: “*Out of Jacob, One shall have dominion, and destroys the survivors of the city*” (19). Who is He who will have dominion, but the Lord Christ who came out of Israel; Who transfigures in the life of the believer with His splendor and glory; And Satan, the survivor, will flee from the city of God (the heart). The Lord Christ will enter into the heart by His cross to crush the devil, who will have no more place in the soul. The new man who bears the features of the Crucified, will have dominion, and the old man will flee together with his works.

3- BALAAM’S FIFTH PROPHECY:

Looking on Amalek, he uttered his fifth and last prophecy; which some consider as an integral part of the fourth one.

He says: “*Amalek was first among the nations, but its end is to perish forever*” (20). The first war fought by Israel in the wilderness was against Amalek; and remained in a continuous war, until Amalek came to their end in the days of Hezekiah (1 Chronicles 4: 43).

If we go back to the book of Genesis, we hear that “*the kings turned back and came to ‘En-Mishpat’ (judgment), which is ‘Kadesh’ (holiness or sanctuary), and subdued all the country of the Amalekites*” (Genesis 14: 7) That is why, on the day of judgment, when evil is separated from righteousness, and the defilement from sanctification, the Amalekites shall be destroyed in Kadesh, namely in the sanctuaries. Namely, where holiness is, there would be no Amalekites (the hosts of evil). According to **the scholar Origen**: [Therefore, those who come around the sanctuaries and are led to holiness and purity, would destroy Amalek, and uproot him, he who snatches the people and make them pervert... In the holiness (Kadesh), or En-Mishpat (judgment); and with a pure heart, they would look at the punishment of the sinners, and the happiness of the righteous; and would wrestle to cast the princes of Amalek down. Whereas those who are not led to Kadesh (holiness), nor to En-Mishpat (the judgment), will not look forward to the day of judgment to come; They would quickly submit to Amalek, who will snatch them, devour them, and divert them away from God¹].

Going back to the book of Genesis (36: 11, 12), we hear of Amalek the son of Eliphaz, the firstborn of Esau by Timnah. That was Amalek the adversary against the children of God, who should be opposed. His father was ‘Eliphaz’, meaning (God scattered me²); and his mother was ‘Timnah’, meaning (the reluctant) ... Amalek is the fruit of the disturbance and the scattering away from God, together with the reluctance to return to Him. Representing a state of sojourn from God, and reluctance to encounter Him. He is considered the first enemy of the people of God, and the first adversary to God and His people; who encounters the children of God in the wilderness to try to destroy them.

If Amalek represents the firstfruit of opposition to God in His people; The Lord Christ, on the other hand, represents the Firstfruit of obedience to God in them. That is why the Lord, who is the Firstfruit (1 Corinthians 15: 32) came to destroy the firstfruit of evil, namely, Amalek. Balaam says: “*But its end is to perish forever*”; and according to the Septuagint version “*But its seed is to perish forever*”. This seed, according to **the scholar Origen**, [is the doctrine he established in the minds of

¹ In Num., hom. 19.

² Ibid.

people to divert away from God; a corrupt spirit and an ugly doctrine, that will perish through the return to God with sighs to be saved (Isaiah 45: 22) ¹].

Balaam continues his prophecy, saying: ***“Then he looked on the Kenites ... and said: Firm is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rocks”*** (21). The Kenite means (he who acquires or posses). If we intends to destroy the spirit of evil, Amalek, and all his seed, namely, all his evil doctrines; We have to acquire Another, or we should be acquired by Him; namely, the Lord Christ, the Rock, in whom we would find a firm dwelling place; and would enter into Him, like a sparrow to find a nest for itself! According to **the scholar Origen**: [The Kenite could be saved if he sets his nest on the Rock, namely, if he puts his hope in Christ; not paying attention to the deceptions of the heretics around him²].

He says: ***“Yet you Kenite, ... How long until Asshur carries you away captive?”*** (22). Here he warns him, who entered into Christ, and found in Him a dwelling place for himself; not to look back at Asshur (the heretics); lest he would divert from the truth, and perish. If Amalek represents the danger from outside the church (sin and evil); Asshur, on the other hand, represents the danger from within the church through the heresies under the name of Christ.

He said: ***“Alas! Who shall live when God does this?”*** (23), He realized that he was prophesying about the Messianic era that is 1500 years after his days; He realized as well, that then, things will happen, that are beyond comprehension.

He ends his prophecy by saying: ***“But ships shall come from the coasts of Kittim (Crete), and they shall subdue Asshur and Eber. And so shall Amalek, until he perishes”*** (24). By the spirit of prophecy he saw several historical events, of which:

a- What Alexander the Macdonian, the Greek ruler who came from Crete did; While some believe that that refer to the Roman invasion, coming from the west; as Kittim used to refer, not just to Crete, but to the entire west.

b- The submission of the Hebrews (Eber) under the Babylonian captivation (Asshur).

c- Some see in the submission of Eber, a reference to the rejection of the Hebrews of the Person of the Lord Christ, and their perdition through disbelief.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 25

COMMITTING HARLOTRY WITH THE WOMEN OF MOAB

Having failed to curse the people of God, Balaam presented to Balak an evil counsel; which is to put an offense before them through the Moabite women; The wrath of God would then dwell upon them, and they will be defeated.

1- Committing harlotry with the women of Moab 1 – 3

2- The Zeal of Phinehas the priest 6 – 15

3- A divine command to kill the offenders 4 – 5

1- COMMITTING HARLOTRY WITH THE WOMEN OF MOAB:

The scholar Origen says that, as the divine care kept Balaam from cursing the people of God, he, intending to please Balak, presented to him this counsel: As this people have conquest, not by their own strength, but by worshipping God, and through their life of purity; To defeat them, you should start by destroying their purity. They would be overcome by the feminine beauty, more than by the power of armies; by the softness of women rather than the roughness of the men of war! ... So, choose for yourself a group of beautiful women, and send them dancing, singing, and clapping their hands before the Israeli warriors! And once the Moabite women see that the men have fallen under their spell, and have bowed their necks to sin; tell them not to respond to their covetousness unless they consent to partake of the sacrifices of their gods, to bow down to them. Under the authority of lust, they would submit to the will of the women, and would recognize the secrets¹ of the worship of Peor².

That counsel of Balaam was for the sake of earning his wages from king Balak; as it is written in the Holy Book: *“These women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord”* (Numbers 31: 16). And more clearly: *“But I have few things against you, because you have there, those who hold the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality”* (Revelation 2: 14). And in the epistle of Jude: *“Woe to them! ... for they have run greedily in the error of Balaam for the sake of gain”* (v. 11).

Going back to the text in the book of Numbers (Chapter 25); he says: ***“Then Israel remained in Shittim (Acacia Grove), and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab”*** (1). According to **the scholar Origen**, ‘Shittim’, as it came in the Hebrew dictionaries means (a response or an answer)³. At the time God has been struggling to keep Balaam and Balak from cursing His people by a word; sending His angel to confront Balaam on his way; and proclaiming His secrets to a diviner, for the sake of His love for His people; Their reaction was that they committed harlotry with the women of Moab, and worshipped their idols! ... Yes indeed! How hard is the heart of man! He is perpetually denying God who cares for him.

Commenting on that evil counsel, **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says: [As the inventor of evil failed to provoke Balaam to curse the people of God, he did not despair, but resorted to use the carnal pleasures to stir-up the nature of evil in man; those pleasures which liken a deadly bait lightly cast into the water to draw the lustful souls. By the

¹ كلمة "فغور" تعني "فجور" أو قبائح.

² Origin: in Num., hom. 20.

³ Ibid.

licentious lust, the nature without foundation is drawn toward evil. That is exactly what happened in the present incident. Those gallants' men of war who defeated the weapons of the enemy, and who proved that all attacks against them were futile before their power; those same men have been wounded by the arrows of the feminine pleasures. Those who were the strongest among men were defeated by women¹].

Again **St. Gregory** says: [It seems to me that history presents to us here a useful lesson. It teaches us that, among the many things that attack the minds of men, there is nothing mightier than pleasures. The men of Israel who proved to be stronger than the Egyptian worriers; who defeated the Amalekites, and the Midianites; and before whom several nations were terrified, were overcome, in a matter of moments, once they saw those women, dancing, singing, and clapping their hands! ... But it is the lust that turned men into wild beasts! That made them forgets their human nature; and become like pigs!

What should we learn from this lesson? Realizing the great power of pleasure, let us keep ourselves as far away from it as we possible can; that this ailment would find no gap through which to crawl into our souls. The wise Solomon counsels man not to walk barefooted on live coal, nor embrace fire in his bosom. In the gospel, the Lord commands us to cut off the origin of evil, namely the offense of looking at it by the eyes, which would open the door before it to infiltrate into the mind and the heart².

Going back to the people fallen into harlotry with the women of Moab, the Book says: ***“They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods”*** (2). Through physical adultery they diverted to the spiritual adultery in its most horrible form, namely to idol worship. According to **the scholar Origen**: They did not only eat but they worshipped as well. Look at how the ministers of God got ahead with their evil; how they delivered themselves to covetousness, then to greed, and finally to infidelity. Infidelity, according to the wise Solomon, is the wages of fornication; and it is written in the law: *“... Neither he shall multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away”* (Deuteronomy 17: 17). Although Solomon has been very wise, and gained great worthiness before God, yet he turned away, because he forsook himself to a multitude of women; as well as to a multitude of the philosophies of nations, which, intending to know and to study as a wise intellectual, he could not keep himself in the divine law. Those philosophies, and the women whom he married, of Moab, Emon, and of many other nations, seduced Solomon, and provoked him to build temples for their gods, and to sacrifice to them. ... It would have been for Solomon, a great achievement to get familiar with a multitude of philosophies and doctrines, without getting astray from the truth; because then, he could have faithfully say: *“There are many queens, and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her”* (Songs 6: 8, 9)³.

The scholar Origen, prefers for man not to preoccupy himself with a multitude of philosophies, lest they would draw him away from the word of God; Yet again consents to using the philosophies; yet cautiously, prudently; so that with God's help, the word of God remains like an only bride to the soul, without competition from any other⁴.

Going back to the old people who were seduced by the women of Moab; he says: ***“So Israel yoked itself to the Baal of Peor”*** (3), meaning to the (god of

¹ *Life of Moses* 2: 297, 8.

² *Ibid* 2: 301, 4.

³ *In Num., hom.* 20.

⁴ راجع نظرة العلامة أوريجانوس إلى الفلسفة في كتابنا: آباء مدرسة الإسكندرية.

fornication); loved uncleanness for its own sake, and enslaved themselves to it. According to **the scholar Origen**: [Let us learn that adultery is fighting us; and that we are subject to the arrows of uncleanness; but they cannot harm us if we listen to the counsel of the apostle, “*girding our waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which we will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one*” (Ephesians 6: 14-17). These are the weapons that would protect us in this war; which, if we get slothful in using them, we would be left to the strokes of Satan, would be captivated by all kinds of demons, would be worth of God’s wrath, and would deserve to be punished in this world, and in the age to come¹].

He also says: [It is befitting of us to know that any man who commits fornication, or fall into any form of harlotry, will be counted as a partaker of the worship of Baal Peor, the devil of the Midianite women²].

[Do not ever approach the doors of the dwelling places of evil. If you happen to feel that an evil spirit is talking to your heart, in an attempt to lead you to sin, You should surely know that he intends for you to get hooked to the worship of Satan, and to receive his secrets³].

The Book goes on to say: “***The anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel. Then the Lord said to Moses: Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel***” (3, 4).

It was the people who erred; yet the Lord commands that all the leaders of the people be hanged out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel. As the leaders are responsible for the behavior of the people, if they are slothful in teaching and warning them, hanging them out in the sun, refers to the horrible judgment on the great day of the Lord, that will happen in the presence of the “Sun of righteousness”.

3- THE ZEAL OF PHINEHAS THE PRIEST:

Seeing one of the children of Israel present to his brethren a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and all the congregation who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, Phinehas the priest took a javelin in his hand, went after the man into the tent and thrust both of them through their bodies. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel after twenty-four thousand died (6-9).

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “***Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood ...’***” (11-13).

This episode drew the hearts of the fathers, having seen in it a live portrait of the holy zeal on the sanctuaries of God; that it revealed the ugliness of the sin of adultery in the sight of God, and a symbol of the divine work in man’s life in the holy water of baptism.

Concerning the zeal, **the scholar Origen** says that some Jews believe that Phinehas was himself the prophet Elijah; whom God extended his life because his zeal

¹ In Num., hom. 20.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

on the house of God¹. Although we cannot accept this view, yet it reflects how the Jewish church felt toward him who was zealous with the zeal of the Lord against those who defiled His sanctuaries by his filthy physical covetousness. Commending Phinehas, **St. Augustine** says: [If what he did was out of hate toward the transgressors, and not out of zeal on the house of God, it would not have been counted to him as righteousness²]. And **St. Gregory the Nezianden** says: [Phinehas was called 'the zealous', because he went after the Midianite woman and the man who committed adultery with her; and by that he took away the disgrace from Israel]. And commenting on the action of Phinehas, **the scholar Origen** say: [You, who was redeemed by Christ who took away the material sword from the hand, giving it instead the spiritual sword; Take this sword in your hand, so that, once you see an Israeli thought defiled by Midianite adulteress women; namely, become mixed with satanic thoughts; Do not hesitate, but strike at once, and kill ... Take away the source of sin, so that it would never get pregnant, nor give birth ... If you do that, you quench the anger of God³]. So, it is befitting of us to be filled with zeal, and strike the sin that intends to unite with our thoughts; and never leave a place for it in us! On the contrary, making truce with the sin and debating with it, would make it unite with us, and conceive fruits that we cannot avoid; and arouse the wrath of God on ourselves.

As to the ugliness of the sin of adultery, **St. Clement of Alexandria** says: [Anyway, in the book of Numbers, it is obvious that the man who thrust his javelin into the adulterers, has been counted as blessed by God⁴]. And **St. Jerome** warns us against it, saying: [Beware, lest Phinehas would aim his javelin against you while committing adultery with a Midianite woman⁵!].

As to what this episode bear of a symbol of the work of God in the sacrament of baptism, **St. Gregory bishop of Nyssa** believes that Phinehas represents the death of the Lord Christ, who strikes with His Javelin to put to death the old man in us, namely, the sin that reigned upon us, to become a holy temple of the Lord: [Now, if we liken His death, the sin in us would certainly become a corpse, having been thrust by the javelin of baptism, as Phinehas thrust his javelin into the adulterers⁶].

If Phinehas killed the Israeli together with the Midianite woman; this refers to the enjoyment by the soul together with the body, of the death of the old man in us. In our commentary on the book of Exodus, we said that the 'man' refers to the soul, while the 'woman' refers to the body⁷. And that it is as though, the soul, having spiritually committed adultery through submitting to the lusts of the body, instead of rising up together with it, within the circle of the Holy Spirit; That is why the true Phinehas – the Lord Christ the Highest Priest – thrust His cross as a javelin, to put to death the works of the old man, and to create in us, by His Holy Spirit, the new man, to live holy -- soul and body.

3- A DIVINE COOMAND TO KILL THE OFFENDERS:

If Phinehas the priest was zealous with the zeal of the Lord, and killed 'Zimri', meaning (who is like a wild ox), a leader of a father's house among the Simeonites; and killed 'Cozbi', meaning (a liar), the daughter of Zur, the head of a father's house

¹ *In Ioan. 7.*

² *On Ps. 106.*

³ *Origin: In Num., hom. 20.*

⁴ *On Marriage 32.*

⁵ *Epis. 147: 9.*

⁶ *Baptism of Christ.*

⁷ للمؤلف: سفر الخروج، 1981.

in Midian; That refers to the destruction of sin; The man was acting irrationally like a wild ox; and the woman was a liar and deceptive ... These are the features of adultery.

The Lord commanded Moses to harass the Midianites and attack them, because the evil they planned for the perdition of the people of God.

THE FOURTH DIVISION

**PREPARATION FOR THE
ENTRANCE INTO CANAAN**

(Chapters 26 to 36)

CHAPTER 26

THE SECOND CENSUS OF ISRAEL

Although the 11 final chapters of this book (26 to 36), do not present events as exciting as those of the previous chapters, which presented some important dealings of God with man during his journey across the wilderness; Yet they tell us about the elaborate preparations for the most important event in the Old Covenant; namely, the entrance into the promised land; and the division of the land among the tribes of Israel, on the hands of Joshua, as a symbol of our entrance into the eternal inheritance on the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The preparations started by issuing a divine decree to take a new census.

1- The divine command to take a census	1 – 4
2- The records of the results of the census	5 – 51
3- Divine instructions concerning the division of the land	52 – 56
4- The census of the Levites	57 – 62
5- A remark on the census	63 – 65

1- THE DIVINE COMMAND TO TAKE A CENSUS:

For the second time, a divine command was issued to take a census of the children of Israel: The first one, one year and a month after the exodus from the land of Egypt, in preparation of the strife across the wilderness. This time, it is in preparation of the entrance into the Promised Land and its division among the tribes of Israel.... Hence the command was not issued before the plague, and the stage of chastisement came to an end (1), And until the people were ready to enter to enjoy the Promised Land. This census came carrying the same conditions of the first one (Chapter 1), save some simple differences concerning recording its events and results.

2- THE RECORD OF THE RESULTS OF THE CENSUS:

The book presented to us a record of the events and results of the census; through which the following remarks are noticed:

(1) In the first division, the names of the families were not included, but only the names of the tribes. Here however, every tribe is divided into families with their names. It is to be noticed that the tribe of Dan, although it includes a single family, yet it comes directly after Judah. Zebulun includes three families; Ephraim, Issachar, Nephtali, and Reuben, each includes four families; Judah, Simeon, and Asher, each includes five families; Gad, Benjamin, each includes seven families; Manasseh includes eight families; And although Joseph begat ten sons in Egypt (Genesis 46: 21) yet it so seems that three of them had no children; or that their families have completely disappeared.

If we take into consideration the symbolism of figures, we shall notice the following:

a- The figure 1 refers to the deity, whose work nobody can enjoy, unless he finds for himself a position in the tribe of 'Dan'; namely, (judges himself). Through entering into the membership of this tribe, man would, not only enjoy the recognition of the One God, but the enjoyment of His attributes, as well, through uniting with Him.

b- The figure 3 refers to the three divine Persons, enjoyed by the members of the tribe of Zebulun, namely, (the dwelling place); Meaning, that he who enjoys the unity with God, namely, the abidance and dwelling in Him; will enjoy the work of the Holy Trinity in his life; being united with the Father, in His Son, by the Holy Spirit.

c- The figure 4 refers to the four gospels, namely, the work of salvation (incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension); enjoyed by members of the

tribes of Ephraim (increasing fruition), Jessacher (a reward), Nephtali (spacious), and Reuben (son of vision); and by those who have the increasing fruition of repentance, receiving their reward from God, bearing hearts spacious for the love of God and their brethren; and have spiritual vision.

d- The figure 5 refers to the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, symbol of the sacrifice of the cross with its several aspects, received by God for the tribes of Judah (Confession and faith), Simeon (listeners), and Asher (happiness). As though these three things, melded together: faith, obedience, and the spiritual joy, will bring us forth to the secrets of the holy sacrifice.

e- The figure 7 refers to perfection, referred to the two tribes: Gad and Benjamin; namely, the striving men, those full of seriousness (Gad), and those who stand on the right hand of God (Benjamin). When the seriousness of the canonical strife melds to abidance on the right hand of God, man reaches the perfection of his goal.

f- Finally the figure 8 refers to the life to come; namely, to what follows the seven days of the week; enjoyed by the descendants of Manasseh; who forget the world for the sake of eternity; and every disturbance and worry, for the sake of the heavenly joy.

(2) It is to be noticed that all the tribes that were under the banner of the camp of Judah, from which the Lord Christ is to come, according to the flesh: together with Jessachar, and Zebulun; have increased in number. As though those who take refuge under the shadow of the Lord Christ, will grow and increase, and never perish.

(3) No other tribe has relatively increased in number, like the tribe of Manasseh which was before the smallest tribe (32,200), and became (64,400), namely, doubled. He who is trained on forgetting the things of this age, would end up bearing double blessing in the final census.

(4) No other tribe has decreased in number like the tribe of Simeon, which was before (59,300) and became (22,000), namely lost about 2/3 of its size. Some refer this decrease to the last plague, as the majority of its victims were of this tribe, because 'Zimri' whom Phinehas the priest killed was a leader of a father's house among the Simeonites (25: 14). 'Zimri', whose name means (like a wild ox), instead of being committed to the feature of his tribe (Simeon, meaning listeners), he lost much through being drawn to the lusts and carnal pleasures, like a wild ox. This tribe came to represent someone who started with the Spirit, obediently listening to the voice of the Lord, but unfortunately ended up chasing the pleasures of the flesh.

(5) During the census, certain names were mentioned, related to the heads of tribes who perished under certain circumstances, confirming the deprivation of the wicked, of the enjoyment of a portion in the promised land; like for example the following names:

Dathan and Abiram who contended against Moses and Aaron, and attempted to take the priesthood by force; whom the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up together with Korah (9, 10).

Er and Onan, sons of Jodah (19); the first, who was found wicked in the sight of the Lord, died without descendants (Genesis 38: 7); and the second, who spilled his semen on the ground, whenever he went in to his dead brother's wife, so as not to give offspring to his dead brother, bore the same fate (Genesis 38: 9).

Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron the high priest, who both died (61) when they offered profane fire before the Lord (Leviticus 10: 1-7).

3- DIVINE INSTRUCTION CONCERNING THE DIVISION OF THE LAND:

“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘To those the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe a smaller inheritance’” (52, 53). Although Joshua the son of Nun was the one designated to divide the land, but God gave the instructions concerning the division to Moses before he died. Although the actual entrance into the Promised Land was to be led by Joshua, a symbol of “Jesus” Christ; But Moses, as a representative of the law, was the one to receive the instructions; As there is no separation between the law and the gospel.

According to **the scholar Origen**: [As long as this division of land is an earthly symbol and a “*shadow of the good things to come*” (Hebrew 10: 1); and presents a model of the heavenly inheritance, coveted by the believers and the saints, I wonder if we should seek the larger inheritance or the smaller one! I think that those who seek the smaller one will be happier than the others; as “*Wide is the gate and broad is the way that lead to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. And narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*” (Matthew 7: 13, 14). In another location, the Lord was asked: “*Lord, are there few who are saved?*” (Luke 13: 23); And, “*Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold*” (Matthew 24: 12); (not the love of few). And in the building of the ark of Noah, according to the dimensions which were given from heaven: Its length should be 300 cubits, its width 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits; but its width decrease with height; because the lower parts should be wide enough to accommodate the multitudes of animals; the higher parts for the birds, and the top part is narrow to be occupied by the limited number of humans¹.

“The land shall be divided by lot” (56). It is noticed that Caleb the son of Jephunneh took Hebron as an inheritance, as a privilege outside the lot (Joshua 14: 6-15), because, together with Joshua the son of Nun, they strengthened the hearts of the people, forty-five years before the division. Likewise, after every battle, the outstanding warriors were given their portion in the spoils outside the lot as a reward. According to **the scholar Origen**: [It seems to me that my Lord Jesus Christ will do the same: Those whom He knows that they suffered more than others, and had their own great works and exalted virtues, He will grant them exceptional honors and glories, which you may say, would be like His own. Do you remember when He asked the Father, on behalf of His disciples, saying: “*Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me, may be with Me where I am*” (John 17: 24); And, “*That they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You*” (John 17: 21). And He said to them: “*You who have followed me, will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Matthew 19: 28). All those things are not given by lot, but as a privilege to the elect by Him who, alone, can search the hearts and minds. As for us, although we are not among them, we shall be content to have the honor to enjoy the portion of the saints²].

4- THE CENSUS OF THE LEVITES:

The Levites are not included in the general census, because they do not inherit in the land together with the congregation; Yet the Lord commanded Moses to count them alone, as a sign of His special care for them. Having dedicated their life to minister to the Lord, and to guard His sanctuaries, their privilege would be to have the Lord Himself as their inheritance, and they will be His; as we have see in chapter 18.

¹ In Num., hom. 21.

² Ibid.

According to **the scholar Origen**: [The Levites represent those who did not fail due to any natural physical limitations to surpass the glory of all the seen things, and chose to put in the Lord all their life, and not to seek any material thing, but wisdom and the knowledge of the secrets of God; “*For where their treasure is, there their heart will also be*” (Matthew 6: 21). Having no inheritance in earth, but they rise up where heaven is; There they will be together with the Lord forever, in His word, wisdom, and knowledge, and satisfied with His sweetness; He will be their food, dwelling place, riches, and kingdom. That is their destiny, and these are their possessions; God is their only inheritance¹].

5- A REMARK ON THE CENSUS:

The census ends by the following remark” “*But among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. For the Lord had said of them, ‘They shall surely die in the wilderness’. So there was not left a man of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun*” (64, 65). By this he confirms that there is no place for evil in the eternal inheritance.

¹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 27

THE INHERITANCE LAWS & SETTING JOSHUA THE NEXT LEADER OF ISRAEL

This chapter includes two issues which came at the end of the life of Moses, the great among the prophets: that of the daughters of Zelophehad, and the setting of Joshua the son of Nun as the next leader of Israel.

1- The daughters of Zelophehad	1 – 5
2- The inheritance laws	6 – 11
3- Setting Joshua the next leader of Israel	12 – 23

1- THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD:

During the last census, a certain unique case appeared; namely, that the children of Gilead became families with males who were included in the census process, except one son – Zelophehad; of whom it was said: *“Now Zelophehad the son of Hopher had no sons, but daughters, and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah”* (26: 33). Consequently, Zelophehad was not included in the census process. But those five daughters were so full of courage, and faith, and of hope in getting a portion among the rest of the people, that *“they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders of all the congregation, by the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying: ‘Our father died in the wilderness, but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the Lord, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Therefore, give us a possession among the brothers of our father”* (3, 4). With courage, yet with reverence and humility, they spoke; confessed that their father died in his own sin, like all the rest of the past generation; But he was not among those who took the priesthood by force, like Korah and his company. So, why should his name be removed from among those who will inherit the new land?!

As such words of faith, and of holding fast to God’s promises, would open the heavens to respond; God committed the whole congregation to a law of inheritance, in which the son inherits his father; and in case the deceased had no son, his daughter would inherit him; and if he had no daughter, his brothers would inherit him, or his father’s brother, or his nearest kinsman nearest him in his family.

That unique episode, recorded by the divine inspiration, also carries a symbolic concept, presented by the scholar **Origen**. He says that the name ‘Zelophehad’, meaning (a shadow in his mouth) or (a shadow in fear), represents him, who utters the grace of the law as a shadow of the truth, without recognizing it in his depths as a life; ... Represents the literal man who gives birth to no children; ... Who does not realize any spiritual meaning, nor a deep thought; ... Who, as he has nothing except the shadow of the law in his mouth, cannot produce any living spiritual thoughts (sons); but only actions and works (daughters), that would serve the people in general¹. ... He bears no thoughts, as the males refer to the mind; while the females refer to the body and work.

¹ In Num., hom. 22.

We can also see in it a symbolic portrait of the life of the believer. If 'Zelophehad' means (a shadow in his mouth) or (a shadow in fear); It would refer to the body, being like a shadow, appears in the world then disappears. As the body dies together with the Lord Christ, as Zelophehad died; Yet it carries blessed daughters, namely, the five senses, sanctified through dying together with Christ.. Those daughters confess that their father died in the Lord Christ, and did not perish together with Korah and his company. Such senses, sacred and crucified together with the Lord Christ, draw the mercies of God and His ordinances filled with love and compassion, so that the body would enjoy together with the soul, the eternal inheritance, and its name would not be removed from among the family of the heavenlies.

2- THE INHERITANCE LAWS:

Because of the case of the daughters of Zelophehad, the inheritance law came to designate the legal heirs of the deceased, as we said: the son, then the daughter, then the brothers, then the father's brothers, then the kinsmen nearest to him in his family. In this law, **the scholar Origen** sees a shadow of the heavenly goods; As these five heirs on earth symbolize the heirs in heaven. The first level includes the "sons", namely, those with spiritual knowledge; The second level includes the "daughters", referring to those with prominent works; as we have repeatedly mentioned that the male refers to the mind or knowledge; whereas the female refers to the body or work and ministry. The former represent those of meditation; while the others refer to those who strive in ministry and work. The third level, that of the "brothers", represents those who strive together with the others like their brothers. The fourth level, that of the "father's brothers", whom he believes, represent the simple people who practice the good habits, yet without depth of thought; And finally the level of the kinsman nearest to him in his family, refers to the heirs, embraced by the Lord for any work they simply do; As the Lord wishes for the salvation of all.

3- SETTING JOSHUA THE NEXT LEADER OF ISRAEL:

The personality of the prophet Moses increases in splendor and glory with every day he lives in ministry, until his last breath, he delivered in the hands of God. Within our hands, is an invitation from God to this great prophet: *"Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel; And when you have seen it, you shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered"* (12, 13). Here the soul of this mighty man glittered by his wise reaction, full of spirituality, away from any spirit of selfishness or haughtiness.

He is called to go up into Mount Abarim, as Aaron his brother went up into Mount Hur, where he died in peace and joy, after taking off his priestly garment and putting them on Eleazar his son (chapter 20). So the prophet Moses goes up into Mount Abarim, namely, (the Mount of crossing-over), where, seeing the realization of God's promises, he would die in peace and joy. As Aaron did not descend into the pit like Korah and his company, but went up into Mount Hur; So did Moses. Death for both of them was ascending up and gain, and not descending down and loss.

The scholar Origen has this beautiful commentary: [See first how the perfect man does not die in a valley, nor on a hill, but up on a mountain, namely, on a high place, where no one can reach. There he looks from afar to the promised land, and behold everything from a high and far place. ... Yes, he who wishes to reach the utmost perfection, should not stay ignorant (on earth), but should recognize all things, see and hear them.... Once he enters into the world of the Spirit and the purity of mind, he would turn back to the things he used to see in their material form while he was in the body, to listen to the lessons of wisdom, to attend their school, and quickly to realize their causes and reasons. ... What would be a better profit for him, before

his departure, than to be able to see the lands and the locations, whose difficulties, he would not have to overcome any more (being in comfort from labor), and without a desire to get any of their privileges (as he is leaving them behind) ¹?!]. ... Indeed, what Moses strived for, during decades of ministry, to enjoy together with his people, he now sees from afar, for his soul to find rest in him.

He sees the promised land from afar, then he gathered to his people like Aaron his brother; He sees them not as a rebuke, but for his soul to rejoice for the sake of his people; That is why he is gathered to his people, namely, to the rows of the fathers of the congregation, to rest together with them, without separating from the congregation.

The Lord reminds Moses of his deprivation, together with his brother Aaron, of entering the promised land, on account of what happened at the waters of Maribah (chapter 20); not to rebuke him, but to let him become more justified before the Lord; As he did not hasten to intercede on his own behalf, nor for that of his brother; but, caring for the congregation, he cried out for the sake of choosing the suitable man, as seen by *“the God of the spirits of all flesh”*! What an amazing love, when the spiritual leader, until his last breath, forgets everything personal, for the sake of the edification of his congregation, its peace, and growth!

God probably allowed to confirm the weakness of Moses in his last moments, to proclaim the inability of the law to sanctify; As, according to the apostle: *“Death reigned from Adam to Moses”* (Romans 5: 14); and, *“Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...”* (Romans 5: 12); There was need for somebody else other than Moses, who is able, not just to see the land from afar, but to bring his congregation over into it. The law proclaimed the heavenlies, yet from afar through the shadow; But the true Joshua made us sit in the heavenlies.

Moses cared to pray, seeking from God to choose by Himself the man to lead the people ... He did not think of his own two sons, nor of anyone of his relatives to replace him; but he cared first of all for the good of the congregation whom he loved from his whole heart. According to **the scholar Origen**: [The leaders of the church, instead of recommending their relatives, according to the flesh, to replace them, they should learn how to resort to God’s ordinances and decision. Was Moses, by his wisdom and sound decision, not qualified and capable of choosing a leader for the people? He, to whom God said: *“Gather to me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people”* (Numbers 11: 16); and he did choose them according to the Spirit of God who dwelt upon them, that they prophesied?! ... But Moses does not dare to do this time, Why? So as not to leave to the future generations the wrong example. He says: ***“Let the Lord, the God of the Spirit of all flesh set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd”*** (17). ... Now, if such a great man like Moses does not trust his own wisdom to choose someone to lead the people, and to set whom to follow him, Who, among the people, or even among the clergy, will see himself worthy of such a thing? Unless it is a divine inspiration he gets through long prayers and fervent supplications to God²!!].

God responded to Moses’ supplication, and commanded him to lay his hand on his disciple Joshua the son of Nun. It was indeed a great joy for Moses, when the

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

Lord chose the man, who, for such a long time, has been like his right arm; who “*did not depart from the tabernacle*” (Exodus 33: 11); who spied the promised land and came back to provide his brethren with the deposit of the new life, together with assurances of the possibility of entrance into the new land, to enjoy its goods ... I shall postpone talking about this new leader to my commentary on the book of Joshua if God wills; But here I shall present the procedure of inaugurating him a leader of the congregation.

The divine commandment to Moses came: “**Lay your hand on him**” (18). The book of Deuteronomy clarified the activity of such an act, saying: “*Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses has laid his hands on him*” (Deuteronomy 34: 9). That is why laying the hands was always connected to the inauguration of the ministers of God.

In the Holy Book, laying the hand was used in many occasions, of which are the following:

a- The laying of hands was used **to deliver a divine blessing**; like when Jacob did with Joseph’s two sons; when he put his right hand on the younger Ephraim, standing on his left side, and his left hand on the older Manasseh, standing on his left side; stretching his hands like a cross, for the blessing of God to dwell upon them ... And when the Lord Christ blessed the children, “*He laid His hands on them*” (Matthew 19: 13). ... That is why the bishop lays his hand on those seeking baptism, while praying on them¹, especially during the prayers concerning the driving away the devil².

b- It is used as well as a sign of **casting the burden of someone’s sins upon another to become a sacrifice on his behalf** (Leviticus 1: 4; 3: 4, 24; 16: 21); as a symbol of what was to happen with the Lord Christ “on whom the Father has laid the iniquity of us all” (*Isaiah 53: 6*).

c- **In healing the sick**, it is said: “*He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them*” (Mark 6: 5; 8: 23; Luke 4: 4; 13: 3; Matthew 9: 18). That was also sometimes done by the apostles (Acts 28: 8).

St. Cyprian³ says that the ministers of God, representing the Lord Christ, lay their hands, on the spiritually sick who come to them repenting their sins, praying ‘a prayer of resolution’ to heal them.

d- **St. Clement of Alexandria** wrote about **laying the hand on the Groom and the bride** to bless them during the sacrament of matrimony⁴.

e- In the book of Acts it came that laying the hand is followed **to pray for the Holy Spirit to dwell upon the newly baptized**; “*And when Paul has laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them*” (Acts 19: 6). The early church continued to do this until it replaced it with the ointment of the ‘Meron’; although the bishop resorts to it in certain situations, like in baptizing women, laying his hand on them, and breathe the breath of the Holy Spirit in their faces.

f- Finally, laying the hand is mostly connected with the **clerical inaugurations**, like inaugurating deacons; It is said: “*They chose ... , whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them*” (Acts 6: 6). And when Barnabas and Saul were separated for ministry, “*They fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them*” (Acts 13: 3). And giving instructions to his disciple Timothy concerning the inauguration, the apostle Paul said: “*Do not lay hands on anyone*

¹ Euseb. Vita Constant. 4: 61; Tertullian: De Coron, 3 PL 2: 79.

² Origin: in Jos., hom. 24: 1 PG 22: 940.

³ De Laps. 16.

⁴ Paedag 3: 11.

hastily, nor share in other people's sins" (1 Timothy 5: 22); and, "*I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands*" (2 Timothy 1: 6). Laying the hands therefore, bore the meaning of 'inauguration'; And up till now, in the Orthodox, the Catholic, and the Church of England, this evangelic look is still followed; and laying the hand is the principal rite in the inauguration of bishops¹.

Going back to setting Joshua the son of Nun a leader in place of the prophet Moses, we hear the divine voice say: "***Set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight***" (19). In the inauguration of the Levites (chapter 8), we see the positive role of the congregation in the rite of inauguration; who do not stand as mere spectators, but are committed to contribute in it cooperating with the priests.

The Lord says: "***You shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient***" (20). If it was Moses who lays the hand; Yet it is God who gave Moses the authority and reverence, and granted Joshua the same gifts.

And if Joshua is set a leader of the people to bring them over into the promised land, Yet in cooperation with Eleazar the high priest, "*who shall inquire before the Lord for him by the judgment of the Urim*" (21). The urim and the Thummim, meaning (enlightenment and perfection), are mostly two precious stones put in the breastplate of the high priest (Exodus 28: 30; Leviticus 8: 8), through which he may come to know the will of God; referring to the work of the Holy Spirit, who grants man the enlightenment and the perfection, for the believer to walk along the way of the Lord without perversion.

¹ J. G. Duies: *A Dict. Of Liturgy and Worship*, p 189.

CHAPTER 28

PERPETUAL FEASTS AND OFFERINGS

The preparations for the entrance into the promised land, to settle down in it after such an extended journey in the wilderness, does not stop at making a census to divide the land, setting inheritance laws, and appointing a new leader to bring the children of Israel over to the promised land; But God intended just before their entrance, to clarify to them the concept of comfort which they will enjoy in the new land; that it is not the comfort of laziness and relaxation; but that of continuous rejoice, through the sacrifices of reconciliation and love, offered daily, each morning and evening, weekly, monthly, and yearly. He intended for their life to be incessant feasts, a sign of perpetual joy.

1- The daily sacrifices	1 – 8
2- The weekly sacrifices	9 – 10
3- The monthly sacrifices	11 – 15
4- The annual feasts: The Passover	16 – 25
5- The Pentecost or the feast of the weeks	26 – 31

1- THE DAILY SACRIFICES:

I prefer to postpone talking about the symbolism of the sacrifices to the cross – with the details of their rites – to my commentary on the book of Leviticus, if God wills; to avoid repetition. It is to be noticed here that the two chapters 28 and 29, talking about the perpetual sacrifices and offerings, include 71 verses, of which 13 verses deal with the sacrifice of sin; while the rest – 58 verses—deal with the sweet aroma to the Lord. This demonstrates to us, what the divine inspiration intends to concentrate on, in our look at the sacrifice of the cross, Although the ultimate goal of the cross is the forgiveness of our sins: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (John 3: 16); Yet, its other consummating side; that has a very important role in the life of the church, is that the cross is “*a sweet aroma to the Father*”, namely, He smells in it an aroma of pleasure toward us in Christ Jesus. Unfortunately, this side is overlooked by many in their relationship with the cross. If the cross has forgiven our sins; Yet, what consummates this -- or if we could say, what is as important – is that it transferred us from the state of animosity, to one of rejoice and pleasure of the Father in us, through His Son. That is why the cross became a feast of joy, and a holy celebration, in which the Father embraces us in His bosom, to provide us with an eternal place! That is what we shall realize and touch in these two chapters.

“*Command the children of Israel and say to them, ‘My offerings, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time’*” (2). He presented to them this commandment, because most of those entering the promised land have not heard the statutes that were presented to their fathers at the beginning of their journey, as the old generation died and a new one emerged. His confirmation to offer them “*at their appointed time*”, was necessary because, so as not to assume that the wars they were about to go through against the inhabitants of that land, would relieve them of offering these sacrifices, but would rather make them in more need of offering them, as they are sweet aroma to the Lord, and without them they will not enjoy conquest and victory.

They are “*His offerings*”, “*His food*”, and “*His sweet aroma*”; which are all expressions revealing God’s longing for man, and His pleasure in Him through His beloved and slain Son. And on another aspect, man’s offerings are not his own, but

they are from God's gifts to him. The Septuagint version came more clear, saying: "Be careful to present to Me in My feasts, My gifts, My offerings, as sweet aroma to Me". Commenting on this, **Pope Athanasius the apostolic** says: [Giving back to our Lord as much as we can, We are giving Him back, not things of our own, but of what we have got from Him -- His grace; He asks us to give Him the gifts He gave to us. Saying, Give Me "*My offerings*"¹].

He began by the '**regular or daily burnt sacrifice**'; offering two male lambs in their first year, without blemish: one lamb in the morning, and the other in the evening; Namely, we are in need of an incessant burnt offering, to be reconciled with God day and night. Being the 'regular feast of the Lord', who rejoices and has pleasure in our reconciliation with Him all the days of our life, days and nights, He started by it as an introduction to the other offerings, He commands us to present as a "sweet aroma to the Lord" (8).

Commenting on this, **the scholar Origen** says: [In the statute of feasts, the Lord did not start with the feast of 'Passover', with that of the 'unleavened bread', or with any other feast; but started with the feast of the "regular burnt offering"; as He intends for him, who seeks perfection and holiness, not to have days with holy feasts to the Lord, and others without, but to celebrate a perpetual feast. To offer a sacrifice, regularly day and night, would imply the thinking in the law and the prophets, who represent the day; and in the gospel, which was proclaimed (in the evening), namely at the fullness of time. These are the celebrations meant by the Lord when He says: *Pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5: 17). Praying without ceasing to the Lord; and lifting up our hands to become like incense ascending before Him (Psalm 141: 2); in a "regular burnt offering", in a morning and an evening sacrifice; would be the foremost celebration.

But the celebrations of the sinners turned into mourning, and all their songs into lamentations (Amos 8: 10); As the sinner who celebrates the day of sin, cannot celebrate a feast; He cannot, on the days he sins, offer the eternal sacrifice; He cannot offer it unless he follows righteousness and forsakes the sin².

2- THE WEEKLY SACRIFICES:

If God intends for us to have all our days, feasts for Him, in which He rejoices in us through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, to receive our day and night prayers, and not to have a single day without a feast; He has set for us as well, a weekly feast, namely, "the **Sabbath**", or "the feast of rest", described by the apostle as "*a rest for the people of God*" (Hebrew 4: 9).

As we said before, the Lord had a rest in the seventh day, not by ceasing to work, but by rejoicing in man and his rest. We, as well, enjoy the Sunday, the day of the Lord's resurrection, as a day of rest; finding in His incessant sacrifice, the secret of our enjoyment of the resurrected life; to rest in God who raised us to sit together with Him in the heavenly places; and God would find a place to rest in us.

Sunday will remain a weekly feast, a true Sabbath for God and the church; or for God and man in Jesus Christ, risen from the dead; until we encounter Him face to face, on the great day of rest, when our body will ultimately enjoy the resurrection from the dead, will bear a new spiritual nature, and man will be together with God, glorified in His glories. Our present feasts are therefore a deposit for the everlasting feast; Or as **the scholar Origen** says: {The true Sabbath in which God will rest from His works, will be in the coming age, when all the sufferings, grief, and sighs, will

¹ *Festal Letters 5: 4.*

² *Origin: in Num., hom. 23.*

come to an end, and God will be all in all. ... On that Sabbath, God will grant us to celebrate it together with Him, and with the saintly angels, by offering the sacrifice of praise, and fulfilling the vows that our lips have uttered here on earth¹].

In this weekly feast the people were committed to offer. “*a burnt offering for every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering*” (10). It is a one sacrifice, non-repeatable, that of the Lord Christ, incessantly set and active, around which the church gather every Sunday, in celebration of the rest of the resurrection, besides the daily sacrifices of love, of prayers and praise presented through the cross.

3- THE MONTHLY SACRIFICES:

At the beginning of every month we celebrate a feast for the Lord in which we present a burnt offering, a sweet aroma (13), together with a sacrifice of sin to the Lord (15), besides the regular burnt offering morning and evening.

It is noticed here that He says: “*At the beginning of your months*” (11); whereas when He talks about the Sabbath, He says “*My Sabbaths*” (Exodus 31: 13; Leviticus 19: 13, 30; 26: 2); indicating how much He treasures the later as the secret of His own joy. Whereas in case of committing sin, he calls them “*your Sabbaths*” (Leviticus 26: 35)². How beautiful indeed when God calls them “*My Sabbath*”, “*My feasts*”, “*My offerings*”; as they all refer to the entrance into the everlasting rest, the perpetual feast, and the eternal sacrifice of the Lord Christ; in which God would rest in man, as well as man would rest in the bosoms of God. ... As to the months, He calls them “*Your months*”, as the month refers to the time, changing from month to month, ending with the end of the world. For our sake, time was created, through the existence of stars; And for our sake, times will come to an end; no more months, and no more years; but one incessant day, with the never-setting Sun; an incessant Sabbath, an everlasting day of rest.

We celebrate as well, a third feast to the lord, besides the perpetual feast, and the Sabbath; in which we rejoice in the slain Lord who granted us the “*eternal life*” in Him. Commenting on this feast **the scholar Origen** says:[The third celebration is the “**feast of the crescent**”, with the appearance of the new moon. What is the significance of celebrating the new crescent? It refers to time when the moon comes very close to the sun. The Lord Christ is the “*Sun of righteousness*”; and the crescent is His church full of His light, strongly connected and united with Him, according to the words of the apostle: “*He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him*” (1 Corinthians 6: 17). We celebrate the feast of the crescent, as we become new through forsaking the old man in us, and getting clothed with the new man, created according to God in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4: 24). By that it becomes worthwhile to celebrate the feast of the crescent, or the “**feast of the renewal**”... The soul that became joined to God, knew His splendor and light, that has no earthly thought, nor preoccupation with something worldly, or the covetousness of admiring it; The soul that delivered herself to the light of wisdom, and the warmth of the Spirit, and became, not material, but spiritual, would never worry about how it is seen by men; as the natural man would not realize, nor approach the spiritual one; Such a soul is truly worthy of celebrating the feast of the crescent, and of presenting the sacrifice of renewal, to the Lord who renewed her³].

4- THE ANNUAL FEASTS:

¹ In Num., hom. 23.

² راجع للمؤلف: سفر الخروج، الأصحاح 31.

³ In Num., hom. 23.

The Lord presented to them two groups of annual feasts: One group to be celebrated at the onset of the year; And another group to begin with the second half of the year, namely the seventh month. During the first half of the year, the “Passover” is celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month; and the feast of the firstfruits, the “Pentecost”, fifty days after the Passover. We spoke about the feast of the “Passover” in our commentary on the twelfth chapter of the book of Exodus, and the ninth chapter of the book of Numbers.

The Passover:

Here, talking about the feast of the Passover of the Lord, he concentrated on the seven days of eating unleavened bread. And on refraining from eating or using leaven in any food; so as to start a new year not connected to the old leaven. About this **the scholar Origen** says: [You will become worthy of celebrating this feast if you take away from yourself all the leaven of malice and wickedness (1 Corinthians 5: 8), and of sin; keeping the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

It is not befitting of us to imagine that the Almighty God, would care to set for man an ordinance to regulate the use of leaven; and would cut off any soul from among His people (Numbers 9: 13), if she happens to forget to clean her place of any old leaven! ... But what God really and truly hates, is the leaven of the wicked, oppressing, and always murmuring spirit; that was leavened with the leaven of evil. God seeks from the soul, to take away such leaven from her place, or else, she would be cut off from among the people of God As whoever leaves in his soul the least seed of evil, would get worse, and more wicked day after day. Therefore, if you intend to celebrate **the feast of the unleavened bread** together with God, you should not leave any trace of the old leaven of evil in your soul¹].

St. Athanasius the apostolic says: [Let us therefore “*keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*” (1 Corinthians 5: 8). And by putting off the old man and his works, “*we put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness*” (Ephesians 4: 22, 24).; and meditate in God’s law day and night, with a humble mind and a pure conscience. Let us put off from ourselves every hypocrisy and deceit, and keep away from every pride and malice. I wish we pledge the love of God and of the neighbor, to become a new creation; drinking new wine, to keep the feast as it should be kept²].

And **St. Augustine** sees in the unleavened bread, a rejection of the old leaven, and receiving the new one; to have the new life and the new praise, etc, saying: [If we have a new life, let us then sing a new song, and praise the Lord with a new praise³].

5- The feast of the Pentecost (the feast of the weeks):

For the sake of sanctifying the time; to make all the days of man sanctified to the Lord, The Lord made for the Jews, the last day of the week, namely the seventh day, a “Sabbath to the Lord”, By sanctifying the seventh day, the whole week will be sanctified.

And the Lord sanctified the weeks by setting the “**feast of the weeks**”, or “**the Feast of the Pentecost**”, fifty days or seven weeks from the onset of the harvest, to be a Sabbath to the Lord. It was a feast connected to agriculture. And as it was difficult to fix the first day of the harvest, it was decided to count it fifty days from the feast of the Passover In this feast “*none of the people shall appear before the Lord empty*”

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Paschal Epis. 1.*

³ *On Ps., 40: 14.*

(Exodus 23: 15), but will bring a new grain offering to the Lord **(26)**. About this new offering, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [It is not befitting of you to come to the house of the Lord without a sacrifice; Do not go to the meeting unaccompanied by your brethren; the best of sacrifices is to present to the Lord a soul when coming to the church¹]. ... On the day of the Pentecost, the Holy Spirit dwelt upon the disciples in the high room of Zion; the fiery Spirit, capable of drawing new offerings to the Lord. On that very day, the apostle Peter, by his sermon, (offered) about three thousand souls to the Lord (Acts 2: 41). That is the best offering of the believers on the day of the weeks – to bring over the heavy-burdened souls to find comfort in the bosom of the Lord.

¹ *To those who had not attended the assembly, 4.*

CHAPTER 29

PERPETUAL FEASTS AND OFFERINGS (continued)

The Lord consummates His talk concerning the sacrifices and offerings; by mentioning here the second group of the annual feasts, set in the second half of the year. Then he ends His talk by the personal “freewill offerings”, presented by man without commitment to a specific commandment.

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1- The feast of the trumpets | 1 - 6 |
| 2- The day of atonement | 7 - 11 |
| 3- The feast of the tabernacles | 12 - 38 |
| 4- The personal freewill offerings | 39 – 40 |

1- THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS:

During the seventh month, three great feasts are celebrated, connected together: The feat of the trumpets or shouting; the feast of atonement; and the feast of the tabernacles. The secret behind the choice of that specific month for celebrating these feasts is as follows:

a- As the days of the week are sanctified through sanctifying the seventh day; and the weeks are sanctified by sanctifying the feast of the weeks; the months, likewise, are sanctified by setting those three feasts during the seventh month; as though it is the Sabbath of the months. The Lord cared for sanctifying the seventh of everything on all levels.

b- The Jews call this month ‘Teshri’, namely, The first Teshrin (October), the onset of the civil year, designated by the Rabbis as the ‘birthday of the world’.

c- Being a period of rest for those working in agriculture; between the harvest and the casting of the new seeds. So God intended to give them the chance to celebrate it by joyful worship.

d- As the year starts by the Passover in the first month, a sign that it is God who brought them over from the past year to a new one; a symbol of our crossing over from the temporal life to the other life; So God intends to sanctify the seventh month, namely, the end of the first half of the year; to let man feel that God who started, will consummate to the end; And that it is not enough for us to present to God the firstfruits of our life, but to deliver to Him all our life to lead by Himself.

In the feast of the trumpets, or the feast of the great shouting; there used to be a holy convocation, and a blowing of the trumpets. It is as though God proclaims to His people to get ready for the two other feasts, integrated together: the great feast of the atonement, and the feast of the tabernacles. According to the Jewish tradition, on that day they do not blow the two silver trumpets mentioned in the tenth chapter of this book, but the ‘Shofar’, or (ram’s horn), that was used in specific revered occasions, like calling the year of the Jubilee (Joshua 6).

2- THE DAY OF ATONEMENT:

On the tenth day of this seventh month they shall have a holy convocation in which they afflict their souls, and present a burnt offering to the Lord as a sweet aroma (8). Thus their affliction would be mixed with joy; As God rejoices in them, not on account of their affliction, but for the sake of the reconciliation realized between Him and them through the burnt offering on the great day of atonement.

The book of Leviticus talked in great details about that great day (Leviticus 16; 23: 26-32). It was a day of fasting, humiliation, and offering an atonement on the sins of the whole congregation; Yet the high priest would not forget to offer an

atonement on his own sins as well. This point drew the attention of the apostle Paul, in his comparison between the Lord Christ the greatest High Priest, who, without sin brought us over into heaven itself; and the Jewish high priest who used to enter into the shadow of the heavenlies, once every year, after offering blood (of sacrifice) for himself, and for the people's sins committed in ignorance (Hebrew 9: 1-12, 24-28). I hope to deal with the details of its rites in my commentary on the book of Leviticus if God will.

3- THE FEAST OF THE TABERNACLES:

If the day of atonement is a day of fasting and humiliation; the feast of the tabernacles which follows it on the fifteenth of the same month, and continues for eight days, is a feast of joy and rejoicing. If atonement refers to the cross, hence connected to fasting and humiliation; the feast of the tabernacles refers to the fruition of the cross, with all what it bears of the power of resurrection, ascension, and the enjoyment of the Holy Spirit; And its continuation for the duration of eight days, refers to the resurrected life, namely, to the other life; as the eighth day is the first day after the past week, or the entrance into a new week. In this feast, all men were committed to appear before the Lord in the temple (Deuteronomy 16: 16); and used to dwell in tents they set during the feast in the city squares; on house roofs and courtyards; the courts of the house of God (Nehemiah 8: 16); and on the mountains around Jerusalem. It was the climax of all feasts, referring to the setting forth of the church out of the earthly dwelling place; And the law used to be read in it once every seven years before the whole congregation, at the appointed time in the year of release at the feast of the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 31: 9-13). Many things have been added to the rites of celebrating this feast besides the sacrifices and offerings which we shall talk about in our study of the book of Leviticus, if God will. ... At the time of the morning sacrifice the congregation used to carry branches of palm trees, myrtle, willows, and fruit trees, and go around the temple one time every day, and seven times the seventh day¹. ,, Then another custom appeared, that a priest used to fill a golden vessel with water from the well of Seloam, carry it to the temple at the time of the morning and the evening sacrifices, every day of the feast, to be received by blowing the horn, and singing the words of the prophet Isaiah: "*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation*" (Isaiah 12: 3); The Lord of glory has probably referred to that when He said: "*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*" (John 7: 37, 38); As though the Lord draws their attention to the Holy Spirit they receive in them. ... And they also used, in the evening following the first day of the feast to light two high minarets, each with four big lamps, that cast their light on the city, as a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit (the inner enlightenment).

It is as though the feast of the tabernacles is the feast of joy of the resurrection and the setting forth toward the heavenlies through the enjoyment of the Holy Spirit, who flows like fountains of living waters in us, and enlightens our inner insight.

Living in tabernacles in this feast refers to the state of the people after setting forth from the land of bondage, traveling across the wilderness, and dwelling in tents, on their way to Jerusalem, the city of the great King. And as **St. Augustine** says: [Now, before entering the promised land, namely, the everlasting kingdom, we live in the wilderness of this world in tabernacles ... He who realizes that he is just crossing

¹ *Joseph. Antiq.*

over in this world, is in tabernacles, and comprehends that he is sojourning in a foreign city, yearning to reach his ultimate home¹].

As to the sacrifices and offerings in this feast, it is noticed:

(1) The multitude of sacrifices and offerings: During the days of the feast, are slaughtered as burnt offerings as sweet aroma to the Lord; 71 bulls, 15 rams, and 105 lambs in their first year without blemish, etc. ... The more intense the joy is, the more are the sacrifices; As our joy is a reflection of our reconciliation with God through His sacrifice; and of His gladness in us through it! In other words, the more we discover the strength of the sacrifice, the more we enjoy the heavenly joy!

(2) If the joy of the feast makes them present such a multitude of sacrifices and offerings, yet without disregarding the daily regular burnt offering every morning and every evening. The feast, although motivating us to more enjoyment of the fellowship with God, and to more liturgical worship, yet this does not mean ceasing to follow the practices of our regular life.

(3) Along the first seven days of the feast, the same number of sacrifices are offered; But the eighth day is a day of a sacred assembly. The number of bulls starts at 13, and ends up on the seventh day at 7; namely, it successively decreases by one every day than the day before.

(4) Every day a sacrifice of sin is offered, as in all other feasts, melded with the burnt offerings as sweet aroma to the Lord.... It is as though God's gladness in us goes hand in hand with His forgiveness of our sins, through the one salvation work of the cross.

4- THE PERSONAL FREEWILL OFFERINGS:

Besides those collective sacrifices and offerings that are offered every day, every month, and every year; there are the sacrifices, offerings, drink offerings, and vowed offerings, offered by man through his own free will; by which the collective work melds with the personal, and the worship of the congregation with that of every one of its members.

¹ *On the Gospel of St. John, tr 28: 9.*

CHAPTER 30

THE VOWS

Having ended His talk concerning the sacrifices and offerings with the freewill offerings, the Lord intended to clarify the extent of the believer's commitment to his vows; discerning between the mature man and the daughter in her father's house, and the wife under a husband.

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1- The vow of a mature man | 1 - 2 |
| 2-The vow of a daughter in her father's house | 3 - 5 |
| 3- The vow of a wife under a husband | 6 - 8 |
| 4- The vow of a widow or of a divorced woman | 9 - 16 |

1- THE VOW OF A MATURE MAN:

The general principle concerning vows, is that someone committed to a vow "*shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth*" (2).

The scholar Origen noticed that this phrase (originally) came with the word 'man' repeated twice: "*If the man (man) vows a vow to the Lord...*". Wondering why this word was repeated, he believes that this refers to an important spiritual principle; which is that he who vows is "the man (man)"; namely, a man who bears inside himself "the new man", or "the inner man". As man cannot present something to the Lord, nor fulfill a vow, unless he bears inside him "the new man", who has spiritual potentials that make glad the heart of God; saying: [We cannot present to the Lord vows, if, in ourselves or in our nature, we have nothing to present. The "outer man" cannot receive God's law, nor present vows; as he has nothing befitting to be presented to the Lord. "The inner man", on the contrary, in his (new) nature, has what he can present to the Lord; As in him, all virtues and all knowledge are concentrated; And in him the image of God is renewed. Once he regains the image in which God created him from the beginning; his virtues are renewed, and he goes back to his first beauty; he can then present vows to the Lord; and we can then call him, not just "the man" but the man (man)". If the "inner man" is not kept sound, nor adorned with virtues, and is not provided with good habits; If he does not seek the wisdom of God, and be diligent to know the holy books; he could not be called "the man (man)", but just "the man", or "the carnal man" ... In case we see "the inner man" in us, hidden underneath the dirt of sins and the rottenness of iniquities, we should hasten to cleanse him from the defilement of the flesh and blood, and to convince him of repentance to remember God and to hope for salvation ... By this we can present vows to the Most High, and would be called "the man (man)" ¹].

That is concerning him who presents vows; But let us ask ourselves: What is the vow that the Lord seeks? The scholar Origen answers, saying: [*What does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul?!*] (Deuteronomy 10: 12). Unless we first give to Him, we shall not receive from Him ... If you give glory to God, you will get glory; as God Himself says: "*Those who honor Me, I will honor*" (1 Samuel 2: 30). As for me, I would say: In case we present purity, namely, purity of the body, we shall get from Him the purity of the spirit. And if we deliver to Him our mind, according to the words of the apostle, He shall provide us with His mind: "*As for us, we have the mind of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 2: 16) ²].

¹ In Num., hom. 24.

² Ibid.

God therefore, seeks our complete heart, our depths, our love, and our strife. Not forgetting the labor of love, He will take from what is His in us, a vow, to pay it double back. Let us give an example from the life of the prophet Moses, when he declared his love for God and for his people, saying: *“If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here”* (Exodus 33: 15). Moses presented love, insisting not to move unless the Lord occupies His place in the middle of His people; as though he is saying to God: In our midst, You have a place that no one else can occupy! ... That is why, after a while, God said to Moses: *“Here is a place by Me”* (Exodus 33: 21). God paid love back with love! ...

In the Old Covenant, Hannah vowed to the Lord the fruit of her womb, and dedicated Samuel to the temple (1 Samuel 1: 11, 24). And, unfortunately, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, saying: ‘It will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from my battle against the people of Ammon, I will surely offer it up as a burnt offering’. When he came to his house in Mizpah, there was his only daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; ... he tore his clothes; but had to carry out his vow to the Lord (Judges 11: 30-40). And there were others who presented properties and beasts. vows to the Lord. But the Lord Christ presented His own life, a vow to the Father, bearing His cross as a sacrifice of love on behalf of humanity, as a sweet aroma to the Father, who smelled it a fragrance of gladness on the believing humanity, sanctified in Him . We, as well, bearing that unique Nazirite inside us, receive the features of His vow in us; bear His cross inside us; present our whole life complete to God; And live, not any more for ourselves, but for the Lord who redeemed us. The sign of our vows, is: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”* (Galatians 2: 20); *“For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him”* (2 Timothy 2: 11).

2- THE VOW OF THE DAUGHTER IN HER FATHER’S HOUSE:

“If a (daughter) vows a vow to the Lord, while in her father’s house, and her father hears her vow and holds his peace; then all her vows shall stand” (3, 4). That was the state of the church in the **Old Covenant**, She was like a woman in her youth, living in her father’s house. Hearing God’s law and statutes, she made a vow to the Lord, when *“All the people answered with one voice and said: ‘All the words which the Lord has said, we will do’* (Exodus 24: 3). The church of the Old Covenant became committed to fulfill that vow; But, unfortunately, she broke it; as all the people were found breakers of the commandment.

3- THE VOW OF A WIFE UNDER A HUSBAND:

In case a wife makes a vow to the Lord while in her husband’s house, and her husband hears her vow and holds his peace, then all her vows shall stand (6, 7). That is the state of the church of the **New Covenant**, that became a bride to the Lord, and is committed to present her life sanctified to Him. She will indeed not be able to fulfill her vow, except by the Spirit of her Groom, that she has got inside her to sanctify her perpetually, and to prepare her for the everlasting wedding.

4- THE VOWS OF THE WIDOW OR OF THE DIVORCED WOMAN:

I believe that the widow or the divorced woman refer to the soul that rejected faith, and was deprived of the house of her Groom ... Would she be able to fulfill her vow?

CHAPTER 31

A FINAL WAR

God commanded the prophet Moses to take vengeance on the Midianites who hired wicked women to cause the children of Israel to trespass against to the Lord; And that would be the final chapter of the strife of the prophet Moses.

1- Fighting against the Midianites	1 - 7
2- Killing the five kings of Midian and Balaam	8
3- The spoils	9 - 12
4- Killing the wicked women	13 - 20
5- Purifying the metals and washing the clothes	21 - 24
6-Division of the plunder	25 - 54

1- FIGHTING AGAINST THE MIDIANITES:

God intended to end the life and strife of the prophet Moses by a war, the goal of which was not mere conquest nor getting spoils; as much as it was “sanctification”, by taking vengeance on the Midianites who listened to the counsel of Balaam, and hired wicked women to use their beauty to create an offense before the children of Israel, to trespass against God. They had to be fought, so that such offense would not happen again. That was a reference to the importance of cutting off the offense in the believers’ life, to make them live by the spirit of conquest and victory.

That would be the end of Moses’ strife before ascending to Mount Abarim to see the holy land from afar. That was the goal of the work of the law, to reveal the offense, and to support the believers’ strife against it; Yet, it was not capable of granting righteousness, nor bringing the believers over to the frontier of the holy land. ... It incites the spirit of strife in us, and raises us up through the shadow and symbol to behold heavens from afar; but is not capable of carrying us over to it.

The features of this holy spiritual strife was:

(1) Taking away the offense: According to **the scholar Origen**: [The offense put before the children of Israel was caused by the Midianites who hired wicked women to make them trespass against the Lord; and brought on them severe punishment for committing sin. The Medianites, in their turn, being the cause of falling into sin, became the object of a more severe punishment. ... From this we learn that, by causing an offense to others to fall into sin, we shall be in a worse condition than committing the sin ourselves! That is what the Lord taught us by saying: “*It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than he should offend one of these little ones*” (Luke 17: 2) ¹].

(2) Falling into sin, Israel was defeated without going into an actual war; Although we did not hear of any war between them and the Midianites or the Moabites; yet 24,000 died with plague (Numbers 25: 9); and if it was not for the zeal of Phinehas the priest on the sanctuaries of the Lord, the whole people would have been consumed (Numbers 25: 11). But now, as the congregation were sanctified, there was no need for all the 600,000 men of war to go to war, but it was enough to let 1000 men from each tribe (12,000) to go, fight, and conquer. It is not a war of the great number, nor of military possibilities of weapons and plans, but of the power of piety and holiness over evil and sin. According to **the scholar Origen**: [As It is written: If they abide to the law of the Lord, just one of them can chase a thousand. We see how the prayers of one saint, would be stronger than an army of the wicked; ... So, knowing how the prayer of the righteous can pierce the heaven; how could we not

¹ In Num., hom. 25.

have conquest on the earth?! Therefore, we should seek first the righteousness of God (Matthew 6: 33), to submit all our enemies, on condition that we “*gird our waist with truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and above all, take the shield of faith, with which we will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one*” (Ephesians 6: 14-16).... By these weapons all the camp and hosts of the evil one will be defeated; and we will, in trust, sing, saying: “*Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; Though war should rise against me, In this I will be confident*” (Psalm 27: 3)¹].

(3) If the figure 12 refers to the kingdom of God on earth, where the Holy Trinity reigns on all directions of the world (3 x 4). the figure 1000 refers to the heavenly life, as one day for the Lord is like a thousand years. The figure 12,000 refers, therefore, to the heavenly kingdom of God on earth, which have conquest over the spirit of evil and offense. Whoever join the membership in the spiritual kingdom of Christ, bearing the heavenly features; before him, the devil and all his hosts will be defeated.

(4) In that war, we did not hear of any military leaderships nor preparation with weapons, but only that: “*Moses sent them to the war, one thousand from each tribe, with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the holy articles and the signal trumpets in his hand*” (6). The whole energies of that war was the 12,000 men, namely, the heavenly life, which exalts over sin and all its seductions; under the leadership of Phinehas the zealous priest on the sanctuaries of God, referring to the incessant fiery worship by the Holy Spirit; With the holy articles of the sanctuary, in particular the ark of the testimony, that refers to the presence of God, as the secret of our sanctification and our conquest; besides the signal trumpets that refer to the word of God, that is “*living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to dividing soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Hebrew 4: 12). These are the true preparations for a conquest in the spiritual war: life with a heavenly mind; the incessant fiery worship; the feeling of the presence of God; and the abidance to the word of God.

(5) The war was directed t “to all males” (7). We said before that the male refers to the thought, mind, or soul; while the female refers to the body, work, and emotion. In our war against sin, we aim our spiritual arrows against every evil thought that corrupts both the soul and the body. We are not against the body, but we resist the thought that corrupts it, its emotions, and feelings.

2- KILLING THE FIVE KINGS OF MIDIAN AND BELAAM:

“They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of those who were killed, namely ,Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword” (8)

Who were those five kings, and who was Balaam?

(1) Who are those five kings, but the five senses that should die to sin, to enjoy the holy life?! There would be no life for these senses unless they first die by the cross, to the works of the old man. **The scholar Origen** says: [Those who reign over the iniquities – according to the Holy Book – are five kings. By that we learn, that every iniquity that prevails over the body, does satisfy one of the five senses. Therefore, the five senses in the kingdom of the Midianites, are to be killed, so that righteousness would prevail on them instead of iniquities; and the good work for edification, instead of the offensive work; as those senses were used for offense in the Midianites. That is why the Lord says: “*If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out*

¹ *Ibid.*

and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you, that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Matthew 5: 29-30). The Lord does not command us to pluck the physical eye, or to cut off the physical hand or foot; but commands us to cut off the physical sense, diverted by body lusts; “to let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you” (Proverbs 4: 25); to let your ears hear and devour the word of God, and your hand to touch and attach to it. By killing those five Midianite kings, and cutting off the offensive iniquities, the righteousness of our Lord Jesus would prevail; as “Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom of God, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 2: 30) ¹].

By killing the five kings, the devil would have no more authority over our senses; Not to live senselessly in denial, but for our senses to set forth enflamed by the Holy Spirit, to the account of the new King, the Lord of glory Jesus Christ.

(2) The names of those kings carry symbolic meanings: The word ‘Evi’, according to some, refers to the (**desire**); As though following the thought is the desire, on which, if the devil prevails and reigns, he would destroy and enslave the life of man. The Holy Spirit works to transfer the desire in man’s life, from the kingdom of sin to the kingdom of righteousness; namely, from the captivity of the devil to the freedom of life in our Lord Jesus Christ.

But **the scholar Origen** believes that the word ‘Evi’ means a **wild animal**; And that the believer is committed to scatter all the wild animal habits in him; saying: [How could you enjoy the blessing: “*Blessed are the meek*” (Matthew 5: 5), unless you first kill ‘Evi’, and deliver the wild anger to death?! I think that the Holy Book does not mention those names to tell a story, but to present certain facts ... The goal of the heavenly text, in my opinion, is teaching the souls to fight such kinds of iniquities; to drive them out of their dwelling places inside us. Let us then cast those kings away from the kingdom of our bodies; according to the words of the apostle, saying: “*Do not let sin reign over your mortal bodies*” ²].

(3) The second king we should kill is ‘Rekem’, meaning (**changing coloration**)³. If the first king represents violence and voracity, this second king fights against the spirit in a contrary way; namely, by changing coloration, namely, by going along with people, to catch their souls. The first kills the soul through violence, and the second through deceptive flirtation. That is why **St. Augustine** advises us to be aware of the wolf, even if it flirts with us and embraces us; and not to fear the dove, even if it gets into adversity with us, saying: [The dove loves, even in its adversity; while the wolf hates, even when embracing⁴]. About that deceptive king, the prophet David says: “*His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords*” (Psalm 55: 21).

(4) The third king was called ‘Zur’, namely (**a rock**)⁵; he who deprives man of his humanity, and turns his heart as hard as a rock. Hence the Lord of glory says: “I shall give you a new heart, and let a new spirit be inside you; take away your heart of rock, and give you one of flesh”. He will kill king ‘Zur’, to reign in us by His Holy Spirit, to set a heart of flesh, and a kingdom filled with love instead of violence and cruelty.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *New Westminster Dict. Of Bible, p 797.*

⁴ *Sermons on N. T. Lessons 14: 4.*

⁵ *J. Hastings: Dict. Of Bible, p 1059.*

(5) The fourth king was called 'Hur', most probably an Egyptian name derived from the god Horus; Although some believe that it is an Acadian name meaning **(a child)**. He does not turn man's heart into a solid rock, but would rather make him like a playful child, who practices his worship with slothfulness and lack of seriousness, and who does not look at the salvation of his soul like a mature man.

(6) The fifth king was called 'Reba', meaning **(fourth)**; probably referring to the temporal physical life; as the figure 4 refers to the earth with its four directions. That was the evil king who attaches man's life to the earth, that the soul cannot set forth high up by the wings of a dove, but is perpetually drawn toward the lowly mortal things of this world.

3- THE SPOILS:

(1) *"The children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and all their goods"*(9).

That was a symbolic work of the man who spiritually conquers; he captivates the body (the women), to work to the account of God, in harmony with the soul. ... The little ones refer to the fruition or works; Instead of having the body with its works serving the devil, it becomes, sanctified and pure, a tool of righteousness for God. ... As to the cattle and all the goods, they refer to the instincts and energies, which after having been defiled, they become sanctified; and instead of being a burden on us, they turn into a helper in our worship of God.

Our faith does not bear animosity toward the body, nor toward its feelings, emotions, works, energies, or talents; but bears a radical turning of it with all its possessions and works, to work to the account of the kingdom of Christ.

(2) *"They also burned with fire all the cities where they dwelt, and all their forts"* (10). To conquer spiritually, man should not disregard the little things, but should destroy every place of offense, uprooting sin from his heart, so as not to give the devil the right to enter into anew; As any slothfulness in completely cleansing the heart of every trace of sin, would give it the right to return to her place at her convenience.

(3) *"Then they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho"* (12).

As we said before, the spoil refer to the sanctification of the body with all its energies, to turn it from the animosity against the Spirit (Galatians 5: 17), to become with all its members "tools of righteousness to God" ... Now, what is the secret of their sanctification?

a- They brought all the booty and the spoil to Moses, the receiver of the law; as a proclamation that the commandment, namely the word of God, is the secret of sanctifying man with all his members ... *"the word of God, living and active ..."* (Hebrew 4: 12), man should keep inside his heart, to sanctify all his possessions, and to take the sin away from him; *"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You"* (Psalm 119: 11); Finding in it the secret of his spiritual life, the Psalmist says: *"My soul clings to the dust; Revive me according to Your word"* (Psalm 119: 25). Namely, his soul, so got attached to his body with all its lusts; that nothing could help that soul, except the word of God, that grants her life after being dead by sin.

b- *"They brought it to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan"* (12). Here is a reference to the sanctification of the body with all its energies through the water of the holy baptism in the Jordan, through the priesthood, among the congregation, namely,

the church. In the holy baptismal font, the Lord Christ destroys the devil, and grants man the possibility of the new life, the life raised together with Him.

4- KILLING THE WICKED WOMEN:

“But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, with the captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle... who had kept all the wicked women alive” (14, 15); the women who caused the people to trespass against the Lord; Hence he gave the command to kill every woman who has known a man intimately; together with her children, the fruit of that defilement; intending by this to leave no possibility of evil to infiltrate again among the people, and even to its remembrance that may lead man to do it a new.

5- PURIFYING THE METALS AND WASHING THE CLOTHES:

And Eleazar the priest instructed the men of war who had gone to battle,... that only gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, and lead, things that could endure fire, to be put through the fire for purification; and that things that could not endure fire, would be purified with the water of purification. As for men of war who touched and killed the Midianites, they should wash their clothes on the seventh day, and be clean, and afterward they may come into the camp (21-24).

In this statute we notice the following:

(1) A magnificent symbolic portrait of the spiritual army of God who conquered the sin, and set forth toward the true camp, the higher Jerusalem, *“the tabernacle of God with men”* (Revelation 21: 3). They are setting forth to their Groom to find comfort with, and in Him, in the bosoms of His Holy Father; with their works following them, namely, carrying with them the gold, silver, bronze, iron tin, and lead; and also carrying their clothes, having washed them and made them white in the blood of the lamb (Revelation 7: 14). ... What is that gold that is put through the fire, but the heavenly life, poured in the life of those who strived, through the work of the fiery Holy Spirit. ... And what is the silver but the preaching of the word of God, tried in a furnace and purified seven times (Psalm 12: 6). The believers enter into the heavenly camp bearing the labor of their love, to present them as precious fruit to the Groom who rejoices in His bride, sanctified in Him. ... As to the clothes washed in the blood of the lamb, they refer to our bodies, that will be raised up on the great day of the Lord, sanctified in the blood of Christ, to share with the souls their eternal crown and their heavenly glories.

(2) It is amazing how the statute counted those who strived, wrestled against sin, and conquered, as still defiled, and are committed to wash their clothes on the seventh day, before they enter the camp. It is as though the Lord intends to confirm that all those who strived – whatever is their spiritual stature – are subject to weaknesses, and are in need of being covered in the blood of the Lord Christ, that purifies from every sin. Although they are counted as heroes, yet their entrance into the camp would not be canonical, except through the Lord Christ, who purifies humanity from every defilement.

6- DIVISION OF THE PLUNDER:

As far as the division of the plunder is concerned, it is noticed:

(1) Half the plunder would go to the men of war (12,000); and the other half to the congregation (600,000 men -12,000). The victorious man of war thus takes more than 50 times the portion of the regular man. God crowns those who strive with special privileges; The Lord Himself says: *“In My Father’s house, there are many mansions”* (John 14: 2); And the apostle Paul says: *“One star differs from another star in glory”* (1 Corinthians 15: 41).. We saw that very clear, even in the division and distribution of the promised land (see the commentary on verse 26: 55).

(2) Although the plunder was distributed among them as a divine reward, yet all of them were committed to present a “*heave offering*” to the Lord (28). The men of war who went out to battle were committed to present one of every 500 of the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep; and one from every 50 from the rest. Thus, in our conquest, when we receive divine gifts, we are committed to present to Him, out of His gifts, offerings of love to Him, a sign of mutual love. On another aspect, giving here is a confirmation that the true leadership in this war has been the Lord’s Himself; Being the one who conquered through them, we should give His portion of the plunder to His priests and the ministers of His house. ... Here the figures 500 and 50, remind us of the parable presented by the Lord Christ about the creditor who has two debtors, one owed him 500 denarii, and the other 50 (Luke 7: 41, 42), both of whom He freely forgave; How the first loves him more. These two figures, as we have previously said¹, refer to freedom; At the age of 50, the Levi is relieved of ministering to the seen tabernacle, to get ready for the unseen one; ... On the fiftieth day, the Holy Spirit dwelt on the disciples of the Lord, to grant freedom to humanity from sin in the worthiness of the precious blood; ... And in the Jubilee (the fiftieth year), the land, the slaves, are liberated; and men are freed from all debts; ... etc.

What those present of their portions, make them free to do whatever they like in what is left with them.

(3) The plunder included, as well, human souls (women and children) together with beasts; as a reference to bringing into captivity every thought in us in the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10: 5). What was under the authority of the kings of Midian, would be taken away from them, to become under the leadership of Christ Himself.

(4) Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold and brought it into the tabernacle of meeting, as a memorial for the children of Israel before the Lord (54). If the gold refers to the heavenly life, it alone among the plunder should remain in the presence of the Lord. Anything that is not heavenly, even if it is a gift from God, would eventually come to an end before the heavenly thought and the heavenly life working in us; would remain for us before the Lord, testifying for our conquest and victory to His account.

¹ تفسير الأصحاح الرابع.

CHAPTER 32

THE LAND OF GILEAD

When the people of Israel set their tents in the plains of Moab, and once the two tribes of Reuben and Gad saw the land of Gilead as a rich pasture land, they desired to possess it, on account of that they had a great wealth of livestock,

- 1- Two tribes request the possession of the land of Gilead 1-5
- 2- Moses rebukes the two tribes 6-15
- 3-The two tribes proclaim their commitment to strive together with their brethren 16-27
- 4- Moses gives command to Eleazar the priest and the leaders of Israel concerning them 28-33

1- TWO TRIBES REQUEST THE POSSESSION OF THE LAND OF GILEAD:

Once the people of Israel took over the region east of the Jordan on their way to enjoy the promised land, the two tribes of Reuben and Gad (and probably also half the tribe of Manasseh), requested the possession of that land, and not to cross the Jordan together with the rest of the congregation (1-5).

Some believe that the word 'Gilead' is derived from the Arabic word meaning (hard or tough)¹; While other believe that it refers to (the heap of stones of the testimony) set by Jacob to testify to the covenant held between him and his uncle Laban (Genesis 31: 47). On a wider sense², Gilead covers all the region east of the Jordan (Deuteronomy 34: 1; Joshua 22: 9; Judges 20: 1; 2 Samuel 2: 9; 1 Kings 5: 17, 24-27). While on a narrower sense, it is a mountainous province east of the Jordan, which nowadays include the modern Balkaa, west of Ammon at the frontier of Heshbon, and that of Yarmok to the south; with an elevation of about 2000 feet above sea level, and includes forests, fields, valleys, and streams; so convenient as a pasture land; that the Groom of the songs likened his bride to a flock of sheep going down from Gilead (Songs 4: 1; 6: 5). It is famed for a kind of trees that produce a gum material called 'Balm of Gilead', of medical anti-inflammatory characteristics (Jeremiah 46: 11), of very high value, that at the time of Alexander the Great, it was evaluated as two double its weight of silver (see Genesis 37: 25). And when the prophets spoke about the reform of the new Israel in the Messianic era, they mentioned Gilead as a satisfaction of his soul (Jeremiah 50: 19; Micah 7: 14; Zechariah 10: 10).

We go back to the book of Numbers to see the two tribes of Reuben and Gad covet that land, presenting to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation the following reason for their request: "*Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Shebam, Nebon, and Beon, the country which God defeated before the congregation of Israel ...*" (3, 4).

"*Heshbon*", a Moabite name meaning (reckoning or evaluating), and its name nowadays is 'Hesban), a ruin of a city on an isolated hill between Arnon and Jebok, about seven and a half miles north of Madaba. East of these ruins there is a great basin of water, probably one of the pools that were outside the city wall (Songs 7: 4).

"*... is a land of livestock, and your servants have livestock ... Therefore, they said, 'If we have found favor in your sight, let this be land given to your servants as a possession, and do not take us over the Jordan'*" (5).

¹ New Westminster Dict. Of Bible, p 331.

² Mckenzie: Bict. Of Bible, p 310.

Ataroth: a Hebrew name, meaning (crowns)¹, and probably also means (a fold of sheep)²; most probably ‘Kherbet Ataroth’ nowadays, on the west slope of Mount Ataros, eight miles north-west of Dibon (Zeban), and three miles north-east of Fekharos, where St. John the Baptist was martyred.

Dibon: A Moabite name, meaning (deterioration), is a city which Sihon, king of the Emmites took over from Moab (Numbers 21: 26; 30), called an Arabic ‘Zeban’, a ruin of a city three miles north of the River Jordan, and two miles north-west of Aroer, and 40 miles south of Amman; where in the year 1868 A.D., the famous stone of Moab was discovered.

Jazer: meaning (a helper), taken over and rebuilt by the tribe of Gad (Joshua 13: 25); became a city for the Levites (Joshua 21: 39); taken over by the Moabites (Isaiah 16: 8, 9; Jeremiah 48: 32), then restored by Judah the Maccabee from the Ammonites; famed for its vineyards (Isaiah 16: 8; Jeremiah 32: 38); And according to Josabius, it was ten Roman miles west of Rabath Ammon, and fifteen miles north of Heshbon.

Nimrah: Or Beth Nimrah, meaning (house of the tiger)³, is ‘Tel El-Baleel’, close to ‘Tel-Nemrin’, ten miles north of the Dead Sea, and three miles east of the River Jordan.

Elealeh: a Hebrew word meaning (God sustained), rebuilt by the tribe of Reuben, then fell into the hands of the Moabites (Isaiah 15: 4; 16: 9; Teremiah 48: 34); its ruins are called ‘El-al’ on the top of a hill, one mile north of Heshbon.

Shebam: meaning (cold or cool), became the portion of Reuben (Joshua 33: 19), then taken over by the Moabites; famed for its vineyards (Isaiah 16: 8, 9; Jeremiah 48: 32). According to St. Jerome, it was half a mile from Heshbon; and is called nowadays ‘Qarn El-Kabsh’ (Ram’s horn), between Hasban and Nebo, three miles north-east of Siaghah on the valley of Salamah.

Nebo: An Assyrian name meaning (A broadcaster)⁴; refers to the son and messenger of the god Merdoch, a Babylonian god of literature and knowledge; who interprets his will to the mortals. The city carrying this name is located on or near Mount Nebo, where Moses stood to look at Canaan before he was gathered to his fathers (Deuteronomy 34: 11); five miles south-east of Hesban; and called nowadays ‘Kherbet el-Moheet; rebuilt by the tribe of Reuben; and according to what came on the Moabite stone, it was taken over by the king of Moab; mentioned among the Moabite cities in the prophecies against Moab (Isaiah 15: 2; Jeremiah 48: 1, 22).

Beon: or ‘Baal Meon’, or ‘Beth Baal Meon’, or ‘Beth Meon’ (Jeremiah 48: 23); Nowadays called ‘Moen’, nine miles south-west of Hesban, and five miles south-west of Medeah.

Why did the two tribes of Reuben and Gad request to have the land of Gilead?

(1) The obvious reason was that it was a pasture land; and they had a great wealth of livestock; and hence considered themselves more worthy than anyone else to have it: That “*lust of the eyes, and pride of life*” (1 John 2: 16), deprived the two tribes of their fellowship in the land that flows of honey and milk, granted to the congregation by the Lord. And by their choice through a human eye, they could not realize that it was a land without natural boundaries to protect them against probable attacks by enemies; which actually happened, and their brethren on the other side of

¹ New Westminster, p 76.

² Mckenzie: p 67.

³ Hastings, p 100.

⁴ J. Jastings, p 692.

the Jordan had to intervene to save them (1 Samuel 11; I Kings 22: 3); That, beside the unfortunate fact that they dwelt far from their brethren, isolated from them.

By such weak and short-range human eye, man may covet for himself things that may be harmful for him, and may deprive him of spiritual and temporal blessings.

(2) The hidden psychological reason for Reuben to chose that location, was probably his feeling that he has lost his firstborn rights as a son of Jacob; For Gad, that he was the son of Zelphah a maidservant; And for Manasseh, that 'Ephraim' his younger brother had more blessing than him ... Those three intended by some way or another to make up for their deprivation of the firstborn rights, by coveting the enjoyment of another material benefits, albeit outside Canaan, and far from the tabernacle

(3) According to **the scholar Origen**, there is another hidden reason behind the choice by those three of the land of Gilead, east of the Jordan; while the other nine and a half tribes enjoy the promised land, following their crossing over the river Jordan, and defeating more than thirty kings. He sees in the first group a living portrait of the church of the Old Covenant, that has been, and still is an integral part of the one church of God; yet without the riches of the blessings of the church of the new Covenant, that crossed over the holy waters of baptism, and bore the sanctuaries in her midst. It is a magnificent portrait of the believing human race: a part of which got a portion through the law (Moses), on whose hands and under whose leadership, conquest was achieved; While the greater portion was realized on the hands of Joshua (Jesus), who brought them over into the land that flows of honey and milk. Although the former were the firstborn, yet, on account of that they were less authentic, they got the inheritance of Moses; While the later, got the inheritance of Joshua (our Lord Jesus). The church of the Jews, although preceding that of the New Covenant, yet she did not enjoy what the later did; because "*He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than (John the Baptist)*" (Matthew 11: 11).

According to **the scholar Origen**: [Notice the reason why the old heirs got their portion beyond the River Jordan, aside from the others; on account that they had a great multitude of livestock (Numbers 32: 1-4). That was the reason why men of the Old Covenant could not reach the inheritance of the land that flows of milk and honey. ... That was the reason why they did not realize that "*the Word became flesh*" (John 1: 14); on account that they had great wealth of livestock. "*The natural man does receive the things of the Spirit of God, because they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*" (1 Corinthians 2: 14) ... ; Hence he got his portion of the inheritance outside the streams of water of the Jordan, and became a foreigner of the holy land¹].

the scholar Origen have focused on the existence of many livestock and abundant reference to a link to him the people of the Old Testament, things did not appreciate the physical tangible perfect to enjoy the mystery of the New Testament but hey saw through the shadows and the symbol of a long, and the New Testament men have livestock but does not impede but rather took their livestock and their herds And their children to cross the Jordan and enjoy the sacred dates Blessed their bodies (women) and their fruits (children) and emotions (cattle) and all their energies do not retire, but with which it won in transit, and inherit the bodies blessings apartment and the Holy Spirit comforting to venerate God.

2- MOSES REBUKES THE TWO TRIBES:

¹ In Num., hom. 26.

Moses, not feeling comfortable with their request, rebuked them bitterly; although he entered with them into a practical debate that ended with pleasing them, yet not at the expense of the truth and the edification of the congregation. Here, the prophet Moses, that amazing leader, even in his advanced age (120 years), despite what is known about the old people of being stubborn and inflexible, still appears as the man of serious firmness, yet full of flexibility, who confronts the problems with an open heart; not to dictate his will with the spirit of authority, but to find solutions by the spirit of love and wisdom;..

The secret why he intended to rebuke them was:

(1) The way those men ended their request by saying: “*Do not take us over the Jordan*” (5); brought grief to the heart of that great leader who spent 40 years in bitterness, coveting to enter, together with his people into the promised land. If the old generation were denied that, because of their continuous murmuring; and he and his brother Aaron, because of their weakness at the waters of contention (Maribah); He was shocked to be confronted by those who coveted not to enter it, when they were actually at its gates! ... How hard it was on his heart to see the children of the promise, despise the promise! ... And to hear the owners of the inheritance reject the inheritance of God for the sake of their temporal heart’s desire?!

(2) While caring for their livestock, when they found a good pasture for them; those men did not care as much for the promises of God to them, nor for supporting their brethren in their coming strife after they cross the Jordan. The prophet Moses realized that the animal aspect of their life – the carnal lusts – has blinded their eyes from seeing God’s graces on them, and kept them from caring for their brethren.

(3) God has probably hid from his great prophet, the realization of the symbolism that the action of those men bore; that they represent men of the Old Covenant; while the nine and a half tribes who are to cross the Jordan, represent men of the New Covenant.

The position of the prophet Moses was full of wisdom; While he clarified the reason for his rebuke; he warned them against sitting in comfort in the land of Gilead, together with their wives and children, while their brethren go to war (6); Against following the lead of their fathers who listened to the bad counsel of the ten men who went to spy the promised land, and came back in non-belief of God’s words; to draw on themselves the wrath of God, that led to the perdition of their generation in the wilderness; And against “*increasing still more the fierce anger of the Lord against Israel*” (14).

3- THE TWO TRIBES PROCLAIM THEIR COMMITMENT TO STRIVE TOGETHER WITH THEIR BRETHERN:

Before the firm, clear, and wise words of the prophet Moses, that bear no partiality nor a show of authority, they had to present a new proposal, in which::

(1) They reconsidered their former proposal concerning not crossing the Jordan, by pledging their readiness to go ahead of their brethren to war, saying: “*We ourselves will be armed, ready to go before the children of Israel, until we have brought them to their place*” (16).

They did not stop at proclaiming to partake of the strife, but even to be at the front rows.

(2) They promised not to return to their homes before the other tribes get their inheritance of the promised land (18).

By that, Moses’ heart came to peace, and he accepted their new proposal; So did the heart of the church, to see that they truly represent men of the Old Covenant, full of faith. Although they did not set forth to the promised land, together with their

wives, children, and livestock, yet, as men of war, they were ready to support their brethren, men of the New Covenant; to cross over to support us by their prophecies, symbols, and the law they received; Fathers and prophets of the Old Covenant have truly gone ahead of the procession, to proclaim the salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Moses' response in approval of their proposal was amazing, not repeating what they said concerning their readiness to be armed, and to go to war before the children of Israel (16), but he confirmed more than once their readiness "*to arm themselves before the Lord for the war*" (20). ... as a proclamation of their submission and spiritual strife in and before the Lord; Counting any retreat on their part of their pledge, as a sin against the Lord Himself (23) ... before which they again confirmed their new proposal (27).

4- MOSES GIVES COMMAND TO ELEAZAR THE PRIEST AND TO THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL CONCERNING THEM:

Knowing that his time to depart from this world was close, Moses commanded Eleazar the priest, Joshua, and the leaders of Israel (28), repeating very clearly all what those men pledged, and mentioning among them, for the first time, half of the tribe of Manasseh.

Those two and a half tribes built and fortified the cities, to leave in them their wives, children, and livestock; pledging not to go back to them before the rest of their brethren consummate their strife. Reuben changed the names of three of those cities after rebuilding them: Nebo, Baal Meon, and Shibmah; because the first two are names of pagan gods; and the divine commandment says: "*Make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth*" (Exodus 23: 13); while Shibmah meant (cold or cool); and it is not befitting of them to dwell in a cool life, but to have their life ignited with the fire of the divine love!

CHAPTER 33

ISRAEL'S JOURNEY FROM EGYPT REVIEWED

At the command of the Lord, the prophet Moses wrote down a review of Israel's journey since they set forth from the land of Egypt, until they reached the plains of Moab east of the Jordan, in preparation of their entrance into the promised land.

1- The divine command to write down the journey 1 - 2

2- The successive stops of the journey 3 - 49

3- The preparation for crossing over the Jordan 50 – 56

1- THE DIVINE COMMAND TO WRITE DOWN THE JOURNEY:

“These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hands of Moses and Aaron. Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journey at the command of the Lord” (1, 2).

The prophet Moses has previously wrote down those journeys in detail, in the books of Exodus and Numbers. What is the need for this concise summary?

(1) The prophet Moses did that not on his own, but *“at the command of the Lord”*. It is probably, as God commanded him to do the census twice: the first census at the beginning of the journey, at the second year, at the beginning of the second month; and the second census just before their entrance into the promised land; Likewise, God allowed for writing down the journey twice: the first time, presenting the details of God's dealings with man; and the second time, just before their entrance into the promised land, as a memorial; according to the words of the prophet Moses: *“You shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not”* (Deuteronomy 8: 2).

In the first record, he was giving the details of God's dealings with us, and the murmuring of man against Him, in order to incite in us the spirit of strife and conquest, and to be perpetually and incessantly on the move, striving to reach the higher Jerusalem. Whereas the second record represents a song of praise for the Lord.

(2) In this concise summary appears the movement of man in this world, in which he sometimes proceeds some steps forward, and other times he retreats; Yet, as long as he is under the leadership of God Himself, covering him as a cloud by day, and lighting the way before him as a pillar of fire by night, he will certainly reach his goal and realize his mission. God's way is indeed the safest, even if it is not the shortest or easiest of ways.

(3) Reading this chapter, with what it includes of the names of cities, valleys, hills, and mountains, beside wells and palm trees, one may consider them as knowledge not of much benefit. But **the scholar Origen** has on it a rather long commentary, of which we quote the following phrase: [Although the lesson within our hands may seem difficult to understand and with not much benefit to read; yet we must know that there is nothing in the writings of the Holy Spirit, excessive or of no benefit; even though it may seem to some otherwise; We are rather committed to direct the eyes of our intelligence toward the Lord who gave the command of writing it, and seek the meaning from Him¹].

In short, **the scholar Origen** believes that those who consider this parade of information as excessive and without much benefit, are like a lion, being a meet-eater, may consider the grass on the ground without benefit; While the cattle, being grass-

¹ In Num., hom. 26.

eaters, may find their satisfaction in the grass, and consider other kinds of food without benefit. Food on earth are diverse for the satisfaction of all; and every kind of animal or bird, has its kind of food. ... In the Holy Book, we find such diversity of food that would satisfy everyone; and different people would find in it their satisfaction and pleasure in different things. The scholar Origen gave us examples of the benefit of this chapter for our salvation, and for our liberation from the land of bondage to set forth to the heavenly Canaan; As every name of a city, a mountain, or a valley, etc. bears a certain spiritual concept on the way of our salvation.

The prophet Moses began his record of the journey by saying: “... *they went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron*” (1). They went out as spiritual men of war, and not fleeing in a haste, but under the leadership of God Himself, through His commandment (Moses) and His holy sacrifice (Aaron the priest); The prophet Isaiah says: “*For you shall not go out in haste, nor go by flight; For the Lord will go before you; And the God of Israel will be your rear Guard*” (Isaiah 52: 12). Although they appeared as fugitives, yet their going out in its depth, bears a divine plan that God took its execution upon Himself.

2- THE SUCCESSIVE STOPS OF THE JOURNEY:

The prophet Moses recorded for us 42 stops that end by their entrance into the promised land. This reminds us of the words said by the Evangelist Matthew: “*All the generations from Abraham to David are 14 generations; from David until the captivity in Babylon are 14 generations; and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are 14 generations*” (Matthew 1: 17); Namely the number of generations from Abraham, the father of fathers until the Lord Christ are 42 generations; conforming to the number of the stops along which the old people passed in their journey from the land of Egypt to Jerusalem. It is as though those stops represent the salvation and its history through humanity. The children of Israel came out from Egypt by their armies, namely, bearing a strength for the spiritual strife, which is actually the Lord Christ, who brought humanity over through history, being the secret of their strength, until He appeared incarnated after 42 generations.

As to the names of those stops, they bear a continuous symbolic work that raises the soul from the state of bondage, to bring it up to the heights of heaven. Hence the scholar Origen call them ‘a chariot of secret words’, that carry us “*from strength to strength*” (Psalm 84: 7), and from glory to glory; going through many sufferings and temptations that increase our spiritual strength and glories ... In the following are the names of those 42 stops that came in this chapter , and what they bear of symbolic meanings:

(1) **Rameses**: an old Egyptian name, meaning (son of the god of the sun – Ra); and also mean (house of Rameses); having been built by Rameses the second as the capital of the Delta or ‘Lower Egypt’, at the eastern frontier of Egypt, and called it by his name. From Genesis 47: 11, it appears to be the land of ‘Goshen’, called today ‘Sa-el-Hagar’ or “San-el-Hagar”, most probably one of the supply cities built by the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 1: 11).

The scholar Origen believes that it means (land of corruption)¹, or (disturbing chaos), or (disturbance of the flea)². The journey starts by setting forth from the land of corruption, the location of offense and sin, where the soul is in state of disturbance. As in that location, the wicked buried their firstborn (4), and lost their peace, the believers should flee from it. According to **the scholar Origen**: [All what is in the

¹ للمؤلف: سر الخروج، 1981، ص 81.

² أوريجانوس: تفسير العدد، عظة 27.

world fall into disturbance, anxiety, and corruption. That is why the soul should not abide in (the love of the world and its seductions), but depart from it to Succoth¹].

(2) **Succoth**: An Hebrew name, meaning (tents), most probably located in the valley of ‘Tamilath; thought by some to be the city surrounding ‘Phethom’; but the prevailing view is that it is ‘Tel-el-Maskhoutah’, at the far end of the valley of ‘Tamilath’².

Symbolically, as the soul sets forth from Rameses, where the inner disturbance is, to Succoth (the tents), to live sojourning and on the move, finding no rest until it reaches the bosom of the heavenly Father, and settled down in its Lord Jesus Christ. According to **the scholar Origen**: [Throwing off from yourself the rust of corruption, and getting away from the range of iniquity, Dwell in the tents, “*not that we want to be unclothed (from them), but further clothed (over them)* (2 Corinthians 5: 4). He would dwell in tents, he who runs toward God, free without chains nor labor³]; And: [The first progress for the soul, is to get rid of the earthly disturbance, and to know that it should dwell in tents like nomads; or to be like an armed soldier, ever ready to confront the enemies (the spiritual), alert, and not confused⁴].

(3) **Etham**: East of ‘Tel-el-Maskhoutah’, at the edge of the wilderness, at the eastern end of the valley of ‘Tamilath’, The wilderness of ‘Etham’ is located east of ‘Etham’. It is assumed that Etham was close to the city of ‘Ismailia’ nowadays.

The scholar Origen believes that the word ‘Etham’ means (a sign)⁵ or (a strait)⁶; Because It is the third stop of the journey, the scholar Origen believes that it bears the symbol of the resurrection of Christ on the third day. Once they reached this stop, they came to the edge of the wilderness, and could enjoy the shadow of the resurrected life with the Lord Christ; seeing God covers over them as a cloud by day; and lighten the way before them by a pillar of fire by night. This is the sign or the vision of this journey, or that is the vision... that it is the journey of the resurrection together with the Lord Christ, about which we already talked⁷.

Commenting on the meaning of ‘Etham’ as (a strait), **the scholar Origen** says: [In the narrowness of the (strait) or in the affliction, we should endure a great struggle, and the proclamation of a battle against the devil and his adversary hosts. So, has Abraham warred in the (depth) of the valley of ‘Siddim’ (Genesis 14: 8) against wicked kings, and conquered them. Our journey, therefore, is a descent down to the dwellers of the depths, or to the lower places (the strait); not to linger there, but to conquer].

Our entrance into ‘Etham’, therefore, is an entrance into the resurrected life in our Lord Jesus Christ, where by Him, we conquer the devil, who dwells in the lower depths or in the (strait).

(4) **Pi-Hahiroth** (or the mouth of Hahiroth): Father or ‘Pere Abel’ believes that it is the swamps of ‘Jeneffeh’, at the edge of the strait between the mountain and the Bitter Lake⁸; located between ‘Migdol’ and the sea, opposite ‘Baal Ziphon’ (Exodus 14: 2, 9); We have already dealt with the symbolic interpretation of this name, and its location; According to **the scholar Origen**, ‘The mouth of Hahiroth’, means (the hard ascent or the barrenness); And it is located between ‘Migdol’,

¹ لمرجع السابق.

² Hastings, p 942.

³ In Exod, hom. 5: 2.

⁴ In Num., hom. 27.

⁶ In Num., hom. 27.

⁸ New Westminster Dict., p 751.

⁵ للمؤلف: سفر الخروج، 1981، ص 86، 87.

⁷ للمؤلف: سفر الخروج، الأصحاح 13.

meaning (a tower), that refers to the necessity of counting its cost (see Luke 14: 28); And the sea, that refers to the continuous waves of temptations. As to being opposite 'Baal Ziphon'¹, meaning (fast ascension), It means that man, entering into the wilderness, should expect the hard ascension or the barrenness, put before the eyes of his heart to count the cost, accept the incessant temptations, and hasten in strife without slothfulness in his spiritual life².

That is a summary of what **the scholar Origen** presented to us in his sermons on the book of Exodus; But he presents to us still another interpretation in his sermons on the book of Numbers. He sees in 'the mouth of Hahiroth' the meaning of (the mouth of the little villages), namely, the entrance into modest little villages, where there is only hard life, and nothing of the luxuries of the large cities. So, if this was the first stop in the wilderness, following the departure from 'Etham', at the frontier of Egypt; We are committed to ascend to the mouth of anguish, labor, and suffering; to ascend through the narrow villages, heading toward the city of God, the higher Jerusalem. As to being located between Migdol and the sea; 'Migdol', meaning (tower), and also (glory), would imply that the believer enters into anguish, yet looks forward to the heavenly glories, as a motive to his incessant strife, not fearing the waves of this world.

(5) **Marah**: An Hebrew name meaning (bitter) or (bitterness); a very bitter spring to which the people reached, three days after crossing over the Red Sea. The bitterness of its water led the people to realize the hardness of the journey, and to start murmuring. But God instructed Moses to cast a tree in the water and it became sweet (Exodus 15: 23-26). This spring is located in the wilderness of 'Shur' on the way to Sinai, most probably it is 'Ein Howarah', about 47 miles from Suez, and only few miles from the Red Sea, separated from it by a chain of hills. The depth of this spring is about 25 feet, although its width increases with depth; the soil of this region contains a high ratio of Sodium, and its water is saline and bitter³.

Three days after entering into the wilderness of 'Etham', they encountered bitter water, that became sweet after casting a tree into it; a reference to the enjoyment by the believer of the life resurrected in Jesus Christ, through his burial in the holy water of baptism, three times, in the name of the Holy Trinity; By which the burial turns into resurrection, the old man in him is crucified with his bitter works, and the new man appears in the image of His Creator. Here, as well, the believer drinks the water of the law, not to find it bitter through the deadly letter, but sweet and satisfying through the grace of the cross, the life-giving tree⁴.

(6) **Elim**: An Hebrew name meaning huge trees like the pine, palm trees, and the terebinth trees, known nowadays as the oasis of 'Wadi Gharandal'; 63 miles from Suez; where there are palm trees, and acacia trees. Into it the old people crossed over after Marah, where there twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees (Exodus 15: 27; 16: 10). That was a reference to setting forth of the soul from the bitterness of 'Marah' to the rich evangelic life through the twelve apostles and the seventy disciples. It is the journey of the soul from the literality of the law to the sweetness of the evangelic spiritual understanding. It is not enough for man to drink from the water of the law, even after it turns sweet through the tree of the cross, but he is committed to drink, as well, from the apostolic evangelic water, and to enjoy the new food⁵.

¹ اسم عبراني يعني "بعل شمال"، غالبًا كان رمزًا للإلهة "بعلة الشمال". أما موقعها فللقرب من خليج السويس على الشاطئ الغربي من السويس.
² للمؤلف: سفر الخروج، ص 88، 89.

³ *New Westminster*, p 586.

⁴ للمؤلف: سفر الخروج، ص 99.

⁵ المرجع السابق، ص 100.

(7) **The Red Sea coast:** “They moved from Elim and camped by the (the Sea of Sof (the Red Sea))”(10). We said that the word ‘Sof’ means (papyrus); as the northern region of the Red Sea on the Egyptian side, was a multitude of swamps rich in papyrus.

Having reached ‘Elim’ and enjoyed the apostolic evangelic life, the people were committed, not to cross over the Red Sea again, but to camp by its coast. They have entered into it, as a reference to baptism, which would never be repeated, even if the believer happens to deny his faith, then came back to it through repentance; he would not enter again into it, but would come close to it through repentance, to restore his work in it. Hence the apostle says: “For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding Him up to contempt” (Hebrew 6: 4-6). According to **St. Cyril of Jerusalem:** [We do not get baptism twice or thrice As there is only “One Lord, one faith. And one baptism” (Ephesians 4: 5). Only the heretics could be baptized again, as their first baptism is not counted¹]. And, according to the scholar **Tertullian:** [The sacrament could never be repeated²].

Camping by the Red Sea, the people would remember the amazing work of God through the holy water; how He saved them from Pharaoh, and destroyed the devil with all his wicked hosts. Camping by the sea would also remind them of the strong waves to which they will be subjected throughout their journey, and how they should not fear them, but look forward to their **salvation**.

(8) **The wilderness of Sin:** (which is different from the wilderness of Zin). Most probably an Acadian word derived from the name of the god of the moon (Sin); In its place nowadays is ‘Dabat-el-Ramleh’, a heap of sand on the south-west, at a peninsula at the foot of Mount of Elim; where God sent the Manna on the people for the first time.

According to **the scholar Origen**, ‘Sin’ means either (bush) or (temptation). Binding the two meanings together, he believes that camping by the Red Sea, and meditating in God’s works with him through the water of baptism, man would remember the (burning bush) that refers to the divine incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection; and hope will be opened before him for the true goods; According to him: [But from where will this hope come? It is in the burning bush in which the Lord appeared and spoke to Moses – the first apparition of God to the people of Israel³]. ... And as ‘Sin’ also means (temptation); Looking at the bush, we are committed to discern between the true vision, that is from God, and the deceptive vision, through which the devil tempts us; he who may “transform himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11: 14). That is why, when Joshua the son of Nun saw a vision, he enquired at once: “Are you for us or for our adversaries?” (Joshua 5: 13). He who reaches that eighth stop, will be committed to bear the spirit of discernment to receive and recognize the divine visions, so as not to fall into the temptations and the traps of the devil.

(9) **Dophkah:** An Hebrew name, most probably means (livestock’s market), on the way between the Red Sea and Rephidim; probably in ‘Sorabiet-el-Khadem, or

² De Oratione. Ench. Patr. 208-314.

³ In Num., hom. 27.

¹ مقال افتتاحي 7.

close to the valley of ‘Magharah’¹. According to **the scholar Origen**, ‘Dophkah’ means (health); as the soul that enters into the wilderness of ‘Sin’, goes through temptations, and has the spirit of discernment, to distinguish between what is for God, and what is for the devil, would be cured of all spiritual ailments, and would enjoy good health. Many of our spiritual ailments are truly a fruit of our lack of spiritual discernment.

In ‘Dophkah’, the soul realizes its Christ as her Physician; to praise Him, saying: *“Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases”* (Psalm 103: 1-3).

(10) **Alush**: close to Rephidim; According to **the scholar Origen**, it means (works); As the soul enters into ‘Dophkah’, namely, into the spiritual health, and praises the Lord who heals her ailments, will set forth to the spiritual works, joyfully, and readily; to be said to the believer: *“When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you”* (Psalm 128: 2).

(11) **Rephidim**: An Hebrew name meaning (spacious places)²; located between the wilderness of ‘Sin’ and Sinai (Exodus 17: 1; 19: 2). Having no water, the people murmured against Moses, who by a divine command stuck the rock with his rod, and water came out of it (Exodus 17: 5-6). In Rephidim, as well, the battle against Amalek took place; in which, when Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed; and when he let them down, amalek prevailed (Exodus 17: 8- 12); And to it, Moses’ father-in-law came and worshipped the Lord together with the elders of Israel (Exodus 18: 1-12); All of which we dealt with in our study of the book of Exodus. Rephidim is probably located at ‘Wadi Rephaid’, north-west of the mountain of Moses, where it connects with ‘Wadi Raddo’. In ‘Wadi Rephaid’ there is a stream of cold water, and an oasis at the foot of Mount Rephaid³.

According to **the scholar Origen**, ‘Rephidim’ symbolically means (commended discernment), saying: [Works should be followed by commendation; Yet what sort of commendation? It is the one with the spirit of discernment. As the soul becomes worthy of commendation, when it has good discernment, *“judging all things, yet rightly judged by no one”* (1 Corinthians 2: 15).

(12) **The wilderness of Sinai**⁴: The word ‘Sinai’ is derived from the Acadian word ‘Sin’ the god of the moon. It is noticed that, by the name ‘Sinai’ is called in general, the wilderness of Sinai, as well as Mount Sinai, that is also called ‘Mount Horeb’. That wilderness surrounding the mountain is 11 days journey from ‘Kadesh Bernea’, by the way of Mount ‘Seir’ (Deuteronomy 1: 2); a spacious wilderness, wide enough for the whole people to encamp, at the foot of the mountain (Exodus 19: 20); and would be so close to the mountain that the people could touch it (10: 12), and could see its top (19: 16, 18, 20). On that mountain, Moses received the ten commandments; and at its foot, was held the covenant between God and His people (Exodus 20: 1; 24: 8). This mountain was not mentioned any more in the Holy Book, except for the fleeing of the prophet Elijah after being threatened by the wicked Isabel (1 Kings 19: 8).

There are many views about Mount Sinai; Some like the Historian Josabius see it as Mount ‘Serial’ in the valley of ‘Firan’, a great and isolated mountain 6758 feet high that could be seen from a great distance, yet, there is no wilderness around it

¹ *New Westminster Dict., p 231.*

² *New Westminster Dict., p798.*

³ *Ibid, p 799.*

⁴ *Ibid, p 886-7.*

spacious enough to accommodate the whole people to encamp. Justenian, believes that Mount Moses is itself Mount Sinai; a steep sloping mountain, at its foot is the valley of 'Raha' (comfort), 4 square miles wide, spacious enough to accommodate the whole camp.. In and Around this mountain which was sanctified by the encounter of God with the prophet Moses, to provide him with the ten commandments, several churches were built, in particular the Monastery of St, Catherine, where the Sinai version of the Holy Book was discovered, going back to the fourth century A.D.

Anyway, symbolically, the soul after entering into 'Rephedim', and is found worthy of commendation, through its spirit of good discernment, she can ascend mount Sinai to encounter her God in a holy seclusion, to recognize His secrets, and to enjoy the reflections of His glory on her.

(13) **Kibroth Hattavah:** Located between Mount Sinai and Hazeroth; 15 miles north-east of Sinai. In it the people complained and coveted for meat, and God sent to them the quails, enough to eat a whole month; and when they did with craving, He struck them with plague.

Its name means (tombs of the crave), or (tombs of the cravers) (Numbers 11: 34). According to the scholar Origen: [It is certainly the location where covetousness is buried and voided, and all the evil desires are quenched; where the flesh does not lust against the Spirit (Galatians 5: 17), but die to the law by the body of Christ (Romans 7).

(14) **Hazeroth:** It is probably 'Ein Khadrah' (Green Eye), 36 miles north-east of Mount Sinai. There, Miriam and Aaron murmured against Moses, and she got leprous (Numbers 12).

The word 'Hazeroth means (settlement); while **the scholar Origen**, believe that it means (a perfect building – well established) or (beatitude), he says: [Notice, O traveler, the progress of the journey; As once you put your body lusts to death, and bury them, you reach a great place (well-established), and get beatitude; Yes, blessed is the soul on which no carnal desire can prevail¹].

Some others believe it to mean (homes) or (folds); which would have the same sense of (settlement); As the soul could not have settlement or comfort, as someone secure in his own home, unless, by the Holy Spirit, she could first bury the carnal desires, and put them to death by the cross!

(15) **Rithmah:** An Hebrew name meaning (Rithm), a kind of (broom trees) that grow in the desert regions, whose roots are eaten in famines; and its shoots and roots are used to make coal (Psalm 120: 4). The scholar Origen believes that the word means (a consummate vision); As the soul which buries her carnal desires, becomes worthy of beatitude, and settlement, will enjoy a sound spiritual vision, through which it could recognize the secrets of incarnation, and the divine ordinance, in a consummate and deep way.

(16) **Rimmon Perez:** Probably 'Nakb-el-Bayar', meaning (the Pomegranate of the fissure or gap). The scholar Origen believes that the word 'Perez' here means a (cut) or (fissure); Namely, it is befitting of the soul, after crossing over 'Rithmah', and enjoying the consummate visions, to discern between the high heavenly things and the lowly earthly things; to separate and recognize the eternal things from the temporal ones.

(17) **Libnah:** Meaning (white). As the soul enters into 'Rimmon Perez', enjoys the separation of what is heavenly from what is earthly; she would choose what is heavenly, to enjoy the (whiteness), the symbol of heaven: St. John the beloved

¹ In Num., hom. 27.

saw in his vision, the heavenly Lord Christ *“His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow”* (Revelation 1: 14); Daniel saw Him, *“His garments white as snow”* Daniel 7: 2); In His transfiguration, *“His clothes became as white as the light”* (Matthew 17: 2). In the events of the resurrection and ascension, the angels appeared with white apparel (Acts 1: 10); In the Kingdom of heaven, those who conqueror are clothed in white robes (Revelation 7: 9); *“Those were the ones who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”* (Revelation 7: 17); And the prophet Daniel says: *“Purge them and make them white”* (Daniel 11: 35).

Therefore, the entrance into ‘Libnah’ is receiving the holy heavenly life, and rejecting the defiled things.

(18) **Rissah:** Probably was in the ‘Kandilet-el-Gorrafi’, between ‘Kossaima’ and ‘Aquaba, north-west of ‘Mount Robissah El-Negin’¹; An Hebrew name meaning (Destruction, dew, or rain); Whereas the scholar Origen believes it to mean (a seen temptation), which is the closest to the meaning of (destruction); And, believing that it also means (worthy of commendation), he says: [However the soul progresses, temptations would never forsake her. As though they are assigned to guard or protect her. ... The way meat will get corrupt without salt, the soul will get corrupt, unless it is salted by successive temptations; Otherwise it will be overcome by slothfulness; Hence it is said: *“Every offering of your grain offering, you shall season with salt”* (Leviticus 2: 13); And the apostle Paul says: *“Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me”* (2 Corinthians 12: 7). These are the (seen temptations) that would make us (worthy of commendation)²].

(19) **Khelathah:** It is probably ‘Kantalat Keraya’, also called ‘Agrod’, where there are wells and a water basin; and a path leading to the well of ‘Moen’³.

‘Khelathah’ is an Hebrew name meaning (an assembly), and also (leadership) or (rod)⁴. It is as though the entrance of the soul into ‘Rissah’, namely, into temptations, will not weaken her, as long as she carries the heavenly seal; On the contrary, she will be more connected to the (assembly) of the heavenlies; ... will be granted a greater authority, like a queen, on the heart, mind, and all senses;... will receive the thought she desires, and drive out what she does not; ... will have control on all her inner depths; ... will hold (the rod), of the cross, by which she can strongly say: *“The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”* (Galatians 6: 14); ... And she will hear the voice of her Groom saying to her: *“You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty; your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you’, says the Lord God”* (Ezekiel 16: 13, 14).

In ‘Khelathah’, the soul enters into the (assembly) of heaven, as a (leading) queen with authority, with the (rod) of her Groom, the secret of her strength and beauty; to reign together with Him forever.

(20) **Mount Shepherd:** Probably ‘Mount Araif el-Naqa’, south of Kadesh. The word ‘Shepherd’ means (beauty) or (elegance). The soul who enters into ‘Khelathah’, counted as a member in the (assembly) of the heavenlies, and granted (authority), and the (rod) of the cross; will enter into the heavenly (beauty) and (elegance), on an exalted level; to hear the voice of her Groom, saying to her: *“Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair!”* (Songs 1: 15); confirming his admiration for her.

¹ New Westminster Dict., p 806.

² In Num., hom. 27.

³ New Westminster Dict., p 534.

⁴ Origin: in Num., hom. 27.

The scholar Origen believes that ‘Shepher’ means (the sound of trumpets). As the soul reigns together with the Lord Christ, holds to the voices of trumpets, that refer to the word of God, the secret of her conquest and her heavenly splendor. By the divine word, she blows the sound of conquest and joy, to celebrate an incessant heavenly feast.

(21) **Heradah:** Probably in ‘Wadi Lusan’¹, or ‘Wadi el- Ein’ , one day journey from ‘Ein Hodeirah’. ‘Heradah’ is an Hebrew word meaning (awe) or (fear). Whatever is man’s spiritual progress, even if he reaches ‘Mount Shepher’, and had the spiritual beauty of the Lord Christ; he still should walk in the fear of God, consummating his salvation in awe and fear. **The scholar Origen** believes that the word ‘Heradah’ means (made worthy). By this, he who reaches ‘Mount Shepher’ by the trumpets of the word of God, becomes worthy of the crown.

(22) **Makheloth:** , Probably is ‘Kahelathah’ itself, to which they returned anew, or another town with a similar name. or most probably it is ‘Kantalet-Kerayah’, known also as ‘Egrod’².

While some believe that it means (assemblies), **the scholar Origen** sees in the return of the congregation to the same town, the symbolic meaning of the words (since the beginning); he says that he, who leans toward the meditation in the word of God ‘Mount Shepher’, and holds fast to its trumpets to conquer, is committed to meditate in Him who was from the beginning, namely, in God the Word, and never to sojourn from Him.

(23) **Tahath:** An Hebrew name meaning (what is below). He who intends to enjoy ‘Makheloth’, namely the holy (assemblies), meditates in Him (who was from the beginning); is committed to be the least of all (below all), and a servant of all; by which he would live in peace, both with God and with men.

The scholar Origen believes that the name ‘Tahath’ means (abidance). He who humbles himself (goes below), would meditate in Him who was from the beginning, not in a theoretical way, but through “*abiding in Him*” (John 15: 4). ‘Tahath’ is probably located at Mount .

(24) **Terah:** Probably between ‘Hazereth’ and ‘Kossaima’. The name ‘Terah’ is an Hebrew word meaning (a kind of mountain goat); But **the scholar Origen** believes that it means the act of the Spirit being caught up into the heavenlies . It is as though, our abidance in the Lord Christ “the Word of God”, brings us over to the realization of His unutterable, immeasurable and divine secrets; to enter where our Spirits are (caught up) into His heavenly secret place.

(25) **Mithkah:** Probably ‘Wadi Abu Takieh’ that descends from the ‘Thokb el-Orod’ to ‘Wadi el-Garafi’. ‘Mithkah’ is an Hebrew word meaning (sweetness); as though it refers to the entrance into the sweetness of the Lord Jesus Christ, through our abidance in Him.

The scholar Origen believes that it means (the new death); As the act of the Spirit being (caught up) into the divinities, exhorts us more to the enjoyment of the death of the Lord Christ, as a new death which is not the fruit of sin that we have committed or inherited, but the fruit of our unity with the Lord Christ, crucified, and raised from the dead.

(26) **Hasmonah:** Probably it is ‘Wadi el-Hasim’. The word ‘Hasmonah’ means (fertile). If Mithkah’ means sweetness in the Lord Christ Jesus, Hashmonah means the fertility of life and fruition in Him.

¹ Hastings, p 364.

² New Westminster Dict.,p 581.

According to **the scholar Origen**, ‘Hashmonah’ means (bones). If ‘Mithkah’ is the (new death); By our death in Christ, we would not fear or be disturbed, as not a single one of our bones (the spiritual) will break.

(27) **Moseroth**: Location unknown, except that it is close to Mount ‘Hor’, at the frontier of Edom. As the word ‘Moseroth’ means (bonds) or (chains), **The scholar Origen** believes that he, who enters into the city of ‘Meseroth’, will put the devil in chains and cast him away, that no place would be given to him in us (Ephesians 4: 27).

(28) **Bene Jaakan**: or ‘the children of Jakaan’; a Horite tribe from Mount Seir, taken over by force by the Edomites (Genesis 36: 20, 21, 27; 1 Chronicles 1: 38, 42; Deuteronomy 2: 12). At the time of Exodus, the tribe of ‘the Children of Jakaan’ occupied a province at the frontier of Edom, close to Mount ‘Hur’ where Aaron died; The children of Israel encamped near some of their wells.

The scholar Origen believes that the word ‘Jakaan’ means (fountains) or (purification). As the devil is cast chained, and has no more place in us, We are committed to drink more from the pure fountains of God, namely, from His word or commandment, that purify our inner depths.

(29) **Hor Hagidgad**: Or ‘Cave of Hagidgad’; or ‘Gudgodah’ (Deuteronomy 10 7); most probably located on ‘Wadi Gudgodah’ or ‘Ghadaghed, a part of ‘Wadi Garaphi’ or ‘Gir Afi’, north of ‘Katilet el-Giraphi’¹.

(30) **Jotbathah**: Probably ‘El-Tabah’, 22 miles north of Aqaba, a land of rivers of water (Deuteronomy 10: 7). The word ‘Jotbathah’ is an Hebrew word, meaning (good things). The more we enter into the city of the temptations of ‘Gudgodah’, the more we enjoy good things, and the bitterness of the temptation would turn into pleasure of conquest in our Lord Jesus Christ.

(31) **Abronah**: An oasis called nowadays ‘Ein Dafia’, seven and a half miles north of ‘Ezion Geber’. The word ‘Abronah’ means (crossing over) or (a path). As the soul that enjoys the spiritual good things (Jotbathah’, is committed to be in a state of a continuous (crossing over), moving forth from goodness to a greater goodness, and rising from glory to glory through the Holy Spirit of God.

(32) **Ezion Geber**: A city located at the north edge of the Gulf of Aqaba near (or west of) Elath (Deuteronomy 2: 8; 1 Kings 9: 26; 10: 22; 22: 48; 2 Chronicles 8: 17); assumed to be ‘Tel el- Khalifa’, 200 yards from the sea coast, half way between Aqaba and the east edge of the Gulf of Aqaba, and ‘Marshrash’ on its west edge; It is at the lower edge of a curve inclined on the east side of the hills of Edom. It has been an important center of the trade of iron and bronze (Deuteronomy 8: 9); where Solomon used its suitable geographic location to build his marine fleet; But it was later taken over by Edom; then taken back from them by king Amaziah, who built the harbor of Elath (2 Kings 14: 22; 2 Chronicles 26: 1, 2)².

Symbolically, **the scholar Origen** believes that it means (purposes of men). As by our entrance into ‘Abronah’, namely, by receiving the continuous life of crossing over, we set forth from the stage of childhood to that of mature men, namely, of spiritual manhood; to have the (purposes of men) and their counsel, about which it is said: “*Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out*” (Proverb 20: 5); And the apostle says: “*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, ... but when I became a man, I put away childish things*” (1 Corinthians 13: 11).

¹ In Num., hom. 27.

² New Westminster Dict., p 289, 290.

(33) **Wilderness of Zin:** Right next to the southern frontier of Canaan; on the border of Edom westward, and Judah to the south east (Joshua 15: 1-3). It was a part of the wilderness of Paran, with Kadesh in between. Different from the wilderness of Sin¹, yet it also means (temptation). We thus set forth, in our journey, from a temptation to another; which is entered by those who have the (purposes of men), to grow in purity and splendor. **The scholar Origen** says: [The craftsman, intending to make a good vessel, gets it close to fire, to make it more pure; and shapes it with a hammer, in the purpose of his art²].

(34) **Kadesh:** A Semite name meaning (holy); also called ‘Barnea’, an important oasis north of the wilderness of Sinai, at the edge of the wilderness of Zin (Numbers 20: 1), westward of ‘Wadi Araba’, close to the southern frontier of the land of the tribe of Judah, or to the southern edge of that of the children of Israel, 11 days journey from ‘Horeb’ in the direction of, and on the way to Mount Seir; not far from Mount ‘Hor’ and the frontier of Edom. It played an important role in the journey, directly following Mount Sinai. In Kadesh the following events happened:

a- The people murmured against Moses, because of their thirst, and he struck the rock twice (Numbers 20).

b- The rebellion of Korah and his company.

c- Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, died (Numbers 20: 1).

d- Moses sent spies to Canaan, who came back with a cluster of grapes, they carried it between two men on a pole, as a deposit of

the land that flows with milk and honey (Numbers 13:23; Deuteronomy 1: 20).

e- Moses sent messengers to Edom to ask permission to pass through his land to the land of Moab (Numbers 20: 14-21).

f- At that location, the people spent the longest period in their journey; hence some assume that the tabernacle was set in Kadesh;

and the congregation moved from there, and got back to it to worship, and to hold the court of justice. While some others believe that it is ‘Ein Kadis’, 50 miles south of ‘Birsheba’ ; Others believe that it is ‘Ein Kadirat’, closer and larger than the first.

Symbolically, ‘Kadesh’, representing the life of holiness, is located no place else, but at the wilderness of Zin, namely, at (the wilderness of temptations); As outside the sufferings, man will not enter into the holy life, in which he drinks from the holy living Rock that flows for him with the Holy Spirit, through the rod (the cross); ... In it, all rebellion and arrogance of Korah and his company, will scatter; ... We receive Miriam’s death with no grief;... We enjoy the deposit of the kingdom (the cluster of grapes); ... And we enter into a war against the devil (Edom).

(35) **‘Mount Hor’:** at the frontier of the land of Edom; where Aaron died and buried (Numbers 20: 24-29; 33: 37-39; Deuteronomy 32: 50).

Up till the days of Josephus³, the prevailing tradition was, that ‘Mount Aaron’ is itself ‘Mount Hor’, half way between the Gulf of Aqaba, and the southern way from the Dead Sea; a sand rock with the elevation of 4780 feet; with ‘Petra’ close westward. Yet some recent scholars believe that ‘Mount Hor’ is ‘Mount Nadira’, 15 miles north-east of Kadesh, on the way between Kadesh and Moab; reasoning that ‘Mount Aaron’ is in the middle of Edom, and not on its border; something that makes it difficult for the people, at that time, to cross over to it. Besides, ‘Mount Aaron’ with

¹ *Ibid*, p 1024-5.

² *In Num.*, hom. 27.

³ *Antiq.* 4: 4, 7.

its high elevation, would not give the chance to the congregation to watch him die (Numbers 20: 22-29).

As to the word 'Hor', meaning (mountain); It is as though Aaron who ascends that mountain to die and rest, without care for the name of the location; It would be enough for him to rise up, and not to go down as Korah and his company did.

He, who enters into the holy life, would desire to rise up on Mount 'Hor', to find rest in the bosom of God forever.

(36) **Zalmonah:** Probably east of 'Mount Aaron' at the well of 'Madkor'. The word 'Zalmonah' means (King's shadow); As he who rises up on 'Mount Hor' through a holy life in the Lord, would not fall into pride and haughtiness, but would live covered by the shadow of the heavenly King; that St. Mary, the Mother of God enjoyed, as she heard the good news, saying, "*The power of the Highest will overshadow you*" (Lule 1: 35). And that is what every soul covets, saying: "*I sat down in His shade with great delight*" (Songs 2: 3).

(37) **Punon:** Probably located on the eastern side of 'Araba', about five and a half miles east of 'Kherbet Nahas', a province famed for iron and bronze. According to **the scholar Origen**, the word 'Punon' means (keeping control on the tongue). Whoever ascends Mount 'Hor', and sits under the shadow of the King Himself, is committed to keep his tongue sacred, speaks the truth, and never utter a vain word.

(38) **Oboth:** Means (close to the water); located close to the south-eastern border of Moab, probably near 'Ein el-Weba'. Closeness to the water probably refers to drinking from the water of the Holy Spirit that perpetually supports us on our journey.

(39) **Ije Abarim:** Ije is a Moabite word meaning (devastation); located at the southern border of Moab; It is the same 'Ijim', probably also 'Machai', seven miles east of 'That el-Ras'.

According to **the scholar Origen**, 'Ije Abarim' means (depth of the crossing over) or the (chasm of the crossing over); As, coming close to the end of our journey, we enter into the depths, into the bosoms of our father Abraham who says to the wicked: "*Between us and you, there is a great gulf (chasm) fixed*" (Luke 16: 26). In that fatherly bosom, the soul finds rest in her perpetual crossing over to the depths of the other great life.

(40) **Dibon Gad:** We have already talked about 'dibon Gad' in Chapter 32.

If the word 'Dibon', according to **the scholar Origen**, means (hive); The more the alert soul gets closer to the eternal crossing over, the more active and serious she gets, to become like a bee hive of God.

(41) **Almon Diblatham:** meaning (we are aware that the figs got withered). This is the stop before the last; between the River 'Arnon' and 'Mount Abarim'; probably the same 'Beth Diblatham' (Jeremiah 48: 22); and most probably the western 'Dalilath', two and a half miles north-east of 'Lab'.

Entering into this location, and realizing that the world became like a withered fig tree, we truly come to believe that "*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*" (Ecclesiastes 1: 2). That is why we do not cover ourselves with fig trees like our early parents Adam and Eve, but we receive the sacrifice of the Lord Christ that covers our weakness, and brings us over to the eternal inheritance.

(42) **The mountains of Abarim before Nebo:** We have already talked about it in chapter 32. It is the last stage of the journey, where we join the prophet Moses in his stand on the mountains of crossing over; and seeing Canaan before us, we desire to set forth to join the congregation of saints who have fallen asleep in the Lord.

That is the journey of the soul from ‘Rameses’ where there is the disturbance and bondage, to ‘Mount Abarim’, where our vision of the heavenly Canaan becomes clearer.

3- THE PREPARATION FOR CROSSING OVER THE JORDAN:

The journey came to an end next to the Jordan, the holy River, where the Lord Christ dwelt to baptize the church, granting her the Spirit of prophecy; sanctifying her a bride for Himself, and a temple for His Holy Spirit.

The great prophet Moses ended his mission by telling the congregation about God’s confirmation, not to leave the pagans in their midst, lest “*they become like irritants in their eyes, thorns in their sides, and the cause of continuous harassment in the land where they dwell; And moreover it shall be that God will do to them as He thought to do to their enemies*” (55-56).

CHAPTER 34

THE APPOINTED BOUNDARIES OF CANAAN

After giving a concise summary of the journey in the wilderness, and a final commandment to the congregation before their entrance into the promised land; He declared the appointed boundaries of that land, who are to inherit it, and who will carry out its division among the tribes as an inheritance.

1- The appointed boundaries of the promised land 1 - 12

2- Those who will inherit the promised land 13 - 15

3- The leaders appointed by God to divide the land 16 – 29

1- THE APPOINTED BOUNDARIES OF THE PROMISED LAND:

- a- God did not leave it up to the people, but appointed by Himself the boundaries of the promised land on all directions; As, in His sight, this has its utmost importance; being *“the shadow of the heavenly goodness”*. And the symbol of the high Jerusalem. This land was so vast in area, that the people of God have not possessed except under the reign of kings David and King Solomon.
- b- The secret of the greatness of that land, was not in its vast boundaries, nor in the wide authority of its kings; as much as it was in being the center of the divine worship for some time, until the time for the Rod to come out of the origin of Jesse, to reign over the hearts of men. The Psalmist says: *“In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel; In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion”* (Psalm 76: 1).
- c- The appointment of boundaries to the land, refers to setting certain conditions for those who are to enter into the high Jerusalem; As, although it is spacious enough to accommodate all humanity, Yet, *“There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination”* (Revelation 21: 27). It is *“a glorious church, ... without blemish”* (Ephesians 5: 27). Hence the firm commandment: *“You shall not pollute the land where you are ..., Do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell, for I, the Lord dwell among the children of Israel”* (Numbers 35: 33, 34). And in the book of Jeremiah, the Lord rebukes them, saying: *“They have defiled My land”* (Jeremiah 16: 18). This is the boundaries: It is His land and dwelling place; he who enters it with defilement, is forcing his way into God’ kingdom and His land!
- d- He set for it natural boundaries and strongholds: The great Sea (the Mediterranean) to the west; the salt sea (the Dead Sea) to the east;; and the wilderness of Zin to the south, ... etc.

2- THOSE WHO WILL INHERIT THE PROMISED LAND:

He appointed those who will inherit the land by the nine and a half tribes; As the tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh will inherit nothing in it; saying about them: they *“have received their inheritance on this side of the Jordan”* (14, 15). He repeated that they have chosen the land they desire, three times; Having chosen for themselves, they will not enjoy what the Lord has chosen for His people. When man chose for himself, by his own free will, he would be denied the blessings of the divine gifts.

3- THE LEADERS APPOINTED BY GOD TO DIVIDE THE LAND:

God appointed those who will divide the land by name: Eleazar the high priest; Joshua the son of Nun the greatest leader; and one leader of every tribe that are

to inherit the land, by name; foremost among whom was to be Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who, together with Joshua the son of Nun, came back to the last generation, from spying the land, carrying a cluster of grapes; The land is not strange from him, as he has entered into it before, tasted its fruit, and testified to it, presenting a deposit of its fruit. ... That is the task of the Christian, to enter into the Kingdom, live it, and enjoy its fruit, then present a deposit of it to his brethren ... Then, On the great day of the Lord, his name will shine like a lighted star, and will enter into the bosom of God with a daring; on account of that he has enjoyed it before, and is not a stranger from it.

We said that 'Joshua' is a symbol of Jesus Christ the greatest leader for the entrance into the eternal Kingdom; And that 'Eleazar' means (God helped); helped us by His only-begotten Son, who came down, and carried us in Him to enjoy His Kingdom. Whereas 'Caleb', derived from (Heart), refers to the faithfulness of heart and its zeal to enjoy the eternal inheritance. So are the names of the rest of the leaders, appointed by God to divide the land, all of them carry the features of those who will enjoy the inheritance, and support their brethren in enjoying it:

'Shemuel'	means	(God listened)
'Elidad'	means	(he who is beloved by God)
'Bukki'	means	(he who is tried by God)
'Hanniel'	means	(God is compassionate)
'Kemmuel'	means	(the assembly of God)
'Elizaphan'	means	(God kept hidden)
'Paltiel'	means	(God saved)
'Ahihud'	means	(my brother is great)
'Pedahel'	means	(God redeemed)

In short, those names reveal the features of the eternal kingdom, being the work of God the Redeemer; ... the fruit of God listening to us in His Son; ... the secret of His love for us in Him; ... His compassion on us; ... He who save us; ... who grants the assembly of the saints in God; ... the assembly hidden in Him; ... in which everyone of us becomes glad to see his brother great, ... and rejoices in the glories of the others.

CHAPTER 35

CITIES FOR THE LEVITES AND CITIES OF REFUGE

Having appointed the boundaries of the sacred land, and the leaders who will divide the land, God proclaimed His care for His ministers who, although will not inherit land, yet they are to dwell in certain cities, some of which are designated as cities of refuge, to which the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee (See Deuteronomy 19).

1- The cities for the Levites	1 - 5
2- The cities of refuge	6 - 8
3- The statutes governing the cities of refuge	9 - 28
4- Firm statutes against murder	29 - 34

1- THE CITIES FOR THE LEVITES:

a- The cities for the Levites and their locations shall be dealt with in detail in the book of Joshua (Chapter 21). But what we shall clarify here is that God who intends for the minds of His ministers to set forth to the heavenlies, would not forget their temporal needs; having promised us, saying: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6: 33). Although He did not wish for His ministers to have fellowship together with the congregation in earthly inheritance; yet He did not forsake them without their own cities, but appointed for them 48 cities, of which 6 are cities of refuge; and 42 cities for them. The figure 42, as we have already said, refers to the 42 stops along the journey of the children of Israel in the wilderness toward Jerusalem; And to the 42 generations between Abraham and the birth of the Lord Christ (Chapters 33). These cities are just temporary stops that bring man over from glory to glory, or from strength to strength, until he reaches the high Jerusalem in the bosom of the heavenly Father. That is the work of the ministers of the word, to bring every soul over, through her journey in this life, into a life of fellowship with God, in His Son, by the Holy Spirit. ... The disciples of Christ decided to be preoccupied by nothing except *“prayer and the ministry of the word”* (Acts 6: 4).

b- God appointed as well the areas of those cities: *“to extend from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubit all around”* (4). And as we already said, the figure 1000 refers to the heavenly life; as though all what belongs to the Levites should bear the heavenly feature.

2- THE CITIES OF REFUGE:

Among the 48 cities of the Levites, six cities were designated for refuge; to be distributed over east of the Jordan, and Canaan; that have their own statutes (Deuteronomy 19).

God is the Refuge of the soul; The Psalmist says: *“God is my defense”* (Psalm 59: 9, 17); *“For You have been my refuge in the day of my trouble”* (Psalm 59: 16; 61: 3); *“You are my strong refuge”* (Psalm 71: 7). Six cities were set: three east of the Jordan, and three in Canaan. Those in the east of the Jordan refer to the church of the Old Covenant, that did not cross over the water of the holy baptism; And those in the land of Canaan refer to the church of the New Covenant; ... Man’s refuge, whether in the Old Covenant or the New One, is the Holy Trinity, the One God for all. ... As to the figure 6, it refers to the complete six working day of man; and, being prone in his work to err, he will find, all along the days of his sojourn, a refuge in God, whose arms are open to him, and will never be closed all his days.

3- THE STATUTES GOVERNING THE CITIES OF REFUGE:

a- As the cities of refuge are the portion of the men of the clergy; It is as though God intends to let the people know that the goal of priests is to guide them to the Lord Christ “the true refuge”, in whom the believer resort away from evil.

b- The manslayer who kills any person accidentally should hasten to resort to the nearest city of refuge. Deuteronomy 19: 3, states that the roads leading to the cities of refuge should be well kept (20 cubits wide, with bridges over streams, and signs with the word ‘Refuge ... Refuge’. The six cities, being evenly distributed over the whole land, to make it easy for anyone to reach it; refer to the Holy Book, open for everyone, to guide him toward God through the Lord of glory Jesus Christ, to find His arms stretched to all.

c- After resorting to the city of refuge, the manslayer will stand before the elders of the city for judgment, who will embrace him. In case they find out for sure that the killing was indeed by accident, and not intentionally to harm the victim, they shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and return him to the city of refuge where he had fled. There he shall remain until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil; After that the manslayer may return to the land of his possession. If the city of refuge refers to the Lord Christ; the repentant man will remain secure as long as he is in the Lord; But if he goes astray from Him, he will be subject to death. The death of the high priest refers to the death of the Lord Christ, by which He redeemed us from the wages of sin, and granted us complete freedom in Him.

4- FIRM STATUTES AGAINST MURDER:

Lest someone may assume that the statute of the cities of refuge means leniency toward the crime of murder, He clarifies the following points:

a- One witness is not a sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty.

b- No ransom shall be taken for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death; lest the rich would assume that, by his money he can kill and then get away with it by paying ransom; ... A killer must be killed!

c- Slothfulness in punishing the murderer is considered a defilement of the land where they dwell; in which the Lord dwells among His people.

Intending to confirm that the cities of refuge do not mean taking the life of others lightly, God wants us to know that salvation does not mean, as well, any leniency toward sin, or taking its commitment lightly.

CHAPTER 36

THE STATUTE OF MARRIAGE OF FEMALE HEIRS

As the Lord gave the portion of inheritance of Zelophehad from the tribe of Manasse to his daughters (Chapter 27), The chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, came to Moses to complain that the daughters of Zrlphehad, if they marry to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of their fathers, and it will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry. So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall change hands from tribe to another. Moses responded according to the command of God, by confirming two principles:

- 1- The girls may have the right to marry whom they choose; as marriage should not be obligatory.
- 2- Yet this right is to be limited as well, to men they choose from the same tribe, so that the inheritance remains kept within the same tribe.

Finally, the book ends by the following phrase: *“These are the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded the children of Israel by the hand of Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho”* (13).

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