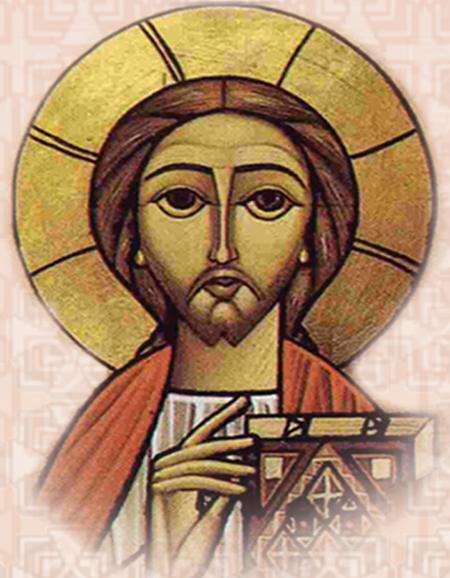


*A Patristic Commentary*



# THE BOOK OF 2 Kings

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A COMMENTARY ON

# **THE SECOND BOOK OF THE KINGS**

**BY**

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## **AN INTRODUCTION**

Please refer to the introduction to the two books of the kings, in the commentary on the first book of the kings.

The present book provides us with the story of the two kingdoms of Israel (the Northern kingdom) and Judah (the Southern kingdom) starting from the glorious end of the prophet Elijah who was taken up to heaven, until the utter destruction of the Northern kingdom of Israel, and its fall under the Assyrian captivation (1 - 17), and the captivation of the Southern kingdom Judah by Babylon (18 – 25). For the spiritual corruption leads to a political and social collapse.

Although God sent several great prophets, and used continuous chastisements, yet, because the two kingdoms: Israel and Judah persisted upon rebellion, and received idol-worship; there was no other alternative except the captivation to be an example before the individuals (Proverb 29: 1), as well as before the nations (Proverb 14: 34).

## **BETWEEN THE SECOND AND THE FIRST BOOKS OF THE KINGS:**

The second book of the kings is considered as an extension and a consummation of the first book of the kings. Both of them, in the Hebrew origin, were one book. The second book starts where the first one ends, by talking about the divided kingdom; when Ahaziah the son of Ahab (853 – 852 BC) was king over Israel, and Jehoshaphat (872 – 847 BC) was king over Judah.

The first book of the kings starts by the kingdom in its climax greatness, and the second one ends by the captivation, previously prophesied by the prophet Moses (Deuteronomy 28: 48-53).

The first book of the kings starts by Solomon the first king to succeed king David, and the second one ends by the last of his successors – king Jehoiakin who was led captive to Babylon, where he was well treated by its king Evil-Merodach (25: 28 – 30).

In the first book of the kings we see the holy temple of God, built to represent the divine presence. And in the second book of the kings we see it utterly destroyed, after being defiled by the kings, the people, and the religious leaders.

The second book of the kings is the book of the divided kingdom as a fruit of the persistence of man on evil, his apostasy from the true faith, and his rejection of the true worship. This darkness is the fruit of the evil human will that led the nation to lose its being, to be divided, and to be taken into captivity.

In this book, as well as in the one before it, we see the clear goal of the author, namely, even though he looks at two kingdoms, despite being politically divided, entering, sometimes, into dispute, other times into alliance; and oftentimes one of them join forces with foreign kingdoms against her sister the other kingdom; yet

he talks about one people. How the book ended up by the loss of Jerusalem the city of God, the destruction of the temple, and the stoppage of worship, are the fruit of sin by the whole people of the two kingdoms.

By the Spirit of God, the author of the book provides us with the Theological interpretation of the events, for one people with one identity.

Presenting justifications for the destruction that came upon the people, the author says about the king that "*he persisted in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin*" (2 Kings 3: 3; 10: 28; 13: 2 etc.); and sometimes he presents a detailed interpretation to justify that divine verdict (1 Kings 11: 9, etc.; 2 Kings 17: 7, etc.)

The goal of the author is not to give a historical record of a certain nation, or of certain events, but to reveal the dealings of God with man, and His care for his salvation, sometimes with compassion and forgiveness, and other times with chastisement.

### **THE MAIN TOPIC OF THE BOOK:**

As sin is the secret of the collapse of Israel and Judah, God cared, at the same time, to set for Himself witnesses to exhort men to return to Him with repentance. What came upon the two kingdoms of destruction,, was not by coincidence, nor according to a predestined destiny; for God has warned them once and again, against the natural fruit of their evils, saying: "*Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets. Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks ...*" (2 Kings 17: 13, 14).

For a long time God persisted on sending prophets to them, in the hope that they might forsake their evil; but they despised the longsuffering of God, and did not

care to perceive the activity and fruit of evil. He sent to them the prophet Nathan (1 Kings 1: 45); Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kings 11: 29-40; 14: 1 etc.); Shemaiah, the man of God (1 Kings 12: 22-24); Elijah (1 Kings 17 etc.); Micaiah the son of Imlah (1 Kings 22: 8 etc.); Elisha (2 Kings 2 etc.); Jonah the son of Amittai (2 Kings 14: 25); Isaiah (2 Kings 19, etc.); Huldah the prophetess (2 Kings 22: 14 etc.); and others.

Von Rad refers to twelve prophecies being actually fulfilled in the books of Samuel and the Kings, starting by the prophecy concerning Eli the priest. The phrase "*The Lord (Jehovah) has fulfilled the word which He spoke*" (1 Kings 8: 20; 2 Kings 24: 13); etc.

According to Von Rad, the goal of the book is not to present a historical record of events, nor a justification of what came upon Israel of captivity; as much as to carry a Messianic touch. For what occurred was a way to fulfill the divine promise of the coming of the Messiah the Son of David, to establish the fallen tent of David, saying: "*I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever*" (2 Samuel 7: 13 – 17); See 2 Samuel 22; Psalm 89 and 132).

### **SHINING LIGHT IN THE MIDST OF THE DARKNESS:**

While the first book of the Kings concentrated on the appearance of the prophet Elijah who was worthy to ascend by a fiery chariot up to heaven; in the darkest moments of history during the reign of the evil king Ahab and his evil wife Jezebel; The second book of the Kings concentrated on the appearance of the prophet Elisha to perform double the miracles done by his spiritual father the prophet Elijah. In the midst of corruption, God does not let Himself be without a witness, nor disregard the few faithful remnant; but sends holy fiery persons, capable of uttering the truth, to testify to the light amid the darkness, and to support the few holy remnant for the Lord amid the affliction.

In the midst of that darkness, we find the phrase “*the man of God*” repeated 36 times; for God “*would not destroy them or cast them from His presence*” (13: 23); but sent to them those who dedicate all their being to testify for Him.

If this book could be given the title of ‘**To Captivity**’, to warn the believers against sin, yet we can also give it the title ‘**Shining light in the Midst of the Darkness**’, For, in every era, whatever the corruption may reach, and however sin may prevail, yet the grace of God keeps on working and shining in the few faithful souls, as a testimony to the divine work in every generation. And it showed that God responds to those who request salvation..

According to Brevard Childs, although this book concentrates on the entire desolation that dwelt upon the people because of breaking the Law of God, yet it also bears the positive aspect, which is that the presence of God is not limited to the temple in Jerusalem, nor to the promised land. By that, he opened the door of hope for the blessing to come by the Messiah, that will come over the future generations of the whole world.

#### **THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK:**

**Many** scholars are in accord with what came in the Jewish tradition that the author of this book is the prophet Jeremiah under the leadership of the Holy Spirit; on account of that, being of priesthood origin, he was aware of everything that happened in the temple, and of the state of the religious leaderships. Having been helped, as well, by his prophetic activity, which touched the practical conditions of the civil and the religious leaderships; and by his relationship with the civil authorities on the highest level. He had a strong awareness of the political condition of Israel and Judah in his days, and even before he was born.

#### **THE VALUE OF THE BOOK:**

This book covers about 300 years of history, starting from Ahaziah, king of Israel and the death of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, up till the captivation. It includes the life of 19 kings of Israel, all of whom were wicked; and 19 kings of Judah, of whom 8 kings were good, even though evil has prevailed upon them in the end. The phrase "*He did evil in the sight of the Lord*" came 21 times, whereas the phrase "*He did what is right in the sight of the Lord*" came only 6 times.

Unfortunately,, Hezekiah, one of the best of the kings of Judah, begat Manasseh, the worst of them (Chapter 21); a sign of the personal responsibility of everyone for the proper raising of his children.

The prophets in the first and the second books of the kings, played a main role to rebuke the kings, the leaders, and the people. About 12 prophetic books were written during the period covered by the second book of the kings.

### **THE KEY OF THE BOOK:**

*"What kind of man was it?"* (1: 7); a question that concerns every believer, the answer of which would be: He is "*a man of God*", led by the Lord, to whom He proclaims His will; who glorifies the Lord, trusts in Him, consummates His divine will, despise the earthly things, and does not favor by the appearances.

### **THE SPIRITUAL LINES OF THE BOOK:**

1- The first and the second books of the kings show the dealings of God with His people and believers. The second book of the kings cares to confirm that the secret of the strength and prosperity in the life of the king and the people is the return to God and the renewal of the covenant with Him.

2-The second book of the kings, very clearly confirms what all the Holy Books, the historical and others, that God is the Controller of history. Nothing happens by a chance, but according to a divine plan that allows for the events to run according to the kingdom of God.

God, who allowed for the appearance of the evil king Ahab, who married the daughter of the pagan king of Sidon, who dedicated all her energies and those of the State to destroy the worship of the living God, and to establish idol-worship; has set king Jehu to destroy the house of Ahab, the idol-worship, and the worshippers.

3- This book cared to demonstrate an important fact concerning the impact of the family on the individual, even if he is a king. For it so happens that a son or a daughter, reaps the fruit of the behavior of the parent, good or bad. We see how queen Athaliah, carrying the spirit of her evil mother Jezebel, killed all the royal seed, except for the infant Joash, whose aunt hid him in the temple of God.

However, if someone intends to live holy for the Lord, the sins of his parents will not stand in his way, but, on the contrary, may be more to his justification. As an example for this we have the good king Hezekiah, who carried a completely different tendency from his father's; and we see how, unfortunately his son Manasseh walked and practiced the evil of his evil grandfather; like offering his own son a sacrifice to the idols, and establishing the pagan abominations.

4- The book reveals the longsuffering of God, both on the level of the people as a whole, and on that of the family or individual. Yet, that does not imply letting things go without control; but by His love, He so does to make us return to Him; and by His love, as well, He chastens in the proper time.

When God chastens His people or one of His believers, He does it gradually, as He did on Israel and on Judah; and when Israel persisted on her evil, He chastened her by the Assyrian captivation on three stages:

The first stage: when Israel was committed to pay tributes to Assyria

The second stage when God allowed Assyria to take over certain regions of Israel and to captivate their inhabitants.

The third stage when the complete captivation of Israel led to the utter loss of her identity, through leading a multitude of her inhabitants away, bringing many of different nationalities to replace them in the capital

Samariah, letting them intermarry and lose their belonging to their country.

It was befitting of the kingdom of Judah to learn from the lesson of her sister Israel that utterly collapsed and lost her identity, but, instead of repentance and returning to God, many of its people wrongly assumed that what

happened to Israel was a natural consequence of its dissent from Judah, despite its greater number of tribes, people, and possibilities; having deprived itself from Jerusalem the city of God, from the temple, the unique

house of the Lord; from the legitimate kings (of the tribe of Judah); and from practicing the worship according to the Mosaic statutes. The wrongly assumed that God would never allow for the destruction of His house, nor for

the captivation of His city Jerusalem. But as the kingdom of Judah has fallen into evil more than her sister Israel, God, after long suffering on her, allowed for her to suffer the Babylonian captivation, also on three stages.

### **THE HISTORICAL ASPECT OF THE BOOK:**

What preoccupied the heart of the author was how the people suffered, and walked as though without leadership; as the kings and the majority of leaders, were not qualified to lead the people in the Lord; and as the people were

characterized by a spirit of rebellion. God, therefore, despite His longsuffering and love, allowed for their captivation..

In some detail, the book narrates the prophetic ministry, specially that of Elijah and Elisha.

During that period Israel faced persistent pressures from Aram (Syria) under the leadership of Ben-Hadad the second, and Hazaiel; beside threats from Assyria, that was quickly growing and increasing in power, under the leadership of king Shalmaneser the third (858-824 BC).

The fourth dynasty initiated cleansing Israel from the plague of idol- worship brought over by the preceding three dynasties (10: 1 – 15: 12). But unfortunately, Jehu, the Founder of that dynasty, even though he acted against idol-worship, he kept worshipping the two golden calves set by Jeroboam in Bethel and Dan.. His successors in the same family were a little better than him; For at that time, the Southern Kingdom set forth from the reign of the wicked queen Athaliah, to Josiah and Omri, who achieved a little reform. As to the outside circumstances, the Aramite danger came to an end when Aram was attacked by the Assyrian Adad Nirari the third. Then Assyria itself started to decline with the beginning of the eighth century BC.

After the death Of Zechariah in the year 752 BC, the Northern kingdom entered into a quick state of declination, that had its impact upon the spiritual conditions. The religious apostasy, together with the ethical perversion, and the lack of wisdom in the political relationship with Assyria, have all led to the destruction of that kingdom in the year 722 BC.

At the same time, Jotham and his evil son Ahaz reigned over Judah, and provoked that kingdom to idol-worship.

Dealing with the history of Judah after the captivation of Israel by the Assyrians, the second book of the kings, after providing us with a narration of the works of the good king Hezekiah (Chapter 18-20); talked about the evil sons of Josiah; who led Jerusalem to face three attacks and captivations, the last of which was in the year 586 BC.

If the kingdom of Judah prospered during the reign of Hezekiah and Josiah; yet the movement of apostasy led to the captivation of Judah, that lasted for seventy years. Yet, in the midst of that dark portrait, the message of God was obvious, namely a divine promise that they will return from captivity (1c Kings 8: 46-53).

### **THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE BOOK:**

865 BC The prophet Elijah starts his prophetic work against Ahab king of Israel.

850 BC The prophet Elijah taken up to heaven ; and the start of the prophetic work of the prophet Elisha.

755 BC The start of the prophetic work of the prophet Isaiah in Judah.

736 BC King Ahaz starts his reign in Judah

722 BC Israel captivated by Assyria.

716 BC Hezekiah reign in Judah

697 BC Manasseh reigns in Judah

640 BC Josiah reigns in Judah

624 BC The Book of the Law discovered in the house of God in Jerusalem

622 BC. Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, falls into the Babylonian hand

586 BC The Babylonian captivation of Judah

### **BETWEEN THE CAPTIVATION OF JUDAH BY ASSYRIA AND ITS CAPTIVATION BY BABYLON:**

The way Babylon captivated any people, it differed from that followed by Assyria:

- 1- **The Assyrians** tended to captivate a larger multitude of people, to take them over away from their country, and replace them by people of different nationalities, to mix and intermarry with those left in an attempt to make them lose their belonging to their land.
- 2- They set their kingdom on robbing the other nations and peoples.
- 2- They found pleasure in cruelly torturing the captives, violently dragging them shackled in chains, and bare-footed.
- 3- In the land of captivity, they used to hold shows parading the captives mutilated in various ways; like putting out an eye, cutting off ears and nose, or skinning them alive.
- 4- They used to gather the skulls together in heaps in public places, as a way of terrorism.
- 5- **The Babylonians**, on the other hand, were only preoccupied with having political authority on the world, on spreading the Babylonian empire, and on benefiting financially from the countries falling into their hands. They were preoccupied with the amount of tributes they take, And, in an attempt to give the people under their dominion, no chance to rebel against their rule, they used to set on them rulers of their own, through whom they govern them.
- 6- The Babylonians allowed the captives to live together in Babylon in congregations, practicing their own worship and statutes, and to keep much of their culture. No wonder we hear the Psalmist cry out saying: *"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"* (Psalm 137: 4). They gave the captives the freedom of commercial and religious practices, etc.. Yet, in their feasts, they used to parade their gods in great processions through the districts where the captives dwell, to proclaim the power and authority of the gods of Babylon, who gave them conquest on all the gods of the other peoples.
- 7- The Babylonians used to cherish the sons of the captive royal families, the elites, and those with special talents, to let them serve in Babylon; like Daniel, the three young men, Mordechai, etc.

<b>The Books</b>	<b>Their subject</b>
1 – 2 Kings	A royal look, with a concentration on the throne
1 – 2 Chronicles	A priesthood look, with a concentration on the temple
The prophets	A prophetic look binding the throne to the temple

**THE DIVISIONS OF THE BOOK:**

1- The fiery Elijah and the chariot of fire	Chapter 1
2- The prophet Elisha	2 -- 8
3- From Jehu to the fall of Israel	9 - 17
4- The kings of Judah until the Babylonian captivity	18 --
25	
a- Judah under the reign of Hezekiah	18 --
20	
b- Manasseh and Amon	21
c- The reform of Judah	22 --
23	
d- The last days of Judah	24 – 25

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**AN ANNEX**

**A LIST OF THE MAJOR EVENTS**

Adam 4000 BC  
 Abraham 2000 BC  
 Moses 1500 BC [   
 The exodus 1440 BC  
 The beginning of the Judges era 1375 BC  
 The enthronement of Saul 1050 BC  
 David reigns 1010 BC  
 The rebellion of Absalom 975 BC  
 David's death 971 BC  
 The beginning of the reign of Solomon 971 BC  
 The division of the kingdom 931 BC  
 Elijah and Elisha  
 Elisha begins his ministry  
 The Assyrian captivity 722 BC  
 The Babylonian captivity 586 BC  
 Cyrus' decree 538 BC  
 Ezra 500 BC  
 Nehemiah in Jerusalem 444 BC

**A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE CONTENTS OF THE HISTORICAL BOOKS  
IN THE HOLY BIBLE:**

While the first and the second books of Samuel, and the first and the second books of the kings, care for the historical parade of the work of God for the sake of the return of His people to Him, The first and the second books of the chronicles, on the other hand, care for the positive aspect of supporting those returning from captivity by the spirit of hope.

<b>The Books: 1, 2 Samuel &amp; 1, 2 kings</b>	<b>The book: 1, 2 of the Chronicles</b>
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Directly mention David's household (2 Samuel 2: 3-5; 5: 13-16)	Care for man up to the end of captivity, to confirm the work of God with all (1 Chronicles 1 – 9)
Talk about king Saul, his weaknesses and death (1 Samuel 9: 31)	Refer only to Saul's death (1 Chronicles 10)
Mention David's fall into adultery (2 Samuel 11)	Mention nothing about that.
Mention the fruits of David's sin (2 Samuel 15 – 18)	Mention nothing about that
A quick reference to David's preparation for building the temple (1 kings 5: 3)	A detailed account of this issue (1 Chronicles 22, 28 -29)
Troubles on the way of Solomon's enthronement (1 kings 1-2)	Mention nothing about that
Solomon's marriage to foreign women (1 kings 11: 1-8)	Mention nothing about that
Present a concise parade of the kings of Israel and Judah	Care only for the kings of Judah
End by the captivity of Judah together with Israel	End by Cyrus' decree (2 Chronicles 36)
Talk about the opposition of Elijah and Elisha against the evil kings	Mention nothing about that
Hinting to the issues concerning the government, and the care for the aspects concerning of the tribes	Care for the Hebrew culture as a whole
Concentrate on the kings and	Concentrate on the temple and worship

their works	
Mention Saul's life before being enthroned as a king (1 Samuel 16-31)	Start by David's life as a king (1 Chronicles 11)
Saul's struggle against David, and the escape of the latter (1 Samuel 18-20)	Mention nothing about that
A debate with Abner, head of Saul's army (2 Samuel 3: 6-21)	Mention nothing about that
Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 15-18)	Mention nothing about that

## THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

THE YEAR	JODAH	ISRAEL	THE EVENTS
931 / 913	Rehoboam (17 years)		(1 kings 11: 43) (2 Chronicles 9: 31). Because of him the kingdom divided. He cared for the economy. He set idols after worshipping the true God for three years
931 / 910		Jeroboam (21 years)	(1 kings 12: 20). Built Shechem a capital for Israel. Set two golden calves in Dan and Bethel. Allowed anyone to be a priest. Changed the system of feasts.
913 / 911	Abijam (3 years)		(1 kings 14: 31). Despite his wickedness he resorted to God in his war against Israel

911 / 870	Asa (41 years)		(1 kings 15: 9) (2 Chronicles 14: 1). Broke down the pagan alters; and removed his grandmother from being a queen mother for she worshipped the goddess Ashtoreth.
910 / 909		Nadab (2 years)	(1 Kings 15: 25)
909 / 886		Baasha (24 years)	(1 Chronicles 15: 16). Led the people to idol-worship
889 / 885		Elah (2 years)	(1 Kings 16: 8)
885		Zimri (7 days)	(1 kings 16: 10); Commander of half the chariots; killed Elah and reigned in his place
885 / 880		Tibni the son of Ginath	(1 Kings 16: 21)
880 / 874		Omri (12 years)	(1 Kings 16: 22). Built Samaria as the capital of Israel; had military strength; led the people to idol-worship.
874 / 853		Ahab (22 years)	(1 kings 16: 28). Married the evil Jezebel. Against him, the prophet Elijah struggled
872 / 848	Jehoshaphat (25 years)		(1 kings 15: 24). His son married the daughter of Ahab. Had a mighty army. Worshipped the living God
853 / 852		Ahaziah (2 years)	(1 kings 22: 40). Suggested a commercial deal with Judah
852 / 841		Jehoram (12 years)	Joram (2 kings 3: 1). Suffered famine and war most of his reign

853 / 841	Jehoram (Joram) (8 years)		Joram a partner in reigning with his father Jehoshaphat (1 kings 22: 50). Married the daughter of Ahab; forced the people to idol-worship. Killed his brothers.
841 /	Jehoahaz (one year)		Or Ahaziah (2 Kings 22; 1). Was a friend of Jehoram king of Israel
841 / 835	Athaliah (6 years)		(2 kings 11: 1). Killed her grandchildren, except for Joash who was saved from her hand. Robbed the temple to build a temple for Baal.
841 / 814		Jahu (28 years)	(2 kings 9: 2) Responsible for the murder of Joram (Judah), Ahaziah (Israel), and Jezebel. He killed the priests of Baal, yet he did not completely worship God.
835 / 796	Joash (40 years)		(Jehoash) (1 kings 11: 2). Repaired the temple and broke down the altars of Baal. Yet, after the death of Jehoiada the priest, he distanced himself from the true God, and ordered the killing of Jehoiada's son..
814 / 798		Jehuahaz (17 years)	(2 Kings 10: 35) Encouraged idol-worship
798 / 782		Joash (16 years)	Jehoash (2 Kings 13: 9) Although he respected Elisha as a prophet, yet he walked in evil.
796 / 767	Amaziah (29 years)		2 kings 12: 21) He did not completely destroy idol-worship
782 / 753		Jeroboam II (31 years)	(2 Kings 14: 16). He became an example of evil, even though he was

			politically and economically strong.
791 / 740	Uzziah (52 years)		(Azariah) (2 kings 15: 1) Loved construction; Organized the army. But, forcing himself upon priesthood, he was struck with leprosy.
753 / 752		Zechariah (6 months)	(2 kings 14: 29) Encouraged idol-worship
752		Shallum (1 month)	(2 kings 15: 1)
752 / 742		Menahem (10 years)	2 kings 15: 14) Overtaxed his people
750 / 736	Jotham		(2 kings 15: 7) Even though he cared for the temple, yet he allowed for idol-worship
742 / 740		Pekahiah (2 years)	(2 kings 15: 22)
740 / 732		Pekah (8 years)	(2 kings 15: 25) Many were led captives to Assyria.
736 / 716	Ahaz (16 years)		(2 kings 16: 1) Closed the gates of the temple. Offered his son a sacrifice to idols.
732 / 722		Hosheah (9 years)	(2 kings 17: 1) Was committed to pay tribute to Assyria. Assyria invaded him, led many captives, and replaced them with foreigners.
<b>722</b>			<b>Samaria falls into Assyrian captivity by Shalmaneser</b>
716 / 687	Hezekiah (29 years)		(2 kings 16: 20) Cleansed the temple. Established the ministry; Broke down the idols; even the bronze serpent of

			<p>Moses</p> <p>God added 15 years to his days. But with pride, he revealed the treasures of the temple to the Babylonian delegates.</p>
697 / 642	Manasseh (55 years)		<p>(2 kings 21: 1) He brought idol-worship back; practiced sorcery; offered one of his sons a sacrifice; set an idol in the temple; and killed a multitude of his people.</p> <p>Then he repented while being captivated in Assyria.</p>
642 / 640	Amon (2 years)		(2 kings 21: 18)
640 / 608	Josiah (31 years)		<p>(2 kings 21: 24) While repairing the temple, the book of the law of god was discovered.. Celebrated the Passover; And broke down the pagan temples.</p>
608	Jehoahaz (3 months)		(Shallum) (2 kings 23: 31). Was imprisoned and taken to Egypt where he died.
608 / 597	Eliakim (Jehoiakim) 11 years		<p>(2 kings 23: 34) Burnt a scroll with the word of God. Was manipulated by Egypt, then by Babylon; the treasures of the temple were carried to Bbylon.</p> <p>He saw the first captivation to Babylon</p>
597	Jehoiakin (3 months)		(2 kings 24: 6) The second captivation to Babylon. While in prison he befriended Evil-Merodach the son and the successor of Nebuchadnezzar.
597 / 586	Mattaniah		(2 kings 24: 17) Saw the burning of

	(Zedekiah) 11 years		the temple. In the last captivation he was led to Babylon, after his two sons were killed before his eyes, then his eyes were put out, was bound with bronze fetters and taken to prison in Babylon
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586

**The fall  
of  
Jerusalem, and  
the  
captivation of  
Judah  
to  
Babylon.**

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM THE SECOND BOOK OF THE KINGS**

**GIVE ME A DOUBLE PORTION OF THE SPIRIT OF THE PROPHET ELIJAH  
TO BEAR A FIERY HEART, FATHERHOOD, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS**

+ Together with Elisha, grant me a double portion of the spirit of the prophet  
Elijah

To carry a double portion of Your strength;

To consummate Your plans toward me.

+ Let me, by the mantle of Elijah strike the Jordan;

To find a way for myself through the waters;

To cross over, together with Elisha, supported by the fellowship of the saints.

+ I seek from You no miracles to show off;  
But I seek Your work in me, O God of miracles and wonders.

+ I ask You to renew my nature;  
To carry the shadow of Your fatherhood, compassion, and love for all;  
To become an icon of You;  
That is the miracle I seek from You, O God of the impossible.

+ O, how amazing is Your longsuffering on me!  
I, who broke Your covenants with me; and disregarded Your law and commandment;  
I, who delivered myself to captivity and servitude;  
I, who was humiliated by the violent Assyria, and captivated by the arrogant Babylon;  
I should not admonish You;  
For it is my sin that carried me into captivity, and shackled me by eternal chains;  
Who can loose me from them, but Your grace, O my King and Liberator?

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# THE FIRST SECTION

## THE FIERY ELIJAH

(2 Kings 1)

### AN EXALTED AUTHORITY

#### THE DOOR OF HOPE IS OPEN EVEN WITH CHASTISEMENT:

While the first book of the kings cares more for the Northern kingdom, to reveal the pagan kings, and how their reign did not last long, because of their idol-worship and corruption, The second book of the kings cares to confirm that the persistence of the leaders of the Northern Kingdom on idol-worship, led to the destruction of the whole kingdom; when God sent Assyria to invade and captivate it.

The kingdom of Judah (the Southern kingdom) did not learn the lesson, but walked along the same way of her sister Israel (the Northern kingdom); and because of her treason and unfaithfulness to God, particularly with the sins in

which king Manasseh has fallen, God allowed Babylon to come to destroy the temple, and to lead the people of Judah into captivity to Babylon.

Yet the last three verses of the book came to open the door of hope before them; when king Jehoiakin was released from prison, and enjoyed good treatment by Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon. It is as though God calls the whole people, by the spirit of hope, to return to Him, to bring them back to their home, and to rebuild His temple.

The way the first book of the kings started with the enthronement of king Solomon in place of his father David, and with the glory, honor, riches, and authority; he enjoyed, so the second book of the kings started with the prophet Elijah and his amazing authority.

When Elijah sought from heaven to send fire to consume the two arrogant leaders of fifties with their men, heaven instantly responded to his request. And the book ends with the two kingdoms Israel and Judah, losing, not only their authority, but even their whole entity. In the same way, while the true believer enjoys a heavenly authority, he who persists on opposing the truth, will lose even the natural temporal authority.

# CHAPTER 1

## ***“WHAT KIND OF MAN?”***

### **THE FIERY ELIJAH:**

Through my study of the first and the second books of the kings, my heart was drawn to the person of the prophet Elijah, the fiery man of God; who lived his ministry with a fiery heart, that even in certain of his miracles, fire came down from heaven, whether to consume two leaders of fifties together with their men (2 Kings 1), or to proclaim God's acceptance of his sacrifice (1 Kings 18: 38). Finally, that man with a heart of fire, by the divine grace, was worthy of God sending to him a fiery chariot with fiery horses (2 kings 2: 11) to carry him up to heaven, to partake of the heavenly creatures, and to enjoy the presence of God, the Consuming Fire.

This chapter narrates to us a terrifying episode that reveals the danger of the sin of apostasy from God, and of the persistence on not returning to Him; when Ahaziah, the wicked king of Israel, fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was severely injured. ... How did happen while being secure in his royal palace? Was he drunk and unconscious? The author did not elaborate; except to say that he fell and was injured, and it so seemed that his condition was serious. And instead of repenting and returning to God, he, most probably, according to the counsel of his evil mother Jezebel, sent messengers to inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron, if he will recover from his injury

The messengers were encountered by the prophet Elijah, who brought to them a divine message that their master will not recover, on account of resorting to a pagan god who cannot give life nor healing to the sick. Once they returned and told the king what happened, and being sure from their description of the man, that it was Elijah, he sent a leader of fifties with his men to put him under arrest, who, when he haughtily ordered the prophet to come down to the king, Elijah

sought fire from heaven to consume him together with his men. This was repeated with a second leader of fifties and his men. But when a third one came to him with the spirit of humility, God commanded him to come down and to go with him to encounter the king, which he did.

Although Ahab, father of Ahaziah was evil, yet, on the political and economic aspect, he was strong enough to bring the kingdom of Moab under his authority, to pay him tribute. Once Ahab died, and was replaced by Ahaziah his son, Moab rebelled against him and sought independence.

This chapter provides us with a comparison between Ahaziah the evil man who rebels against God, and Elijah the man of God.

When the king got the message sent by Elijah, he inquired: "*What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?*" (7). He was not preoccupied with the divine message, but with the identity of the one who sent it, Elijah, on the other hand was only preoccupied with consummating the will of God, whatever the cost is.

### **Between the prophet Elijah and John the Baptist:**

Comparing between the persons of the prophet Elijah and John the Baptist, St. Ambrose says:

[Both of them lived in the wilderness. While Elijah was sustained by ravens, there, John trampled over all the pleasures of life, and loved poverty. One did not seek favor in the sight of king Ahab; and the other despised that of king Herod.

The mantle of one divided the water of the River Jordan; and the other turned those waters to cleanse our sins and grant us salvation.

The one appeared with the Lord in glory (in the transfiguration); and the other lived with the Lord on earth.

The one preceded the first coming of the Lord; and the second will precede His second coming.

The one, by his prayers, brought rain on the earth that dried up for a duration of three years; and the other cleansed the dust of sin off our bodies in the water of faith all along three years.

You may ask me: **What three years?** To which I would answer by the words of the Lord Himself, saying: "*For three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none*" (Luke 13: 7)

...

The first year, in the era of the patriarchs, when the harvest reached an extent that was never realized thereafter.

The second year, in the time of Moses and the prophets.

The third year, when our Lord and God came to "*preach the acceptable year of the Lord*" (Luke 4: 19)]

1- A divine leadership	1 - 8
2- Glorifying God	9 - 14
3- Trusting in God	15
4- Consummation of the will of God	16 – 18

### **1- A DIVINE LEADERSHIP:**

The worst enemy of man is when his heart and mind retreat from his inner depths, and the true life, to the outside appearances. The fall of Ahaziah from the lattice of his upper room, and his serious injury, should have exhorted him to care for his eternity, to take heed of the shortcomings of his family, and to seek the counsel and help of the Almighty God, instead of resorting to the vain gods; But he sent messengers to Beelzebub to inquire whether he will recover from his injury.... Elijah, the man of God, on the other hand, being trained on having the

Lord Himself as his Leader and Guide, God sent to him an angel to command him to go to encounter the messengers of the king of Israel, and to carry to him a message to rebuke him on resorting to Beelzebub.

*“Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab” (1)*

Moab, which, once submitted Israel (Judges 3: 12-14), overcome by king David (2 Samuel 8: 2), probably became independent after the death of Solomon, then was overcome by Omri king of Israel, according to what is engraved on the ‘Moabite stone’, a memorial that was discovered in the year 1869. The Moabites continued paying tribute to Israel (2 Kings 3: 4) until the Israeli army scattered after the death of king Ahab, when Moab rebelled against it (2 Samuel 8: 2; 2 Kings 3: 4).. By the rebellion of Moab, the author means the rebellion of ‘Mesha’ its well-known king..

*“Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and was injured; so he sent messengers and said to them, ‘Go, inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this injury” (2)*

The talk concerning Ahaziah started in 1 Kings 22: 51, and continued here as a consummation of the previous book.

The houses in Israel, most probably, used to be one-storied; whereas the palaces and the luxurious houses were two-storied. So Ahaziah probably fell through the lattice of the upper story, or through a fence around the roof,

**“through a lattice”**, Until recently, the windows in Egypt were covered by a wooden lattice, called ‘Arabisk’ by some, although it took after the Coptic art.

**“Beelzebub”**, Originally known as “Beelzebul”, namely (god of life), the greatest of the gods worshipped by the Philistines; in his temple in the city of Ekron, claimed to have a secret exalted power to protect them against illness and death caused by the germs carried by the house flies. And as the Jews were fond of playing with words, they changed the name of that god and called it “Beelzebub”, namely (God of the house flies); either to honor or to scorn the Philistinian Baal (See Matthew 10: 25; 12: 24; Mark 3: 22; Luke 11: 15, 18, 19). . Some read it as (the god of trash); and was counted by the Jews as ‘the rulers of the demons’ (Matthew 12: 24).

It was not the same Canaanite god “Baal” which was worshipped by Ahab and Jezebel (1 kings 16: 29-33).

In Taylor’s Calmet, there is an interesting portrait of an ancient antiquity representing the head of the god Jupiter with the appearance of a huge house fly.

According to Scaliger, the original name of that god was ‘Baal-Zebahim’, namely (Master of the sacrifices), and scornfully the Jews changed it to ‘Beelzebub’, namely, the god who is unable to drive the house flies away from the sacrifices offered to him.

**“Ekron”**, One of the five cities of the Philistines, to the north of their land.

It is amazing that although the name of the king was “Ahaziah”, meaning (Jehoah supports), he resorted to Beelzebub to inquire whether he will be healed of his injury, a sign of not trusting and despising the living God; and of setting forth to drink from the water contaminated by the deadly poison of idol-worship, instead of enjoying the living water of God.

+ It so seems that, in this, he was counseled by his evil mother Jezebel, who turned her two sons Ahaziah and Joram, together with their father into slaves to her.

(St. (Mar Ephraim the Syrian)

- + Despite having a higher floor in the house of the Lord, 'Pashur' threw the prophet Jeremiah into the lower dungeon.. As for us, we intend now to take Jeremiah up to the upper floor of the house of the Lord, by the spiritually exalted meaning; which I shall make clear, by quoting many texts in the Holy Book, that confirm that the righteous receive the prophets in the upper floors:

According to the book of the kings, the widow of 'Zarepath' which belong to Sidon, whom the Lord commanded to provide for Elijah, let him stay in the upper room of her house. (1 kings 17: 19)

Also the notable Shenomite woman, who used to give hospitality to the prophet Elisha, made for him a small upper room to find comfort whenever he passed by (2 Kings 4: 8-10).

The Lord Jesus counsels you, as well, saying: "*Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house*" (Matthew 24: 17)

According to the book of Acts, the righteous apostles were gathered together in the upper room to pray and meditate in the word of the Lord, when the Holy Spirit came down upon them in the form of divided tongues as of fire, and one sat upon each of them (acts 2: 3)..

And about St. Peter, who, if he did not go up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour (Acts 10: 9); he would not have seen heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners,

descending to him, and in it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

And about 'Tabitha' the woman who was full of good works and charitable deeds, who was not in the lower floor, but in the upper room (Acts 9: 37), where Peter went up to raise her from the dead .

And when the Lord Christ intended to eat the Passover with His disciples, they said to Him: "*Where do You want us to prepare? He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you*

*carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters; then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My*

*disciples. Then he will show you a large furnished upper room; their make ready"* (Luke 22: 9-12). He who intends to celebrate the Passover together with the Lord Jesus Christ, should never choose the lower floor,

but should be sitting high up in the large furnished, adorned and prepared upper room; where He will offer you the cup of the new covenant and the bread of grace; where He will grant you His body and blood.

We therefore counsel you to ascend to the high up places; to raise your eyes toward the mountains.

(The scholar Origen)

*"But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, 'Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them: Is it because there is no God in Israel, that you are going to inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron?'" (3)*

The latest mention of the prophet Elijah was when he talked to king Ahab in the vineyard of 'Nabot the Jezreelite', four years earlier (1 kings 21: 17-24)

Following the lead of his evil parents in their worship of the Baal, Ahaziah did not send his messengers to the temple in Samaria lest the news of his serious injury would spread to his people.

We learn from the prophet Elijah that God can enter into the life of His people in the time He chooses. That in every era, God sends prophets, whose talents are well-qualified for that specific circumstances, to have witnesses who illuminate the darkness. God always work to the account of His kingdom, even if man wrongly thinks that He has turned His face away from humanity, because of their corruption; *“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself”* (2 Timothy 2: 13).

As the events of the life of the prophet Elijah, most always carried the element of surprise, the way it happened here, some of the Jewish scholars tended to assume that he was an angel, and to call him in ‘Haggadah’ ‘the Bird of Heaven’; for he was like a bird flying in the world to realize heavenly missions; he was sent by God in the era of Ahab, the most evil of the kings of Israel, and his equally evil son Ahaziah.

According to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, [Because he was splendid, beautiful, righteous, and blameless; he was taken up to blameless place. Compared to his brethren in humanity, and not absolutely. He bore the symbol of the Lord Christ in many ways he portrays here:

- + Elijah the watcher and full of beauty, mixed his whole life with God, and dwelt in the wilderness far from the worldly pleasures;
  - He acquired a good will with God, not contradictory to the divine will;
  - In all things he was commanded to fight against the people, he arose to do the will of God;

He did not long to do anything on his own, but to consummate all the work of God;

He did not live for himself, nor moved to work for his own sake; all his movements were in the hand of God;

+ Elijah arose and came to encounter the messengers sent by the son of Ahab to Beelzebub

He said to them: Go and say to your master the king: "Is it because there is no God in Israel, he sent to inquire from the god of the Philistines?"

Has he not heard that the Lord of the children of Jacob is greater than all the other gods?

Whose news are in Egypt, and His experience is in the sea; His might in Horeb, and His majesty in Shiloh.

Whose dwelling place is in Sinai, His fear is in the whole world; His name is exalted in Jordan and Jericho;

His sword and His bow are in all the peoples; His terror is in Palestine, and His great might in the islands;

Who did not hear that there is a God for the children of Jacob? ...Why is He now scorned as though non-existent?

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*"Now therefore, thus says the Lord, 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die'. So Elijah departed" (4)*

**"Bed or divan"**: The royal bed, as it is nowadays in the houses of the wealthy of the East, is a divan 3 or 4 feet wide, and about a foot high; sometimes extends the whole length of the room, and other times occupies three sides of it, used during the day for sitting, and during the night for sleeping. It is usually about a

foot higher than the ground; and according to Hackett, it is sometimes so high that it needs two or three steps to climb, and may be more for the royal bed. Hence it is said: *“the bed to which you have gone up”* (4); and David says: *“I shall not go up to the comfort of my bed”* (Psalm 132: 3)

The king inquired from a foreign pagan god, but the answer came from the true God, in whose hand are life and death. Elijah uttered *“You shall surely die”*, not on his own, but on behalf of God who has the authority on life, who kills and let live. That verdict is a natural fruit of resorting to a pagan god, assuming that he can heal him.

Elijah then returned to his dwelling place on Mount Carmel (2 Kings 2: 25; 1 Kings 17: 42)

Presenting a concise comparison between the living God whom the king disregarded, and Beelzebub, the god of Ekron to whom he resorted, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi says:

- 1- The living God, being the Grantor of life to whoever seeks Him; how could anyone seeks healing from Beelzebub?
  - 2- The living God is of authority, capable of granting life by his might.
  - 3- The living God listens to the prayer, and responds to it; whereas Beelzebub is neither able to listen nor to respond.
- +` Life is not in the hands of Beelzebub to be sought from him;  
As the living God is the Life-Giver; not seeking from Him, You will not live;  
God, having authority on the life of men, you should seek it from Him;  
As the devil of Ekron is helpless to respond, and hence should not be asked; God who knows, said: *“You shall surely die”*.

*“And when the messengers returned to him, he said to them, ‘Why have you come back?’” (5)*

Not knowing the identity of that strange man, who talked with authority about the king, and not daring to ask him about his name, nor to consummate their way to Ekron; the messengers returned to tell the king the message of God on the tongue of Elijah.

The king most probably knew that it had to be Elijah the Tishbite, whose amazing works against his father Ahab and his mother Jezebel he heard, and whom he has probably seen.

*“So they said to him, ‘a man came up to meet us, and said to us, ‘Go return to the king who sent you, and say to him, ‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire*

*of Beelzebub, the God of Ekron? Therefore, you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die”*

(6)

He did not benefit from the experience of his parents who were terrified before Elijah, because they have gone astray from the way of the truth. Therefore, the way they were chastised, the prophetic voice came to him, saying: *“You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up; You shall surely die”*

As the people, together with their leaders, perverted to idol-worship, after Ahab and Jezebel, then their sons, like Ahaziah, the prophet felt responsible to exhort the people to return to worship the living God. He confronted Ahab; by making him suffer draught for three and a half years; and by telling him that the dogs will lick his blood; And behold, here he firmly proclaim to Ahaziah that he will not come down from the bed to which he has gone up, and that he shall surely die. In that he did not intend to avenge himself, but as a watchman he feared for the perdition of the whole people, because of the perversion of their kings. He

intended to close the door shut before idol-worship, and to make the people return to that of the living God.

+ The messengers of the son of Ahab heard what Elijah said, and returned to the king with the bad tidings, that he will not come down from the bed to which he has gone up;

To the sick pagan king, they carried the death sentence, and wounded his heart by the words of Elijah;

The prophet came to be like a watchman on the children of Jacob, and his rebuke was strong against the idol-worshippers among them;

He killed Ahab by a verdict against him; and now came to chase his sons;

By his spiritual judgments, he was diligent to uproot idol-worship from the hearts of the people;

He said to Ahab: [The dogs will lick up your blood]; and sent a word to his son, saying: [You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up];

As a warrior, he fought against the pagan kings, and rebuked them in their presence without fear;

Whenever they perverted from the living God to other gods, he strongly confronted them;

He delivered some to the dogs, and others to death, to guard his people by the awesome chastisements of God;

He used every chance to close shut the ways of idol-worship before the circumcised children of Abraham.

(St. (Mar) Jacob el-Serougi)

*“Then he said to them, ‘What kind of man was it, who came to meet you and told you these words?’ (7)*

*“So they answered him, ‘He was a hairy man, and wore a leather belt around his waist’. And he said, ‘It is Elijah the Tishbite’” (8)*

By hearing the description of the man who confronted his messengers, that he was “*a hairy man, and wore a leather belt around his waist*”, the king knew that it was Elijah the Tishbite, (whose outer appearance and his spirit we can also perceive in St. John the Baptist, ‘the second Elijah’ (Matthew 3:4).

“**A hairy man**”; a reference to his long hair; although, according to some it may refer to his leather mantle, the regular attire of the prophets (Zechariah 13: 4)

According to St. John Chrysostom, the outer appearance of Elijah bore a kind of primitive life. In the transfiguration of the Lord Christ, Moses and Elijah appeared with Him; and he says: [Both of them were not eloquent; for Moses was “*slow of speech, slow of tongue*” (Exodus 4: 10), and Elijah had a primitive appearance. Both of them elaborately kept the optional life of poverty. Moses did not work for any worldly profit, and Elijah had nothing more than his leather mantle... Nevertheless, according to St. John Chrysostom, the king of Israel, with all his possibilities, was in need of Elijah with his apparent poverty.

+ The king was in need of that poor man;

He who had a plenty of gold, depends on him who had nothing but his leather mantle.

The leather mantle was therefore more exalted than the purple, and the cave of the righteous was greater than the royal courts;

When Elijah was taken up to heaven, he left nothing to his disciple Elisha, but the leather mantle ;

As though he said to him: By the help of this mantle I strove against the devil; and when you take it you will be armed against him;

Persistence is a strong weapon; a steadfast stronghold of eternity;

Elisha has got the leather mantle as a great inheritance, more valuable than gold;

Elijah left his leather mantle to his disciple; And the ascending Son of God left for us His body.

Elijah truly took off his mantle before he was taken up; And the Lord Christ left His body behind for our sake; then took it back to ascend with it.

- + As Elijah was clothed with a rough garment, so were all the saints who, being in a continuous working condition, they trampled every adornment under their feet. Proclaimed by the Lord as the greatest commendation of virtue; He says about John the Baptist: *“What did you go up to see? a man clothed in soft garment; Indeed those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses”* (Matthew 11: 8)

(St. John Chrysostom)

Like Elijah, Jeremiah had his loin was girded by a rough leather belt; as though to partake of his people’s celebration of Passover; or to head the command of the Lord Christ to His disciples: *“Let your waists be girded”*

(Luke 12: 35); which, according to St. Jerome, is a commandment *“not to allow the flesh to lust against the Spirit”* (Galatians 5: 17). According to St. John Chrysostom, girding the waist refers to that man is perpetually moving and working.

- + Since a long time we see in the saints, examples of the importance of wearing a girdle:  
*“John the Baptist was clothed in camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist”* (Matthew 3: 4); as Elijah before him was (2 kings 1: 8).  
It is also obvious from the words of the angel to St. Peter, saying: *“Gird yourself, and tie on your sandals”* (Acts 12: 8); and from the prophecy of Agabus, when *“He took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and*

said, *'Thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt'* (Acts 21: 11).

The Lord commanded the righteous 'Job' to gird himself (Job 38: 3).

The Lord's disciples used to gird themselves, as is obvious when the Lord forbade them to carry money in their belts.(Matthew 10: 9).

(St. Basil the Great)

- + Despising the wool of sheep, as a kind of luxury, the blessed St. John the Baptist chose to put on himself camel's hair. ... How could he do otherwise, he who, forsaking the pleasure and comfort of living in cities, headed to the seclusion of the wilderness, to live in peace with God, away from all the vain and valueless appearances.. Like Elijah and John the Baptist, was Isaiah who was barefoot and almost naked wearing sackcloth, the attire of humility (Isaiah 20: 2). So has been Jeremiah who had nothing more than *"a linen sash around his waist"* (Jeremiah 13: 1)

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

## **2- GLORIFYING GOD:**

*"Then the king sent to him the captain of fifty with his fifty men. So he went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill. And he spoke to him: 'Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down'"* (9)

It was enough to send one soldier or an officer to put such unarmed man under arrest; But what Ahaziah heard about what Elijah did with his father and mother,

made him fear him; and, instead of repentance he thought that by a multitude of soldiers he could arrest him.

Saying: "*Man of God*", the captain of fifties knew that Elijah was sent from God; and he most probably knew how, by his prayers, he brought fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. He, however thought that the king had enough authority on him; that, with his fifty men, he could put him under arrest, and that he will not escape from their hands. He called Elijah "*Man of God*" because, even though the king himself and his royal court perceived his true identity, yet they could not endure his presence. .

This title was first given to the prophet Moses (Deuteronomy 3: 1); then to Samuel ( =1 Samuel 9: 6-7); to Elijah (1 kings 1: 9-13), to Elisha (2 kings 4: 9), to David (2 Chronicles 8: 14), and to Timothy (1 Timothy 6: 11)

+ Persisting upon his stubbornness, the king, instead of repentance and returning to God, sent a captain of fifties with his fifty men to put the man of God under arrest.

*“So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty: ‘If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men’. And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty” (10)*

As he previously did by seeking fire to come down from heaven to consume the sacrifice, to oppose the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18: 36-38); Now he seeks fire from heaven to let Ahaziah and his men perceive that the Lord God of Israel is awesome and has the authority on nature, whereas the god of Ekron is helpless.

Commenting on the prophet saying “*If I am a man of God*”, the scholar Origen says: [In the church there are “*men of God*”, whereas those who have forsaken prudence and understanding, are counted like beasts, according to the saying of the psalmist “*O Lord, You preserve man and beast*” (Psalm 36: 6). In case one of

these simple beings dies in sin and becomes a rotten corpse, whoever touch it will be defiled. That is concerning the domesticated animals, whereas he sees the dead lion refers to the attachment to the devil, about which the apostle Peter says: "*Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Peter 5: 8). The wolves refer to the heretics, according to the saying of the apostle Paul: "*For I know this, that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock*" (Acts 20: 29); He who follows their lead will be as though defiled by touching the corpse of a dead wolf.

For the sake of the glory of God, Elijah sought fire from heaven to consume the captain of fifties together with his fifty men, those who persisted on their haughtiness. Now, having come down to the world, the Lord Christ set out of His true ministers flames of fire, filled with love, that turn the enemies to beloved friends (Romans 12: 14-21).

The word of Elijah brought forth the same lethal fire from heaven mentioned in the book of Numbers 11: 1; and talked about by the apostles (Luke 9: 54). God has previously proclaimed receiving Elijah's sacrifice by fire from heaven; Now the same fire comes down from heaven to consume the soldiers of Baal who assumed by their evil hearts that they could put the man of God under arrest. According to St. Aphrahat the Persian Savant: [The captains of the fifties were consumed for they approached the mountain on which Elijah was sitting; he who was later taken up to heaven by a chariot of fire. Hence, beloved brethren, the righteous are tested by fire like gold, silver, and precious stones; whereas the wicked will be consumed by fire like wood, chaff and weeds.

Men as a whole, including the children of Israel, were in need to perceive the fear of God to forsake idol-worship and their disobedience of the divine commandment. But the Lord Christ, having come to raise humanity to spiritual maturity, rejected the request of His two disciples, Jacob and John, to bring down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans who did not receive Him, and

rejected Him in their village (Luke9: 51-56); because He came to gain humanity by His love proclaimed on the cross, and not to consume them by fire.

Elijah's heart desire was not revenge; but what he uttered was a proclamation together with a warning against an actuality revealed to him by the Lord. That fire from heaven does not contradict the love of God, but God suffers long upon the wicked, and in a proper time He allows for chastisement, to become a practical lesson before the others. Fire came down from heaven, and not up from earth; for men are not allowed to burn one another, nor to seek from God to avenge them.

+ The king sent a captain of fifties with his fifty men to bring Elijah forth to him, even against his will.

That pagan king Ahaziah was worthy to have Jezebel as his mother;  
How could he expected to be, being born and raised by such a wicked mother?;

With such a cruel heart like his mother's, he intended to fight Elijah by fifty men;

How could such a man like Elijah, before whom all creation tremble, be overcome by fifty men?

How could such a man whom both height and depth fear, be brought by the son of Jezebel like a weakling?

How could such a man who called fire to come down, and it did, be overcome by the chaff?

How could such a man whose voice, fire recognizes and obeys, not be feared by such weak men?

In that he followed his mother's lead, who previously threatened that same mighty man; and intended to kill him, whom death itself fears.

The captain of the fifties saw him sitting alone on the top of the mountain.

(St. (Mar) Jacon El-Serougi)

*“Then he sent to him another captain of fifty and his fifty men. And he answered and said to him, ‘Man of God, thus has the king said, ‘Come down quickly’” (11)*

Not learning from the lesson of the consumption of the captain of fifties and his fifty men; instead of repenting and feeling grief on the those he caused to die, the wicked king, with the cruelty of heart, sent another captain of fifties with his fifty men; then again for a third time (13); even though the third captain of fifties had humility and wisdom more than his king who, together with pride, he was also foolish.

*“So Elijah answered and said to them, ‘If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men’. And the fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty” (12)*

+ He sent again a captain of fifties with his fifty men, more arrogant than the first;

He also came up to Elijah and said to him: *“Man of God, thus has the king said: ‘Come down quickly’;*

The first captain of fifties who went up to Elijah was probably not to blame like the second one who followed him;

For the first one was consumed by fire without seeing a precedent episode, that would probably make him fear what would come on him;

The arrogance of the second captain of the fifties was therefore greater, because on his way to Elijah, he must have seen with his own eyes the burnt up corpses scattered on the mountain;

The awful smell of his fellow officer the first captain of fifties who was consumed by fire, did not deter him from going up to the man of God;

Together with his fifty men, he trampled with rage upon the scattered corpses of their fellows, toward the man who consumed them;

With a wild, cruel, and evil will, he did not tremble before the fire that consumed the first group

He made his heart as hard as stone, he threatened to fight against God and His fire;

He raised his voice saying to Elijah: "*Man of God, thus has the king said: 'Come down quickly'*";

And Elijah answered him saying: "*If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men*"; and the fire came down and consumed them";

A cruel heart that did not learn from the lesson of what happened to the first captain of fifties;

Having no fear he became horror; and having not learned the lesson, he became an example;

The shepherd of the people stood on the mount to guard his flock by powers, and wonders;

When the wolves gathered together to devour him, He sought fire from his Lord to consume them;

The flame became for him as a great rod by which he chased the wild beasts away from his flock;

The prophet sought the fire twice to gather together his scattered flock; by a miracle;

The fire recognized his voice and responded to everything He sought.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

## **Why did God allow for the two captains of fifties to be consumed by fire together with their fifty men?**

According to the scholar Tertullian, as the first two captains of fifties, were probably two false prophets of the god Beelzebub, God allowed for the fire to come down from heaven to confront the idol-worship by violence. As Israel perverted to idol-worship, believing that Beelzebub is the god of rain, fire, and crops; whose worship also includes offering their children as human sacrifices, both prophets Elijah and Elisha intended to confirm that the power of the true God, and His authority upon fire, rain and crops, are far beyond the alleged power of the Baal; and to proclaim their care for the little children, by reviving the son of the widow of Zarephath which belongs to Sidon (1 Kings 17: 17-24), and of raising the Shunammite woman's son from the dead (2 Kings 4: 18- 37).

- + In the days of the Old Covenant, punishment was physical upon any crime or disobedience done by the people; according to the statute: "*eye for eye, tooth for tooth etc.*" (Exodus 21: 24); as a deterrent through fear of the physical punishment against such offenses.

In the days of Elijah, because the Jewish people forsook God, offered sacrifices to the idols; and not only refused to honor the prophets of God , but intended to kill them, Elijah, filled with the jealousy of God, caused some to be put under such physical punishment; to heel those who were slothful for the salvation of their souls through fear of physical punishment..

The same thing happened through the blessed Peter in the case of Ananias and Sapphira his wife, who perished for lying to the Holy Spirit, to become a lesson to others; hence it was said: "*So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things*" (Acts 5: 11)

As the miserable Jews only thought about their bodies, and not about their souls, God the divine Judge let them suffer pain in those bodies, to which they have much dedicated.

- + We realize as well that the two captain of fifties might have perished because of not giving honor to Elijah, not on account of his advanced age, nor of being “*a man of God*”; the Holy Spirit talked on the tongue of the prophet; and struck them with a breath from heaven.

With justice, few were punished by death, to grant salvation to many.

(Father Caesarius bishop of Arle)

- + Consumption of men by fire was not an act chosen by Elijah on his own, but he was moved to do it through the Holy Spirit.  
We should not assume that Elijah got angry, and caused the fire to come to appease his anger;  
He was driven by the Spirit in all his works, to provoke the pagans to forsake their idol-worship;  
The Lord turned him into an intermediary between Him and them, to perform amazing wonders by his hands;  
He allowed for the consumption of the two hundred to bring the others back to him;  
Because the idol-worshippers arrogantly held fast to their gods, God had to deal with them by fire;  
He consumed them by quenchable fire, to save others from the unquenchable fire, eternally inherited;  
Spiritually and with great love, the holy man moved, to give life to the world, dead by idols;

Even though against his own choice, he killed and burned to realize the will of his God, and to glorify His name.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Again he sent him a third captain of fifty with his fifty men. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and pleaded with him, and said to him, ‘Man*

*of God, Please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight”* (13)

*“Look, fire has come down of heaven and burned up the first two captains of fifties and their fifties. But let my life now be precious in your sight”* (14)

Although the first and second captains of fifties also called him *“the man of God”*, yet with the hardness of heart they intended to put him under arrest, and bring him forth to the king. The third captain of fifties called him by the same title, but with humility he sought mercy, pleading with him to let his life and those of his men be precious in his sight. For although they came by an order of the king, yet, trusting in the authority of the prophet, they sought the mercy of God. By his humility, the third captain of fifties was worthy of that, God sent His angel to command the prophet to go along with him to the king.

+ For the third time the king sent a captain of fifties, not caring for those who have already perished;

With a sick yet fearful heart, he refused to change;

With humility that could prevail on all the mighty, the third captain of fifties went up to Elijah;

Looking at Elijah he recognized whom and how he is, and feared him like a sea of fire;

He thought about what happened to the first two captains of fifties, and perceived that he might end up like them;

He perceived that Elijah is a great prophet sent by a great God;

With humility he approached him seeking mercies and compassion on himself and his fifty men;

He knelt down on his knees, and in fear, he bowed his face to the ground before Elijah;

He approached him with a contrite heart, terrified soul, a bowed down head; and a low voice, seeking mercy;

He said to him: *“O man of God, Please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight; those who came against their own will;*

*I know that you have the authority to send fire from heaven to consume those who disobey you.*

*The way your might is known in those consumed, show off your mercy on the world in me;*

*You have the authority to consume or to spare; And if you choose to spare me, it is up to you;*

*By the two captains of fifties you revealed the power of God; By me now, show His compassion and forgiveness..*

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

### **3- TRUSTING IN GOD:**

*“And the angel of the Lord said to Elijah, ‘Go down with him, do not be afraid of him; So he arose and went down with him to the king” (15)*

By saying “*Do not be afraid of him*”, the angel sent by the Lord means that he should not be afraid of the king or the captain of fifties. In complete trust in the work of God, the man of God did not fear to tell the king that he will not be healed but will die, for he has despised the true God and resorted to Beelzebub.

Talking about how the happy life is not bound to the outside circumstances, but to the depth of the heart, St. Ambrose compares between the prophet Elijah and the prophet Moses; and between him and king David, saying:

+ Elijah was not less happy than Moses, even though the former was in need for food, put on the goat-skin belt; with no children, friends, nor possessions; while the latter was a leader of a multitude, rejoiced in his children, and girded with power. Both of them, by different means have got equal privilege as proclaimed by the gospel, when they shined together with the Lord Jesus in the glory of the transfiguration (Matthew 17);

Elijah was not less happy than David, even though the former was under kings, while the latter was, himself, a king with royal authority. Yet both of them equally gained the grace of prophecy and holiness.

(St. Ambrose)

+ By his supplication the third captain of fifties found favor in the sight of Elijah; and mercy set to spare him;

The Lord saw a contrite heart, and sent a watcher (an angel) to instruct Elijah to go down with him;

The Lord intended to show that whoever supplicates will have hope; and that the door is open before him who seeks mercy'

The Lord inclined with His face toward that supplication, on account of that it was raised with humility;

The Lord intended to proclaim that those consumed by fire were worthy of it because of the harness of their hearts;

They perished because of their pride, while he who showed humility before Elijah was spared.

While rebuking those who were consumed by their own choice, the Lord intended to show his great compassion by sparing the other one;

He intended to show men that, by killing or giving life, He has the same goal;

He consumed the first two batches, to let the pagans, through fear forsake their idols;

And by sparing him who supplicated with humility, He intended to show His compassion;

Those who were arrogant, the Lord sent fire to consume them; while those who showed humility, got what they wanted;

The Lover of mankind is moved by humility; yet does not allow for the arrogant to approach Him.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

### **3- CONSUMMATION OF THE WILL OF GOD:**

*“Then he said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord: ‘Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word?*

*Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have come up, but you shall surely die” (16)*

With a full power, Elijah consummated the will of God. He stood before the king who sought to kill him, and bravely told him that he will not be healed, but will

surely die. After talking to him Elijah disappeared, and the Holy Book did not tell us how he did, and where he went.

+ Elijah went with them to the king, and with no fear he raised his voice and rebuked him;

Face- to-face he told the king that he will surely die;

His message was the same, whether near or far;

Once he saw the king's face, he rebuked him, with no partiality on his part, lest he would not be true;;

Looking only to God, he cared to utter the truth everywhere;

Ahaziah died as proclaimed by the great prophet; and his word confronted the pagans and their idols;

The death of the pagan king was a motive for many to approach God, on account of the power they saw;

The god of Ekron was exposed before his worshippers who were terrified to enter his temple; for the news spread everywhere;

As the wrath of God struck the pagan king, Who could not fear to mention even the name of Elijah?

All realized that Baalzebub was helpless;

For the sake of which, all that happened, and Elijah came in such a disturbed time.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“So Ahaziah died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken. And because he had no son, Jehoram became king in his place, in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah” (17)*

According to the word of the Lord to Elijah through His angel; Ahaziah died on his bed; and his brother Jehoram reigned in his place , at the same time Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat reigned on Judah.

In the fifth year of the reign of Jehoram the son of Ahab (2 Kings 8: 16). according to some scholars, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat reigned together with his father in the eighteenth year of his reign.

In many of the old kingdoms, the king used to entrust certain responsibilities of government to his firstborn son or to whom he finds qualified; a tradition that was followed along the generations. Some scholars, count that Jehoram's reign starts by his partnership with his father; while others count it starting by reigning alone after his father's death, or in case he chooses to step aside, to acquire wisdom and philosophy in peace.

- + After the death of Ahaziah, having no son of his own, his brother reigned in his place; not that was what the law so proclaimed, but because that was the way followed by the neighboring countries of Israel. ...Yet as far as the kingdom of Judah is concerned, God commanded that the kings had to be of the household of David.

*“Now the rest of acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” (18)*

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 1**

### **A FIRE FROM HEAVEN**

+ Let me dwell together with Your prophet Elijah in the midst of the holy mountains;

Let me dwell in Your Holy Book, the highest mountain;  
To bear the spirit of strength, courage, and enlightenment.

+ Perceiving what You granted me of authority;  
I have no fear of any king moving his armies;  
Nor of leaders filled with haughtiness and arrogance.

+ Carrying authority, kings move their leaders as they wish;  
And entrusted with authority, the leaders move their soldiers as they see fitting;

As for me, I carry the authority You give me;  
To tread upon the serpents, the scorpions, and all the hosts of darkness.

+ Carrying such an authority, heaven moves to serve me;  
Fire comes down to consume the followers of demons and to scatter their work

Following Your lead, I seek no fire to consume men;  
For You came, not to burn but to save;  
I seek the fire of Your Holy Spirit, the Burner of sins;  
I seek Your heavenly fire to kindle the hearts with love;  
I seek Your holy fire to destroy the fire of evil.

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# THE SECOND SECTION

## ELISHA, THE WONDER-MAKER

(2 Kings, chapters 2 to 8)

### THE COMPASSIONATE FATHERHOOD OF ELISHA:

This section starts by the ascension of Elijah to heaven, after delivering the prophetic work to his disciple Elisha, who desired to have a double portion of the spirit of his master, to be able to fulfill his mission and to confront the increasing current of evil. God granted him the power to work double as many miracles as what was done by his master, not that he is greater than him, but to confirm the need for a greater work because of the increasing corruption.

Those miracles came in the Holy Book, not chronically, but in an exalted Theological order. They were not to demonstrate his possibilities and capabilities of Elisha, but carried practical Theological and spiritual concepts that touch our daily life, and our fellowship with God; and most prominently, those miracles done by God on the hands of Elisha, came to reveal the compassionate fatherhood of the prophet.

By God's exalted power, Elisha divided the River Jordan by Elijah's mantle; and in compassionate fatherhood, he responded to the request of the sons of the prophets to send fifty men of valor to search for the prophet Elijah everywhere. He did not rebuke and remind them that they, themselves, have told him that he will be taken from over his head today; and that, even if they assumed that the Spirit of God has taken him away to another place, as it so previously happened, why should they search for him? Do they intend to offer him food or drink? Would the Spirit of God take him away, and do not provide him with all his needs?

- 1- He cared for the sons of the prophets, as a congregation; went with them to cut timber; and cared for the needs of each of them, as when the iron head of the ax of one of them fell into the water.
- 2- He cared for the poor widow, who was about to deliver her two sons as slaves to the creditor.
- 3- He cared for the notable woman, when he sought from God to grant her a child; and when he died, he cared to raise him from the dead..
- 4- He cared for the army, and in jealousy upon the glory of God; he sought victory for them.
- 5- He cared for the common people, he sought from God to fulfill all their needs.
- 6- He equally cared for the king, for the prophets, and for the commons; carrying love and fatherhood toward all.
- 7- In his fatherhood, he used both firmness and compassion as tools to carry out his mission.;

The fathers frequently counted him as a symbol of the Lord Christ, as a Minister and Philanthropic.

### THE MOST PROMINENT MIRACLES PERFORMED BY ELISHA AND THEIR SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE:

- 1- Dividing the River Jordan by the mantle of Elijah's mantle, (Chapter 2) :Refers to the destruction of evil desired by our Savior.

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|---|--|
| 2- Turning the bad water to sweet water edification.                        | (Chapter 2) Our Christ turns all the destructive energies ti our |
| 3- Cursing the young men, the opponents to the truth opponents of the truth | (Chapter 2) By our Christ, we have no fear of the                |
| 4- His propcey to the three kings against Aram victory                      | (Chapter 3) Our Christ satisfies our needs, and grants us        |
| 5- Blessing the oil of the widow with His grace                             | (Chapter 4) Our Christ fills our empty inner vessels             |
| 6- Raising the son of the Shenumite woman                                   | (Chapter 4) Our Christ is the Grantor of Resurrection            |
| 7- The deadly food becomes eatable  | (Chapter 4) By our Christ we challenge death                     |
| 8- Satisfying hundred men with twenty loaves of bread nature.               | (Chapter 4) By our Christ we challenge the laws of               |
| 9- Cleansing Naaman the Syrian from leprosy                                 | (Chapter 5) By our Christ we enjoy the new birth in Baptism      |
| 10- Restoration of the iron head of the ax by a wooden stick                | (Chapter 6) By the wooden cross our burdened and                 |
| sunken souls are lifted up  |  |
| 11- Making the Aramite men blind (fellowship of the heavenlies)             | (Chapter 7) Those with us are more than those with them. The     |
| 12- The lepers and the Aramite camp others enjoy their good fortune.        | (Chapter 7) Today is a day of good tiding; Care to let the       |
| 13- Counseling the Shenumite woman to depart care of us anywhere we go.     | (Chapter 8) Our Christ the Controller of everything will take    |
| 14- His propcey to the Aramite Hazael                                       | (Chapter 8) The cry-out of the heart upon the fallen             |

## CHAPTER 2

### A DOUBLE PORTION OF ELIJAH'S SPIRIT

This chapter starts by heavens, opening to receive the prophet Elijah (1 – 11); and ends by the wild bears mauling the young men who mocked the man of God.

After talking about Elijah with his fiery heart, it mentioned his ascension to heaven in a fiery chariot with fiery horses; to refer to that whoever has his heart kindle with the heavenly love, and with the holy jealousy, his soul will be qualified to soar up as though with a fiery chariot, to ascend to where God, the Consuming Fire; sits, and to be counted as one of His fiery servants.

Having fulfilled his mission, Elijah ascended to heaven; and there was need for someone, with the same spirit, to consummate his ministry, and to fulfill his mission,— Elisha who got his heart's desire, to have a double portion of the spirit of his fiery master the prophet Elijah.

As 'Enoch'; was taken up to heaven without tasting death (Genesis 5: 24; Hebrew 11: 5); So was Elijah. That indicates that, it is God alone who has the keys of life, death, the grave, and the resurrection

+ Enoch and Elijah's death was just postponed; for they will eventually experience death, and their blood will be shed by the vanity of the work of the antichrist (Revelation 11: 3)

(The scholar Tertullian)

The ascension of Elijah to heaven, reveals to us four kinds of persons, who encountered him, or heard about his ascension:

- 1- **His companion who worked together with him:** Namely Elisha, who, when Elijah threw his mantle upon him, he left the oxen and ran after him (1 Kings 19: 19-21), and served him for as long as about ten years. And when Elijah said to him to stay in Gilgal, in Bethel, or in Jericho, Elisha said "*As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you*" (2 Kings 2: 4). For not delaying to accompany Elijah and to serve together with him, Elisha was qualified to be granted by God a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

Elishah is considered a living example of whoever gets attached to the Lord Christ, and enter with Him in a fellowship, to enjoy the spirit of strength, and become an icon of Him.

- + Your features, O Lord, are printed on us. You created us in Your image and according to Your likeness; You made us Your currency; Yet, it is not befitting of Your image to stay in the dark, Send the ray of Your wisdom, to scatter our darkness, so that Your image would shine in us.

- + A perfect minister of Christ has nothing beside Christ. For, if he does, he would not be a perfect minister.

(St. Jerome)

- + It is our right to be there in the presence of God in heaven, for we have learned the lesson while being on earth, and went there to heaven to enjoy the love of God the Father, whom we knew while we were on earth; and because God, the Holy Word, who made everything, taught and is teaching us everything, and trains us on all the good things.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

- 2- **The group of watchers;** who, although the Spirit told them what was going to happen, yet they were satisfied by just saying to Elisha: *“Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?”* (2 Kings 2: 3). They came to have a true knowledge from God Himself, but they made no attempt to get attached to Elijah, to enjoy what Elisha did. ... They are like those who believe in the Lord Christ, but do not walk by His Holy Spirit; they stop at the mental knowledge, and do not come to enjoy Him.
- 3- **The group of workers:** After Elijah was taken to heaven by a fiery chariot, Elijah did not erect a memorial stone, nor lived in, or for the sake of the memories of the past, , but moved to work (2 kings 2: 19-22). By that, Elisha came to be a living example of him, who perceive his being a son of God, and an ambassador of the heavenly Lord Christ. By that, our dust hearts would turn into a new heaven; and eternity would become a life that we taste its deposit; we touch in our practical actuality, and to which we testify , as ambassadors of the Lord Christ, and stewards of heaven; desiring for the earth to become heaven.
- + Indeed, the Lord came to annul the old things, to call us to a greater home; to do everything to liberate us from the unnecessary things, and from our love of the earth. Hence He referred to the pagans, saying: *“For after all these things the Gentiles seek”* (Matthew 6: 32); those who present all their labor for the sake of the present life, and do not care for the things to come, nor for any heavenly thought.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- 4- **The group of mockers:** Many of those who heard the news in Bethel, stirred up young men to mock Elisha, by saying to him: *“Ascend, O baldhead”* (2 kings 2: 23); as though to say to him: [Ascend like you're your master, O baldhead].

1- Elijah's splendid life qualified him for heaven	1
2- Why did Elijah conceal his ascension from his disciple Elisha?	2
3- The Lord proclaims the ascension of Elijah	3
4- Elisha had no intention to leave Elijah	4
5- The Spirit reveals the ascension of Elijah to the sons of the prophets	5 - 7
6- A miracle at the River Jordan	8
7- Elisha seeks a double portion of Elijah's spirit	9 - 10
8- Mother earth bids Elijah farewell	11
9- Elisha mourns Elijah's departure	12
10- Elijah's mantle	13 - 14
11- The position of the sons of the prophets	15 - 18
12- The bad water becomes sweet	19 - 22
13- Elisha curses the youths, the opponents of the truth, who mocked him	23

#### 1- ELIJAH'S SPLENDID LIFE QUALIFIED HIM FOR HEAVEN:

*“And it came to pass, when the Lord was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal”* (1)

While Elijah enjoyed ascension to heaven by a chariot of fire, Moses died and was buried. Yet both of them equally appeared in the transfiguration of the Lord Christ. The ascension of Elijah has its mission, so has the death of Moses. We should not discern between this and that, for each of them consummates the mission of the other in Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world.

**“Gilgal”:** Gilgal here is a location different from that with the same name mentioned in Joshua 4: 19. For it is located in Mount Ephraim 8 miles north of Bethel. Nowadays it is ‘Galgalia’, where the sons of the prophets dwelt (2 Kings 4: 38). The word ‘Gilgal’ means (rolling down). Leaving ‘Gilgal’, namely the (rolling down), the prophet Elijah, filled with zeal, went to dwell in ‘Bethel’, namely in the (house of God); a reference to longing to enjoy the heavenly world.

The Holy Book told us nothing about Elisha all along the period between being called to the prophetic work (1 Kings 19: 19-21) and the ascension of Elijah to heaven; which was most probably a period of discipleship by the spirit of prayer, together with caring for the way of behavior, being a disciple of the prophet Elijah.

Looking at the scene of ascension of the prophet Elijah to heaven, St. Jacob El-Serougi calls him “the beautiful” or the “the splendid”; probably meaning the one bearing the reflection of the splendor of God on himself, to be qualified for a splendid heavenly chariot, to come down to carry him up to heaven. He marvels at such man of dust whom the earth could not take hold of him, to return, like his father Adam to dust; but who set forth to dwell among and mix with the heavenlies. It is as though he was taken away by heaven from the earth to proclaim his victory.

Having enjoyed an encounter with God on Mount Sinai, Elijah’s soul was filled with the heavenly fire; and his ascension to heaven came as a natural extension of his perpetual attachment by his whole being to God, the Heavenly One. As there was nothing more in him, whether in his soul or in his body, with all his energy, that inclined to see the world; his ascension, therefore, came a fruit of his continuous ascension, his whole life, toward heaven, perpetually ascending on the ladder of the spiritual perfection. Not being preoccupied with the human or bodily encounters, he was qualified to dwell among the heavenlies; his continuous conquests qualified him to set forth from a world full of snares; and his spiritual condition qualified him to dwell among the heavenly creatures.

The Holy One did not wish to let that victor become a bread for death! Before the head, that never bowed to sin and evil, the gates of heaven were opened, so as not to bow beneath the gate of the pit.

+ Let us then talk about the ascension of that beautiful, and about the splendid chariot that came to him on earth.  
Let us talk about the man of dust who was worthy of dwelling among the spirituals; and did not return to earth to become dust.  
Let us talk about the lowly creature who set forth up high; and about our fellow human being who left us to mix with the angels.  
Let us talk about the miracle, when the high-up creatures snatched someone on earth to be among their hosts.  
Let us see why, and how such thing happened;  
Having acquired such an exalted beauty; they took him up to dwell among those full of beauty.  
Having been enlightened on Mount Sinai, and his soul was kindled with that exalted scenery;  
Having been purified by the ‘Shakinah’ of secrets; and every worldly part in him was consummated,  
He ascended to dwell by his mind with God; and the Most High came down to dwell in him;  
The ‘splendid’ did not have to dedicate some time for perfection, for he mixed his whole life with God;  
After ascending to perfection, he did not descend; for he kept on ascending all his life long;  
Having had no part in him inclined toward the world, the Most High intended to take that lowly creature up to heaven;  
He intended to give him the immortal crown of life; which He took away from Adam once he got naked;

He intended to crown the 'beautiful', for the sake of his strife in the world;  
He intended to give this glory as a gift of life to that activist who ran like champions in the tracks of righteousness.

He intended to take him away from the world filled with suffering, for He found him not loving it, although he dwelt in it;

He intended to give him a place in His own world of no suffering; for He realized that he lives in a place where he does not belong;

He intended to lift him up from a pit full of snares, to an exalted and splendid place free of evil;

He intended to let him ascend to dwell among the spirituals, on account of his spiritual beauty;

The Lord intended to give rest to His good servant, saying to him , 'Come, you who labored hard, have rest from your labor and affliction;

'Come, O glorified, enter into the secret place of the new life, where the greedy death is not worthy of having you as its bread;

Behold, the gates up high are open before you; Enter, O saintly man, lest your haughty head would bow beneath the gate of the pit.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

+ While Elijah was taken up to heaven, Paul the apostle was taken up to heaven and paradise (2 Corinthians 12: 2, 4) (For the disciples of Christ are worthy of a double grace); where he heard unutterable words. Yet, Paul descended again, not on account of unworthiness to stay up there, but, having enjoyed all the things that surpass man's perception, he had to return to preach Christ, and to die for His sake, to earn the crown of martyrdom.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

## 2- WHY DID ELIJAH CONCEAL HIS ASCENSION FROM HIS DISCIPLE ELISHA?

*"Then Elijah said to Elisha, 'Stay here please, for the Lord has sent me to Bethel', and Elisha said, 'As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you'; so they went down to Bethel" (2)*

*"The Lord has sent me"*. By a call from God, the prophet Elijah set forth in his last hours on earth to visit the sons of the prophets in their different locations, to establish them and to give them farewell words of encouragement.

Why did Elijah sought from his disciple Elisha to stay in Gilgal?

- 1- In his last hours on earth, he probably intended to be alone to have hidden talks with God.
- 2- Having compassion on his very beloved disciple, he probably intended to spare him watching him taken from this world, after which he would be lonely
- 3- Elijah probably intended to test his disciple's love and faithfulness; who, with great love said to him, *"As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you"*

In very critical moments, Elijah perceived that it was time for him to depart from the labors of this world, to stand before God face-to-face, and to live on an exalted level, where his body needs no necessities of life here. And at the same time, Elisha perceived that it was time for his master Elijah to separate from him, whom he called: "*My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen*" (13); and there was nothing to be said by any of them to the other; for the feelings were beyond any human expression.

"*I will not leave you*". Elijah intended to conceal his ascension to heaven from his disciple Elisha; seeking no glory from men, even from his own disciple, beloved by him, But God did not conceal it from him; hence Elisha insisted on sticking to Elijah during his last hours on earth.

Elijah did not want to be celebrated by anyone on earth; and in his humility he sought from his disciple to forsake him, to spare him watching his ascension. But the Holy God revealed the secret to Elisha and to the group of the sons of the prophets. Elijah's ascension was celebrated by the prophets on earth, while he was received with great joy by the heavenly hosts.

+ By a secret sign, Elijah moved, prepared himself to go on his way;  
Because of the beauty of his humility, he did not wish to be seen or celebrated by anyone when he goes up to his exalted place;  
Hence he hid the secret from his disciple, whom he tried to keep away by several excuses;  
Having attached his heart to the High One, he thought only of him, and wanted no lowly creature to see him;  
Disregarding the vain glory and honor of this world, he saw it as nothing of value.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

### 3- THE LORD PROCLAIMS THE ASCENSION OF ELIJAH:

*"And the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, 'Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?'. And he said, 'Yes I know, keep silent'" (3)*

"**The sons of the prophets**" who used to call their head or teacher their 'father', were students in the school of prophets. Some of them were granted the gift of prophecy; and were on diverse spiritual levels.

It so seems that it was the prophet Samuel who established that system, although it is difficult to say when those schools that spread everywhere began to function, in an attempt to confront the current of spiritual and faith corruption, that started in the days of Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, after his dissent from Judah.

Those schools were found in Ramah (1 Samuel 19: 19-21), in Jericho (2 kings 2: 5), in Gilgal (2 kings 4: 38), in Bethel (2 kings 2: 3), and probably in other locations. Their number was substantial; claimed to be one hundred in Gilgal (2 kings 4: 43), and at least fifty in Jericho (2 kings 2: 7); in groups; some of them were married, and probably dwelt in their own houses (2 kings 4: 1-2), while others were not married, dwelt and ate their meals together in public buildings (2 kings 6: 1-2). and each group assembled around a certain teacher, to learn on his hands how to talk about God. Those schools flourished in the days of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha.

Many scholars considered the sons of the prophets on the same level of the prophets (1 kings 20: 35, 38); although the prophet Amos discerned between the two categories (Amos 7: 14)

It so seems that the sons of the prophets embraced the good as well as the bad; And probably among them some false prophets appeared, who perverted for some reason or other; whether to seek personal benefit from the kings and rulers, or to gain publicity through smooth false words, that deceived the people, instead of exhorting them to repent (Isaiah 30: 10; Jeremiah 6: 14; 8: 11).

Having a specific system of education, the sons of the prophets studied the law, the history of the people of God, together with holy poetry and music; although they were not governed by any monastic system, nor were students of theological studies. Their mission was to help the prophets to fulfill their mission; and probably to succeed them in certain cases.

Being aware of the ascension of the prophet Elijah, probably through a divine proclamation, when they inquired from the prophet Elisha if he knew about it, he answered 'yes', yet sought from them to keep silent; for it was not the time to discuss such an exalted topic concerning the prophet Elijah, nor the ministry; and on account of that his mind was completely preoccupied with the enjoyment of being attached to his master Elijah in the Lord. He was in no need of a word of empathy from anyone. He perceived that it was such an exalted subject that warrants neither discussion nor debate.

- + Intending to conceal the beauty of his way from everyone, the prophets celebrated him in groups; He attempted to hide himself in humility; yet his Righteous Lord revealed him to many; Once he perceived that God calls him to go up, he decided to hide himself from men; He even sought from his own disciple to depart from him; telling him that God sent him somewhere.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

#### **4- ELISHA HAD NO INTENTION TO LEAVE ELIJAH:**

*"Then Elijah said to him, 'Elisha, stay here, for the Lord has sent me on to Jericho'. And he said. 'As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you'. So they came to Jericho"<sup>(4)</sup>*

While Elijah tried to conceal the issue of his ascension from his disciple Elisha, God, on His side, proclaimed that secret to the disciple who was qualified for prophecy. According to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, that proclamation by God came to let the disciple benefit from the treasure that was within his hands; to see his mentor Elijah as a sun to enjoy its light and splendor, and a fountain flowing with the water of life to drink from, to have his depths lifted up high; to see him as a splendid fire, to embrace to kindle the flame of love in his depths; and as a spiritual wave that fills him with strength; and as a sea full of divine proclamations, to receive their riches.

As there were only few hours for Elijah on earth, the disciple, hastening to seek, was given, to enter through the door which was still open before him.

It was amazing how Elisha swore, saying: "*As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives*", perceiving that the soul of Elijah has acquired life, by being attached to God the source of life. The disciple persisted on staying with his mentor to acquire the spiritual riches from him.

As there only hours for Elijah on earth, it was up to his disciple to hasten to seek and to take; to enter through the door that was still open before him. It is amazing how Elisha vowed "*As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives*", having perceived that Elijah's soul has acquired life, on account of that it was attached to God, the source of life. The disciple insisted on not leaving his master, to acquire from him the spiritual riches.

+ As that young man was worthy of prophecy, the divine inspiration secretly instructed him not to forsake the company of his mentor;

Come, O young man, care to take for yourself a limitless wealth, as long as that great rich treasure is at hand;

Before this treasure is lifted up from you, take for yourself as much as you can, to become, in your turn as rich and as learned;

As long as the sun is still with you, seek from it light and adorn yourself with its splendor;

As long as you are close to that fountain that flows with life, quench your thirst from it; for it will soon be lifted up from you up high;

As long as that live and beautiful fire is with you, hold fast to it, and kindle yourself from it, for it is bound to disappear;

As long as the wave of the Spirit follows you, open yourself to it, and get filled with its strength;

As long as the sea, full of inspirations is still with you, trade with it, to become rich after it is lifted up from you;

Do not forsake him until you see him ascend; after he gives you a valuable thing, to make you as rich;

Hasten to get, seek to be given to you. The door is open before you; it is your lucky day if you dare;

As the Spirit secretly inspired the young man about these issues, he refused to forsake his mentor;

He said to him: *"As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives"*, I shall not forsake you nor separate from you, O my good company;

He swore, putting Elijah's soul together with the soul of God, for he was sure that it was spiritually with God;

By saying: *"As God lives, and as your soul lives"*, he meant that Elijah's soul has acquired life in God;

By it, his soul lives; and with it, is mixed; And as God lives, it lives as well with Him in one will;

He did not intend to retreat from his decision, for he longed as well to acquire the spiritual riches from the company of that splendid mentor.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

##### 5- THE SPIRIT REVEALED THE ASCENSION OF ELIJAH TO THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS:

*"And the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, 'Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?'. So he answered,*

*'Yes I know; keep silent'" (5)*

Once the Spirit revealed Elijah's ascension to heaven to the prophets; something that Elijah intended to conceal from them; they set forth to tell him what the Spirit revealed to them, to perceive that it was also revealed to him.

+ To make the celebration of Elijah's ascension great, the Spirit revealed it secretly to the prophets;

Inspired by the Spirit, the disciples came forth from Bethel and from Jericho;

They came to tell their teacher with love, saying: *"The Lord will take away your master from over you today"*

But Elisha told them to be silent, to keep the secret he already knew.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*"Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here please, for the Lord has sent me on to the Jordan'. And he said,*

*'As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you'. So the two of*

*them went on" (6)*

When he began his prophetic work in the days of Ahab, Elijah came forth from Gilead, east of the Jordan (1 kings 17: 1). And at the end of his prophetic work, he crossed the Jordan back, to ascend to heaven.

After visiting the school of the prophets, the Spirit sent him across the Jordan, so that his ascension would be in a secluded location as much as possible; the way Moses ascended Mount Nebo to die.

The river Jordan was a symbol of baptism, where the believer crosses over from the love of the fallen world to the promise of inheritance, namely to the life to come. The Lord Jesus fulfilled that promise by His incarnation and baptism (Mark 1: 9)

+ The name "Jordan" means (descent); which the Lord fulfilled, making those who dwell close to the River Jordan be purified from the contagion of sin

(St. Ambrose)

+ At that time Elijah lived together with Elisha whom he consecrated a prophet by a divine command (1 Kings 19: 19) .. They had the same way of life ... When it was time for Elijah to ascend to heaven by a chariot of fire, with the same body that weighed him down to earth; it so happened that after they crossed over to Gilgal, on his way to Bethel, Elijah asked Elisha to stay in Gilgal, but Elisha disobeyed him, and refused to leave him, counting his words as though putting him in a prison. Hence Elijah consented to take him along with him. And when they reached Bethel where they spent few days, Elijah, planning to go to Jericho alone, asked Elisha to stay in Bethel, but Elisha persisted on disobeying him; for he felt being torn apart if separated from his master. And not knowing what to do Elisha consented on letting him stay in his company.

(St. Mar Ephraim the Syrian)

*"And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance, while the two of them stood at the Jordan" (7)*

Those fifty men were from the school of the prophets in Jericho, for there were many of those schools around; as many people tended to flee to those schools to worship God, away from Ahab and his household.

#### **6- A MIRACLE AT THE RIVER JORDAN:**

*"Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water, and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground" (8)*

Having concentrated his sight on heaven, the River Jordan was not to be an obstacle against Elijah, who struck the water by his mantle to turn it into dry land on which both men crossed over. He who could cross over to heaven by a chariot of fire, would not be hindered by the river. The way Moses struck the water of the Red Sea by his staff, to turn it into a way through which his people crossed over to the wilderness away from the bondage of Pharaoh (the symbol of the devil); on their way to the promised land, Elijah struck the water to split the River to cross over dry land, he and Elisha. That was a testimony by the Lord for his work through the two prophets to liberate from the bondage of evil, and to proclaim the entrance into the comfort of life together with God.

By crossing over the Red Sea, the prophet Moses referred to baptism (Exodus 14: 16-23). And Joshua commanded the priests who carried the ark of the covenant to put their feet in the River Jordan; and when they did the River split and the whole people crossed over to the promised land (Joshua 3: 13-17). Now, the prophet Elijah strikes the water with his mantle to split it, for the believer to cross over, not from the bondage of Pharaoh, but from the bondage to the earthlies,

and to enter together with him as though into a chariot of fire, setting forth with their hearts to heaven. ... What God did for the sake of the congregation, He also did for the sake of one man.

- + Elijah's baptism in the River Jordan prepared him to ascend to heaven. ... And through the River Jordan, the prophet Elisha received a double portion of Elijah's spirit; probably on account of that he crossed the River Jordan twice: once together with Elijah and the second time when he struck the water with Elijah's mantle, saying: "*Where is the Lord, God of Elijah?*"; and the river split here and there.
- + It is befitting of us to notice that before Elijah ascended in a whirlwind of fire, he took his mantle, rolled it, and struck the water to split it into two, to cross over together with Elisha (2 kings 2: 80. By that he was baptized in the Jordan; and was prepared to ascend high to heaven ... Paul the apostle called that amazing crossing over 'baptism'.

(The scholar Origen)

The mantle which Elijah cast over Elisha when he called him (1 kings 19: 19), refers to his partaking in the prophetic work;  
With it he struck the water of the River Jordan to split;  
According to the scholar Origen, Elisha struck the River Jordan twice; as the prophet Moses struck the rock twice. On one aspect for the water to flow to quench our thirst, and on another aspect to split the river, namely to discern and reveal to us the word of truth, to have its sound interpretation.

- + Elijah ascended to heaven, yet not without water; for he started by crossing over the River Jordan, then was carried by a chariot of fire to heaven.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- + How great are the saints! Not just by their words, nor by their bodies, but even by their clothes, honored by all men. For by the leather robe of Elijah he split the River Jordan.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The man of blessings full of glories walked and reached the Jordan together with his privileged disciple;  
The true, splendid, perfect, virgin, chaste, pure, righteous, glorious, amazing, and great man; set forth ahead,  
left the world behind his back, heading to heaven; and knew the earth no more;  
He stood before the River, full of might, putting on a great spiritual strength;  
He struck the river with his mantle to turn it into dry land;  
The free flow of water halted to open a way before the splendid man to cross over;  
The mighty waves forsook their normal violence, to suit the way of the saint, and not to be an obstacle before him;  
The man of God crossed over the dry land on his way to his amazing destination.

(St. (Mat) Jacob El-Serougi)

#### **7- ELISHA SEEKS A DOUBLE PORTION OF ELIJAH'S SPIRIT:**

*"And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you'. And Elisha said, 'Please, let a double portion*

*of your spirit be upon me” (9)*

Elijah left no money for Elisha his disciple or his spiritual son, to inherit; But Elisha got what is greater than all the things in this world.

When the last hours of Elijah's life were close at hand, his only companion was Elisha, whose only request was to have a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 kings 9: 2), based on his enjoyment of the firstborn to inherit a double portion of the inheritance, and the fatherhood leadership of the household after the death of the father. Elisha did not seek to be greater than Elijah, but to be worthy of being counted as his firstborn.

Elisha's request did not mean to be able to perform double the wonders and miracles that his mentor did; although it is befitting to know that the number of miracles performed by Elisha was about double as many as recorded for Elijah. He sought to have a double portion of his mentor's spirit for ministry and testimony to God. Simply and with the spirit of humility, Elisha the man of God desired to consummate the mission of his mentor, looking at Elijah as a living role model.

Elisha counted himself as the firstborn son of Elijah, who has the right of a double portion of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21: 17). Counting himself, in the daring of love, as Elijah's firstborn, Elisha asked for the right of the inheritance of the firstborn; a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

Elisha did not desire anything except to follow the lead of his master, and to bear his spirit. But Elijah perceived that this was beyond his authority to give, but is a divine authority, granted by God who searches the hearts and minds of His faithful beloved servants. Elisha did not request to be greater than his master, nor more powerful; but considering how the kingdom persistently deteriorated, he saw that it was in need of an increasing divine power to confront that mighty sweeping torrent.

The spiritual man, loving the others as his firstborn, desires to give them a double portion of inheritance in his farewell will. That is what Elisha desired when he asked his master, saying: "*Let a double portion of your spirit be upon me*" (2 kings 2: 9).

Elisha asked with faith, feeling his weakness and his need for a double power from heaven, to support him to confront the drastic corruption of the people at that time. Elijah was not offended by Elisha's request, but, even though he perceived that it is beyond his authority to fulfill it, yet his depths actually exulted to feel that his disciple will consummate his mission with the spirit of power.

I wish we, on our turn, do not despise the new generation, but seek from God to grant them greater grace than we got, so that the church in the future would become more powerful and capable to confront the challenges with the spirit of victory and conquest,

According to St. Augustine, by Elisha's request to get a double portion of Elijah's spirit, he actually meant the Spirit of God working in him. It is befitting of us, who enjoy the work of the Spirit, to seek an increasing portion of it. As for those who still do not enjoy the work of the Spirit in them, they should seek it from God.

+ The promise (concerning the growth of the work of the Spirit) is not in vain; whether concerning him who still has not acquired (the Holy Spirit), or him who does. The former will have the Spirit to acquire; while the latter will have it increased. For, if (the Spirit) is not to be acquired by measure, less for some than for others, Elisha would not say to Elijah: "*Let a double portion of your spirit be upon me*" (2 Kings 2: 9).

But when St. John the Baptist said: “*God does not give the Spirit by measure*” (John 3: 34); he was specifically speaking about the Son of God who did not acquire the Holy Spirit by measure; for the Spirit dwelt in Him with the perfection of divinity.

- + He who is ‘Omnipresent’, does not dwell in everyone, and does not exist equally in those He does; Otherwise what would be the meaning of Elisha’s request to get a double portion of the spirit of Elijah? And how would certain saints be more holy than others; except to have a more flow of the Spirit of God in them?

(St. Augustine)

- + How can we perceive the words said by the Lord to His disciples: “*He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also, and greater works than these he will do*” (John 14: 12), if we consider them in the light of His saying: “*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master*” (Matthew 10: 24)

As an example, while Moses killed only three kings, Joshua his disciple, killed thirty of them (Joshua 12; 1-24)

While Moses persisted on praying and supplicating to enter the promised land, but his request was denied;

Joshua, on the other hand entered it and partook of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 24; 4-5).

Samuel was greater than Eli the priest; and Elisha has got a double portion of his master Elijah’s spirit, after his ascension (2 kings 2: 9-12). And the Lord Christ granted His disciples a double of his miracles.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“So he said, ‘You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so’”* (10)

Feeling the difficulty of the mission awaiting to come upon his shoulders, Elisha sought to get a double portion of the spirit of his spiritual father; But Elijah felt that Elisha has asked for a hard thing; for it was not within his authority to choose whom will succeed him, but it was that of God alone.

Elijah’s answer came to say that it is not within my hand, but within the hand of our God.... If He grant you the grace to watch me while I depart from you, it shall be so for you; as though he says to him: “*Let it be, not my will but that of My Father in heaven*”.

Elijah’s ascension was hidden from the physical eyes; as were the chariots and horses were hidden from the sight of Gehazi, Elisha’s servant in Dothan (17: 9). When Elisha saw it, Elijah perceived that God has granted him the power to look into the spiritual things to see and understand what others cannot. By that, Elijah perceived that his disciple has been appointed by God to be the head of the prophets, and a spokesman of the divine things to men.

Having watched his master set forth in the chariot of fire toward heaven, that scene remained printed on his heart and memory all life long; by which his faith became stronger to be able to say in the time of affliction: “*Those with us are more than those with them*” (16: 6). Before seeing such a scene, Elisha probably used to lean upon Elijah the man of God, but after seeing it, God came to occupy his whole mind, and to fill his whole heart and inner being.

The scene of the chariot of fire that carried Elijah was not to be seen by his physical eyes, unless God opens the eyes of man by His divine grace. Gehazi the servant of Elisha could not see the valley full of chariots and horses of fire, except after Elisha asked God to open his eyes (6: 17). Elijah therefore perceived that if Elisha was granted by God to watch his departure in the chariot of fire to heaven, he would be granted to power of sight in the spiritual things; and would be appointed by God to succeed him as the head of the prophets.

According to St. John Chrysostom, No man can enjoy a divine grace unless he longs and watches for it. It was not possible for Elisha to get the grace of having a double portion of Elijah's spirit, unless he longed and watched to see it. For this reason the Lord Jesus promised His disciples to get a power from above through the dwelling of the Holy Spirit upon them, without revealing to them when would that be, to exhort them to long and to watch for it.

+ Splitting the River, the splendid man crossed over together with his disciple; and said to him with love:  
[Now ask me what would I do for you before I depart from you. Whatever you ask I shall give you, as long as I am still with you];  
With a good heart, the blessed disciple, seeing that a door was open before him to ask whatever he likes, he wisely asked for a great treasure;  
He asked with confidence that his master will not disappoint him;  
He asked for a double portion of his master's spirit to come upon him;  
Although his master said to him: "*You have asked a hard thing*" (2 kings 2: 10) yet he did not deny him;  
But said to him: "*If you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if not it shall not be so*"  
He placed the issue in God's hands; the same way the divine Son said to His Father: "*Not My will but Yours be done*"

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

+ If the angels who carried Elijah up to heaven guarded Elisha on earth; there is no wonder that the angels who set forth with the Lord, have protected His disciples.

It is befitting of us to notice that the honor the angels gave to the father (Elijah), they also gave to Elisha his spiritual son, and the heir of his holiness, as justified by getting a double portion of Elijah spirit.... What an amazing inheritance!... when the heir gets more than what the giver processes,. Elijah left two portions of holiness to Elisha, even though he himself processes only one portion. In an amazing way, Elijah left a grace on earth, greater than what he carried to heaven.

(Father Macximus, bishop of Torin)

## **7- MOTHER EARTH BID ELIJAH FAREWELL:**

*"Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (11)*

The way Elijah was separated from Elisha reveals God's power and authority.

According to some fathers, the chariot and horses of fire, are heavenly hosts that came to carry Elijah the fiery man of God to heaven.

And according to St. Augustine, Elijah will come again before the day of judgment; and the Jews will believe in the Lord Christ through his preaching and interpretation of the Holy Book.

Preparing us to encounter Him face-to-face in heaven, and to enjoy the fellowship of the heavenly glories, God presents to us in the present life the enjoyment of continuous glories as a deposit of what we shall get.

+ When your eyes are opened, you will see a chariot of fire like that of Elijah, waiting to carry you up to heaven (2 Kings 2: 11). Then you will sing with joy: *"Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and we have escaped"* (Psalm 124: 7).

+ For us, humans, life is like a wrestling arena; we wrestle here, but will be crowned somewhere else. No one can feel safe, while surrounded by serpents and scorpions which attack him on all sides. The Lord says: *"My sword shall be bathed in heaven"* (Isaiah 34: 5). Shall we expect to find peace on earth?... No!, for the earth produce only thistles and thorns, and its dust is the food of the serpent (Genesis 3: 14, 18); *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places"* (Ephesians 6: 12). We are surrounded by enemies on all sides. The weak body will soon become dust. We are one against many; fighting against horrible adversaries. *"The ruler of this world has not yet come, and had nothing in Him (Jesus Christ)*. Up till now you are not listening in peace to the words of the prophet, saying: *"You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day..."* (Psalm 91: 5-7).

When you are afflicted by the enemy; when your desires stir up; when you say; 'What shall I do?' Then you will be answered by the words of the prophet, saying: *Do not fear, for those with us are more than those with them"*. and by his prayer, saying, *"O Lord, I pray open his eyes to see"* And when your eyes are opened, you will see a chariot of fire like that of Elijah, waiting to take you up to heaven (2 Kings 2: 11); Then, you will sing with joy, saying: *"Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snares of the fowlers; the snare is broken and we have escaped"* (Psalm 124: 7).

(St. Jerome)

+ Although Elijah was carried by a chariot of fire; yet it did not consume him.

+ *"Our God is a consuming fire"* (Hebrew 12: 10); that consumes the wicked ... It is the Holy Spirit who carried Elijah in a chariot of fire; from whom the weak Elisha sought help; and who led and strengthened David.

(St. Gregory the Neizianzen)

+ If that is the way our souls will ascend, like Elijah, and our minds will be taken up high as though in a chariot of fire; lifted up to the heavenly beauty; we should understand that the chariot of fire is the Holy Spirit who came to dwell upon the disciples, like tongues of fire divided upon them. You will dare to approach the stars, namely, the holy things that give light to our souls by the heavenly spiritual word of God.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

+ To those who consider the ascension of the Savior as something impossible; let them remember how an angel carried the prophet Habakkuk by the hair of his head; For then, the God of the angels and the prophets could rather ascend on a cloud from the Mount of Olives by His own power.

Remembering such wonders, you should give the precedence to God the wonder-Maker. For all those were raised up, while He, on the other hand, is the One who raises everything up by His might.

Remember that 'Enoch' was taken; while Jesus ascended.

Remember how Elijah was taken up to heaven by a chariot of fire; while *"the chariots of God are thousands of thousands"* (Psalm 68: 17).

Remember that Elijah was taken up to heaven, but Christ is in heaven;  
Remember that Elijah sought from God to grant his blessed disciple Elisha a double portion of his Spirit; But Christ granted His disciples the grace of the Holy Spirit; and let the believers partake of Him through the laying of hands.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- + Having controlled the desire of the body, Elijah denied the adulterers the rain of heaven.; ...  
Having overcome the carnal desire while living on earth, Elijah soared up high to where holiness dwells in peace;
- + Elijah longed to see Him (the Lord Christ); and having not seen Him on earth, being utterly purified by faith, he was raised up to see Him in heaven.  
Moses and Elijah saw Him; the meek ascended from the depths of the earth, and the zealous descended from up high; and in the middle they saw the Son; both symbolizing the secret of His coming.  
Moses, the symbol of the dead; and Elijah, the symbol of the living, who fly to encounter Him on His coming;  
Those who tasted death are ahead; and those who did not, will follow lead to encounter Him.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

- + Having his heart in heaven, the birds of heaven used to bring food to Elijah; ... Being in the likeness of the angels of heaven, the angels used to bring bread and water to him; ... And having put his thoughts in heaven, Elijah was taken up by a chariot of fire to heaven where a place for him was eternally set.

(St. Ephraim)

- + Of the Spirit who carried Elijah in a chariot, Elisha requested a double portion.
- + According to some, having embodied no physical desire, Elijah was taken up to heaven on a chariot of fire; appeared glorified together with the Lord (Matthew 3: 17); and will come as a forerunner to the second coming of the Lord (Malachi 5: 4).
- + Good are the wings of love, the true wings that hover on the mouths of the apostles, the wings of fire that utter the pure words (Psalm 12: 6)  
On these wings, 'Enoch' was taken up to heaven (Genesis 5: 24)  
On these wings, Elijah set forth on a chariot and horses of fire up to the high places (2 Kings 2: 11)  
On these wings, the Lord God led the father Patriarchs by a pillar of fire (Genesis 13: 21)  
The seraphim have such wings; When a Seraph took a live coal from the altar, and touched with it the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, his iniquities were taken away, and his sins purged (Isaiah 6: 6-7).  
By the fire of those wings the sons of Levi were purified (Malachi 3: 3); ... the tribes of the Gentiles, according to the testimony of St. John, were baptized, when he said that the Lord Jesus "*will baptize you with Holy Spirit and fire*" (Matthew 3: 11; John 1: 33).  
David, knowing that he should not fear the fiery wings of love, wished that his loins and heart be consumed (and proved) by fire (Psalm 26: 2).  
The Hebrew young men did not feel the heat of the furnace, for the flame of love gave them coolness.  
And to know how the perfect love has wings, hear the Lord Christ say: "*O Jerusalem, , ... how often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing*" (Matthew 23: 37).

- + The fiery Spirit kindles the hearts; for the divine spiritual fire has the activity to give light to the souls; and try them, the way pure gold is tried in the crucible. But the divine fire consumes every evil like thistles and thorns, *"for our God is a consuming fire"* (Hebrew 12: 29); *"In flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Thessalonians 1: 8). This fire gave the disciples the power to talk by tongues of fire (Acts 2: 25). This fire, surrounding (Saul of Tarsus); even though the voice enlightened his mind, the fire blinded him.. This fire appeared to Moses in the bush; and, in the form of a chariot, carried Elijah up to heaven (2 kings 2: 11) The blessed David sought the activity of this fire when he said, *"Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart"* (Psalm 26: 2)

(St. Maccari the Great)

In his debate against the heretics, St. Erinaos uses the episode of Elijah's ascension to heaven, as a prophecy about the resurrection of the body, which is denied by the heretics.

- + Elijah was taken while in his natural body form, proclaiming by prophecy, the ascension of the spirituals; and that nothing would stand as a hindrance against the ascension of their bodies; For by the same hands by which they were created at the beginning, they will ascend.
- + Not confronting death, 'Enoch' and 'Elijah' are assigned for eternal life, and testify to our future and sure resurrection.  
Let us quote the words of the apostle, that they are our examples (1 Corinthians 10: 6)  
He wrote about them for us to believe that the Lord is more powerful than all the physical laws concerning the body.
- + Although Enoch did not experience death (Genesis 5: 24; Hebrew 11: 5); So did Elijah (2 kings 2: 11); yet that is certainly just a postponement; for both are kept to suffer it; that by their blood they will destroy the antichrist (Revelation 11: 3).

(The scholar Tertullian)

- + Matrimony was granted to preserve the human race.  
Yet, concerning Elijah who mounted the chariot of fire, and dwells in heaven, hasn't he embraced virginity? ... Hadn't he a virtue that proclaimed his exalted ascension? ... Who closed heaven shut? ... Who raised the dead? ... Who Split the River Jordan? (2 Kings 2: 14) ... Wasn't he the virgin Elijah?  
  
Didn't Elisha, his disciple, after proving that he was equally virtuous, sought to get a double portion of Elijah's spirit?  
  
How about the three young men? Haven't they, by being virgins, become stronger than fire?  
  
Hasn't Daniel body, through virginity, confronted the fangs of the wild lions (Daniel 3: 20)? ... Didn't God, when He intended for the children of Israel to see Him, command them to purify their bodies (Exodus 19: 15;

Numbers 6: 2)? ... Haven't the priests purified themselves before approaching the sanctuary, to offer sacrifices? ... Didn't the law call purity 'a great vow'?

(Father John of Damascus)

+ How (delicious) you are, O fasting! ... Blessed is he who conquers by you!; for in you all secrets are present; ... By you, Elijah became beautiful and pure!; acquired two wings; flew and ascended to where death cannot enter (2 kings 2: 11).

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi presents to us the following marvelous poem, as though uttered on the tongue of the earth, and addressed to its son Elijah, to whom it gave birth; before he became counted among the heavenlies.; when it felt that it is not worthy of being treaded by him; having lived pure, while it was filled with corruption

+ Go ahead, O lowly one who was found worthy of living and counted among those high up; ... whom I raised, and of whom I am proud for giving birth;  
Go ahead, O beautiful one; Be my deposit among the angels; Enter as a firstborn offering before the Mighty One;  
Because of you, the congregation of the heights will acknowledge me, saying:: [It is the earth that raised this fruit, and sent it to our place];  
This bunch of grapes, from that crucible corrupted by Adam; gathered sweetness from among the thorns, for us to savor..

This head of grain came up from that cursed field, and safely ripened among the tares.

Go ahead, O saint; for whose steps I am not worthy, because of the corrupt adultery practiced daily on me.

Go ahead in peace, for heaven – my sister – desired your beauty, and took you away from me; for she deserves to have all the beautiful righteous.

Go ahead, for you have amazed me by your actions and your splendid spiritual intimate relationship

Go ahead in peace; for although I am sad because you left me, yet I boast the fruit which I raised.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

## 9- ELISHA MOURNS THE DEPARTURE OF ELIJAH:

*“Now Elisha saw it, and he cried out, ‘My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and its horsemen!. So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces” (12)*

Elisha called Elijah *“The chariot of Israel and its horsemen”*; on account of that the Lord used him to guide the people, warns them against the enemies, and grant them conquest.

The word *“chariot”* in the origin came in pleural as “chariots”; for he was considered as the mightiest weapon that reveals the power of God to defend Israel at that time. What happened with Elijah was like what happened with the prophet Moses, who disappeared, and the location of his burial was not known to this day (Deuteronomy 34: 6).

+ When the disciple saw his mentor separated from him, he cried out with a voice filled with grief;  
The heir mourned his spiritual father, whose valuable company he was denied;

The wise son cried out: "*My father, my father*"; and tore his clothes, because his spiritual father was taken away from him;

He called him "*the chariots of Israel and its horsemen*", for by him, Israel conquered in all its battles;

He took his mantle, and inherited his spirit; although he was denied the company of his mentor who was taken up high.

(St. (Mar)Jacob El-Serougi)

+ Even though Elijah endured hunger, treason, fear of death, and bitter labor; he was the only one who left the earth to heaven, carried on a chariot and horses of fire.

He denied any worthiness for getting such a grace; and, regardless of any human consideration, he referred it to the Holy One.

+ The soul says: "*You had made me as the chariots of noble people*" (Songs 6: 12).

The soul, like a chariot that carries its good master; has both good and bad horses. The good horses are the virtues of the soul, whereas the bad are its physical desires. Hence the master tends to rein the bad horses, keeps them back, while urging the good ones ahead.

The good horses are four: reason, moderation, abidance, and justice;

And the bad horses are: anger, evil desires, fear, and oppression.

It so happens sometimes that there is controversy between the two categories; as for example, when anger or fear stir-up, and hinder the progress of the chariot. The good horses, on the other hand, set forth flying, lifting the soul up from earth to high up places; especially if it has the easy yoke and the light burden of the Lord (Matthew 11: 29-30)

The clever master knows how to control his horses, keep them all going with the same step in harmony; because if the reason is too zealous, and the justice is too slow, he would yрге the slow one with his whip; and if moderation is too mild, and abidance is too sharp, he knows how to harmonize them both to keep on their progress.

(St. Ambrose)

Despite what Elisha reached of spiritual maturity, and what he enjoyed of blessings, he, in weakness, not enduring the departure of Elijah; tore of his clothes into two pieces as a sign of his great grief for being separated of his mentor; But, holding fast to Elijah's mantle, he felt that Elijah was still with him.

Elisha believed that, with the holiness of Elijah's soul, and his body that was qualified to be carried by a chariot of fire to heaven; even his mantle carried a power by which to split the river Jordan.... God sanctifies the souls, the bodies, the clothes of His children, and even their shadows, as we see in the book of acts, when the handkerchiefs, aprons, off the sick apostle Paul, and the shadow of the apostle Peter performed miracles and wonders. It is the work of God who sanctifies all what belong to his believers.

The prophet Elijah, for Israel, has been like chariots and horsemen, and even better, for by him, the Lord used to guide and warn His people, and grant them conquest.

St. Athanasius the apostolic presents to us the following comparison between the ascension of Elijah to heaven and the ascension of the Lord Christ:

- + For the Lord Christ, the angels used to appear all the time: when He was born, when He was risen, and when He ascended to heaven. According to the Holy Book, the angels said to His disciples: *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven”* (Acts 1: 10-11).

Now concentrate your attention with me! Why did the angels say that to the disciples? ... Haven't they seen by their own eyes what happened before them? Hasn't the Evangelist said: *“While they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight?”* (Acts 1: 9). Why then did the two angels tell them about His ascension into heaven?

**The first reason:** For the disciples started to grieve because Christ was going to leave them ... *“None of you asks Me: ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart”* (John 16: 5-6) ... That is why the two angels stood by those who grieved at the ascension; to remind them that He will come again, saying: *“The same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven”*. It is as though they tell them: ‘Now you grieve because He ascended; Do not grieve, because He will come again’.... They so told them, lest they might do what Elisha did when he tore his clothes when he saw his master set forth up into heaven (2 kings 2: 12); because no one came to tell Elisha that Elijah will come again.

**The second reason,** is not less important. The angels said: *“Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven!”*. As heaven is so far away beyond the power of their eye sight to reach; the two angels came to tell the disciples the truth of Jesus' ascension, lest they may think that He goes up to where Elijah was taken; but He truly ascended to heaven. ... Elijah was taken (as though) into heaven, on account of that he is just a minister; whereas Jesus ascended into heaven (where the divine throne is); for He is the Lord.... To one (the servant) a chariot was sent to take him up; while the other – the divine Son, having the throne of His Father, according to the prophet Isaiah: *“Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud”* (Isaiah 19: 1)... When Elijah was taken up, his mantle fell down to Elisha (2 kings 2: 13); whereas Jesus when He ascended, He sent graces to all His disciples, and not to one prophet. For there were many among them who were like Elisha, and who were even more glorious than him.

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + Let us set up, O beloved brethren; Let us raise the eyes of our souls toward Him who will come back; For the apostle Paul says: *“For the lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God ; and the dead in Christ will rise first; then we, who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”* (1 Thessalonian 4: 16, 17).. But not everyone will so enjoy, but some will ascend to heaven, and some will remain; ... Listen to the words of the Lord Christ saying: *“Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and the other left: (Matthew 24: 41).... Shall we also ascend?*

When I say “we”, I count myself not worthy of being among those who will ascend, for I am not without sense or understanding to disregard my own sins. But, lest I cry with bitter tears, when I recall in my mind these words and remember my sins, and spoil the joy of this holy feast,. I shall therefore, end my sermon,. to let the joy of the feast radiate in your minds, by saying to you: ‘Let the rich not rejoice in his riches; nor the poor feel miserable because of his poverty; but let everyone, whoever he is, do his work according to his own conscience. For it is not the rich who is happy, nor the poor who is miserable; but he is rather blessed, and even

triple as much, he who is found worthy to ascend on the clouds, even if he is the poorest of all. And he is truly miserable, and triple as much, he who is counted along with those lost, even if he is the richest of all.

(St. John Chrysostom)

#### 10- ELIJAH'S MANTLE:

*"And he also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen down from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan" (13)*

Elisha has previously taken Elijah's mantle on the day he was called for ministry (1 Kings 19: 19); then he gave it back to him, because it was not yet time to succeed him.

The falling down of the mantle refers to the spirit and the power crossing over from Elijah to Elisha. In a similar way the robe of Christ moved to the church after His ascension into heaven, on the day of the Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit dwelt upon the church; giving a true meaning of the words spoken by Christ to His disciple, saying: *"He who believes in Me, the work that I do he will do also, and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father"* (John 14: 12).

According to St. Jerome, in the falling of Elijah's leather mantle, when he was taken up into heaven, there is a living portrait for the believer who intends to have his heart raised up to heaven, to take off from himself the evil carnal desires. The way Adam put on a leather shirt after his fall, the devil – the ancient serpent – intends for us to put on the deadly desires.

- + Once Elijah was taken up into heaven by the chariot of fire, he left his sheep-skin mantle on earth ... As long as our souls are preoccupied with things of this world, and chained by the temporal possessions and wealth, we shall not be able to think freely in God ... Now, casting wealth aside is for the beginners on the way, and not for those who became perfect ... For, presenting oneself to God, concerns the Christians and the apostles; those who liken the widow *"who out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood"* (Mark 12: 41-44). By presenting all their possessions to the Lord, they are counted worthy of hearing His words, saying: *"You will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"* (Matthew 19: 28).
- + Should it not be befitting of us to cry and sigh when the serpent seduces us as it seduced our early parents, to eat from the forbidden fruit? . And after we are driven away from the paradise of virginity, it intends for us to put on a mantle of sheep-skin, like that left by Elijah on the earth, before being taken up to paradise?... Say to yourself: What shall I benefit from the pleasures of the senses that will soon come to an end? ... What shall I do with the sweet, yet dangerous 'Sirens song', on him who listens to it?
- + That is why the rich find difficulty in reaching the kingdom of heaven, that requires from its citizens, souls that soar up high, free of all bonds and obstacles.  
When the Lord says: *"Go and sell"*, he means, not a part, but all you have, and give the poor, not just your relatives and friends.  
When He says: *"No one having put his hand on the plow, and looking back, is fitting for the kingdom of heaven"* (Luke 9: 62)  
When you are on the roof, do not think about your clothes in the house, to flee from the hand of your Egyptian mistress (Genesis 39: 12).  
Leave behind the mantle of this world. For Elijah in his swift departure into heaven, could not take with him his mantle, but left in the world the clothes of the world.

(St. Jerome)

+ While Elijah left his mantle (of sheep-skin) to his disciple, the Son of God, left His body for our sake, then took it back before ascending.

I wish we do not cast away Jesus' robe;... I wish we do not feel sorrow or fear because of the difficulty of times;... for He, who did not hesitate to shed His own blood for the sake of all, and allowed us to partake of His body and blood again and again, What would He not do for the sake of our faithfulness?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

*"Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over" (14)*

According to some scholars, Elisha struck the water once and not twice. And according to others, when Elisha struck the water with Elijah's mantle and nothing happened the first time; When he said: "*Where is the Lord God of Elijah?*", and struck the water by the mantle a second time, the water was divided this way and that.... It so happened so that the Lord would confirm to Elisha that the power was not in the mantle of Elijah, but in the Lord of Elijah.

The Holy Book, the Word of God, finds pleasure to refer God to His godly men, on the level of the congregation, as well as of the individuals; so that every believer would desire to have God referred to him, as well as to his brethren, and to the church as a whole.

Elijah's mantle was nothing but a symbol of the power of God by which the prophet was clothed. Elijah's mantle was therefore analogous to the rod of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 4: 1-9; 7: 9).

+ It was said that God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob (Exodus 3: 6). He truly wishes for His light to be referred to no one but to men; being written: "*The Life is the light of men*" (John 1: 4). And lest it may be assumed that He is just the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, alone, He is also said to be "*The God of Elijah*" (2 Kings 2: 14); "He is God of my father Simeon" (Judith 9: 2); And "*He is the God of the Hebrews*" (Exodus 3: 18; 5):

- + Elijah lived in the wilderness, so did John the Baptist. The former was sustained by ravens, and the latter despised all the worldly pleasures, loved poverty, and hated luxury.  
The former did not seek favor from king Ahab; and the latter despised that of king Herod.  
The former appeared with the Lord in glory; and the latter lived with the Lord on earth  
The former will precede the second coming of the Lord; and the latter preceded His first coming.  
The former brought rain down on a land that suffered draught for three years; and the latter, for as long as three years, cleansed the dust of our bodies in the water of faith.  
If you may ask me which three years I mean? I shall refer you to what is written: *"For three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down. Why does it use up the ground?"*(Luke 13: 7).  
The first year is the era of the early fathers, when the harvest reached a level never to happen again. ... The second year is the era of Moses and the prophets. ... And the third year is when our God and Savior came *"to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"* (Luke 4: 19)

#### **11- THE POSITION OF THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS:**

*"Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha'. And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him" (15)*

The sons of the prophets showed the befitting honor to the saintly prophet Elisha, as a symbol of the apostolic succession. Although Elisha was denied the presence of his master Elijah in the flesh, yet he was surrounded by the power of God that worked in him. Seeing how he inherited Elijah's mantle by which he divided the River Jordan, the sons of the prophets were sure that he replaced him.

The prophets in Jericho did not see the chariot and horses of fire; but noticing how Elijah disappeared, and how Elisha returned and divided the river, they perceived that the power and authority of Elijah have dwelt upon Elisha. They bowed to the ground before him, as a sign of honor and acceptance of the divine will that set him to replace his father Elijah.

- + Elisha embodied two persons: Elijah from above, and Elisha from below.

According to the scholar Origen, it is important to know that the talk here, that Elisha enjoyed a double portion of Elijah's spirit; And what came in the gospel according to St. Luke, that John the Baptist "*will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah*" (Luke 1: 17); does not imply that Elijah's soul is the same in John; For the Holy Book discerns between 'the soul' and 'the spirit', as it came in 1 Thessalonian 5: 34: "*May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*"; and also what came in the song, by the three young men, saying: "Bless the Lord, O spirits and souls of the righteous" (Daniel 3) [That is why Elijah was not called 'John', because of the soul, but for the sake of the spirit and the power; something that does not contradict with the teaching of the church].

*"Then they said to him, 'Look now, there are fifty strong with your servants, Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley'. And he said, 'You shall not send anyone'"*  
(16)

They said "*The Spirit of the Lord has taken him up*", on account of that Elijah used to disappear and appear all of a sudden.

Although the sons of the prophets in Jericho, have enjoyed a divine proclamation concerning Elijah's ascension; and said to Elisha: "*Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?*" (2: 5); Yet they chose fifty strong men to set forth to search for Elijah, "*lest perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley*"

+ Their search testified to his ascension..  
As putting guards on the Lord's tomb, judges the Jews, for it confirms Your resurrection.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*"But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, 'Send them out'. Therefore they sent fifty men, and they searched for three days, but did not find him"* (17)

Why was Elisha ashamed when they urged him?

He knew that God proclaimed to them the ascension of Elijah, as they themselves so testified; yet wished to debate with him before it happened. ... Now, as Elijah has already ascended, as he himself has seen, hating to enter into more vain debate, he was ashamed, and consented to their request, to let them perceive by themselves the issue of ascension.

- + Who are those sons of the prophets, who encountered Elisha, and who told him that his master will be taken away from over him; and who, despite their knowledge of his ascension to heaven by a chariot of fire, they insisted on sending fifty strong men to search for him in the mountains, and did not find him?

The sons of the prophets refer to the Jews who received the law, and enjoyed the appearance of the prophets. Who, through the prophecies, knew about the Heavenly Christ who was to descend to us and then ascend to His heavens.

They seek the Messiah, yet according to their material thinking. Searching for him by strong men, and not by the Holy Spirit, they failed to encounter Him.

They did not find Him, for *"He came to his own, and His own did not receive Him (John 1: 10), ... For He did not come according to their wish; hence they were denied His presence.*

- + When Elijah, in the old, set forth from the earth to God, that brought sorrow to the people of Israel; but Elisha comforted them, when he put on the mantle of his master.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

*"And when they came back to him, for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, 'Did I not say to you, 'Do not go?'" (18)*

## **12- THE BAD WATER BECOMES SWEET:**

After dividing the water of the River Jordan by Elijah's mantle, by which God proclaimed that Elisha is surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, among whom was his master Elijah, God allowed him to turn the bad water sweet. It is claimed that it is the spring of sweet water called 'Ein Sultan' nowadays.

*"Then the men of the city said to Elisha, 'Please notice, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees, but the water is bad, and the ground barren'" (19)*

The geographic location of the city was pleasant, and the soil was fertile, but the water was bad and corrupting the fertile soil making it barren, not fit for agriculture. That city refers to the people of God as a congregation and as individuals. God created man good, to set from his depths a holy paradise for himself, to rejoice in it, and to call the heavenly creatures, his friends, to enjoy, together with him, the joyful fruits of the spirit; according to the words of the song: *"Let my beloved come to my garden and eat my honeycomb with my honey; ... Eat, O friends; drink, yes, drink deeply"* (Songs 5: 1)..

What does he mean by the bitter water? ... If the water refers to the law and its statutes, the literals have corrupted its meaning and message, to become bitter, ... No one can take its bitterness away but the Lord Christ, the Holy Salt, who lifts us up from the letter to the spirit.

In a message sent by St. Jerome to comfort Ostochiom for the departure of her mother Paula, he referred to her mother's visit to the holy land including Jericho, where she saw how the barren and extremely bitter spring of the law was healed by the True Elisha, by His wisdom, turning it into a sweet spring, grantor of fertility

- + About him the prophets spoke, saying with amazement: [His master's spirit dwelt upon him with abundance]. As a spiritual physician, they sought from him to heal the sick, corrupt, and barren land; Seeing his power, they sought from him to heal the bad water, and to give prosperity to the whole city; He asked them to bring him a new bowl, and put salt in it; and they did;

Bringing it up to the spring, he cast in it the water with salt, and Healed it.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“And he said, ‘Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it’; So they brought it to him” (20)*

‘Tselochith’ was sometimes translated as ‘a bowl’ (2 Kings 21: 21; Proverbs 19: 24, 26, 35), or ‘a frying pan’ (2 Chronicles 35: 12); supposed to be a flat metal plate.

- + Nowadays, the sweet salt of the prophets is scattered upon the Gentiles;  
Let us acquire a new taste;  
Let us utter wisdom, and not what is contrary to it; lest we, as well, would become outside the wisdom.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“Then he went out to the source of the water, and cast in the salt there, and said, ‘Thus says the Lord: I have healed this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness” (21)*

The healing power was not in the new bowl, nor in the salt, but in the saying of the Lord and His active word in the believer, being a new bowl, by which he enjoys the new life, resurrected together with Christ Jesus. For, once the believer receives the Lord working in him, he would become, according to the words of the Lord “*salt of the earth*”, that takes away the corruption from it. The secret of the newly acquired sweetness of the bad water is the name of the Lord; and Elisha was just a tool in the hand of the Lord.

The way the Lord healed the water of Jericho by the salt, the incarnated Word of God renewed the whole creation. According to father Methodius: [What Elisha did, refers to the work of the Lord Christ. By offering food without leaven, as a sign of His birth without human seed, He took away from the food the bitterness of death. As to casting the natural elements in the Jordan, it refers ahead to the descent of our Lord to Hades to save those on whom corruption dwelt.

- + This is the secret of the Son; He healed the bad water, and reformed the spring, when He visited it;  
Once the prophet crossed over the river, he encountered the Secret who transfigured;  
The city with pleasant location, is the whole creation, which was beautiful before breaking the commandment;  
The bad water is the sin that came upon men, brought death upon all the human race, by which they became barren;  
The big serpent vomited venom in the head of the spring, bringing corruption, and hence death to the whole river;  
And as the creation, by nature, used to be full of beauty, it became corrupted by sin, to become hateful and barren;  
Breaking the commandment brought forth death, and made earth barren by the dreg of the wine mixed by the serpent in Eve’s ear.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“So the water remains healed to this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spoke” (22)*

The message of every true prophet and ministry of the word, is turning the souls, made barren by the spirit of the world, the bitter water, to become a spiritual paradise for the Lord. This is realized by casting the salt in it through a new bowl;

which is the experience of the resurrected life. As, according to the Holy Book: "*Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*" (2 Corinthians 5: 17). The salt is the work of the Holy Spirit in us; turning us into salt to the world.

It is befitting of the believer who bears the Spirit, to become like salt; by whose light touches, he would make the others salted, as the salt does to the food keeping it from corruption. It is befitting of him not to put his nose in the life of others, to be as though pouring too much salt on the food and corrupting it. . Let us then do it in light, tranquil, and active touches; Let us not be busybodies, committing others to adopt our own thoughts and concepts.

+ It so seems that that bitter spring refers to Adam, the early man from whom all the human race emerged, and remained fruitless and bitter through his sin; before the coming of the True Elisha, namely our Lord and Savior. ....Although the new bowl in which the salt was put, may represents the apostles; but fittingly, we should see in it the incarnation of the Lord.  
Now, the salt was put in it, namely wisdom; as we read: "*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt*" (Colossians 4: 6).

Besides, As Christ is not only the "Power of God", but the "Wisdom of God", as well; the body of Christ, when the Word incarnated, would be like a new bowl filled with the divine wisdom, That is why Elisha cast the salt in the new bowl in the bitter water to turn it sweet and fruitful. So is the new bowl, namely the incarnate Word, sent by God the Father to turn the human race from being a spring of bitter water into sweet water, to lead them to the pure love, instead of the evil practices, and the barrenness of good works; and to bring them back to fruition.

Indeed, brethren, Does it not seem to you that the new bowl filled with the salt of the divine wisdom, was put in the water, when the Lord Christ came down into the river to be baptized? For then, all the waters turned sweet and were sanctified by such a new bowl, namely the body of Christ.

As a result of this, the water not only became not barren, but the water of baptism produced in the whole world, a multitude of Christians, as increasing fruition, and extremely abundant crop.

+ Water in the book of Revelation refers to the people "*The water which you saw .....peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues*" (Revelation 17: 15). And it is obvious that the bowl with the salt, cast into the water, represents the apostles, according to the words of the Lord to them, saying: "*You are the salt of the earth*" (Matthew 13: 5). By His grace He made a new men from the old ones, filled them with the salt of His divine teachings and wisdom, and sent them to the whole world, as though to the spring of the human race, to take away the barrenness in their good deeds and dealings..

+ We, as well, brethren, without any prior worthiness, have received great good deeds from the Lord through His rich grace; were found worthy to have sweetness instead of bitterness, and were called from unfruitfulness to fruitfulness in the good deeds

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

+ You should notice the greatness of the worthiness of Elisha in his first visit to his sons the prophets, when he produced abundant fruits. For by taking away the barrenness from the water, he brought benefit to the inhabitants of the whole city; which otherwise would be completely deserted. By purifying the water, he purified the people, and through purifying the fountain of water, he purified the souls.

According to the blessed apostle Paul, these things happened to them as a symbol (1 Corinthians 10: 6). What was said: *"Rejoice O barren who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband"* (Galatians 4: 27; Isaiah 54: 1), was said concerning the church, referring to it as the barren city, whose water was bad before the coming of the Lord Christ, because of the defilement of the people of the Gentiles; that made her unable to conceive with sons of God. But when Christ came, and took a human body like an earthen bowl, He reformed the bad water, namely He took the defilement of the people away; and turned the church from barrenness into fruitfulness.

(Father Maximus, bishop of Turin)

+ He cast the salt in a new bowl as a symbol of the perfect birth given from the womb of the pure virgin;  
He portrayed the virgin as the new bowl, completely pure of defilement;  
By the salt he portrayed the only-begotten Son, by whose distinguished taste, He salted all the worldly food;  
By the new bowl he portrayed the pure body of the young woman;  
The salt healed the bad water, namely, the Son, by His birth healed the race of Adam;  
The pleasant city was sick with corruption, until the Salt visited it and healed it;  
So was the whole beautiful creation full of death, until the Son shone on it and healed it;  
The sick water would not be healed unless the salt in the new ball was cast into it;  
As the human race would not be set aright from its fall, unless the Virgin gave birth to the Son of God;  
The salt was mixed with the water for everyone to drink; as God the Father mixed the Son with men, to let all live;  
Come and see how the salt is taken up by the bad water; how the dead men live through eating the Son of God;  
By the salt for the water, and the body of the Son, they acquired health; and the earth of Jericho was healed;  
By casting the salt, Elisha proclaimed the secret of the Son; took the curse away, and healed the sick water;  
At the beginning, God the Father cursed the earth because of Adam; and Joshua the Son of Nun cursed Jericho;  
He portrayed Christ who voided the verdict of God the Father; and how, by His cross He took the curse away from the earth;  
And by the salt, Elisha voided the verdict of Joshua the son of Nun on Jericho (Joshua 6: 26); and took the curse away from the water..

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

### **13- ELISHA CURSES THE YOUTHS, THE OPPONENTS OF THE TRUTH, WHO MOCKED HIM:**

*"And he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, 'Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead'"* (23)

As in Bethel, in the city where Jeroboam made a golden calf, there lived, as well, some of the sons of the prophets, who considered Elijah their master and mentor; It was therefore a place of violent religious controversy.

Having his head covered as it was the custom in the Middle East at that time, the words "You baldhead, you baldhead" was not a shout by some mocking youths, as much as it was an insult to the head of the sons of the prophets, namely a direct insult to God; most probably provoked by their parents, who reaped the punishment that dwelt upon their children.

The Hebrews used to admire the head covered by dense beautiful hair, and despise the baldhead (Isaiah 15: 2); hence the shout "You baldhead" was used for ridicule.

While Elijah was "a hairy man", Elisha had an distinctive bald head.

- + It so seems that the attitude of the youths was a fruit of their upbringing by their parents, who bore animosity toward Elijah and his disciples, who proclaimed the news of the ascension of their master, fiercely received by the people in Bethel. The youths did not therefore, by their shouts, mock Elisha's bald head, as much as, by them, they meant to distort his reputation, and ridicule his claim about the ascension of Elijah, which was well received by the people of Jericho.

(St. Ephraim the Syrian)

*"So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the Lord. And two female bears came out of the woods, and mauled forty-two of the youths" (24)*

After enjoying such an exalted power from God, by which, directly after the ascension of Elijah, Elisha divided the water of the River Jordan by Elijah's mantle; and turned the bad water into sweet water by the salt in the new bowl, the youths of the city, came out to mock him. Their action was not some sort of innocent children play to entertain themselves, but was rather one by grownups to oppose the work of God. They seemed to be a great crowd; for it is said that the two bears, "*mauled forty-two of the youth*", who came out of the city with an obvious plan to mock the prophet with words they intentionally uttered.

Who were those youths?

- 1- As Bethel was the main center of the worship of the golden calf made by Jeroboam, Elisha, the man of God was not welcome by some of its inhabitants. What happened, was probably according to a plan set by the devil through the priests of Baal, and those who worked to the account of idol-worship; and the punishment that dwelt on the youths, was therefore, to chasten their families, the opponents to the divine truth.
- 2- According to some others, they were disciples of a certain teacher who dedicated his life to teach against godliness and good life.

Some may wonder: How would God allow for forty-two youths to be mauled by the bears for some words of ridicule they uttered against the prophet Elisha?

- 1- They were most probably members of a gang of young men, by whose mocking words they meant to destroy the faith in the living God, and who could draw a multitude of other young men to follow lead. Elisha's life was therefore in danger for their great number and the nature of their obvious disregard of his authority as a prophet
- 2- By that God intended to put fear in the hearts of any other gang, who could become a serious danger against all the men of God.
- 3- According to some, their shouts: "*Go up you baldhead*"; and repeating it, they mocked what he proclaimed to the people concerning the ascension of his master Elijah; as though they meant to say: [If the long-haired Elijah has ascended to heaven by a chariot of fire, why should you not do likewise, O baldhead?!].

The mocking was meant to be against Elijah, claimed to have ascended to heaven by a chariot of fire, whom the wicked kept on opposing even after his ascension. It was, therefore, not directed against the person of Elisha, as much as it was against his prophetic mission as a whole, and the divine work through him and through his master Elijah.

What those young men did, represented a serious plan by the people of Bethel, who heard how the sons of the prophets in Jericho honored Elisha when they saw how he divided the water of the River Jordan by Elijah's mantle; and how he reformed the bad water to the account of all the inhabitants of the city, by which, Jericho testified to the ascension of Elijah, the man of God into heaven by a chariot of fire. In order to confront that claim, before the arrival of the prophet Elisha to Bethel, they sent those young men in an attempt to break down his psyche; and to keep anyone in Bethel from listening to his claim..

Father John of Damascus used that event as an example of the importance of giving honor to the men of God. The places where the Holy God finds comfort are the "Theotokos" and the saints who strive to liken God as much they can, having opted to cooperate with the divine will. For in those God dwells, and calls them 'gods', not by nature, but through adoption; like when we call the red hot iron bar 'afame', not by nature, but because it partakes of the work of fire.

He says: "*You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy*" (Leviticus 19: 2). This is first, then followed by choosing good; for once we choose it, God will help us to increase in it; saying: "*I will walk among you*" (Leviticus 26: 12). ... "*You are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you*" (1 Corinthians 3: 16);... "*When He called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease*" (Matthew 10: 1); ... "*He who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also, and greater works than these he will do*" (John 14: 12);.....; "*Far be from Me, for those who honor Me I will honor*" 1 Samuel 2: 30);... "*f indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together*" Romans 8: 17); ... and, "*God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods*" Psalm 82: 1).

Hence, Being gods, not by nature, but because they partook of the divine nature, they should be honored, not because they are worthy, but because they bear inside them, Him who is worshipped by nature.

We do not touch the red-hot iron, because of its nature, but because it partakes of what is hot by nature.

The saints are honored for God glorified them; and through Him they are feared by enemies. They are not gods by nature, but because they are ministers who love God, we honor them, because the king is honored through giving honor to his beloved servants.

When someone prays by faith in the name of an apostle, God will listen to his prayer, because He acknowledges the honor given to His faithful servants, whose shadow, handkerchiefs, and aprons had the power to heal.

On the other hand, those who seek to be worshipped like God by others, are hated and are worthy of the eternal fire. And those who, because of their haughtiness reject giving honor to God's ministers, will be condemned because of their attitude, of not giving honor to God through them. The young men, therefore, who mocked the prophet Elisha, were so condemned, and mauled by the bears (2 Kings 2: 23).

(St. John of Damascus)

- 4- Those young men paid their temporal life a price for the corruption and abomination in which they lived, and for rejecting the reproaches of the prophets Elijah and Elisha.
- 5- The prophet did not call the two bears, but left the matter in the hands of God, who sent the two bears from the forest. The prophet cursed them by the name of the Lord, whom they opposed and mocked. He did not seek revenge for himself, nor any action to chastise them; but it was God who sent the bears to proclaim the seriousness of opposing the divine truth.
- 6- God allowed for that, because mocking the men of God was a common thing all along the eras, particularly among the young generations; God, therefore, intended to present a lesson to all generations.

What they did was not a little insult; for they mocked the prophet of God, who utters the words of God. What those young men did, therefore, was not only directed against the prophet of God, but to God Himself in the person of the prophet.

- 7- According to the scholar Tertullian, God allowed for the mauling of those young men who mocked the prophet, to confirm that He has no partiality; for the way He allows for the perdition of the foreign pagans, opponents to the divine truth, He also chastens His own people, even if they are young men, if they persist on their evil doing.
- 8- Some fathers, like St. Augustine and St. Jacob El-Serougi, bind this episode to the crucifixion of the Lord of glory Jesus Christ, whom the crucifiers mocked, crying out "*Crucify Him, crucify Him*". They justify the mauling by the two bears of the young men who mocked the prophet Elisha; by seeing Elisha as a symbol of the Physician who healed the water of the human nature on which corruption dwelt; and the young men to refer to the congregation of the crucifiers who mocked the work of redemption.

The crucifiers who denied the Lord Christ who walked among them doing good, became like irrational young men walking in ignorance, and bringing the curse upon themselves. So were the high priests, the priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees who mocked the Lord Christ during His trial, because He exposed their hypocrisy; instead of giving Him thanks for coming, of preaching them, and testifying to the fulfillment of the prophesies.

- + Remembering the gospel (Matthew 27: 33),  
I wish no one mocks the cross of Christ; for the demons devoured the Jews who cried out, saying, "*Crucify Him, crucify him*" (Luke 23: 21), the same way the young men who cried out, saying, "*Go up, O baldhead*" (2 kings 2: 23), Infancy is put before us to imitate humility, as well as to beware of foolishness.

(St. Augustine)

- 9- According to some interpreters, the word "baldhead" probably refers to lepers, who used to shave their heads; Namely, those young men looked at Elisha as an unclean leper.  
And according to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, behind those young men, was the devil who provokes his followers to mock the Savior, and to bark like dogs against Him. For the devil could not stand still, while seeing the Heavenly Physician healing the human nature, and restoring her health and beauty.

10- It was befitting of all to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for turning the bitter into sweet water; and the barren into fruitful land. But instead of thanksgiving and praise, they mocked God, and His prophet Elisha. What befell the young men was therefore a natural fruit of the spirit of mocking God, His works, and His ministers.

+ While being in Judah, the blessed Elisha and the other prophets, were not honored by the majority of people, but were mocked, insulted, and counted as crazy men possessed by the devil. As it happened at that time that, when Elisha sent one of the sons of the prophets to anoint Jahu a king, the captains of the army who were sitting with Jahu said to him: "*Why did this madman come to you?*" (2 Kings 9: 11).

Because the young men would not do what they did unless they were provoked by their parents, the Holy Spirit, intending through Elisha to confront the pride of the Jews, let two bears to maul 42 young men; so that by striking the young, the old would be chastised, and probably learn to fear the prophet whom they rejected, despite the miracles he performed before their eyes. Anyway the Jews persisted on their evil ways; so that in them the written: "*In vain I have chastened your children. They received no correction*" (Jeremiah 30: 2) was realized.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

+ God visited His people, even while chastising them, when they denied Him (see Numbers 11, 21); as He did when He sent two bears to maul the young men who mocked His prophet.

(The scholar Tertullian)

According to St. Jerome, the 42 young men refer to the 42 years between the ascension of the Lord Christ to Bethel (heaven), and the coming of the two (bears) the Roman leaders Vasbesian and Titus, who burned the temple.

+ Now, according to the letter, O beloved brethren, It is befitting of us to believe that the blessed Elisha was motivated by a divine zeal to reform the people, more so than by anger, when he caused the two bears to maul the Jewish young men. He did not intend to have revenge, but rather to reform. ...

He, as well, bore here a symbol of the passion of our Lord and Savior .

For, the way the ill-behaved young men cried out, saying "*Go up, O baldhead*", the Jews foolishly cried out with evil words against the Lord Christ, the true Elisha, saying: "*Crucify Him, crucify Him*". For what "*Go up, O baldhead*", mean, but [Rise up on the cross at the Golgotha]. ...

Now, notice, O brethren, that 42 young men in the days of Elisha were killed; and 42 years after the passion of the Lord Christ, two Roman (bears) -- Vasbesian and Titus came to put Jerusalem under siege.

Notice also that the siege of Jerusalem happened during the celebration of the Passover, by which the Jews got the punishment due to them, after 42 years of the day they crucified the true Elisha, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. History tells us that out of three and a half million Jews who gathered together in Jerusalem, one million and a hundred thousand were killed by the sword or famine, beside one thousand young men led into captivity to Rome. ... Jerusalem was put under siege for as long as two years, and dead bodies were cast outside the city, in heaps as high as the city walls. That desolation was previously symbolized by the two bears that mauled the 42 young men who mocked the blessed Elisha; to realize what the prophet David said: "*xxxxxxxxxxxxxx*" (Psalm 14: 79). ; For, as we said before, After 42 years of the passion of the Lord Christ, the evil nation got what it deserve on the hands of the two Roman bears: Vasbesian and Titus.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

+ Yes indeed, Elisha was the disciple of that beautiful Elijah, and his beauty was shown by his actions wherever he went.

He healed the bad water, and the barren and sick land;

He annulled death and put an end to it;

While on his way up to Bethel, some young men dared to mock him;

Some ill-behaved and cursed young men mocked the physician who healed them for free;

In that he was like our Lord who was mocked by the Jews whose sick He healed;

The foolish young men were like those who, having seen the powers performed by our Lord, they reviled and mocked Him;

Those young men secretly referred to the crucifiers; for Elisha, as well, bore the secret of the Son of God;

As he was mocked after healing the bad water, he likened the Lord Christ who was mocked after performing divine powers;

After putting an end to death, the Hebrews paid him back with evil; for they were used to slander all the good deeds;

For bandaging and healing a great wound for free, they paid him back with reproach and revile;

After visiting the bad water and healing the spring, they mocked the good physician;

When he healed them, he did not seek a reward; but the children of the serpents reviled him.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

According to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, the prophet Elisha did not seek revenge, nor was overcome by anger, but sought the purification of humanity of the spirit of mockery. His attitude was like what Phinehas did, for the sake of his jealousy on the holiness of the house of the Lord (See Numbers 25: 11), who in appearance, killed the two who despised the sanctity of the temple, yet in his intention, it was a prayer and an attempt to purify the sanctuaries of God of adultery, corruption, and despite..

The cause of being sometimes offended by the behavior of the men of God, is not perceiving the spiritual concepts, and not knowing what lie in their hearts and minds. What the men of God do, are sometimes not perceived by the carnal laymen, who do not enjoy the fellowship with God like the spiritual men of God, who do nothing except through their union with the Holy One.

+ When you hear that he cursed the young men, do not think that he was overcome by anger, and tended to avenge himself;

His tree was all-good, and never produced bad fruits;

He, in whom are life for the dead and the prophecy, never did a thing with anger;

He did not intend for them to be mauled by the two bears;

Can we say that Phinehas was a murderer, who, by killing the adulterous, saved the camp (Numbers35: 8)?

The splendid man carried a prayer in his heart, and a spear in his hand;

He used the killing as though a prayer;

So are all the honorable and children of the light, they move by the Spirit;

When they kill they intend to make alive; their will, like God, is more exalted than the evil;

The spiritual is different from the physical in his actions, which are not always perceived;

That is why, his actions may sometimes cause offense;

When you look at Elisha, look at him under this light; for he is a man full of spirit and discernment;

Having his soul made by God, all his actions were to help others by a good heart;  
 His heart was captivated by the Spirit he took from God, and never moved to work without it'  
 His soul was enlightened by the Lord who dwelt in him; he never trip because he walked in Him as though in daylight;

That man was enriched by the divine treasure given to him by his mentor before his ascension;  
 He received the great key by which he could open and close, like a steward of the house of God.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*"Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria" (25)*

Samaria was the capital of the kingdom, where Elisha had a residence (5: 3, 9; 6: 32); had a close relationship with the king and elders, and enjoyed a special position among them.

### THE PROPHET ELISHA AS A SYMBOL OF THE LORD CHRIST

ELISHA	THE LORD CHRIST
1- He had a double portion of Elijah's spirit (1)	He is the Lord of the prophets
2- He was mocked by the young men of Bethel (2)	He was rejected by His own
3- He prophesied the conquest over Moab, when the water appeared red like blood (7)	He proclaimed the conquest over the devil by the water of baptism that bears the power of blood
4- He blessed the oil (4)	He gave the riches of the ointment of His Holy Spirit
5- He raised the son of the Shunammite woman from the dead (4)	He is the Grantor of resurrection
6- He reformed the venom in the pot (4)	He is the Creator and the Reformer
7- He fed hundred men by twenty loaves of bread (4)	He is the Bread of life
8- He cleansed Naaman the Syrian of leprosy (5)	He cleanses us by the water of baptism
9- He made the iron head of the ax float by casting a branch of a tree into the water (6)	He changed our nature by His cross.
10- He revealed the secret plans of the king of Aram (6)	He reveals the hidden tricks of the devil
11- His prophecy concerning opening the windows of heaven (7)	He is God of the impossible
12- His prophecy to Hazael that he will prosecute the believers (8)	He reveals the afflictions to come

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### AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 2

#### YOUR FIERY SPIRIT CARRIES ME TO YOUR HEAVEN

- + Who will not long to ascend together with Your prophet Elijah?
- Who will not seek a chariot and horses of fire to carry him up to heaven?
- To dwell together with Your angels, the messengers of fire.
- Grant me to bear Your fiery Spirit, so that I know no slothfulness

Behold, Your Holy Spirit comes down like tongues of fire;  
He turns my depths into a fire of flaming love;  
That all the water of the world could not quench.

+ Let me have the fiery heart, to be qualified to ascend to You;  
To see the gates of heaven open, to find comfort.

+ Like You brought joy to Elijah's heart by Elisha;  
Grant me joy of seeing all practice Your work;  
To see all carry, together with me, not Elijah's mantle;  
But Your amazing body, as an eternal life.

+ Let me enjoy Your mantle, by which I can divide the river of the world;  
And find a way for myself amid the water, to cross over to You;  
To walk in it, and not divert to the right nor to the left.

+ Let me enjoy the true fatherhood as a gift;  
By which I cast, not fine flour in a new bowl;  
But Your body that renews my nature;  
And turns my wilderness, and that of my brethren, into a living spiritual paradise;  
Yes, to find in us the fruit of Your Holy Spirit;  
To find pleasure in it, and to call the heavenlies to enjoy it.

+ Your fiery Spirit grants me an unbeatable power  
By which, the opponents of truth would be like the mocking young men;  
Let them mock me and my mission that I received from You;  
How miserable they are!  
The bears will certainly come out to maul them;  
O Lord, take away all opposition to the truth;  
As to the opponents, bring them back to You, to exult in Your salvation.

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# CHAPTER 3

## ELISHA AND THE KING OF MOAB WHO OFFERED HIS FIRSTBORN SON A BURNT OFFERING ON THE WALL

In an attempt to submit Moab that rebelled against him, led by its king Mesha, Jehoram king of Israel made an alliance with Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and with the king of Edom. By their alliance, they had strong military might, yet they did not have the simplest of thing, namely water, through the lack of which, they would face, not only defeat, but death with thirst. Knowing that the prophet Elisha was nearby, the three kings came to seek his help. He initially refused to assist Jehoram, king of Israel, and told him to go to the prophets of his parents Ahab and Jezebel; but he finally consented to help them for the sake of king Jehoshaphat. He asked them to bring to him a musician; and when they did, and the musician started to play music, the hand of God was upon Elisha; and without seeing any wind or rain, he counseled them to dig several wells in the valley, to collect the water that will certainly come through Edom; and predicted to them, as well, the utter defeat of Moab.... All his prophecies were fulfilled.

Because the three kings: Judah, Israel, and Edom joined forces without the counsel of God; they were destined to perish for the lack of water, if not for His intervention that rescued them in an supernatural way, as He did in the old, when He rescued Samson the judge, who, *“when he became very thirsty, ... God split the hollow place that is in lehi, and water came out, and he drank, and his spirit returned and he was revived* (Judges 15: 18-19)

While they put the capital of Moab under siege; Mesha king of Moab offered his firstborn son a burnt offering on the wall for his god, before the sight of his enemies, who, watching that they grudgingly walked away and returned to their lands.

1-Jehoram, king of Israel, did evil in the sight of the Lord

1 - 3

2- Moab rebels against Israel

4 - 5

3- An alliance between Jehoram king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah

6 - 12

4- Elisha confirms the victory over Aram

13 - 20

5- Moab calls to gather the spoils

21 - 26

6- Mesha king of Moab offers his firstborn son a burnt offering

27

### **1- JEHORAM KING OF ISRAEL DID EVIL IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD:**

*“Now Jehoram the son of Ahab became king over Israel at Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years” (1)*

After the death of Ahaziah the son of Ahab, his brother Jehoram sat on the throne, for Ahaziah had no son of his own.

In the eighteenth year of the reign of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, in the second year his son Jehoram reigned together with him; (1: 17); there was friendship between the two kingdoms, on account of that Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat married Athaliah the daughter of Ahab. Although that friendship had a good effect

upon Israel; in that Jehoram did not do as much evil as his father and mother did; and he removed the idol of Baal erected by his father, Yet it had bad effect on Judah; for the worship of Baal entered into it.

+ While sitting together with the unwise will corrupt the heart, talking to the wise is like a sweet spring.

+ Do not compromise with the slothful, lest you, yourself will go down to the lowest level; But let your meditation be with the good, to dwell together with them up high, where there is the high knowledge; Head to where the light is.

(St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)

+ If you feel harmed by your friendship with one of the brethren, hasten to cut yourself off him.... I do not mean to provoke you to hate the others; ... No! but to cut off any cause of iniquity.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

+ *“Do not be deceived; evil company disrupts the good habits (1 Corinthians 15: 33) ... If you despise gold, while someone else love it;... If you reject wealth, while someone else fervently seeks it; ... If you love silence, and privacy, while someone else finds pleasure in vain conversations in public places; ... Do not be together with him under one roof. ... Do not trust in your previous chastity; for you could never be more holy than David, or wiser than Solomon! ... If, within your priestly task, you are required to*

visit a widow or a virgin, do not enter into her house alone; go with a company; Do not sit together with a woman secretly and without witnesses. In case she has a secret she wants to tell you; she should have with her a nanny, a widow, or a married woman friend

(St. Jerome)

While 1 kings 1: 17 mentions Jehoram as the king of Judah, here the same book mentions Jehoshaphat as the king of Judah. It was the custom of many kings in the world, as in Israel, Babylon, the Roman Empire, etc. to appoint the son to be a partner of his father the king, to get the necessary experience, so that no gap would happen when the old king dies. Here we see Jehoshaphat appoint his son Jehoram (Joram) as his partner to reign together with him for as long as five years (853 -848 BC). Hence there were two kings in Israel and Judah with the same name “Jehoram” at the same time.

*“And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his father and mother; for he put away the sacred pillars of Baal that his father had made” (2)*

Jehoram, king of Israel put away the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had made; yet, because he did not destroy it , but he only displaced it from its position; it was brought back later on; until king Jehu completely got rid of it (2 kings 10: 26-27)

Some of us may forsake certain sins, but persist on others; or may forsake these sins during the days of fast, and commit them again in certain occasions like during the unbefitting wedding celebrations; Or may correct

certain doctrinal faults, yet without a commitment to a holy life in the Lord.

*“Nevertheless he persisted in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin; he did not depart from them” (3)*

Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom (Israel) became an example of an evildoing. He made two golden calves in Dan and Bethel to be worshipped by his people; corrupted the system of priesthood and the feasts, mentioned in the divine law; and provoked the people to apostate from worshipping the true God; and denied them the enjoyment of the worship in the temple in Jerusalem.

Provoking the people to Worship the two golden calves in Dan and Bethel was a political more than a religious matter; Otherwise, the people would probably hasten to go to Jerusalem to worship the living God; and submit to the kings of Judah.

- + About Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, the Book says that he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father Ahab, and his mother Jezebel (1 kings 22: 51-52). Then the second book of the kings says that Ahaziah's brother, Jehoram, walked in the sins of the Jeroboam household (2 kings 3: 3), followed by Ahaziah the third, about whom the Book also said that he also did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Once the time came to punish the household of Ahab who persisted on doing evil in the sight of the Lord, up till the fourth generation, a king was anointed king of Israel – Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nemshi, who killed Ahaziah and Jezebel, together with seventy other sons of Ahab; as though he was an executioner of the climax of the divine wrath; for which he was commended by the Lord who said to him *“Because you have done well in doing what is right in My sight, and have done to the*

*house of Ahab all what is in My heart, your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation” (2 Kings 10: 30).*

Hence, you may notice how God reluctantly punish the descendants of the evildoers up till the fourth generation; while whoever gives God honor, God covers him with His mercy up to the fourth generation. Therefore, O Jews, stop your unwarranted accusations against the divine justice.

(St. Cyril the Great)

## **2- MOAB REBELS AGAINST ISRAEL:**

*“Now, Mesha king of Moab was a sheep-breeder, and he regularly paid the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs, and the wool of one hundred thousand rams” (4)*

The name ‘Mesha’ or ‘Mesa’, as the king of Moab came engraved on an ancient Moabite stone, on which was also mentioned the wars between Omri king of Israel and Moab, that ended in the submission of Moab to Omri and his son after him for as long as forty years. But eventually, Moab rebelled against Israel and took over several of its cities; which most probably happened in the days of king Ahaziah (1: 1)

According to St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian, the word ‘noqds’ mentioned here in the Holy Book, is derived from the Hebrew language, and may be translated as (king of the shepherds of rams).

Paying the wool of one hundred thousand sheep and one hundred thousand rams, indicates how Moab was rich in cattle, and how Israel had authority on it.

*“But it happened when Ahab died that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel” (5)*

Once Ahab died, Moab found its chance to rebel against Israel. Ahaziah did nothing to confront that movement, until his successor Jehoram came and joined forces with Jehoshaphat king of Judah to fight against Moab; and almost prevailed. But watching how the king of Moab offered his own firstborn son a sacrifice on the wall (27), they, grudgingly departed from him and returned to their own lands.

Moab was on the south-east border of Israel; and, because it for long, has put its eyes on the fertile land of Israel, there were many wars between the two kingdoms, and Mesha its king, in the year 840 BC, recorded some of his victories on a tablet called ‘the stone of Moab’, discovered in the year 1869 AD.

### **3- AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN JEHORAM KING OF ISRAEL AND JEHOSHAPHAT KING OF JUDAH:**

The rebellion of Moab against Israel, stirred up Jehoram to chastise them.

*“So king Jehoram went out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel” (6)*

*“Then he went and sent to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, saying, ‘The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?’ And he said, ‘I will go up; I am as*

*you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses” (7)*

Jehoram resorted to Jehoshaphat because of the friendship between the two of them; and of the fact that Jehoram’s sister was married to Jehoshaphat’s son.

*“And he said, ‘Which way shall we go up?’ And he answered, ‘By way of the wilderness of Edom’” (8)*

Going to Moab could be by one of two routes: either toward the East after crossing over the River Jordan to the South; Or toward the South, west of the Sea of Lot, then to the East to Edom; and from it to the North to Moab. The Moabites were probably well set to defend their land in the North, and did not expect an attack from the South.

Jehoshaphat probably preferred the second route, to have Edom join them in the battle. It came in 1 Kings 22: 47, that there was no king in Edom, but a deputy of the king, under the authority of Judah. By suggesting to confront Moab through Edom, Jehoshaphat's attempt was to avoid the strongholds of Moab in the North, and to attack it where they did not expect..

'Edom' was the title of Esau the son of Isaac, who bore a violent animosity against his brother Jacob. The word 'Edom' means (bloody, Red, or blood-thirsty); he refers to the devil who can not stand the kingdom of God. That name was then given to the province inhabited by Esau, namely to the land of 'Seir' (Genesis 32: 3); a rough mountainous land, taken over by Esau after driving the Horites out of it (Deuteronomy 2: 12).

The children of Edom were the descendants of Esau (Genesis 36: 19); whose animosity against the Jews most probably goes back to the days when Jacob tricked Esau and took his firstborn status. The Holy Book mentions how the Edomites did not allow the Hebrews to go through their land on their way to the promised land after their exodus from Egypt (Numbers 20: 14-41); even though God commanded His people not to harm the Edomites on account of that they were their brothers (Deuteronomy 23: 7-8).

Saul, the first king of Israel fought against the Edomites (1 Samuel 14: 47); and king David invaded Edom, and put a garrison in it (2 Samuel 8: 13-14). ... Hadad – one of the princes of Edom – escaped to Egypt, and came to be an adversary to king Solomon (1 Kings 11: 14-22).

Now, Jehoram the son of Ahab joined forces with the kings of Judah and Edom, and fought Moab (2 Kings 3: 5-9); The Edomites helped Israel and Judah in their war against Mesha king of Moab (2 Kings 3: 4 – 27)

In the days of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, Edom rebelled against Judah, and set a king for themselves (2 Kings 8: 20; 1 Chronicles 21: 8-10). ... Amaziah killed ten thousand Edomites by casting them over the cliff in the Valley of the Salt; And Sela took over their capital (2 Kings 14: 7; 2 Chronicles 25: 11-12). And during the reign of Ahaz, the Edomites invaded the tribe of Judah and took captives. And rejoiced to see how Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem (Psalm 137: 7).

Because of its intense animosity against Israel, the prophets prophesied against; and also prophesied its inclusion in the kingdom of God (Jeremiah 49: 7-22; Lamentations 4: 21-22; Joel 3: 19, etc.)

;

*“So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, and they marched on that roundabout route seven days; and there was no water for the army, nor for the animals that followed them” (9)*

**“And they marched on that roundabout route seven days”**; Water was rare and the armies were huge and in need of water more than they could carry, a problem that the leaders were negligent to study before moving on to battle.

*“And the king of Israel said, ‘Alas! For the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab’” (10)*

*“But Jehoshaphat said, ‘Is there no prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?’ And one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, ‘Elisha the son of*

*Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah’” (11)*

The question posed by Jehoshaphat hints to the fact that the majority of priests have already departed from the kingdom; so have the true prophets who kept away from the presence of kings, on account of that the later considered them as bad omen. What Jehoshaphat said, he previously said when the two kings intended to fight against Ramoth Glead (1 kings 22: 5-7); an indication of the fear of God; Yet they should have enquired from the Lord from the beginning before they move.

***“Who poured water on the hands of Elijah”***; namely was his servant and disciple. Before using spoons and forks for eating, they cared to wash their spoiled hands after eating, and used a basin with two bottoms: an upper one with a cover with holes through which the water soiled by washing the hands would fall down to the lower bottom, and not to appear. There was, as well, a place on the cover to accommodate a bar of soap.

*“And Jehoshaphat said, ‘The word of the Lord is with him’. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him” (12)*

We notice here that the three kings showed humility in seeking to encounter Elisha, and not calling him to come to them. That shows how God gives His servants, an awe, even in the eyes of His wicked opponents.

#### **4- ELISH CONFIRMS THE VICTORY OVER ARAM:**

*“Then Elisha said to the king of Israel, ‘What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother’. And the king of Israel said to him, ‘No, for the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hands of Moab’” (13)*

Here, Elisha talked roughly against the wicked kings of Israel who used to enquire from the Baal (1: 2-3).

**“What have I to do with you;”** Elisha addressed Jehoram king of Israel with courage For although he has put away the sacred pillar of Baal, yet he did not put away the worship of Baal, which, for him, was more to realize political benefits.

*“And Elisha said. ‘As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you, nor see you’” (14)*

**“As the Lord of hosts live, before whom I stand”;** Here, Elisha used the same way his mentor Elijah spoke. With courage, he said to Jehoram: *“I would not look at you or see you,* For Jehoram dedicated his heart and life to the account of Baal, and God had no portion in him; whereas Jehoshaphat bound himself to God, and was, therefore qualified to get the divine grace.

For the sake of His servant David, there was still a lamp of God in Judah – Jehoshaphat king of Judah – who although God rebuked him for his sin of uniting with the wicked (2 Chronicles 19: 1-3; 20: 37), yet he was a godly man who fears the Lord, did not forsake the Lord, and did not worship the idols. ... The wicked benefited from the presence of such a righteous man among them; yet his action brought upon him a lot of troubles.

+ The prophet talked roughly to Jehoram, but was pleased with Jehoshaphat, gave him hope of salvation; and promised that by his intervention, victory will be realized through his stewardship to the Lord.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“But now bring me a musician’, and it happened, when the musician played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him” (15)*

The prophet told them to bring to him a musician, most probably to play a hymn or to sing a praise; so that, in such a tranquil and peaceful atmosphere that would take away the anxiety and disturbance, God would proclaim His will to him; and the heart would be ready to hear His voice. ... David used to play music to revive king Saul (1 Samuel 16: 23). and the prophets of the old covenant used to sing praise accompanied with musical instruments.

+ With such a peaceful musical background; when the miracle happens, they would not be able to refer it to the Baal or to the idols they worshipped; for the three armies included a huge number of idol-worshippers.

+ The musician played, and the water abundantly came. Through that symbol, he befittingly referred to the voice of Christ, who kept the harp of the Spirit on the cross, when He cried out twice and yielded up His Spirit (Matthew 27: 46-50; Mark 15: 34-27); and the Roman Centurion instantly glorified the Lord (Matthew 27: 54; Mark 15: 39); a first sign of bringing the Gentiles to believe in God..

Having consummated the new glory on the cross, the springs were opened, and the rivers of living water flooded upon the peoples and

nations -- symbolized by the valley -- according to the words of the Lord Christ before His passion: *“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”* (John 7: 38).

By that the word of the prophet David who played on his harp in the name of the Lord (Psalm 108: 3) is fulfilled..

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“And he said, ‘Thus says the Lord: ‘Make this valley full of ditches’”*

((16))

His commandment here came to make the valley full of ditches (used to store water); namely to proclaim their faith practically, by believing that the water will certainly come falling down from the mountains, where it would rain far away, and run down to them in the valley where they were. They did make ditches in dry land, before any sign of rain appears. ... By faith, we should believe the divine promises, and act according to them.

He commanded them to make ditches to keep the water, and not to be just satisfied by drinking it, the same way the Lord Christ commanded His disciple to gather the fragments that remained (Matthew 14: 20).

They most probably were surprised to hear his command to make ditches; for there was no sign of rain; and it was not winter season to expect it. ... But ‘God of the impossible’ requests from us to do as much as we can, although His gift is free, and despite our unworthiness of any such a reward. ... The kings were committed to make ditches to be filled with the water, God promised to send, to fill the valley for their men and beasts.

Why did the Lord command them to make ditches in the valley?

- 1- The number of men in the three armies was very huge; and their gathering together was a chance for God to be glorified among them On account of that the majority of them were idol-worshippers; and making ditches before any sign of rain, will make them wonder what they were doing!... And while the musician was playing his music, and men of three armies were making ditches, if they become filled with water, no one of them would dare to deny the miraculous work of the living God.
  - 2- It would be enough to let them prepare pots in the valley to collect water; but god intends for us to have more than what we ask for and more than we need.
  - 3- Demanding making ditches reveals God honoring man; For He who fills the ditches with water without wind or rain, could he not send clouds to rain on them, to quench their thirst. But He intended for them to do a little according to their possibilities; and then He does the impossible;... St. John Chrysostom confirms the practical role of the believer, after which God would grant him the super-natural.
- + “O Lord, I know, the way of man is not in himself” (Jeremiah 10: 23); The prophet then adds: “*It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*”.
- He means to say: [Not everything depends upon us. Some of them do, and other things depend on God. Namely, choosing the best, making decisions, showing jealousy, and enduring troubles, all are realized according to our intention; while reaching the requested result, keeping us from perversion, and reaching the goal of good deeds, would be realized by a grace from above.

As you may see, God grants us the virtue, without leaving everything to us, lest we would probably pervert in our foolishness; And without taking everything over Himself, lest we would pervert to slothfulness. With such a simple part on us, God does the major part.

Actually, in case everything depend on us, some may fall into haughtiness. Listen to the Pharisee (Luke 18: 10-14), who boasted counting his head higher than the whole world. .... That is why God left just a little, to find a reason to truly glorify us.

In the parable the Lord used, when He said that the owner of the vineyard,, finding some men at the eleventh hour, he sent them to work in the vineyard (Matthew 20: 6-7); ... What could they do at such a late hour?; practically nothing!; but even such a short time was enough to give them the complete wages.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For thus says the Lord: ‘You shall not see wind, nor shall you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, so that you, your cattle, and your animals may drink’” (17)*

For they proclaimed their belief in getting the blessing of the Lord, the water was granted to them, even though it was not the season for rain (Rain falls in the Middle East in winter and not in summer as in certain other geographical regions). Elisha had no gold nor silver or armies; but he was rich by God who satisfied his needs and the need of those who seek it from him. By God he was richer than all kings.

+ Look how numerous were his privileges; by which you can perceive his limitless authority;

When three kings begged him for water, he could respond to their request with abundance;

The man of God was rich, his riches were genuine; and the kings of the land stood begging before him;;

Although he had no silver, gold, or possessions in this world;

He could bring healing to the bad water, and abundance to the sick springs, when asked to do so;

He could keep away death; give life to men, and instruct the beasts of the wild;

He could fill the ditches in the dry land for the benefit of the soldiers; and could turn the water into oil when needed;

He could give the barren women the fruit of wombs; and could raise the dead by his prayer;

He could turn the bitterness of water into sweetness; and give abundance to the few loaves of bread;

He could heal the leper, and clothe the liar with leprosy.;

He could make the wood sink in water, and the iron float;;

By his prayer he could open up the closed eyes; and be accompanied by the horses of fire wherever he goes;

And he could close shut the eyes of the enemy; and see everything from afar;

He could defeat the armies by the sound of weapons without a battle; and could give satisfaction to cities;

By his word, he could weaken the tyrant kings; and could reveal the secrets of the future;

He could reveal to sick kings the time of their death, and prophesy who will succeed them;

He could anoint kings; and could give them might in their battles;

If asked, he could give life to the dead by his approach; and reveal his power with every spiritual wealth.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“And this is but a trivial thing in the sight of the Lord. He will also deliver the Moabites into your hand”* (18)

After being given the first blessing of filling the ditches with abundant water, without need for wind or rain, the armies would get the second blessing, namely the defeat of Moab on their hands. *“For with God nothing will be impossible* (Luke 1: 37; 18: 27). He is God of the impossible ; and as the Lord Christ Himself says: *“With God everything is possible”* (Matthew 19: 26; Mark 10: 27).

If God cared for those three armies, most of which were idol-worshippers; and gave them water without rain; and victory over their enemies without need to enter into a battle, How much more would He grant us to enjoy the work of His Holy Spirit; to have in us fountains of living water; and to grant us conquest over the devil and all his hosts?!

What we think impossible in our spiritual life; our Christ would grant it to us for free and in abundance; in an easy, sweet, and even joyful way..

+ *“With men it is impossible, but not with God”* (Mark 10: 27). This we learn from the counsel given by Paul to his disciple Timothy, saying: *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them be good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share; storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life”* (1 Timothy 6: 17-19).

(St. Jerome)

*“Also you shall attack every fortified city and every choice city, and shall cut down every good tree, and stop up every spring of water, and ruin every good piece of land with stones” (19)*

While Moses commanded the armies of Israel not to destroy the trees of their enemies (Deuteronomy 20: 19); Here we read the verse: *“You shall cut down every good tree” (19)*

According to some scholars, what came in the Book of Deuteronomy apply only to using the trees for siege-works; for it is said: *“When you besiege a city , ... do not destroy the trees” (Deuteronomy 20: 19)*; which agrees with the fact mentioned in the Book of Deuteronomy that the trees that produce fruits good for eating, would be so used by man; otherwise they may be cut off.

It could be that the command not to destroy the trees concern those in the land of Canaan, where the children of Israel were about to dwell; whereas the Book of the kings refers to destroy the trees in the land of Moab, where they were not going to dwell. ... Besides, the pagans used to worship their gods under every tree.

The Lord Christ says: *No one is good but one, that is God” (Matthew 19: 17; Mark 10: 18; Luke 18: 19)*. Here, the Lord Christ talks about absolute goodness of God alone; while there are men relatively good; and things relatively good temporal-wise.

+ In case we find in the Holy Book, someone good (other than the Holy Trinity), like an angel or man (Psalm 37: 23; Wisdom 1: 1), or a good tree (19); they are all called “good”, yet not according to the accurate meaning of the word; For goodness in them is accidental and not essential.

(The scholar Origen)

- + Isn't God Good? Having fed thousands of people in the wilderness with the bread of heaven; keeping famine away from them; when they did not even need to partake of work to be satisfied; and as long as forty years walking on foot in the wilderness, "*their clothes have not worn out on them, and their sandals have not worn out on their feet*" (Deuteronomy 29: 5). ( ).

Is God not "Good"?, having exalted earth to heaven; that the way the stars reflect the splendor of His glory in heaven as in a mirror; So the choir of apostles, martyrs, and priests, glitter like the stars, and send their light to the whole world. .... He is not just "Good", He is far more than that.

*"He is the Good Shepherd; and the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep"* (John 10: 11)

For my own benefit, I believe that God is "Good"; and, "*It is good to trust in God*"; It is good to confess that He is the Lord; for it is written: "*Give thanks to the Lord for He is Good*" (Psalm 118: 1)

(St. Ambrose)

*"Now it happened in the morning, when the grain offering was offered, that suddenly water came by way of Edom, and the land was filled with water"* (20)

By saying "*In the morning when the grain offering was offered*" (20); that does not mean that the armies of Judah, Israel, and Edom offered grain offerings in the battlefield, but it was a reference to the time when the grain offering was offered in the temple every morning (Ezekiel 29: 38-39).

- + Man could be truly perseverant whether when he is inflicted by calamities, or when he bows down in despair of realizing his hope. About the attitude of the evil mind, it is written: "*For men will praise you when you do good to them*" (see psalm 49: 18). Here, the righteous mind is discerned from the evil mind; for even in the midst of affliction; the former knows that the glory of the Mighty God would never break down by the temporal things; and would not collapse together with the outer glory, but would rather become stronger when the temporal goods are lost.

(Pope Gregory the Great)

## **5- MOAB CALLS TO GATHER THE SPOILS**

*"And when the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to bear arms and older were gathered, and they stood at the border"* (21)

*"Then they rose up early in the morning, and the sun was shining on the water; and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood"* (22)

It was not possible for the Moabites to perceive that the ditches were full of water; on account of that there was no rain to fill them; But as the sun was shining on the water, the Moabites saw it as red as blood; and, assuming that the three armies "*have struck swords and killed one another*", they instantly hasten to the spoil, and were defeated.

The same water that filled the ditches for quenching the thirst of the three armies, and saved them from sure perdition; brought perdition to the Moabite enemy.

When the Sun of righteousness shone on humanity, the believers were watered by the water of the Holy Spirit; whereas the non-believers were terrified, counting the water as destructive blood. According to the apostle Paul: "*To the one we are the aroma of death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life*" (2 Corinthians 2: 16)

+ To whom is it is "*the aroma of death to death*", but to the non-believers, and to those who do not abide to the Word (the Logos) God? ... Again, Who are they, who are saved, and get the inheritance? But surely those who believe in God, and who persist on loving Him, like Caleb the son of Jephuneh and Joshua the son of Nun (Numbers 14: 30), and the innocent children (Jonah 4: 11), those who have no sense of evil. .... Who are they who are saved now, and enjoy the eternal life? Are they not those who love God, believe in His promises, and "*be babes in malice*"?! (1 Corinthians 14: 20).

(St. Erinaos)

*"And they said, 'This is blood; the kings have surely struck swords and have killed one another; Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil'" (23)*

+ Because the Moabites did not come armed to fight, but rather to take spoil, they did not resist, but turned their faces and fled away;

(St. Ephraim the Syrian)

*“So when they came to the camp of Israel, Israel rose up and attacked the Moabites, so that they fled before them, and they entered into their land, killing the Moabites” (24)*

The three armies did not expect what actually occurred. They only hoped – by the prayer of Elisha – to have water to save them of sure perdition by thirst. But God, Generous in His giving, brought forth to them water to quench their thirst and that of their beasts, and let the water remain filling the ditches, for the Moabites to think it as blood. By order of their leaders, the soldiers threw their arms away, and set forth to gather the spoil, without entering into battle; to be delivered into the hands of the three armies that restored their strength by the water they drank, and won the battle without a fight.

This is a living portrait of the work of the Lord Christ , who turns our battle against the devil into an exalted conquest. Instead of the destruction of the kingdom of Christ in our hearts, disgrace and reproach dwell upon the kingdom of the devil.

- + Now, beloved brethren, Satan is slain; that tyrant against the whole world ... Death will no longer reign; but life will dwell instead; For the Lord says: *“I am the life”* (John 14: 6). There will be joy and happiness, as it is written: *“The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice”* (Psalm 97: 1).

(St. Pope Athanasius the Apostolic)

- + A great affliction and an intense grief, dwelt upon the devil and his hosts on the day of the crucifixion of our Lord; For by His death and descent to Hades, He did to them what He did to Pharaoh and the Egyptians; He set the children of Adam free from their prison; as He liberated the children of Israel from the land of Egypt.

(St. Ambrose)

*“Then they destroyed the cities, and each man threw a stone on every good piece of land and filled it; and they stopped up all the springs of water, and cut down all the good trees, except that they left intact the stones of Kir Haraseth. However the slingers surrounded and attacked it” (25)*

**“Kir Haraseth”** or ‘Kir Hareth’ (Jeremiah 48: 31) or ‘Kir Moab’ (Isaiah 15: 1); known nowadays as ‘Karak’, a fortified fertile city, located at the head of a hill surrounded by deep valleys. The word ‘Kir’ means (a wall). Because it was the only city with a wall, the Israelites kept it intact after they destroyed the other cities; yet they afflicted its inhabitants and struck them with the stone-throwers.

*“And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too intense for him, he took with him seven hundred men who drew swords, to break through to the king of Edom, but they could not” (26)*

The king of Moab broke through to the king of Edom, probably because he saw him as the weakest of the three kings; or on account of that he was intensely angry on him because he joined forces with his enemies: Israel and Judah after being his ally (2 Chronicles 30: 22).

+ Three kings came forth to fight against Moab;

Yet, when they were confronted with great thirst, they resorted to the prophet Elisha for help, and he responded to them;

By his prayers, the ditches they dug in the valley were filled with water, without wind or rain;

By a hidden sign, the valley was filled with swamps of water; and the three armies, gathered together for war, quenched their thirst;

Having regained their strength, the Moabite enemy was destroyed;

He was surrounded by the three armies that devastated his land, and angrily destroyed his inheritance;

The battle was heated, his fortified cities were destroyed, and the beauty of his land was corrupted;

When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too intense for him, and that he was unable to prevail;

He intended to escape but could not;

For the war surrounded him like the waves of a great sea, from which he found no escape.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

## **6- MESHHA, KING OF MOAB, OFFERED HIS FIRSTBORN SON A BURNT OFFERING:**

*“Then he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering upon the wall; and there was great indignation against Israel. So they departed from him and returned to their own land” (27)*

Seeing that his defeat was eminent, the king of Moab broke through, to attack the king of Edom, but he failed. Then he offered his firstborn son a burnt offering upon the wall. There was a great indignation was against Israel, who departed from him and returned to their own land.

It is amazing how Israel were indignant when they saw how the king of Moab publicly offered his own firstborn son a sacrifice; how, counting his action as abomination, they departed and returned to their own land. ... They did not think about removing the idol-worship from their land! When God flooded the three armies with ditches full of water with no wind or rain, from which the three armies quenched their thirst; no one thought of offering God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, or to praise God who cared for them. While the pagan king, on the other hand, having been afflicted, and his city was put under siege, he hastened to offer his firstborn a sacrifice to his idol.

Many wonder why was God angry against Israel when the king of Moab sacrificed his son to the devil. About it St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi talks in his poem "Elisha and the king of Moab who offered his son a sacrifice upon the wall":

+ I took the Book, and was shocked to read how the king of Moab offered his son a sacrifice upon the wall;

With great amazement, I quit reading, and strived to understand the situation;

Why, when the pagan king offered his firstborn son a sacrifice to the defiled devil; there was great indignation from God against Israel?

I tried to find a reason for something that was beyond the understanding of many;

+ When king of Moab did his horrible act before the eyes of many; A great indignation from God came upon the Hebrews and the Edomites;

While the pagan king was relieved of his affliction, the three kings who came to make war against him stopped their war;

By slaying his son, the great adversity against him came to an end; and by the blood of his firstborn, he won the war of the mighty;

Now, let us ask ourselves: How did the pagan prevail by such an abominable sacrifice he offered?

The war is the Lord's; and the sacrifice was offered to the devil. ... How did the Lord let him prevail by such an abominable sacrifice?

The idol to whom the pagan king offered his firstborn son a sacrifice, could give him neither victory nor defeat;

The sacrifice offered was not to the Lord, in whose hand was the victory and the defeat, but it was to the helpless idols;

The great indignation of God against his people Israel was because He saw how the pagan king trusted in his false god

While the people of God doubted His salvation;

The indignation of God against the Hebrews was because they did not love Him, and were not proud of Him, like the idol-worshippers of their god;

While the pagan king so loved his god who is not a true god, to offer him his own firstborn son a sacrifice;

And I, the Great Being and the Lord; was counted by My people as nothing,

For this I shall crush those who do not love me, while that pagan loved his god;

While that pagan believed the lies and did not doubt them, My people do not believe the truth, and doubt the salvation;

While that pagan who found no help, signs, nor victories, so trusted in his god, to sacrifice his son to him;

Israel, who saw how my exalted power divided the sea, brought water forth from the rock, sweetened the bitter water; brought down the Manna and the  
xxxxxxx,

Who saw how I divided the river, broke down the city walls, and conquered the kings;

Who saw My might in Egypt, miracles in the sea, signs in the wilderness, terror in Sinai, and wonders everywhere;;

After seeing all those great things I did, My people are slothful and doubtful, and do not believe that they could prevail by Me;

That is why I shall deliver them before the loser; to learn from him how to trust his god;

He who loves his idol without testing it; while I, whom My people tested, they do not love me;

Moses taught them to love their God, and they did not listen to him; And the pagan rebuked them by his great love for his idol;

To make that people who did not love their God feel shame, that pagan king sacrificed his own firstborn son;

Those three kings who made war against that pagan king, saw the wonder done by the prophet Elisha;

They saw how the ditches they dug in the valley were filled with water without wind nor rain, to quench the thirst of the great armies;

They drank the water and did not praise God, nor move to offer thanksgiving to the Lord;;

That is why they were rebuked by the sacrifice offered by the pagan king, who bound his trust in his god without any sign from him;

They saw in Elisha the power of the great Moses, when he prayed and filled the valley with water to quench their thirst;

Because they denied that great sign; they were despised by that pagan who believed in his god, although he saw no sign from him;

The miserable man who lost, whose land was destroyed, and his people were wiped out;

Saw the signs done by the God of Jacob; heard the news of the wonders done by Elisha; and saw by his own eyes the exalted arm of Adonai;

Although he saw and felt how the great war surrounded him;

Yet he did not forsake his god, and did not doubt his idol for not saving him;

But sacrificed his firstborn son, still hoping for his help;

The Lord saw, and His indignation came against Israel; for he was not loyal to Him like the pagan king to his god;

Such trust shown by the pagan king in what is nothing, God sought in His people;

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

- + Mesha king of Moab, who lost all hope in his armies, completely and suddenly changed, Seeing how no human could help him, and losing his trust in his idol god, he was counseled by his wise men to supplicate for mercy from the God of Israel, by an unusual sacrifice, according to the tradition common among the Canaanites, similar to that of Abraham the father of Israel (Genesis 22: 1- 18) by which he found favor in the sight of God, and to that of the judge Jephthah with his firstborn daughter (Judges 11: 35) ..

Seeing that amazing wonder done by God by the prayers of the prophet Elisha, they knew that no one but God could make the water flood upon His people; and that no other god could give his people more benefit. The king of Moab, seeing that wonder, by his own eyes, did not wish to be denied such great help in the serious situation he was in. Doubting his own faith, he forsook the idol-worship and resorted to the Mighty God who created a new sea in the wilderness; and offered his own firstborn son, the pillar of his household, and the hope of his kingdom, a sacrifice upon the walls of the city; before the armies that surrounded him. He intended for the Hebrews to see the sacrifice he offered to the God of Abraham.

- + Some people imitate the good deeds, not out of love for them, as much as for the sake of their own benefit,

The king of Moab saw how Jephthah has slain his firstborn daughter (Judges 11: 30), and not an animal, and God had compassion on him,

although he did that with great pain. Which God allowed to happen to keep men from offering their fellow humans as sacrifices to Him.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

There are several other interpretations of that sacrifice, of which are:

- 1- Some wonder : Did the king of Moab offer his firstborn son a burnt offering to his god 'Camush'? in an attempt to have favor in his sight; or did he offer the son of the king of Edom, whom he took captive? (Amos 2: 1)
- 2- What does "*There was great indignation against Israel*" (27) mean?
  - a- According to some, the two kings of Judah and Edom, seeing how the king of Moab offered his own son a sacrifice, felt remorse for what they caused him of intense affliction, and cast the responsibility upon the king of Israel who provoked them to go to war.
  - b- Some others, interpret this phrase that Israel, seeing what the king of Moab did, felt great indignation before such an abominable act, and departed to their land.
  - c- According to others, still, the indignation was by the Moabites upon Israel, Judah, and Edom. Seeing how their king offered his own son a sacrifice on the wall; they fought so fiercely that their enemies had to depart..
  - d- Offering human sacrifices, as mentioned by 'Burder', has been a very ancient custom, practiced by several nations in many eras; among which were: the Ethiopians, the Phoenicians, the Skithians, the Egyptians, the Chinese, the Persians, the Indians, the Ghalians, the Gosians, the Cartagenians, the Arabs, the British (before the invasion of the Anglo-Saksanians), and the Romans. It was

practiced in different ways: sometimes slaying by the knife, by drowning, by burning with fire, and by burying alive.

The idol-worshipping Israelites followed the lead of their neighbors the Phoenicians in this concern (See Jeremiah 19: 5; Micah 6: 7).

Lately, an inscription was discovered in 'Behistun', which, according to 'Grotefend' of Hanover, referred to that Nebuchadnezzar burned his own son to death to bring Babylon out of a certain affliction.

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 3**

### **TO YOU, I RESORT, O GOD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE**

+ By human measures, the kings of Judah, Israel, and Edom, assumed that they will definitely conquer Moab;

Without seeking Your Counsel, O Lord, they set forth to war;

But they oversaw the simplest of military preparations;

They gathered together for battle without an adequate provision of water;

Although their human and military provisions were strong;

Yet because of the lack of water, they were prone to perdition by thirst.

+ Judah insisted on seeking Your counsel through Your prophet Elisha;

And with Your longsuffering, You presented to them more than what they asked for;

They sought water to quench their thirst, to be able to fight;

You satisfied them and their animals with water enough to fill the ditches they dug in the valley;

You did not send wind or rain;  
So from where did water come to fill the ditches?  
You are God of the impossible;  
You granted them beyond their dreams;  
You provided them with water without labor;  
And You promised them victory without going into a battle;

+ You presented water to rescue those who, in their thirst, resorted to You;  
When Moab saw the water red by the rays of the sun, he wrongly thought  
it as blood;

So he ordered his army, not to fight, but to hasten to take spoil;  
They, therefore, fell into a trap from which they could not escape.

+ O my God, my soul praises You; for You open the doors of hope before  
me;

When it gets narrower before my physical eyes;  
You open my insight to see wonders;  
Through affliction, Your mercy shines on me;  
You shine, O Sun of Righteousness in me, and I get enlightened;  
And Your splendor, scatters the kingdom of darkness.

+ Your love captivates me, and liberates me from the bondage of the devil;  
You support me with Your Spirit; and set Your kingdom in me;  
Glory be to You, who turn my bitterness into sweetness;  
You, who set me free out of the pit, and bring me up to Your heavens

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# CHAPTER 4

***“IS IT WELL WITH YOU? IS IT WELL WITH YOUR HUSBAND? IS IT WELL WITH THE CHILD?”***

## **THE SECRET OF THE PREACHING CHURCH:**

In **the first miracle**, God proclaimed to the sons of the prophets that Elisha has truly become a prophet. Bearing the same power of his mentor Elijah; he divided the River Jordan with Elijah’s mantle (2 kings 2).

In **the second miracle**, God proclaimed what Elisha had of love, and what he was given of power in the Lord. As a symbol of the Lord Christ, the Heavenly Physician; He healed the bad water, to make the village fruitful.

In **the third miracle**, God, proclaiming Elisha’s care for the salvation of souls; allowed two bears to maul the young men who mocked the prophet, instead of giving God thanks for healing the water and the land. By that He gave the whole people a lesson of the importance of thanksgiving instead of denials, and the godly behavior instead of mockery..

In **the fourth miracle**, God proclaimed the riches of the men of God, and their enjoyment of exalted treasures. What the three allied kings could not do to provide their armies with water to drink, the prophet Elisha could do without wind or rain. By the conquest of the king of Moab after his defeat before the three kings, by publicly offering his firstborn son a sacrifice to his idol on the city wall, God gave a serious lesson to His people, who did not love Him, nor feared Him, or held fast to Him, the way that pagan king did to his idol.

Now, if that pagan king honored his idol; and gave the people of God, who denied the true God, such a lesson; In **the fifth miracle** before us, God proclaims the church of the New Covenant; that, not only loves and fears God, but opens the gates of hope to all peoples and nations.

While Elijah tended more to minister to the congregation as a whole, and to the people as a nation, without disregard of the ministry to the individual; Elisha, on the other hand, tended more toward the ministry to the individual, without disregard of that to the congregation. That is why, according to some, Elijah, in his ministry, was like St. John the Baptist; whereas Elisha was like the Lord Christ.

In this chapter, Elisha practices the double portion he got of Elijah's spirit (2: 9); which is apparent through the multitude of miracles he performed. This chapter presents to us a living portrait of his ministry:

- 1- Elisha sustains a widow and her two sons  
1 - 7
- 2- Elisha receives hospitality from a notable Shunammite woman  
8 - 10
- 3- Elisha fulfills the need of the notable woman  
11 -  
17
- 4- Elisha raises the dead son of the notable woman to life  
18 - 37
- 5- Elisha heals a deadly food  
38 -  
41
- 6- Elisha satisfies a hundred men with twenty loaves of bread  
42 -  
44

#### **1- ELISHA SUSTAINS A WIDOW AND HER TWO SONS:**

*“A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, ‘Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord. And the creditor is coming to take my own sons to be his slaves’” (1)*

It so seems that the late husband of that widow, under the circumstances of severe illness, had to borrow money from a creditor; who, after the man died, sought from the widow to pay back. And as she could not afford to do, he threatened to take her two sons as his slaves.

It was allowed in the old for the poor and needy who owe someone a debt, to sell themselves or their children as slaves to pay back their debts. The law seeks from the rich to show mercy on the poor brethren; and not to abuse their hard circumstances (Deuteronomy 15: 1 – 18). But the creditor, here, did not keep the law; and the work by Elisha, here, came to reveal the riches of God’s gift, of love and mercy toward those who suffer.

Asking Elisha’s help, he had two options: either pay her debt back from his own pocket, or to appeal to the creditor to give her a break. But Elisha had no money enough to do the first option; and the creditor had no merciful heart to listen to the prophet’s appeal. So the prophet had to deal with a jar of oil, rather than with that man. For nature responds to the prophetic voice more than the cruel-hearted human.

The laws and the by-laws allowed for selling the children as slaves to pay the debts back, yet the Holy Book allowed it within limits, so as not to abuse it; by which it prepared humanity to treat the slaves as brethren in humanity who have their rights. Furthermore, according to the Mosaic law, the creditor was committed to set his slaves free on the year of the Jubilee (Leviticus 25: 39 – 41; Nehemiah 5: 5, 8; Job 24: 9; Isaiah 50: 1).

Such a complaint is revealed by whoever feels a condition of orphanhood because of sin that isolates the human soul from her heavenly Groom, as though she has lost Him to become a widow with no one to support her or satisfy all her needs. The soul becomes in need of the oil of the rich grace of God which grants us forgiveness by repentance, and the return to our Savior God; and liberates us from the cruel bondage with the devil.

It is obvious that beside virgin prophets, like Elijah and Elisha, there were also married prophets, who had possessions and private businesses.

- + It is claimed by some that the widow concerned, was the wife of the prophet Obadiah, the treasurer of king Ahab, and a secret disciple of prophet Elijah; who hid and sustained a hundred prophets from being murdered by the evil queen Jezebel.. It so seems that although he was the keeper of the gold of the royal household; yet when he died, he left his wife with a big debt she could not pay back, and consequently her sons were to be taken as slaves by the creditor. The widow resorted to the prophet Elisha, knowing that he was *“a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows”* (Psalm 68: 5); and was sure that he would never hesitate to help the children of a righteous man who helped his fellow prophets in time of affliction.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“So Elisha said to her, ‘What shall I do for you? Tell me what do you have in your house? And she said, ‘Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil’”* (2)

**“A jar of oil”** (Asuk); most probably an earthen deep pot with a narrow neck; that was used by the Romans and the Egyptians for storing wine, oil, and water, with or without two handles.

+ That poor prophet Elisha, even though he had on earth, beside God, no silver nor gold; yet he was rich in everything; and whatever he was asked by the needy, he gave and made them rich.

A widow who was threatened by the creditor resorted to him with tears because of her affliction;

Where will a widow go when afflicted, except to God, her (Husband); and to the prophet Elisha, His steward, to save her children from bondage?

She hastened to resort to the Father of the fatherless; as He so promised to be;

She cried out loud to the prophet, saying: *“Your servant, my husband is dead, and the creditor is coming to take my sons to be his slaves”*;

*“And you know your servant feared the Lord”*. Therefore, I beg you to take his place for the sake of the Lord whom he feared;

She so wisely presented her case to commit him to help her;

Knowing that he was a prophet of the Lord, who promised to reward the righteous to a thousand generations;

She appealed to the prophet being the Lord’s steward, to fulfill His promise;

It was requested from him as though his name was in the handwritten document; and he acted with joy to do what is expected from him.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Then he said, ‘Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors – empty vessels; do not gather just a few’”* (3)

He did not tell her to add them to what she had, which indicates that she did not have even empty vessels of her own. Those neighbors, most probably, were families of the other prophets, who hearing what the prophet said, hastened with faith, to provide the widow with all they had of empty vessels;

God, here, calls on us on the tongue of His prophet Elisha, saying “*do not gather just a few*”; We, being the children of the Lord, are exhorted to seek great things, as is befitting of our Great Father:

- + That widow, namely the church, is burdened with a heavy debt of sins, and her creditors are extremely cruel; She made herself submitted to the devil; For as the prophet previously said to us: “*For your iniquities you have sold yourselves; and for your transgressions, your mother has been put away*” (Isaiah 50: 1), she became a captive, waiting for the Redeemer to come. But once Christ, our Lord, the true Redeemer came, He visited the widow, and relieved her of all her debts. ... Now, let us see now, how that widow was liberated, except by an abundance of oil, which is understood as being ‘mercy’

Notice, brethren, how when the oil decreased, the debt increased; but when the oil increased , the debt decreased. ... So it was when the true Elisha – our Lord Christ – came, the widow, namely the church was liberated of the debt of sin, through the increase of the oil, the gift of the grace of mercy, namely the riches of love.

- + Let us take into consideration what the blessed Elisha said to her: “*Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors – empty vessels, ... and when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons, then pour it into all those vessels*” (3, 4). Who is the widow, but the church, and who are her neighbors from whom she borrowed the vessels, but the Gentiles, who presented “*empty vessels*”, to deserve getting the oil of mercy?. Because, before they get the gift of mercy, the

Gentiles were known for their lack of faith, love, and good works. Then, all those who came to get the revered baptism, and the anointment by the oil of blessing, they became, no more “*empty vessels*”, but filled with God, being His temple.

- + Notice brethren that the widow had oil in her own vessels, yet it was not enough to pay back her debts ... That is true, brethren;... For, by loving only himself, it is not enough for man to pay back the debts of his sins; but once he starts to share the oil of love with all his friends, neighbors, and truly all men, he will then be satisfied and free of all debts.

Yes indeed, brethren, this is the nature of the holy and true love, as much as it is spent to others, it increases with abundance in man. If you offer the bread of love to a hundred men, it will remain utterly intact, even if you offer it to the whole world, you will lose nothing of it; but it will rather increase; for the profit got by those to whom you gave will increase in you.

- + We are committed, therefore to search for vessels to fill with oil, namely for men. If we wish to have a flood of the oil of love, we are committed to love both the good and the wicked:: the good for the sake of their own goodness; and the wicked to become good. Yes indeed! The oil of love has such power, it makes the good better, and brings the wicked forth from the darkness of their sins, to the light of the truth.

*“And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones” (4)*

The prophet instructed her to come in and shut the door behind her and her sons, to perceive that what she will be granted is from God living in her depths and in her house. Shutting the door refers to concentrating her sight upon the Lord, generous on giving, and not to anticipate oil from outside. In our prayers, the Lord of glory told us to shut our doors, so that our Lord would be the only subject of our thoughts and hope (Matthew 6: 6).

- + Saying that the widow poured the oil in the vessels while the door was shut, means that everyone of us is committed to give alms while his door is shut; namely for the sake of being worthy of finding favor with God alone, and not to do it in a way to seek commendation by men.

Anyway, if man does good works for the sake of the eternal life, and of the forgiveness of his sins; even if he does them publicly, he is as though doing them while his door is shut; *“For while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen”* (2 Corinthians 4: 18)

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

*‘So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out’* (5)

Having sought a double portion of the spirit of his master Elijah, Elisha got his heart’s desire. The way Elijah enjoyed the power to command nature and it obeyed, not to be rain or dew until he so commands; so has Elisha enjoyed the same power. He commanded the little oil to increase to fill the empty vessels, and it did.

By so doing, the prophet confirmed that God is capable to satisfy the needs of believers, even their material needs.

It is sad to see how the little oil responds to the request of the prophet, and how the blessing dwell to pay back the debt of the poor widow, and to save her two little sons; while the heart of man does not respond to show compassion.

The widow let her two sons partake of the good work, by bringing the empty vessels to her to fill with the oil; to let them get the practical experience of the work of God that satisfy our needs.

+ The prophet asked the widow: *“Tell me what do you have in your house? And she answered: Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil”* .

Why did the prophet ask her that?

He intended to perform a miracle in her house, to increase what she already had, and to make her rich by it.

By the spirit he has taken from the Lord, he could have power upon the creation, to increase or to decrease it.

Saying that all she had was a little oil, he intended to increase it;

If she said that she had any other thing, he would have increased it

Taking the key of the great Elijah, Elisha could open and close creation;

He was granted by the Lord the power to command creation, and to have them obey and serve him;

When he knew that all what she had was a little oil, he instructed her to borrow empty vessels from her neighbors;

And to go into her house, shut the door, and fill the empty vessels with water; and she did.

By a miracle the water in the empty vessel turned into oil and she got rich..

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

(It was not mentioned in the Holy Book that she ordered her sons to fill the empty vessels with water, which turned into oil; but that it poured in them from the little oil she had in her jar),

Here, talking about the behavior of the prophet Elisha, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, says that many have offered him silver, gold, and clothes, which he declined; he could have taken from them to pay back the debt of the widow, but he instead, instructed her to go into her house, together with her sons, shut the door, and have all the empty vessel filled with oil. It is a marvelous portrait of the work of the Lord Christ in His church, that presents the rich and exalted secrets of God in her; the secrets not perceived by those on the outside; by which the Lord Christ turns our cold and empty hearts, to be filled with the oil of His grace.

+ Who will give me a clear eye to see the secrets; and a mouth with authority to talk about the hidden things?;

A soul full of the love of the Lord, of faith, and a word that is able to discern;

An ear full of great love; and a longing to hear the beauty of the secrets, when described to me?

In that widow who complained to Elisha, the secret was clearly portrayed for others to see;

The prophet could have paid her debt back, without the oil, if he commanded the creditor to forsake it;

He could have given him silver, gold, and clothes from what have been offered to him, and rejected;

He asked the Shunammite woman what he could do for her sake; and was ready to talk to the king on her behalf;

He, who could command the kings, why did he not command the creditor of the widow?

He instead, let her go into her house, shut the door on herself and her sons; to perform the secrets he intended to do;

Our Lord is the breath of prophecy; that would never live without His secrets;

By that widow who entered and shut the door upon herself, Elisha portrayed the secret of the church, and of our salvation;

She shut her doors and paid back her debts; and by that she portrayed the church that shut her doors to forgive sins;

The secret was kept from those outside who did not perceive it; when she did what was asked from her, between herself and her two sons, inside her house;

Ekisha, sent the spirit to hover in the widow's house.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

In the widow, having brought into her house empty vessels from the neighbors, for Elisha to fill with oil, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, saw a living portrait of the church that brings forth humanity from all nations and peoples, to her membership, to let them all have their hearts filled with the dwelling of God in them;

+ Inside the house with the doors shut, the three of them uttered the secret; poured, and filled the empty vessels with great riches;

The empty vessels refer to men who were empty of life and of the talent of Divinity;

Inside the church, the Holy Trinity pours life, and fills everyone with His talents and treasures;

These secrets that take place inside the church, is found in all the work that occurred in the widow's house;

Instructing the widow to borrow empty vessels from her neighbors;

That refers to the fact that the church takes from all peoples, empty men to fill them with faith;

*“Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son: ‘Bring me another vessel’. And he said to her, ‘There is not another vessel’. So the oil ceased”* (6)

God granted the widow as much oil as the many vessels she presented. He gives His gift as much as we request, and fills as much as we can receive. Our faith and our obedience open up the storehouses of God for us to take more than we seek and more than we need. As wide as we open our mouth, He fills them. God does not cease to bless and to give us until we are full.

*“Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, ‘Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest”* (7)

Elisha was called *“the man of God”* six times in this chapter (7, 16, 21, 22, 25, 27).

The widow was so wise and godly that, when the vessels were all full, she did not act on her own, but inquired from the prophet what she should do. With a spirit of humility she did nothing without seeking the counsel of the man of God. As to the prophet, it is obvious that he, in true fatherhood, cared for all, satisfied their needs, and solved their spiritual, social, and material problems.

The widow sought the urgent need to save her children from bondage; and the prophet provided her, not just that, but what would support her in her daily life. Saying: *“Go, sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your sons live on the rest”* (7).

When all the vessels were full of oil, she was not preoccupied with the flood of oil, nor was amazed by the miracle, but she hastened to the man of God to tell

him what happened to consummate the will of God. So it is befitting of us, in all our affairs to seek God's counsel, and not to move according to our own.

- + From the symbolic aspect, we should notice three things:
  - a- It is said that the widow filled the vessels of her neighbors with the oil that emerged in her house as a gift from God. The holy church, represented by the widow, was not deserted when her Man ascended to heaven, but filled the hearts of the nations by the oil of the knowledge of salvation, that increased and flowed in abundance in her, through the presence of the Holy Spirit.
  - b- Seeking empty vessels from her sons, she filled them, big and small with oil. This means that the saints who reject the temporal issues, and are sealed with the holy anointment, and with the oil of gladness; everyone of them, great and small, will be granted oil by his mother, namely the grace of God, *"for all things are yours"* (1 Corinthians 3: 21-22), according to the words of the apostle: *"Speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head – Christ"* (See Ephesians 4: 15). Those, on the other hand, who go down because of covetousness, drunkenness, and temporal preoccupations, those who – according to the apostle: *"walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts"* (Ephesians 4: 17-19; Romans 1:21-24); deny themselves this grace, which, they, actually do not desire to have it, and if they do, they do not prepare a vessel to be filled with it.
  - c- The oil left by the deceased man for his widow, refers to the mercy of Christ shown to the saints while He was with them on earth. According to the wise Solomon: *"He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord,*

*and he will be paid back for what he has given” (Proverbs 19: 17).*

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

## **2- ELISHA RECEIVES HOSPITALITY FROM A NOTABLE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN:**

Having been, himself, a notable man who carried a heart wide enough for all, and cared for all, God sent to him a notable woman and her husband to care for him, set for him a place in an upper room to find comfort whenever he happened to pass by in his frequent travels, especially between the centers of prophets or their schools.

In the episode of the Shunammite woman and the prophet Elisha, as recorded in the Holy Book, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi found a magnificent source of evangelic concepts; to talk about:

- 1- The concept of the riches; He compared between the inner and the outer riches
- 2- The ministry to the saints; And how the believer would be qualified for this blessed ministry.
- 3- The equality between woman and man; and how she may become more zealous than him
- 4- Initiation of love and giving; Being among the features of the believer, he does not anticipate to be asked for anything
- 5- The believer is one with authority
- 6- The believer has an open insight

7- The believer is serious in his ministry, and wastes no time in vain compliments

8- Christ alone is the resurrection and its Grantor

9- Our homes should become churches of God, or the Golgotha, testifying to the cross of Christ

*“Now it happened one day that Elisha went to Shunem, where there was a notable woman, and she constrained him to eat some food. So it was as often as he passed by, that he turned in there to eat some food” (8)*

“**Shunem**”, was a portion of the tribe of Issachar (Joshua 19: 18); It is ‘Solem’ on the south-eastern side of Mount ‘Dohi, three miles away from Jezreel. In it the Philistines dwelt before the great battle of Gilboa; and was where ‘Abishag the Shunammite’ lived (1 Kings 1: 3). Elisha often passed through Shunem, for it is on the way from Carmel to the cities of Galilee, and the schools of the prophets in Gilgal, Bethel, and other places.

“**A notable woman**”, It is obvious from what is said about her that she was a rich woman, or the wife of a rich man; yet more godly and clever than him; beside being generous and zealous.. Even in the midst of difficult years because of corruption and idol-worship, there were godly people, notable in their private life.

Having forsaken his possessions, and opted for poverty, finding in the Lord his God his treasure, riches, satisfaction, and peace, Elisha carried that treasure in his depths wherever he went. He did not feel need, but flowed riches over whomever he encountered; as it so happened with the Shunammite woman. That made St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi open his poem ‘On Elisha and the Shunammite Woman’, by the following comparison between the inner and the outer riches:

- a- The outer riches represents a burden on man, that makes him try to find a secure place to keep it, for fear of being stolen. The inner riches of God dwelling in man, on the other hand, grants man a secure happy life.
- b- The outer riches sets snares for its possessor, that may probably lead to his perdition; whereas the inner riches brings its possessor forth to a blessed life.
- c- The outer riches is like a chain that binds its possessor, and make him lose his freedom; whereas in the inner riches there is perfect freedom, carried by its possessor wherever he goes.

+ As the riches of this world is a burden upon its possessor, By You, O Lord I am rich, for Your riches is life for whoever loves You;

Every possession of man outside You is a great trap that strangles him who possesses it;

Let us, O Lord, possess You; for You are the riches that would never be robbed, that makes whoever seeks it, win good life and blessing;

As the outer riches will eventually change or pass away from its possessor, why would he rejoice in it?

The true riches is the inner one which man carries with him wherever he goes

The servants of the Lord were only rich in the Lord, and poor in all the things of the world;

They were poor in the possessions of their short time on earth, but rich in God and His talents;

That is the true riches for those who know it; that abides in those who acquire it without change;

That is why the righteous seek it, for from it come all riches without change.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

The Shunammite woman was worthy to have Elisha dwell in her house whenever he passes by, on his way to Carmel; as his soul found comfort in that godly woman. In this he was a symbol of the Lord Christ who used to find comfort in the house of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha in Bethany.

And the Lord Christ commanded His disciples, whenever they enter into any city, to dwell in the house of whoever is worthy of that by his godly life, holy in the Lord.

+ He turned in to the house of the Shunammite woman who was worthy to receive him by the love of her faith;

He was following the new commandment of the Lord since the beginning of his life, yet according to the Old Testament

The Lord commanded His apostles when they enter a city to inquire: who is worthy to dwell in his house;

And as it is the same spirit in the old and the new, Elisha acted with enlightenment;

Seeing that the Shunammite woman was worthy to receive him, he perpetually visited her whenever he passed by;

You can appreciate her worthiness from her talk to her husband concerning Elisha;

Wisely, she said to her husband concerning Elisha: "*I know that this is a holy man of God*"

By so saying the beauty of her faith was apparent.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

+ According to an elder: [It is said that the Shunammite woman refers to the soul, while the prophet Elisha refers to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, once the

soul keeps away from the carnal preoccupations, the Holy Spirit will dwell on her; Then, even if she is barren, she will conceive and give birth].

- + According to Abba Bemen: [One day I went to Abba Amon and asked him to tell me a wise word of benefit. He said to me: Doing good saves man from Hades and perdition. Look at how the virtue of Tabitha raised her from the dead (Acts 9: 36-42); How the prophet Elisha raised the son of a woman who did him good;(2 kings 4); and how king Hezekiah, because of his righteousness and good works, fifteen years were added to his life (2 Kings 20: 1-11).
  
- + A brother said to Abba Cronius: Tell me a word of benefit, and he said: {The Shunammite woman refers to the soul; and the prophet Elisha to the Spirit of God. If the soul is alert, away from every preoccupation, and rejects her own will; On her, the Spirit of God will dwell, and she could give fruit, even if she is barren.

(The paradise of the fathers)

*“And she said to her husband, ‘Look now, I know that this is a holy man of God, who passes by us regularly” (9)*

Saying: *I know that this is a holy man of God*”, she means that, being faithful in dedicating his life to the ministry to the Holy One, he became His possession.

- + After the ascension of the prophet Elijah, Elisha took his place as the head and care-taker of the sons of the prophets. Accordingly, he was committed to visit their dwelling place in Bethel, Jericho, and at the Jordan. While so doing, he had to pass through the village of Shunem, and used, every now and then, to turn in to the house of the Shunammite woman; who, wisely

perceiving that his visit would bless her house, she counseled her husband to build for the holy man a small upper room, isolated and separated from those dwelling in the house.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

According to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, Even though woman is equal to man in the human nature, her mental capacity and wisdom, yet she is superior to him in that she can realize what she intends to do, whether good or evil. According to him, as well, the Shunammite woman was a living role model of the righteous woman, with a holy mind, a role model to her husband, and a source of blessing for all her household.

- + The Shunammite woman gave women a living portrait full of beauty, to see and to imitate in their relation with their husbands.  
It is easy for a woman to exhort her husband on everything beautiful; and by her faith, she could be a source of goodness for her household;  
According to nature, women do not lack knowledge; and if they so choose, they could be very wise;  
Even though the habit of slothfulness and the vain love of the world, have brought some women down from the knowledge of God;  
Yet, naturally, men and women are equally created; in mind, discernment, and understanding;  
It is easy for a woman to understand everything clearly; unless she is overcome by the habit of slothfulness;  
Like a man, what she intends to do, she does;  
If she so chooses, she could be very eloquent to commend; and when she hates, she could be as efficient to curse;  
If she chooses, she could be very active and enlightened in the divine teaching;

Look at the Shunammite woman, whom all women should imitate;  
In practicing teaching righteousness, and being bound to holy thoughts;  
For by that they would become the cause of blessing to their husbands,  
and would be role models of everything of benefit to their households.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Please, let us make a small room on the wall, and let us put a bed for him there and a table and a chair, and a lampstand; so it will be, whenever he comes to us, he can turn in there”* (10)

The upper room (aliyah) in the East, was a room built by those who could afford, on the roof of houses especially those on the highway, furnished in a way befitting to guests, who could move freely up and down by a staircase outside the house.. It could also be a favorable place for the man of the house to retreat for some time if he wants to. The prophet Elijah dwelt in such a room in the house of the widow of Zarephath which belongs to Sidon (1 kings 17: 19, 23). King Ahaziah was in such a room in his palace in Samaria, when he fell down from the lattice (2 kings 1: 2); Eglon king of Moab was in such a room when he was murdered by Ehud (Judges 3: 20, 23). To such a room, David went to mourn his son Absalom (2 Samuel 18: 24); In such a room Daniel used to pray three times daily (Daniel 9: 10); And the upper room was used with a symbolic meaning in Jeremiah 22: 13, 14; and psalm 104: 3, 13.

In the New Testament, the Lord Christ established the sacrament of the Eucharist in the upper room of the house of Mary, mother of the apostle Mark (Mark 14: 15; Luke 22: 12).

According to ‘James Freeman’, the original word in the second book of the kings came as ‘Kisse’, which does not literally mean an upper room, but used

sometimes even to mean a throne.. And according to the scholar Origen, the upper room refers to going up to the spiritual interpretation of the Holy Book, instead of going down to the dungeon of the literal interpretation thereof.

+ It is only logic for Jeremiah to be struck like Paul, and even like the Lord Christ. *“Now Pashur the priest, struck Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin (Jeremiah 20: 1, 2).* The stocks were in the upper floor . The tribe of Benjamin, as indicated in the Book of Joshua had Jerusalem as their portion of inheritance, where the temple of the Lord was ... Despite the fact that there was an upper floor in the house of the Lord, yet Pashur chose to put Jeremiah in the lower dungeon. .... As for us, we intend to take Jeremiah now and move him to the upper floor of the house of the Lord; namely to the high spiritual meaning, as I shall make clear through many texts in the Holy Book, that confirm that the righteous receive the prophets in the higher floors, as did the widow of Zarephath whom the Lord chose to sustain the prophet Elijah in the upper room of her house (1 kings 17: 19). So also did the Shunammite woman who used to give hospitality to the prophet Elisha, and made for him an upper room to find comfort whenever he passed her by. (2 kings 4: 8-10). ... On the contrary, the sinner king Ahaziah fell down from a lattice in the upper floor (2 kings 1: 2).... The Lord Christ commands you, as well, not to go down from the roof, saying: *“Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house”* (Matthew 24: 15-17).

### **3- ELISHA FULFILLS THE NEED OF THE NOTABLE WOMAN:**

*“And it happened one day that he came there, and he turned in to the upper room and lay down there”* (11)

*“Then he said to Gehazi his servant, ‘Call this Shunammite woman’. When he had called her she stood before him”* (12)

By the words “his servant” they used to call someone under training, more so than someone who serves. Elisha himself was so called in his relationship with the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19: 21). Yet ‘Gehazi’, by his evil action showed that he was not worthy to succeed Elisha, the way Elisha succeeded the prophet Elijah.

- + The non-material divine fire has its activity in stirring the souls up, testing and refining them as the gold is tested and refined in the crucible. But it consumes all evil like thorns and thistles, *“For God is a consuming fire”* (Hebrew 12: 29); *“A flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thessalonians 1: 8). Such a fire appeared to the prophet Moses in the burning bush; and came down like a chariot of fire that took Elijah up from earth to heaven (2 Kings 4: 11). The blessed David sought the activity of such a fire when he said, *“Examine me, Lord, and prove me; try my mind and my heart”* (Psalm 26: 2).

(St. Macarius the Great)

*“And he said to him, ‘Say now to her, ‘Look you have been concerned for us with all this care. What can I do for you? Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?’ And she answered, ‘I dwell among my own people’”* (13)

Elisha was generous; he intended to pay back everyone who did him good, with any service he might be in need for. The king, though evil, yet he and his commander of the army used to honor Elisha and listen to him (3: 12; 6: 9, 21; 13: 14). Elisha, not wishing to misuse the love of the notable woman, asked her if

he could do her any favor . He was used, to pay the gift by a gift, and the love with a practical deed of love.

The church calls God “The Beneficent” for He initiates giving to His beloved children. So Elisha, like His God, intended to do good to the notable woman. She asked him for nothing, but he was the one who asked her what he could do for her. ... It is so befitting of every believer to initiate by his whole heart to give without being asked

- + Notice how the blessed Paul cares for the needs of the temporal and spiritual needs of the (wrestlers); Listen to him commending the church concerning one woman, saying: *“I commend you Phoebe, our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever she has need of you, for indeed she has been a helper of many, and of myself also”* (Romans 16: 1); And, *“I urge you, brethren – you know the household of Stephanus, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and how they have devoted themselves in the ministry of the saints; that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us”* (1 Corinthians 16: 18).

With the spirit of love of the saints, helping the others in temporal things. Elisha helped the Shunammite woman, who gave him hospitality, both materially and spiritually (2 kings 4: 12); saying to her: *“You have been concerned for us with all this care’ What can I do for you Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army”* (2 kings 4: 13).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + By her faith, she showed the way to her husband; and let him build for the saint (Elisha) a holy residence in her house;  
By her loving soul, faith and discernment, she said to her husband, "*I know this is a holy man of God*"  
She gave the counsel, and the man, responding to the request of his believing wife, built a place for the prophet to stay whenever he passed by;  
Being like his God, Elisha intended to reward the good woman; the way God rewards the good deeds of his beloved servants;;  
As God gives to those who seek from Him; and intends to respond to every supplication by His believers;  
By the same principle, the prophet inquired from her if she needs him to talk on her to the king or to the commander of the army..

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*"So he said, 'What then is to be done for her?' And Gehazi answered, 'Actually, she has no son, and her husband is old'" (14)*

The woman did not tell the prophet that she was barren, and has no son; probably because she has lost all hope in that issue; but Gehazi, perceiving the feelings of a barren woman married to an old man; with nothing to satisfy her motherhood; and no one to inherit her large fortune, counseled the prophet, not to talk on her behalf to the king or to the commander of the army, but to God, who, alone, can grant her a son. Gehazi believed in God of the impossible.

Abba Isaiah said: Abba Pavnotius told me: [I used to visit the two elder fathers: Abba Anob, and Abba Bemen, twice a month all along their life on earth. And my cell was 12 miles far from theirs. Asking them about what went

on in my mind, they said to me:: Make no name for yourself in the place where you dwell, in order to find comfort. The Shunammite woman gave hospitality to the prophet Elisha, for she was not much preoccupied with her man

(2 kings 4: 14-17). And we say that the Shunammite woman refers to the soul, and Elisha to the Spirit of the Lord; and if the soul lives far away from any evil deeds, the Spirit of God would visit her; and she, after being barren, could give birth to a son].

*“And he said, ‘Call her’. When he had called her, she stood in the doorway” (15)*

*“Then he said, ‘About this time next year you shall embrace a son’. And she said, ‘No my lord, Man of God, do not lie to your maidservant’” (16)*

In her state of despair for such a long time, the woman thought that the man of God lied to her, not intentionally, but out of his love, faithfulness, and longing to reward her. He sought for her to have a son, although, on his own, he was unable to fulfill that promise, for it is beyond his authority or of anyone else..

Hearing that the woman was barren, and her man was old, the prophet Elisha remembered Sarah and Abraham, and how God granted them a blessed son. He truly believed that God is capable to set in the stony womb of the woman children of the Lord.

+ The prophet intended to pray to God to give her a son, she did not ask for ;

Hearing that the woman was barren and her husband was an old man, He wrestled against barrenness and old age, and the great prophet got fruition of both;

As the word of God was in the mouth of that prophet, it was easy for him to make children out of stones;

From his lips came an active power; and nature could not disobey his command;

With confidence he promised the barren woman, who rejoiced in the fruit; and the household became rich with a beloved heir;

Elisha, when he gave the promise; the barren womb gave fruition; and the Shunammite woman rejoiced in a son to embrace.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi

Elisha presents to us a living example of the life of solitude and meditation. According to him solitude is a fellowship with God, with work by the Spirit of the Lord to the account of His kingdom, and to the edification of the people of God. The solitude is not isolation nor slothfulness and idleness.

+ Let us compare between the comfort of Elisha, and that of others, who, in order to seek comfort, and to give themselves peace of mind and tranquility, would take their minds away from work, and retreat from the fellowship and company of men.

Quietly, and with no publicity, Elisha divided the River Jordan. The lower end flowed ahead, and the upper end retreated to its source.

On the Carmel he promised the barren woman to have an unexpected child of her own (2 Kings 4: 6)

He raised a man from the dead (2 kings 4: 34)

He turned the bitterness of food sweet by mixing it with flour (2 kings 4: 14)

Giving twenty loaves of bread to a hundred men, they gathered together the fragments that remained after they were satisfied (2 kings 4: 44);

He made the iron head of an ax float by casting a branch of a tree into the water (2 kings 6: 6)

He healed the leper and made him clean (2 Kings 5: 10)

He turned the draught into rain (2 kings 3: 17)

He turned the famine into abundance (2 kings 7: 1)

How could the righteous be in solitude, when God is perpetually with him? ....

How could he be forsaken, who has never be separated from Christ? ...

According to the blessed Paul: "*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? ...*

*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come ...*" (See Romans 8: 35, 38).

(St. Ambrose)

*"And the woman conceived, and bore a son when the appointed time had come, of which Elisha had told her" (17)*

The barren, almost dead womb conceiving; and giving birth to a child, represents our enjoyment of the new life in the Lord, instead of death.

+ For many, to believe that a virgin could conceive and give birth; certain barren women, and even old ones, were so granted; to prepare the minds of men to believe that it could happen.

+ The same way a barren woman, by the prayers of Elisha, gave birth to a child, the church was also barren before the coming of the Lord Christ, then gave birth to the Christian people, once He came.

And as the child of that woman died during the absence of Elisha, and came back to life when he came down from the mountain, the son of the church who died for sin, came back to life when the Lord Christ came down from heaven.

**4- ELISHA RAISES THE DEAD SON OF THE NOTABLE WOMAN TO LIFE:**

*“So the child grew.. Now it happened one day that he went out to his father, to the reapers” (18)*

The land of Shunem is still fertile; and it is obvious that the woman's husband was a rich man who had many servants and reapers.

*“And he said to his father, ‘My head, my head’. So he said to a servant, ‘Carry him to his mother’” (19)*

*“When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died” (20)*

The death of the son of the Shunammite woman was not a sign of God's anger against her, but was for God to be glorified in His prophet Elisha. By his prayer God granted a son to the woman; and by his prayer he brought him back alive to her after his death. God is the Grantor of life, and who raises from the death.

+ Intending for His chosen servant to conquer, God made him great by the signs he let him perform.

He sent death to pluck the precious fruit that has grown; and the barren woman who conceived him put on the mourning dress. He granted him to her, then took him back, to reveal His great might; For the life and death of the whole world are in His hands.

By the death of the child, God was not only glorified, and Elisha not only has got honor in the Lord; but the Shunammite woman was justified as well; and her faith in God who can raise from the dead was revealed.

When her child died, she did not seek condolence from her man, nor from her household; Despair did not crawl into her heart; nor she thought of burying him; but she carried him and laid him on the prophet's bed, trusting in God's work through him.

+ God's ordinance is greatly exalted, and there is no fault in his wise works;

His works amaze the privileged; and are not perceived except by the loving faithful.

Even when God takes something away from man, it is as though He gives, for him who meditates in it.

When God granted the barren woman a child, and when He took him back, He dealt with the same grace;

He granted the barren woman a child, but she lost him; then He came back and gave her the dead child alive to let her rejoice in him;

He doubled the gift He gave , to increase its beauty, and to let the prophet be commended by it;

He gave His prophet the power to give children to the barren; and added to him the power to raise the dead;

By his prophecy he made the womb and the pit give fruition; and showed his ability in the two bosoms that were barren;

And in order for His might to conquer n the whole world, God let the son of the Shunammite woman die;

God saw how great was her faith, when she asked Him without doubt to raise the dead child;

God knew that she will not leave the godly man until he raises her child from the dead;

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

+ Surely, death is not punishment, for the saints go through it as well; and even the Lord of the saints, Himself, He who is their life and death, went through it.

(The by-laws of the saintly apostles)

*“And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut the door upon him, and went out” (21)*

Her behavior reveals about the prayer received by God; when we cast our issues in His hands, without seeking a particular thing; but accept His holy and wise will.

According to St (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, the Shunammite woman, seeing the prophet Elisha as a symbol of the Lord Christ, the Lion coming out from the tribe of Judah, who roars to kill death, she brought her child up to the upper room, as though to the church of Christ, and laid him on the prophet's bed; as though she brought him into the tomb of Christ. ... The battle is, therefore between the Lion, the Grantor of life, and death, that cannot confront the Grantor of resurrection.

+ Her beloved son dies; and instead of opening a tomb for him, she brought him up to the upper room, that gives life;

She knew him who dwells in the house; she was sure that he will soon come, and with him, life will shine;

She put the child on Elisha's bed and closed the door, anticipating Elisha to come and drive death out;

She laid the corpse on the godly man's bed, to come and crush death that crushed the little child;

She brought the dead into the Lion's den, and closed the door, for the man of God to roar on death and drive him away.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Then she called to her husband, and said, ‘Please send me one of the young men and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and come back” (22)*

She laid her son on the prophet's bed in the upper room, and shut the door upon him, so that her husband and the rest of her household would not know what happened, to avoid any confusion; a kind of behavior that reveals her faith that the man of God, by whose prayer God granted her the child, when she was barren, and her womb was utterly dead; can, as well, by his prayer raise him from the dead in the name of the living God.

From Shunem to the Carmel was a distance of six hours walk; and it was very rare that such a notable woman walk it out, but would mount a donkey or a horse.

*“So he said, Why are you going to him today? It is neither the new Moon nor the Sabbath’. And she said, ‘It is well’” (23)*

On the days of feasts the believers do not perform their daily work, but dedicate the day for worship and ministry; they go to the house of the Lord to practice spiritual work (Exodus 20: 9-12; Amos 8: 5).

It is clear that, in spite of the fact that idol-worship at that time prevailed on the land, there were still some remnants who worshipped the true God, and celebrate the feasts, specially together with the prophets.

She did not speak to her husband, for she was in a hurry to go to the man of God, and for fear that he may not let her go, as long as the child is already dead.

The prophets were probably used to hold meetings to teach the people on the head of the months and the Sabbaths Hence, according to the prophet Amos, the greedy, say; *“When will the new moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat?”* (Amos 8: 5); namely, they preferred their daily works to keeping the holy days, or listening to the word of God, and to the teachings of the prophets.

Having surely believed that Elisha was capable, by the Lord, to raise her dead child, the Shunammite woman hid the matter from her man until the child is raised alive; for, probably being aware of his relatively weak faith, she did not want to confuse him, or make him grumble with protest..

+ She laid the dead body on the prophet's bed, and set forth on her way, to let the prophet come and bring back the captive that death has taken away from her;

She went to call the physician who knows how to make the dead live;

By her faith she perceived that, by his capable power, he could act like a mighty man;

She went up to his mount to bring him along, to raise the child up from the pit of death;

She hid the calamity from her husband, lest he might protest, until the child is already raised from death. Then she would tell him everything.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*"Then she saddled a donkey, and said to her servant, 'Drive, and go forward; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you'" (24)*

*"So she departed and went to the man of God at Mount Carmel.*

*"And so it was, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to his servant Gehazi, 'Look, there is the Shunammite woman'" (25)*

*"Please, run now to meet her, and say to her, 'Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?' And she answered, 'It is well'" (26)*

Saying "*It is well*" to Gehazi, means that she was in a hurry to meet the prophet, for the issue is too serious to waste any time talking to him.

The prophet's three questions reveal the peace in his heart for every one. She wanted to talk directly to the prophet, as he alone could partake of her feelings, and had the power by the Lord to do the impossible to her; According to the custom in the East, in case you ask somebody about someone else's health, you know for sure is ill, he would answer "He is well, thank Goodness", even if he adds that he has already departed.

One of the examples presented by the scholar Tertullian to confirm the unity of the Old and the New covenants, was that Elisha's commandment here bears a symbol and harmony with that the Lord Christ gave to His disciples when He sent them to preach (Luke 10: 4-9).

*"Now when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet; but Gehazi came near to push her away. But the man of God said, 'Let her alone, for her soul is in deep distress, and the Lord has hidden it from me, and has not told me'"*  
(27)

All what preoccupied Gehazi was to keep the woman from catching the man of God by his feet; Whereas the prophet was preoccupied with seeing the bitterness of her soul to help her, regardless of any outer inconvenience..

By saying: "*The Lord had hidden it from me, and has not told me*", It is clear that hiding the issue was exceptional; and that the Lord used to reveal everything to His prophet; but in this case, for a divine wisdom, he did not tell him about the bitterness in the soul of the woman.

***She caught him by the feet***", Such a behavior reveals a kind of humility and giving honor to the prophet (Matthew 28: 9)

Commenting to the reaction by Gehazi here, St. Clement the Roman says that so was the nature of life of Elisha; no foreign woman was allowed to have the daring to catch him by the feet.

- + But here the prophet did not allow his servant to keep the woman away, saying: "*Let her alone, for her soul is in deep distress*", to refer that she must have a good reason to act in such a way; she must be in anguish. God will never let you down when you approach Him while in distress; That is why the Lord Christ blessed those who mourn (Mathew 5: 4)..

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Sorrow leads to crying-out, and to raise fervent supplication to God, and will surely bring forth His response and help. .When Elisha saw how the woman approached him with great sorrow and intense grief, he did not let his servant stop her, but allowed her to come to him, and responded to her request.(2 kings 4: 17).  
Therefore, O Christian, in your distress, do not despair, but cry-out to the Lord.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

The words by St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi kindles the heart to long to get attached to the Lord; for the Lord intends to grant those who love Him an open insight; and does not hide a thing from them; And even if He does it from someone, it would be for his edification and glory. Elisha, like his master the prophet Elijah, perceived even the heavenly secrets; nothing was hidden from him except by a divine ordinance for edification.

+ If God did not hide it from His prophet, he would have hastened to keep death away from the child; But that would not be as great as raising him from the dead, and giving him back to his mother.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)      *“And she said, ‘Did I ask a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?’” (28)*

The bitterness in her soul by the death of her only begotten child, God’s gift to her, was more intense than her bitterness when she was barren with no child.

She addressed the prophet saying: *“Did I ask a son of my Lord? Did I not say, do not deceive me?”*. By these two questions, Elisha probably thought at first that the child was ill, but he soon perceived that he died.

*“Then he said to Gehazi, ‘Get yourself ready, and take my staff in your hand, and be on your way. If you meet anyone, do not greet him; and if anyone greets you, do not answer him; but lay my staff on the face of the child’” (29)*

Elisha’s command to his servant was to be on his way, not to greet anyone, and not to answer anyone who greets him; For it is befitting of the minister to consecrate all his time to the testimony to the gospel of Christ, as much as he can.

Elisha told his servant to take his staff in his hand; for he probably felt that it bears a power the way Moses’ staff, and Elijah’s mantle had; but God did not intend it to be done that way.

- + The monks use the staff imitating the prophet Elisha (2 kings 4: 29). As to its spiritual concept, it is unbefitting of the monk to go unarmed among the dogs of sin that bark, and the unseen spiritual beasts in evil; those which the prophet David intended to free himself from, says: "*Do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast*" (Psalm 74: 19). When they attack him, he is committed to strike them with the sign of the cross, and drive them away. And if they are fiercely stirred up against him, he should scatter them by his perpetually reconciled life, through his endurance of the passion of the Lord, and through following up the example of the life of faithfulness.

(St. John Cassian)

According to St. Augustine, the staff Elisha gave to his servant to put upon the dead child, that failed to restore him to life, is the law sent by the Lord through His servants the prophets; but the child would not be restored to life except by the coming of the lord Christ, our Lord, Himself. Gehazi setting forth with Elisha's staff, refers to the work of the law, helpless to raise the dead. And Elisha setting forth, refers to the work of the Lord Christ, the Grantor of grace, and who, alone, can raise from the dead.... The law through his servant, and the mercy through himself. The law, as though in the staff failed to bring the child back to life, "*For, if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law*" (Galatians 3: 21); But the mercy, as though, in Elisha himself, who bears the symbol of Christ in giving life to the dead; the meaning bound to the great secret of the New Covenant.

(St Augustine)

Commenting on this command, St. Ambrose says [ that the Lord did not forbid us from giving the greetings of peace, but forbids giving it while on the way to preach.. Elisha gave his servant the same command (2 kings 4: 29), to hasten to consummate the mission. Giving a greeting of peace is a beautiful custom; but consummating the divine works is more beautiful; and any delay in doing it would bring displeasure].

+ Notice that the Lord did not say to His disciples “*Greet no one*”; but saying, “*Greet no one on the road*” (Luke 10: 4) which implies no lack of care for those they encounter

When Elisha, sent his servant to put his staff on the body of the dead child, he commanded him to hasten to go, to consummate the mission of preaching by resurrection, lest he would be delayed on his mission by unnecessary debate with anyone on the way.

He did not take away the zeal to give the greeting of peace; but sought taking away any obstacle on the way of godliness.

When a divine commands are given, human commitments take the second priority.

(St. Ambrose)

+ By fervently seeking from the man of God, she committed him to do according to her request.

He sent Gehazi with his staff, and commanded him to go quietly and not to waste any time on his way

He told him: “*If you meet anyone do not greet him; and if he greets you, do not answer him*”

That was the same command the Lord Christ gave to His disciple: “*Greet no one along the road*”

The two commands were said with the same spirit; for our Lord granted the prophets His Spirit.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“And the mother of the child said, ‘As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you’. So he arose and followed her” (30)*

The woman used the same language of the prophet, saying: *“As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives”*; and the same language he uttered when he refused to forsake his master Elijah (2: 2, 4, 6).

*“Now Gehazi went on ahead of them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Therefore he went back to meet him, and told him, saying, ‘The child has not awakened’” (31)*

It was impossible for Elisha’s staff to bring the child to life; for like the law, both are unable to save humanity without the incarnate Word of God.

Elisha’s staff refers also to the ark of the covenant, or the divine presence, as well as to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Before the ark of the covenant the River Jordan was divided, and the priests together with the people crossed over to the promised land. While when the wicked priests, like the two sons of Eli the priest, carried it, the people were defeated and the ark was taken over by the pagans. It is the same with the name or with the cross of Christ, by which the disciples performed signs and miracles; whereas when it was uttered by the sons of Sceva to drive the demons out, the demons attacked them and prevailed over them (Acts 19: 14). So, when it happened with Gehazi, the weakness was not in

the Elisha's staff itself, but in its bearer (Gehazi) who was empty of the grace of God.

+ Gehazi took the staff and went ahead of them; and when he reached the house he laid the staff on the face of the child, according to his master's command.

Death did not move out of the child. The weak staff did not have the power to bring him back to life, for its bearer was empty of grace and not up to the miracle;

The ark of the covenant that divided the river, broke the walls down, and by which Joshua, the great priest, performed miracles;

That ark, itself, was captivated and humiliated together with his people; It did not overcome in the hands of wicked priests; as Elisha's staff did not perform in the hands of Gehazi;

The weak carried a strong staff, but could not perform a miracle; as the ark could not overcome by the wicked who carried it.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“And when Elisha came into the house, there was the child, lying dead on his bed” (32)*

*“He went in therefore, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the Lord” (33)*

Resorting to prayer, Elisha revealed what was in his heart and mind:

- 1- His love for the child and his care for his parents.
- 2- Seeking refuge and trusting in God; not in the staff, in the servant, or even in himself
- 3- Being sure that God listens and will respond; and that He is able to raise from the dead

*“And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands; and he stretched himself out on the child, and the flesh of the child became warm” (34)*

As the staff of Elisha could not raise the dead, there was need for the prophet to put his mouth on the child’s mouth, and his eyes on his eyes, etc. In that he was a symbol of the Lord Christ who delivered His life to redeem us.

According to St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian, what Elisha did, refers to the incarnation of the Word of God, who became Man, less than the angels (Hebrew 2: 9), to raise us from the dead. And the prophet contracted his body to the size of the little child for our sake.

- + The servant could not raise the dead child by his master’s staff, as testified by the apostle Paul, saying: *“For the law made nothing perfect”* (Hebrew 7: 19); but when the master himself came, and, with humility, stretched himself out on the child, accommodating his body to that of the dead child, *“Who being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men”* (Philippians 2: 6-7). By breathing on the dead body, proclaiming the divine gift, the Spirit grants the seven-fold grace on those who are cast in the death of sin. The child was brought forth to life; he whom the staff of fear could not revive, came back to life by the spirit of love.

(Pope Gregory the Great)

- + If, instead of contracting his body, the prophet did the contrary, he would not be able to bring the child back to life; So it is, to give life, the Lord Christ made Himself less; ... Even though He is according to the image and likeness of God, He adopted the human form;... He made Himself less, to make us more.... He decreased so that we increase through Him.

(St Jerome)

- + Several examples in the gospels testify to the resurrection from the dead; Now, let us bring back to memory few of them: Raising Lazarus, four days after his death; Raising the widow's son; Raising the daughter of the head of the synagogue; and when the earth quaked, the rocks split, and the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised (Matthew 27: 52). And above all, let us remember that Christ Himself is risen from the dead (1 Corinthians 15: 20)

Let us also talk about how the prophet Elijah raised the widow's son from the dead; and how the prophet Elisha raised the dead twice: once in his life, and another after his death. In his life he raised the dead by his soul (2 kings 4: 34); but in order to confirm that not only the souls of the godly men are so honored, but, in their bodies, as well, there is power; the corpse of a dead man cast in Elisha's tomb, came back to life when it touched the dead body of the prophet (2 kings 13: 21); he who died and was buried brought life back to the dead; even though he who gave the life remained among the dead, ... Why? .... For if Elisha came back to life, the work would then be only referred to his 'soul'. But to show that, even in the absence of the soul, the virtue still dwells in the bodies of the saints, in which their godly soul dwelt for so long..

Let us then refrain from foolishly denying that all those events have actually happened; for if the shadows, handkerchiefs, and aprons of the apostles healed the sick by touch, how would it be with the body of the prophet who used to raise the dead.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- + That disciple of Elisha refers to the blessed Moses, whom God sent to Egypt with his staff. For without Christ, Moses would not be able to save the people from the original sin. According to the apostle, "*The law made nothing perfect*" (Hebrew 7: 19). There was need for Him who sent the staff to come down himself. The staff without Elisha is useless; as the cross without Christ is powerless.
  
- + Elisha bowed down to bring the child to life; And Christ became humble to save the world cast into sin  
Elisha put his mouth on the child's mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. Notice, O brethren how a grown-up man contracts his own body to accommodate that of a little dead one. What Elisha did in the case of the child, was completely realized by Christ for the sake of the human race. Listen to the words of the apostle, saying: "*He (Christ) humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death*" (Philippians 2: 8). ... The compassionate physician bowed down; For no one, O brethren, can lift up someone cast on the ground, if he refrain from bowing down.

*“He returned and walked back and forth in the house, and again went up and stretched himself on him; then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes” (35)*

- + The child sneezing seven times, reveals the seven-fold grace granted by the Holy Spirit to the human race by the coming of the Lord Christ to bring them back to life; according to the words of the apostle saying: *“If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His”* (See Romans 8: 9) ....

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

Walking back and forth in the house tells how confused the prophet was, but, even though God did not respond instantly to him; Yet he did not lose confidence in God's ability to raise the child from the dead.

According to St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian, moving back and forth refers to the entrance of the Lord Christ into the houses of men, to dwell among them, and to partake of their life.

- + Notice how ‘Salmus’, the blind Jew, commenting on the resurrection of the Lord Christ, says: [This is the question: Is it possible for someone who truly died to resurrect with a true body?] ... It was unbecoming of a Jew to say such a thing; if he believes in what came in the two books of the kings, concerning the two cases of raising the dead: one by Elijah (1 Kings 17: 21-22), and the other by Elisha (2 Kings 4: 34-35). Jesus came to no other nation but to the Jews, who were used to see miraculous events. And if they compare the wondrous works done by Jesus with those done by who preceded Him, they will confess that He was greater than all.

(The scholar Origen)

*“And he called Gehazi and said, ‘Call the Shunammite woman’; So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, ‘Pick up your son’”*  
(36)

“So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed on the ground; then she picked up her son and went out” (37)

With bitterness of her soul, that notable woman who previously fell at the prophet’s feet because of grief on her son; Now she so does because of her joy, and to express her gratitude for bringing him back to life.

#### **4- ELISHA HEALS A DEADLY FOOD:**

*“And Elisa returned to Gilgal, and there was a famine in the land. Now the sons of the prophets were sitting before him; and he said to his servant, ‘Put on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets’”* (38)

**Gilgal;** about a mile north-east of Jericho; was the first place to where Israel came after crossing over the Jordan (Joshua 4: 19-29).

He probably refers here to the famine that continued for seven years (2 kings 8: 1-2).

*“So one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered from it a lap-full of wild gourds, and came and sliced them into the pot of stew, though they did not know what they were”* (39)

According to St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian, that 'one' who was responsible of taking care of the daily sustenance of the sons of the prophets, went out into the field to gather herbs; and finding none of what he was familiar with, he gathered what he did not know, wild gourds, not suitable to eat, bitter, and causes acute diarrhea, stomachache, and vomiting.. In the Syrian language 'Pechitta', St. Ephraim it was quoted by St. Ephraim as 'Colocynths'.

+ The sons of the prophets, the monks of the old covenant, who built for themselves huts close to the River Jordan, away from the crowded cities; .lived on soup and wild herbs (2 kings 4: 38-39; 6: 1-2).

As long as you are at home, make your cell your paradise, where you gather the various fruits of the Holy Books. Let them be your favorite company; and bear their commandments in your heart.

(St. Jerome)

+ Why was Elisha's life a role model of a biography? Just meditate in how he was given hospitality by the Shunammite notable woman; and how he, himself, gave it to the sons of the prophets. Meditate in how, by the prayers of that fasting prophet – as death was at the door, waiting for those who ate of that deadly food – poison disappeared from the pot (2 kings 4: 39-41)

(St. Cyril the Great)

*"Then they served it to the men to eat. Now it happened, as they were eating the stew that they cried out and said, 'O, man of God, there is death in the pot'. And they could not eat it" (40)*

Recognizing it by its bitter taste, they stopped eating before it was too late. They cried out to the prophet Elisha, who asked them to bring some flour, to put it into the pot, and serve it to the people that they may eat; When they so did, they ate and were satisfied.

As the world present to us nothing but death, there was need to add flour to the pot to bring forth life instead of death. That flour is the body of the Lord Jesus Christ who became "*the Bread of life*", whoever eats it will enjoy the eternal life (John 6: 53).

*"So he said, 'Then bring in some flour', and he put it into the pot, and he said, 'Serve it to the people, that they may eat', and there was nothing harmful in the pot" (41)*

The flour carries no miraculous power to remove the deadly poison from the food, but it was Elisha's faith in the power, might, and love of God, that did. Although flour has nothing in its constituents to neutralize the poison, yet God chose it as he previously chose the salt (2: 20) to reform the bitter water.

The sons of the prophets revealed their faith in the Lord and His prophet, by eating according to his command without hesitation.

- + The way Elisha reformed the nature of the cooked food by adding a little flour which gave it a new taste, so did our Lord by His divine ordinance, to motivate us to imitate Him, to walk in the way of righteousness and godliness, to rejoice in the great reward that He promised us, and for the sake of healing the illnesses, tribulations, and anguish that perpetually surround us since the beginning of time.

Adam, the father of our race gathered those bitter fruits as a price of his sin, and presented them to us, in the moment he heard the words of his Creator, saying: *“Cursed is the ground for your sake. In toll shall eat of it all the days of your life”* (Genesis 3: 17-19).

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

#### **5- ELISHA SATISFIES A HUNDRED MEN WITH TWENTY LOAVES OF BREAD:**

*“Then a man came from Baal Shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley bread, and newly ripened grain in his knapsack. And he said, ‘Give it to the people, that they may eat’”* (42)

- + St. John the Evangelist, concerning the miracle of satisfying the multitude, said that, it was with barley loaves (john 6: 9), not without a specific goal; to teach us to tread by our feet upon the pride of life. Barley was the food of the prophets .

(St. John Chrysostom)

The scholar Tertullian, in the second century AD, debated the view of Mercion in five books; specifically concerning the unity of the Holy Book (namely the two Testaments). Mercion used to hate the Old Testament, Saw the Creator as a violent Being, who knew no mercy nor compassion; And believed that the Lord Christ, the Wholly Merciful, came to contradict the Creator of material, namely the element of evil. Tertullian quoted this episode

within our hands, when Elisha satisfied a hundred men with twenty loaves of bread, of which much remained afterwards, in his debate against Mercion; on account of that it bears a symbol of the work of the Lord Christ, the Creator.

“**Baal Shalisha**”, was previously mentioned in 1 Samuel 9: 4; of unknown location, other than it was close to Gilgal.

“**Bread of the firstfruits**”, probably brought that man, because it was a religious duty to offer to the Lord (Leviticus 23: 14). That indicates that there were those who still feared the Lord, who refrained from worshipping the Baal, among whom was that man who did not keep it for himself, but presented the firstfruits to the men of God, even in the time of famine (38). As to the work of the Lord, it was by blessing the twenty loaves of bread to satisfy a hundred men, and had some left over..

“**The newly ripened grain**”, is green heads of grain roasted on the fire, what is known nowadays as ‘Ferik’ (Leviticus 2: 14).

+ Here two miracles were performed by Elisha among his disciples: the first by removing death, hidden in the pot of cooked food; and the second when he satisfied a hundred men with twenty loaves of bread. In both miracles, he was a symbol of Him who blessed and fed five thousand men (except for women and children) with five loaves of bread and a few fish (Matthew 14: 13-21).

*“And his servant said, ‘What? Shall I set this before one hundred men?’ He said again, ‘Give it to the people, that they may eat; for thus says the Lord: ‘They shall eat and have some left over’” (43)*

*“So he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the Lord” (44)*

When we offer what we have to others, the blessing of the Lord will dwell, we and the others will be satisfied, and will have some leftover. The Wise Solomon says: *“There is one man who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty”* (Proverbs 11: 24-25).

Satisfaction is not in eating a plenty of food, nor in its diversity, but in the blessing of the Lord.

It was not possible for Elisha to let the sons of the prophets go hungry; for God, who created man, was committed to satisfy all his needs, and to give him more than he asks, and beyond what he needs. And it is the work of the true minister of God, and of every Christians, to stretch his hand to satisfy all those around him.

The figure 100 refers to the perfect congregation; hence when speaking about the lost sheep, the Lord said that the shepherd had a hundred sheep. What the prophet did was to call every minister to care to satisfy the whole human race; as according to St. John Chrysostom: [O priest, you are the father of all mankind].

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 4**

**I SHALL OPEN MY MOUTH WIDE, AND YOU WILL SATISFY MY DEPTHS  
WITH THE OIL OF YOUR GRACE**

+ When Elisha blessed the jar of oil, the house of the widow was filled with joy;

He saved her two sons from bondage, and provided the family with all their needs

+ Come, O God of Elisha into my house;

For my soul became a widow, and her sons were about to become slaves;  
The devil, like a violent creditor came to take my children into bondage;  
He came to take my mind, emotions, senses, talents, and all my possibilities;

Come into my house, and pour the oil of Your grace in me;  
Who can fill all my empty vessels but You?

Why should I beg from men: compassion, money, or a word of commendation?

When You, my rich Father satisfies all my need?

+ A notable woman set an upper room for Your prophet, where he would find comfort;

Grant me to deliver my depths to You, to set in them a holy temple for Yourself;

Where You may dwell, and invite Your heavenly friends;

Yes, Come and dwell in me; and turn my depths into a joyful kingdom.

+ You take away the barrenness of my soul;

You grant me children of Yourself, whom I labor to Your account;

In case my only begotten soul dies; or that of my brother perish;

To whom shall I resort, except to You?

You are the Life, and You are the resurrection;

You are the Destroyer of death; You are the Grantor of conquest;

Let my body attach to Your body; and let my soul get united to You;

For whoever unite with You, from him death will flee away;

And to him, the eternal life will run forth.

+ The multitude gathered together around You, seeking to hear Your words;  
You satisfied their souls with Your commandments; and their stomachs  
with Your food;

No one comes to You and return empty;

You satisfy him, and quench his thirst, to let him, in his turn, give to others;

Glory be to You, O Bread of heaven;

Glory be to You, who satisfies everyone.



# CHAPTER 5

## OUR GREAT JORDAN

This chapter showed our commitment to work to the account of the kingdom of God; whatever is our position in society, or our role in life; to walk in the spirit of the divine wisdom and not according to human assumptions; and to seek the glory of God, and not the glory and riches of the world.

This chapter narrates to us the story of a girl captivated by the Aramites in one of the battles, taken to a foreign land with no father, mother, sister or brother; with no relative to satisfy her emotions; with no priest to support her soul, and to pray for her sake; and no Holy Book in her hand. She lost her freedom and her humanity, and came to be submitted to others to control her life... . In spite of all that, her spirit was not broke down, nor she grumbled against God, but testified to the work of God before the foreign commander of the Aramite army; and courageously moved history; something in which the king of Israel failed to do.

The girl testified to the exalted work of God in the land of bondage, and brought the pagan commander into faith and to believe in the power of baptism; when the Israeli king, the one with authority, only tore his clothes, and did not recognize the possibilities of God in his, and his land's life.

With faith, the commander believed the captive girl; and with a spirit of humility he listened to his servants who appealed to him to do according to the counsel of the prophet Elisha.

The little girl who achieved a preaching work among the Gentiles, was a symbol of the church at its beginning; or of the apostles and the disciples. the few remnants who preached among the Gentiles. And the king who refused to work represents the Jewish nation, by whose denial and lack of faith, did not receive the divine work.

The most amazing thing in this chapter is how the foreign commander discovered the secret of our Jordan, that alone, could grant the new birth; our amazing Jordan, sanctified by the Lord Jesus Christ, to let us enjoy the birth from the water and the Spirit.

- + By coming and dipping in the water of the Jordan, Naaman, the Syrian commander, has been a measure of the purity of the souls of the believers baptized by Christ from their sins The location where Naaman dipped in the Jordan was where the ark of the covenant (stood) in the time of Joshua the son of Nun; and where the Lord Christ, the Son of God, was baptized, to turn the symbol to an actual fact.
- + The people – who were foreigners – who were lepers before they were baptized in the secret River; were purified by the sacrament of baptism, from the stains of their souls and bodies. Yes indeed, their coming salvation was proclaimed by the example of Naaman.

(St. Ambrose)

- + The River Jordan is the only River to receive the firstfruit of holiness and blessing, and to become a source of the grace of baptism to flow on the whole world.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

- + No other River can cure leprosy from man, if he enters into it with faith, and cleanses himself in Jesus Christ.

(The scholar Origen)

1- The testimony of a captive girl	1 - 4
2- The wrong assumption by the king of Aram	5 - 7
3- The need for the Jordan	8 - 14
4- The glory of God, and not of the world	15 - 19
5- By choosing to become rich, Gehazi became poor	20 – 27

### **1- THE TESTIMONY OF A CAPTIVE GIRL:**

The captive girl and the servants of Naaman played an active role in consummating this miracle. The girl gave a testimony to the Lord, which the king of Israel did not perceive. And the servants of Naaman encouraged their master to obey the instructions of the prophet, by which he came to enjoy being healed, and to enjoy as well faith in God, Savior of humanity.

So God works through captives, servants, and those with little talents, to play a role beyond the capacity of those of exalted positions and great talents.

*“Now, Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor; but he was a leper” (1)*

The Lord, being God of all humanity, who cares for all, we hear here how He gave salvation to Aram; most probably before Assyria.

Leprosy at that time has been one of the most serious and un-curable diseases, like Aids nowadays; Those inflicted by it were driven out of the cities, to live in isolated camps. Naaman's leprosy, most probably, was in its early stages; and he anticipated that the time would soon come for him to forsake his position as the commander of the army because of his disease.

Naaman, who had such a unique personality; that the Holy Book testified that *"Because of him, the Lord had given victory to Syria"* (1); Yet he listened to the counsel of his wife; who, in her turn, with the spirit of humility, listened to the counsel of her little captive maidservant (2-4); And he listened, as well to the counsel of his servants who used to call him, "our father".(13-14)

*"And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife"*  
(2)

Aram was close to the north-eastern border of the Northern kingdom of Israel; and there were often battles between the two nations. In David's days, Aram used to pay tributes to Israel; but in the days of the prophet Elisha it increased in power, and often attacked Israel in an attempt to put fear and disturbance in the people's hearts, and carried with them captives, among whom was the little girl mentioned here.

*"Then she said to her mistress, 'If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria. For he would heal him of his leprosy'"* (3)

Being proud of her God, she believed in His capacity to heal even a pagan of his leprosy.

Elisha had a residence in Samaria, capital of Israel, where the king and his elites used to live. In this he differed from the prophet Elijah, who used to live in the wilderness and on the mountains, and had no permanent residence anywhere. Elisha's reputation was common among all people, that that little captive girl heard of him, and perceived his possibilities in the Lord. Her faith surpassed that of the king of Israel; and with her love, though a captive, she moaned together with a pagan leper..

+ Naaman, commander of the Aramite army, by the counsel of a little captive girl, coming to the blessed Elisha to heal him of his leprosy; was a symbol of the Gentiles. The little captive girl who came from Judah, and told her mistress that if her master went to the blessed Elisha, he would restore him to health, was a symbol of prophecy. Despite the fact that prophecy at that time was confined in Judah alone; yet its blessed knowledge had to reach the surrounding nations as well. Hence Naaman listened to the counsel of the little captive girl and went to Elisha; the way the Gentiles heard about the Lord Christ and came to Him. Coming to Elisha, Naaman was healed of his leprosy; and coming to the Lord Christ, the Gentiles were purified of the leprosy of the sins.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

+ That little captive girl was a symbol of the church of God that was assembled from the Gentiles, enslaved before to sin, when she did not have the freedom of grace; by whose ordinance, the foolish nations heard the word of prophecy in which they formerly doubted, but coming to believe in it, they had to cleanse themselves from the defilement of sin.

Before he was healed, Naaman had doubt in his heart , but you, having been healed, should have no doubt.

*“And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, ‘Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel’” (4)*

## **2- THE WRONG ASSUMPTION BY THE KING OF ARAM:**

Our wrong human assumptions often may cause for us spiritual, material, and social troubles.

In this chapter, the king of Aram wrongly assumed that it is the king of Israel who will heal Naaman of his leprosy; and because of his wrong assumption, war could have happened between Aram and Israel.

Naaman, as well, wrongly assumed that his healing would happen by just encountering the prophet Elisha, when he puts his hand on him to pray to God to heal him. And if it was not for the intervention of his wise servants, he would have

returned home in disgrace and bitter soul, and would not have been healed. ... Naaman, as well, wrongly assumed that the two rivers of Damascus – Abanah and Pharpar were better than all the rivers of Israel.

*“So the king of Syria said, ‘Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel’. So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing” (5)*

The king of Israel at that time was most probably Jehoram the son of Ahab; and it was not feasible for the king of Aram to write that request to the king of Israel. Although it was obvious that at that time there was peace between the two nations, yet with some kind of apprehension, as is clear from what the king of Israel did and say (8).

The gifts carried by Naaman refer to his riches and his great need to get rid of his leprosy. In the old days the people used to deal by gold and silver by weight and not by cash; and the gifts even between friends used to be gold, silver, clothes, or sheep. Clothes were among the gifts as a kind of appreciation, cherishing, and honoring. In the present case, they must have been very precious clothes befitting as a gift from the commander of the army.

Samson promised to give clothes to whoever solve his riddle (Judges 14: 12-13, 19). Even king Solomon in all his glory, did not refuse to accept such precious gift (2 Chronicles 9: 24); Daniel put on purple, presented by the king to honor him (Daniel 5: 9); and we are told about a famous poet in the ninth century who, when he died left behind 100 set of complete attires, 200 shirts, and 500 turbans. And the Hindos at the end of a feast, still give new clothes to every guest who attend the celebration.

*“Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, ‘Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy’” (6)*

The message from the king of Aram did not refer to the prophet, but asked only to heal Naaman, a request which seemed so ridiculous that the king of Israel assumed that it is meant to stir up war between the two kingdoms.

*“And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, ‘Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him from his leprosy? Therefore, please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me’” (7)*

The faith of the little captive girl was greater than that of the king; for by her faith she moved the commander of the army of Aram, to seek healing from the God of Israel; while the king of Israel revealed his lack of faith. He was most probably Jehoram the son of Ahab, who had then a good relationship with the king of Aram; but his name was not mentioned in the book because of his lack of faith. The Holy Book here concentrated on the work of God through the prophet Elisha.

Ben Hadad king of Aram sent Naaman to the king of Israel, with the assumption that he had authority to order the prophet; and that healing could be purchased with money. As to the king of Israel, he knew nothing about the power of God.

The king of Israel assumed an ulterior intention in the king of Aram, to find an excuse to enter into a battle against him; he did not think of asking the counsel of the prophet Elisha, because he could not imagine that he can heal a leper by the power of God; he did not perceive that it is God who *“kills and makes alive”* (2

kings 5: 7), that the days of man are known by God, and that He has the absolute power.

- + *“Since his days are determined; ... You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass”* (Job 14: 5).; designated by our Creator for everyone, not only in years and months, but even in days and hours; and could never be altered. .... Do not you know that many could be cured from a deadly disease, while others, in good health, would die all of a sudden? ... Do not you know that some may fall from high places and no harm would happens to them, while others, while walking, die with a wrong step?;...Do not you know that some would float on a wooden board from a sunken ship, and safely reach the coast, while others go down on board their ship within the safety of the harbor, where no one expect it?

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, ‘Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel’”* (8)

Tearing the clothes refers to immense grief, as well as to inability to realize a certain thing requested.

- + The prophet was full of the Holy Spirit, the Revealer of secrets;  
He could easily heal illnesses, performs powers, support the weak; and appease the wounded;  
His might was well known by the Hebrews; and his good news disturbed the Aramites;

His power to heal became like a fountain; that ran to quench the thirst of the Israelites; and flowed over the Aramites.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha” (9)*

St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi gives us a portrait of how Naaman, standing at the door of Elisha, being the commander of the Aramite army, expected to have a special reception, but was dismayed to find that the prophet did not care to come out to receive him. The prophet Elisha probably refrained from getting in touch of the leper Naaman, lest he would probably catch the disease; for, according to the statutes, it carries a kind of defilement.(13); while St. (mar) Ephraim presents to us another reason for not coming out to receive him.

+ Now, the question is: Why did Elisha not let *Naaman* enter his house to see him?

On the first aspect, for he, being the commander of the army of Aram, was in the service of king Ben Hadad (1 Kings 20: 1-43); who killed many of the children of Israel, destroyed their land, and his hands were covered with their innocent blood.

And on the second aspect, because he was a leper; and, according to the statutes of the law, he should not be touched.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, ‘Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean’” (10)*

That request could be counted as a call to Naaman to be humble, and to trust in God alone (15). And according to the Scholar Tertullian, washing himself in the water of the Jordan seven times refers to being ridden by seven deadly sins: idol-worship, blasphemy, murder, adultery, defilement, false testimony, and cheating. It is as though every time he plunges in the water, he would be purified of one of those sins.

- + The prophet Elisha proclaimed ahead the indescribable riches of the water of baptism; and at the same time, that it will extend to whoever intend to receive faith; when he sent Naaman the leper, the foreigner who sought healing, and counseled from him to plunge seven times into the Jordan; in an attempt for such a foreigner to learn that God found rest on the seventh day; or he referred to the divine Spirit in a symbolic way.

*“But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, ‘Indeed I said to myself, he will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy’” (11)*

Naaman, as a great commander, probably counted Elisha’s behavior, and his counsel, as an insult to him, and that his command was ridiculous; for how would this river be compared to the two rivers of Damascus – Abanah and Pharpar? (12).

According to St. John Chrysostom, he who suffers some trouble, seeks in one way or another, some seen and touched signs.

Elisha, however, was far from being a proud man, but, on the contrary, he refrained from coming out of the house, and from touching Naaman, for he intended mainly to direct the sick man’s thoughts to that it is the Lord who will heal him; and to present to mankind a lesson in faith about baptism, and receiving the Gentiles as members in the body of the church.

- + Elisha did not move to receive Naaman, despite his knowledge that his action might offend him; but he was elaborately obeying the law. He sent Naaman to get cleansed in the water of the River Jordan. The Lord Christ, on the other hand (when he healed the leper); in order to show that He heals him, not as a minister, but as the Supreme Lord, He touched the leper (Matthew 8: 2-3); on account that his hand could not be defiled by touching him; and the leper's body will be he cleansed and renewed by His holy hand; ... For as we well know, He came to heal,, not only the bodies, but souls as well.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + It is not unexpected to see such a great commander of the army to have such thoughts, and to be so stirred up; for he could not get in touch with the hidden secret of that un-natural healing.
- + Naaman was overcome by anger, for he had no knowledge that our Jordan could purify those defiled by leprosy; and not the prophet, whose role was just to direct the leprous to the source of healing. Not understanding the great secret of the Jordan, he said: *"Indeed I said to myself, he will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy"(11)*. But he did not know that putting the hand on the leper to heal him could only be done by the Lord Christ (Matthew 8: 1-3). When the leper beseeched Him, saying *"Lord, if You are willing, , You can make me clean"*, He did not only say to him: *"I am willing, be cleansed"*, but He touched him, and he was instantly healed. Naaman was wrong, and did not know that all the other rivers were less than the Jordan, as far as healing power is concerned.

(The scholar Origen)

The scholar Origen continues his talk, confirming that the River Jordan is superior to all the other rivers, in that it is the only river capable of healing leprosy.... On the rivers of Babylon the Israelites sat, and remembering Zion, they cried. Being captivated to Babylon, when they drank water, other than the holy water of the Jordan; they longed to the River of salvation. ... And the prophet Jeremiah rebukes those who drink from the water of Sihor (Jeremiah 2: 18)

There is great difference between the mind of God and that of man. While man assumes that he can realize everything he wants; God presents to us His salvation, to be satisfied, and glorified by His free grace (Isaiah 55: 1; Romans 3: 24; Revelation 22: 17). .... While man intends to choose the ways of salvation according to his own will; God intends for us to deliver our life and our will into His hands. .... While man sees the way to salvation as difficult and impossible; God sees it simple as cleansing in the River Jordan, presented to every soul longing for it.

Elisha did not come out to receive Naaman, not out of pride on his part, but to direct Naaman's mind to the Lord and not to his person; and to that healing is from the Lord and not from the prophet.

+ While Naaman the Syrian assumed that his leprosy could not simply be healed by the water of the River Jordan; What seemed to him as impossible, God by His great grace made possible.

+ The leper Naaman, the commander of the armies of the children of Esau, heard that the prophet could heal the leper;

His name shined all over the land like the sun, and the sick from all over the place gathered together at his door;

Among them, came the leper Naaman, to take off him the shirt of leprosy;

The commander with his shirt of leprosy came and stood at his door, and begged him to heal him;

But the amazing prophet sent to him counsel to go and dip in the River Jordan seven times;

Naaman, despising the words he heard, turned and went away in a rage;;

He said in anger: Why did he not come out to receive me and heal my leprosy?

If that was this way, there are many rivers in Aram, where I could go and wash myself to be healed.

*“Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus better than all the rivers of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage” (12)*

**Abanah:** Nowadays the River Baradah; has its source is in the Eastern Mountains; And the other River ‘**Pharpar**’ has its source in Mount Sheikh. The River Abanah runs in the middle of Damascus. These two rivers, providing the

lands around Damascus with their rich water, make these provinces of the most fertile in the whole world; contrary to the rivers of Israel and Judah that mostly run in deep and rocky valleys.

Thinking in himself that he has at home better rivers where, most probably he used to bathe, but was not cured of his leprosy, he despised the command of the prophet; but according to the counsel of his servants, and their exhortation, he consented and dipped in the river; and once he was healed, he perceived that it is not the water itself that purifies man, but the grace of God.

- + It may seem to Naaman the Syrian that it is impossible for water to cleanse sins,. The same way, it would seem impossible for sins to be forgiven by repentance; But the Lord Christ gave this authority to His apostles, which moved ahead through the work of priesthood; And what seemed impossible became possible.

(St. Ambrose)

*“And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, ‘My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash and be clean?’” (13)*

Naaman was indignant, because, having lived all his days a hero, he despised to get healed through such a little kind of treatment, the simple treatment of faith. This is how many people feel, despising the free gift of God – the simple faith; do not trusting that our Christ can cleanse and purify, and even grants sonhood in the water of baptism.

- + Naaman eventually listened to the counsel of his friends, and was purified. This means that he accepted the cross of Christ. ... The Gentiles did not believe in Christ when He talked by Himself; but they later came with a godly spirit to the sacrament of baptism after the preaching of the apostles.

If we add to this the fact that Elisha did not touch Naaman nor baptize him; we remember that the Lord Christ did not personally come to the Gentiles, but through His apostles, to whom He said: "*Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (See Matthew 28: 19)..

Notice also that Naaman, the symbol of the Gentiles, has restored his health in the same river the Lord Christ, by His baptism, sanctified it later on.

Believing that he could restore his health through his own rivers (2 kings 5: 12), Naaman refers to the fact that mankind assumed that they could depend upon their own will and self worthiness, which, without the grace of Christ could not give them health.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- + To be purified from the illnesses: of the soul, and of the body, it was necessary for Naaman to represent in his person, the purification of all nations through the cleansing of renewal, that starts in the River Jordan, being the father and initiator of baptism.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (14)*

Although he was upset, counting that the prophet has not given him his due honor; beside his seemingly unreasonable command, he meekly listened to the counsel of his servants, and did not persist upon his position. Like a little child, he was easily angered and easily pacified. He accepted the counsel of his faithful servants who found in him such a kind of fatherhood, to call him “our father”. He went and dipped in the Jordan ; and passed the test of faith. After the first six dips, he did not feel any change in his condition; but, all of a sudden, with the seventh dip, he was healed of his leprosy, as well as of his pride and arrogance.

In his attack on Mercion, who despised the material, and refused to call the Lord Christ “the Creator”; and like most of the Gnostics, who see Him, greater than to be the Creator of material; the scholar Tertullian saw in the prophet Elisha a symbol of the material (the water of the Jordan), by which Naaman the Syrian was healed. ... If that is the work of the minister Elisha; How much more would be the work of His Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, who created the material, and used to heal by His word?

Through redemption, the believer enjoys the new birth; becomes a new creation in the image of His Creator; becomes a son of God in the water of baptism, by his union with the only begotten Son; becomes the New Maaman, about whom it is said: *“He went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (14)*. And in him the saying of the Lord Christ to Nicodemus, would be realized: *“Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3: 5-6)*.

- + No one was purified except Naaman the Syrian, who was not from Israel. Notice that those who are cleansed by the Spiritual Elisha – our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – are purified in the sacrament of baptism, and are cleansed from the literality of the law. Naaman went down in the Jordan, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child. ... Who is this little child? But he who is born in the (font) of renewal.

(The scholar Origen)

- + The cleansing of Naaman the Syrian, and not any of the children of Israel, has its significance all over the nations of the world, to be cleansed in Christ, their Light (Luke 2: 32); as though of the seven deadly sins: idol-worship, blasphemy, murder, adultery, fornication, false testimony, and cheating.

He cleansed himself in the Jordan seven times, as though once for every sin of the seven; And, because the one perfect work of baptism, is awesomely referred to Christ alone, He who established on earth, not only a proclamation of, but the active sacrament of baptism.

(The scholar Tertullian)

- + It was not without cause that the leper Naaman of the old was cleansed by baptism; but that was also meant for all of us, who are afflicted with the leprosy of sin, and unable to get cleansed. For by the holy water, and calling for the Lord, we would be cleansed of our old transgressions; and be spiritually renewed like newly born children; according to the proclamation of the Lord, saying: "*Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*" (John 3: 5).

(St. Erinaos)

- + By the amazing sacrifice, the prophet Elijah clearly proclaimed to us the rite of the sacrament of baptism, to be befittingly established later on. For, by the fire igniting in the water poured three times; it is clear that where the secret water is, there will be the ignited spirit that consumes the wicked, and enlighten the believers. ... Yes, his disciple Elisha, as well, when the leprous Naaman the Syrian came to him begging for healing, cleansed him in the water of the Jordan (2 kings 5); a clear reference to what will be done in the future by using water generally, and the dipping in the River Jordan particularly. . The River Jordan alone among all the rivers, received the firstfruit of sanctification and blessing, granting it as though from a fountain in the symbol of the grace of baptism. These are all references to the work of the new birth in baptism.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

- + It was not the water of the pool of Siloam that opened the eyes of him who was born blind (John 9: 7); and it was not the water of the Jordan that cleansed Naaman (5: 14); but the grace of the Lord that did. So it is for the water of atonement that cleanses us, but rather the name uttered that grants it to us.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

- + While the Syrian dipped seven times under the law, you have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Remember how you confessed the names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;

Notice the ordinance of things in this faith: Having been dead to the world, and resurrected in God; having been buried to the world in that element (the water); having been dead to sin, and resurrected to the eternal life;. You should, therefore, believe that this water is not without power.

- + You, O Lord, who saved the world, Save the soul of a single sinner; For that is the exaltation of Your personal compassion, by which You save the whole world, one by one; Elijah was sent to one widow (1 Kings 17: 9) And Elisha cleansed one man (2 Kings 5: 14) But you, O Lord Jesus, cleanse today thousands: In Rome, in Alexandria, in Constantinople, a multitude receive the word of God.

(St. Ambrose)

- + When Naaman dipped in the river, the symbol of baptism, "*His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child*" (2 Kings 5: 14). Notice, O beloved brethren, how this likeness is consummated in the Christian people; for you know that all those who are baptized are still called children, whether they are old or young. Those who were born from Adam and Eve, are born anew as children by Christ and the church. The first birth produce ones for death; while the second birth produce ones for life. The former produce the children of anger; while the second give birth to them anew as vessels of mercy; as according to the apostle: "*In Adam all die*" (1 Corinthians 15: 22).

Hence, as Naaman, a grown up man, have become like a little child through dipping seven times in the water of the River Jordan, so the

Gentiles, though they are 'old' because of their previous sins, they were renewed by the grace of baptism, in such a way that no trace of the leprosy of the original or the present sin would remain in them ... In them, therefore, the saying of the apostle to the church, concerning the Lord Christ, : *“that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having a spot or wrinkle”* (Ephesians 5: 27)

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- + Through punishment, his body is consumed, *“to return to the days of his youth”* (Job 33: 25). By falling into sin, the first man was driven out of the pleasures of paradise, and was bound to the misery of this mortal life. By suffering that punishment, we came to feel how serious was our sin that we committed through the seduction of the serpent; for outside God, we find nothing but sorrow in our body suffering of torture and death. That is why the Lord, by His amazing ordinance, and through punishment, altered what dwelt upon us as a result of committing sin.

Through punishment, man's body is consumed *“to return to the days of his youth”*; As though he says: Through the punishment of death, man's age retracted to return to the days of his youth; namely, he is renewed to the perfection of his previous life; will not remain in the condition he came to be, but by his salvation, he will return to the pleasures of the condition, he was originally created... As we are brought forth to such power of the new life, not on our own, but through the Savior Lord Jesus Christ; I wish He would say to him who is under punishment: [Go back to your days of youth!].

(St. Gregory the Great)

Was it not enough for him to dip in the water of the Jordan only once? The spiritual work or the spiritual healing, according to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, does not submit to figures. ... But the figure 7 refers to rest, for God created the world in six days, and had rest in the seventh day. ... In the book of Proverbs, it came that Wisdom (the Word of God) built her house, namely the church, in magnificent beauty, and set it upon seven pillars; ... And God created the time set upon the week, formed of seven days. The prophet intended to bind the miracle of cleansing from leprosy to the work of creation itself; For cleansing the leper was not through the personal power of Elisha, but was the work of the Creator, who finds his comfort and pleasure in cleansing humanity from the leprosy of sin; and in sanctifying the time, to be pure in the present world, as a deposit of the perfect holiness in the life to come. . God created time for the sake of man, to be holy and pure.

- + He went and dipped seven times as he was commanded, and came back cleansed of his leprosy by a great power;  
Why did he order him to dip seven times, when the power was one, and does not submit to figures?  
The creation was consummated in six days; and the Creator had rest in the seventh day;  
That is why the seventh day was honored, for it is the crown of creation;  
Wisdom built for herself a great house full of beauty, and supported it upon seven pillars;  
The days of the week, on which the world is set, stand like pillars to sustain it;  
That is how the prophet taught the Aramite, the secret of the Sabbath, by commanding him to dip seven times to be cleansed;

And in case he inquire about this figure, the secret of the Sabbath will show itself;

In the Torah, the beauty of this figure is revealed, by which the Creator made the worlds;

Cleansing the Aramite was a miracle; and with it, there had to be also teaching;

In case he inquires about the secret of the seven times, he will be referred to the Torah with its treasures;

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

### **3- THE GLORY OF GOD AND NOT OF THE WORLD:**

Naaman stood in awe when he perceived that his leprosy is gone, and his body is restored like that of a little child, as though God created it anew. His heart, as well as his tongue were opened to testify to God by a life of thanksgiving and praise. He did not hasten to set forth back to Damascus to encounter the king and his own family, but returned to the prophet to offer God a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

*“Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him, and he said, ‘Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel;*

*Now, therefore, please take a gift from your servant” (15)*

As Naaman was cleansed of leprosy, it became possible for Elisha to receive him. Naaman stood before him as someone who has got in touch with God’s love and might, to proclaim his faith in Him.

Every nation had its own gods; but Naaman perceived and proclaimed that God of Israel is the only true God in the whole world, before Whom he humbled himself and in whom he trusted.

His exalted personality was shown in that, in his joy for being cleansed of his leprosy, he did not hasten to return to his land, but returned to give thanks to the prophet; the way the Samaritan leper returned to thank Jesus who cleansed him, although the nine others, who belong to the ancient people of God, did not (Luke 17: 12-19).

Having previously counted, in being cleansed in such a small river as the Jordan, there is some sort of insult to his position as the commander of the army, he had to humble himself and obey; to find out that the Lord Christ Himself, the Cleanser of all sins, will be baptized in that same river; and to see how heaven opened up, and the Holy Spirit transfigured. ... Naaman had to perceive that God's ways are different from those of men; ... that God wants from us to obey Him, more so than to offer countless sacrifices; ... and that God, with a few or many, is capable to give salvation.

Naaman, a thanksgiving man, returned to the prophet Elisha to thank him; although he had to travel 30 miles more to do so. He could have sent a messenger to the prophet, with a message of thanksgiving. But he was indeed cleansed physically, as well as spiritually.

St. John Chrysostom, talking about thanksgiving, even in the midst of suffering, said: [Offering thanksgiving, while we are in joy, and out of fear, is something, and offering it while suffering is something else... Nobody can claim that the righteous 'Job' did not grieve because of what dwelt upon him; nor that he was not crushed by it in his depths. Nobody can deny him great commendation for his righteousness ... The devil does us harm, not to take what we have, and leave us with nothing; but his intention is that, while suffering this we would blaspheme against God].

['Job' was crowned and became famous, not that he was not shaken, despite the limitless tribulations that dwelt upon him, and the shameful attitude of his wife; but that he kept on giving thanks to God in every case; ... not just when he was rich, but when he became poor as well; ... not only while he was in perfect health, but even when his body was inflicted with boils... not that all those things happened gradually to him, but when it came upon him all of a sudden like a mighty violent tempest, on his person, as well as on his household].

+ Naaman got cleansed, his leprosy disappeared, and he acquired a new body like that of a little child;

When he heard the prophets words he despised them as unreasonable; and when he was healed, he was overwhelmed with awe;

The mighty power that created the world in seven days, altered Naaman's body after dipping seven times in the Jordan.

When his body was restored to health; his heart was overjoyed, and his soul was filled with faith in God;

When his leprosy fled away, and with it the doubts in his mind,

He returned with joy to the door of the man of God to praise God;

He proclaimed that there is no other God in the whole earth, except in Israel, before whom he will worship;

*"But he said, 'As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing'. And he urged him to take it, but he refused" (16)*

It was not possible for the man who chose poverty by his own free will for the sake of the Lord, to bow before Naaman the Syrian to receive gold, silver, and clothes; which he had forsaken from the depth of his heart, and counted as trash for the sake of his preoccupation with divinity.. Because the love of money could never crawl into his heart, he, by the Lord, could cleanse Naaman from his leprosy. ... By God leprosy fled away from Naaman; and by God Elisha despised

the wealth of the world.... God's might proclaimed itself by the conquest over leprosy through the cleansing of Naaman; and proclaimed its greatness in the prophet Elisha when he despised the love of money..... By that, Elisha became a symbol of the disciples and apostles, those who obeyed the divine commandment; had no silver or gold; but introduced the mighty name of Jesus to humanity.

While the righteous stand with confidence before God, to grant them the holy life (1 John 3: 21), saying, together with Elisha: "*As God is living before whom I stand*" (2 kings 5: 16); the wicked, on the other hand, flee away from the face of the Lord; because, according to St. Ambrose, The guilty conscience becomes so weighed down, to punish itself by itself, without need for a verdict by a judge; Although it intends to be covered, yet it is naked before God].

Through sin, man loses his inner peace, and enters into a condition of terror. Concerning the hiding of Adam from the face of God, St. Dedymus the blind said: [Having sought the knowledge through the experience of evil, and forsaking the pure knowledge of God, Adam hid from the face of God. According to the scholar Origen, the wicked hide from the face of God, as it is written: "*They have turned their back to Me, and not their face*" (Jeremiah 2: 27).

The prophet Elisha refused to take anything gift from Naaman, so that the later would not think that God's mercies and gifts could be purchased; and to confirm to him that, when we stand before God, He does not look at our riches, positions, or processions, but only to our persons, and gives all goods as grace. God's pleasure is that all mankind would enjoy the true happiness.

+ Elisha refused to take the royal gifts, despite repeated pressure on him to do, on account of that this is a very obvious and awesome symbol of the secret of healing; granted for free to all nations on earth by our Lord, through His apostles; according to His promise to them on the tongue of

His prophet Isaiah, saying: "*You have sold yourselves for nothing; and you shall be redeemed without money*" (Isaiah 52: 3).

And as all illnesses are a kind of bondage, it was important for the prophet to confirm the healing in the seventh dipping in the water; analogous to the command and the promise of the statute of the law, to set the slaves free in the seventh year (Exodus: 21: 1-3; Deuteronomy 15: 12).

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

- + The Aramites brought forth silver, gave it to Elisha, and begged him to take it as a 'Corban';  
Riches and poverty wrestled together at the threshold of that divine poor man;  
Who trampled with his feet upon that kind of riches, and refused to take it;  
It was not befitting of him who cried out, and drove leprosy away, to stretch his hand to take it;  
He drove both the leprosy, and the money away from his threshold;  
Despite much and repeated pressure to take the silver from him, he was not moved; for he despised all the treasures of the kings;  
Faith was burning in Naaman's soul; and the flame of the love of God ignited in his heart  
He strongly desired to give the silver; but the man who hated to acquire riches refused;  
Leprosy was driven out by God; while despite of the riches was by the prophet;  
The beauty of his soul was apparent, in fleeing away from the riches, that burn a multitude by its fire;  
The love of money that kills even saints, was killed by the prophet, and trampled under his feet;

The commandment given by the Son of God to His apostles, to hate gold, was engraved in the prophet's soul like one of them;  
By the exalted eye of prophecy, the prophet, seeing the way of the apostles, he walked in it with no processions.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

Elisha refused to take any of the gifts of Naaman, lest the later think that God's mercies and gifts could be purchased with money; He also intended to confirm to him that, when we stand before God, He will not look at our persons, wealth, positions, or processions; but He gives all everything as grace. His pleasure is for all men to enjoy the true happiness.

- + The prophet rejected the gifts of the great man, in spite of the pressure he applied on him several times; as an obvious and awesome symbol of the secret of healing granted free to all nations on the face of the earth by our Lord through His apostles, whom he had promised ahead through the prophet Isaiah, saying: "*You have sold yourselves for nothing; and you shall be redeemed without money*" (Isaiah 52: 3).

As all illnesses are a kind of bondage, it was necessary that the prophet fixes the healing after the seventh dip in the water of the Jordan; conforming to the fact that the statutes of the law command and promise the liberation of the slaves at the seventh year (Exodus 21: 1-3; Deuteronomy 15: 12).

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“So Naaman said, ‘Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord’” (17)*

With humility, Naaman asked permission from the prophet to take two mule-loads of the dust of Israel, to spread in Aram, and build on them an altar for the Lord; an appreciation of the holiness even of the earth of Israel. Based upon a wrong assumption that any god would not be worshipped away from His own land, Naaman believed that Jehovah could not be worshipped except on the dust he brought from the earth of Israel.

- + His request to take two mule-loads of the dust of the promised land, was intended to bring shame upon Israel; that a foreigner believed that even the dust of the earth of their land is holy by God, while the Hebrews did not believe that God dwells in His prophets.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“Yet in this thing, may the Lord pardon your servant; when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord please pardon your servant in this thing”*  
(18)

Naaman counted worshipping in the temple of Rimmon, one of his political duties as the commander of the army of Aram; But he promised not to offer any burnt offering or sacrifices to other gods, but to the Lord.

**“Rimmon”**, Probably one of the famous gods of Aram; its name, according to some, refers to the worship of the sun; while, according to others, it is derived from the word ‘Raman’, meaning a high place, also bound to the worship of the sun. Rimmon was the god of the storms and tempests;

**“Leans on my hand”**, It was the custom of some kings and queens of the old to lean on the hand of an officer of the court or the commander of the army. It came in the consummation of the book of Esther, that she, as the queen approached the king together with two maidservants: one to lift up the train of her robe, and the other for the queen to lean on her hand.

*“Then he (the prophet) said to him, ‘Go in peace’. So he departed from him a short distance” (19)*

Naaman did not ask the prophet Elisha to allow him to worship the god Rimmon, but told him that what he does was within his duties toward his master the king; confirming that he will never offer a burnt offering to other gods except to the living God alone.

While Naaman strived to worship the One Living God, and to get rid of the pagan worship, Israel; perverted to idol-worship.

According to some, the prophet response *“Go in peace”*, implies his consent on the two requests: allowing him to take two mule-loads of the earth of Israel, and forgiving him for his nominal worship in the temple of Rimmon; And according to others, by that response, he left it to him to take whatever decision he might choose according to his own conscience.

**5- BY CHOOSING TO BECOME RICH, GEHAZI BECAME POOR:**

*“But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, ‘Look, My master has spared Naaman the Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the Lord lives,*

*I will run after him and take something from him”* (20)

Gehazi assumed that he could become rich by few lies he would tell his master Elisha, and nobody will know what he has done; but God revealed it to the prophet. Gehazi did not perceive that by the riches he took, he became poor, and that the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to him and his descendants forever. The love of money made Gehazi commit a series of sins:

- 1- He sought a price for something he did not do.
- 2- By seeking money as a price for the free gift of God, namely for healing Naaman from leprosy, he gave Naaman a wrong portrait.
- 3- Intending to cover the situation up, he lost the feature of faithfulness and truth, and lied to the prophet, to become a son of the devil, the liar and father of liars.
- 4- The love of money corrupted Gehazi’s heart, and hindered his ministry to Christ, who later said: *“No one can serve two masters – God and mammon”* (Matthew 6: 24)

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is rich, made Himself poor, that by His poverty He would make us rich.

**“As God lives”**; a vow uttered by some without thinking, as a matter of habit; by which they break the divine commandment: *“Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain”* (Exodus 20: 7). .

Comparing between the prophet Elisha who testified to the amazing power of God, shown by rejecting the gold, silver, and all the riches of the world, and

Gehazi who, by loving wealth, it humiliated him and trampled him under its feet;  
St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi said:

- 1- The love of money, setting its nets for the slothful, Gehazi got caught in it, whereas Elisha soared above it.
- 2- The love of money is like fire, put off by Elisha, but ignited by Gehazi who was consumed by it.
- 3- The prophet defeated the sin of the love of money by the splendor of virtue (Christ); whereas his greedy servant was captivated by it.
- 4- The love of money motivated its captive to lie and steal.
- 5- The love of money made its captive so proud to assume that he was wiser than those he lied to them.

+ The love of money defeated by Elisha, made a snare for his slothful servant

Defeated by the master, it went back to his servant, and finding him slothful, it treaded on him and humiliated him.

The sin conquered by that great teacher, full of splendor, got back to his servant full of greed.

The teacher who rejected the wealth of the Aramite, saw what his servant did, and despised him for getting drunk by the love of gold;

His love for riches pierced him with its spear; to fall and to become a thief;

Having been overcome by the fire of the love of possessions, by his daring he became a robber;

He blamed his master, thinking in himself: Why has he rejected the gift of the Aramite for healing him?

Having been so drunk by the repulsive love of money, his own master became repulsive in his eyes;

Assuming that he could correct the alleged shortcoming of his master, he ran after Naaman, and said to him

[Some poor men came to my master; Please give a talent of silver for them]'

The commander of the army with a good heart, readily gave him silver and clothes;

He gave them double as much as he sought, which he took and hastened to go back to hide it.

*“So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from his chariot to meet him, and said, ‘Is all well?’” (21)*

Going down from his chariot was a kind of giving honor to the servant of the prophet, who previously conveyed to him the command of the prophet to dip in the water of the Jordan seven times, by which he was cleansed of leprosy.

*“And he said, ‘All is well; My master has sent me, saying, ‘Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments’” (22)*

A talent of silver, considered then a huge amount, equivalent to 300 Shekels, or about 70 pounds, needed two men to carry to Gehazi’s place of dwelling..

*“So Naaman said, ‘Please take two talents’. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed them to two of his servants, and they carried them on ahead of him” (23)*

Gehazi deceived Naaman, by claiming that the prophet does not seek it for himself, but to give two young sons of the prophets who used to come to the prophet to fulfill their needs.

*“When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand, and stored them away in the house, then he let the men go, and they departed” (24)*

The Hebrew word translated as “citadel” refers to a hill or to a house built in the form of a citadel or stronghold (2 Chronicles 27: 3; Micah 4: 8).

*“Now he went in and stood before his master. And Elisha said to him, ‘Where did you go, Gehazi? And he said, ‘Your servant did not go anywhere’ (25)*

The same way Gehazi lied to Naaman, he also did to his master Elisha.

The evil behavior makes us cover the evil with evil, Gehazi lied to Elisha and did not utter the truth (25); Indeed *“He who walks with integrity walks securely”* (Proverbs 10: 9). The love of money made Gehazi lose his reason, to forget that God has granted His prophet the gift to know the hidden things; which has previously stirred up the king of Aram.

+ That foolish Gehazi, Did he forget who his master is? Or has he got so drunk with the love of gold to lose reason?

What secret ever happened to be hidden from Elisha; to hide your silver from him?

The evil desire often covers up the face of the soul like a veil; to keep it from seeing the evil work;

If the conscience of man condemns him before he commits a sin, and if it reveals to him how repulsive his sin is, he may refrain from doing it;

But if the evil desire moved and hastened to work, it would annul the befitting control of the conscience;

The evil desire so blinded Gehazi to remember how his master has secret eyes that reveal the hidden things.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

According to St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian, Elisha made an attempt to give his servant the chance to reconsider his position, and return to God; but Gehazi, instead, went forth to hide his greed that occupied the depths of his heart; but his own mouth betrayed him.

- + Peter was not present when Ananias and Sapphira sold their possessions, but having been present by spirit; he said to them: *“Why has Satan filled your hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourselves? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your hearts?”* (Acts 5: 3,; 4). The illiterate Peter (Acts 4: 13), through the grace of the Holy Spirit, knew what the Greek philosophers did not.

So did Elisha, when he healed the leper Naaman for free, and so did his servant Gehazi when he took the reward of what he did not do, and hid it in the dark. But as the dark is not hidden from the men of God, when Gehazi came back, Elisha asked him: *“From where did you come, Gehazi?”* (2 kings 5: 22);.... From the darkness you came, and to the darkness you will go. ... The way you sold the healing of the leper, leprosy will be your inheritance. Elisha meant to say to him: [While I did according to the divine command: *“Freely you have received, freely give”* (Matthew 10: 8); you sold that free gift. ... By saying: *“Did not my heart go with you?”* (2 kings 5: 26). Elisha ment to say:[Although I was here bound by the body, God granted me the gift to see the hidden things that happen somewhere else}.... See how the Holy Spirit, not only takes ignorance away, but grants knowledge as well, and enlightens the spirit of men!

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

*“Then he said to him, ‘Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money, and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants?’” (26)*

The word “heart” here, does not only mean just Elisha’s knowledge of Gehazi’s shameful deed, but refers to the extent of bitterness of his depths for his behavior.

God sometimes allows for His faithful servants and godly men to enjoy the knowledge of supernatural things, yet within certain limits, and on a temporary basis, through His will for the benefit of His kingdom.

The evil desire so blinded the eyes of Gehazi, that he hastened to bury what he stole in earth; While Elisha’s insight was opened to see beyond the mountain, when he was bound within the walls of his own house.

+ He dug and buried; assuming that his master will never know; Getting drunk with the evil desire, his soul got darkened to reason;

He secretly hid his silver; then came to stand before Elisha, like an honest man;

But that godly man whose soul was filled with the Spirit of proclamations, asked him: *“From where did you come Gehazi?”*

The foolish man answered and said: *“Your servant did not go anywhere”*

Starting to rebuke and expose him, the prophet said to him: [My heart showed me a certain man got down from his chariot to meet you; and gave you silver which you hid];

The heart of that amazing prophet was like a mirror that spiritually reveals the hidden secrets;

While bound in his own home, he saw Naaman beyond the mountain;  
while he was giving the silver to Gehazi the robber.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

- + The way Elisha rejected the gift, through the faith he learned; You, as well, should walk according to the principles you learned from the Lord who said: "*Freely you have received, freely give*" (Matthew 10: 8). Do not delay in ministry; offer it for free. You are not allowed to evaluate the grace of God with money; And it is unbecoming of the priest of God to think about riches, but to concentrate on ministry.

Teach this to your servants; and if it happens that one of them did what Gehazi has done, send him away as the prophet did; count that what he wrongly got, will defile the body and soul; and say together with the blessed prophet: "*Is it time to receive money, and to receive clothing, olive groves, and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever*" (2 kings 5: 24-25).

- + By a miraculous way, and through the allowance of God, the prophet saw what took place; something that would not be doubted by anyone; How much more would the men of God enjoy, when the Lord comes to be all in all? And when the corrupt body weighs upon the soul, nor cause any hindrance before it? For the prophet did not lose the use of his eyes, although he was in no need of them to see his servant while he was away from him. .. Far it is of us to say that, in the life to come, the saints would not see God while their eyes are closed shut; but they will see Him by the Spirit.

(St. Augustine)

- + That is what it means to say that someone is “present in spirit”; the way Elisha was present with Gehazi; and said to him: “*Did not my heart go with you*” ... How amazing is the power of this gift, which makes all together as one, and qualify them to know the far off things; “*I already judged, as though I were present ...*” (1 Corinthians 5: 3).

(St. John Chrysostom)

. “*Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever’. And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow*” (27)

Leprosy, in the mind of Jews was bound to sin, for its distortion of the image of man, and its easiness of contagion. That is why the Lord used it sometimes for

chastisement, as He did to Miriam, Moses sister, on account of her talk against her brother (Numbers 12: 10); to Gehazi when he ran after Naaman the Syrian to seek gold and silver, and lied to his master the prophet Elisha (2 kings 5: 27); and to king Uzziah for forcing himself on the task of priesthood (2 Chronicles 26: 16-21).

Of leprosy, like of sin, the Jews, as well as all the nations, having no possibility to rid themselves on their own; felt the need for a divine intervention to do. Being purified of it was therefore considered “cleansing” from defilement, or from the traces of sin; as it is said about Naaman the Syrian when he was cleansed of it in the water in the Jordan (2 kings 5: 10-14); when the Lord Himself said, “*The lepers are cleansed*” (Matthew 11: 5); and when a leper beseeched Him saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can cleanse me”; and He answered him saying “*I am willing, be cleansed*” (Matthew 8: 1-3).

Leprosy referring to sin (Leviticus 13). Gehazi became a leper because of greed and deception; Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, because of jealousy and bitter criticism (Numbers 13); and king Uzziah because of pride (2 Chronicles 26: 16-23).

In the episode of Naaman, when Gehazi desired silver, and challenged the Lord, he acquired Leprosy; And when Naaman believed in the Lord he was cleansed of it.

The wise Solomon, likens the greedy, who attach wings to the wealth (Proverbs 23: 5), not to bring them forth to comfort, but to fly away from them and disappear, and cause them to lose all what they gathered. Whereas the satisfied man who knows how to use the world well, bears wings to fly by them as though to heaven.

Having been enslaved by the love of money, Gehazi, the servant of the prophet Elisha, ran after Naaman the Syrian, to take something from him (2 kings 5: 2); although he has got double as much as what he sought, but the leprosy of Naaman attached to him and his descendants forever (2 kings 7: 25). ... And when Achan the son of Carmi took of the accursed things: "*a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold*" (Joshua 7: 21), the wrath of God dwelt over the whole people because of him.

Naaman, the Gentile, became thankful to God; ... Gold, silver, and clothes, became as nothing in his eyes, ... and he returned to honor the prophet.. Whereas Gehazi the disciple of the great prophet, becoming greedy and a liar, taking from Naaman silver and burying it in the dust, his life became dust; ... and taking from him two sets of clothes to put on together with his descendants, he, together with them put on leprosy.

+ You cannot live according to God, if you love money and earthly pleasures.

(St. Abba Ithozorus)

+ Listen and endure from me, O brother, a point of view that may benefit you, whom I see, tempted by the devil of greed and the love of money. But if you listen to my counsel and took it out off your heart, you will consummate the work of God with perfection in this place, will ultimately become glorified, and the chastisements of God will not dwell on you. But if you do not listen to me, you will fall into what Gehazi has fallen; for I see his illness in you.

+ I say to you, O my son, There is nothing worse than adultery and the love of money. ... Adultery may be very bad indeed, and after a little while,

man will get disgusted because of its abhorrent smell; but the love of money comes from accumulation; and would seem pleasant at first; but because the soul is always greedy and never satisfied; man therefore should, through fear from the hosts of this time, seal the doors of the church of his wilderness. For certain persons will actually come to search for the inheritance of those who have fallen asleep, forgetting what is written: *"If riches increase, do not set your hearts on them"* (Psalm 62: 10 LXX); about which the apostle also says: *"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil"* (1 Timothy 6: 10).

+ If Gehazi happened to repent, he would be forgiven; but he arrogantly denied that he secretly received money as a price for healing Naaman the Syrian.

+ So was the destiny of Gehazi, Elisha's servant in the episode of Naaman; For although what he took was not by violence, yet it was by deception which may be as wrong.

- + The way Gehazi served the prophet Elisha for money; so did Judas, who attached himself to our Lord and Savior Jesus to acquire earthly wealth by cheating;; for it is written in the gospel: "*he was a thief, he had the money box, and he used to take what was in it*" (John 12: 6). Now, Gehazi who could have been qualified to benefit from the features and qualities of his master, the same way his master benefited from those of the blessed Elijah; but he was overcome by greed, and was worthy to have the horrible leprosy attach to him forever. And the way Judas lost the grace of apostleship through his love of money, and his life ended by hanging from a tree, so we understand the end will be of all those greedy and lovers of money, whose souls are inflicted inside by the leprosy of sin.
  
- + Anyway, we can consider Gehazi to be a symbol of the Jewish people; who were struck by the leprosy of sin, at the same time the gentiles were cleansed of its defilement. During the passion of Christ, as those miserable Jews cried out, saying, "*His blood be on us and on our children*" (Matthew 27: 25); and, "*Let Him be crucified*", they truly deserved to be inflicted by the leprosy of sin; at the same time the grace crossed over to us. The apostle Paul ultimately addressed them saying: *it was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of the everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles*" (Acts 13: 46). ..... Once the teaching of the apostle crossed over to the Gentiles, the leprosy of sin got attached to the miserable Jews.

(Father Caesarius. Bishop of Arle)

- + To the prophet Elisha, the secret was revealed, as though he was present with his servant Gehazi when he encountered Naaman the Syrian, and saw all what he did; rebuked him and put him to shame.  
O my disciple, Who taught you the love of gold?

Why, O Gehazi, Who taught you greed and robbery, that you did not see in me?;

Why the possessions, the vineyards, the olive trees, and the corrupt riches that will never endure in this evil world?

When I sent you to bring the dead child back to life, I commanded you not to bless or be blessed by anyone who might encounter you;

I commanded you to go quietly and hasten along the great way of prophecy;

But, being overcome by greed; let the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian, whose silver you took. be attached to you;

Acquire his leprosy, with his silver; for both are repulsive; Be the ridicule of the whole world;

In a divine way, the words of the saint were quickly realized; and the greedy Gehazi was clothed with leprosy;

The shirt of leprosy taken off by Naaman the Syrian, Gehazi put it on; and in both cases the power of the prophet was greatly shown;

By the word of his mouth, he took it off one, and put it on another;

He cleansed Naaman, and gave the defilement to the greedy Gehazi;

Despising the riches, Elisha gave conquest to poverty; and made greed the reproach all over the world;

As Gehazi desired to acquire clothes, the prophet gave him leprosy to acquire;

He made this example to all the lovers of wealth; and made the robber an example to the whole world;

By it, the whole world would learn that the love of money is a defilement, a hidden leprosy; repulsive to those who acquire it;

Let the crown of conquest be to him who rejects gold;

Blessed is He who granted Elisha such a beautiful name in the whole world.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 5**

### **LET ME ENTER WITH YOU INTO THE RIVER JORDAN TO ENJOY A NEW SPIRITUAL BIRTH**

- + Together with You O Lord, I enter into the River Jordan;  
Not to be cleansed like Naaman from the leprosy of the body;  
But to enjoy a new spiritual birth;  
By which You grant me sonhood of God Your Father;  
And my nature would be renewed by Your Holy Spirit ;  
I would dip together with You, and be buried together with You;  
Then would be risen together with You, bearing the power of Your  
Resurrection.
  
- + On the day of my birth in the Jordan, the heavenly hosts exulted;  
They glorified Your exalted grace of love;  
It set out of me, the dust, a heavenly citizen  
It took corruption away from me;  
And turned me into a holy temple for You.
  
- + By Your cross, You set me free from the bondage of the Tyrant devil;  
You granted me the glory of the children of God;  
Glory be to You, O the whole Love.

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# CHAPTER 6

## FAITH IN GOD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

This chapter exhorts us to have faith in “**God of the impossible**”; For God is glorified in His work when the solutions seem impossible. It presents us the following:

1- Elisha makes: the iron head of the ax float

1 – 7

2- Elisha comes to know the hidden secrets of the king of Aram

8 - 2

3- The heavenly hosts are revealed to Elisha by God

13 – 17

4- Elisha does what surpasses the human mind; he Sees good things instead of famine 18 – 33

### 1- ELISHA MAKES THE IRON HEAD OF THE AX FLOATS:

According to the laws of nature, iron dips in water, and wood floats. But when the iron head of an ax, borrowed by a son of the prophet falls, the prophet Elisha throws a wooden stick in the water, and the iron head floats.

Here, the compassionate fatherhood of Elisha is shown. The sons of the prophets resorted to him in everything big and small. When the location where they dwell became too small for them, they asked him to allow them to go to the Jordan to cut wood and build for themselves wider places to dwell. And when he did, they sought from him to accompany them, and he consented. Now, when a borrowed iron head of an ax fell in the water, he made the iron float against natural laws..

This miracle bore a symbolic work for our salvation. For, crawling into our life, sin turns us like the iron head that fell down into the depths of the river, like the Pharaoh of Egypt, who, together with his army “ *sank to the bottom like a stone*” (Exodus 15); and like the sinful woman seen by the prophet Zechariah as a basket of lead (Zechariah 5: 8). On the contrary, bearing the righteousness of God in us, instead of sinking into the depths, we come to be like a light cloud that soars up to heaven; as according to the apostle, about the saints: “*We are surrounded by a great a cloud of witnesses*” (Hebrew 12: 1); and St. Mary the mother of God was likened to a light cloud, As it written: “*Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt*” (Isaiah 19: 1)

Now, as sin has weighed our souls down to the depths, we shall not rise again except by the (tree), namely by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is our continuous strife, to bear the cross of our Lord Jesus, and to present it to those fallen into the depths of water to make them float, and to carry them forth to God.

Mentioning this miracle between the miracles of cleansing Naaman the Syrian, the commander of the army of Aram from leprosy, and that of saving the army of the kingdom, clearly shows that the prophet, respected by the kings and the leaders, does not disregard to care for his disciples, even in little things.

*“And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha; ‘See now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us’ (1)*

Those sons of the prophets were most probably those who dwelt in Jericho, close to the Jordan; which Elisha as their head often visited their schools and their places of dwelling..

+ These words were realized by the apostles in the following way: When they realized that (Israel) was not wide enough to befit the greatness of the gospel, they set forth and built a holy church to gather together the

righteous children of God. That was what the prophet Isaiah referred to ahead by saying: *“It is too small a thing that you should be My servant, to raise up the tribe of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel. I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles; that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth”* (Isaiah 49: 6).

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

- + Having had a godly mother and a priest father, did not make John the Baptist live in his father’s house, away from the temptations of the world; but led him to dwell in the wilderness, for he was seeking nothing else but to see Christ with his own eyes; Feeding on locusts and wild honey, prepared him to exhort on virtue and chastity. ... The spiritual descendants of the prophets – the monks of the old covenant – intended to build for themselves huts close to the waters of the Jordan, forsaking the crowded cities, to live on soup and wild herbs (2 kings 4: 38-30).

Now, you who live at home, let your cell be your paradise, where you can gather together the fruits of the Holy Book. Let these fruits be your favorite companions, and bring its commandments into your heart.

*“Please, let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam from there, and let make there a place where we may dwell’, And he answered, ‘Go’” (2)*

The work of Elisha was not a show of the exalted miraculous works; but bore a revelation of the salvation plan of God. In the episode of restoring the lost iron head of the ax, we see the Lord long to restore by the tree of the cross, the souls that plunged into the depths of the waters of sin. It confirms His exalted care for every big and small details of the life of His believers; perpetually intending to bring them forth to the eternal life.

*“The one said, ‘Please consent to go with your servants’. And he answered, ‘I will go;’” (3)*

The sons of the prophets were simple men, dwelling in huts they themselves built, that cost them nothing more than the labor of their hands. ... According to some, on account that the miracles did not come chronologically, but according to a mental, theological, and spiritual order that “one” mentioned here was Gehazi his servant, and that miracle happened before the cleansing of Naaman the Syrian;

*“So he went with them, and when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees” (4)*

*“But as one was cutting down a tree, the iron ax head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, ‘Alas, master, for it was borrowed’ ” (5)*

St. Jerome sees in the sons of the prophets in the time of Elisha, who were too humble and poor to possess their own ax, a portrait of a humble monastic life. .... Having no food, the servant of the prophet went into the field to gather herbs, found a wild vine, from which he gathered a lapful of wild gourds, and came and sliced them into the pot of stew (2 kings 4: 38, 39). And when the place where they dwelt got too narrow for them, they were committed to cut trees to build huts by an ax they borrowed (2 kings 6: 1-5).

In our commentary on the book of Exodus, we saw how the wicked were likened to lead that sank to the depths (Exodus 15: 5-10). Evil, like lead makes the soul go down (Zechariah 5: 8); whereas the saints never go down but may even walk on water. In them there is no heaviness of sin, and by the work of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, the lead is taken away from them to become light in weight.

According to the scholar Origen: [Our Lord and Savior, who truly knows no sin, walked on the water (Matthew 14: 25); and so did His disciple Peter, although he was a little terrified, for his heart was not completely pure, but carried some lead inside ... That is why the Lord said to him: "*O you of little faith. Why did you doubt?*" ( Matthew 14: 31). "*he, who will be saved, will be saved as trough with fire*" (1 Corinthians 3: 15); even if inside him was some lead to be melt..

Feeling that our souls are not truly ours, but are possessed by Him who acquired them by His precious blood, we would say, together with the son of the prophets: "*It was borrowed*".... Let us then, hold fast to the cross of the Lord, bring it forth into our depths to make them float; Let us hold it fast and present it to Him; for all what we have are borrowed from God to consummate His work (John 3: 27). We borrowed from Him the iron head of the ax, by which to cut evil, during our ministry to God.

+ Elisha the man of God who inquired: "*Where did it fall?*", was a symbol of our Lord who came among men; He, who asked Adam: "*Where are you?*".

The fall of the iron head of the ax into the dark depths, is a symbol of the heavy burden of the human nature, empty of light.

The wooden stick cast into the location of the lost iron head, is a symbol of the glorious cross.

The Jordan is truly the eternal Baptism; For our sake the Creator of the Jordan, chose to be baptized in the Jordan.

Ultimately, the iron head that floated over the water, and was brought back to the one who lost it, refers to that we, in the holy Baptism, soar up to the heavenly heights, to find the grace which is our old true dwelling

place..... In case someone assumed that this is not a prophecy about Baptism; why then is it mentioned in the Holy Book?!

+ He came down to us, to bring us up to the heavenly heights

(St. Dedyms the Blind)

+ It also refers to the fall of Adam. We were truly saved from sin by the great flood in the days of Noah (Genesis 6: 17); and at the fullness of ages.

You have been cleansed in the holy water of Baptism by our Lord, when He was baptized by John; when He accepted to eat together with the sinners; and when, in His passion, "*He was numbered with the transgressors*".(Mark 15L 28)..

The wood sank down, and the iron floated; for Emanuel died, was buried, and descended to the cursed levels of earth; and from there He came back; and by His ascension, Adam was raised from the depths up high.

*“And the man of God said, ‘Where did it fall?’. And he showed him the place. So he cut off a stick and threw it in there, and he made the iron float” (6)*

According to St. Ambrose, what happened here, was a symbol that reveals the helplessness of human strength to save; and that there is need for the power of God for salvation in the water of Baptism.

And according to St. John Chrysostom, water refers to Baptism; the iron head of the ax refers to the person baptized; and the wooden stick refers to the cross. Sinking into sin and death like iron, we enjoy the new life in the water of Baptism by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; and start a journey up to heaven.

And according to St. Erinaos, When the Holy Soul of the Lord Christ descended to Hades, a multitude of souls were raised, and appeared to many in their bodies; the same way the light wood sank into water, while the heavy iron floated.

Through the incarnation of the Word of God, the heavy earthly body became immortal, and light to be carried up to heaven after the resurrection.

- + By casting a stick of wood into the water of the Jordan, Elisha restored the iron head of the ax, by which the sons of the prophets intended to cut wood to build a dwelling place, where they would read and study the commandments of God. ...Similarly, our Christ saved us from our heavy sins by being crucified on the tree of the cross, and through sanctifying us by the water of baptism. We who sank in the mire of our deadly sins, He made a house of prayer and worship.

(St. Justin)

- + In creation, God brought things out of their opposites; For example, out of the weak sand, He made a wall to rein the mighty sea; ... He set dry land on the waters; namely what is dense and heavy on what is light and fluid. ... And through His prophet, and by a light stick of wood, He made iron

float on water.. In the same way, by the cross, He drew the world to Himself. The way water carried the earth, the cross carried the world.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Through Elisha, a light stick of wood made the heavy head of iron float on water from the depths of the river (6); And through weakening the body by fasting, that dries up the rivers of sensory desires, the soul of the monk would be restored from the sea of the worries of the world.

(Father Hyperechius the priest)

- + By saying: "*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity*" (Psalm 32: 1-2), David refers to the forgiveness of sins by wiping them out; ... "*having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*" (Colossians 2: 14). ... By a tree (in paradise) we, through Adam, came to be indebted to God; and by a tree (of the cross), our debt is paid back.

By so doing, the prophet Elisha referred to that the sure Word of God, we lost through our slothfulness through a tree; and as we were not on the way to get it back anew, it is befitting of us to have a new ordinance for the tree (namely the cross of Christ). For the Word of God is likened to an ax; by John the Baptist, who refers to it, saying: "*And even now, the ax is laid to the root of the trees*" (Matthew 3: 10); and according to the prophet Jeremiah, concerning the same issue, "*Is not my word like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*" (Jeremiah 23: 29). This word which

disappeared from us, as I already referred, was proclaimed by the ordinance of the tree. The way we lost it through a tree, it is proclaimed anew through a tree; to show the length, height, width, and depth inside it.

(St. Erinaos)

*“Therefore he said, ‘Pick it up for yourself’. So he reached out his hand and took it” (7)*

Not knowing where the iron head fell; God granted Elisha the wisdom to cast a stick of wood, by which the iron head floated; in the same way the prophet Moses previously cast a branch of a tree in the bitter water of Marah, to turn it sweet (Exodus 15: 25); and like the salt cast by Elisha in the spring of bad water and made it good. Those tools had no power in themselves; but in being symbols of the cross of the Lord of glory Jesus Christ.

To those who may protest, saying: Is that piece of iron worthy of a miracle performed to restore it? we say that beyond that work, hearts were being prepared to perceive the secret and power of the cross.

+ What is more obvious than the secret of that wood?! ... The world that sank in the depths of sin; was liberated by being baptized by the tree of Christ, namely by His passion; So that what perished through the tree in ` Adam, was restored through the tree in Christ ... That same tree was previously carried by Isaac the son of Abraham, on which he was to be offered a sacrifice, according to God’s command.

(The scholar Tertullian)

- + If casting the wood, which naturally light, into the water in the days of Elisha altered the heavy nature of iron, how much more would the Lord, by sending to us His light, active, and good heavenly Spirit, bring the soul out that sank into the water of iniquity, make it light, lift it up on His wing toward the high heaven, and utterly alter its original heavy nature.

And as it is well known that no one can cross over the sea, except by a light boat of wood; lest he would drown and perish; so it is with the soul, it cannot cross over the bitter sea of sin, and go through the difficult pit of the crafty hosts of darkness in the air, except by acquiring the light and gentle Spirit of Christ, who can bring her forth through every craftiness. .By this Spirit it can reach the safe haven of heavenly comfort, through a narrow passage to the city of the kingdom.

(St. Maccari the Great)

- + It so seems that the iron head of the ax which fell, refers to Adam, or to the human race as a whole. Therefore the son of the prophets held it in his hand; for our Lord and Savior holds the human race He created in His hands. And as the ax fell from the hand of the prophet into the water; so, through the self pride the human race fell, and sank into the river of evil pleasures and the water of sin. The ax fell into the water, for the human race fell into the depths of all transgressions in a sorrowful perdition; as it is written: *“I sink into deep mire where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters where the floods overflow me”* (Psalm 69: 3). The river into which the ax fell, refers to plunging into the pleasures of this mortal world that goes down to the depths.

What does casting a stick of wood into the water, and the appearance of the iron head of the ax afloat, refer to, but to the lifting up of the human race from the depth of the pit, and to liberating them from the mire of all sins by the secret of the cross?

- + After the iron floated, the son of the prophets held it in his hand to repair it and make it of benefit again to its owner. The same happened to us, O beloved brethren; we who fell from the hand of the Lord through pride. without any self-worthiness on our part, return again to His hand and power through the wood of the cross. I wish therefore, we strive by His help, as much as we can, so as not to fall again from His hand through pride.

Without any self worthiness on our part, we were brought forth from darkness to light; were called from death to life; got back the true way instead of the multitude of sins. I wish, therefore, we hasten to possess the light of life, and do not be slothful to make use of the passing by days of salvation. I wish we do not rejoice in the corrupt and the very serious pleasures of the world; lest we would fall again from the good works and the way of righteousness, as from the hand of the Lord; going in a hurry to the river of this evil world.

Let us listen to the words of the apostle: *"If then we were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God"* (Colossians 3: 1-2); Why does he say: *"If you are raised"*, unless we have fallen? ... In another place he says: *"Awake you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light"* (Ephesians 5: 14). Does it not seem to you that he is crying out to the ax that fell down into the mire?

## 2- ELISHA KNOWS THE HIDDEN SECRETS OF THE KING OF ARAM:

While at home, Elisha could know what the king of Aram planned against Israel, and told them to the king of Israel, to get away from the snares of the enemy. So he who enjoys the Word of God, would perceive the evil plans of the devil, and escapes from his nets.

*“Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel, and he took counsel with his servants, saying, ‘My camp will be in such and such a place’” (8)*

St. Ambrose presents to us a comparison between the prophet Elisha, in the confinement of his home, almost not moving, but always working; and nothing makes him lose his peace; and the king of Aram, who planned plots, and set snares to fight the people of Israel; and despite his possibilities and capabilities, he lost his peace. So it is befitting of the believer to imitate Elisha, who bore the exalted peace of God, who was not disturbed by all the events around him; and by his tranquility in the Lord, he could realize what the others could not realize with all their possibilities and human plots.

*“And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, ‘Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there’” (9)*

If the king of Israel and many of his people have distorted the worship of the living God; but for the sake of the faithfulness and longsuffering of God, and the few faithful remnants, He worked for their conquest; by revealing the secrets of the king of Aram to His prophet Elisha, who, in turn, revealed them to the king of Israel.. The secret of Elisha was the purity of his soul, not corrupted by the love of the world, nor by the evil desire of the body. His soul was the leader of his

body, would never bow to its commands, but lead it by the Spirit of the Lord; by which it acquired the insight to see the unseen beings of angels and demons. ... By bearing a pure soul, the man of God likens the angels, and, like them, he can spiritually see; the pure soul and its senses can unite with God, to enjoy seeing the divine things.

According to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, the pure soul can see the hidden things; but in case the evil desires of the body prevails over the soul, its insight is darkened and cannot see the divine things.... I wonder if that saint enjoyed such an experience that may seem to us impossible or exaggerated!

+ The soul is exalted by nature, full of beauty, and bears the great image of the Godhead;

When it is purified from the worldly works; and when it is not defiled by the foreign lusts;

When it becomes the mistress of the body, does not work by its commands; but lead it by holiness, .

When it is purified from all the bodily movements; it can spiritually see the hidden world;

It can see the angels and demons face to face;

Every saint who spiritually trains himself, can clearly see all what go on earth;

All saints see the same as the angels of the Lord; and nothing would be hidden from them.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Then the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice” (10)*

The king of Israel did not send an army but spies to verify the words of the prophet, a kind of behavior that bears doubt and lack of faith.

*Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing, and he called his servants and said to them, 'Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?'" (11)*

+ The prophet could clearly see the hiding places and the hidden plots of the enemy;

When they talked secrets in Aram, Elisha could expose them in Judea;

While dwelling among the Hebrews, Elisha exposed the plots made by the Aramites;

Whenever the king of Arm plotted something, it would be voided before he puts it into effect;

All the secret thoughts and plots done by the Aramites were exposed by Elisha

While in his house, he could see the hidden things in the houses of the Aramites;

The great distance between him and the enemy did not hide a thing from him;

That man had a clear vision full of light, by which he could see all the hidden things;

Whenever the Aramites happen to alter their plans, that Hebrew, with his spiritual eye, could see and expose;

The Aramite king got furious and disturbed; and his heart was broken;

He thought that one of his followers voided his plans by revealing his secrets to the Israelites, ;

He started to complain and to express his doubts to his servants;

But they hastened to assure him that it was Elisha who exposed their plots and snares.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“And one of his servants said, ‘None, my lord, O king, but Elisha the prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom’” (12)*

According to the righteous ‘Job’, *“He uncovers deep things out of darkness, and brings the shadow of death to light”* (Job 12: 22); God exposed the plots made in the darkness, and the evil done in secret.

### **3- THE HEAVENLY HOSTS ARE REVEALED TO ELISHA BY GOD:**

We often fear the enemy and his hosts, because we walk by sight and not by faith. If, by the eyes of the heart we see that God and His hosts are on our side, Who can stand against us?

*“So he said, ‘Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him’.  
And it was told him, saying, ‘Surely he is in Dothan’” (13)*

If the heavenly secrets were revealed to the prophet Elisha, would what the king of Aram secretly does in his palace be hidden from him? By such a grace, the prophet became a support to his people.

But the king of Aram, foolishly assuming that, with his military might, he could captivate him, whom God grants the knowledge of secret things, he sent a great army to put the unarmed prophet under arrest; not perceiving that the heavenly hosts find pleasure in protecting him, for he is the man of God, beloved by them.

“**Dathan**”, The hill of Dothan nowadays, 12 miles north of Samaria, was only referred to, here and in the Book of Genesis, where Joseph was cast into a well (Genesis 37: 17).

*“Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city” (14)*

Not “**a great army**”, for going to war, but great enough to catch a single person; For we see Elisha bring them forth to Samaria, make them enter into the city, where the king held a banquet for them (19, 23)

While the king of Aram made plans by his human wisdom, depending upon his armies and human arm, Elisha, on the other hand, enjoying a heavenly wisdom, was surrounded and protected by limitless heavenly hosts that never go to sleep, whom the Lord commanded to keep the wicked away from His prophet.

+ The angels were guarding Elisha wherever he goes;  
The hosts of God surround those who fear Him, and save them from evil;  
The alert hosts of fire surrounded him on all sides, and drove danger away from him;

The prophet’s servant, like a little child, was terrified to see the horses and chariots of the enemy;

He came to his master Elisha and said: “*Alas my master, what shall we do?*”

Elisha, on the other hand had no fear from their great number, and counted them as nothing;

For he knows that he is surrounded by the hosts of God, who were more than those against him.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, ‘Alas, my master! What shall we do?’” (15)*

**“The servant of the man of God”**, Although most of the scholars believe that he was Gehazi, before he was afflicted with leprosy, some others believe that he was another servant who replaced him.

What the servant did not see, was seen by Elisha whether directly or by faith; how the hosts of the Lord were on their side. Nevertheless, Elisha did not despise his servant nor acted haughtily before him, but he meekly put his heart at peace, and prayed to God to open his eyes.

In the laws of the saintly apostles it came that it is not befitting of man to despise the other men, on account of that they have not acquired the same gift he has. While there were seven thousand knees that did not bow to the Baal, none but Elijah and Elisha performed miracles. Daniel and his friends the three young men did not despise the rest of their fellows; for God saved Daniel from the den of lions, and the three young men from the furnace of fire.

*“So he answered, ‘Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them’” (16)*

Perceiving how great was the angelic help, Elisha did not fear the army sent by the king of Aram to surround the mountain where he dwelt, to catch him (2 kings 6: 16).

The heavenly hosts bear an exalted love for us, being our fellow servants who intended to minister to their Lord through us (Romans 22: 9). It is a joyful fact

proclaimed by the Holy Book, that the angels and men form an integral family together.

Because of our weakness, if we are compared to the possibilities of the Devil, we may be counted as one before a thousand; but by the Lord, protecting us, the thousand cannot stand before us, and we can drive them away.. That was the faith of Elisha who said to his servant: "*Those who are with us are more than those who are with them*" (2 kings 6: 16).

I wish we do not fear the devil and all his hosts, for the Lord our God fights on our side until He brings us forth into the perfection of His eternal glory.

Indeed, the devil is horrible by the violent tricks and heavy temptations by which he fights against man; yet he is without authority on us, if we walk in the Lord, and bear inside us the fiery Spirit of God; to enjoy the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions.

Talking about the possibilities of the believer to confront the seductions and violence of the devil, St. John Chrysostom says: [In case the devil see you watching and bound to heaven, he would never dare, even stir at you]; The pure behavior mutes his mouth].

It is befitting of the believer not to fear, and to say: 'my enemy is mightier than me; How can I prevail against him?'; But let him say together with Elisha: "*Those who are with us are more than those who are with them*" (16); And as it is written: "*Let the weak say, 'I am strong'*" (Joel 3: 10).. By our Lord Jesus Christ we can have the spirit of strength and not of defeat and failure. We, therefore should not be disturbed before the temptations, the tribulations, or the sins.

God opens the mouths of His saints to utter the truth (Ephesians 6: 19); and their ears to understand His Word (Isaiah 50: 4-5); and their eyes to see His care. Whereas the devil attempts to enter them to possess and to destroy (Romans 1: 29-30)...: 27).

+ The prophet encouraged his disciple who was overcome by fear when he saw the dust stirred up by the advancing troops;

He told him *“those who are with us are more than those who are with them”*;

The splendid man of God prayed to God to make his disciple see, and God responded to his prayer;

He saw the horsemen and the horses of fire covering the valley; an awesome and terrifying scene.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

+ God opens the mouths of the saints, as well as their ears to hear the divine words; Isaiah says that the Lord will open up his ears to know when he ought to speak (Isaiah 50: 4-5). He also opens the eyes: *“He opened the eyes of Hagar, and she saw a well of water”* (Genesis 21: 19). Elisa prayed to God, and said, *“Lord, I pray, open the eyes of the (young man) that he may see; and the Lord opened his eyes, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha”* (16-17). For *“The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him and deliver them”* (Psalm 34: 8).

About Judas it was said: *“Satan entered him”* (John 13

+ *“The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea; The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation”* (Exodus 15: 12).

Those who chase us are horses; so are all those born in a body, they are symbolically horses. As all horses have their horsemen, there are horses mounted by men of God, that run all over the earth; about which is said:

*“Your horsemen are for salvation”*; there are other horses mounted by the devil and his hosts.

Judas was a horse. When the Lord was his horseman, he was a member of "*the horsemen of salvation*", sent by the Lord for truth, to heal the sick and to give health to the weak (Matthew 10: 1). But when he followed the devil; "*after he was given the piece of bread, Satan entered him*" (John 13: 27), became his rider, and he started to walk against our Lord and Savior.

Therefore, all those who persecute the saints are horses that neigh, led by evil angels as horsemen. When you see your persecutor stirred up in a very violent rage, know for sure that he is mounted and stirred up by a demon.

(The scholar Origen)

- + When Elisha thought that he is alone in the wilderness, he actually was in the company of angels. So were the Hebrews persecuted by Pharaoh; they, in anguish went through the wilderness, but those who faithfully endured, entered into the promised land. The same way, those who temporarily endure sorrows here, will find comfort at the end; whereas those who do not will be treaded upon under feet, and will have a sad end.

(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)

- + A huge number of saints and believers, carry God, as His chariot; which He leads to reach the ultimate end. It is written: "*Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end*" (1 Corinthians 15: 23-24). That is the holy church that follows Him. Thousands of men "*rejoice in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer*" (Romans 12: 12).

(St. Augustine)

- + Yes, God entrusted angels of light to guard men, particularly the righteous, according to the words written by the apostle, saying: "*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*" (Hebrew 1: 14). Those angels exhort the righteous to the exaltation of sight and works, lest they trip by the stone of humiliation and disobedience. And, by their help, they lift up the weak while struggling hard, lest they come to offense, and be treaded upon by the devil.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- + The prophet smiled before his disciple, and encouraged him to rejoice. Yet, as the disciple was not perfect, he did not listen to him, and remained on his fear.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Abba Moses the black, who lived in 'Petra', namely (the Rock), when it so happened that he wrestled against the temptation of adultery, and could not stay in his cell, he went to Abba Isothorus who comforted him by words from the holy books, and told him to return to his cell. When he was not convinced, saying: [I cannot, father, I am not able to endure]; Abba Isothorus took him to the roof, and told him to look toward the West; and there he saw a multitude of horribly looking demons, ready for war. Then he told him to look toward the East; and there he saw uncountable number of angels in glory and great splendor. Then the father said: [Those on the

West fight against the saints; and those on the East are sent by God to help the saints. Know therefore that *“those with us are more than those against us”* according to the words of the prophet Elisha (16)]. Then Abba Moses was comforted by the Lord, and returned to his cell without fear, glorifying God.

(The paradise of fathers)

+ Notice how those unseen, who guard the ministers of Christ, are far more than those seen,

+ Pharaoh mounted his horse and perished; so did the Egyptian army. That is why it came in the law that the Jew should not possess horses (Deuteronomy 17: 16)... Solomon had no horses in Jerusalem and Judea; but purchased them from Egypt (1 kings 10: 28).

*“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God”* (Psalm 20: 7). Those who mount horses will end up perishing.

The Lord also has horses, as well as shining mountains; whereas those of the devil are full of darkness. For as there are shining mountains and dark mountains, there are good horses and bad horses.

When the horsemen came to arrest Elisha (13- 17), and his servant saw them surrounding the city, his master said to him: *“Do not fear, for those with us are more than those with them”* Then it came in the second book of the kings that Elisha said, *“Lord, I pray open his eyes that he may see. Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; And behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha”*.

Notice that it is said *“horses and chariots”*, and not “horsemen or charioteers”; meaning that the multitude of angels were chariots and horses; and the Charioteer was the Lord Himself. That is why the prophet

Habakkuk sang, saying: *“Your chariots of salvation”* (3-8). This means that, if we are the horses of God, we are led by God; while the other horses will fall in long sleep, together with their horsemen.

+ As for us, our life is an arena of wrestling; Here we strive, and there we will be crowned.

No one can avoid fear if he is encountered by serpents and scorpions along his way on the earth that produces thorns and thistles, and its dust is food for the serpent (Genesis 3: 14, 18). *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6: 12). We are surrounded by hosts of enemies on all sides. The weak body will soon be a corpse. We are as

though one before a multitude, fighting against horrible hosts; and it will stay that way until the it deteriorates, when the prince of this world comes, and *finds nothing in (us)*" (John 14: 30).

Listen, therefore, attentively to the words of the prophet, saying: "*You shall not be afraid of the terror of the night, nor of the arrow which flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness*" (Psalm 91: 5-6)

... When you are afflicted by the enemy; ... When your body is inflicted with fever; ... When evil desires are stirred up in you; ... When you say in your heart: "*What shall I do?*"; the words of the prophet will answer

you, saying: "*Do not fear, for those with us are more than those against us*" (6: 16).

When your eyes are opened to see a chariot of fire carrying you to heaven like Elijah (2 kings 2: 11; 6: 17); you will then joyfully sing: "*Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snares of the fowlers. The snare is broken, and we have escaped*" (Psalm 124: 7).

+ I shall show you now how God was there in everyone of our righteous forefathers when they prayed:

When Moses prayed, he was alone on Mount Sinai; and God was with him. his prayer was intensively heard, and took away the wrath of God on Israel (for Moses carried his brethren in his heart).

Elijah was alone on Mount Carmel, and by his prayer heavens were closed, bonds were loosed, the people were saved from death, and from the pit. By his prayer, he uprooted the defilement of Israel; and brought fire down three times: once on the altar, and twice on men. ... Fire was a way of revenge when it came down by his prayer. .... When he knelt on his knees, his prayer was instantly heard; and responded to, whereas those of the 450 false priests who cried out loud, were not heard because it was directed to the Ball..

When Elisha prayed, he raised someone from the pit; and was rescued from the hands of the wicked people who surrounded him; Although he was alone, yet he was actually surrounded by a great army; for he said to his servant: *“Those with us are more than those against us”* (6: 16).

(St. Aphrahat)

*“And Elisha prayed and said, ‘Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see’. Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha”* (17)

Elisha did not seek from the Lord to send an army to protect him and his disciple, for the army was already there; but he sought from God to open the eyes of the

young man, whose faith was shaken, were opened, to see the divine presence around him.

God has no material armies, chariots, and weapons; but we cannot perceive the spiritual things except through carnal ways. The enemies of Israel often terrified them by chariots (Exodus 14: 7; Judges 4: 3; 1 Samuel 13: 5; 2 Samuel 8: 4; 10: 18). But how can their chariots stand before those of God. When the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened, he saw the mountain full with horses and chariots of fire around Elisha (6: 17).

The angels are sent for specific mission to the account of those who fear the Lord, who will inherit the salvation (Hebrew 1; 6-7). It is, therefore, befitting of us to think about the ministry of the angels in a sound joyful way, often referred to by the Holy Book (2 kings 6: 15-17; Psalm 16: 11; Luke 16: 22). Even if our enemies are very numerous and strong, yet those heavenly messengers are more in number and mightier, an uncountable multitude assigned to protect us.

God, in His love for us dwells in our midst, and even in us; and sets His angels to guard us against evil. He sent an angel to get the apostle Peter out of prison; and to strike Herod, his persecutor, to die by maggots. (Acts 12).

+ How great is the faith of the saintly prophet; he did not fear the adversaries he saw, for he knew that the angels were with him who believe in God. He did not fear the earthly plans, for he knew that the heavenly hosts are present with him. ... He says: "*Those with us are more than those against us*".

The prophet was talking about a multitude of heavenly hosts, while his servant was not sure of the salvation. The spiritual eyes are qualified to discern more than the physical ones. While the later sees the enemy's hosts, the former enjoys what refers to protection. The divine mercy grants

the human beings an unseen protection. Those in danger get help they even not recognize. That is the compassion of the Savior, He intervenes for the sake of salvation, and keeps Himself unseen; to be touched through His help; and not through sight.

That is why it is not right for man to think that he can make a successful war, and overcome by his own strength; but he should know that the adversaries are more overcome through the worthiness more than through the strength; by the holiness more than by the power; the way Elisha prevailed upon his enemies, not by armies but by prayer.

(Father Maximus, bishop of Torin)

- + The Lord surely call the human souls "*His vineyard*"; those whom He surrounds by the authority of His teachings and guards by His angels.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + An unseen power destroyed the Egyptian army in the miracle of the Red Sea; That power the text calls "*the horsemen*"; whom we assume were an army of angels referred to by Habakkuk, saying: "*You rode on Your horses; Your chariots of salvation*" (Habakkuk 3: 8); and by David, saying: "*The chariots of God are thousands of thousands*" (Psalm 68: 17).
- + Those to whom the text (Songs 5: 7), refers as "*the watchmen who went about the city*", are the ministering spirits sent to minister to those who are going to inherit the salvation.  
Happy are the souls recognized by the angels who hover around the heavenly city.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

- + Preparing myself to get married to the King's Son, the Firstborn of all creation, the angels accompanied me, ministered to me, and presented to me the law as a wedding gift.
- + Those are the angels who guard the little children who see the face of the Father in heaven.
- + When the angels saw the great King walk on earth, they joined their Lord, and obeyed His will, when He assigned them to guard the believers, to minister to their salvation... It is as though they said among themselves: [If the Lord Christ has taken on Himself a mortal body. How could we stand tight-handed? ... Come, O angels, ... let us all go down from heaven]. That is the reason the place was full of angels glorifying and praising God at the nativity of Christ

If the angel of the Lord "*The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them*" (Psalm 34: 7); it so seems that, when a number of people assemble for the glory of Christ; each of them will have his own angel encamps around him, guarding and guiding him. By this, when the saints assemble together, there will be two churches: one of men, and another of angels.

(The scholar Origen)

- + "*We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father*" (John 1: 14); How could we behold His glory, unless He makes it possible

for us to behold it through a human body that hides Him, and lives among us. But what does it mean: “*the glory as of the only begotten of the Father*”? For many prophets have been also glorified, like Moses, Elijah ascended to heaven by one of them,. Elisha was surrounded by chariots of fire; followed by Daniel, the three young men, and many others, who performed wonders; Angels, and even the cherubim and the Seraphim appeared to men, and partly showed to those who saw them, bright light according to their nature; .... But the gospel takes us far from the splendor of our fellow slaves; to put us before the climax of the good things; ... before the Lord of all Himself; the king Himself; the Only begotten Son, whose glory we have seen.

The expression “*as of*” here does not imply an analogy or comparison, but a kind of confirmation without doubt; like saying: [We saw his glory, as it should be possessed by an only begotten Son of the Creator and the King of all creation].

(St. John Chrysostom)

= When Elisha thought that he was alone in the wilderness, he was actually accompanied by angels. Although men suffered at the beginning in the wilderness, yet he who remained faithful was found worthy to enter into the promised land.

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

+ I believe that if the soul is perfectly pure and normal, bearing a pure insight, it can see more and better than the demons, for having the Lord

who proclaims everything to her; the way Elisha's soul knew what Gehazi has done; and saw the armies that surrounded him (17)

(St. Abba Anthony the Great)

## **5- ELISHA FORSEES GOOD THINGS INSTEAD OF FAMINE:**

Getting to know that his real enemy, who corrupts all his military plans was Elisha, the king of Aram sent a huge army to arrest him; but it so happened that it was Elisha who arrested them instead, and sought from the king of Israel to set for them a banquet, as a sign of making a convention with them.

*“So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, ‘Strike this people, I pray, with blindness’. And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha” (18)*

They probably were not utterly blinded, but were inflicted with inability to discern clearly what they see. They could follow Elisha, yet they could not Recognize his identity, nor recognize the way they took.

+ A single man led all the army without a fight; they were too weak to get rid of him;

He hindered their sight, and led them to where he chose;

They were sent to catch him, and it ended up that he caught them;

He covered their faces with a veil of blindness to humiliate them;

They followed him without recognizing his identity, to let them become a laughing stock;

(St.) Jacob El-Serougi

- + The same thing happened to Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the church; whose eyes were wide open, but he could not see (Acts 9: 8); Yet God who amazingly shut his eyes, soon opened them again.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

- + “*The Lord is merciful and gracious*” (Exodus 34: 6). I wish we know God, but not in a partial way, I wish we do not make His compassion a cause for us to become slothful .... He who makes the sun shine (Matthew 5: 45), also strikes people with blindness (18);... He who sends rain (Zechariah 10: 1), also sends rain of fire (Genesis 19: 24).

(St. Basil the Great)

*“Now, Elisha said to them, ‘This is not the way nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek’. But he led them to Samaria” (19)*

How could a man of God lie to those soldiers? Is it allowed to lie in wars? ... What Elisha said was not actually a lie; for the soldiers of Aram were going to Dothan to captivate Elisha, but God struck them with blindness; Elisha, having come to encounter them outside Dothan; entering Dothan, then, was not the right way to arrest Elisha. He said to them, “*Follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek, and he led them to Samaria*”; Which was true. And once they were there, God opened their eyes to see Elisha, who, when the king of Israel asked him if he should kill them, he sought from him instead to give them food and water.

*“So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, ‘Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see’. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and there they were inside Samaria” (20)*

The way Elisha sought from God to strike them with blindness, He sought from him to open their eyes. As God has the authority to strike with blindness to chastise, and to let them realize how helpless they are, he also has the authority to open their eyes to let their hearts see the divine truth.

According to St. Ambrose: [Elisha intended to save and not to destroy those whom he apparently deceived, For they were struck with blindness by a foolish decision, but by the power of God]

+ He led them to enter into Samaria; and sought from God to open their eyes;

When he lifted from them the vanity that clothed them, they were enlightened and knew where they were, and how they ended up there.

Knowing that he was the man whom they sought they were filled with fear and confusion, how could they not recognize him while talking to him on the way.

They came to be blamed, weak, despised, ignorant, and under the threat of death;

Recognizing how great the man of God was, they despised the king who sent him to arrest him.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Now, when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, ‘My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?’” (21)*

The expression "*My father*" was used by Elisha in his talk with the prophet Elijah; and the servants of Naaman used it in their talk to their master; and behold. Although the king of Israel was an evil man, yet, perceiving the stature and godliness of Elisha, he called him "*My father*". Elisha sought from him to refrain from killing the Aramites, not to refer to himself the favor of what God did; and to give them hospitality to let them testify to God who opened up their inner eyes to see His mercies, and to perceive His plan.

Commenting on Elisha's virtuous behavior, who, while believing in God's protection, yet he did not seek to avenge himself against those who sought to arrest him, but sought instead to give them hospitality, St. Ambrose said: [It is obvious here, that faith and righteousness should be kept even in war].

*"And he answered, 'You shall not kill them. You would kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master'" (22)*

*"Then he prepared a great feast for them and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the hands of the Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel" (23)*

If the beginning of this episode amazingly reveals God's exalted care for those who attach themselves to Him, yet its end is more amazing; for Elisha led those who came to arrest him into the city; and although it was so easy to have them all killed, he sought from the king of Israel, instead, to set a banquet for them and then let them return safely to their king. Treating them as guests, had its good impression upon the king of Aram, who refrained from sending any more armies to Israel for some time..

Elisha practiced the virtue of loving the enemies (8-26); which was to be presented by the Lord Christ Himself (Luke 22: 49-51); a commandment that the early church was to live by and practice (Acts 7: 59-60; Romans 12: 20)  
The act of love coming from the heart removed the animosity of Aram against Israel for some time, which was most probably several years before the attack mentioned in verse 24; after the Aramites forgot all about the previous episode..

+ When they entered into samara, the king of Israel intended to kill them, as though he was the one who conquered them;

If it was not for the man of God who did not let him do it;

He said to him, "*You would kill those whom you have taken captives with your sword and your bow*"

Do not boast a conquest that is not yours. Feed them and let them be impressed by your hospitality;

Elisha overcame evil; and fed those who came to arrest him, then sent them away, as is befitting of a man of God;

He made peace between the two sides with no fighting;

Blessed is He who gave him such wisdom and might.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*"And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria" (24)*

Most probably, that was Ben-Hadad the second, whose father reigned over Aram in the days of king Baasha (I Kings 15: 18).

*"And there was a great famine in Samaria; and indeed they besieged it until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one fourth of a kab of dove droppings for five shekels*

*of silver” (25)*

The book of Deuteronomy talked about famines that would dwelt upon Israel when they reject God's leadership of them. It so seems that that siege was the most horrible in Israel's history, when the immense hunger made them practice what was against human measures (2 Kings 6: 25-29). Having rejected the word of God, the food of the Spirit, they came to be in an extreme famine; their depths turned wild, and they did what the wild beasts never do by their natural instinct.

Among God's threats to His people was that in case they worshipped idols, and disobeyed the divine commandments, He would allow for them to suffer famine: *“When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back your bread by weight; and you shall eat and not be satisfied”* (Leviticus 26: 26). Cutting off their supply of bread; refers to cutting off the bread of life, the divine word; to make them live in famine, a sign of which was, that instead of every woman has her own oven to bake bread, every ten women would use one oven to bake their bread. A further signs was bringing back the few bread they baked by weight, as the blessing was taken away from them; And it would reach it maximum when the hands of the parents stretch to eat the flesh of their own children; as it so happened in the days of Jehoram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, when two women agreed to cook their sons one every other day (24-26); It also happened in the days Jerusalem was put under siege by the king of Babylon; being written: *“The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children; they became food for them, in the destruction of the daughter of my people”* (Lamentations 4: 10); And when the Roman commander 'Titus' put Jerusalem under siege, ....

The donkey's head which was never eaten became so expensive to buy. According to St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian, the donkey's head here, most probably refers to the views of the philosophers, opponents to the divine truth.

While the doves refer to the spiritual interpretation the divine law, the dove droppings refer to the literal interpretation thereof..

According to some, that siege happened after seven years of the famine referred to in chapter 8: 1-2.

**A cab** was a measure equivalent to half a gallon, used for dry goods.

And according to some, **the dove droppings** refer to edible bulb plant, which is called nowadays 'the star of Bethlehem'.

*"Then, as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, Help, my lord, O king" (26)*

*"And he said, 'If the Lord does not help you, where can I find help for you? From the threshing floor or from the winepress'" (27)*

*"Then the king said to her, 'What is troubling you. And she answered, 'This woman said to me , 'Give your son that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow'" (28)*

*"So we boiled my son, and ate him. And I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him; but she has hidden her son'" (29)*

In a unique lamentation, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi portrays how the arrow of hunger so stabs the heart of women to turn them into wild beasts, and even worse; because wild beasts never eat their young; while here, the human compassionate mothers stab their knives in the necks of their own children, disregard their cries, and devour their flesh to keep themselves alive; for if they do not do that the famine will eat the mothers and their children.

+ What should I say? It is a horrible thing to hear and to imagine;

When hunger so corrupts the hearts of the compassionate mothers to kill their own children, to keep themselves alive;

How horrible it is, that the mother is not moved by the cry-outs of their beloved child; and is not terrified to have her hand dip in his blood.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he tore his clothes; and as he passed by on the wall, the people looked, and there underneath he had sackcloth on his body” (30)*

Although the king tore his clothes, and the people looked, and there underneath he had sackcloth on his body, yet he did not put the blame upon himself, but upon the prophet Elisha, and sought to kill him. There is no benefit in putting on sackcloth, when the heart is hard and there is no repentance. He most probably put on the sackcloth to appease, either the true God or his own gods; and to impress his people.

- + The king threatened to kill Elisha, believing that it was within his authority as a prophet to put an end to the siege, and to avoid the famine. And he probably was angry because the prophet did not let him kill the Aramites whom he sought from God to strike with blindness.

(St. Ambrose)

*“Then he said, ‘God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today’” (31)*

Knowing for sure the identity, holiness and possibilities of Elisha, it was befitting of the king of Israel to ask him how he would sanctify himself, together with his armies and people, in an appeal to God to save them. But, bearing the spirit of

his bloodthirsty mother, Jezebel, he turned his wrath upon the prophet. As though he says about him: 'As he offered food in abundance to the Aramite thieves yesterday, he will today give his own disciples food with abundance, not caring for the people of the city, and disregarding their need'. He therefore vowed to kill him for the sake of the blood of his people. Instead of putting the blame upon Elisha, Jehoram should put it upon his own father Ahab who, if instead of despising the prophets, he followed their counsel and killed Ben-Hadad, who put Samaria under siege, he would have spared the land from all those calamities.

Jehoram was called 'the son of the murderer', on account of that his father Ahab killed the prophets of the Lord (1 kings 18: 13); killed Naboth the Jezreelite (1 kings 21: 9-13); persecuted and wiped out the servants of the Lord (1 kings 19: 18); he was 'the son of a murderer'; for instead of repenting, he walked with the spirit of evil like his father before him.

instead of presenting a true repentance to God, the king of Israel put the blame upon Elisha, on account of that he did not use his authority as a prophet to save the land from that calamity; and vowed to kill him. God informed the prophet of the king's intention; who, in turn informed the elders sitting with him that the messenger of the king is on his way, to be directly followed by the king himself to take his head. And sought from them not to allow the messenger to enter until his master arrives.

+ Hearing the horrible news of the two women who fed upon their own children, the king was shaken, tore his clothes, and wailed;

He vowed and threatened to kill Elisha;

What was the crime done by the man of God? He was silently sitting in his house, under siege like everyone else in the city;

If the women ate their own children; what had he to do with that?

If the Aramites gave you, the king, a hard time, what had Elisha to do with that?

You have the leaders of the army, and have the weapons; Go out and fight; instead of threatening the man of God;

The king of Samaria, knew who that man was; and was sure that, if he so chooses, he would make salvation;

He was sure that if Elisha prayed; thousands of Aramites would perish;  
He would seek fire to come down on the enemies; or to have them swallowed by the earth;

By his word, he was sure that he would conquer them without fight;  
Regardless of the women who ate their own children, the king was in distress of being under siege;

Having been the son of the bloodthirsty Jezebel, he was ready to do like what his mother did;

The city was under siege because the sins of the people; and the foolish king threatens to cut the head of the saint.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“But Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him; and the king sent a man ahead of him, but before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, ‘Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent someone to take away my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold him at the door. Is not the sound of his master’s feet behind him?’” (32)*

+ While still in his house, Elisha felt that the king sent someone to cut off his head;

By his spiritual insight he saw the messenger who came to do it;

From afar, he saw the horrible deed, and revealed to the elders sitting with him the identity of the messenger;

He was expected to act as though the ruler, and make the Aramites go away;

He was expected to bring prosperity again to the afflicted Samaria and to its people under siege;

He was expected to choose, either to defeat the Aramites, or to die;

He was expected to bring forth security and great satisfaction.

(St. (Mar Jacob El-Serougi)

*“And while he was still talking with them, there was the messenger, coming down to him, and then he said, ‘Surely, this calamity is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer’” (33)*

Some wonder who was the one talking here; Is it the king on the tongue of his messenger; or is it the prophet Elisha after the messenger arrived to deliver the king’s message to those present.

According to some, that message, carrying so much bitterness against the Lord and His prophet Elisha, was most probably was from the king, in response to Elisha’s request from him to repent; as though saying: ‘If what happened of anguish and bitterness came from the Lord, that mothers had to eat their own children, because of the intense hunger, and of the shadow of death before their eyes; what more would I expect from the Lord and his prophet Elisha?’... This is the way of many under strong temptations; they put the blame upon others, and even upon God Himself. ...

Here, in the name of the king, the messenger reviles the God of Israel and His prophet Elisha for the following reasons:

- 1- When Elisha told the king that he had to return with repentance to God, he responded by just putting on the sackcloth on his body; yet, not by his heart, as the siege stayed longer, the king counted the prophet's counsel some kind of deception.
- 2- All along centuries, there has been wrestling between the kings and the prophets; and the kings always considered the prophets as a source of trouble.
- 3- Remembering how the prophet Elijah put an end to the previous famine (1 Kings 16: 41-46); the king expected that it is within the authority of the prophet Elisha, as well, to do the same if he chooses to save the kingdom, . Hence he became so angry against him for not doing it..

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 6**

### **THE PLACE WHERE WE DWELL IS TOO SMALL FOR US**

- + Together with the sons of the prophets, we cry out to You:  
The place where we dwell is too small for us;  
Allow us to go to the Jordan;  
And there, we could build a bigger place for ourselves.
  
- + In the waters of the Jordan we see Your wooden cross;  
You come down to our depths to carry us up high to heaven;  
To liberate us from the dragon lying in the depths;  
And to enjoy peace as the free children of God.
  
- + You long to draw all souls to Yourself;  
For all to find a place in Your bosoms to settle down.

- + Together with the prophet Elisha, You grant us a spiritual insight;  
By which, although we do not see the king of Aram planning against us;  
Yet we can recognize the tricks of the devil to destroy us;  
And when we perceive his snares, we escape to You.
  
- + If You open our insight to see the heavenly hosts surrounding us;  
We shall never complain of being alone;  
We shall never fear from enemies nor adversaries;  
*“For those with us are more than those against us”;*  
*“Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear” (Psalm 27: 3)*
  
- + Let the enemy, with all his possibilities and energies, put me under siege;  
Let him deprive me, even of the necessary things to live in this world;  
For You open before me the windows of heaven;  
To satisfy my spirit, soul, and body;  
To fill my whole being with exultation and joy;  
To turn my life into a heavenly banquet;  
To turn my whole time into an unceasing feast

=====

# CHAPTER 7

## THE LORD OPENS WINDOWS IN HEAVEN

As the calamity became so intense, that women became cannibals; and they even ate the flesh of their own children, the reactions came diverse: Not enduring to see the extent of bitterness that dwelt upon his people, the king tore his clothes, and the sackcloth he wore on his body was revealed. Yet, instead of returning to God with repentance, he decided to kill Elisha, putting the blame upon him. But the prophet promised salvation; which was realized in a time not expected by anyone..

Now, in this chapter we shall see what different people did during anguish.

1- Elisha proclaims the divine joy	1
2- A king's officer proclaims his doubts	2
3- Four lepers act with wisdom	3 - 8
4- They let the others partake of their good fortune	9 - 11
5- The king doubts the news	12 - 15
6- God opens windows in heaven	16
7- The king's officer who proclaimed his doubt dies.	17 - 20

### **1- ELISHA PROCLAIMS THE DIVINE JOY:**

*“Then Elisha said, ‘Hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord: ‘Tomorrow about this time a seah of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria’ (1)*

**“At the gate of Samaria”**; The markets were held at the gate of the city, to make it easy for those who enter or exit to purchase their needs.

At the end of the last chapter, the messenger from the king, hearing the counsel of the prophet to the king, the leaders and all the people to repent and to return to God, responded by saying: *“Surely, this calamity is from the Lord; Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?”* (6: 33); a response that carries no admonition, but rather despair.

God longs to enter into a debate with us , and is ready to receive admonition from His believers; as it happened with our father Abraham, when God told him His intention to burn Sodom and Gomorrah; ... With the righteous ‘Job’; ... and with the blessed psalmist. But all those debated with God with the spirit of humility; while the king here, his messenger, and leaders did with a spirit of haughtiness together with despair. Even though, God’s response on the tongue of Elisha, came to carry a joyful hope; yet at the same time, it confirmed that the calamity was caused, not by God, but by their evil ways.

- 1- All what the king sought was to put an end to the siege, to have, together with his authorities the chance to put things back in order, which was expected to take a long time after so much devastation and desolation. The divine response came timely not just by the day, but even by the hour, saying: *“Tomorrow about this time”*
- 2- The solution was to come from the Lord complete and soon: An abundance of high quality flour, as well as of barley, will come to satisfy the needs of both men and beasts; and what remain will be sold very cheap.

While, through a divine proclamation, the prophet perceived the prosperity that will dwell upon Samaria, the king's entourage, on the other hand, did not believe his prophecy, and the divine proclamation.

+ You should be humble for your own sake, looking at how God has condescended for your sake, and not for His own sake.

Confess your weakness, and lie before the Physician with perseverance.

For, once you perceive His condescendence, you will rise together with Him; not that He raises Himself, being the Word; but rather through more perception by you.

He would not increase; but when you progress, He will appear as though increased together with you;

Look at the tree; it started its growth by sending its roots downwards to be able to grow up high; The more it hold fast in earth , the higher it can go up to heaven. ... Will you exert much effort to grow, except through

humility? ....

Therefore, *"that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love; ... that you may be filled with all the fullness of God"* (Ephesians 3: 17-19).

(St.

Augustine)

+ That man, filled with the Spirit of God, endured the reproach, and was not offended by those who dared;

Threatening to kill him did not disturb him; he endured, responded to them, and brought them comfort;

His might soul moved to perform a wonder; and raised his voice with an amazing prophecy

Tomorrow security and satisfaction will dwell. Tomorrow the city will publicly open up its gates;

Tomorrow those under siege in the city will come out of anguish; the hungry will be satisfied, and will forget all about the famine that tortured them;

Tomorrow, all the people will find at the city gates, an abundance of grain sold cheap;

The prophet uttered a divine proclamation, which was despised by the king's entourage; They threatened to cut off his head because of the famine; and when he promised prosperity, they did not believe him.

(St. (Mar)

Jacob El-Serougi)

A great difference between the situation during the famine, and when it was over. During the famine, they desired to eat the donkey's head, considered unclean by the statutes of God; yet they could not afford its high price. But once it was over, the seah of fine flour would be sold for a shekel; and there will be no one to buy; not for being unable to pay the price, but because of its abundance. They all robbed the enemy, ate, and filled their storehouses; and there was no point of purchasing more. ...Look how great is God's generosity in giving.

### **3- A KING'S OFFICER PROCLAIMS HIS DOUBT:**

Whoever believes in the God of the impossible, would take out of his dictionary the word "how?"; ... He would never wonder: "*How can one satisfy these people with bread in the wilderness?*" (Mark 8: 4).

*"So an officer, on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said, 'Look, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, could this thing be? And he said, 'In fact you shall see*

*it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it'" (2)*

The word "officer" originally came to mean the third man (Shaliyesh) in a military chariot, who used to carry a huge shield. But here, it means a deputy military leader (9: 25; 10: 25). Although the Lord offered such a great promise of salvation, yet the unbeliever did not enjoy practicing it; namely, did not partake of its blessings.

The expression: "*on whose hand the king leaned*", refers to that that officer was a counselors of the king; the way Naaman was to the king of Aram (5: 18)

The city was under siege, and its inhabitants could have nothing from the outside; how could they have an abundance of fine flour and barley? Will God open windows in heaven? ... The way to respond to such doubt by the king's officer in what God proclaimed on the tongue of His prophet Elisha, seen by him as something impossible to happen, was to realize the impossible; to give all the people what to eat, while denying that king's officer eating with them.

In great grief, St (Mar) Ephraim writes about that king's officer, saying: [He was a symbol of the fall of the people of Abraham, who saw by their own eyes "*the bread coming down from heaven*", namely the Lord Christ; yet they were not worthy to enjoy the grace of our Lord and Savior, that was granted to those who sought it.

+ The mighty officer started to talk with a haughty spirit, far from faith;  
Unless windows are opened high up in heaven, what you say will never happen;  
The blessed prophet answered: You will see it happen by your own eyes, but you will not eat of the goods you see;  
And he could do as he said; for the words are his, while its execution is God's;  
Both security and war were put upon his lips; to say a word, and to let it happen right away;  
He promised that there would be security, satisfaction, and a feast loaded with prosperity.

(St. (Mar) Jacob

El-Serougi)

What seemed against logic for the king's officer, was that God who opened the windows of heaven in the days of Noah to bring down the great flood, is able to open them to bring down food for the people to eat

Unfortunately, we often take a likewise position when we are so captivated by sins for a long time, to assume that it would be impossible for us to be saved and sanctified. ... But, God who opened the gates of His love to save the people from famine, Would He not open them to save our souls from corruption, and to grant us an abundance of His grace?! .... Would He not present Himself: joy, heavenly food, spiritual drink, peace, and divine goods?!

+ Let us, while contemplating in what the gospels say in the light of those promises of goods; confirm that the goods proclaimed by the apostles in the gospels are simply: “Jesus Christ”.

One of those goods they proclaim is “Resurrection”; But resurrection is “Jesus Christ”, who says: *“I am the Resurrection”*.

Isaiah says: *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news!”* (Isaiah 52: 7). He sees how beautiful and befitting, is the proclamation of the apostles who walked (in Christ), who says: *“I*

*am the way”*; ; he commends the feet of those who walk along the way thinking of Jesus Christ, and going through that door to God the “Father” ....

(The scholar

Origen)

### **3- FOUR LEPERS ACT WITH WISDOM:**

*“Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate, and they said to one another, ‘Why are we sitting here until we die?’”* (3)

The lepers were usually sent away to live out of the city at the gate (Leviticus 13: 4-6); Numbers 5: 2, 3), in a kind of a quarantine, not to be touched by anyone. The people of the city used to put food for them afar without coming in contact with them. But because of the famine that dwelt upon the city under siege, that food supply was completely cut off. As for the enemy, they were utterly disregarded and left out to their natural destiny, namely to die.

In the ‘Gamara’, it came that those four lepers were Gehazi, the former servant of Elisha and his three sons. But God in His love, who uses all things for our edification; caused those who used to be a burden over the people, providing them with food for nothing good on their part, to be the way to joyful salvation. In His amazing goodness, God uses even the horrible disease, the anguish, and the devil himself to have us crowned.

- + When you go down to death, and the most devastating calamities dwell upon your head, do not despair; for God can find a way when it so seem there is none.
  
- + We are committed to submit to our Creator, and to accept with joy, and great pleasure what He decides; regardless of the appearances of events. And above everything else, God knows for sure what is for our benefit, and the ways to our salvation.

(St. John

Chrysostom)

*“If we say, ‘We will enter the city, the famine is in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore, come let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep*

*us alive, we shall live, and if they kill us, we shall die”* (4)

*“And they rose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians; and when they had come to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, to their surprise no one was there”* (5)

*“For the Lord had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses – the noise of a great army; so they said to one another, ‘Look, the king of Israel has*

*hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us”* (6)

The Aramites got terrified to hear the noise of the hosts of the Lord; assuming that it was the noise of several armies hired by the king of Israel, from the Hittites in particular. ... The Assyrian documents referred to Palestine as the “land of the Hittites”.

That noise, whether it was actually that of heavenly hosts, or an imaginary noise heard by the Aramites, has been through a divine plan.

**The kings of the Hittites:** The Hittites at that time were in the region of Homs, Hamah, and Alippo; with their greatest base in Carchemish on the Euphrates; ... Tripoli nowadays.

**The kings of the Egyptians:** Because of their terror, the Aramites did not think with reason, that it was difficult for the Egyptians who were far away on one side, and the Hittites who were far away on the other side; to join forces to attack the Aramite army besieging Israel. .

As the noise was too loud and close by; the Aramites counted that there is no time for them to gather together their tents and food; and on another aspects they thought that leaving their tents, all their possessions, and beasts of burde, would probably give the Israelites the wrong impression that the Aramites were still staying in their camp and are never far away.

St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, binding between what previously happened, when an army surrounded the mountain to arrest the prophet Elisha, were struck with blindness, and were led captives to Samaria, And when the enemy was disturbed by imaginary noise of a great army which was actually not there;... he saw that an awesome unseen heavenly camp was always accompanying Elisha the man of God, wherever he went..

+ Intending to confirm His word, God defeated the Aramite with an amazing miracle.

He let the enemy hear horrible noise that made them hasten to escape;

The horses neighed, the weapons clang, and the armies cried out preparing to attack the Aramites;

Noises were coming on all sides from the front and the rear, like that of the sea; as though there were forces coming from all directions;

God let them hear terrifying noise, of weapons, horsemen, gnashing teeth, and curses by men;

Such a camp was always surrounding Elisha wherever he went;

Such were the horses and horsemen that surrounded him when the Aramites came to captivate him;

God who once struck the Aramites with blindness, now let them hear imaginary terrifying noises;

The Aramites assumed that the king of Israel hired armies from the Egyptians and the Hittites to fight against them;

Here those hired forces, together with the Hebrews are on their way, ... Who could confront them?!

Let us escape right away, because they are close at hand!.

(St. (Mar) Jacob

El-Serougi)

*“Now therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact – their tents, their horses, and their donkeys – and they fled for their lives” (7)*

While the Aramites enjoyed everything in abundance, the mothers were eating their own children in Samaria. But as God intervened, all the possessions of the Aramites became a banquet for those who were under siege.

+ The fear of death drove the Aramites away leaving back all their possessions;  
They forsook all their riches; for life is more precious than anything else in the world.  
The possessions are beloved until death is close by; when everything else is valueless;  
An hour of life is of more value than all treasures and gold of the earth;  
All what the Aramites had, they forsook when they thought that death has reached them;  
They fled away with their life, whoever took something, threw it away once he hears the disturbing noise;

The noises were so overwhelming that gave the Aramites no chance to take anything from their camp;

(St. (Mar) Jacob

El-Serougi).

*“And when these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp they went into one tent and ate and drank, and carried from it silver and gold and clothing, and went and hid them; then they came back and entered another tent, and carried some from there also, and went and hid it” (8)*

We hear sometimes of certain Aids victims, who bear some kind of envy or hate toward those who are healthy. ... We hear of a woman who drew many to commit the sin with her, then sends each of them a card in which she wrote: [Congratulations! You are now a member of the Aids club].....And I remember a young man in Los Angeles telling me that a certain victim of Aides, snatched the syringe from the hand of the nurse and with great fury, he struck her with it to give her the disease. ....

Now we have four men inflicted with leprosy, the worst disease at the time, which denies man the right to live together with his family, but to be cast away to live outside the city altogether; and whenever someone comes near him, he would cry out ‘Unclean, unclean’. Those four men, though, did not bear any feeling of hate toward the society, but had such wide hearts to share their good fortune with others.

#### **4- THEY LET THE OTHERS PARTAKE OF THEIR GOOD FORTUNE:**

*“Then they said to one another, ‘We are not doing what is right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king’s household” (9)*

It was not possible for those lepers, isolated away from the society, to enjoy the spoil of the enemy without letting the others know about such a divine work. .... They called every believer – whether a priest or a layman – to testify to the others about the work and gifts of God, so that all would enjoy what they do. .... It is befitting of us to sing together with them: *“This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent” (9)*. ... We should not wait until morning light, but should hasten

in the darkness to preach the good news..... The lepers considered it an evil to keep silent and not to share their good fortune with the royal household. to be punished by God.... Their voice rebukes us if we are slothful to spread the word of salvation. Those men were so wise not to surrender to despair, but set forth to open the door of the spirit of hope before the whole people.. With love for their brethren they went and told the gatekeeper to convey the news to the king, so that all may enjoy what they did.

The soul that experience the sweetness of life with the Lord Christ, and become satisfied, would never find comfort until it give the good news of the true joy to everyone, to practice and taste the sweetness of the eternal life in the Lord.

- + Even with their hateful outer appearance, those lepers, through the symbol, proclaim the good news to the inhabitants of their city, and shine inside by the splendor of the righteousness. They truly refer to the four saintly Evangelists, through whose books, the grace of our Savior, the Source of life, became known; and liberty to the whole mankind was proclaimed, according to the divine plan. They symbolize the saintly apostles at the beginning, who, despite their modest origin on the outside, their inside was adorned with righteousness, and by the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in them, their “old ma” changed and renewed; they put on a garment shining with the colors of heaven; and were sent to show the works of the hands of God.

(St. (Mar)

Ephraim the Syrian)

*“So they went and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and told them, saying, ‘We went to the Syrian camp, and surprisingly no one was there, not a human sound – only horses and*

*donkeys tied, and the tents intact” (10)*

*“And the gatekeepers called out, and they told it to the king’s household inside” (11)*

Here, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi) presents to us a magnificent portrait of the banquet offered by God to His people through the lepers, driven outside he walls:

+ How amazing is the ordinance of God!, when the good news came to the people through lepers;

Who brought hope forth to the people under siege; and the good news were uttered by all mouths;

The city under siege opened its gates, lighted its streets, and danced everywhere, when it foresaw security, satisfaction, and the joy of heart;

The rich became richer; the poor and hungry became satisfied; and the gloomy countenance of the people shined with light;

The hearts of the women who ate their beloved children opened up. And forgot hunger, once they anticipated the great satisfaction;

The people under siege enjoyed the spoil, and the food they found in the Aramite camp;

The people coming out from such a great anguish, enjoyed bread, wine, oil, and honey;

The Aramite camp came to be like a banquet, where everyone got satisfied;

All the spoil gathered together by the Aramites were brought forth into the city by the needy of Samaria;

They ate and were satisfied, and what remained, they sold;

They set a feast to which they invited the prophet Elisha.

(St. (Mar) Jacob

El-Serougi)

## **5- THE KING DOUBTS THE NEWS:**

*“Then the king arose in the night and said to his servants, ‘Let me now tell you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we are hungry; therefore they have gone out of the camp to*

*hide themselves in the field, saying, ‘When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city’” (12)*

By “*his servants*” here, he means the military leaders and counselors.

When the Holy Book, talk about a wicked man, it does not disregard his good sides; and when it talks about a righteous man, it does not disregard his weaknesses. That king, despite his evil nature, yet his heart, being preoccupied with his people; arose in the night to partake of their suffering and bitterness, and to be committed to his responsibilities toward them.... Binding what he heard from the lepers to what happened in the old in the battle of Ai (Joshua 8: 3-19), king Jehoram assumed that the absence of the Aramites in their camp, might be because they were hiding according to a military plan against his city. Even though his way of thinking might seem somewhat logic, and not strange; on account of that there was nothing to make the enemy loosen the siege all of a sudden; yet it was befitting of him to bind what the lepers said to the prophecy previously uttered by the prophet Elisha about the good news to come. But instead, he assumed that the Aramites decided to hide somewhere, then, in case the inhabitants of the city come out, they would fall upon them like lightning and destroy them all. Such tricks of war were common in the old times..

*“And one of his servants answered and said, ‘Please, let several men take five of the remaining horses which are left in the city. Look, they may either become like all the multitudes of Israel*

*that are left in it; or indeed, I say, they may become like all the multitude of Israel left from those who are consumed; so let us send them and see”* (13)

**“Like all the multitude of all Israel”**; As most of the horses died of hunger, and the remaining horses which are left were weak and frail; they could be a ransom for the whole people, in case they come out, and do not return.

Anyway, sending those horses was not a big deal, for, if they remained in Samaria they would certainly die of hunger; and if they are set forth to the Aramite camping around Samaria they would probably die as well. The text in our hands (the Hebrew version) refers to some kind of sacrifice of five horses to find out the truth; while in the Septuagint version, those five horses were

all what remained in Samaria, after all the other horses died of hunger, or slain for consumption by the hungry people of Samaria.

*“Therefore they took two chariots with horses, and the king set them in the direction of the Syrian army, saying, ‘Go and see’” (14)*

According to the plan, two chariots, each with two horses, and a horseman on the fifth horse preceded the procession to discover the way, then, in case of emergency, would hasten to return to report what happened.

*“And they went after them to the Jordan; and indeed all the road was full of garments and weapons which the Syrians have thrown away in their haste. So the messengers returned and told the king” (15)*

He came back to report that the road was covered with garments and weapons which the Syrians have thrown away in their haste. The Aramites most probably escaped through the major way between Samaria and Damascus through Geba En-Gannim, Bet-shean, and Afik; which crosses over the Jordan at Mejamia, 35 miles North-east of Samaria.

The discarded garments and weapons, refer to that even those who cared to carry few possessions, have thrown them away because of the terror that dwelt on them, and their haste to escape, never to think of coming back.

## **6- GOD OPENS WINDOWS IN HEAVEN:**

*“Then the people went out and plundered the tents of the Syrians. So a seah of fine flour was sold for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord” (16).*

*“Heaven and earth will pass away, but (the words of God) will by no means pass away”(Matthew 24: 35; 1 Corinthians 1: 9; 1 Thessalonians 5: 24; 1 Peter 1: 25)*

## 7- THE KING'S OFFICER WHO PROCLAIMED HIS DOUBT, DIES:

*“Now the king had appointed the officer on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate. But the people trampled him in the gate, and he died, just as the man of God had said, who*

*spoke when the king came down to him” (17)*

*“So it happened just as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, ‘Two seahs of barley for a shekel, and a seah of fine flour for a shekel, shall be sold tomorrow about this time in the*

*gate of Samaria” (18)*

*“Then that officer had answered the man of God, and said, ‘Now look, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?’. And he had said, ‘In fact you shall see it with your*

*eyes, but shall not eat of it” (19)*

Repeating the talk about the death of the king's officer, proclaims the realization of Elisha's prophecy. He was not treaded upon by the hungry people by intention, but as a result of the stampede, when they rushed to look for food. The mighty man was denied to enjoy the goods enjoyed by all the people, because of his doubt in the word of the Lord on the mouth of His prophet Elisha; His lack of faith denied him of the divine gifts that came in abundance, as though from open windows in heaven over the whole city.

+ The market was opened, and the prices of the goods were according to what the prophet proclaimed the day before;

The words of Elisha, the mighty man, full of conquests, were realized; and security and great satisfaction came as promised;

He satisfied the hungry, and defeated those outside with terror;

His word shined, and the prophecy restored its honor; because the Lord consummated what He promised with abundance;

The other mighty man – the king’s officer – who doubted the words of the godly man,  
concerning the promised satisfaction;

Saw by his own eyes, but did not taste what he saw, as prophesied;

He was treaded upon by the multitude, and fell down in disgrace;

Even though many weak and old have gone forth to gather spoil from the Aramite camp;

None of them died the same way the king’s officer who doubted did;

Blessed be to Him who granted Elisha the treasures and riches of prophecies.

(St. (Mar) Jacob

El-Serougi)

*“And so it happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gate and he died”*

(20)

The prophecy of the prophet Elisha was literally realized, in a way not expected by anyone.

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 7**

### **OPEN UP, O GOD, I PRAY THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN**

- + Who can fulfill all our needs but You;  
If the earth closes her resources;  
If we are surrounded by affliction on all sides;  
You open up the windows of heaven to pour Your blessings on us;  
You give us more than what we ask and seek;  
You give us what may seem impossible; and grant us beyond what we imagine.
  
- + The king’s officer did not believe Your generous promises;  
He challenged Your prophet, and counted his words as utter nonsense;

But Your promises were fulfilled; and were not enjoyed by that officer;  
The windows in heaven were opened up; but were not enjoyed by him with a closed up  
mind;

By his denying heart, he denied his body of enjoying the divine blessings;  
And his soul lost the peace of God, and the joy of the Spirit.

+ The city gates were shut before the lepers;  
Those who were despised by everyone;  
They had no more food to be offered to them, even the littlest little.

+ The windows of heaven were opened before everyone;  
And those despised lepers were the first to enjoy that abundance, even before their  
healthy brethren;  
They ate, became satisfied, and carried gold and garments;  
Having the windows of heaven opened before them,  
They opened the windows of their hearts before their brethren;  
They gave the good news to the king, the elites, as well as to the poor;  
They came to become symbols of the four Evangelists;  
Those who presented to the nations and the peoples, the heavenly Christ, as food and  
drink;

+ Open up, O Lord, my inner windows with love;  
I shall find no comfort until everyone enjoy You;  
Until all enjoy the bread of life and the water of the Spirit;  
Until they are satisfied, their thirst quenched; and come to be the paradise of God;  
Setting Your Kingdom in them, they will be filled with joy;  
Glory be to You, O who bring joy to the hearts of all.

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# CHAPTER 8

## ATTACHMENT TO THE LORD

In the last chapter we saw how God intervened and opened windows in heaven to pour His goods upon His people; while the king's officer lost his life because he doubted the promises and possibilities of God. In the present chapter we find a living portrait of getting attached to the Lord, walking in His ways, and trusting in Him.

1- The Chunammite woman, attached to the Lord	1 – 6
2- Ben-Hadad seeks Elisha's help, but not Elisha's God	7 – 1
3- Hazael does not perceive the truth of his heart	11 –
15	
4- The son of the good king Jehoshaphat marries a pagan wife	16 -
24	
5- An alliance outside the Lord	25 –
29	

### 1- THE CHUNAMMITE WOMAN, ATTACHED TO THE LORD:

Not wishing to be indebted to anyone, Elisha asked the notable Chunammite woman (2 kings 4: 8) who did favor to the man of God: "*What can I do for you? Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army; She answered: "I dwell among my own people"* (2 kings 4: 13); Namely, [Why should I be privileged above my people? What you want to give me, give it rather to my people; for what my people get, I count as though I got it myself].. Her answer, revealing her love for her people, giving them priority above herself, qualified her to get what she did not expect; to be granted by God a son when she was barren, and her man was too old.

That notable woman suffered three calamities; and in each of them, she was justified by getting more attached to the Lord, with whom she was faithful:

- a- When her only son died, God, through His prophet Elisha raised him from the dead (2 kings 4: 35)
- b- When her man, the head of her household, died, God granted her a heavenly comfort; the way St. John Chrysostom wrote to a young widow, saying: [If, indeed, he has ultimately perished, and completely gone, that would be a major catastrophe and sorrowful; but if he just sailed toward a quiet haven; and gone on a journey to God, his King; we should, therefore, never grieve, but rather be joyful].
- c- When she lost all her possessions because of the famine; it was amazing how God used the fact of raising her son from the dead, a chance to restore what she lost. Indeed *“All things work together for good to those who love God”* (Romans 8: 28). .

*“Then Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, ‘Arise and go, you and your household, and sojourn wherever you can sojourn, for the Lord has called for a famine, and furthermore, it will come upon the land for seven years”* (1)

***“The Lord has called for a famine”***; Namely, even if the events seem to happen because of natural factors, yet they are actually allowed by God, either to chastise His people, ... to punish His opponents, ... to give humanity a chance to deal with the victims with compassion, and to make man practice practical love toward his needy or suffering fellow man; ... or be used by God for His glory.

The famine mentioned here was probably that which came in 2 kings 4: 38.

- + Elisha prophesied to the Chunammite woman a famine that would come on the land for seven years, and called on her to depart to a new location he chose for her – the land of the Philistines -- a close-by, fertile land, whose inhabitants were all rich, because of marine commerce, being on the coast of the sea, with reputed ports full of uncountable ships, as often testified by the Holy Book. For the same reason the two Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac, took refuge in it (Genesis 12: 1).

According to the symbolic interpretation, the land of the Philistines that received righteous men, refers to sojourn from the Lord (2 Corinthians 5: 6), on account of that its people bore a strong animosity against the people of God, and used to treat the God-fearing people badly. They were later defeated by David, and banned from making weapons, even though they continued somehow to do it every now and then.

The world hates the saints and persecutes them all the time, even after the Lord defeated them together with their prince – the devil – Yet they will never cease to fight against God's ministers, by provoking and destroying the slothful and the ignorant

(St. Ephraim the Syrian).

Here, it is befitting of us to look into the reason of Elisha's care to save that particular Chunammite woman from the famine to come:  
Because that notable rich woman became in great need; and it was not befitting of the saintly prophet to disregard her. He, as a believer should enjoys the true virtues which are a practical translation of our love for God, through our love of our brethren; in particular the poor, the needy, and those in distress.

In His talk about the great day of the Lord, the Lord Christ set the criteria for distinguishing the saintly sheep from the wicked goats; based upon the secret relationship of unity between the Lord Christ and the poor. For the way the two categories treated the poor, the Lord counted as though it was Him, whom they treated (Matthew 25: 31-46). ... Talking about giving, St. Cyprian says: [Don't you know that we walk among several portraits of Christ?].

+ As much as someone is “the least”, Christ will come to you through Him. For whoever gives a great man, would do it with boasting; whereas who gives the poor, will do it with good heart for the sake of Christ.

+ Nothing would make us close to God, and according to His image, like a good deed.

+ Through mercy, man would soar to an exalted height, It give him a great daring with God.

When the queen intends to enter to the king, no one in the king's court would dare to stand in her way; but all would receive her cheerfully; He who does mercy and giving, would come before the king without any hindrance; For God strongly loves mercy, and keeps it close to Himself; hence the Holy Book says: “*The queen sits on the right hand of the king*” ( ). Mercy has such a special place in God's heart, because it made him come to be Man for the sake of our salvation.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“So the woman arose and did according to the saying of the man of God, and she went with her household and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years” (2)*

Again, that notable woman showed her faith in God’s proclamations on the tongue of His prophet, and obeyed his counsel without discussion.

*“It came to pass at the end of seven years, that the woman returned from the land of the Philistines; and she went to make an appeal to the king for her house and for her land” (3)*

The Chunemmite woman did not sell her possessions, but, according to the counsel of the prophet Elisha, she departed from her city because of the famine to come. Now, returning from the land of the Philistines after seven years, and found that her land was taken by force, probably by the king himself, because the land was still legally hers, she appealed her case before the king.

*“Then the king talked with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, ‘Tell me please all the great things Elisha has done’” (4)*

It is obvious that that happened before the event of cleansing the leper Naaman in the River Jordan, and before Gehazi was inflicted with leprosy; for otherwise he would never be standing before the king of Israel. Through an amazing divine ordinance, while the king was talking to Gehazi, the woman in question came to appeal her case before the king. ...

According to some, Gehazi’s love to talk about the work of God through his master Elisha to king Jehoram, who, himself, sought from him to do, is an evidence that even the wicked can have some good touches in them. ... How amazing!... while the wicked sometimes love to talk about the exalted work of

God, and to listen to them, the people of God “*forgot God their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt*” (Psalm 106: 21).

- + I wish I can tell every generation to come: Coming back from captivity, you belong now to the new Adam, the Grantor of liberty. ...It is not through my own power, nor righteousness, but “*Your righteous, O God, is very high. You have done great things. O God, who is like You?*” (Psalm 71: 19).

“*Your power and righteousness*”; ... to what extent? .... Will it be even to blood? ... No, “*It is very high*”, much higher!

High up is heaven, where there are angels, thrones, principalities, and hosts;

All are indebted to You for what they are;

All are indebted to You for their life;

All are indebted to You for letting them live with righteousness;

All are indebted to You for the blessings in which they live;

Do not think that man has the grace of God; ... For what was the angel before he was created?

How would the angel be if forsaken by Him who has created him?

(St. Augustine)

Man stands in amazement before that sitting between two persons; one of whom (Gehazi) was a lover of money, and the other (the king) was an idol-worshipper. Their talk, however, was about the great works done by God through His prophet Elisha. Those two persons will judge us on corrupting our time in things not for edification.

According to the Psalmist, *“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord”* (Psalm 150: 6); and, *“Blessed is the man who meditates in God’s law, day and night”* (psalm 1: 2). For the believer, enjoying the divine grace, counts every breath of his life, day and night, to have its weight and value, even in the sight of God.

+ Today is yours; but tomorrow you cannot tell for whom it will belong. Those who come to bury you may be at the door! ... Don’t ever bury your day, without burying your iniquity together with it! ... Don’t ever close your eye to sleep, before you open your mind to pray.

Seeing how the day hastens to depart, you should also hasten to forsake your sins... Let your righteousness shine with the morning! ... Don’t ever postpone today’s work until tomorrow.

+ If it happens that you are robbed by a thief, you would loudly wail; ... How come when your life is robbed away from God’s, you keep silent and do not mourn for it?

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Now it happened as he was telling the king how he has restored the dead to life, that there was the woman whose son he has restored to life, appealing for her house and for her land.*

*And Gehazi said, ‘My lord, O king, this is the woman and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life’” (5)*

How amazing are God’s wisdom and care! The Chunammite woman comes to appeal before the king to restore her possession to her, at the same moment he

hears how the prophet Elisha raised her dead son to life. Hence the king responded to her appeal, after seeking to hear her story from her own lips.

*“And when the king asked the woman she told him. So the king appointed a certain officer, saying, ‘Restore all that was hers, and all the proceeds of the field from the day that she left the land until now’” (6)*

All she requested was to have back her land and that of her son; but having listened to her story, the king gave his command to restore to her even all the proceeds of the field from the day she left the land until coming back. It is obvious from this that the famine was over, and the fields started again to produce, even though with less capacity..

Let us now end our talk by a word of admonition to the king. It is well and good to savor the talk about the wonders that God does through His saints in the life of others; but he should also seek the God of those saints to do wonders in his own life... When will our reading of the wonders and miracles done by the Lord Christ in the life of the saints, turn into an enjoyment of a practical experience in our inner life and our daily behavior?

As an example, when St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi read about the great works of God shown in the encounter of the Lord Christ with the Canaanite woman, he was preoccupied, not with the great miracle enjoyed by the Canaanite woman, when the Lord proclaimed the greatness of her faith, and granted her the healing of her daughter (Matthew 15: 21-28); but he rather concentrated his sight upon the Lord Christ, seeking from Him to grant His great deeds upon all the aspects of his own life.

+ He is the way along which man walks to encounter his Father, the door of life; through which those who enter will overcome death (John 14: 6; John 10: 9).

He is the Physician, from whom come all helps; and the fountain that flows life to all those around;

By Him the devil and the demons are driven away from mankind; and the diseases and wounds of the sick are healed;

By Him the life of the soul is purified and enlightened; By Him the multitude of the sins of the world are slain;

By the power of His preaching, the tax-collectors are justified; and By His forgiveness the sinners become perfect;

He drove the devil out of the Canaanite woman who sought it from Him; and He puts off the covetousness of your soul, if you concentrate your sight upon Him;

He bears the weight of the mighty world; In Him all creatures trust; and by Him they exist;

He is the Sun of Righteousness, and the great Light; He is the Physician who heals all the sick (Malachi 2: 4);

He is the Rich, the Son of the Rich, and who gives riches to all; He is by whom the weak get strength (2 Corinthians 8: 9; Ephesians 2: 4);

He bandages the wounds; heals the sick, and drives the demons away. Blessed is He who came down to visit the world, and to heal its ailments.

(St. (Mar Jacob El-Serougi)

## **2- BEN-HADAD SEEKS ELISHA'S HELP, AND NOT ELISHA'S GOD:**

Resorting to Elisha for help, the heart of Ben-Hadad king of Aram was far away from God; he was only preoccupied with his physical health, and not with his eternity.

*“Then Elisha went to Damascus; and Ben-Hadad king of Syria was sick, and it was told him, saying, ‘The man of God has come here’” (7)*

We do not know why Elisha went to Damascus; he probably was led by the Holy Spirit to follow up what the prophet Elijah has previously prophesied in Horeb, several years ago (1 Kings 19: 15); namely to set Hazael of the royal court, a king over Aram. For Elisha said to him: "*The Lord has shown me that you will be king on Aram*".

Although the people of Aram did not worship God, Yet God the Almighty moves the whole world to fulfill His divine plan, without depriving man of his own will; which is the most precious gift God has granted humanity.

+ Man (Adam) has been an image and an example of the Supreme Power that governs all creation;

Hence he, as well, had the authority over himself, being like Him who has the overall authority;

He was never a slave to any outer influence;

No, but he was always thinking of what is true, and with his own free will he used to choose what pleases him; And by his own free will, the calamity that dwelt upon the human race came.

+ That good God, would never deprive man of the most noble and precious thing; namely the gift of liberty, and the ability to make his own decisions.

For if it is only the necessity that governs man's life, he (the image of God), "the image" would be false; for it would be too far away from the Original, with no likeness to Him whatsoever.

How could nature, enslaved to any kind of necessity, have the likeness of the royal nature? ...

God is not responsible for the present evil; for He has set your nature to be free of any bondage. But the responsibility is upon the pervert will, by which man chooses what is worse, and not what is better.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

When Elisha entered Damascus, he did not do it in disguise, for he was well known there as the prophet, the man of God who healed Naaman of his leprosy (2 kings 5).

*“And the king said to Hazael, ‘Take a present in your hand, and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, ‘Shall I recover from this disease?’” (8)*

Remembering the healing of Naaman the Syrian, the king of Aram commanded Hazael to take a gift in his hand, and go and meet the man of God, and inquire from the Lord by him, if he will recover from his disease. In ‘The bylaws of the holy apostles’ it came that the prophet Elisha rejected the gift, the same way God rejects an offering, if it is the price of a dog or the wages of an adulteress. If the prophets of God reject the gifts of the wicked, it would be befitting of you, O bishops, as well, to do the same.

In an Assyrian inscription on a black obelisk, displayed nowadays in the British Museum; the names of Ben-Hadad and Hazael were referred to as two kings of Damascus who fought against and were defeated by xxxxxxxx the Assyrian king.

*“So Hazael went to meet him and took a present with him of every good thing of Damascus, forty camel-loads; and he came and stood before him, and said, ‘Your son Ben-Hadad king of Syria has sent me to you, saying, ‘Shall I recover from this disease?’” (9)*

It does not mean that the gifts were so numerous to be carried by forty camels. But that was an old custom to present the precious gifts in several containers, carried by many camels. According to 'Maillet', the gifts of a bridegroom used to be carried on four or five horses, even though they could be carried by a single horse; ... and for the sake of boasting, they used to put the precious jewels in fifteen plates, even though they could be contained in a single plate. ... When 'Ehud' brought a gift to Eglon, king of Moab, it was carried by a procession of people (Judges 3: 18)..... And it was said that in Persia, it was not feasible for one man to carry more than a single item of the gifts.

- + Ben-Hadad, king of Syria was inflicted by an acute depression and mental disturbance, caused by the defeat of his armies in his war against Samaria, at a time his people anticipated a sure conquest. His whole army escaped in disgrace, as a result of a false perception that a huge army was approaching to attack them; even though it was later on revealed that there was actually no such an army.

Hearing that the prophet Elisha came to Damascus, the king sent Hazael, a notable officer of the royal court to meet him, to inquire about the possibility of being healed of his disease. And believing that his request should be accompanied with gifts, according to the custom at that time, he sent with him of every good things of Damascus, forty-camel loads. But the prophet rejected the gift as he did when he rejected the gift of Naaman the Syrian.

(St. Ephraim the Syrian)

Hazael, being the personal attaché of the king, or the head of the royal court, said to Elisha: "*Your son Ben-Hadad king of Syria has sent me*"; which reveals that, together with his spirit of firmness, the prophet presents a

spirit of fatherhood, not only to the people of God, but to all with whom he dealt, even if he is a wicked pagan king. If that was the spirit of a prophet in the old covenant, how much more it is befitting of the priests of the new covenant, to testify to the compassionate fatherhood of God, through their own fatherhood to all mankind. That is why St. John Chrysostom used to say to the priest: [You are a father of the whole world].

+ I know for sure that someone prominent among a congregation, would not be exalted by anything more than to reveal his deep love toward those under his authority. A father is not a father just for giving birth to children, but rather for providing them with love. If therefore, nature implies the necessity of this love, how much more would be the sonhood through the grace?! I mean, if man is committed to love his natural offspring, to be called a natural father, how much more he would he would love his spiritual baptized children according to grace?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“And Elisha said to him, ‘Go, say to him, ‘You shall certainly recover’. However the Lord has shown me that he will really die”* (10)

It so seems that the disease of the king was not life-threatening; hence the prophet told Hazael to say to the king: *“You shall certainly recover”*; and went on to say: *“However the Lord has shown me that he will really die”*. He probably meant that even though the king will not die because of his disease, and will recover from it, yet he will die by some other cause. According to some, the prophet intended by his words to rebuke Hazael because he knew that he will not convey his whole message.

- + If his disease was not life-threatening, how would he die otherwise?! He actually died on the hands of his messenger Hazael, who took a thick cloth and dipped it in water, and spread it over the king's face, killed him and reigned in his place, as Elisha has prophesied.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

### **3- HAZAEL DOES NOT PERCEIVE THE TRUTH OF HIS HEART:**

Hazael represents a serious category of people who, although they resort to God, and carry the image of godliness and humility, yet their hearts are cruel, and they are not aware of it. ... Elisha recognized the crime lying in Hazael's heart, which Hazael himself did not.

*"Then he set his countenance in a stare until he was ashamed, and the man of God wept" (11)*

Seeing what was hidden in Hazael's heart and mind, of what he intended to do to the children of Israel, the prophet Elisha set his countenance in a stare on Hazael, and wept. Here, Hazael was ashamed of himself, for he perceived that God revealed his hidden criminal intentions to the man of God, as it came in 2 kings 10: 32-33. ... In those days God started cutting Israel off, and Hazael struck them all over the land, from the Jordan toward the East – the whole land of Gilead, Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh, from Aroer on the valley of Arnon, Gilead, and Bashan; As it came in 2 kings 13: 3-4) *"Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-Hadad the son of Hazael, all their days. So Jehoahaz pleaded with the Lord and the Lord listened to him; for He saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them...; and Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz". ...*

The way the prophet wept, the Lord Himself so did when He shed tears upon his lost people (Luke 19: 41).

*“And Hazael said, ‘Why is my lord weeping. And he answered, ‘Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. Their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword; and you will dash their children, and rip open their women with child’” (12)*

*“So Hazael said, ‘But what is your servant – a dog, that he should do this gross thing?’. And Elisha answered, ‘The Lord has shown me that you will become king of Syria’” (13)*

Did Elisha request from Hazael to kill king Ben-Hadad to reign in his place? ... Certainly not; but what he said to him was a prophecy of what Hazael was going to do; killing the king and taking the throne by force; and the evil he was going to do against Israel. ... Not able to imagine the extent of denial, his own heart was going to reach, to do such evil against the people of the prophet who prophesied to him that he will be a king, he said to him: *“But what is your servant – a dog, that he should do this gross thing?” (13)*. ... Man often assumes that he is too exalted to commit horrible sins; that he is able to have authority over his own behavior; and that he would never go down to such a lowly level; regardless of the evil hidden in his heart; instead of seeking the strength and help from God.

*“Then he departed from Elisha, and came to his master, who said to him, ‘What did Elisha said to you?’. And he answered, ‘He told me that you would surely recover’” (14)*

Hazael only told the king a part of the words said by the prophet Elisha; by which his words carried deception.

*“But it happened on the next day that he took a thick cloth and dipped it in water, and spread it over his face so that he died; and Hazael reigned in his place” (15)*

By killing the king that way, it would seem that he died because of his illness. The prophet Elijah has prophesied that Hazael will take the throne (1 Kings 19: 15); but the latter could not wait, but killed Ben-Hadad to reign in his place.

#### **4- THE SON OF THE GOOD KING JEHOSHAPHAT MARRIES A PAGAN WIFE:**

In spite of what Jehoshaphat had of good qualities, yet allowing his son to marry a pagan wife for some reason or another, whether for her beauty, or to create an atmosphere of friendship between Judah and Israel, has corrupted his depths, and made him lose his godliness.

Jehoram (Joram) reigned on Judah eight years (853-841 BC – See 2 Chronicles 21: 4-20). He reigned together with his father Jehoshaphat for a duration of five years; while according to other scholars, Jehoshaphat reigned together with his father Asa two years before his death; and the reign of Ahaziah and Jehoram is counted from the time Jehoshaphat reigned alone.

Now in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat having been king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat began to reign as king of Judah” (16)

According to some, this phrase came to summarize what came in 1 Kings 22: 50; saying: *“And Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; then Jehoram his son reigned in his place”.....* About Jehoshaphat it came that he reigned at least 23 years (1 Kings 22: 42, 51; 2 Kings 3: 1; 2 Chronicles 20: 31). It is assumed by some that Jehoshaphat gave

his son the title of 'The king of Judah', in the sixteenth year of his reign; then seven years later he made him an actual partner to reign together with him in the twenty-third year. Two years later, Jehoshaphat died, and Jehoram became the sole king.

What caused such confusion in the dates of events, was that some kings like Jehoram were given the royal title in the sixteenth year of the reign of his father; partook of the reign in the twenty-third year; then reigned alone after the death of his father, who reigned over Judah for 25 years.

*"He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem" (17)*

The eight years are counted from the time he partook of reigning together with his father.

*"And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord" (18)*

Making such a political and social alliance with Ahab and his household, did not allow Jehoshaphat nor his sons to keep their faith pure; for Jehoram, influenced by his wife Athaliah, daughter of Ahab, walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and introduced the worship of Baal in Judah.

It is amazing that the source of evil that brought the wrath of God down over Israel, namely by Ahab and his wife Jezebel (1 kings 16: 31), was the same source that brought it down over Judah; namely by 'Athaliah', daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (2 kings 11: 1). Although the goal of that bond in marriage between the king of Judah and the evil daughter of the king of Israel, was to set peace between the two kingdoms, yet that serious political alliance brought a serious

catastrophe over the kingdom of Judah. As Athaliah took after Jezebel her mother, the unity with the wicked would produce nothing but weakness and desolation. Even though that alliance actually had some political benefits, like peace between the two kingdoms, but it provoked the Southern kingdom to idol-worship. After the death of Jehoram, Ahaziah his son became a king; and after his death in battle, Athaliah, to set herself a queen, and to establish her throne, killed all the royal offspring, except for Joash who was hidden by his aunt (11: 1).

*“Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah for the sake of his servant David, as He promised him to give a lamp to him and his sons forever” (19)*

The natural fruit of Jehoram’s apostasy was the desolation of his household, and the transfer of Judah’s throne to another family; the way it happened with the kings of Israel: Jeroboam (1 kings 14: 10); Baasha (1 kings 16: 2-4); and Ahab (1 Kings 21: 20-22).

But despite the wickedness of Jehoram, the Lord did not destroy Judah, for the sake of His covenant with His servant David, and His promises (2 Samuel 7: 12-16; Psalm 89: 30-37), to give a lamp to him and his sons forever. This lamp is a symbol of the hope that it would stay lighted even in the darkest situations; a promise that was fulfilled by the coming of the Lord Christ the Light of the world (1 kings 15: 4; John 1: 13); and the Son of David according to the flesh.

The chastisement against Jehoram came in some way other than transferring the throne to another family; namely by allowing Edom to humiliate Judah (2 kings 23: 8); by spreading illnesses on them, and by allowing the Philistines and the Arabs to invade and rob their land (2 Chronicles 21: 14-20).

*“In his days Edom revolted against Judah’s authority, and made a king over themselves” (20)*

King David previously invaded Edom and put garrisons in it (2 Samuel 8: 13-14; 1 Kings 11: 15-17), but they caused his descendants much troubles (2 Kings 8: 20; 14: 7, 22; 16: 6). As they kept mocking and ridiculing the Jews, particularly when they were captivated by the Babylonians; many prophecies in the Holy Book came against them (Jeremiah 49: 1-22; Zephaniah 2: 8, 11; Ezekiel 25: 12-14, etc.). What came here refer to the chastisement of Jehoram.

Edom rebelled against Judah, by which the prophecy that came in Genesis 27: 40 was fulfilled; and since then they had their independence (Jeremiah 25: 21; 27: 3; Amos 1: 11, etc.). The Assyrian inscriptions referred to the kings of Edom as independent.

*“So Joram went to Zair, and all his chariots with him. And he rose by night and attacked the Edomites who had surrounded him and the captains of the chariots, but his people fled to their tents” (21)*

‘Joram’ here is, himself, Jehoram.

**Zair:** a Hebrew name meaning (little); It was the main city in Edom, claimed to be the one with the same name nowadays, five miles North-East of Hebron, where the tomb of Esau (Edom) is. In a prophecy about Edom, Isaiah refers to Zeir as ‘Seir’, saying: *“The burden against Dumah. He calls to me out of Seir, ‘Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, ‘The morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; Return! Come back’”* (Isaiah 21: 11-12).

**Dumah;** here is short for Idumea;.

The prophet stood on the watch point the whole nights (8); as a kind of darkness prevailed upon the world, in anticipation of the Sun of Righteousness to come to

scatter the darkness of the night, and to bring the morning forth. Now there is a voice, probably from heaven, or from the few remaining prophets and men of God; saying: “*Watchman, what of the night?*”. The fullness of time has come, and the light of the morning shone. ....Let the nations be silent; .... let them come to death of their old man, to enjoy the light of life; .... Let them seek now, to find their light through their faith in the Lord Christ; .... Let them return to God their Savior, and come back to Him, to find Him stretching His hands by the practical love to embrace them.

He repeats: “*Watchman, what of the night?*” twice; for the talk here concerns the Jews, as well as the Gentiles; and the believers of the Old and the new covenants; so that all would enjoy salvation, while silently contemplating in God’s work with them.

*“Thus Edom has been in revolt against Judah’s authority to this day. And Libnah revolted at that time” (22)*

Although Judah and Edom had mutual borders, and had one grandfather – Isaac – Yet they lived in continual wars. Edom submitted to Israel in the days of David as we saw; then to the Southern kingdom. Now, as it revolted against Jehoram, and declared independence. Jehoram went to attack Edom, but failed, and lost a part of his land as a punishment for his failure to honor God.

**Libnah;** a city on the coast between Makkedah and Lachish (Joshua 10: 39; 12: 15); of the cities of Judah South-West of Jerusalem, claimed to be Tel El-Safia nowadays; assigned to the descendants of Aaron (Joshua 21: 13; I Chronicles 6: 57). It rebelled against the kingdom of Judah, when it grew weak in the days of Jehoram; the reason of their rebellion, as it came in 2 Chronicles 21: 10-11, was that Jehoram has forsaken the God of his fathers, and provoked the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit adultery. ... It was besieged by Sennacherib king of Assyria (2 Kings 19: 8; Isaiah 37: 8).

*“Now the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?” (23)*

*“So Joram rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. Then Ahaziah reigned in his place” (24)*

It came in 2 Chronicles 21: 18 that Jehoram died because of a serious illness, that caused his intestine to come out. He was buried in the city of David, but not in the tombs of his family, namely that of the kings.

#### **5- AN ALLIANCE OUTSIDE THE LORD:**

*“In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, began to reign” (25)*

According to some, Ahaziah reigned for one year together with his father because of his serious illness.

In 2 kings 8: 25, it came that Ahaziah the son of Joram became king over Judah in the twelfth year of the reign of Joram the son of Ahab the king of Israel. Even though, in 2 kings 9: 29, it came that Ahaziah reigned over Judah in the eleventh year of the reign of Joram over Israel. What is the truth?

Both are true, but the difference came from the different way of counting the duration of reign in Israel and Judah. During the reign of Ahaziah over Judah, the system was to count the duration of reign according to the “Accession year”, as the first official year of the king, only begins at the start of the new year following the sitting on the throne. Whereas the system followed in Israel was according to the “Non accession year”, in which the year in which the king is actually enthroned is counted as the first year of his reign; It is the eleventh year according to the former system, and the twelfth year according to the later one.

*“Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Athaliah the granddaughter of Omri, king of Israel” (26)*

Ahaziah was the only son remaining of Jehoram king of Judah; who, even though was the youngest son, yet he received the throne because all his other brothers were led into captivity during one of the attacks by the Philistines and the Arabs (2 Chronicles 21: 16-17).

The name of the king’s mother is often mentioned, on account of that she was oftentimes the actual queen who ordained the issues of the state.

**Athaliah;** According to some scholars, although Ahab was the one who brought the idol-worship into Israel, yet he did not forsake the worship of the living God altogether; on account of that he gave his children the names: ‘Athaliah’, meaning (Jehovah is high up); ‘Ahaziah’, meaning (Jehovah supports); and ‘Joram’, meaning (Jehovah is exalted).

**The granddaughter of Omri;** Athaliah was the daughter of Ahab the son of Omri, who had a special consideration in Israel. Ahaziah mentioned here was the son of Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri king of Israel. The likeness of names in that era between the two royal families of Israel and Judah, caused some kind of confusion. Ahab, king of Israel had two sons who reigned consequently; namely Ahaziah and Jehoram (Joram). Whereas Jehoshaphat king of Judah had a son called Jehoram, who followed him on the throne; and had a son called Ahaziah who followed him on it..

**In Judah,** Jehoshaphat had a son ‘Jehoram’, who had a son ‘Ahaziah’;  
**In Israel,** Ahab had a son ‘Ahaziah’, whose brother was ‘Jehoram’.

*“And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab” (27)*

As Israel in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, has reached the climax of apostasy; So it was in Judah, in the days of their daughter Athaliah.

*“Now he went with Joram the son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth Gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram” (28)*

Here began the troubles of Hazael king of Aram, prophesied by the prophet Elisha (8: 12)

*“Then king Joram went back to Jezreel to recover from the wounds which the Syrians had inflicted on him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick” (29)*

**Jezreel**, was the summer resort for the kings of Israel. Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, returned to Jerusalem after Joram was wounded, and from it he went down to Jezreel to see Joram the son of Ahab .

Finally, the events mentioned in this chapter motivate us to deliver ourselves completely in the hands of our heavenly Savior; for the sake of His exalted care and ordinances:

- 1- God cared for the Chunnammite woman and her son, amid the famine that dwelt upon the people. He is aware of the future which is within His hands.
- 2- Although Ben-Hadad bore a portrait of religion; God was aware of his evil heart

- 3- Hazael, king of Aram honored the prophet Elisha, who was aware of the bitterness that his heart bore
- 4- Jehoshaphat walked uprightly; but evil friendship corrupted his godliness.
- 5- Despite the wickedness of Joram king of Judah; yet God kept His promise to His servant David, together with chastising the king.

God cares for us, plans for our salvation; and seeks the purity of our hearts, not just a portrait of godliness, but to have a fellowship with our brethren; and ultimately, He remains faithful in His promises, despite our unfaithfulness.

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 8**

### **LET ME BE ATTACHED TO YOU, O MY FAITHFUL SHEPHERD**

- + You allowed for a famine to dwell over the whole land;  
But You would not forsake the widow attached to You;  
For her future and that of her children are in Your hands;  
My soul will be perpetually at peace;  
I shall never fear tomorrow, for it is in Your hand.
  
- + Ben-Hadad king of Aram, bearing the image of Godliness;  
Did not seek the his gods when he fell ill;  
But sought the counsel of Your prophet;  
He offered many gifts to Your servant;  
But his heart was very far from You;  
You do not seek the image of godliness,  
and do not need sacrifices and offerings;  
But You seek the pure heart a dwelling place for yourself

+ You gave all possibilities to Hazael, full of venom toward Your people;  
You revealed to him what is hidden in his mind and heart;  
He counted himself like a dog if he dares to do wrong toward you;  
He wept when Your prophet revealed to him the violence and cruelty in his  
heart;  
Yet, he did not seek Your grace, nor asked You to lead his life;  
Despite all the divine warnings, he consummated the evil desire of his  
heart;  
Keep me safe from my corrupt depths; sanctify me, and carry me on Your  
hands.

+ My soul is bitter to see how the heart of Jehoshaphat collapsed;  
His alliance with the wicked made him lose his inner insight;  
He lost sight of You and Your heavens;  
And walked behind the pervert human compliments;  
Let Your fiery Spirit keep my depths pure;  
Keep me from perverting to the right or to the left;  
I rejoice to see You;  
I enjoy being attached to You, and having fellowship with You.

+ Chasten me because of my sins, but do not give me over to death;  
Let Your promises be perpetually faithful, despite my unfaithfulness;  
Set, O Son of David the fallen tent in my depths;  
To proclaim Your joyful kingdom in me;  
Glory be to You, amazing in Your divine care.

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# **THE THIRD SECTION**

## **THE TWO KINGDOMS UNTIL THE ASSYRIAN CAPTIVATION**

(2 Kings 9 – 17)

### **SIN IS THE WAY TO ETERNAL CAPTIVATION**

The first book of the kings presented to us a joyful portrait of the soul: how Solomon the son of David, enjoyed the heavenly wisdom, together with exalted glories and talents; to become an example of the soul that unite with the incarnate Wisdom of God, our Lord Jesus; how he built, not a temple in the earthly Jerusalem, but let the Spirit of God set His kingdom in his depths, as the deposit of heaven... How the life of the prophet Elijah came in the same book, and in the beginning of the second book of the kings, to ignite our depths, to long to the fiery holy zeal, to be qualified, not for ascending to heaven, together with

Elijah, but to encounter the Lord of glory on the clouds. And how the life of the prophet Elisha also came to exhort in us the spirit of love toward God and men, and the perpetual work to the account of the kingdom of God; so that our insight would be opened, not to see chariots and horses of fire surrounding us, but to see the bosoms of God wide open to receive us, and the Lord of glory Jesus preoccupied with preparing a place for us on an eternal level.

Now, having enjoyed such an exultant portraits, the rest of the second book of the kings warns us against the danger of stubbornness and sticking to the sin, hated by the law.

This section (2 kings 9-17) stirs up in the soul; a strong bitterness, revealing the corruption in Israel that reached an extent surpassing that of Judah; how all the kings of Israel were wicked, none of them was good; ... how God suffered long on them as well as on Judah. ... And how He ultimately allowed for chastising them through Assyria that captivated them on stages. ... Why?

- 1- The captivation happened in stages, to give Israel, on the different levels of the leaderships and the people, the chance reconsider all the events since Jeroboam rebelled, and set a dissented independent kingdom of ten tribes, that rejected having on them any king of David's household; and banned going to Jerusalem to worship in the temple of God; etc.; and to give them, as well, the chance to remember the chastisement brought up by the Lord over their fathers, to return to God with repentance
- 2- Bringing the captivation in stages refers to God's longsuffering; He does not desire their humiliation and perdition; but, together with every stage, it would be befitting of all to return to God; As though God does not desire to bring on them the whole captivation.

- 3- Bringing the captivation in stages might give the chance to the kingdom of Judah, as well, to perceive the danger of sin, and to benefit from the bitter lesson of Israel; but unfortunately, instead of repentance, Judah wrongly assumed that God would never allow for Judah to fall into captivity, nor to deliver His city Jerusalem and His temple; nor to take away the kingdom from David's household. Judah, accordingly went so far in evil to surpass that done by the Kingdom of Israel; and God allowed for it to fall under the Babylonian captivity, also in stages.

Sin, indeed is very sinful; It is the way that leads the human soul to captivity, to lose her liberty in the Lord; and to have her hope in the eternal glory taken away from her.

- + Sin, being very heavy; needs great mercies.

(St. Jerome)

- + We are committed to perceive that, concerning the human issues, there is no true goodness, except for the virtue of the spirit alone, that by true faith, leads us to the heavenly issues, and make us perpetually holdfast to the enduring issues. On another aspect, we should never call something evil except sin alone, that separates us from God, and binds us to the evil Satan.

(Father Theodor (Tadros))

- + In case you stay in what concerns dust, you will ultimately turn into dust. It is befitting of you to change, to turn, and to become heavenly.

(The scholar Origen)

- + In case man falls into sin, he would lose the joy of his heart, and would walk distressed and sorrowful, because of the continuous rebuke of his conscience. But, once he is saved from sin through repentance, he will restore the joy of salvation....

So will be the salvation of the nations – our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Hence the prophet seeks from God the Father to exult the world by the coming of His Son incarnate, and by the Holy Spirit who prevails on and rules the whole creation.

- + The prophet seeks wiping away all the iniquities, for, if a single sin remains, it will deny us the entrance into the kingdom of God; the same way, just a little defilement in our attire, will deny us the entrance into the Sanctuary. That conforms with the words said by the apostle Paul: *“Do not be deceived, Neither fornicators, nor Idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, will inherit the kingdom of God”* (1 Corinthians 6: 9-10).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **THE DOGS WILL DEVOUR JEZEBEL’S FLESH**

The events mentioned in this chapter are bitter and cruel; for it was time to destroy those leaders who corrupted the people, and made them pervert from the worship of the living God, and provoked them to idol worship and to practice their abominations. Nothing God hates more than sin, which closes the doors of heaven, sets the foundations of Hades, corrupts the image of God in us; and brought the incarnate Word of God to the cross to save us from it.

The prophet Elijah had previously prophesied the killing of a multitude of wicked leaders, once Jehu becomes a king (1 Kings 19: 16-18). That was realized on the hand of his disciple the prophet Elisha, who commanded one of the sons of the prophets to anoint Jehu the leader of the army a king over Israel, then hasten to flee out of the whole region, once he consummates his mission, before the slaughter starts. The cruel actions of Jehu was apparent in destroying all relatives and friends of Ahab (2 Chronicles 22: 8-9).

King Jehu, the main personality in the ninth chapter; was one of three, Elijah was commanded to anoint, while being on Mount Horeb, for the mission of destroying idol-worship in Israel (1 Kings 19: 15-18). Jehu was the last one of the three to execute that mission. We have already seen the other two – Elisha and Hazael -- who worked against the Baal in Israel: hazael through making war against Israel (2 Kings 8: 28-29); and Elisha through reproaching the idol-worshippers, and revealing the miraculous might of God in the whole book.

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| 1- Jehu Is anointed to strike Ahab's house | 1 - 10  |
| 2- Jehoram, king of Israel killed          | 11 - 26 |
| 3- Ahaziah king of Judah killed            | 27 - 29 |
| 4- Jezebel's violent death                 | 30 - 37 |

#### **1- JEHU ANOINTED TO STRIKE AHAB'S HOUSE:**

The prophet Elisha sent one of the sons of the prophets to Ramoth Gilead, where Jehu the Leader of the army of Joram camped to confront the Aramites. He commanded him to anoint him a king in secret, then hasten to flee away, after telling him that God has anointed him a king to take away all who remain of the household of Ahab, the most evil of the kings of Israel; in fulfillment of the prophecy of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 21: 21-25)

*“And Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets, and said to him, “Get yourself ready, take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth Gilead” (1)*

According to the Jews, that son of the prophets was Junah the son of Amittai.. He commanded him to get himself ready to depart on a serious mission; for the time has come to bring down the household of Ahab, and to set a new king of another household. ... We know of no other king of Israel, after their dissention and rebellion against the household of David, who has been anointed except for Jehu.

**The flask of oil;** a marble or glass flask, **that** contained a holy oil for anointment, which God told the prophet Moses its composition, and by which to anoint the tabernacle of meeting and its furniture; Aaron and his sons to become priests of the Lord; and later on to anoint the kings. It was forbidden to make any other like it (Exodus 30: 22-23).

**Ramoth Gilead;** a city of great importance for the Jews, East of the Jordan, has been a stronghold of defense against the attacks of the Aramites (the Syrians), restored by Joram (2 kings 8: 29); and in it the Israeli army camped under the leadership of Jehu.

King Joram has already left Ramoth Gilead to Jezreel to recover of his wounds; which were not that serious, as he later on came out from Jezreel in his chariots to meet Jehu.

. *“ Now when you arrive at that place, look there for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in and make him rise up from among his associates, and take him to an inner room”* (2).

Jehu was the leader of the army during the days of Ahab and his son Jehoram; zealous, brave, and active; yet he did not fear God nor any man; was known to drive his chariot with an intense speed; and nobody dared to oppose him.

**The son of Jehoshaphat;** other than Jehoshaphat king of Judah

**Take him to an inner room,** to talk to him freely, away from the ears of those around him; and for the security of the messenger during fulfilling his mission

*“ Then take the flask of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, ‘Thus says the LORD: “I have anointed you king over Israel.”’ Then open the door and flee, and do not delay”* (3)

Elisha commanded the young man to open the door and hasten to flee; for there was danger on him in that mission from king Jehoram, and probably from Jehu himself in case he was loyal to Jehoram; or from any of the officers of the court, loyal to the king and the queen. By hastening to flee, he would give Jehu or his associates no chance to debate a command that was issued by the Lord Himself; and, on another aspect to give Jehu a chance to take a quick decision before the king moves to oppose him.

+ The prophet Elisha called one of the sons of the prophets and said to him: Get yourself ready and take the flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth Gilead (2 Kings 9: 1). Here, the Holy Book presents a just judgment to dwell upon Ahab’s household. It has chosen the judge, and chooses the executioner – Jehu the son of Nimshi ... After the messenger consummated his mission and hastened to flee away, it so happened that there was an amazing unanimous choice of Jehu a king of Israel.:

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syeian)

*<sup>4</sup> So the young man, the servant of the prophet, went to Ramoth Gilead” (4)*

That young prophet no doubt perceived the extent of apostasy that dwelt upon the kingdom on the hands of Ahab, his wife, and their sons, hence, as that mission found an echo in his heart, he hastened to move quickly in obedience to the command of the prophet Elisha, with a spirit of godliness. Some believe that that young man was the servant who replaced Gehazi after he was inflicted with leprosy as a punishment for his greed and lies.,

*“ And when he arrived, there were the captains of the army sitting; and he said, ‘I have a message for you, Commander’; Jehu said, “For which one of us? ”And he said, “For you, Commander.” (4)*

Not knowing who Jehu was, the young man said : “You commander” without saying his name; but when Jehu, being the leader of the army, answered the call, the young man knew his identity. Perceiving that the messenger must have carried a serious message, Jehu left the assembly of leaders under his command, who were at the time probably discussing some military plans, and followed the young man away from the hearing of all.

*“ Then he arose and went into the house. And he poured the oil on his head, and said to him, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I have anointed you king over the people of the Lord, Israel” (6)*

The Northern kingdom (Israe) forsook the worship of the living God, and walked in the way of Jeroboam. But God kept sending prophets to them, and caring for them, hoping that they will eventually return to Him....

Saying: “*Over the people of the Lord*”, the prophet confirms to Jehu that the call to make him a king is not for his personal worthiness, nor for his human efforts, but it is a call from the Lord to him to govern the people according to the divine law, to cleanse the kingdom from the foreign worships, and to take away the spirit of apostasy..

*“You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel” (7)*

The words of the prophet Elisha came to fulfill the prophecy of his master the prophet Elijah, twenty years ago (1 Kings 21: 17-23).

As Jehu was serving the king, he was completely aware of his evil, together with his household. And as, whoever unjustly shed blood, his blood has to be shed; what Jehu will do is a fulfillment of the divine justice. Yet that was to be realized with the purity of heart, and not for the sake of personal benefits.

*<sup>8</sup> For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; and I will cut off from Ahab all the males in Israel, both bond and free” (8)*

Although it was God who commanded Jehu to strike down the house of Ahab; yet the prophet Hosea prophesied that God said: “*I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu*” (Hosea 1: 4). ... How would God judge Jehu on the bloodshed which he did according to His command? ...

The answer to this refers to that, although God indeed commended Jehu for his obedience, and told him he was right to kill the house of Ahab; but having not walked according to the law of the Lord God of Israel, did not keep away from the sins of Jeroboam, and did not destroy the two golden calves (2 Kings 10: 31); God judged him on his sin of bloodshed. It is obvious that Jehu worshipped other gods, did not walk according to the law of the God of Israel from his whole heart;

and did not destroy the house of Ahab out of love for the execution of the commandments of God.

*“So I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah” (9)*

Sin destroys man himself, as well as his house, and extends to the nation, if the house and the nation conformed to and were slothful to the evil. The house of Ahab came to an end according to the prophecy of the prophet Elijah (1 kings 21: 17-24); So did the house of Jeroboam (1 kings 14: 1-21) on the hand of Baasha (1 kings 15: 29); Then the prophet Jehu (other than king Jehu), prophesied about the destruction of the house of Baasha (1 Kings 16: 1-12, 11, 77).

+ I wish no one wrongly understands the longsuffering of God; or fails to put the judgment to come into consideration.

I wish no one believes that the just Judge leaves the works of evil without chastisement;

I wish everyone learns from the judgments that came on Pharaoh (Exodus 14: 4); on Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 5: 57); on Jezebel (2 kings 9: 7-10); on Amalek (Baruch 3: 27-28); on the sons of Korah (Numbers 16: 31), on the congregation of Dathan (Numbers 26: 9-10); on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19: 24-25), and on all the nations. For looking at those wicked nations who despised the longsuffering of God, would make us stand a little, and fear the punishment that would dwell upon the like of them.

(Father Hesichius of Jerusalem)

*“The dogs shall eat Jezebel on the plot of ground at Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her.”; And he opened the door and fled” (10)*

The prophecy was literally fulfilled (2 kings 9: 33), and precisely took place on the plot of ground of Jezreel, that belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite, killed by Ahab and Jezebel. ...

People, even the poor among them, always care to prepare tombs befitting of them, and count, not being properly buried, as a great disgrace and reproach (Isaiah 14: 18-20; Jeremiah 22: 18-19).

## **2- JEHORAM KING OF ISRAEL KILLED:**

*“Then Jehu came out to the servants of his master, and one said to him, “Is all well? Why did this madman come to you? And he said to them, “You know the man and his babble” (11)*

Those sitting with Jehu, recognized that young man as one of the sons of the prophets, from the way he was clothed, how he talked, and how he did not present the honors and greetings due to them as prominent leaders of the army, sitting together with their supreme leader.. They looked at him as a madman, for he came and went in a strange way, for the signs of disturbance on his face, for how he took their leader from among them, and probably on account of that, being leaders of the army, they used to despise the prophets who spend most of their time worshipping, isolated from the world, and away from the actuality of life.

It is not strange that the false prophets accuse the true men of God to be self-appointed; and that they utter words of no power. At that time ‘Shemaiah the Nehelamite’, the false prophet, who was not sent by God, but came in his own name, accused the true prophets like Jeremiah, of provoking the spirit of defeat and submission among the captives, when he sought from them to build for themselves houses, and to plant gardens, as though they were well established in Babylon (Jeremiah 29: 24-29). ... That Shemaiah wrote to stir up Zephaniah, counting him set by God instead of Jehoiada, to do nothing but to persecute the true men of God, like Jeremiah, whom he considered a madman, the way the

wicked used to count the true prophets of God (2 kings 9: 11; Acts 26: 24; 2: 13, 15, 17, 180. ... Jeremiah was a symbol of the Lord Christ who was falsely accused of being “*out of His mind*” (Mark 3: 21).

Saying “*You know the man and his babble*”, Jehu probably intended to know how they were impressed by what they saw and heard; or he probably, fearing their envy and jealousy, he would lose his ability to hasten to put the matter into effect.

*“And they said, “A lie! Tell us now. So he said, Thus and thus he spoke to me, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: “I have anointed you king over Israel.” (12)*

Because of their despise for the sons of the prophets, they said: “a lie”; as though they said: ‘We know for sure that he would not say something reasonable, but would utter according to his foolishness and ignorance. But just the same, let us hear what he told you; Then Jehu, mockingly, told them the truth. And because of their hate for the house of Ahab, they would rather have it be so realized, namely to have Jehu reign instead of the house of Ahab.

*“Then each man hastened to take his garment and put it under him on the top of the steps; and they blew trumpets, saying, “Jehu is king!” (13)*

By each man taking his garments and putting it under Jehu, all of them declared their consent to have him as their king, and made for him a throne by their own garments; as though they say: ‘By putting our outer garments under you, we deliver everything to you to control; and we will work under your authority as your servants’. ... Jehu, then was sitting on the steps to lead the assembly of the leaders of the army. And by putting their garments under him he was as though sitting on a throne.

That behavior probably also referred to what the apostles of the Lord Christ did with the Gentiles; on whom they threw their garments, namely their apostolic

teachings, the virtuous life in the Lord, and the interpretations of the Holy Books; to cover the nakedness of their life for such a long time; to become a throne for God to sit and to reign.... Those garments, the church keeps throwing upon every offended heart, trembling with cold, to turn them into a throne for the Lord to sit and to have rest. Throwing the garments on the road under the Lord's feet, refers to the submission of the body to Him, after being submitted to the abominable lusts. Many have thrown their garments on the road for the sake of the Lord: The martyrs threw their bodies through having their blood shed for the sake of faith, as a way for the Lord to walk through the simple who received faith; And the spiritual monks threw their bodies through the spiritual evangelic monasticism; to turn their life into a way on which the Lord walked along the generations. So did the preachers, the Laymen, and even the children. ... According to St. Ambrose, [The disciples threw their garments under the steps of the Lord as a reference to their preaching the gospel; for the garments in the divine Scripture often referred to the virtues]

In the declaration of new kings, the trumpets are blown (1 kings 1: 39; 2 kings 11: 14); And all that will be consummated by the coming of "the King of kings", accompanied by the angels in the midst of the sound of heavenly trumpets, declaring an eternal heavenly kingdom.

Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat became a king over Israel for a duration of 28 years (841- 814 or 813 BC; 2 Kings 9: 14; 10: 36).

*So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, conspired against Joram. (Now Joram had been defending Ramoth Gilead, he and all Israel, against Hazael king of Syria)" (14)*

Although Israel has already restored Ramoth Gilead from Aram; yet, because the king of Aram threatened to take it back; the army of Israel was camping in it; and Joram, despite his illness, all the time anticipated the news of Ramoth Gilead; entrusting the whole authority of moving the army in the hand of Jehu. ... In such

atmosphere, Jehu hastened to sit on the throne before Joram leaves Jezreel and come to Ramoth Gilead, for in Jezreel he had no army to protect him. It was Jehu's chance to kill the king in Jezreel, and to sit on the throne before the news reach the region of Ramoth Gilead.

*“But King Joram had returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds which the Syrians had inflicted on him when he fought with Hazael king of Syria)*

*And Jehu said, “If you are so minded, let no one leave or escape from the city to go and tell it in Jezreel” (15)*

Jehu talked as though asking their counsel; for he was then, not yet enthroned as the king.

*“So Jehu rode in a chariot and went to Jezreel, for Joram was laid up there; and Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to see Joram” (16)*

Jehu hastened to go to Jezreel to kill Joram before he hears the news of anointing him a king, and would attempt to oppose him. At the same time, Ahaziah king of Judah came down to see Joram for he was his ally in war, and because he was his nephew.

It is obvious from this text that, because Joram was wounded in the battle against Aram in Ramoth Gilead, he had to go to Jezreel to recover and to rest; and there, his nephew, king of Judah, came down to inquire about his health. Both of them did not perceive the plot done in Ramoth Gilead against Joram; on account of that the leaders, assembled there with Jehu, having consented to support him to take the throne by force, took care of keeping the matter secret, even from the army camped in Ramoth Gilead.

*“Now a watchman stood on the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came, and said, “I see a company of*

*men. And Joram said, "Get a horseman and send him to meet them, and let him say, 'Is it peace?'" (17)*

The region was characterized by its high altitude that makes it expose a great distance toward the East almost as far as the River Jordan; Besides it is on a hill and contains royal palaces and watch towers. But all that did not stand against the fulfillment of God's plan to destroy the house of Ahab..

Beth-Shan, on the other hand, six or seven miles away, is of low altitude; hence as Jehu and his company reached between Geba and Beth-Shan, they were spotted by the watchmen on the towers, who reported their arrival to the king while in his palace. The king therefore hastened to send a horseman to inquire about the reason of Jehu's unexpected coming.

The presence of the majority of the army in Ramoth Gilead made the king and his entourage in a continuous anticipation of the news of the army there. But no one could imagine that Jehu would ever leave his men and come to kill the king.

*"So the horseman went to meet him, and said, "Thus says the king: 'Is it peace? And Jehu said, "What have you to do with peace? Turn around and follow me."(18)*

Inquiring about peace was a custom followed before entering into a negotiation or debate. Jehu's response came to reject anything of the sort, as though he says: 'Why are preoccupied with the situation in Ramoth Gilead, whether war or peace; turn around and follow me'. By telling him to follow him, he kept him from returning to tell the king.

*"So the watchman reported, saying, "The messenger went to them, but is not coming back.. Then he sent out a second horseman who came to them, and said, "Thus says the king:*

*'Is it peace? And Jehu answered, "What have you to do with peace? Turn around and follow me." (19)*

Jehu so answered him, for whoever pervers from the fellowship with God, has no right to inquire about peace, which is a gift from God. Jehu ordered the two horsemen to follow him, to keep them from returning to report to the king to warn him of the eminent danger against his life.

*"So the watchman reported, saying, "He went up to them and is not coming back; and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives furiously!" (20)*

Jehu was reputed for his daring and swift military movements. Yet he was not driving the chariot by himself, but he had a driver whom he ordered to drive furiously. The word 'Furiously' might refer to his ill temper; yet, according to the Historian Josephus, he led his army with reason, although firm and serious..... Here the watchman referred Jehu to his grandfather and not to his father; for Nimshi was more famous than his son Jehoshaphat.

*"Then Joram said, "Make ready." And his chariot was made ready. Then Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot; and they went out to meet Jehu, and met him on the property of Naboth the Jezreelite" (21)*

Joram and his nephew Ahaziah king of Judah set forth, each in his chariot, to meet Jehu, assuming that he so urgently came to report important news concerning the situation in Ramoth Gilead. The two kings, not doubting Jehu's intentions; to save time, they did not wait for him to arrive, but went to encounter him on the way, to discuss the issue, then to let him go back to his army in Ramoth Gilead. They foolishly set forth to encounter Jehu, when it was better for them to stay back in the city.

*“Now it happened, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, “Is it peace, Jehu? So he answered, “What peace, as long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft are so many?”*  
(22)

The word “harlotries” here, had a wider meaning; namely: idol-worship, vain religion, sorcery, and rebellion against God; referring to Jezebel, as the one responsible for all those abominations.

*“ Then Joram turned around and fled, and said to Ahaziah, “Treachery, Ahaziah!”* (23)

*. Now Jehu drew his bow with full strength and shot Jehoram between his arms; and the arrow came out at his heart, and he sank down in his chariot”* (23, 24)

Jehu shot Joram between his arms, namely in the middle of his back; and the arrow came out of his heart, to kill him instantly. He fell down in the field of Naboth the Jezreelite, according to the prophecy of the prophet Elijah (1 kings 21: 19). ... If his fall on the ground by the hand of his leader of the army, looked horrible, his hidden fall toward the eternal perdition through the sins he committed by his own free will, was far more horrible

- + Although sins do more harm to the soul than that done by the maggots to the body, yet we do not perceive their corruption, and do not feel the urgency to get rid of them. Like the drunkard who cannot recognize how repulsive the taste of wine is; contrary to the reasonable man who can do that with ease, so it is with sin. Whoever reverently lives can easily recognize the mire and the corruption; whereas whoever lives in evil would be like the drunkard, who does not perceive that he is sick; while lying in mire, he thinks that he enjoys the sweet fragrance of spices;. And as the maggots works in him. he boasts as though he has precious jewels, and

has no desire to kill them, but rather to feed and revive them, until they ultimately bring him forth to the maggots in the life to come.

- + If man is rich and honorable; but captivated by a sin, he would be more corrupt than all corruptions.... The way a king, captivated by barbarians, would be the most miserable of men, so it is with sin; it is like a barbarian, from whose captivity, the soul is not able to rid herself. The sin takes therefore the role of a tyrant to destroy all who get attached to it.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Then Jehu said to Bidkar his captain, “Pick him up, and throw him into the tract of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember, when you and I were riding together behind Ahab his father, that the LORD laid this burden upon him” (25)*

**Bidkar**, short for ‘ben deqar’, meaning (the son of the stab).

Jehu justified his act by bringing to remembrance the curse under which Ahab and Jezebel fell because of unjustly killing Naboth the Jezreelite to inherit his field. Jehu counted himself God’s tool to fulfill His wrath upon Ahab and his household (1 kings 21: 21-24).

The pillars of Ahab’s household so came to an end by the death of Jehoram, and throwing him into the tract of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite, taken by force by Ahab, after his wife Jezebel plotted to have him killed through falsely accusing him of blasphemy against God and against the king (1 Kings 21: 17-24).

*“Surely I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will repay you in this plot,’ says*

*the LORD. Now therefore, take and throw him on the plot of ground, according to the word of the LORD” (26)*

He probably means here, what the messenger of Elisha, who anointed him, told him, and sought from him to let the house of Ahab repay for the blood of Naboth the Jezreelite and his sons; and God probably confirmed that in a night vision, after the son of the prophet departed.

Ahab killed Naboth to inherit his field, according to the counsel of his evil wife Jezebel; and to make the field a garden that brings pleasure to his life; not knowing that it will be a place for burying his equally evil son.

It was not written that Naboth's sons were also killed; but Jezebel most probably planned their death in an attempt to wipe out every memory of their father Naboth, nor of her crime killing him.

### **3- AHAZIA KING OF JUDAH KILLED::**

*“But when Ahaziah king of Judah saw this, he fled by the road to Beth Haggan.<sup>[a]</sup> So Jehu pursued him, and said, “Shoot him also in the chariot.” And they shot him at the Ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. Then he fled to Megiddo, and died there” (27)*

Ahaziah reaped the fruit of being bound to the wicked, and entering into a familial relationships with them; not for the sake of their salvation, but rather for political and material benefits, a bond that made him lose the purity of heart, and turned his life into a cheap price for it.

According to some, Jehu did not plan to kill Ahaziah king of Judah; and did not know beforehand that he came to Jezreel to visit the wounded Joram. But that was allowed by God to reveal his alliance with his uncle Joram, and to be

accordingly killed by Jehu. By that all the descendants of Ahab were wiped out, not only in Israel, but in Judah as well.

*And his servants carried him in the chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his tomb with his fathers in the City of David” (28)*

*“In the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab, Ahaziah had become king over Judah” (29)*

In the twelfth year according to 2 Kings 8: 25; for Ahaziah was a partner in reign with his father for a year at least (2 Chronicles 21: 19)

#### **4- JEZEBEL’S VIOLENT DEATH:**

*“Now when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window” (30)*

Jezebel, 55 years old or may be more; for Ahaziah, her grandson from her daughter was 23 years old when he was killed, having known about the death of the two kings, and perceiving that her turn will soon follow, she preferred to die as is befitting of a queen, or assumed that by her beauty she might be able to captivate Jehu’s heart not aware of the words written: *“Though you clothe yourself with crimson; though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold; though you enlarge your eyes with paint; In vain you will make yourself fair; your lovers will despise you; they will seek your life” (Jeremiah 4: 30).*

Women in the old used to put paint on their eyes to enlarge them, as a sign of beauty. And according to Jofinal, the custom of painting the eyes was commonly followed both by men and by women in Rome. And according to Barnes’ notes, painting the eyes is still common among the women in the East, to make the eyes look wider and more shining.

Miserable is he who, in his spiritual strife, trust in his self-righteousness; he would lose all inner beauty, would even become his own killer, and would hear the divine reproach, saying: *“Because you say ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments , that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see”* (Revelation 3: 17-18)

Having perceived that Jehu was going to kill her, and intended to confirm to herself and to those around her, that she is brave, and never terrified; she called Jehu *“Zimri: the murderer of his master to take the throne by force”* (1 kings 16: 11-12)

+ Anoint your eyes, not by the salve of the devil, but by the ointment of Christ for the eyes.

(St. Cyprian)

+ It was expected that she will mourn her dead son – king Jehoram --, but, the same moment she heard that the new king Jehu arrived, she put paint on her eyes, adorned her head, and looked through a window; assuming that Jehu would probably be deceived by her looks and take her among hid wives. She probably heard about the episode of Adoniah, the son of David (1 kings 2: 17) who asked for ‘Abishag the Shunammite’ to be his wife in the days of king Solomon, so that through her he would take the throne, and thought that Jehu might do the same by marrying her, to establish his position as a king. That was how Jezebel thought, until she saw Jehu come through the door, for then, remembering that he is the murderer of her son; she could not control her temper, she reviled and

insulted him before everyone by saying: "*Is it peace Zemri, murderer of your master?*". Nothing could destroy the violence of that arrogant woman, not even her hope for marriage, nor her fear of the eminent death by the hand of her opponent with his threatening sword. She, who tortured others, could not control herself, but like a mad woman, reviled the new king with harsh words, and stirred up his wrath against her..

She adorned her head with the royal crown, to die like a queen, not aware that Jehu will not only take away her crown, but will let the horses trample her on the ground, and the dogs eat her flesh and bones. So, the wicked often deceive himself by the temporal honor, not perceiving that it may bring him down to dust.

+ Every sin is a sign of lie, harmful to him who commits it more than him who suffer from it.

+ While grace is accompanied by joy, peace, love, and truth ... Sin is accompanied by disturbance, and hate toward God.

- + How denying and wicked is this generation!, that sets itself for destruction for the sake of its stubbornness. If a Physician is coming to you from afar, to give you medication to heal your disease, Will you not hasten to receive him?

*“ Then, as Jehu entered at the gate, she said, “Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?” (31)*

‘Zimri’, the leader of the army 40 years ago, took the throne by killing his master, but did not last on it longer than seven days (1 Kings 16: 8-19).. By saying that , Jezebel intended to give Jehu a lesson, and to warn him that his destiny as a traitor will be like that of Zimri; he will be killed in no time. It is amazing how her pride endured even while perceiving that her perdition is close at hand.

+ Notice, brethren, the boasting of the wicked;

Man should be mighty, yet in goodness, and not in malice ... *“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1: 31); He who glories, let him glory in goodness.

That is how the good Christians boast in goodness and not in malice:

a- They boast in the Lord and not in themselves

b- They zealously practice the works of edification, holding fast to it; But the works that seem for destruction, they practice for the sake of chastisement, and not as pressure on the innocent.

(St. Augustine)

*“ And he looked up at the window, and said, “Who is on my side? Who?” So two or three eunuchs looked out at him” (32)*

By saying: *“Who is on my side?”*, he calls on those with the queen to defect; as it so often happens that men usually join the new king, and hasten to obey his orders, fearing his wrath, and hoping for his favor.

Jezebel died , mourned by none, and remembered by none. .

*“Then he said, “Throw her down.” So they threw her down, and some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot” (33)*

Her death was disgraceful, her own eunuchs threw her down from the window, to be torn down before she reached the ground, and some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses. Jehu drove his chariot on her corpse as a sign of despise; then left it to be devoured by dogs.

For so long, Jezebel thought of herself as a successful woman, of a strong personality, who knew how to move her husband king Ahab and her own sons like slaves; and to ordain all the affairs of the kingdom to the account of Baal. She gave orders to be obeyed; and before her all the officers of the court and the leaders of the army all over the kingdom were terrified. She assumed that no power on the face of the earth could stand against her. She did not perceive that the sins she committed, bear corruption and horrible destruction hidden within them, to appear in due time. Now, she lost her son the king with a treason by his own men, and lost her authority, as well as her life, and died a disgraceful death; all through the sin that had authority over her.

- + When Ahab was struck and fell in battle, his servants came to mourn him, and honorably buried him in the tomb of the kings (1 kings 21: 27-29). Whereas Jezebel, who on the contrary, distorted justice, and provoked anger by her defiled behavior, never showed remorse; and never forsook

her vanity; Even in the moments before her death she raged like a mad woman, and there were many reasons for her to be treated with violence.

Notice and perceive, how Jezebel, who terrified prophets, and enslaved kings, was thrown from a window by her own servants in disgrace and reproach; and how she was torn apart by dogs. This happened to mute the mouths of those who say: "*Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?*" (Jeremiah 12: 1).

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

- + Go back to your heart; there, to find yourself alone with Him who sees all things.

Hate sin to bring pleasure to God; ... Do not seek it; ... Don't think about it (During repentance); ... but rather despise it and avoid it.

Temptation may suggest to you that sin can make you happy; and by threatening grief, it seduces you to do evil; Yet, be sure that all that is nothing but a passing by void.... By its suggestions, evil can dwell in the mind, and can easily corrupt the upright life. ... Throw them away to where they came from, out of your heart; ... do not care for them, nor seek them ... Let us remember what the Lord commanded us, saying: "*Pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonian 5: 17); For if you do, He will never forget His mercies.

(St. Augustine)

*“And when he had gone in, he ate and drank. Then he said, “Go now, see to this accursed woman, and bury her, for she was a king’s daughter.” (34)*

If Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of Sidon, has taken the field of Naboth the Jezeelite by force, and added it to her palace, Now Jehu, as a new king, has taken it over, and here he eats the food that was prepared for Jehoram and his mother Jezebel.. He called her: “accursed”, for she committed her man to worship the Baal, killed the prophets, raised her children in a corrupt way, her evil extended to generations to come, and her evil influence reached the kingdom of Judah; so that her name was hated by all,

*“So they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands” (35)*

All her authority, power, royal honor, family, and wealth, came to an end, and of her, nothing was left except the bones left by the dogs after devouring her flesh. She became an example before everyone who walks in evil by which he will lose everything.. ... Because, by her head she plotted to shed the blood of the innocent Naboth the Jezreelite; by her hands she wrote the instructions to put her plan into effect; and by her feet she moved to execute it; the dogs refused to eat her skull, and the bones of her hands and feet.

Man, as the most exalted creature on earth, is supposed to use his head including his brain to run his life with reason; but the wicked, instead, uses it together with his hands and feet to practice evil and corruption, to end up losing the holiness of his life.

While the bones of the prophet Elisha raised a dead man in his tomb (2 kings 13: 23); those of Jezebel came to be trampled upon by men and beasts; and to be devoured by dogs.

*“Therefore they came back and told him. And he said, “This is the word of the LORD, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘On the plot of ground at*

*Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel” (36) – (1 kings 21: 33).*

*“and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as refuse on the surface of the field, in the plot at Jezreel, so that they shall not say, “Here lies Jezebel.”” (37)*

Who can imagine the feeling of those who gathered what remained of the bones of Jezebel, after the dogs licked her blood, devoured her flesh, and some of her bones?! By sin, man does need to be buried in a tomb to cover his dead corpse; for his own soul is like a tomb that includes corruption in it; as according to St. Jerome: [The way a saint is the temple of God, the sinner sets a tomb out of his soul].

Some may wonder why should God allow for such cruel chastisement?! Wasn't threats enough? ... God finds no pleasure in cruel chastisement; and the believers do not gloat over what happen to the wicked; but for the sake of seeking the divine grace with faithfulness, God allows for that.

- + By fearing that the same things may dwell upon him, the righteous will attempt to make his life more pure. That is, therefore, a sign of God's great care.... For if He just threatens without executing punishment, will you not be more slothful?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

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**AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 9**

## GRANT ME TO ESCAPE TO YOU, AND NOT FROM YOU

- + The wicked Jezebel assumed that she could escape from God;  
She killed His prophets, and broke down His altars;  
She assumed that she would prevail
  
- + God was longsuffering on her;  
Even Elijah desired death because of her;  
But God's thought are not like our thoughts
  
- + Jezebel corrupted her man and her whole household;  
She appointed priests for the Baal, and killed those of the living God;  
She destroyed the worship of God, and embraced the abominations of the idols;  
Her hands stretched to oppression; and planned devilish plots;  
She killed the innocent, and took by force what does not belong to her.
  
- + In the proper time, God set a king to destroy all her household;  
She lost her family and her honor;  
She was despised even by the beasts;  
She was trampled over by horses;  
Her flesh and some of her bones was devoured by dogs;  
How disgraceful and corrupt is sin!

+ Grant me to escape to You, to give me Your righteousness;  
To escape from the violence of the sin;  
How I savor Your encounter!  
How my soul feels comfort in Your bosoms!  
You alone is my refuge!  
By You I challenge sin, death, and corruption;  
By You, the devil flees away;  
All his plans will fail;  
By You my soul will rise as though to heaven;  
I shall never fall into the nets of the devil;  
Glory be to You, O Lover of mankind, and Savior of men.



# CHAPTER 10

## JEHU WAS A ROD OF CHASTISEMENT ON AHAB'S HOUSE

There is no doubt that Jehu has done a great effort to destroy the whole house of Ahab wherever they were; fulfilling the prophecy of the Prophet Elijah, that no male descendent of Ahab will remain alive (1 Kings 21: 17-24). He also broke down the worship of Baal. But that salvation from evil was not followed by a positive work to build up the worship of the living God; He did not walk in the law of the Lord from his whole heart; and did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam who made Israel sin; as though he turned Israel into a void house..

Jehu represented someone jealous on the church of God; yet enslaved under sins and evil desires from which he does not seek to rid himself; or he is like someone serious in getting rid of the negatives, but without moving by the divine grace, to enjoy the positives. God rewarded Jehu for the sake of what he did, by letting his sons sit on the throne of Israel only to the fourth generation.

Here, the author moves from talking about Israel to talk about Judah, where Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, was the wife of Jehoram king of Judah for as long as six years (831-835 BC) (2 Chronicles 22: 10; 23: 21); loved evil, characterized by violence, and oppressed the godly

1- Jehu kills Ahabs sons

1 - 10

2- Jehu kills all who remained of Ahab's house, and his acquaintances

11

- 3- Jehu kills Ahaziah's brothers  
12 - 14
- 4- Jehu encounters Jehonadab  
15 - 17
- 5- Jehu kills the worshippers of Baal  
18 - 28
- 6- Jehu did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam  
29 - 31
- 7- The end of Jehu  
32 – 36

#### **1- JEHU KILLS AHAB'S SONS:**

*“ Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote and sent letters to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel, to the elders, and to those who reared Ahab's sons, saying: “(1)*

Ahab had 70 sons and grandsons in Samaria, because he had many wives, who gathered together in the capital, while the king went to Ramoth Gilead to recover of his wounds, and to relax. Once they heard the news of Jehu's rebellion, and taking the throne by force, they gathered together in a stronghold in the city.

**“To the rulers of Jezreel”**; The rulers of Jezreel probably escaped from Jezreel to Samaria. In the Jesuite version it came as **“To the rulers of Israel”**, and in another version it came as: **“He sent it from Jezreel to the rulers and elders of Samaria “:**

*“Now as soon as this letter comes to you, since your master’s sons are with you, and you have chariots and horses, a fortified city also, and weapons” (2)*

The goal of sending this message was to explore what lied in the heart of those rulers: whether they will take a position of submission to him, and accept him as king; or they will take the position of animosity, and defend the house of Ahab, even after the killing of his son Joram and his mother Jezebel.

By saying, mockingly, “**You have chariots and horses**”, he means to say to them:: As long as you have princes, leaders, chariots, horses, weapons, etc. Set one of Ahab’s sons or grandsons a king, and let us make war; which he knew for sure that they would not dare to do,

*“choose the best qualified of your master’s sons, set him on his father’s throne, and fight for your master’s house” (3)*

This message reveals the personality of Jehu; as a military brave and daring man, who fulfill his goals without wasting any time. He put in hid heart to start by

Samaria; for in case there happen to be any rebellion there, some other cities of Israel will follow suit, and it would become difficult for him to control the situation. He wrote to the rulers and princes who raised the king's sons, as it was the custom at that time; for fear that they might commiserate with them, on account of that they raised them.. He did not seek entering with them into a debate, for the situation did not warrant any debate: They had the option to accept him a king, or to enter into war against him. He left it to them to decide among themselves. As for him he will stick to his decision.

*“But they were exceedingly afraid, and said, “Look, two kings could not stand up to him; how then can we stand?” (4)*

Terrified, all the rulers in Israel submitted to Jehu who has already killed the kings of Israel and Judah. They knew for sure that, by his message he was mocking them, but had no fear of them; for he knew, that without a king, whose orders they used to abide without debate, and with no role in taking decisions, they were confused.

*“And he who was in charge of the house, and he who was in charge of the city, the elders also, and those who reared the sons, sent to Jehu, saying, “We are your servants,*

*we will do all you tell us; but we will not make anyone king. Do what is good in your sight.” (5)*

He who was in charge of the house, namely the overseer of the royal court (1 Kings 4: 6), and at the same time the governor of the city, who had the responsibility to write the executive orders, wrote to Jehu, in collaboration with the main rulers, to proclaim their unanimous unconditional submission to him, without need to enter into any battle, nor to shed any blood.

<sup>127</sup>*Then he wrote a second letter to them, saying: If you are for me and will obey my voice, take the heads of the men, your master's sons, and come to me at Jezreel by this time*

*tomorrow. Now the king's sons, seventy persons, were with the great men of the city, who were rearing them".(6)*

Giving them no time to ponder, he sought from them to take the heads of the men, and come to him at Jezreel by that time the next day, as a confirmation that they killed them all, and have not let any of them get away.

To make sure of establishing his kingdom, he sought the heads of his competitors; to have no adversaries among Ahab's sons or grandsons, whom anyone in the army or outside of it, may declare a king.

According to the customs in the old East, those who take the throne by force used to kill everyone who happen to have the right for the throne. Seeking from them to come to him in Jezreel, it is obvious that he has already started to practice his work as a king in the royal palace in Jezreel; and that he wrote his messages to the rulers in Samaria from the royal palace.

*"So it was, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons and slaughtered seventy persons, put their heads in baskets and sent them to him at Jezreel." (7)*

In the Assyrian inscriptions, we often see the heads of rulers sent from one place to another, not in baskets, but held by the hair.

They did not go to him in person, for fear that he might kill them likewise; They sent to him the heads, albeit most probably with shame and reproach, for killing those they have raised of the sons of the king to whom they were loyal and faithful.

Cutting off the head played a major role in destroying even the mighty armies; as the armies in the old have always been bound, in victory or defeat, to their leader or to the king. When the young man David cut off the head of the mighty Goliath, the army of the Philistines were instantly broken down (1 Samuel 17: 54). For the same goal, the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead fastened the bodies of king Saul and his sons to the wall with nails (1 Samuel 31: 9-12); as it also happened to the family of Ahab (10: 7, 8); and the Jews hung Nicanor's head and the right arm of the Syrian leader, from the citadel in front of Jerusalem (2 Maccabees 15: 35); and Judith sought to hang the head of Eliphanah, the leader of the Assyrian army that she cut off.; .

*“Then a messenger came and told him, saying, “They have brought the heads of the king’s sons. And he said, ‘Lay them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until morning.’” (8)*

Laying the heads in two heaps, on the right and the left of the city gate, was intended to let all those coming in or getting out of the city see them, have fear of Jehu, and submit to him, in particular those who were on Ahab's side. That show that took place in the evening once the heads of the king's sons came, remained until the morning, to spread the news, not only in Jezreel, but all over the country; as, most probably, rulers from everywhere came to proclaim their submission to him. Such a show would certainly destroy any probable thought or attempt to resist Jehu. In the old in several countries, like Turkey, Persia, and Baghdad, making such a show of the cut off heads put in heaps at the city gate, used to be a declaration of the glory of conquest. The Egyptians used to gather together the hands as a count of the number of the dead. While king Saul sought from David to gather together certain other parts of the bodies of the dead (1 Samuel 8: 25, 27). No wonder that up to the twentieth century, some countries still made such a show of the corpses of those executed.

*“So it was, in the morning, that he went out and stood, and said to all the people, “You are righteous. Indeed I conspired against my master and killed him; but who killed all these?” (9)*

In his address to the people, Jehu claimed that, even though the sons and grandsons of the king were killed by the leaders and the elders; on account of misunderstanding his message to them, Yet what happened was, anyway, according to a divine judgment because of the evil of the house of the king. What he said was the truth; for it was according to a divine command on the mouth of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 21: 21); yet saying that the rulers killed the sons of the king, by misunderstanding his message, was not the whole truth; because the killing was according to his obvious command.

As some, probably felt guilty, in how, having been faithful to the house of Ahab, they all of a sudden joined his killer, he intended to put their conscience at peace, by showing that:

- 1- On one aspect, no one among the people, committed any treason or crime against the house of Ahab
- 2- Killing the sons of Ahab was a result of misunderstanding his message to the rulers
- 3- What happened was according to the words said by the Lord Himself, whose words would never fall.

A great crowd gathered together to hear what lied behind that episode; some of them surely bore a kind of loyalty to the house of Ahab; and some harbored an inner rebellion against them. And Jahu had to tell them why the two kings and Jezebel were killed; and the reasons behind the massacre in Samaria. The situation was very critical. Even though, with his huge military might, nobody in the whole kingdom could dare to challenge him, yet he was committed to convince the people and the rulers of his quick daring actions without taking anybody’s counsel.. He was facing many who were loyal to the house of Ahab,

even though in secret; and was facing the officers of the royal court who felt indebted to the house of Ahab for their positions.

*“Know now that nothing shall fall to the earth of the word of the LORD which the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab; for the LORD has done what He spoke by His servant Elijah” (10)*

It is difficult to evaluate the personality of Jehu; for, on one aspect, he honored the word of the Lord on the tongues of the prophets; counted himself a tool in God’s hand to fulfill His purpose; opposed the worship of Baal, and did his best to take it away; But, on another aspect he continued to worship the golden calves set by Jeroboam in Bethel and Dan (2 kings 10: 29). He actually selfishly used fulfilling God’s judgments to the account of his own ambitions.

- + The words of the Lord, above anything else, are enough to hold our hearts fast in the Holy Spirit, our Leader; to stay unshakable in receiving every word uttered by the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8: 3) ... David says: *“The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure; they stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness”* (psalm 111: 7, 8) ... And in the second book of the kings, Jehu says: *“Nothing shall fall to earth of the word of the Lord which the Lord spoke”* (2 Kings 10: 10).

(St. Basil the Great)

## **2- JEHU KILLS ALL WHO REMAINED OF AHAB’S HOUSE AND HIS ACQUAINTANCES:**

*“So Jehu killed all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his close acquaintances and his priests, until he left him none remaining” (11).*

By killing all his great men and his close acquaintances and priests, he, most probably killed, as well, some of those who cut off the heads of the seventy sons and grandsons of Ahab. . He did not stop at destroying Ahab and his household, according to the command of the Lord, but he killed, as well all those of authority, who might probably join together in commiserating with the house of Ahab against him, even after killing them.. Here, he does not mean all the priests of Baal; for he later on conspired to have them all killed (2 Kings 10: 19); but he means here the priests of Baal in the royal court, who had an important role and authority.. In his zeal, Jehu went far beyond the divine command; for which the prophet Hosea proclaimed, later on, the punishment upon the house of Jehu for the sake of those violent actions (Hosea 1: 4-5).

### **3- JEHU KILLS AHAZIAH’S BROTHERS:**

*“And he arose and departed and went to Samaria. On the way, at Beth Eked of the Shepherds” (12)*

**“At Beth Eked of the shepherds”**, In the Jesuite version, it came as “in the house of the congregation of the shepherds”; and in the English version it came as “The house of shearing of the shepherds”; namely where the shepherds used to shear their sheep every year. The word “Eked” probably refers to binding the feet of the sheep while shearing them... Or “*Beth Eked*”, probably refers to a location close to Mount Gilboa.

*“Jehu met with the brothers of Ahaziah king of Judah, and said, “Who are you? So they answered, “We are the brothers of Ahaziah; we have come down to greet the sons of the*

*king and the sons of the queen mother” (13)*

By saying “brothers” here, they mean his relatives, particularly his nephews; for his brothers were already killed (2 Chronicles 21; 17; 22: 8). Jehu’s swift and firm actions, made everyone fear to talk about those events, which made them secret to some extent; Those relatives of the two kings here, came to greet the sons of the king and of the queen mother, not aware of what has taken place, and were consequently killed themselves.

*“And he said, “Take them alive!” So they took them alive, and killed them at the well of Beth Eked, forty-two men; and he left none of them” (14).*

He probably thought about captivating them, and gave the command to take them alive, before any of them could get away, then he decided to kill them,

#### **4- JEHU ENCOUNTERS JEHONADAB:**

“Now when he departed from there, he met Jehonadab the son of Rechab, *coming* to meet him; and he greeted him and said to him, “Is your heart right, as my heart *is* toward your heart?

And Jehonadab answered, ‘It is’, and *Jehu said*, ‘If it is, give *me* your hand’. So he gave *him* his hand, and he took him up to him into the chariot” (15)

**Jehonadab**, means (The Lord is noble or generous), a relative of Jehu. He was the son of Rechab the Kenite, a monk faithful in his relationship with God; who formed the congregation of the Rechabites, named after his father; commanded them to live as nomads in the wilderness, not to build houses, nor to plant fields, but live in tents (Jeremiah 35: 1-16); and committed them and their children to refrain from drinking wine forever. He showed his zeal by separating himself,

together with his family from idol-worship; and from the pressures and seductions of the society. In chapter 35 of his book, Jeremiah commends their godliness, and presents a magnificent portrait of their dedication to God; Hence the divine promise came, saying: "*Jehonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me forever*" (Jeremiah 35: 18, 19).; which reveals the presence of godly men in Israel (the ten tribes), even though few in number.

Jehonadab, the chief of the Rechabites (Jeremiah 35: 6-9), an opponent of the worship of Baal, whose courage gave the Rechabite a special position, came to encounter Jehu the son of Nemshi after he was declared a king over Israel, having destroyed the household of the wicked Ahab. Seeing him, Jehu blessed him, namely greeted him, considering uniting with such a man will guarantee the loyalty of all the tribe of the Rechabites. Historically, Hobab the Kenite accompanied the children of Israel in their journey from Egypt ; and after their entrance into Canaan, the Kenites dwelt South of Judah.

Jehu said to him: "*Is your heart right, as my heart is toward your heart? And Jehonadab answered, "It is, it is" (15) and Jehu shouted all of a sudden: "Give me your hand", "and took him up to him into the chariot" , saying, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord". ... From this we know that Jehu knew that Jehonadab was a man, dedicated to worship the Lord, and hated idol-worship, who never mixed with idol-worshippers in the temple of Samaria before they were killed.*

**"Give me your hand"**, an expression that, beside bearing Jehu's help to Jehonadab to mount the chariot, a sign of making a covenant between the two of them. His presence with him in the chariot was an obvious sign before the people that they were both of the same page of thinking.

Yet, when Jehonadab saw Jehu still walking in the way of Jeroboam, his spirit was crushed in him for the insults directed toward the Lord; and led him to commit himself to a way of life that testifies to his rejection of evil, and of enjoying

the pleasures of life; and even of being a citizen in that land that made the worship of the Lord *impossible without the divine grace.*,

“Then he said, “Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD.” So they had him ride in his chariot” (16).

The first book of the Maccabees tells us about the faithfulness of the Rechabites, from whose seed the Maccabees came, in keeping the law of the Lord, in holding fast to the worship of the living God, and in their zeal on faith in the days of Epiphanius. The title of Psalm 71 in the Septuagint version, came as: ‘About the house of Jehonadab the son of Rechab, who were the first to be led into captivity; the psalm says: “*I have become as a wonder to many; but You are my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with Your praise, and with Your glory all the day*” (Psalm 71: 7, 8); and, “*You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth. You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side*” (Psalm 71: 21, 22).

Boasting, therefore before Jehonadab saying: ‘*Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord*’, Jehu was deceptive even to himself. ... How a hypocrite, a haughty, and a killer you are! ... Do you really have zeal for Jehovah and His pure religion?!... How about your actions that reveals your real depths?! ... While you call the others to testify to your zeal for the Lord, your godliness and love, in selfishness you are truly seeking your own benefits.. ... Yes indeed, you destroyed the household of Ahab, but you used violence without limits. You killed all his friends, and the leaderships you had a little doubt of their loyalty... You surpassed every imaginable limit.... While you destroyed the worship of Baal, you left the two golden calves in Bethel and Dan.... You followed the lead of Jeroboam, who did not reject the worship of God altogether, nor considered Him a false God; or rejected the law of Moses; but mixed the worship of God with foreign worships; and forbade the people to go to the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, and to partake of the celebration of the feasts in Jerusalem.

*“And when he came to Samaria, he killed all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed them, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke to Elijah” (17).*

Although he literally fulfilled the words of the Lord, yet his heart was pervert; and all his actions were for the sake of his own honor; working to the account of his temporal glory, not that of the Lord; Hence he drank from the cup of his works, even in reference to the blood in Jezreel; as it is said by the prophet Hosea: *“In a little while, I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. It shall come to pass in that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel”* (Hosea 1: 4-5).

#### **5- JEHU KILLS THE WORSHIPPERS OF BAAL:**

*“ Then Jehu gathered all the people together, and said to them, “Ahab served Baal a little, Jehu will serve him much” (18)*

Proclaiming that no other worship will be in Israel except to the two golden calves in Behel and Dan; Jehu deceptively claimed that he was going to offer a sacrifice to Baal, in an attempt to gather together all the worshippers of Baal in one place, to slay them once and for all, with no one of them to escape..

*“Now therefore, call to me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests. Let no one be missing, for I have a great sacrifice for Baal. Whoever is missing shall*

*not live.” But Jehu acted deceptively, with the intent of destroying the worshipers of Baal” (19).*

With the spirit of deception, Jehu gave the command that whoever does not show zeal for the worship of Baal will have his life in danger. The text discerns between three categories of the worshippers of Baal: the prophets, the priests, and the common people who worshipped Baal. It was not difficult to gather

together all those categories in one building; for their number steadily decreased as a result of the ministry of the prophets Elijah and Elisha; and because Jehoram neglected its worship.

“And Jehu said, “Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal.” So they proclaimed *it*” (20)

In that, Jehu used an expression that came in the statute concerning the celebration of the major feasts of Jehovah, saying: “*You shall call for a sacred assembly*” (See Leviticus 23: 36; Numbers 29: 35; Deuteronomy 16: 8)..

*“Then Jehu sent throughout all Israel; and all the worshipers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left who did not come. So they came into the temple of Baal, and the temple of*

*Baal was full from one end to the other” (21).*

The temple of Baal was erected by king Ahab (1 Kings 16-32); together with a surrounding annex that could accommodate several thousands.

*“And he said to the one in charge of the wardrobe, “Bring out vestments for all the worshipers of Baal.” So he brought out vestments for them” (22).*

The worshippers of Baal had special vestments to put on when they come to worship, the same it is done by almost the priests and the worshippers in all nations, considered sacred, and used only during service; most probably soft white fabric, stored in a special wardrobe in the temple under the charge of a designated person. Jehu sought that, not only for the priests of Baal, but for all the worshippers as well, to make sure that no one of those who worshipped the living God were among them.

*“Then Jehu and Jehonadab the son of Rechab went into the temple of Baal, and said to the worshipers of Baal, “Search and see that no servants of the LORD are here with you,*

*but only the worshipers of Baal.” (23)*

It so seems that after a period of the spread of the worship of Baal, the priests of Baal used to get together with the priests of the Lord, in a sort of camouflage, yet, not at the time of offering the sacrifices. What made them conspicuous, though, was the vestment they used to put on inside the temple.

It was, therefore, not new, nor strange for Jehu to seek from the prophets and priests of Baal to search and see that no stranger were there in the assembly; for many religions considered the presence of a stranger some kind of defilement of the worship, which warrants killing him. Therefore when Jehu so commanded, nobody doubted his intention.

*“ So they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had appointed for himself eighty men on the outside, and had said, “If any of the men whom I have brought*

*into your hands escapes, whoever lets him escape, it shall be his life for the life of the other.” (24)*

There was no truce with the pagan worship which was set upon apostasy from the true God, beside the practice of sexual abomination, etc, a sin that would destroy life itself.

*“ Now it happened, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guards and to the captains, “Go in and kill them; let no one come out!”*

*And they killed them with the edge of the sword; then the guards and the officers threw them out, and went into the inner room of the temple of Baal” (25)*

It was not clear from the text, if it was Jehu who offered the sacrifice, or the high priest of Baal. Most probably Jehu who donated the sacrifices which was offered by the priests of the Baal; by which he intended to put their hearts at peace of his good intentions. ... When the first book of the kings say that the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices to the Lord (1 kings 8: 62), that does not imply that the king himself or the people did the actual offering; but they donated the sacrifices and the priests offered them.

*“And they brought the sacred pillars out of the temple of Baal and burned them” (26).*

The sacred pillars in the house of Baal were most probably shapeless wooden structures (Deuteronomy 16: 21); whereas the statue of Baal (270 was in stone or metal.

*“Then they broke down the sacred pillar of Baal, and tore down the temple of Baal and made it a refuse dump to this day” (27).*

The sacred pillars in the house of Baal were not images of Baal, but referred to gods of less level than Baal; whereas the statue of Baal that was torn down was most probably at the entrance of the temple.

*“Thus Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel” (28)*

## **6- JEHU DID NOT TURN AWAY FROM THE SINS OF JEROBOAM:**

*“ However Jehu did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin, that is, from the golden calves that were at Bethel and Dan” (29)*

All the kings of Israel walked in the way of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12: 25 – 33); who set a kind of worship contrary to the commandments of the Lord, concerning the use of statutes in worship, the priests, the feasts, and the place of worship.

He was preoccupied with destroying the Baal, yet without a true zeal to worship God with sanctification and purity! According to the apostle James: “*Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all*” (James 2: 10); particularly when that sin was not out of weakness but done by intention to realize a personal benefit. Jehu has done wrong against God and men; for he did not turn away from the golden calves in Bethel and Dan; and because when he moved to destroy the house of the evil Ahab, he did it with a spirit of violence toward many who did not belong to the house of Ahab; and therefore, he lost the nature of love.

“ Because you had no mercy on others, no mercy will be done to you; ... Because you shut the door of your house before the poor, God will not open before you the door of His kingdom. ... Because you denied the bread to the poor who demanded it from you, God will deny you the eternal life that you demand.... You will reap what you sowed. If you sow bitterness, you will reap bitterness;... If you sow cruelty, you will reap nothing but cruel labor and sufferings.... If you fled from mercy, it will flee from you; .... And if you despised the poor, you will be despised by Him who became poor for loving you.

+ He who does not show mercy, is not worthy of the mercies of God; and will not have a portion of God's compassion by his prayers.

+ He who have mercy on man, God's door will be open before his requests all the time.

(The spiritual elder)

*“And the LORD said to Jehu, “Because you have done well in doing what is right in My sight, and have done to the house of Ahab all that was in My heart, your sons shall sit on*

*the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.” (30)*

God commended Jehu for destroying the Baal-worship; God rewarded him by letting his sons reign on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation; namely Jehoahaz; Joash; Jeroboam, and Zechariah. But He punished him on his sins.

*“But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin” (31)*

Because Jehu's goal was to get rid of all those who challenged his greed, he dealt with evil according to his heart's desires.... We saw him destroy the house of Ahab, but he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. .... He broke down the temple of Baal, but he kept the golden calves intact. ... He made war against the

enemies of the Lord, led by his own desires; Hence we read: "*Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin*" (31).

Jehu's sin was not that he consummated certain good work, and neglected another; but because he took no heed for the purity of his heart; the importance of which the Holy Book confirms in the following verses:

"*My son, do not forget My law; but let your heart keep My commands:* (Proverb 3: 2)

"*Let not mercy or truth forsake you; Bind them around your neck; write them on the tablets of your heart*" (Proverb 3: 3)

"*Trust in the Lord with all your heart*" (Proverb 3: 5)

"*Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart*" (Proverb 4: 21)

"*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life*" (Proverb 4: 23)

"*Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck*" (Proverb 6: 21)

"*Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise; and apply your heart to My knowledge*" (Proverb 22: 17)

"*My son, if your heart is wise, My heart will rejoice – indeed I Myself*" (Proverb 23: 15)

"*Hear, My son, and be wise ;and guide your heart in the way*" (Proverb 23: 19)

"*My son, give me Your heart, and let your eyes observe My ways*" (Proverb 23: 26).

+ "***Keep your heart with all diligence***"(Proverb 4: 23), lest something of devilish nature would enter into our minds; or any spirit of the adversaries may turn our thoughts according to his wish. We pray for the Light of the knowledge of God to shine in our hearts; and for the Spirit of God to dwell

in our minds, to lead them to meditate in the divine things; For those who are led by the Spirit of God, are the children of God.

(The scholar Origen)

- + Let us then live this way; Let us continuously keep our hearts diligent; for we have horrible and deceptive *enemies*, the evil demons, with whom we wrestle, according to the words of the apostle: "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Ephesians 6: 12)..

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + . "*Create in me a clean heart, O God*" (Psalm 51: 10); he seeks such a creation; not that he had no heart, but having corrupted it, he desires to have it back clean.

(St. Dedyms the blind)

- + Jehu, by impure lies, and unclean sacrifice, inquired about ungodly men to kill them; which the Holy Book does not want us to imitate; Talking about his person, it wrote that "*his heart was not upright with God*"; What would he benefit if he practiced a kind of obedience concerning the complete destruction of the house of Ahab, if he revealed the evil desire of authority, and got some mortal wages in a temporary kingdom?

(St. Augustine)

- + It is not the unclean body, but the unclean soul that God hates ... The prophet says: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God*” (Psalm 51: 10); and, “*O, Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness*” (Jeremiah 4: 14)

## 7- THE END OF JEHU:

*“ In those days the LORD began to cut off parts of Israel; and Hazael conquered them in all the territory of Israel” (32)*

Out of Hazael God made a kind of a pair of scissors to cut off from the kingdom of Israel, all what was East of the Jordan, of the very fertile lands, from Aroer, at the frontier of Moab, in the far south, to Bashan, at the frontier of Moab in the far north. Yet the Lord’s wrath came upon Hazael, because he did that with greed and cruelty.

*“from the Jordan eastward: all the land of Gilead—Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh—from Aroer, which is by the River Arnon, including Gilead and Bashan” (33).*

As a divine chastisement, Israel lost all the Eastern bank of the Jordan; and consequently, an utter destruction and desolation dwelt upon the region belonging to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh (Joshua 22: 1-9), on the hand of Hazael king of Aram. A region that the armies of Damascus could reach, more easily than through the western bank.

“**Aroer**”, a Moabite and Hebrew name, meaning (naked or nakedness); many regions bore the same name, of which ‘Aroer’ mentioned here was the most prominent. A town to the North of the River ‘Arnon’ in Moab, south of the Amorite

kingdom of Sihon; taken over by Hazael , after the Gadites fortified it. It is called 'Araer' nowadays, 12 miles east of the Dead Sea, a little south of Deban

**“Gilead and Bashan”**, The whole region was called 'Gilead'. Here he discerns between Gilead in the south, and Bashan in the north (1 kings 4: 13, 19).

*“Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, all that he did, and all his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” (34)*

Jehu was a mighty man of valor, although he was ultimately collapsed and lost. His '**might**' refers to his violent personality and courage, more than his authority, having been defeated before Hazael king of Aram. He reigned for 28 years, of which we only know the period at the beginning of his reign.

The name of Jehu was inscribed on an old 'black obelisk', erected by 'Shalmaneser', the Assyrian king, in which Jehu appeared kneeling in humiliation before the Assyrian king. He paid tribute to the Aramites at the beginning of his reign (in the year 841 BC); The Holy Book did not mention his relation with Assyria, the nation that was about to become an international power.

*“So Jehu rested with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria. Then Jehoahaz his son reigned in his place (35)*

After the death of Jehu, his son Jehoahaz reigned in his place (13: 1 9); followed by Joash (also called Jehoash) (13: 10-13); then Jeroboam the second (14: 23-29); then a short period by Zechariah (15: 8-12); who was killed by Shallum. By whom, the line of Jehu came to an end in the fourth generation according to the words of the Lord (10: 30).

*“And the period that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years” (36)*

Ahab's family made Jezreel the second capital of Israel, representing a partial center of reign (2 kings 9: 14-30). Whereas Jehu and his descendants concentrated on Samaria as their capital (2 kings 13: 10; 14: 23; 15: 8). No one reigned longer than Jehu on Israel except Jeroboam the second, who was among his descendants – who reigned for 40 years.

Having started his reign uprightly, King Jehu could have been the subject of pleasure of God; but his heart was not completely upright not moderate. He destroyed the house of the evil Ahab; and destroyed the worship of Baal; but held fast to another form of idol-worship, the two golden calves set by Jeroboam. He was anointed by the prophet Elijah, and confirmed by the prophet Elisha; and could have been a good king who consummates the will of God; but his daring and arrogance made him prone to faults. His heart was not complete before God, he obeyed God in what conformed with his own personal agenda. His opposition to the worship of Baal was for the sake of political benefit; For as that worship was connected to Ahab's family, destroying it established his throne. As to the two golden calves he left them intact, on account of that destroying them would make the people go back to the temple in Jerusalem to worship the true God , ... his family, however, reigned for a duration longer than any other royal family.

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+ Let Your Holy Spirit work in me;  
Let Him lead my whole life: my behavior, mind, heart, and all my senses  
I often deceive myself;  
I count myself fulfilling Your will;  
But as Your Holy Spirit is the Leader of my depths;  
Shining His light in me, I perceive the truth of my depths;  
He guides me in You, and leads me to You;

+ Grant me to become a tool of righteousness to the account of Your kingdom;

I cannot claim that I defend the truth;  
For I would then be prone to criticism, judgment, and anger;  
Defending the truth, may cause me to lose love;  
For there would be no truth without love.

+ It may seem to me that walking in godliness is an easy matter; but who will control my eyes and my mind?

Who will sanctify my hidden feelings and emotions?  
Who will grant me the holy truth, but You, O Holy One?

Create a clean heart in me, O God;

And renew a steadfast spirit within me.



# CHAPTER 11

## THE KID JOASH ANOINTED A KING

In the last chapter we saw how God set Jehu to destroy the house of Ahab, who, together with his wife, family, priests, and acquaintances corrupted Israel, and almost turned it from a people of the true God to a pagan people that worship the Baal; oppress the prophets, and the men of God. That (plague) moved, as well, to Judah, when the two royal families entered into a marital relationship. But Jehu killed the two kings of Israel and Judah, and almost every one who belong to the house of Ahab. Now Athaliah the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel received the throne in Judah; and bearing the spirit of her evil mother, she put in her heart to destroy the whole house of David, so that none of them would survive to reign; and got preoccupied with spreading the pagan worship in Judah. She was the only woman who reigned in Israel and Judah.

In an attempt to strengthen his kingdom, Jehoshaphat king of Judah gave his son Jehoram in marriage to Athaliah the daughter of Ahab; a bond, according to many, was a part of a devilish plan to bring idol-worship into Judah.

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|--|---------|
| 1- The kid Joash saved from Athaliah's hand          | 1 - 3   |
| 2- Joash anointed a king by Jehoiada the high priest | 4- 12   |
| 3- Athaliah killed                                   | 13 - 16 |
| 4- A return to the worship of the true god           | 17 – 21 |

### 1- THE KID JOASH SAVED FROM ATHALIAH'S HAND;

“When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs” (1)

In the last chapter we saw a man set by the Lord to reign on the throne of Israel, to destroy the whole house that corrupted the leaders and the people. But unfortunately, although he did destroy them, he did not know how to deliver his own heart to the Lord, to have the words of the wise Solomon: *“The king’s heart is in the hands of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes”* (Proverb 21: 1).... Now it presents to us a different portrait of a woman who received the throne in Judah; and, instead of putting her heart in the hands of the Lord, she put in it to oppose Him; by which she actually opposed herself, and without knowing it, she destroyed her position and her life.... Those two: Jehu king of Israel, and Athaliah queen of Judah, even though contradictory,; for the former so seemed to be zealous on the worship of the living God; and the later, had zeal to spread the worship of Baal, but both of them, having not put their hearts in the hands of the Lord, provide us with a single call to set a kingdom of God in us; through putting our hearts in the hands of the king of kings; He who made us kings and priests (Revelations 1: 6).

- + Deliver your soul in the hands of the Lord; not only when you depart from the body, but even while it is still in the body; let your soul be in the hands of the Lord; for you cannot see it, nor its source, or where it reaches; It is in you, and, at the same time with God. *“The king’s heart is in the hands of the Lord”*, who leads and guides it ... If the heart of man is in the hands of the Lord, how much more would be his soul?

(St. Ambrose)

- + If the king’s heart is in the hands of God, he would not be saved by the strength of his arms, but by the divine leadership. ... Not everyone is in the hands of God; but only him who is qualified to bear the royal name.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + Surely, the prophet does not refer to the kings of this world; when it is written: "*The heart of the king is in the hands of God*". The "kings of the earth" are those who have the authority over sin.

Can we, for a moment, assume that the heart of Jolian the denier, ....or those of the persecutors Neron, Maximianus, Dakios, are in the hands of the Lord?? Far from it!...

- + Can the heart of Manasseh be in the hands of God: ... Can the hearts of the evil kings of Judah be in the hands of God? ... The "kings" are the saints whose hearts are in the hands of God.

(St. Jerome)

Athaliah was the mother of Ahaziah king of Judah; (not Ahaziah king of Israel, the son of Ahab and Jezebel); After her own son was killed, she put it in her heart to destroy all the royal seed; in an attempt to annul the

divine promise concerning setting kings of the descendants of David forever. The way the seed of her father were destroyed by Jehu, she wished to destroy that of all who remained of the descendants of David. Athaliah

the daughter of Ahab and jezebel, and the widow of Jehoram king of Judah, introduced the worship of Baal into Judah; Like her mother in her wickedness and violence, she did not hesitate to shed blood to realize her goal.

She could control her man (8: 18, 27; 2 Chronicles 21: 6), and her son (2 Chronicles 22: 2-4).

According to St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian, Athaliah provoked her son Ahaziah to work, through the sons of iniquity, to draw the priests away from the house of the Lord to minister to the idols; and like a blind man, he obeyed

her without debate. And once she received the throne, after her son was killed, she concentrated on realizing that by herself, in order to draw all the Jews from worshipping the true God to the old worship of Sidon.

Pride was, yet, behind the destruction of both Jehu, whom God chose to chastise the house of Ahab, and Athaliah. When they both received the throne, assumed that by their own strength and wisdom, they could realize their

mission with success. But despite all their possibilities, abilities, and talents, not turning to God with the spirit of humility, to seek His council, and wisdom, and to let Him hold the steering wheel of their life by Himself, they

failed, and destroyed themselves, in spite of the appearances of shining signs of prosperity at the beginning of their reign,.... Pride or haughtiness is the way to the destruction of man by his own hands, whatever is his

position.

+ A proud and a haughty man is like an ox prepared for slaughter, that is left to roam in relative freedom, to destroy what it wishes to destroy, until the day of its slaughter (See proverb 7: 22).

+ All those proud men bear haughty necks; they not only practice evil, but refuse to see it as such; and when they are rebuked they tend to justify themselves.

+ When the wicked fight against God, the earthen vessel are broken into pieces; so are those who trust in their own strength, in "*their embossed shield*" about which the righteous 'Job' says the wicked "*run stubbornly against Him, with a strong embossed shield*" (Job 15: 26).

(St. Augustine)

+ The sons of rulers, who boast in their ability of degrading some priests from their priesthood ranks; boast in things, not of true value, and, accordingly have not the least reason for boasting. ... Some, who boast of having the power to cut the heads of men, "*their glory is in their shame*" (Philippians 3: 19); ... And others who boast in their earthly riches... All these things are not worthy to be put into consideration, and it would be unfitting to boast in them. But to boast in being wise, to boast that for the last ten years we did not practice any carnal pleasures or lusts; or that we haven't approached them since childhood, or in that we bear shackles in

our hands for the sake of the Lord Christ; these are the things truly worthy of boasting. Yet even these things, as well, if we use our reason, we shall realize that we should not boast in them.

Paul had what are worthy of boasting: the visions, proclamations, miracles, signs, the sufferings he endured for the sake of the Lord Christ; and the many churches he established in several locations of the world. According to human measures, boasting in those things would seem to people as natural; yet, to spare him from the danger of boasting even in such things, God the Father, in His mercy, as He granted him those privileges, lest he should be exalted above measure, he also gave him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. Concerning this thing he pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from him; but the Lord said to him. 'My grace is sufficient to you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness (See 2 Corinthians 12: 7 – 9)

+ Hate greatness, for it is the fruit filled with death;

Adam ate from it in Eden, and it gave him death

By it, Satan had fallen in the beginning;

By it, the house of Adam were driven out of paradise;

Nothing is hated and despised by God like the love of greatness, and he who boasts with pride

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king’s sons who were being murdered; and they*

*hid him and his nurse in the bedroom, from Athaliah, so that he was not killed” (2)*

**“Athaliah:**, Although her name means (the Lord is glorified); but unfortunately she did not walk as befitting of her name. She put in her heart to kill all her grandchildren, the descendants of Ahaziah, and all the royal seed; but failed, as Jehosheba, snatched her nephew Joash the son of Ahaziah, together with his nurse and hid him in the house of the Lord for a duration of six years, helped by her husband Jehoiada the godly high priest. Being the sister of Ahaziah, she had free access to the royal palace, beside that the workers there had compassion on the little infant and helped her to save him. And above everything else, we should remember that God promised David that his throne will endure forever; and that the Messiah will come from his seed (2 Samuel 7); He therefore, kept Joash for the sake of His promise to David.

Jehosheba, daughter of king Jehoram, and sister of Ahaziah from his father and not from his mother; according to Josephus, not being the daughter of Athaliah she confronted her wickedness (2 kings 11: 2; 2 Chronicles 22: 11), and saved the little Joash by hiding

him from Athaliah six years in the temple; and most probably Athaliah, having no knowledge whatsoever of his existence, she did not search for him to kill him. Jehosheba hid the little infant in the house of the Lord, until he could take the throne (11: 12); the way Miriam hid her brother Moses (Exodus 2: 3); Rahab hid the two spies (Joshua 2: 4); and Joseph and Mary hid the infant Jesus in Egypt (Matthew 2: 13); until the proper time assigned by the Lord..

In the house of God, we take refuge, not only from the wicked enemies, but in it we gain honor, as we offer the sacrifices of exultation and praise. There, as our hearts are sure of the perfect conquest; hence we raise our heads high in Joy and pride; despite being surrounded on all sides by enemies who threaten us. The temple was considered as a place of security (2 kings 11: 3; Nehemiah 6: 10); not on account of its strong walls and gates, but of that God dwells in it, and the fellowship of Him therein. There, the believer truly finds his security, inner peace, comfort, happiness, and perpetual growth.

*“One thing I have desired of the Lord; that will I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (Psalm 27: 4)*

*“Those who are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God” (Psalm 92: 13)*

*“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the lord; We have blessed you from the house of the Lord” (Psalm 118: 26)*

*“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’” (Psalm 122: 1)*

*“Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good” (Psalm 122: 9)*

*“Behold, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who by night stand in the house of the Lord” (Psalm 134: 1)*

*“You who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of God” (135: 2).*

+ *“Those who are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God” (Psalm 92: 13).* We are planted in a place, and will flourish in another. We

are planted here, and will flourish in the kingdom of God. We are planted in the house of the Lord, namely in the church; not within its walls, but in its teachings; For the Lord says: "*The kingdom of God is in you*" (Luke 17: 21). All who are planted in the house of the Lord, and have their roots grow here, will bear flowers there... We may seem at home here, but, compared to the angels, and the heavenly hosts, we are not in our ultimate home, we are just in the beginning, and not in the end of the way to perfection. We shall not become angels, but like the angels. Do not ever count it as an easy matter, O man, to be like an angel.

(St. Jerome)

It so seems that before killing the sons of the king, Athaliah did not do a census of their names, and did not make sure of killing them all; but, assuming that she is the one of authority, she gives the orders to be The child was snatched from among the dead corpses of his siblings, suspected as dead; or from his nursery;

In the 'bedroom', translated as the storehouse of beds and mattresses; a place that would never be searched for the sons of the king.

Here we stand amazed before the hidden divine care: Jehosheba, the daughter of Jehoram, the evil king, got married to Jehoiada, a zealous and a godly priest; by which she could play the role of saving the child. On another aspect, her

husband the priest could keep him safe in a secure place, that the evil queen would never suspect to be a hiding place for one of the king's sons together obeyed by all.

*"So he was hidden with her in the house of the LORD for six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land" (3)*

Not perceiving that God is the King of kings, Athaliah counted herself as the sole one of authority, who could do whatever she likes; and that no one would dare to stand against her. The wise Solomon previously warned against the wrath of the king, counting him like a roaring lion , not to avenge, but to exhort man against

evil that could destroy him; saying: *“The wrath of a king is like the roaring of a lion; whoever provokes him to anger, sins against his own life”* (proverb @0: 2). Who is this King, but the Lion who comes from the tribe of Judah. According to the scholar Origen the talk here is open on Christ being the King. Whoever provokes His anger by his sin, his own sins would stand against him].

Queen Athaliah never thought about the temple, nor cared for it.. For as long as six years she worshipped the Baal, and disregarded the worship of the living God; she built a temple for Baal, and appointed priests for it (11: 8). By comparing what came in 2 kings 12: 5-12 with what came in 2 Chronicles 24: 7, we can realize how Athaliah cared to spread the worship of Baal in Judah, and to annul the worship in the house of the Lord as much as she could. She considered the house of the Lord, no more than a storehouse from which the vessels could be drawn to use in the temple of Baal; It did not come into her mind to care to check out what went on there, being sure that it will eventually collapse before the might of the worship of Baal.

## **2- JOASH ANOINTED A KING BY JEHOIADA THE HIGH PRIEST:**

*“ In the seventh year Jehoiada sent and brought the captains of hundreds—of the bodyguards and the escorts—and brought them into the house of the LORD to him. And he made*

*a covenant with them and took an oath from them in the house of the LORD, and showed them the king’s son”* (4).

The high priest put a secure and a wise plan to guarantee that Athaliah would never have the chance to do a contrary action.... She was actually surprised by the fact that the kingdom returned to the seed of David after seven years of her reign, all by a divine ordinance on the hand of Jehoiada.

“**Jehoiada**”, a Hebrew name, meaning (God knows) was the high priest in the days of Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Joash; a husband of Jehosheba, sister of king Ahaziah. He, together with his wife put in their hearts to save the infant Joash from the hands of Athaliah; being the only one left of the house of David, through whom the throne would be kept in the seed of David. He cared for him, and the Holy Spirit, through him ordained a political plan to make him sit on the throne a king, when he reached the seventh year of age; and he took the role of being his guardian.

Because of his glorified works in supporting Joash, destroying the idols, and reforming the temple, Johoiada was buried in the tombs of the kings in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 24: 15, etc.); on account of that he cared to perform the following overall reform movements:

- 1- He enthroned the new king
- 2- He set a covenant between the Lord and the people to become the people of God (17)
- 3- He set a covenant between the king and the people
- 4- He motivated the people as a whole to tear the house of Baal down
- 5- They broke into pieces the altars and images of Baal
- 6- They killed Mattan the priest of Baal
- 7- He appointed the priests officers over the house of the Lord
- 8- A great joy and peace dwelt over the whole city, for the new reforms under the supervision of Jehoiada.

The appearance of Joash, the youngest king in the history of Israel and Judah, is considered a decisive moment, for he sat on the throne when he was seven years old; and reigned for as long as 40 years; but unfortunately he perverted in his last years, and was slain by his servants when he was 47 years old.

The church, since the apostolic era cared not to ordain the spiritual leaders, the bishops in particular, in their young years; with the exception of those who, together with youth, were granted wisdom, godliness, and reason.

In the by-laws of the saintly apostles: [We hear from our Lord that the shepherd who is to be ordained a bishop over the churches in any eparchy, has to be blameless, free of all kinds of evil that prevail on the common people; and **to be at least fifty years of age**; so that he would have already crossed over his young years in good life ... But in case a small eparchy has no one advanced in age, it is allowed to choose a younger man, who has a good reputation, to be qualified for the position as a bishop; who crossed over his years of youth in the meekness and reason of an old man; and, after testing him and writing a good report about him, he would be ordained in peace. ... Josiah, reigned in his 8 years of age, walked uprightly (2 kings 22: 1); and Joash reigned when he was 7 years old (2 Chronicles 24: 1; 2 kings 11: 3-4).. Therefore, if the one chosen was young, let him be meek, gentle, and peaceful; for the Lord says through Isaiah: *“On this one will I look, on him who is poor, of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word”* (Isaiah 66: 2)].

Through those six years, he hid the infant Joash in the temple, the Spirit of the Lord was working strongly in the life of Jehoiada. He not only ordained priests zealous on the kingdom of God, but he had an active role in the life of the kings' officers and others, to prepare leaders and people who rejected the violence of Athalib and her opposition to the work of God. As it was high time to take a daring stand on the level of leaders and people to get rid of the tyrant Athaliah, and to receive the infant Joash a king, and to be submitted to God Himself, and to return to Him.

**“The bodyguards”** refer to the royal bodyguards, who were often foreigners, as was done by king David, who were trusted more than the Israelites, if a rebellion or a riot happens among the people (2 Samuel 15: 18).

**The escorts**”: refer to the messengers who were sent from one place to another, bearing the king’s commands, Jehoiada, being the high priest, let them enter into the house of the Lord, namely into the chamber where the little son of the king was hidden. There is no doubt that they, together with many of the children of Judah, longed for getting rid of the Athaliah who took the throne by force; and to bring it back to the house of David.

In 2 Chronicles 23: 2 it came that, after their secret covenant, they went all over Judah, and gathered together the Levites and the elders of Israel, and brought them over to Jerusalem, where they, as well, made a covenant with the king in the house of the Lord; and were armed by Jehoiada with the spears and shields that were kept in the house of the Lord.

*“Then he commanded them, saying, “This is what you shall do:: one-third of you who come on duty on the Sabbath shall be keeping watch over the king’s house” (5)*

The prophet David had previously divided the priests and the Levites into 24 divisions; every division to serve according to their order. Jehoiada chose the day of the Sabbath to declare the enthronement of Joash a king in the temple; on account of that it was the day the believers used to gather together. He most probably called all the divisions to come without knowing what he was going to declare; they were only prepared to receive the little infant of the seed of David to be the king. They came without weapons, as though to worship, and according to plan, those responsible for the enthronement of the new king, were armed with the weapons stored by king David in the temple (10). It was indeed a magnificent chance for the whole people to rejoice; those who lost any hope for someone of the seed of David to be enthroned, on the assumption that none of them survived.

*“ One-third shall be at the gate of Sur, and one-third at the gate behind the escorts. You shall keep the watch of the house, lest it be broken down” (6).*

There were three divisions of guards, Jehoiadah commanded one third to keep the watch of the house of the king, namely where Athaliah dwelt; and two thirds to keep watch of the house of the Lord around the little king Joash.

The first third: namely the guards on the house of the king were divided into three divisions:

- a- A division at the gate of Sur, most probably what was called ‘the gate of the foundation’ (2 Chronicles 23: 5)
- b- A division at the gate behind the escorts
- c- A third division were standby in the quarter of the guards.

Through that regular assignments, Jehoiada intended to keep Athaliah from having any doubt of anything that may indicate treason.

*“The two contingents of you who go off duty on the Sabbath shall keep the watch of the house of the LORD for the king” (7).*

Those were the division that, even though already served their shift, yet were ordered to show up in the house of the Lord, and not to be dismissed as usual, to partake of guarding the little king.

*“But you shall surround the king on all sides, every man with his weapons in his hand; and whoever comes within range, let him be put to death. You are to be with the king as he*

*goes out and as he comes in.” (8)*

Through very careful planning, Jehoiada, did not leave any chance for someone to come to kill the little king to have favor in the sight of Athaliah; And at the same time, he did not leave any chance for any riot or disturbance to happen that would corrupt the celebration of the enthronement of the new king.

*“So the captains of the hundreds did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded. Each of them took his men who were to be on duty on the Sabbath, with those who were*

*going off duty on the Sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest” (9)*

*“And the priest gave the captains of hundreds the spears and shields which had belonged to King David, that were in the temple of the LORD” (10).*

King David dedicated those spears and shields to the house of the Lord, after striking the army of Hadadezer (2 Samuel 8: 9-11). And as those weapons were not in gold nor silver, they were disregarded by Shishak king of Egypt when he took over the treasures of the house of the Lord, and of the king's house (1 Kings 14: 25-26)

*“Then the escorts stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, all around the king, from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, by the altar and the house” (11)*

By the altar here, is meant the altar of the burnt offering, that was in the court in front of the house.

The watch was intact all around the king; but the true watch was that, it all happened in the holy house, dedicated to the Lord of hosts; who was the true “Guard””: about whom the Psalmist sings, saying: *“Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Psalm 127: 1).*

- + Why would we suffer of having no house, no cover, or no neighbors?... Is it not better for us to dwell in the Builder of our house, and be guarded by the Guard of our city? If David did not find comfort until he found (God His comfort); how could we seek comfort outside Him?

(St. John Saba)

- + However clever and alert in your work, O shepherd, you cannot refer your success to your effort, strong personality, or diligence in work. For it is God alone who keeps the souls and whose grace watches over them.
- + *“Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain”* (Psalm 127: 1) ... We (the shepherds), watch over you as stewards of God; but we, likewise seek from Him to watch over us together with you.

Even though we are your shepherds, but we are watched by God; for we are your fellow sheep.

We may be your teachers, but we are your fellow students in the school of God, the only Master.

If we wish for God to watch over us, As He humiliated Himself for our sake; let us be humiliated likewise.

No one should count himself as something; for there is nothing good in anyone, unless he gets it from God, who is the only One good.

- + This is the house we build by living a virtuous life; by God’s help to us; for *“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it”* (Psalm 127: 1)

(St. Augustine)

*“And he brought out the king’s son, put the crown on him, and gave him the Testimony; they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, “Long live the king!” (12)*

The enthronement of the new king (see 2 Chronicles 23: 11) was done according to the following steps:

- a- The little king who was hidden in the temple from the face of Athaliah for six years.
- b- A proclamation that he is the legitimate king
- c- The crown was put on his head. A similar crown to that put over the head of the high priest; namely a golden crown with a ribbon.
- d- He was anointed. The Holy Book mentioned that Saul the first king over Israel was anointed by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 10:1); So was David (2 Samuel 2: 4); Solomon (1 Kings 1: 39); and now Joash. The king was therefore called *“the Lord’s anointed”* (1 Samuel 12: 3, 5; 2 Samuel 1: 14, 16; Psalm 2: 2; Habakkuk 3: 13).
- e- When anointed, the new king was handed a copy of the law of Moses, to be committed to walk according to it (Deuteronomy 17: 18), in which was written the duties of the king concerning keeping the law of God. By the “testimony” given to the king, is meant a section of the books of Moses (Deuteronomy 17: 18), or what was written by Samuel (1 Samuel 10: 25), or the ten commandments. The “testimony” was a scroll that included the divine law, together with a reference that it is the guide in running the state affairs. As the word “gave” did not come in some versions, some understand that the priest put the crown, together with the testimony on the new king’s head, as an indication that he will submit to the law of God.
- f- By clapping their hands, and shouting, the people proclaimed their unanimous consent to welcome him as their king. According to ‘Harmer’, in the Hebrew text, as well as in Psalm 47: 1, and Isaiah 55: 2; it came as “hand” and not “hands”; for everyone used to clap his hand gently over his lips as a sign of joy.

g- Shouting: “*Long live the king*”, means: “*God save the king*”

This book portrays to us the celebration of the enthronement of the little king Joash, with formalities bearing holiness, done by the high priest himself, he who has for six years anticipated that joyful day, elaborately prepared for it, and spent much expenses, and effort to realize it.... It is a portrait of our coronation as kings and priests for God the Father (Revelation 1: 6). This double celebration is realized in the water of baptism in which we enjoy the new birth, be counted as the children of the King of kings, and enjoy the general priesthood, offering God the sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise. This coronation did not start to happen just then, but was prepared by God for long centuries; and had cost Him sending fathers, prophets, and the law; and even to deliver His only-begotten Son for the salvation of the world. ... The fathers of the early church tell us about the creation of man to be a king and a ruler.

+ Man (Adam) did not enter into the world of existence until the sixth day of creation ... For it would not be befitting for the ruler to appear before the things he is going to rule.

But once his kingdom was ready, as the divine Creator prepared all things for a royal dwelling place for the king to come, the ruler was proclaimed.

This royal dwelling place is the earth, the sea, and the sky, which is like a bow surrounding everything as a roof.

In that palace, all kinds of material riches were stored; a world of animals and plants, everything with body, soul, and life. And in case the material things are to be counted as riches, they include everything beautiful and

of value in the sight of man, of gold, silver, precious stones, to enjoy.

The divine Creator hid all those things in the womb of the earth; as though they are a royal treasure, so that once man appears in the world, he would meditate in some, explore the others. and, enjoying all.,

he would give thanks to the Grantor of goods; and looking at the beauty of what he sees, he would be drawn to the unperceivable great power of their Creator.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa\_

- + It is befitting to call the saints 'kings' in the language of the Holy Book; for they soar above the carnal emotions, control the pleasures of evil lusts, appease the flame of greed, bow down the haughtiness of pride, crush the thoughts of the body, and put off the fire of covetousness. They will forever sit on the throne of the eternal kingdom, and receive the authority to judge the others. So the Lord says to the Laodicean church: "*To him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne*" (Revelation 3: 21).

It is not a contradiction to proclaim in some place else that His disciples will sit on twelve thrones, to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19: 28); while here, He says that they will be granted to sit on His throne. By the "twelve thrones", He refers to the general judgment; whereas by "the throne of the Son", he refers to the special exaltation of the higher Judicial authority.

(Pope Gregory the Great)

### **3- ATHALIAH KILLED:**

"Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the escorts *and* the people, she came to the people *in* the temple of the LORD" (13)

Although Athaliah perceived that something seriousness was going on, yet she did not think about fleeing from the palace, her pride made her trust in her ability to manage any situation, and did not allow her to withdraw in

weakness and disgrace, following the lead of her mentor – the devil – who dared to tempt the Lord of glory Jesus, and even to go with Him on the pinnacle of the temple, seeking from Him to show off His possibilities, by casting

Himself down from there, to see if His angels will carry Him to safety.

*“When she looked, there was the king standing by a pillar according to custom; and the leaders and the trumpeters were by the king. All the people of the land were rejoicing*

*and blowing trumpets. So Athaliah tore her clothes and cried out, “Treason! Treason!” (14).*

It is not easy to perceive the feelings of the queen, who was sure that she has managed to kill everyone who could sit on the throne, and lived six years in a false peace of mind, seeing, all of a sudden, an infant king surrounded by all the religious and civil leaderships, and exulted by all the people. She tore her clothes and cried out: “Treason, treason”; when she was, in truth, the one who committed treason, by killing all the house of David, to get rid of anyone who could compete against her to sit on the throne.

*“And Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the army, and said to them, “Take her outside under guard, and slay with the sword whoever*

*follows her.” For the priest had said, “Do not let her be killed in the house of the LORD.” (15)*

Jehoiada gave the command to arrest her, take her out of the house of the Lord, and kill her; because she killed all the seed of David, supported idol-worship, built a temple for Baal; robbed all what she could of the vessels of the house of the Lord to the account of the temple of Baal; and because, being an enemy of the people, she destroyed their peace. The high priest cared for two things:

- a- Not to kill her in the house of the Lord
- b- To kill with the sword whoever follows her to defend her, or to avenge those who oppose her.

*“So they seized her; and she went by way of the horses’ entrance into the king’s house, and there she was killed” (16).*

The way of the horses entrance into the king’s house is different from the way of the gate of the escorts (19); which was the normal way from the house of the Lord to the house of the king.

#### **4- A RETURN TO THE WORSHIP OF THE TRUE GOD:**

*“Then Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD, the king, and the people, that they should be the LORD’s people, and also between the king and the people” (17).*

Now, having done the difficult task of getting rid of the wicked Athaliah, who took the throne by force, and shed innocent blood, the high priest cared to let the new king start his reign by setting a covenant between the Lord, the king, and the people. He intended for the king to be faithful in his relationship with God, and his relationship with the people of God.

He renewed the covenant on the level of the whole people (Exodus 19 24; 27: 9), by which the king is committed to govern in harmony, and conforming to the divine law; And the people, in turn, are committed to show love and obedience to the king in the Lord.

At the start of his reign, the king walked uprightly, thanks to the influence of his aunt Jehosheba and his uncle Jehoiada.

For a long time the king and the people did not renew their covenant with the Lord;

Jehoiada, as the high priest acted as a guardian of the king, on account of that no one of his family was alive to do it instead. Jehoiada, therefore, being the actual ruler at the time, started by the following works:

- a- He renewed the covenant between God, and the king, and the people; and between the king and the people. As it came in Exodus 19: 5- 8; 24: 3-8; 34: 10 – 28); by which the king is committed to submit to the divine law; and the people are committed to submit to the king.
- b- He destroyed the worship of Baal; for whom, Jehoram or Athaliah might have have built a temple in the city of Jerusalem; and Mattan was the high priest for Baal.
- c- He brought king Joash to the house of the king, and let him sit on the throne..

*“And all the people of the land went to the temple of Baal, and tore it down. They thoroughly broke in pieces its altars and images, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars.*

*And the priest appointed officers over the house of the LORD” (18)*

The people began their renewal of their covenant with God by destroying the idol-worship introduced by Athaliah; for there is no fellowship between God and Bileal; nor between the light and the darkness.

*“Then he took the captains of hundreds, the bodyguards, the escorts, and all the people of the land; and they brought the king down from the house of the LORD, and went by way of the*

*gate of the escorts to the king’s house. Then he sat on the throne of the kings (19).*

*“So all the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet, for they had slain Athaliah with the sword in the king’s house” (20).*

All the people rejoiced; as the fruit of being attached to the Lord, and of their return to Him, is the enjoyment of inner peace and the true joy.

*“Jehoash was seven years old when he became king” (21).*

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 11**

### **SET YOUR KINGDOM IN ME, O HOLY ONE**

+ Grant me to sing together with the wise Solomon, saying:

O God, who by Your wisdom have formed humankind, to have dominion over Your creation;

And to rule the world in holiness and righteousness;

And pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul (Wisdom 9: 2-3)

You wish for all to be truly kings, masters, and rulers;

Not to enslave anyone, whatever weak are his capabilities;

But, by Your Holy Spirit, to lead their hearts;

And, by Your grace, to control their senses and emotions;

And to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God.

+ You did not create man to be a slave of his brother or sister;

But to carry the spirit of dominion and authority;

To walk along the royal path, to cross over to You;

Not to fear the devil and his evil hosts;

Not to bow in humiliation to any evil or vain desire;

Not to be enslaved to the love of the world, or to the desire of the vain glory;

But by the spirit of love and humility, he, as a king, would be attached to his Father the King of kings;

Grant me to be like a little child for whom You care with love;

To reveal to me Your plan toward me;

To grant me to find refuge in Your holy house; and to enjoy Your sweet love;

Let the devil stir up; let him assume that he can destroy Your children; For You are a refuge and stronghold for their souls;

They find their peace, joy, and prosperity in Your bosoms.

+ Who will set Your kingdom in me, but You?

Who will guard my depths against the snares of the enemy but Your Holy Spirit?

You are the Lord of hosts! You are my stronghold and salvation from the enemies;

Proclaim Your divine presence in my depths

By You, I cross over the journey of my life in peace;

By Your Holy Spirit, my soul flies up to Your heavens.

+ The high priest Jehoiada cared to raise the infant Joash to become a king;

He set for him a safe haven in the house of the Lord, to keep him safe from Athaliah;

He put strong guard to protect him;

He put the crown and the testimony over his head;

He anointed him a king, and the people exulted and rejoiced;

How amazingly joyful was the celebration to all!

+ What can I say concerning my own coronation, a king; and setting me a priest for God Your Father?

According to Your plan, even before creating me?

For my sake you sent fathers and prophets, and gave me the law to help me;

For my sake You incarnated, and with me, You partook of everything, except for sin;

You were counted among the doers of iniquity; for me to be counted among the children of God;

You carried my reproach on the cross; to make me enjoy the fellowship of Your glories;

You set for me a place of comfort;

Not in a house made by a human hand, but by Your divine arm;

You set a strong guard to keep the devil from crawling into me;

Having made me a member of Your Holy Body, the angels desire to guard me;

The devil who worked in Athaliah's heart have no dominion to force himself into my depths

+ Reign, O Lord in my depths; to take away the spirit of bondage;

And to grant me the joy of the Spirit.

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# CHAPTER 12

## JOASH AND THE REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE

Joash the son of Ahaziah reigned for forty years (835-796 BC) (2 Chronicles 23: 1; 24: 27); which we can divide into two parts: before the death of Jehoiada the high priest; and after his death. During the first part, Joash worked under the guidance of the priest with the spirit of godliness; and God made the life of Jehoiada long to reach 130 years of age (2 Chronicles 24: 15); the longest since the days of Omram father of Moses and Aaron who lived for 137 years (Exodus 6: 20).

Jehoiada, as a guardian, mentor, and counselor, undoubtedly had his active role in the life of Joash, whether in resisting the worship of Baal, in the care for repairing the temple, and in the worship of the living God. Indeed, Solomon built the temple with the best material possible; but with time, lack of care to maintain it, the loss of interest of the people to worship God, the evil effort of the sons of Athaliah to destroy it, and to move many of its vessels and holy articles to the temple of Baal (2 Chronicles 24: 7), have all destroyed the house.

It is befitting of the believer, beside his care for the house of the Lord in this world, in which the congregation of God gather together with the angels to worship God with a flaring spirit, to care for the inner house of God in his heart, as well as in those of his brethren; that needs no material maintenance, and that neither the time, nor the devil with all his hosts, would be able to destroy, nor to move its holy articles to unbecoming places. This is the house made by the Holy Spirit of God, not man-made.

What shall I call it? ... Shall I call it another Golgotha? ... the dwelling place of God with men? ... the deposit of heaven? ... the paradise, fruitful by the Spirit? ... the (hospital) of souls, where the Lord is the heavenly Physician? ... the haven of comfort? ... the heavenly treasure which cannot be robbed or stolen? ... the embassy of God? ... or the house of the divine and brotherly love?

+ That spiritual paradise is the church; and the tree of life is its holy altar

The tree of knowledge is outside its door, from which the lovers of the world pluck its fruit every day;

Here (in the church), the serpent that deceived our mother Eve, cannot enter; because Mary stands to listen to the word of the angel Gabriel;

The Virgin Mary and the alert angel utter the clear truth; whereas the one who utters the hateful thoughts is driven out, .

The time when the old Eve talked to the serpent is over; and the young girl entered to talk to the angel

The cherub who was assigned to guard the gate of paradise is out of commission; and the gate of paradise is wide open. Therefore, come, O dead, and enter when resurrected;

There are no more gates, nor guards on the tree of life; for even the splendid thief and murderer entered;

Come, O good and bad (the repentant); enter, and eat from the tree that scatters its fruit on the near and far;

Eve plucked the fruit that kills, gave it to Adam; and both died because of that deadly food;

+ The church in the world is a secure haven; let everyone who labors, come to find comfort in it; its doors are open, its eyes are good, its heart is wide; its banquet is loaded, and its wine is good for the worthy;

Come, O lovers of the world, out of the maze of this evil world; find comfort in the house full of compassion on those who enter;

O exhausted laborer, who seeks and chases the riches that are mortal and temporary;

O rich, who lost his way because of his riches, acquire God, and hate the riches that will eventually not be yours;

O who runs after the world that caused him to suffer, come to find comfort in the chamber of light;

For in it you will find life, blessings, and all pleasures; where man lives rich without worries.

- 1- Joash under Jehoiada's guidance  
1 - 3
- 2- Care to repair the Lord's house  
4 - 16
- 3- Jehoash gives Hazael king of Aram the gold of the Lord's house and of  
the king's house 17 - 18
- 4- The death of Joash  
19 -21

#### **1- JOASH UNDER JOHIADA'S GUIDANCE:**

*"In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba" (1)*

Here the name of the mother of the king is mentioned; for in many countries the queen mother used to play a practical role in the royal household; and to have authority and honor (1 king 15: 13)

*"Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him" (2)*

As the high priest Jehoiada had a great influence upon king Jehoash, the king did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days in which the priest instructed him; even though he failed to remove the high places. Of his most important achievements was the repair of the house of the Lord that was in very

bad shape; for the leaders and the people on all levels were preoccupied with the pagan worship for a long time, and disregarded the house of the Lord.

Yet, after the death of the high priest, *‘the leaders of Judah came and bowed down to the king; and the king listened to them. Therefore they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served wooden images and idols; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem because of their trespass’* (2 Chronicles 24: 17, 18). And when Zechariah the son (or the grandson) of the high priest Jehoiada attempted to bring the people back to the worship of the living God, king Jehoash condemned him to be stoned to death (2 chronicles 24: 17-18), to which the Lord Christ referred in (Matthew 23: 35; Luke 11: 51). ... Jehoash, nevertheless, was considered one of the few kings who showed some kind of righteousness.

*“But the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places”* (3)

Although worship on the high places was against the divine law (See Deuteronomy 12: 1-14), yet it was not as horrible as worshipping the Baal. Even during the days of the godly kings, the people used to worship the lord in them (1 kings 15: 14; 22: 43)..

How faithful was Jehoiada in instructing king Jehoash; and how strong was his influence on him; is clear in that, once Jehoiada died, Jehoash listened to the leaders of Judah, and they worshiped the wooden images and idols (2 Chronicles 24: 17-19); But although the verse in the Cronicles, does not refer to that Jehoash, himself worshipped the idols, but allowed the leaders of Judah to do; Yet it was his responsibility being the king.

Without the total destruction of the high places it was not possible to do any real reform; Jehoiada, unfortunately did not use his influence on the young king, and the submission of the priests and leaders to him, to destroy them. Therefore, even, with the repair of the temple, and the zeal of the people to partake of it, yet

leaving those high places intact, did not help to take away idol-worship from the hearts of the leaders, who, once Jehoiada died, they hastened to return to it.

It is difficult to evaluate, whether the heart of the high priest was put to comfort by getting rid of the evil Athaliah; and by the great zeal of the people to repair the temple; and did not wish to apply more pressure on them to take away the high places? ... Or he fear the rebellion of the leaders against him, on account of that, in their sight, taking the high places away implies some kind of exaggeration? ... Or has the high priest assumed that, with time, those high places will gradually fade away, through the practical care for the temple and the worship of the living God? ... Although these questions are difficult to answer. Yet it was befitting of that great priest to listen to the words said by the prophet Moses to the tyrant Pharaoh: "*Not a hoof shall be left behind*" (Exodus 10: 26); when the later allowed the Israeli people to go together with their women and children, but "*Let your flocks and herds be kept back*" (Exodus 10: 24). ... It is, therefore, befitting of all of us, together with our women, children, flocks, and herds, to get away from the dominion of the devil and his kingdom, to offer everything to the account of the kingdom of God, to leave no hoof to him in our life..

It was befitting of Jehoiada to say together with the psalmist: "*O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, happy is the one who repays you as you have served us; happy is the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock*" (Psalm 137: 8, 9). The high places were like evil or unclean little thoughts; which, if left to grow, they will open the gates of evil anew.. Let us therefore, by the Spirit of the Lord, uproot the evil, and deliver our life to Him, to conform us according to the image and likeness of God.

- + By "the little ones" here he means the evil thoughts ... those which, if we feel that they are little at the beginning, we should take hold of them, cut them off, and dash them against the Rock, which is Christ (1 Corinthians 10: 4). We should kill them, according to the Lord's command, and not leave them breathe inside us.

- + I plead to you, therefore to “*put on the new man who is created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness*” (Ephesians 4: 20-24 Romans 12: 1-2); Take heed that you can be renewed, and throw off the image of (the pig) from yourselves, namely the impure soul, and that of (the dog), that refers to him who barks and talks filth. We can turn, even from the image of the (serpent), by which the wicked are addressed by the Lord, saying: “.”*O, serpents, broods of vipers*”.(Matthew 23: 33)

Now, if we are convinced that we can turn away from the images of the pigs, the dogs, and the serpents, let us learn from the apostle how this could be done, and how it all depend on us, saying: “*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: 17). If you are conformed and changed by the Lord; you turn from dog to man. If you were wild and cruel, and listened to the Word that domesticated and turned you to a man, you will not any more be addressed as: “*serpents, brood of vipers* (Matthew 23: 33).

(The scholar Origen)

## **2- CARE TO REPAIR THE LORD’S HOUSE :**

Because Athaliah and her followers abused the temple and moved all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord, over to the Baal’s. (2 Chronicles 24: 7), Jehoash intended to repair the temple, and set it for the priests to collect the silver donated to the temple, and use it to repair it. The sources of that silver were:

- a- The cost of the offerings redeemed by silver by those who offer them (Leviticus 27: 11-12)

- b- The census money; namely that of the souls: ½ shekel on every soul, measured by the shekel of the sanctuary; on every male from 20 years old over (Exodus 30: 11-12)
- c- The donations (the assessment money), namely all the money that a man purposes in his heart to bring it into the house of the Lord.

Yet that system did not work, because the priests cared more for their own benefit. That is why, after a long time passed, and no progress happened in the repair of the temple, the king stopped the priests from collecting the silver from the people.

*“And Jehoash said to the priests, “All the money of the dedicated gifts that are brought into the house of the LORD—each man’s census money, each man’s assessment money—*

*and all the money that a man purposes in his heart to bring into the house of the LORD” (4)*

Perceiving his responsibility as a king who will be questioned by God about repairing the temple, the work that nobody else could do, Jehoash, as well, saw the temple as the stronghold where he was hidden during his early childhood from the face of the wicked Athaliah.

The repair of the temple was usually done on the expense of the kings, but Jehoash felt that it should be done on the expense of the whole congregation, under the supervision of the priests (4-6); to deprive no one of getting the blessing of partaking of that work.

As that did not work the way he intended it to be done, the king ordered that all the silver donated should be collected in a box; part of which was to be spent on the repair of the temple by the high priest and the king’s scribe; which had its impact on the income of the priest. ... As the coins were not minted at that time, the silver were presented in alloys by weight.

*“let the priests take it themselves, each from his constituency; and let them repair the damages of the temple, wherever any dilapidation is found” (5)*

Assigning a box for that purpose, the king, beside removing the idols and all traces of idol-worship, proclaimed the need to repair the temple that was subjected to damage, and to remove the abominations, accumulated along the years, through the neglect of the wicked leaders, queen Athaliah in particular (2 Chronicles 24: 7, 8)

But as the priests, unfortunately, were not faithful on the silver donated for that purpose, According to the Greek law at that time, the accounts of the temple had to be audited from time to time (2kings 12: 15; 22: 17).

*<sup>6</sup> Now it was so, by the twenty-third year of King Jehoash, that the priests had not repaired the damages of the temple” (6)*

The reason for the delay to repair the temple was one or all of the following reasons

“

- a- The income of the house of the Lord was so little to cover even the necessary expenses..
- b- The priests cared for their own benefit more than for repairing the house of the Lord
- c- The people had no more confidence that the money collected was spent as is befitting.
- d- Although the people generously donated, yet, because the priest did not move as they should to do the repair, the people lost interest and stopped donating.

, *“So King Jehoash called Jehoiada the priest and the other priests, and said to them, “Why have you not repaired the damages of the temple? Now therefore, do not take more*

*money from your constituency, but deliver it for repairing the damages of the temple.” (7)*

In an attempt to regain the confidence of the people, the king ordered the repair to be done under the direct supervision of the high priest and the king's scribe as his deputy.

It is amazing that the king who had such a zeal to repair the house of the Lord, perverted to idol-worship after the death of Jehoiada the high priest . Did he care to repair the building and disregarded the inner repair of the soul; .... Or he was faithful in his care to repair both the building and the godly life; and his perversion later on was provoked by some leaders, because of his poor personality, and that because he did not bear inside him strong depths and steadfast foundation, he was moved according to what the others told him to, sometimes with a spirit of godliness, and other times with evil

*“And the priests agreed that they would neither receive more money from the people, nor repair the damages of the temple” (8).*

*“Then Jehoiada the priest took a chest, bored a hole in its lid, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one comes into the house of the LORD; and the priests who kept the*

*door put there all the money brought into the house of the LORD.” (9)*

The king used the system of the chest with a hole in its lid, to collect the silver; for the purpose of repairing the temple, which only the high priest and the king's scribe had the authority to open.. Being set beside the altar, on the right side, as one comes into the house of the Lord, it was visible to all the people who again resumed donating with abundance (2 Chronicles 24: 10); and the work started and was consummated within a short period of time..

The gatekeepers watched all who entered, to keep any pagan worship, or anything that contradicted with the law of the Lord, from entering into the house of the Lord.

*“So it was, whenever they saw that there was much money in the chest, that the king’s scribe and the high priest came up and put it in bags, and counted the money that was*

*found in the house of the LORD” (10)*

What happened then, and continues to happen along the generations, reveals the important role of the leader; for the people in general, when they see that their leader is full of zeal, they strongly respond to him. What Jehiash showed of serious desire for work, provoked many to contribute in an amazing way. That what puts the leader in a critical position; for, in case they behave with the spirit of zeal, they will ignite the hearts of many to work and to give in a strong way. But if they do formalities slothfully and with no spirit, that will reflect negatively on their subjects.. It is befitting of the leaders, to have their role in the life of their people, to listen to the words of the Lord Christ, saying: *“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me? ... Tend My sheep”* (John 21: 16). For, by love, the hearts of the people would ignite with that of the leader to work with a holy zeal.

+ *“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me ... Tend My sheep”*

I wish we do not love ourselves, but love Him, and by tending His sheep, we seek what is his, and not what is ours; for he who lives by himself will surely lose his life.

I wish the shepherds of the herd would not love themselves, lest they would be tending the sheep as though they are their own possession, and not that of the Lord Christ.

I wish they, being ‘lovers of money’, do not seek a material profit;

Or treat the people while **‘puffed up with pride’**;

Or seek glory from the honor given to them, being **‘haughty’**;

Or fall into heresies as '**blasphemers**'

Or despise the saintly fathers as '**disobedient**'

Or pay the good back with evil; being '**deniers of good deeds**'

Or kill themselves and others, being '**without mercy**'.

Or attempt to distort the image of the saints, being '**false witnesses**',

Or set their evil desires free, being '**unclean**'

Or always complain, being '**unmerciful**',

Or know nothing about the ministry of love, being '**without compassion**',

Or disturb humanity by their foolish debates, being '**stubborn**'

Or do not understand what they persistently say, being '**blind**'

Or prefer carnal pleasures to the spiritual joy, being '**self-lovers**, more than their love for God'

Those and other like transgressions, whether they are all in one person, or one of them has the authority on one person, and another on someone else; they all are from the same root, namely being 'self-lovers'

This transgression that those who shepherd the herd of Christ should avoid, is to seek what is for themselves, and not what for Jesus Christ; and use the shed blood of Christ to realize their own evil desires.

Those who shepherd His herd, should have a great love, with a spiritual zeal, to overcome the fear of death, that makes us reject to die, to live with Christ; the way the apostle Paul wished to depart and be with Christ

(Philippians 1: 23).

(St. Augustine)

The high priest and the king's scribe gave a magnificent portrait and a living example of the mutual work; in which the priests do not disregard the role of the laymen; and the later does not isolate himself from the priests. For

they both need each others; Where love and cooperation are, God would proclaim His presence, and pour His blessing on all. If the high priest and the king's scribe could, by love, work to the account of repairing the temple; it

is befitting of the priests, together with the people, to work, if possible, to the account of the edification of the kingdom of God, in the heart of every man. The people not only have a role in the church, but they, being

themselves, the church, do the work of the church, namely, 'love', translated according to the talent of each of its members, his possibilities, and his role in the holy congregation; for love should be practically expressed.

+ Love should not be inactive; You would not be able to show me one as such.

+ We do not tell you to refrain from practicing love; for in case you do, you would then be with cold feeling, dead, hated, and miserable; Go ahead and love; but care to know what you do.

(St. Augustine)

+ Because of this, the Lord brought to us His exalted heavenly teachings; to take away our vain thoughts, to be, if possible, like Him;... but how could we be? ... If we do everything according to the common good, and not only to our own; according to the words of the apostle, saying: "*For even Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, 'the reproaches of those who reproached You, fell on Me'*" (Romans 15: 3; Psalm 69: 6).

Let no one, therefore, seek what is for him; let no one be passive, but truly seek what is good for himself, when he cares for what is for his brethren; For what is for their benefit, is for our benefit as well; because we are one body and members of one body.

Even if he is not a relative or a friend, yet, being man, he partakes of your same nature, has the same Lord, a fellow servant, a company in your journey; born like you in the same world.

- + Don't lay the whole burden upon your teachers and those who guide you... if you choose, you can teach among yourselves, more than we could ever do; as you have more chances to encounter one another more than we have; are acquainted with the circumstances of each other more than we do, and you have more freedom to speak and to love; which are all very important in teaching. ... You are more capable than us to rebuke and to counsel one another; ... I, therefore implore you, not to despise such a talent; for everyone of you has his wife, his friends, his neighbors, and his servants; ... If you help your neighbor in some way, you will get a great reward from God.; ... You may say to me: I am not elequent ; But it is not a matter of speech nor of eloquence; ... Support him by doing everything as is befitting; namely, not like someone walk without sin; nor as a teacher, but as a friend and a brother.

This is the true friendship: "*A brother helping another will be like a strong city*" (Proverb 18: 19)

Friendship is not eating and drinking, for that is common even among thieves and murderers; but to be friends, we have to care for one another.

*"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6: 2).

- + Everyone of you – if he so chooses – can be a teacher. ... I know many families who got great benefit from the virtues of their servants; ... I address all in general, as well as every individual. Let everyone of you care for the salvation of his neighbors; ... For in so doing, there is great benefit; not only that it would alleviate the burden of work on the teacher, but every student would partake of the suffering, to become able to teach.
- + We can consider every believer a shepherd of his own household, friends, servants, wife, and children.
- + Make your house a church.
- + Nothing will make man like Christ like caring for his neighbors,

- + I cannot see the salvation of him who does not work for the sake of the salvation of his neighbors.
- + Nothing is of no true value, like a Christian who does not care for the others.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Then they gave the money, which had been apportioned, into the hands of those who did the work, who had the oversight of the house of the LORD; and they paid it out to the carpenters*

*and builders who worked on the house of the LORD” (11)*

Those who did the work were many, and of several nationalities, because of the greatness of the task, for the house of the Lord, for so long, was left without any maintenance or repair.

*“and to masons and stonecutters, and for buying timber and hewn stone, to repair the damage of the house of the LORD, and for all that was paid out to repair the temple”.(12)*

*“However there were not made for the house of the LORD basins of silver, trimmers, sprinkling-bowls, trumpets, any articles of gold or articles of silver, from the money brought into the*

*house of the LORD” (13).*

The house of the Lord was empty, for the kings have taken all its vessels and articles and gave them to their enemies. (1 Kings 14: 26 15: 18)

*“But they gave that to the workmen, and they repaired the house of the LORD with it” (14).*

*“Moreover they did not require an account from the men into whose hand they delivered the money to be paid to workmen, for they dealt faithfully” (15)*

According to the statutes of the Lord (Leviticus 5: 16; Numbers 5: 8-9)

*“The money from the trespass offerings and the money from the sin offerings was not brought into the house of the LORD. It belonged to the priests” (16).*

### **3- JEHOASH GIVES HAZAEL KING OF ARAM THE GOLD OF THE LORD’S HOUSE, AND OF THE KING’S HOUSE::**

Having reached the age of 130 years, Jehoiada died; and Jehoash, according to the counsel of the princes, forsook the worship of the living God, to which he was faithful during the life of Jehoiada. And the idol-worship returned through the women of Sidon who were punished in the days of the high priest. And when Zechariah the son of Jehoiada attempted to stand firm with his whole strength and with a fiery spirit, against such evil deeds, he was stoned to death while standing between the temple and the altar, on the holy ground.... Many have been offended by such a crime through a command from the king himself, regardless of the great care and kindness which Jehoiada, his father has done to him; ... Zechariah cried out to God, as a witness of that criminal act; saying: *“The Lord look on it and repay”*.(2 Chronicles 24: 22).

- + That saintly man (the priest Zechariah), by the spirit of prophecy, foresaw the calamities that would soon dwell upon the king and his kingdom.... For after a year the Syrians (the Aramites) invaded Judah and robbed the land. And, although, in order to save his life, the king gave up all the treasures of the house of the Lord and his own house; yet that was not enough to spare him of abuse by his enemies, he was severely wounded; his own servants conspired against him, and killed him on his bed (2 Chronicles 24: 17-25)



*“Hazeal king of Syria went up, and fought against ‘Gath’, and took it; then Hazeal set his face to go up to Jerusalem”(17)*

*“And Jehoash king of Judah took all the sacred things that his fathers, Jehoshaphat and Jehoram and Ahaziah, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own sacred things,*

*and all the gold found in the treasuries of the house of the LORD and in the king’s house, and sent them to Hazeal king of Syria. Then he went away from Jerusalem” (18).*

Although Jehoram and Ahaziah dedicated holy things to the house of the Lord, they worshipped the idol as well; and their worship was a mixture of this and that.

The book of the Chronicles did not say that Hazeal was there; but the talk here was about the leader of the Aramite army, the deputy of the king, yet everything happened by the king’s command, as though present. Some say that he sent the army first, then followed later himself.

The disobedient kingdom of Israel publicly rebelled against the Lord since Jeroboam set the two golden calves, to keep the people from longing to go to the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem; appointed priest who did not belong to the tribe of Levi (1 kings 12: 28, 310; and held a feast in Bethel. Not a single one of their kings sought the Lord, except once, when the affliction was intense because of the Aramite invasion (2 kings 13; 4-5); And the Lord actually saved them, *“But they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam who made Israel sin”*, Before such public and persistent stubbornness along the generations, God delivered them to the Assyrian captivity, they forsook their land, like a divorced wife who forsakes her marital home.

#### **4- THE DEATH OF JOASH:**

*“Now the rest of the acts of Joash and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?”*  
(19)

*“And his servants arose and formed a conspiracy, and killed Joash in the house of the Millo, which goes down to Silla”* (20).

To **“The house of Millo”**, built by Solomon (1 Kings 9: 15, 24); Jehoash took refuge at the time of danger. He was severely wounded when he was attacked by a small company of the Aramites (2 Chronicles 24: 24-25); Then was killed by two of his own servants.

*“For Jozachar the son of Shimeath and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, struck him. So he died, and they buried him with his fathers in the City of David. Then*

*Amaziah his son reigned in his place”* (21)

He was not buried in the city of David, though not in the tombs of the kings, a reference to not giving him the honor due to kings.... He was killed by the officers, not on account of his apostasy from the worship of the living God to that of the Baal, but because of the disturbance that prevailed on the kingdom; But God allowed for his killing for his persistent perversion to evil, on the hands of evil people; and for killing Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24: 17-22)..

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 12**

### **WHO WILL SET YOUR KINGDOM IN ME, BUT YOU?**

+ Jehoash cared to repair Your temple in the earthly Jerusalem;

And the hearts were stirred up to collect silver to partake of the repair;  
Now, here is Your temple in me that I ignored by my own free will;  
Its repair needs no gold or silver;  
For You Yourself provided its expenses on the cross;  
It needs no temporal guarding;  
Nor material possibilities;  
Your Holy Spirit sets out of it a heavenly paradise;  
By planting in it Your life-giving cross;  
By planting in it the tree of life;  
In Your divine presence, the serpent cannot crawl into it;  
And it will not incline my ear to listen to it;  
As long as Your voice exults my depths.

+ Your temple in me is the subject of Your Father's pleasure;  
And the lab of Your fiery Spirit, beloved by Him;  
A living icon of heaven, and a deposit of the heavenly life.

+ What can I call that temple set by Your right hand?  
It is Your dwelling place, and an amazing presence of Your majesty;  
It is a hospital for the souls;  
Where, by Your wounds, You heal all my ailments;  
It is the haven of comfort;  
Where everyone who labors will find shade under Your wings;

It is a treasure, that the hosts of the devil cannot rob;  
It is a place for a living testimony to You;  
It is an embassy of heaven on earth;  
It is a place for the heavenlies to encounter the weak men;  
It is the house of the divine and the brotherly love;  
Where You lie Your head and find comfort.

+ Set Your kingdom in my depths;  
Uproot all the roots of sin from me;  
Receive my whole being, possibilities and talents;  
Consecrate them to Yourself, so that the devil would have nothing in me;  
I shall completely retreat from his kingdom;  
I shall leave no (hoof) in his land;  
By You, I shall crush evil;  
By You, I shall leave no evil thoughts hidden in me;  
By You, O Rock of ages, I shall dash every little though of the devil that  
dwell in my depths;  
Sanctify me completely;  
To carry Your joyful icon.

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# CHAPTER 13

## ELISHA'S BONES RESTORE LIFE TO THE DEAD

Here, the author moves from the chronicles of the kings of Judah to those of the kings of Israel..

In the present chapter we perceive the meaning of the saying of the Lord Christ: *"My Father has been working until now, and I have been working"* (John 5: 17). God in His love never ceases working to our account; but He does not commit us to accept His work in, or to our account. The hand of God works, particularly in the time of affliction (1-13); by the few as by the plenty (11-210; according to His faithfulness in His promises 922 – 25).

1- Jehoahaz persists on the sins of his predecessors	1 - 9
2- Joash persists on the sins of his predecessors	10 - 13
3- The prophet Elisha's illness and death	14 - 20
4- Elisha's bones restore life to the dead	21
5- Elisha's prophecy to Joash, realized	22 - 25

### 1- JEHOAHAZ PERSISTS ON THE SINS OF HIS PREDECESSORS:

By walking in evil, Jehoahaz brought on Israel the bondage to foreign kings (3); yet in the time of affliction, when he supplicated to the face of the Lord, He listened to him, and saved them from the hand of the Aramites, according to the words of the psalmist: *"He has not dealt with us according to our sins; nor has punished us according to our iniquities"* (Psalm 103: 10).

“ In the twenty-third year of Joash the son of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria, *and*

*reigned seventeen years” (1)*

Jehoash king of Judah reigned in the seventh year of Jehu (12: 1). Jehu reigned 28 years. The enthronement of his son Jehoahaz was 21 years after that of Joash king of Judah. if we count a part of the year for the former, and a part of the year for the later, it would add up to 21 years.

“**Jehoahaz**’, means (The Lord holds). After two centuries a king with the same name reigned over Judah after the death of his good father Josiah (2 kings 23: 31).

Ahaz king of Israel persisted on the policy of his predecessors concerning the worship of the two golden calves. And the apostasy from the worship of the living God increased more than it has been in the days of his father Jehu. That is why the chastisement dwelt upon the kingdom more firmly. The tool of the chastisement was Hazael the Aramite, and his son Ben-Hadad, While the Israeli army persistently weakened in number and might.

*“ And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. He did not depart from them” (2)*

The sins of Jeroboam was worshipping the two golden calves in Bethel and Dan; appointing priests not of the sons of Aaron; and altering the time of the feasts (1 Kings 12: 28-32). Although Jehoahaz did not commit any new sins, yet he persisted on the sins of his predecessors that he should have forsaken.

*“Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-Hadad the son of Hazael, all their days” (3)*

Ben-Hadad the third the son of Hazael, was the leader of the Aramite army in the days of his father; and had fame in the last days of his father (2 kings 13: 24).. Saying: *“all their days”*, does not mean all the days of the two Aramite kings: Hazael and Ben-Hadad; for Ben-Hadad lost the cities that Aram possessed from Jehoahaz (2 kings 13: 25), but means all the days of Jehoahaz (2 kings 13: 22), or all the days of Hazael.

*“So Jehoahaz pleaded with the LORD, and the LORD listened to him; for He saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them” (4)*

In spite of the fact that Jehoahaz did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam (6), yet, when he fell into an intense affliction, and supplicated to the face of the Lord, He listened to him, and gave Israel a deliverer, for the sake of the longsuffering of God (1 kings 21: 25-29; 2 Peter 3:9). But although the Lord listened to him, yet He did not give him a deliverer in his days, but in the days of his son Joash (25), and his grandson Jeroboam (14: 25-27).

The people returned to God, but for a limited time, for their hearts were not upright, have not departed from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, nor taken away statue of Ashtoreth in Samaria... Our repentance has to be true; we should receive God the care-Giver, and strongly take away all traces of sin.

*“Then the LORD gave Israel a deliverer, so that they escaped from under the hand of the Syrians; and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents as before” (5)*

Here, he did not give the name of the deliverer of Israel; The Lord probably used the Assyrian king ‘Adad-Nerari the third, to save them; the way He did with the

Persian king, in whose heart God put to allow the Jews to return from captivity to Jerusalem, and called him 'His anointed' (Isaiah 45: 1; 44: 28).

Aram on the North frontier of Israel has been in perpetual war with Israel; For it felt that Israel was shutting its way of trade toward the South; While Israel in its turn felt that Aram was shutting its way of trade toward the North. They were both preoccupied with fighting one other, in an attempt to bring prosperity to its economy; but it so happened that they destroyed one another; while disregarding the growing might of Assyria, until they were trampled over by it (16: 9; 17: 6).

“Nevertheless they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin, *but* walked in them; and the wooden image also remained in Samaria” (6)

Ahab set up pillars in Samaria (1 kings 16: 32-33), with all the defiled abominations tied to them. The pillar was a holy tree or a wooden pillar, a sign used in the worship of the god Ashtoreth or Venus It had a sexual role, considered as the god of fertility in Canaan. The erection of such a pillar in the capital of the kingdom has been a perpetual testimony of the treason of Israel.

God, on His side, used every possible way, compassion as well as firmness; in the hope that the believer or the people would eventually return to Him, and enjoy fellowship with Him; but, together with the feeling of the need of returning to God, yet, as our heart remains attached to a certain sin or sins; we falter between two ways: the way of the holy life in the Lord; and that of being bound to a certain vain pleasure.

God, in His great love for us, and His faithfulness to His promises, allows for affliction for a certain time, until we seek His grace, and return to Him with our whole hearts.

Presenting to us his experience, the psalmist says: “*In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul*” (Psalm 94: 19). Those

comforts come from Him, not only to appease the affliction, but for the sake of some greater goal; namely to turn the affliction into a source of edification of the soul, and an experience of life with God.

*“For He left of the army of Jehoahaz only fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand foot soldiers; for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing” (7).*

The Holy Book often likens the people fallen under chastisement, to sheaves of heads of wheat on the threshing floor, trampled over by the feet of beasts, and those of the man guiding them, and going around on them with the threshing implement. Indeed the heads of wheat include a large amount of straw, and less of wheat; Even though, during chastisement, we are trampled upon by the feet of beasts and men, yet that will result in cutting the heads of wheat and the straw to little pieces, which makes it easy to separate the wheat from the straw. By chastisement, evil in us will be cut off, and the Spirit of God will work to make us carry the fruit of the Spirit.

Thus, in the days of Jehoahaz, God allowed for firm chastisement; the kingdom became as though with no army to protect it; and as though has been destroyed and been made like dust at threshing.

*“ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, all that he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” (8)*

If they fell under chastisement in such a painful way, the cause of their fall was not the weakness and helplessness of the king, but rather his corruption. Saying about Jehoahaz: *“All that he did, and his might” (8)*, confirms that he was not without courage, but lacked the righteousness of God to support him.

*“ So Jehoahaz rested with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria. Then Joash his son reigned in his place” (9)*

There were probably tombs for the kings of Israel in Samaria, as there were of those of Judah in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 28: 27). Burying a king in those tombs was a significant sign of honor.

## **2- JOASH PERSISTS ON THE SINS OF HIS PREDECESSORS:**

*“In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years” (10)*

Each of the two kingdoms had a king called ‘Joash’ (Jehoash). Joash king of Judah started his reign as a good king; whereas Joash king of Israel was evil. Joash the son of Jehoahaz partook of reigning two years before the death of his father; and a little while before the death of the prophet Elisha. He reigned in Samaria 16 years, added to them the two years he was a partner with his father. Calling the grandson of Jehu by the name ‘Joash’, has been a kind of giving honor to the seed of David, when the infant Joash was enthroned over Judah. At that time there was a kind of peace between the two kingdoms.

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, but walked in them” (11)*

*“Now the rest of the acts of Joash, all that he did, and his might with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the*

*chronicles of the kings of Israel?” (12)*

At the beginning he mentioned the sixteen years of the reign of Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu over Israel, without any details (10-13); except for three things that happened in his days: the death of the prophet Elisha (14-22),

the military campaigns and a conquest over Aram (24-25); and his war against Amaziah king of Judah (12; 14: 8-14).

In Jehu's life there were good moments, and the kings of Israel enjoyed rewards from the Lord; but neither in Jehu, nor in any of his descendants who reigned over Israel for as long as four generations, there was one single king who served the Lord with his whole heart; for none of them ever departed from the sins of Jeroboam who made Israel sin (10: 13).

By the might of Joash king of Samaria, he probably means his conquest over Amaziah king of Judah (2 Kings 14" 12-15; 2 Chronicles 25: 20-27).

“So Joash rested with his fathers. Then Jeroboam sat on his throne. And Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel” (13).

### **3- THE PROPHET ELISHA'S ILLNESS AND DEATH:**

In the midst of that corruption on the level of the king, his leaders, and the people, there was one godly man – the prophet Elisha – even though he had his own weaknesses; but for the sake of his faithfulness, faith, and walking in the Lord, he presented to the king a power greater than that of an army.

*“Elisha had become sick with the illness of which he would die. Then Joash the king of Israel came down to him, and wept over his face, and said, “O my father, my father, the chariots*

*of Israel and their horsemen!” (14)*

Elisha became sick in the tenth year of the reign of Joash; by which the prophet's ministry as a prophet covered 65 years. Joash wept over the elder Elisha, and uttered the same words uttered by Elisha when the prophet Elijah ascended to

heaven (2-12). It is as though Elisha was attached to his mentor Elijah from the beginning of his ministry to the last moments of his life.

Joash, king of Israel feared the death of the prophet Elisha, for, in spite of the fact that about 43 years passed since the last time Elisha was mentioned, yet the king always felt the blessing of his presence and prayers.. Coming down to the sick 80 years old prophet, the king proved how he honored him, and the Lord whom Elisha served.. *“He wept over his face”*, namely his tears poured on Elisha’s face while lying in bed; by which the king expressed his faith that the greatest power for Israel was the help of the Lord through the prayers of the prophet Elisha; hence he called him *“his father”*... . Despite what he showed of evil, Joash king of Israel revealed a good side and faith that God keeps his people, and listen to the prayers of His prophet for their sake. If the Holy Book testified to that Joash *“did evil in the sight of the Lord”*, yet It mentions his good side. God will never forget a cold drink offered in His name (See Mathew 10: 42).

*“Elisha said to him, “Take a bow and some arrows.” So he took himself a bow and some arrows” (15).*

Although Joash obeyed the dying Elisha, yet only partially. Elisha put his hands on the king’s hands, a sign of his longing that the Lord would bless him; which was actually realized when he conquered the Aramite army three times; even though he did not enjoy the ultimate victory.

+ The king called the prophet: *“The chariot of Israel and their horsemen”*; because the peace of the kingdom and its conquests, depended on his prayers and ordinance.

The prophet rewarded the king’s tears, by saying to him; *“Take a bow and some arrows”*; then put his hand on the king’s hands, told him to open the window toward the east, and to aim the arrows. When he shot one arrow, Elisha said: *“The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance, and the arrow of*

*deliverance from Aram*". As the window actually faced Aram; the prophet added: "*For you must strike the Syrians at Aphek till you have destroyed them*" (17). This phrase bears two spiritual meanings:

a- **The first spiritual meaning** is that, binding the conquest of Israel to a sign is not a new thing; but was there for long centuries ... When God sent plagues on Egypt, and liberated the people, he used the staff of

the prophet Moses (Exodus 4: 17);... The perdition of Amalek depended on raising Moses' hands with prayer (Exodus 17: 9-13); ... And the destruction of the city of Ai, depended upon stretching out the spear in

Joshua's hand toward Ai (Joshua 8: 18- 19).

It was convenient for the situation to be as such, so that the people would positively realize that the help of God has been given to them at the moment they got that grace, whose memory will last in their hearts

forever.... In the case of Elisha and Joash, the prophet alone knew the secret, but the king did not; or else he would not stop striking the ground after three times , but would have struck it ten times. Having

hesitated and stopped, he was blamed by Elisha, not that he did something wrong, but because, by so doing, he denied his people the ultimate conquest over the Aramites, and the destruction of their kingdom;

something for which the prophet Elisha strongly hoped. But the true reason that hindered the grace meant by that sign, was the apostasy of the king, and the people, and their rebellious will to worship the idols.

(St. (Mar Ephraim the Syrian)

*"Then he said to the king of Israel, "Put your hand on the bow." So he put his hand on it, and Elisha put his hands on the king's hands" (16)*

Elisha put his hands on those of the king, to let him know that what he is going to do, is by the support of God's hand, and not by his own power.

What is the hands of Elisha that conveyed power to those of the king, but the church of Christ that provides the believer, being a king, with the power of God for salvation; to strike with the cross "*the arrow of the Lord's*

*deliverance*, from the devil; and would not stop striking him, up to the ultimate conquest over the kingdom of darkness.

The hands of the king touched that of Elisha, the symbol of Christ; the same way the Canaanite woman touched the hem of the garment of Christ, namely His church; and a power came out from Him to heal her.

- + It is true that by putting Elisha's hands on those of the king, the weak hands of the king are strengthened by the power in the hands of the prophet, who symbolizes his Lord, to enable; to destroy Aram completely, after Aram so destroyed Israel.

It is obvious that Israel in the days of Joram were extremely weakened; In the royal city, according to the Scripture, there were only five horses; and in the days of his son, there were only ten chariots in the whole country, fifty horsemen, and ten thousand foot soldiers; because the king of Aram destroyed them, and made them like dust at threshing (2 kings 13: 7); after they were in the days of king Solomon: 52, 000 horses in the king's stables, and 800,000 mighty men of valor from the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

b- **The second spiritual meaning** is that the sign refers to two symbols, each has its own meaning.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“And he said, “Open the east window”; and he opened it. Then Elisha said, “Shoot”; and he shot. And he said, “The arrow of the LORD’s deliverance and the arrow of deliverance*

*from Syria; for you must strike the Syrians at Aphek till you have destroyed them.” (17)*

He said to him to open the east window, because the enemies of Israel, namely the Aramites were in the East. That action was followed and repeated as a declaration of war, to give a chance for negotiations; and in case there is no response within a certain time, the actual attack takes place.

+ “*The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance* “, obviously refers to the Lord Christ, being hanged on the cross, grants His spirit, by which He descends to the pit and saves the righteous there; and after His resurrection, He submits the whole world by His saintly apostles, and grants a new life to those who believe in His name. On another aspect, the arrow that was shot from the east window refers to the consummation of our deliverance, realized by the ascension of our Lord, up to what is far above the heavens .

By His ascension He lifted up the eternal gates, and made us, captives, ascend to heaven (Ephesians 4: 8)

Again, the arrow shot toward the ground, then was taken back, refers to the burial of our Lord and His resurrection, after He descended to the pit in the land of the dead.

Notice that the land of Israel is struck with three arrows; whereas the kingdom of Aram is defeated in three battles; like the revered body of our Lord, afflicted by the thorns on the head, the nails in the hands and feet, and the spear in the side; who destroyed the dominion of the devil concerning death, three times: He crushed the devil, and took away the sin and death.

Again, by shooting the arrow three times toward the ground, He gave the saints the hope of resurrection.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“Then he said, “Take the arrows”; so he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, “Strike the ground”; so he struck three times, and stopped” (18)*

The children of God will never cease nor become slothful in their battle against the devil, until they, by Christ, crush the head of the serpent, and the Lord of glory proclaims the conquest in their depths.

*“And the man of God was angry with him, and said, “You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it! But now you will strike*

*Syria only three times.” (19)*

He was angry with him, on account of that the king, because of his weak faith, sought the few, while the Lord was ready to give in abundance. It was befitting of the king to keep shooting the arrows toward the ground, and not to cease until the Prophet tells him to do; realizing the active plan of God to grant him victory. So we should, not trust our carnal thoughts (the ground), but persistently strike by the arrows of the Holy Spirit, until our inner ground is sanctified, and turn into a heaven; to have the plan of God realized in us,, and to proclaim our obedience to Him; to become truly stewards of heaven and living icons of Christ.

*“Then Elisha died, and they buried him. And the raiding bands from Moab invaded the land in the spring of the year” (20)*

Elisha died and buried in a tomb; and was not taken up to heaven by a chariot of fire. But, to reveal the holiness of his corpse, that strived together with his soul for

so long, God allowed for raising a dead man to life once his corpse touched the bones of Elisha.

He mentioned the invasion of raiding bands from Moab as a common thing that happened all the time, reaching the center of the land, an evidence of the persistent weakness of Israel.

- + Elisha was buried by his disciples, the sons of the prophets, most probably accompanied by king Joash, who visited him while ill in bed, showed deep love toward him, wept over his face, and wrote lamentations about his death. It so seems that the prophet Hosea took Elisha's place, as the head of the sons of the prophets; for Hosea, at the beginning of his book, said that he prophesied in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

#### **4- ELISHA'S BONES RESTORE LIFE TO THE DEAD:**

Elisha died, was buried in a tomb, his body deteriorated, leaving only dry bones. But those bones testified to the spirit of power lived by the prophet, which death could not destroy.

*“ So it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders; and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet” (21)*

While burying a dead man, and suddenly saw a band of raiders, the Israelites hastened to cast the corpse of the dead man in the nearest tomb, which happened to be that of Elisha. By that God intended to proclaim the holiness of His servants and faithful believers, He sanctifies even their bones after their death; for once the corpse of the dead man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet (2 kings 13: 21). His memorial bore a power revealed from his bones. In a like way the Lord Christ said about the woman who poured a bottle of fragrant oil over His head: *“Assuredly, I say to you, wherever*

*this gospel is preached in the Whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her*" (Mark 14: 9); And St. Mary, the mother of God said: *"Henceforth, all generations will call me blessed"* (Luke 1: 48).

As the memorial of the saints will remain bearing the sweet fragrance of Christ, and give blessings along the generations, we see St. Gregory the Neziarian, in his eulogy of his brother St. Caesarius, demands that the human feelings should be expressed in moderation; saying: [Even in my tears and my admiration, I am committed to respect the law that govern these things, for it is according to our philosophy. Having in mind the words: "*The memory of the righteous is blessed*" (Proverbs 10: 7), Let our tears flow, and let us lament, for that will keep us from both being without feeling and from exaggeration thereof]

- + "Remembering the righteous is commended" .This does not mean that the departed soul would care for our commendation; but because those who commend the departed would have a greater benefit by remembering them. I wish, therefore, that we do not despise the words of the wise man, but we should rather give them much care.
- + It is not only the bodies of the saints, but even their tombs, are full of spiritual grace. For as in the case of Elisha, when a corpse happened to touch the tomb, the chains of death were loosened, and he returned to life. Now, therefore, as the grace became more abundant, and the energy of the spirit became greater, by touching the tomb with faith, we can have a great strength. Hence God allowed us to care for the remains of the saints, longing for us to imitate them, to give us a kind of refuge, and a secure haven from the evil all around us.
- + Those who cast the corpse of the dead man down, did it, not for the sake of faith, but out of cowardice, for fear of a band of raiders they saw. As to the person himself, who was cast as a dead corpse, he was revived and stood on his feet because of the holiness of Elisha's bones.

- + In the example of Elisha, the corpse of the dead man came in touch with Elisha's bones; But in case of the crucified Lord Christ, by His voice, He raised the dead, while His body was still on the cross; beside the rocks splitting, the earth trembled; to let His crucifers know that He could strike them with blindness, and tear them apart ... Yet, He chose to pour His wrath on the elements; but intended to save them with His mercy

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + None of the prophets, after their death, raised a dead man; hence we can see that Elisha has got a double portion of Elija's spirit. ... Actually, the power the Lord gave to Elisha's bones, is a symbol and seed of resurrection; and the honor they got, reveals the glory by which the bodies of the saints will be clothed on the day of resurrection of the dead.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

- + Those who live with God, even their remains are not without honor. For Elisha, after his death raised a dead man; which would never happen unless Elisha's body was holy.

(The apostolic laws)

- + If a dead man was raised by touching the bones of Elisha, Would it not be easier for the Creator of humanity to be raised by the power of God the Father?!... Well, the Lord Christ was risen indeed, and after His

resurrection, He was seen by His disciples.... Yet, there are still doubts concerning His resurrection!

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + Let me talk about the prophet Elijah and the son of the widow he raised from the dead; and about the prophet Elisha who raised a dead twice: once while he was still alive, and a second time after he died.

In his life, Elisha raised the dead by his soul (2 kings 4: 34). But, in order not to honor just the souls of the godly men, but to believe that there is even power in their dead bodies, the corpse cast in Elisha's tomb revived once it touched Elisha's bones(2 kings 13: 21). ... The body of the prophet did what was done by his soul.... He who died and was buried, revived a dead corpse; even though he who gave it life remained among the dead. Why? ... Lest, if Elisha himself came back to life, the work could be referred to his soul alone. But so as to reveal that, even in the absence of the soul, there is virtue in the bodies of the saints, because of the godly soul that for so long dwelt in it.

Let us then, through ignorance, not deal with those things as though they never happened; for, if the handkerchiefs and aprons that are outside the body of the men of God could heal the sick who touch them, how about the possibility of the prophet's body itself to raise the dead?!

- + Elisha raised the dead twice: once while alive (2 kings 2: 1), and another while dead (2 kings 13: 21). ... Can you believe that Elisha while dead could raise a dead body cast on his bones; and do not believe that Christ Himself is risen from the dead?

In Elisha's case the dead body that touched his bones revived and stood on his feet; while Elisha himself remained dead ... But here, the dead about whom we talk (the Lord Christ), is risen, and, together with Him, He raised many of the dead saints, even without touching Him; for it is written: *"The graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves they went into the holy city, and appeared to many"* (Matthew 27: 52, 53).

Elisha, even though he raised a dead, yet he did not overcome the world;.

Elijah, even though he raised a dead; yet the unclean spirits do not come out in Elijah's name;

We say nothing evil about the prophets, but we exalt their Lord much more; Although we do not disregard their miracles, yet we gain more confidence by remembering what happened to them.

- + if it was the corpse of a patriarch, or even that of Abraham himself, would it be counted as defilement to touch his dead bones?! What if it touched the bones of Elisha that raised a dead man? ... Would it be counted as defilement to touch the bones of prophets?... Notice how unbecoming are the Jewish interpretations!. ... Let us see what kind of touch makes man defiled; and what kind of touch makes him pure.... The Lord Christ says in the gospel: "*Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart*" (Matthew 5: 28); for his heart touched the iniquity of evil desire, and his soul, therefore became defiled. If man, therefore touches something with lust, whether for a woman or for riches, he would touch what is defiled, and comes to be defiled.

(The scholar Origen)

- + Why would we marvel that the souls is healed by the Word of God, and the body return to its bones; if we remember how a dead man came back to life through touching the body of the saint (2 Kings 4: 34; 13: 21)? how Elijah prayed and the little child was raised from the dead (1 kings 17: 22); how Peter, in the name of Christ commanded Tabetha to be raised and to

move (Acts 9: 40)... How would we then, not believe to purchase our resurrection by the passion of Christ?

(St. Ambrose)

+ If Elisha's dead body raised a dead; how much more would God do, when He raises the bodies of the dead, and bring them forth to judgment?!

(St. Erinaos)

In his magnificent poem on Elisha's bones, St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi portrays the possibilities of the divine grace that grants the bones of the righteous, buried in tombs, strength, and honor. What St. Jacob El-Serougi sees, except what we experience through the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in us?

- 1- Evil desires, haven't crawled into Elisha's bones, they came to be a treasure full of love and compassion. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit to us, He who sanctifies us, to enjoy love instead of evil desires; and get filled with compassion toward whoever gets in touch with us, if he is dead with sins.
- 2- There was an exalted power in Elisha's tomb; as the Lord Christ said to His disciples not to depart from Jerusalem until they receive power from high above (Acts 1: 4-8).
- 3- Their bodies as well as their bones flow with spiritual healings; which are the gift of the cross (the tree of life).
- 4- Mar Jacob likens the bodies of the righteous to a river or a fountain in the garden of Eden, through which the believer bears the joyful fruits of the Spirit.

- 5- He says that Elisha died to the world while exultant, by the gift of joy that did not ever depart from him; according to the commandment of the Lord Christ, saying: "*When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting*" Matthew 6: 17, 18) to have a smiling and fresh face, like that of the three young men, whose faces looked better than those who ate the pleasurable food
- 6- Elisha's bones made death a laughingstock, to be ridiculed.

+ The ashes of the righteous that was scattered in the pit, was chosen gold, and a fountain of all goods.... The pure body, not defiled with lusts, is the treasure of compassion to whoever approaches it.

In the remains of the servants of the Lord, dwells power; and spiritually, a sweet fragrance emerges from their bones, better than that from precious spices.

From their bodies runs the River 'Gihon' (see Genesis 2: 13), to heal every ailment in the vicinity of the tree of life.

Although all humans die, yet the death of the righteous is unique for whoever tastes it.;

When the iniquity-doer died, he was received by a pit full of horror; Whereas when the righteous died he jumped above the snares of the evil one.

From the corpse of the dead sinner, abhorrent smell comes forth; whereas the righteous is like chosen censor of divinity.

Once death takes him away from this world to the great world, he enters and set forth to help his comrades.

The body of the righteous bears every day help to whoever approaches him; like a blessed fountain in Eden; By death the godly man comes close to God; and like a **steward** he distributes riches on the needy.

He strived with sweat, and got the crown of conquest in the battle against righteousness.

He has falleb asleep in God, but behold, life is still awake in him every day. Dead for the world, he became alive for his Lord by the gladness of face.

+ Elisha who brought the child of the believing Shunemite woman, back to life; After his death, his bones brought life back as well.

The prophet was not dead by his death, but was alive, and gave life to others.

The same power that was in him before he dies, remained with him after his death. In his death he was alive, doing good.

The corpse of the man of God was put in the grave, and in him the life of the dead was gloriously shown.

The prophet was laid among the dead, but in him remained his power that was his during his life;

Elisha was buried, and in him life was buried, to give it to someone else who came in touch with him;

As the Lord lives ,the saints live with him as well; and when they die in Him, they are buried alive for Him;

Let us marvel at someone who, while dead, brought life to the dead who came in touch with him

As he was mighty while alive, he remained mighty when dead; his power for doing wonders has not been weakened after death;

When he was alive he brought back to life the child of the notable woman; and brought another dead back to life when dead;

Raising the dead is extremely great to him who meditates in it; but raising a dead man while he himself dead is amazing;

Death could not take away his power; which remained as strong as it was during his life;

When he was in the world, he was by God as a lamp; hence death could not bring darkness on him while in the grave;

That amazing flame ignited in him, and after his death it showed that it is still awake in him;

It is amazing to say that from the dead confined in his grave in silence; a power that brought life to a dead man came forth.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

## 5- ELISHA'S PROPHECY TO JOASH REALIZED:

*"Hazeal king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz." (22)*

*"But the LORD was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not yet destroy them*

*or cast them from His presence" (23).*

*"Now Hazeal king of Syria died. Then Ben-Hadad his son reigned in his place" (802-780 BC) (24)*

*<sup>25</sup> And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz recaptured from the hand of Ben-Hadad, the son of Hazeal, the cities which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war.*

*Three times Joash defeated him and recaptured the cities of Israel" (25)*

The cities that Jehoash recaptured, probably East of the Jordan, were previously taken from Jehoahaz by Ben-Hadad when he was the leader of the army during his father Hazeal's days..

The way Elisha prophesied, Joash defeated Aram three times, and recaptured the cities of Israel; but the complete conquest over Aram was realized in the days of his son Jeroboam the second.

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## AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 13

**SANCTIFY ME, O LORD, AND SUPPORT ME BY YOUR GRACE**

+ Behold, I am in Your hands, confessing my sins and weaknesses;

Who will sanctify me but You, O Holy One?  
Let Your Holy Spirit would work in me;  
To make sin bitter in my mouth;  
To leave no place for it in me;  
Let me acquire You, O Holy One;  
To drive evil away from my depths;  
Whether in Your compassion on me, or in Your chastisement, do not forsake me forever;  
Let Your eyes be on me, to lift me up from the dust.

+ The evil one is standing by to tread on me with his feet;  
To make me like dust under his feet; but he is unable to destroy me;  
You turn his strikes on me, into chances for true repentance;  
Let the enemy destroy the straw that filled my depths;  
But the wheat and the fruit of the spirit, he cannot approach.

+ Your prophet Elisha put his hands on those of the king while holding the bow;

The king shot the arrow; and it was “the arrow of the Lord’s deliverance from Aram”

What bow I carry except Your divine promises?  
Let the church’s hand be put on my hands;  
To enjoy Your exalted power;  
Let me, together with the Canaanite woman, touch the hem of Your garment; namely to get attached to Your holy church;  
To enjoy Your healing power, the giver of salvation;  
Grant me not to cease striving by Your grace  
Until You reign in my heart, and my whole being;

+ The bearers of the coffin, in fear of a band of raiders;  
Cast the corpse of the dead man in a nearby grave;

Touching he bones of Elisha, the dead man instantly revived;  
Your life-giving power was proclaimed through the bones of Your prophet;  
And exhorted us to experience the power of Your resurrection in us;

+ Let us live with you, to live by You, and to bear the power of Your holiness;

The king of Israel called him "his father' who protects him;

*"O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and their horsemen"*

Behold, his dry bones inside the grave had compassion on a dead man, and proclaimed their love for him;

And give him and his family an exalted joy;

His fatherhood comes from his soul, as well as from his body and bones.

+ You allowed Elisha, while alive, to raise a child from the dead;  
And while dead, to raise a dead man through touching his bones;  
To proclaim that his soul is holy by You, the subject of Your pleasure;  
Even his bones after the departure of his soul from his body, are still holy;  
You honor the souls of Your saints, as well as their bodies;  
You honor their bones as well as the rags on their bodies;  
You honor even their shadows, as You did with Peter Your apostle.

+ Glory be to You, O resurrected from the dead;  
You, who raised the dead from their graves, without touching them;  
And brought out those who were in Hades, to Your paradise;  
You raised the dead; but left Elisha in his grave;  
And will raise all the dead on Your coming on the clouds.

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# CHAPTER 14

## AMAZIAH, KING OF JUDAH AND JEROBOAM THE SECOND, KING OF ISRAEL

The book moves from talking about Jehoahaz and Joash the two kings of Israel, to talk about Amaziah king of Judah (1-22); then to talk about Jeroboam the second king of Israel.

The story of Amaziah king of Judah reveals the importance of the persistence till the last breath. For many who start by the Spirit, because of slothfulness and licentiousness, they do not fulfill the way in the Lord, but fulfill by the flesh (Galatians 3: 3). Hence it is said: *“Who endures to the end will be saved”* (Matthew 10: 22); 24: 13; Mark 13: 13)

Amaziah had a good beginning, and was a practical example for holding justice fast on earth, and for the obedience of the commandments of God (Deuteronomy 24: 16); but he did not endure to the end. For, once he got a great conquest over Edom, he fell, because he gave God the back instead of the face; and haughtily worshipped foreign gods..

According to the counsel of the apostle Paul: *“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly; as God had dealt to each to each one a measure of faith”* (Romans 12: 3). When the believer concentrates his sight upon God, his conquest would provide him with more humility; and God would be glorified in him. But once he turns his sight away from his Savior, his conquests would make him haughty, and would bring him forth to destruction.

+ It is befitting of us, O beloved brethren, to persevere with persistence; so that, enjoying hope in truth and liberty, we would get the truth and liberty ourselves.

+ Whatever precedes the end, by it we are raised up to salvation.

(St. Cyprian)

1- Amaziah executes those who murdered his father	1 - 6
2- Amaziah's conquest over Edom	7
3- Amaziah defeated by Joash	8 - 14
4- Jeroboam the second reigns over Israel	15 - 16
5- Amaziah assassinated	17 - 22
6- The evil and greatness of Jeroboam the second	23 - 27
7- Syria defeated by Jeroboam the second	28
8- The death of Jeroboam the second	29

#### **1- AMAZIAH EXECUTES THOSE WHO MURDERED HIS FATHER:**

*"In the second year of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, became king" (1)*

The name 'Amaziah' means (The Lord is mighty); He was one of the few godly kings of Judah; the best of whom were 'Hezekiah' (18: 1, and 'Hosiah' 22: 1). About him the second book of the Chronicles said: *"He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a loyal heart" (25: 2)*

*"He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem" (2)*

*."And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like his father David; he did everything as his father Joash had done" (3)*

The Holy Book cares to mention if the king did what is right in the sight of the Lord, or if he was evil; for that would be the most important feature in the life of a king, and of every man.

Amaziah did what was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like his father David. ... No one of the kings was said to have done what was right in the sight of the Lord like David, except for Asa (1 kings 15: 1)

Of the sins of Amaziah was his pride, and that he worshipped the gods of Edom after he prevailed on them; rejecting the warning of the man of God (2 Chronicles 25: 14-16, 19)

*“However the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places” (4)*

Unfortunately, Amaziah allowed for the worship in the high places; which opened the way before idol-worship, in his life and in those of the kings who followed him (16: 4; 21: 3).

*“ Now it happened, as soon as the kingdom was established in his hand, that he executed his servants who had murdered his father the king” (5)*

He killed his servants who murdered his father, because they represented danger on his own life, and on the kingdom as a whole.

*“But the children of the murderers he did not execute, according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, in which the LORD commanded, saying, “Fathers shall not be*

*put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; but a person shall be put to death for his own sin” (6)*

He did not stretch his hand to their children, according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 24: 16); and not according to the old tradition (Joshua 7: 24; 2 kings 9: 26).expressed by a Greek poet

who said: [He who kills someone and did not kill his children is a fool; for he should know that the children will avenge their father].

Caring to talk about the personal responsibility of man in some detail in the eighteenth chapter of his book, Ezekiel says that God has no partiality, *“Behold, all souls are Mine, the soul of the father and the soul of the son is*

*Mine The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18: 4).*

+ The soul that does not dwell in God, being the source of its evil, sins. And the soul that sins shall die.

(St. Ambrose)

## 2- AMAZIAH'S CONQUEST OVER EDOM:

*"He killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt, and took Sela by war, and called its name Joktheel to this day" (7)*

.The talk about his conquest over Edom came in more detail in 2 Chronicles 25: 5-15.

Why did the Holy Book say that Amaziah did what is right in the sight of God (13), when it says *"He killed ten thousand Edomites in the valley of Salt" (7)*, and despite of the fact that the law condemn it, saying: *"You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother" Deuteronomy 23: 7)*. The text did not say that he killed the Edomites because he hated them; but most probably as a payback for what the Edomites did ; and their punishment was according to the law, as he did not kill their children for the sake of the transgressions of their fathers.

**Sela;** Called 'Petra' by the Romans, an old city built in a rocky fissure, midway between Jericho and Mount Sinai, nowadays called 'Moses' valley'; was not only a stronghold for Edom, but a center of commerce with India.

Amaziah carried out an orderly and elaborate plan; he made a general census of the men capable to partake of a battle, from 20 years old up (2 Chronicles 25: 5). Yet did not seek the counsel of God, but hired 100,000 mighty men of valor from Israel for 100 talents of silver. Hence the man of God came to warn him that God will not be with him, because He is not with Israel (2 Chronicles 25: 6-8).

But the conquest of Amaziah over Edom, and taking 10,000 of them into captivity, was not a true conquest; for on his return after striking the Edomites, he brought their gods along with him, and worshipped them as his own gods, bowed down before them and burned incense to them (2 Chronicles 25: 4).

Even though he listened to the voice of the man of God, and sent the mighty men of valor of Israel home; having conquered Edom; he assumed that he is no more in need of God;

worshipped the gods of Edom, fell into haughtiness, and sought to enter into war against Israel, that ended up in his defeat and the destruction of his country.

### 3- AMAZIAH DEFEATED BY JOASH:

*“Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash<sup>[b]</sup> the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, “Come, let us face one another in battle.” (8)*

Several factors provoked him to seek to enter into a military confrontation against the king of Israel:

- a- Amaziah hired a great number of mighty men of valor from Israel to support his own army in his battle against Edom. Being warned by the man of God, because God has forsaken Israel, and he sent them back home, they got very angry, and broke into some of the cities of Judah.... ..Both kings of Judah and Israel were haughty, because one of them conquest of Edom; and the other struck Aram..
- b- By his conquest over Edom, Amaziah became haughty and proud, even though, after overcoming them he bowed down before their gods, and burned incense to them (2 Chronicles 25: 4)

It was befitting of Amaziah to listen to the words of the wise Solomon, saying: *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”* (Proverb 16: 18); and, *“He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own, is like one who takes a dog by the ear”* (Proverb 26: 17). Falling into pride, Amaziah, sought a battle against his brother king of Israel, for which he was in no need.

- + To a question: what is the greatest of virtues?, Both **Abba Maccari** and **Abba Longinos** answered: If pride is the worst of transgressions, that has cast angels down from heaven; there is no doubt that humility is the greatest of virtues, for it can bring him who holds fast to it, from the deep pit up to heaven, even if he is a sinner; hence the Lord gave blessing to the poor in spirit, before giving it to all the others.

- + According to **Abba Isotheros**: If you regularly fast, do not be puffed up with pride; for it would be better for you to eat meat; than to glorify yourself.
- + According to **St. Pavnorius**: Once pride covers up man, and makes him boast the beauty of his talk, referring it, not to God, but to his great knowledge and monasticism, God will take away from him the angel of the divine care. And when this happens, this man who boasts his natural ability, would fall into uncleanness; his wisdom would be taken away; and his talk would not any more qualify him to have the trust of others. Actually, godly men tend to flee from the teachings coming out of the mouth of such a man; as though it is a source of parasites.:
- + According to **father Elijah**: What can sin do if there is repentance? And what would be the benefit of love when there is pride?
- + According to **Mother Theodora**: A teacher should be a stranger from the desire of authority, vain glory, and pride; should not let himself be deceived by flirtation, nor blinded by gifts, nor to be conquered by the desire of the belly; or by the sin of anger. He should have perseverance, humility, love and care for the others.

(The  
paradise of the fathers)

- + Fleeing from the vain glory and pride, we should always remember the honor and glory of the world to come. For the vain glory would prevail upon the knowledge of God; for whoever falls into this deceptive sin, would become a stranger to peace, and cruel of heart.

(Abba Isaiah)

- + How can we achieve the befitting humility, by forsaking the destructive pride? ... If we practice it unceasingly; and if we realize that nothing is so harmful to our soul as pride, if it is preoccupied by it, or be dedicated to it

(St. Gregory the Theologos)

- + Those who confess their disgrace, trample the devil under their feet. And according to the saintly fathers: By going down to Hades, humility soars up to heaven; and by soaring up to heaven, pride goes down to Hades.

(St. Zosima)

It is amazing how Amaziah, disregarded God's work with him, once he had the conquest over Edom. He did not only fell into pride, but admired and worshipped the idols that could not defend their worshippers. He,

and his whole kingdom paid the price of his arrogance, haughtiness, forsake of the living God , and trust in foreign gods (2 Chronicles 25: 14-16, 19).

The wise Solomon, warning us against falling into idol-worship, and practicing its abominations, binds it to adultery, saying: "*The idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication and the invention of them was the*

*corruption of life*" (Wisdom 14: 12). The secret of binding idol-worship to adultery, is that the relationship of the believers with the true God is like that of a bride with her groom; if they give their back to Him to bind with pagan

gods, they wouldfall into a marital treason. Hence it was said about the traitor Israel: "*Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce?*" (Isaiah 50: 1) and, "*Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and*

*play the harlot with their gods, and*

*make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you, and you eat of their sacrifice; and you take of his daughters for your sons; and their daughters play the harlot with their gods, and make your sons play the harlot*

*with their gods*” (Exodus 34: 15-16).

The origin of idol-worship is the corruption of man’s mind, and treason to God the Creator; counted as adultery by the soul that forsakes her unity with its Creator to unite with accursed idols.

- + Idol-worship was invented among men, for no other reason, but the existence of evil desires in those who imagined them.
- + If the human soul experiences the different kinds of pleasures, forgets the divinities; enjoys the carnal evil desires, she puts before her eyes; cares only to meditate in the present things; forgets that she was once created according to the image of God, she would no more have the strength to see God the Word, according to whose image it was created, and tends to imagine what does not exist.
- + As those of the previous era lost their reason, drowned in evil desires, and fantasies of carnal things, and forgot the knowledge of God and His glory, as a result of their lack of reason, they made for themselves gods from the seen things, glorified the created and not the Creator God; and worship the things made and not their Maker.

(Pope

Athanasius the apostolic)

- + Whoever serves vain gods, commits adultery behind the truth. As every vanity is adultery, he plunges in adultery.

(The

scholar Tertullian)

- + Happy was Rachel who hid the vain idols of the nations, and proclaimed that their images are filled with defilement. No one should blame her for not showing her father his due reverence, sitting down while he was standing up (Genesis 31: 35); for it is written: *“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me”* (Matthew 10: 37)

The woman who commits adultery is not attached anymore to her man; she is no more one body with him (1 Corinthians 6: 15-16), but she separates herself from him by her adultery. So it is with the soul that does not attach herself to God, but commits adultery by worshipping vain idols, it separates herself from the Lord by the horrible defilement of the sanctities; ... Whoever separates himself from the Lord will perish.

(St. Ambrose)

*“And Jehoash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, “The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, ‘Give your daughter to my son*

*as wife’; and a wild beast that was in Lebanon passed by and trampled the thistle” (9)*

Joash’s response to Amaziah was symbolic, he likened Amaziah to the thistle, and himself to the cedar of Lebanon. By that Joash intended to exhort Amaziah to reconsider his behavior, and to be reasonable; telling him that his conquest over Edom changes nothing of the actual fact that he still is a thistle, not to be compared to the cedar of Lebanon. He likens him to a lowly man who seeks from one of the notable men to give his daughter in marriage to his son.

Joash likens Amaziah to the thistle which is the lowliest of plants, trampled and destroyed by any wild animal passing by. And likening himself to the cedar, one of the greatest and most honorable of the trees of Lebanon. Joash considered Amaziah so despised, to seek entering into a battle with him. By the assumption that he is on an equal level with Joash, he misjudge him, as well as himself..

*“You have indeed defeated Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Glory in that, and stay at home; for why should you meddle with trouble so that you fall—you and Judah with you?” (10)*

He warned him against his pride. Intending to enter into a battle with Israel, Amaziah over-estimated his own power after defeating the Edomites, to think that he would be able to do the same to Israel. ...Not heeding Jehoash's warning, Amaziah was defeated, the wall of Jerusalem was broken down all along 200 meters; and all the gold and silver of the temple were gone.

*"But Amaziah would not heed. Therefore Jehoash king of Israel went out; so he and Amaziah king of Judah faced one another at Beth Shemesh, which belongs to Judah" (11)*

Because of Amaziah's pride, Joash set forth to fight against Amaziah inside his kingdom. He captured him at 'Beth Shemesh', a name that refers to that in it, there was a temple for the god 'Shemesh' in the days of the Canaanites. Located in the Valley of 'Sorek', 15 miles west of Jerusalem, it was the city where the ark of the covenant was put, when the Philistines brought it back (1 Samuel 6: 10 – 7: 2). ;Beth Shemesh' is 'Ein-Shams' nowadays, 20 miles to the west. It is obvious that Joash took the coastal way in the land of the Philistines, then ascended to Jerusalem via Beth Shemesh..

*"And Judah was defeated by Israel, and every man fled to his tent" (12)*

*"Then Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash, the son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh; and he went to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of*

*Jerusalem from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate—four hundred cubits" (13)*

Breaking down 400 cubits (about 600 feet) of the wall of the city was a serious matter, for the attacking enemy could easily enter into the city, that became bare of any protection..

*"And he took all the gold and silver, all the articles that were found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria" (14).*

Not intending to kill Amaziah, and to take over Judah, Joash only took hostages, and robbed all the gold and silver that were found in the house of the Lord and in the king's house, which were not much for the king's father

sent it all to Hazael king of Aram (12: 18).

**“The hostages”** were notable men of Judah, taken by Joash to Samaria, to be killed in case Amaziah did not fulfill what he pledged to do. Joash returned with his army to Samaria to fight against the Aramites.

#### **4- JEROBOAM THE SECOND REIGNS OVER ISRAEL:**

*“ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did—his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” (15)*

*“So Jehoash rested with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. Then Jeroboam his son reigned in his place” (16).*

#### **5- AMAZIAH ASSASINATED:**

*“Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel” (17)*

Amaziah lost his position as the king of Judah, .... Was it because he was captivated to Samaria, or because his residence was restricted to a certain location in Jerusalem or elsewhere, the Holy Book did not tell us. Although he survived Joash for 15 years, yet without honor or authority. According to some, he returned to his throne and stayed a weak king over Judah for as long as fifteen years, full of troubles and calamities.

*“Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?”(18)*

*“And they formed a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish and killed him there” (19)*

Amaziah was assassinated the way his father was (12: 20, 22)

**“Lashish”** (Tell El-Doweir); a very important strategic location; in control of the old way from the Palestinian heights to the Valley of the Nile. Was a densely populated city before the days of Abraham,, 35 miles south-west of Jerusalem; and 5 miles south-west of ‘Gebrin’ one of the greatest old cities of Judah (Joshua 15: 33, 39); thought to be ‘Tel El-Hassa nowadays, It was referred to in the messages of Tel El-Amarnah, ... It fell in the hands of Joshua, who killed its king Japhia (Joshua 10: 3). It was fortified by king Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 11: 9), and built around it a double wall with strong towers. To it Amaziah king of Judah fled from those who rebelled against him in Jerusalem; and there he was killed (2 kings 14: 19; 2 Chronicles 15: 27).

*“Then they brought him on horses, and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the City of David” (20).*

His friends brought his corpse to Jerusalem on horses; quietly, without celebration or procession; and buried him with his fathers in the city of David. Having walked in vain, he lost everything, even the people’s care for his funeral and burial.

*“And all the people of Judah took Azariah who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah” (21)*

‘Azariah received the throne (15: 30; 2 Chronicles 26: 1); For despite the popular objection against Amaziah, being the cause of all the calamities that dwelt over the people, yet this feeling did not extend to his household or to the heir on his throne.

According to some, Azariah was a child when his father died; and Judah was without a king for 11 years. While according to others, Azariah reigned together with his father when Judah was defeated before Israel (14-12), while being 16 years old.

*“He built Elath and restored it to Judah, after the king rested with his fathers”*  
(22).

**“Elah or Elath”**, a Hebrew name meaning (trees); for the region of Aquaba is still rich in palm trees; a town at the northern extremity of the Gulf of Aquaba (the eastern arm of the Red Sea), near ‘Ezion-Geber’; was an important marine port, and a center of caravans. It is most probable that king David took it over from the Edomites (2 Samuel 8: 14), And Solomon used it as a port for his commercial fleet. The Edomites took it back, then Uziah king of Judah restored it, and rebuilt and refortified it (2 Kings 14L 22), before ‘Rezin’ king of Aram captured it, and the Edonites returned to it (2 kings 16: 6).

## **6- THE EVIL AND GREATNESS OF JEROBOAM THE SECOND:**

*“In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years”* (23)

**Jeroboam:** That was the second king of Israel who carried this name. Jeoboam the first was the one who called for setting the northern kingdom after the death of king Solomon in the year 930 BC (1 kings 11: 12).

Jeroboam the second reigned over Israel 41 years (793-752 BC). Ten years of which he was a partner of his father Joash.. He was the greatest of the kings of Israel, his reign was the longest, Yet, as it came in Hosea, Joel, and Amos, even though it was an era of economic prosperity, but was characterized with ethical lowliness, oppression of the poor, corruption, idol-worship, and forsaking of the worship of the true God.

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nubat, who had made Israel sin”* (24)

*."He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant*

*Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher" (25)*

In that period – the eighth century BC – the people of God were divided into two kingdoms: Israel and Judah, were spiritually deteriorated, and sunk into sin. The northern kingdom practiced idol-worship and its abominations, publicly and shamelessly; and the southern kingdom has fallen in vain formalities. At the same time God sent prophets inspired by His Spirit to write.

Jeroboam was known for his great talent to control of the various issues of the kingdom; including the military aspect, together with not caring for the spiritual life (1 Chronicles 5: 11-17; Hosea 4: 6; 5: 7; 7: 5). Getting outer gains, he was able to restore completely the territory of Israel, by which his kingdom stretched from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of Arabah; and his power was apparent by the submission of Hamath and Damascus to his dominion.

God proclaimed his faithfulness in His promises to His people, despite their unfaithfulness (Hosea 2: 2-3; 5; 11: 14; 10: 6)

**From the entrance of Hamath;** the land around the city of Homs – an open plain to the north toward Hamath; to the east toward the wilderness of Syria; to the south toward Reblah and the Baccah; and to the west toward the land of the stronghold, and the sea.

**The Sea of Arabah;** namely (the Sea of Lot)

**Jonah the son of Amittai;** Mentioning him here make it clear that his episode that came in the book of Jonah is a historical episode and not symbolic as some claim it to be. Jonah's prophecies concerning Israel were not recorded; but all what came in the book of Jonah concerned Nineveh the capital of Assyria.

*"For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel" (26)*

Seeing that Israel was without a helper, God intervened to save the people on the hand of Jeroboam the second; and granted Israel a glorious period of conquests.

*“And the LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash” (27).*

Because the five kings who came in succession were evil, and did not respond to God’s warning of sure judgment, God delivered them to the Assyrian captivity. Yet despite the fact that Israel perverted from the Lord, and became in bitter affliction, yet God kept His promise not to blot out the name of Israel from under heaven. ... God promises His church, saying: *“I am with you always”* (Matthew 28: 20).

#### **7- SYRIA DEFEATED BY JEROBOAM THE SECOND:**

*“Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did—his might, how he made war, and how he recaptured for Israel, from Damascus and Hamath, what had belonged to*

*Judah—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” (28)*

It came in 1 Chronicles 18: 3-11, that David, the prophet and king, defeated Syria, took over military sites in Damascus and other regions, and put all Syria under tribute. But Syria could rid itself from that yoke, could even take over certain vital sites in Israel, and annexed them to Syria; that Jeroboam could later on manage to restore.

**“Hamath, what had belonged to Judah”**; He may refer here to that ‘Toi’ king of Hamath sent gifts to David, and blessed him (2 Samuel 8: 9); which indicates that it belonged, in some way to king David, who was from the tribe of Judah.

The Northern kingdom enjoyed power and material prosperity in the days of Jeroboam, because of his military and administrative shrewdness; yet the spirit of oppression so prevailed on the land,

that the rich became richer, and the poor became poorer. We are told by the prophets Amos and Hosea (Hosea 13: 4-8; Amos 6: 11-13) how the rich trusted in their possessions and not in God.

**“And his might”**; the excavations in Samaria revealed its greatness as the capital of Jeroboam the second, who fortified it by a double wall; that the beautiful palace discovered belonged to Jeroboam the second, and not to king Ahab;; and that the seal ring of ‘Shimah, the servant of Jeroboam, had on it the inscription of a lion, that reveals the high level of art in that period.. .. Many rich people of that time imitated the **ivory** palace of Ahab, as revealed by the ivory discovered in Megiddo and other locations.

## **8- THE DEATH OF JEROBOAM THE SECOND:**

*“So Jeroboam rested with his fathers, the kings of Israel. Then Zechariah his son reigned in his place” (29)*

The period in which Zechariah, the fourth generation after Jehu, was short (15: 8-12); By him the divine promise to Jehu was fulfilled (10: 30).

In that period many prophets appeared like Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Micah, and Isaiah. It is as though God was preparing the minds of His believers to preach to the world; and used the deterioration of Israel to prepare the way for the appearance of the Messiah the Savior of the world.

**“Rested”**; Some wonder whether the dead are asleep, or are they conscious!

The Holy Book talks sometimes of death – as it came here – as though it is a time during which man rests with his fathers (1 Kings 2: 10; 11: 21, 43; 14: 20). The Lord of glory said: *“Our friend Lazarus sleeps”* (John 11: 11), when he actually died (John 11: 14). And St. Paul the apostle talks about *“those who had fallen asleep”* (1 Thessalonians 4: 13; 1 Corinthians 15: 51). And in other places, the Holy Book talks about persons who were conscious in the presence of God after they died (See 2 Corinthians 5: 8; Philippians 1: 23; Revelation 6: 9).

The first group of verses refer to the body; while the second group refer to the soul. "Sleep" is a suitable word to express the death of the body; because death is a temporary situation in anticipation of the resurrection, when the body will rise from its sleep. Besides, both sleep and death take the same posture of stretched body.

The teaching of the Holy Book is clear concerning the perpetuity of the soul (the Spirit) after death (Luke 12: 40); and that it is conscious in the presence of God (2 Corinthians 5: 80, in a better place (Philippians 1: 23); other souls talk (Matthew 17: 3), and pray (Revelation 6: 9-100. And the unbelieving soul is tortured (Matthew 25: 41; Luke 16: 22-26; Revelation 19: 20 – 20: 15).

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 14**

### **YOU ARE THE FIRST AND LAST IN MY LIFE**

- + Whom have I but You, O Savior Beneficent;  
You are the beginning and the end of the way, and even the Way itself;  
You are the ladder that takes us up to heaven
  
- + Let Your Holy Spirit carry me, and guide me;  
Carry me from the first step to bring me up to the end;  
To forget what is behind, and extend to what is ahead;  
Not to pervert from the way to the right or left;  
You will not allow for me to have an anguish of the spirit as long as You dwell in my depths;  
I shall never have the spirit of failure, as long as I am in Your bosom.
  
- + By Your grace, I ascend; and by Your grace I hold fast in what I gained.

By it, I even go up to higher levels;  
Whenever You raise me up, I come to be in need of your support;  
Offering You my thanksgiving;  
With every ascension by You, support me with the spirit of humility;  
For whoever hold fast to You, and You hold fast to him,  
the spirit of vain and destructive glory will never crawl into him.

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# CHAPTER 15

## UZIAH (AZARIAH), KING OF JUDAH, AND HIS SON JOTHAM

## AND ZECHARIAH, KING OF ISRAEL, UNTILL PEKAH

Uziah, king of Judah (791-740 BC), like Jeroboam the second, king of Israel; both reigned for a long time, and both had their reign characterized by political and economic prosperity. But Uziah, having attempted to force himself upon the priestly task, using his royal power, he was inflicted with leprosy, and his son Jotham sat on the throne. An inscription on a calcite stone in Jerusalem, dating back to the first century AD, said: [Here the bones of Uziah, king of Judah were brought; Do not open].

Jotham reigned from about the year 750 to 736 BC.

In the diaries of Tiglath-Pileser the third came a reference to Uziah king of Judah, and his alliance with the kings of the west.

Zechariah the son of Jeroboam the second, reigned over Israel only for 6 months (753-752 BC); was killed by Shallum; by which the reign of the household of Jehu came to an end.

Shallum, who forced himself on the throne, was murdered one month after he sat on the throne; by Menahem, who reigned from the year 752 to 742 BC.

The evil of the kings grew to a serious extent, in the Northern kingdom in particular; and the only solution for the two kingdoms was to fall into captivity to be chastised.

1- Azariah reigns in Judah	1 - 4
2- Azariah struck by leprosy	5 - 6
3- Jotham reigns in Judah	7
4- Zechariah reigns in Israel	8 - 12
5- Shallum reigns in Israel	13
6- Menahem reigns in Israel	14 - 18
7- Menahim bribes the king of Assyria	19 -21
8- Pekahiah reigns in Israel	22 – 26
9- Pekah reigns in Israel	27 - 31
10- A return to Jotham king of Judah	32 – 38

#### **1- AZARIAH REIGNS IN JUDAH:**

*“ In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, king of Judah, became king” (1)*

‘Azariah’ was the tenth king of Judah (after the division of the kingdom), his name means (he Lord helps); but being called ‘Uziah’ means (The Lord is my strength); He was probably so called when he reigned alone.

We find the episode of Azariah or Uziah king of Judah in 2 Chronicles 26; Isaiah 1: 1; 6: 1. He rebuilt the wall broken down by Joash king of Israel; refortified the city with weapons; and got independent from Israel. In his time, Judah enjoyed peace and prosperity in a way never experienced since the days of king Solomon; while Israel rolled down deeply, and its fall became eminent.

Azariah or Uziah (2 Chronicles 26: 1; Isaiah 1: 1), reigned for 52 years; including 10 years instead of his father Amaziah who was in captivity (792-782 BC); 15 years he was a partner with his father Amaziah after he was released of captivity (782 – 767 BC); and 25 years he reigned alone (767- 740 BC). During the last period of the reign of Azariah, his heart got haughty, because the great army he

built; and he forced his way into the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. When he was opposed by the priests, he got furious, and was instantly struck by leprosy on his forehead. He was driven out of the temple, and was a leper until the day of his death. Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land in place of his father (2 Chronicles 26: 16-21).

Azariah or Uziah when he was 16 years old, is believed to have reigned together with his father over Judah in the fourth year of the reign of Jeroboam king of Israel (14: 23; 15: 8), That was a little while after Joash invaded Jerusalem. and Amaziah was killed in the fifteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam. The kingdom of Judah was under the dominion of the king of Israel for some time; but in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of Jeroboam, Azaria got stronger and became independent from Israel.

*“He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem” (2)*

*.”And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done” (3)*

With time, the kings of Israel became more corrupt and violent; as shown by the frequent events of assassination of kings. Concerning the kings of Judah, even with the appearance of certain good kings, like Amaziah and his son Azariah, yet they often failed to remove the high places, and consequently provoked their people to idol-worship. On another aspect, it so often happened that, after having a good beginning, they perverted; as we see in the case of Amaziah, who fell into pride because of his conquest over Edom, when he brought forth their gods, bowed before them, and burned incense to them (2 Chronicles 25: 14). And as we see in his son Azariah, who after doing what is right in the sight of God at the beginning of his reign, he perverted, and used his royal authority to force himself into the temple to practice the priestly task.

In spite of offering sacrifices of thanksgiving to God who granted the two kingdoms an abundance of riches and prosperity, they perverted to disregard God, and to disobey Him. The Holy Book, however, did not disregard the good side of Azariah the son of Amaziah, saying: *“He did what is right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done; except that the high places were not removed, etc.”* (3-4). Even though he did what is right in the sight of God, yet, like his father Amaziah and his grandfather Joash, he left his people to worship on the high places, without taking a positive stand to exhort them to return to God; which brought on him the wrath of God.

*“except that the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places”* (4)

## **2- AZARIAH STRUCK WITH LEPROSY:**

*“Then the LORD struck the king, so that he was a leper until the day of his death; so he dwelt in an isolated house. And Jotham the king’s son was over the royal house, judging the*

*people of the land”* (5)

Getting haughty because of his conquest over Edom, Azariah, in the thirty-seventh year of his reign, forced himself on the house of the Lord, to burn incense on the altar of incense. And when the priests dared to oppose him, he got furious, and came out with the signs of leprosy on his forehead. Being a leper, he most probably lived fifteen years, the rest of his life, in an isolated house, and was banned of having any relationship with the people (Leviticus 13: 46). Jotham reigned together with his father Azariah for a duration of ten years, probably because his father got old, and was in need of someone to help him; or because he became a leper; or still, to be trained on the royal work, and on leading the State.

We already saw how this custom was commonly practiced by many kings; as for example when Jehoshaphat reigned together with his father Asa; Jehoram with his father Jehoshaphat; Jotham with his father Azariah; Jeroboam with his father Azariah; and Manasseh with his father Hezekiah. And in our study of the book of Daniel, we saw how Belshazzar reigned together with his father 'Nabonides'.

After that, Ahaz, his grandson reigned; and being evil and weak, he gave the king of Assyria the treasures that were gathered together by his grandfather; became a slave of the king of Assyria; bringing an end to the precious glory.

The devil knows how to set his destructive snares to seduce men of all ages; So he did with the little children, the youth, men, women, priests, kings, and great men. The enemy has his experience along thousands of years to achieve his purposes with everyone. To avoid his snares, however, we need to hide in the Savior of the world; and to deliver the leadership of every soul and body to His Holy Spirit, the Grantor of wisdom, power, and the ability to turn the snares to our conquest and coronation.

Concerning the leaders in general, whether civil, military, religious, of the society or of the church, the most serious thing for man, is to be struck with cherishing himself, and getting independent of the work of God with him, and to overstep his limits. The devil tends to strike the leaders with falling into self-belittling with what follows of feeling failure, despair, and inability to realize their mission, which may lead them to stop work altogether. It is befitting of those to listen to the divine voice, saying: "*Do not say I am a youth (kid)*" Jeremiah 1: 7); and to work as men of God, by the spirit of strength and not of failure.

In case those snares fail to do the job, the devil sets contradictory ones, namely to provoke man to be haughtily, to cherish and boast his authority, possibilities, experience, human wisdom, education, and to give God the back and not the face; instead of delivering all those possibilities in the hand of God, to sanctify and increase; and to turn his life into a joyful praise, thanksgiving to the Grantor

of gifts. The work of the devil, here, is to provoke the leader to overstep his limits; to *“tend to think of himself more highly than he ought to think”* (Romans 12: 3), according to the words of the apostle Paul. It is befitting of the leader, perceiving that what he got of civil, military, or religious authority, is nothing but a gift from God; to practice his authority with the spirit of humility, together with strength in the Lord.

David, the prophet and king, perceived that God does amazing things with His people; gives them possibilities on an exalted level; to make every believer cherish what he has got, and still gets from the hand of his God; yet, being committed to have the spirit of humility like his Lord; he sings, saying: *“Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty; neither do I concern myself with great matters”* (Psalm 131: 1)

The Holy Book presents to us many examples of leaders who abused their authorities, and overstepped their limits; of which are the following:

- 1- When Korah, Datha, Abiram, and their company, tended to force themselves on priesthood, And the earth opened and swallowed them up (Numbers 16: 31-32)
- 2- When the prophet Samuel delayed to come to Gilgal, king Saul offered the burnt offering (1 Samuel 13: 9). He probably took the chance of the prophet's delay to force himself upon the priestly rights, to have it beside his authority as a king; and consequently lost, together with his family, the royal authority.
- 3- When Azariah (Uziah) forced himself upon the priestly task, and was inflicted with leprosy, and lost his status as a king.

+ The Holy Book teaches us – as I believe – that the higher man raises himself up, the lower he falls down to earth. That is why pride is said to be ‘an ascension downwards’.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

- + Now, we plead with everyone of you to commit himself to the rank he is assigned to, and not to overstep his befitting limits; For the ranks are not from us, but from God. The Lord says: "*He who hears you, hears Me; he who rejects you, rejects Me; and he who rejects Me, rejects Him who sent Me*" (Luke 10: 16; Matthew 10: 40; John 13: 20).

- + *“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 10: 17; and see Jeremiah 9: 24). He who does not boast in the cross is utterly foolish, and against the law (the Christian law). He who does not boast in faith, would be more miserable than all, and on his way to perdition; Hence the apostle says with confidence: *“But God forbids that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”* (Galatians 6: 14); and in a similar way, he says: *“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; let not the mighty man glory in his might; nor let the rich man glory in his riches”* (Jeremiah 9: 23-24)..

Rejection of haughtiness; hate and vain appearances, is a good achievement... It is a considerable security of virtue; and a great protection of humility.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Now the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?”*

(6)

### **3- JOTHAM REIGNS IN JUDAH:**

*“So Azariah rested with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the City of David. Then Jotham his son reigned in his place” (7).*

- + Jotham took control of the government of Judah for a duration of 16 years, and earned a considerable praise, as referred by the second book of the kings to all the heroic acts he did; and was not rebuked in 2 Chronicles 27: 1-9) except for not removing the high places (1 Kings 12: 31-32; 2 Kings 12: 3, etc.); a fault, most probably common to all the good kings of Judah

First, he strengthened Jerusalem by building new strongholds, and towers in the wilderness. ... He conquered the Ammonites who perpetually bore hatred against the Jews; and committed them to pay tribute to the kings of Judah.

### **3- ZECHARIAH REIGNS IN ISRAEL:**

*“In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months” (8)*

Very little was written about his reign, except about his apostasy from the worship of the living God to idol-worship.

During the six months of Zechariah's reign, he was only known for his evil. He was struck and killed by Shallum in front of the people; the way Jehu did with

Joram (9: 14); and in him God's promise to Jehu, that his children will sit on the throne up till the fourth generation, was fulfilled (Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam the second, and Zechariah). God probably shortened the duration of Zechariah's reign, as well as that of his murderer Shallum, and allowed for repeated assassinations, to exhort the kingdom of Israel to reconsider her actions, and to return to the divine Truth.,

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin” (9)*

Zechariah not only sinned, but encouraged the Israelites to sin

*“Then Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck and killed him in front of the people; and he reigned in his place” (10).*

The prophet Amos warned Zechariah that he would soon be killed, and the household of Jeroboam would come to an end (Amos 7: 9, 11)

*“Now the rest of the acts of Zechariah, indeed they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel” (11.*

*“This was the word of the LORD which He spoke to Jehu, saying, “Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation; And so it was” (12)*

## **5- SHALLUM REIGNS IN ISRAEL:**

*“Shallum the son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah; and he reigned a full month in Samaria” (13)*

Shallum reigned only a (full) month in Israel, and was murdered by Menahem; That reveals the collapse of the kingdom and the disturbance among the people. There were most probably two parties in Israel: the party of Shallum in Samaria, and that of Menahem in Tirzah (Tirzah was the capital of Israel from the days of Jeroboam). As Israel rejected the reign of the house of David, kings of nine families reigned on it, and many destructive civil wars prevailed on it.

#### **6- MENEHEM REIGN IN ISRAEL:.**

*“For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, came to Samaria, and struck Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria and killed him; and he reigned in his place” (14).*

Documents tell that Menahem was the general leader of the army of Jeroboam the second (14: 23-29), after the assassination of the son of Jeroboam (15: 8-10). He probably considered himself as more deserving to sit on the throne than Shallum.

*“Now the rest of the acts of Shallum, and the conspiracy which he led, indeed they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel” (15)*

Even though Shallum’s reign was not more than one month, yet it was not disregarded by the Holy Book,

*“Then from Tirzah, Menahem attacked Tiphseh, all who were there, and its territory. Because they did not surrender, therefore he attacked it. All the women there who were with child he ripped open” (16).*

**“Tirzah”**, an important old Canaanite city, known for its exalted beauty (Songs 6: 4); has been the capital of Israel during the reign of the first and the second

dynasties; and from Tirzah, Menahem attacked Tiphseh that refused to open its doors to receive him, He struck Tiphseh and its whole population, and ripped open all the women there who were with child. Such horrible act was a common practice in wars in those days (8: 12; Amos 1: 13).

*“ In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem the son of Gadi became king over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria” (17)*

It is weird to know that the name ‘Menahem’ means (the comforter); when his actions were so horrible, to assassinate Shallum in Samaria, and to rip open the women with child in Tiphseh’.

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin” (18)*

## **7- MENEHEM BRIBES THE KING OF ASSYRIA:**

*“Pul king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his control” (19)*

‘Pul’ another Babylonian name for the king of Assyria ‘Tiglath-Pileser’ (745-727 BC) (29; 1 Chronicles 5: 26), a general leader of the army, who forced himself on the throne. In the days of Tiglath-Pileser and his successors, Assyria became the super power in the Near East, all along a duration of a full century (747-612 BC). During that period Assyria interfered in the affairs of Israel and Judah. In the year 743 BC, Tiglath-Pileser the third, carried out an invasion, that made Syria and Palestine submit to Assyria for serious conditions to the benefit of Assyria. In the records of the Assyrian king, it came that Menehem king of Israel paid tribute to him (19-20)

The Assyrian inscriptions confirm that 'Pul' was, himself, Tiglath-Pileser (29), who took that name when he sat on the throne.

It is obvious that Menahem, having faced opponents in his kingdom, resorted to the king of Assyria to support him, and to establish his kingdom, for a certain tribute, as a bribe, he had to pay;; not perceiving that the one he thought will protect him, came back to captivate Israel. Trusting in the human protection instead of returning to God, he reaped the destructive fruit of his decision.

+ The holy history says that 'Pul', in the days of Menehem king of Israel, was the first king of Assyria to rob the ten tribes of Israel (2 kings 15: 17-21).

The second was 'Tiglath-Pileser', who came to Samaria in the days of Pekah the son of Remaliah (2 kings 15: 27)

The third was 'Shalmaneser' who took over all Samaria (2 kings 17: 3-6)

The fourth was 'Sargon' who fought against Ashdod (Isaiah 20: 1)

The fifth was Esarhaddon who captivated the people of Samaria in the land of Judah

The sixth was 'Senecharib' who put Jerusalem under siege in the days of Hezekiah king of Israel, after taking over Leshish, and other cities in Judah (2 kings 18-19)

Yet, according to some all those names belong to one person

(St. Jerome)

“And Menahem exacted the money from Israel, from all the very wealthy, from each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and

did not stay there in the land” (20).

The king of Assyria did not stay in the land but returned to his country. Yet he came back and took over much of the land, and captivated many of the people to Assyria (29).

When king ‘Pul’ (Tiglath-Pileser the third – verse 29) sat on the throne of Assyria, the Assyrian empire was on its way to be an international power; while Aram and Israel were going down.

This is the first time Assyria was mentioned in the second book of the kings. The invasion by king ‘Pul’ happened in the year 743 BC; by which Assyria made Israel a State under its dominion; and Menehem had to pay a tribute to Assyria, That was the first of three Assyrian invasions; the two invasions to follow were mentioned in (15: 19; 17: 6).

Menehem was an evil king who paid bribes to keep the enemy from striking him; but the desolation of Israel was eminent. ... As to our Lord Jesus Christ, on the contrary, was the Holy King who delivered Himself a ransom to redeem humanity (Matthew 20: 28), by which crushed the head of His enemy the Devil.

*“Now the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” (21)*

## **8- PEKAHIAH REIGNS IN ISRAEL:**

*“So Menahem rested with his fathers. Then Pekahiah his son reigned in his place”.(22)*

*“In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years” (23)*

**Pekahiah**, means (the Lord opens the eyes).

*. “And he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin” (24)*

*.”Then Pekah the son of Remaliah, an officer of his, conspired against him and killed him in Samaria, in the citadel of the king’s house, along with Argob and Arieah; and with him*

*were fifty men of Gilead. He killed him and reigned in his place” (25).*

Menehem and his son Pehahiah were under the dominion of the king of Assyria; And ‘Pekah’ was probably an adversary of Assyria, who, seeking independence, united with Rezin king of Aram, and ascended to Jerusalem to force Ahaz to join forces with them; yet Ahaz resorted instead to the king of Assyria.

*“Now the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, indeed they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel” (26)*

## **9- PEKAH REIGNS IN ISRAEL:**

*“In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years” (27)*

Pekah sat on the throne through assassinations and blood-shed; the same way Shellum and Menahem did.

As Hoshea the son of Elah reigned in Samaria on Israel nine years that began in the year 732 BC; Pekah, who reigned for 20 years, including the turbulent period in the days of Shellum, Menahem, and Pekah (752-740). Leading the climax of the feeling against the Assyrians; that led to Pekah's fall through the second invasion by Tiglath-Pileser the third (734-732 BC); to which the prophet Isaiah referred in his book (9: 1).

After one year of Pekah's reign, Uziah king of Judah died; and Isaiah, in his vision, saw the destruction of Israel to come (Isaiah 6).

According to what came here, Pekah reigned 20 years on Israel in Samaria; Nevertheless, Yet it is also mentioned that Hosheah the son of Elah murdered Pekah, 8 years after the later took over Samaria from Menehem.... How could he rule Samaria for 20 years, when he took it over 8 years before the end of his reign? ... The answer is: Although Pekah did not rule the city of Samaria, yet, he was considered the legitimate ruler of Israel; hence his rule over Israel and its capital Samaria, could be counted from the time he received the throne after the death of Zechariah in the year 752 BC. Pekah actually took a residence in Samaria in the year 740 BC, two years after the death of Menehem. Yet, 8 years later, in the year 739 BC, he was murdered by Hoshea the son of Elah.

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin” (28)*

*“In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maachah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali;*

*and he carried them captive to Assyria” (29)*

Tiglath-Pileser came, for Pekah did not submit to him the way his predecessors Menehem and Pekaiah did, he even united with Rezin king of Aram, to fight against Judah, to remove Ahaz, and to replace him with the son of Tabeil. The king of Aram struck Judah, and captivated a multitude of its people to Damascus. So did Pekah who killed 120,000 in one day, captivated 200,000, and took great spoil. But the men of Israel released the captives, in response to the words of prophet Oded to them (2 Chronicles 28: 5-15; Isaiah 7: 1-9). Then came the king of Assyria when Ahaz resorted to him, and struck Abel and Beth Maachah, and captivated them to Assyria,

*“Then Hoshea the son of Elah led a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck and killed him; so he reigned in his place in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah” (30).*

The invasion by Tiglath-Pileser had, no doubt, had its reaction; for there were those who were pro Assyria inside Israel; a tendency that ended up in the murder of Pekah, and to the sitting of Hoshea in his place.

The documents of Tiglath-Pileser the third, refer to the heavy tribute put on Hoshea; and to the claim by the king of Assyria that he, himself, was the one who brought the new king to the throne.

Through conspiracies and murder, Hoshea realized his wish to become the king of Israel (9: 14; 11: 1, 14; 12: 21; 14: 19; 15: 10, 25); to be the last king to reign over it.

According to the Assyrian writings, Hoshea, in the beginning, submitted to the king of Assyria, who helped him to kill Pekah.

*“ Now the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, indeed they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel” (31)*

## 10- A RETURN TO JOTHAM KING OF JUDAH:

*“In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, began to reign” (32)*

**“Jotham”**, his name meaning (The Lord is Perfect), reigned in Judah 16 years (752-736 BC)

- + In the Holy Book we find some persons called by two or even three names; like Solomon who was called ‘Jedidiah’ (2 Samuel 12: 25); Zedekiah, who was called ‘Mattaniah’ (2 Kings 24: 17); Uzziah who was also called ‘Azariah’ (2 Kings 15:32); and many others in the books of Judges, Samuel, and the kings. Even in the gospels, we find Matthew who was called ‘Lewi’ (Luke 5: 27); and Thaddaeus who was also called ‘Lebbaeus’.(Matthew 10: 3).

(The scholar Origen)

*“He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jerusha the daughter of Zadok” (33)*

*. “And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done” (34)*

The reign of Jotham was partly good. After getting rid of Ahaziah and Athaliah (9: 27-29; 11: 13-16); the kings of Judah: Joash or Jehoash (12: 2-3), Amaziah (14: 3-4); Uzziah or Azariah (15: 3-4), were relatively good. But the ones who were truly righteous, and had an active role, were Hezekiah (18: 3-6), and Josiah (22: 2)

*“ However the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. He built the Upper Gate of the house of the LORD” (35)*

**“THE UPPER GATE OF THE HOUSE OF THE LORD”**: The book of Jeremiah mentioned the higher gate of Benjamin of the house of the Lord; as probably the gate built by Jotham to the north, for the sake of defense against any probable attack by the Assyrians. In 2 Chronicles 27, some of the works of Jotham were mentioned in detail: He built much on the wall of the ophel; built cities in Mount Judah, strongholds and towers in the forests; Namely he greatly prepared to defend Judah; for in those days, the Lord allowed Rezin king of Aram and Pekah king of Israel to come against Judah. Jotham perceived that the kingdom of Israel was about to fall, and nothing would then deter Assyria to attack Judah. Yet all those preparations did not benefit Judah much; for Jotham’s son Ahaz forsook the Lord, who delivered him to Rezin and Pekah; and only by a miracle they could be saved from the Assyrians; for the Lord listened to the prayer of Hezekiah.

*“Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?”*  
(36)

About Jotham, the book of the kings mentions that he constructed very expensive buildings in Jerusalem and Judah (2 Chronicles 27: 3); and that he was preoccupied with war against the Ammonites (2 Chronicles 27: 5); All of which made Judah lose its possibilities and strength, it enjoyed in the days of his father Azariah.

*“In those days the LORD began to send Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah against Judah” (37)*

**Rezin and Pekah**; Those two adversaries had their fame in the days of Ahaz (Chapter 16; Isaiah 7)

*“ So Jotham rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David his father. Then Ahaz his son reigned in his place” (38).*

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 15**

### **KEEP ME, O LORD FROM SELF-BELITTLING AND FROM HAUGHTINESS**

- + How much You long to set out of men ambassadors for Yourself;  
You created humanity to testify to Your love and might on earth;  
You did not create man to live in the humiliation of slaves;  
Yet You did not create man to work with the haughtiness and pride of Satan;  
But, in truth, to liken You, O amazing in Your humility and abilities.
  
- + By Your humility You descended to our earth;  
And conformed from dust an icon for You;  
By Your might, You renewed our nature that we corrupted;  
And prepared eternity to be a glorious dwelling place for us.
  
- + Grant me not to go down to self-belittling and the spirit of failure;  
And not to be haughty, to think of myself more highly than I ought to think  
But, in truth, that my life would turn to a praise of thanksgiving;  
Which I offer you with every breath I have;.
  
- + Keep me against any right or left stroke;  
Not to pervert from the true way;  
For You are the Way and the Truth; Whoever walks in You, will live in security;

You carry me in, and by You, to ascend from glory to glory;  
To work by the spirit of strength and not of failure;  
To work with, and by You, until I settle down in Your bosoms.

+ Your perpetual presence in my depths, raises me up as though to heaven;  
My life would turn into a perpetual wedding, and unceasing feast;  
I experience the deposit of heaven, and anticipate to encounter You;  
Yes; Come soon, O Lord Jesus;  
Or hasten to set me forth to encounter You face to face.



# CHAPTER 16

## AHAZ THE KING OF JUDAH, AN EXAMPLE OF FAILURE

Jotham king of Judah lived uprightly before the Lord (15: 34); Yet he did not remove the high places; where they left the people to sacrifice and burn incense . Receiving the throne, Ahaz his son became a bad example of failure in all his life:

- a- Failure in his behavior (1-4). For evil was a main feature in his personality
- b- Failure in politics (5-9); as is clear from entering into war against Rezin and Pekah, kings of Aram and Israel
- c- Failure in his worship (12-18);as he practiced apostasy to a great extent.

If success is a divine gift presented to the believer in every aspect of his life; Failure, on the other hand, is the fruit of separating himself from God, the true source of his prosperity.

1- Ahaz the evil king	1 - 2
2- Ahaz and idol-worship	3 - 4
3- The kings of Aram and Israel fight against Ahaz	5 - 6
4- Ahaz resorts to Tiglath-Pileser	7 - 9
5- Ahaz encounters Tigleth-Pileser	10
6- Ahaz admires the pagan altar	11 - 18
7- Ahaz dies, and his son Hezekiah sits on the throne	19 – 20

### 1- AHAZ THE EVIL KING:

*“ In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign” (1).*

The name ‘Ahaz’ means (God holds fast).

If Ahaz’s father Jotham, and his grandfather Azariah, walked uprightly in the sight of the Lord, yet they were not like David their father, for they, later on perverted and walked in evil. But Ahaz, even though of the seed of David, he did not obey the Word of God, nor trusted in Him, but walked in the ways of the kings of Israel in their perversion to idol-worship. And instead of imitating his father David, to be the subject of pleasure to the Lord, he imitated the evil kings of Israel, and failed like them. Yet we cannot disregard the fact that his father and grandfather have planted in him the seeds of apostasy, by not removing the high places; which had its bad fruits in his personality and public behavior.

*“Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done” (2).*

Some may object that it was mentioned here that Ahaz was 20 years old when he sat on the throne, and reigned for 16 years in Jerusalem. While in (2 Kings 18: 1-2), it was mentioned that Hezekiah his son was 25 years old when he reigned. By simple calculation, we shall accordingly see that Ahaz was married when he was 10 years old, and got his son Hezekiah when he was 11 years old, which is against the natural law, and contradict with the sound logic..... To answer this: By turning to the biography of Ahaz, we find that he corrupted the system of worship in the temple, and replaced it with idol-worship. Hezekiah his son came to reign to find before him a heavy burden of religious reform, that took from him several years to perform before being appointed as a king according to the Mosaic statutes and rites (2 Chronicles 28-30); It is well known that anointing kings in the old covenant, necessitated first that a system of worship is well

established in the temple. That is why it is most probable that Hezekiah was not anointed a king by the hands of the priests, before the completion of those reforms, which took a long time. That is why what came in (2 Kings 18: 2) that Hezekiah was 25 years old when he reigned, namely when he was anointed according to the Mosaic statutes, meant that he was anointed after that reform of the system of worship in the temple. So now, if he was 20 years old when his father died, that means that his father has begotten him when he was 16 years old or a little more, which is more logic.

## **2- AHAZ AND IDOL-WORSHIP:**

*“But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before*

*the children of Israel” (3)*

After a series of kings in Judah, who walked relatively upright, Ahaz came to walk in evil, like the kings of Israel; who might claim that their worship of the two golden calves in Dan and Bethel was a necessity to keep the people in Israel from going to the temple in Jerusalem to worship, with the probability, in case they do, of submitting to the king of Judah who was of the seed of David; While Ahaz king of Judah, had no excuse to justify imitating the kings of Israel, in disregarding the worship of the living God, committing to His commandment..

Ahaz was an apostate, who led the people to idol-worship (2 Chronicles 28: 2-4). And the second book of the Chronicles presents to us reports of passing his son in fire, a custom connected to the worship of Baal, practiced in the valley of the son of Hinnom (23: 10; 2 Chronicles 28: 2-3)

In the days of king Joash and Jehoiada the priest, the people broke down the altars of Baal, and his statutes (2 kings 11: 18); but as Ahaz reigned , he returned to what the evil Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, did. He, as well, offered his son a sacrifice to the idols by passing him in the fire, to get the favor of the false gods, through offering the best he has got to them (Micah 6: 7); the most horrible of the pagan practices, against which God often warned his people.

'Molech' the false god, had a bronze statue sitting on a throne, and in the hollow cavity inside it, they used to ignite fire, then put their children on its red-hot arms, to burn and die; amid the sound of drums to conceal the screams of the children while burning.

The prophet Jeremiah stood at the gate of the pit where trash was cast, to address his talk to the kings of Judah, together of the people of Jerusalem' for partaking of those horrible customs (2 kings 21: 16; 24: 4), and offering their children as human sacrifices to the idols (2 kings 16: 3; 21: 6); to let them all listen to a cruel word of rebuke, and to a divine condemnation against them all with no exception. Of course it was difficult on the soul of the king of Judah to hear that the prophet Jeremiah sent to him such a harsh message at the trash gate; but that was how low he brought himself down to such a level by partaking of those pagan practices.

The divine commandment clearly came, saying: "*You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abomination to the Lord which he hates, they have done in their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods*' (Deuteronomy 12: 31).

In 2 Chronicles 28: 3, it came that Ahaz burned his own children in the fire according to the abominations of the nations; and that Manasseh the most evil of the kings of Israel did the same (2 Chronicles 33: 6). That was done in Tophet or Taphtah; located in the valley of 'Rababah', on the eastern plains of Mount Zion (Nehemiah 11: 30), That name is probably derived from a word meaning (a

furnace), or from an Aramite word meaning (the place of fire). It was originally a holy garden for the Canaanites; then became a center of worship for Baal, where the perverted Jew used to pass their children in fire for the god 'Molech' (Jeremiah 32-35).

The good king Josiah defiled 'Tophet', that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech.(2 kings 23: 10). And Topheth became such a symbol of desolation and abominations; that the prophet says: "*Therefore, behold, the days are coming , says the Lord, , when it will no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury in Tophet until there is no more room. The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away*" (Jeremiah 7: 32, 33). Along the history, that Valley was so full of trash cast over the walls of the city, that all its features were completely lost.

How amazing! ... Ahaz offered his own son a sacrifice to the idols that were unable to protect themselves; with the assumption that, by so doing, he would guarantee his own security and conquest; instead of offering his heart to the Almighty God! ... In his corruption, man loses his reason, mental balance, and even his natural human wisdom, that, In his disobedience to God , he would even surpass the limits of practicing the pagan worship in Israel, to plunge down to such a disgraceful level of offering his own son as a sacrifice to Molech!

It is a sad thing that the children of God, He created to be kings and priests (Revelation 1: 6), and to rise by the Spirit of their Father up to where He sits, to bring themselves down to fall under judgment together with the evil children of the devil, through partaking of their evil behavior; and to plunge even to a lower level than that of the beasts.

+ What a tragedy that was! ... By offering their own children sacrifices to the devil! they forgot the suffering of child-birth; treaded with their feet upon

raising their children; and ignored the statutes of human relation, to become more vicious than any wild beast.

- + Having created Adam, God did not provide him with physical wings like those of birds; for He originally intended for him to have the wings of the Holy Spirit, that, in resurrection, would raise him up to where the Spirit desires; those wings that the holy souls would have the privilege to have even now, and, in their minds, would fly up to the heavenly range. ... Christians have their own different world, their own different banquets; their own different attire; their own different enjoyment; and their own

different reasoning and thinking... They have the privilege to gain those things inside their souls even now through the Holy Spirit, so that, their bodies would be counted as worthy of resurrection to partake of the goods of this eternal spirit, by which they mix with the glory their souls experience in this life.

(St. Maccari the Great)

. *“And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree” (4).*

Ahaz practiced all the abominations of the idol-worshippers, warned against by God. As his father failed to remove the high places, they became a serious offense to his son, who, not only disregarded their existence, but went further to plunge into idol-worship on those high places. Ahaz became an evil example before his people in offering sacrifices on the high places, and under the old, big, isolated trees, and with the assumption that they are dwelling places for gods, no one would dare to cut them.

+ Those who trust in idols are foolish.... How could they say that the things they make by their own hands, {they have created us?}; ... Besides, they used to guard their idols, lest they might be robbed by thieves ... How foolish!. If the idols could not protect themselves, how could they protect and save others?!

(Father John of Damascus)

+ As in the first of the ten commandments, the worship of the Lord, the One God, was very clearly commanded, ... Likewise the ban concerning the

worship and service presented by the believers to any creature, also came in a very strict and firm way, It is written: "*I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of bondage. You shall have no god before Me*" (Exodus 20: 2).

(Fulgentius, bishop of Ruspe)

- + Do not you see that this was not said concerning the repentant, but concerning those who, not only hold fast to evil, but persist upon putting obstacles on our way? ... However dear those are to us, we are committed to desert; and however they may seem of benefit for us, we are committed to forsake.

(Pechian, bishop of Barcelona)

- + The Christians and the Jews are commanded to keep away from the pagan temples, with their altars and statues; according to the commandment, saying: "*You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him*" (Deuteronomy 10: 20) They should, not only keep away from them, but be ready if necessary, to strive even to death to avoid the defilement of their understanding of God of the universe, through any behavior contradictory to His law.
- + When certain people attempt to seduce us to apostatize; It would be advisable for us to meditate in what God wishes to teach us, by saying: "*I am the Lord your God, a jealous God*" (Deuteronomy 6: 15). I bridegroom who desires from his bride to live in chastity, to dedicate herself completely to him, and beware of having a relationship with any one but him; I believe he has to be wisely jealous. So it applies to the Law-Giver,

particularly when He proclaims Himself as the Firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1: 15), to say to His bride – the soul – that He is a jealous God. By this way, He keeps His believers against any adultery with the demons and the vain gods.

(The scholar Origen)

### **3- THE KINGS OF ARAM AND ISRAEL FIGHT AGAINST AHAZ:**

: *“ Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to make war; and they besieged Ahaz but could not overcome him” (5)*

Rezin king of Aram and Pekah king of Israel (15: 37), intended to have dominion over Jerusalem, and to set over it a king of their own (Isaiah 7: 6); Yet despite their huge effort, and military preparations, they failed in their endeavor. Despite Ahaz's perversion to idol-worship, in imitation of the kings of Israel, God, for the sake of His true promises to the house of David, sent to him the prophet Isaiah, to proclaim that He will grant him conquest over Rezin and Pekah; according to what is written: *“Then the Lord said to Isaiah, ‘Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's field; and say to him: Take heed and be quiet, do not fear or be faint-hearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands; for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah” (Isaiah 7: 3-4).*

. *“At that time Rezin king of Syria captured Elath for Syria, and drove the men of Judah from Elath. Then the Edomites went to Elath, and dwell there to this day” (6)*

Rezin put Jerusalem under siege, then retreated; and all what he got was to restore Elath to Aram. God allowed for Ahaz to have conquest, with the hope that he would return to the living God, to attach himself to Him, and to forsake the idol-worship. Yet He allowed for the Aramites to restore Elath, as a chastisement for Ahaz for forsaking the worship of the living God.

Uziah king of Judah, the grandfather of Ahaz had previously taken Elath over (12: 22); a prominent port (1 kings 9: 26), which was taken back from Judah by the Aramites up to the day of writing this book.

#### **4- AHAZ RESORTS TO TIGLATH-PILESER:**

*“So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, “I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from*

*the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me.” (7)*

It was befitting of Ahaz to return to God, and to offer Him a thanksgiving sacrifice, for sending the prophet Isaiah to assure him, and for granting him the conquest over the two kings of Aram and Israel; But in denial and lack of faith, he rebelled against God, and resorted to the king of Assyria for support and protection. And he so did, not with the spirit of friendship and cooperation, but with humiliation, saying: *“I am your servant and your son; Come up and save me”*.

How amazing that man often prefers to resort to fellow men with humiliation instead of resorting to God with the spirit of sonhood and self-respect! ... That he would rather have bondage to the earthlies, instead of the liberty granted to him by the Heavenly One.

Ahaz did wrong to resort to human alliances, and not to return to God. ... For, in case the kingdom of Judah join forces with Aram and Israel, they would stir up

the wrath of Assyria; And in case it unites with Assyria, the later would swallow and enslave it; and It would be like a unity between the lamb and the wolf. ...That is why, crying out to Tiglath-Pileser, Ahaz became his servant; instead of resorting to the Heavenly God.

- + The Christians perpetually have their heart, mind, and ways of thinking, in the heavenly range. The true Christians always see the eternal goods as though in a mirror, because they acquire the Holy Spirit and His fellowship, they are born from God up high; and have truly and actually got the privilege to become the children of God; having reached, after so long wars and labor, to such a steady state of liberty and freedom from disturbance, to a state of comfort; not to go back to be overcome by anxiety and vain thoughts.

The distinctive feature of the Christians, is not in the outer ways and attitude as many think; who unfortunately in their minds and thoughts are still like the world, disturbed by shaking thoughts, lack of faith, confusion and fear

They may be different from the world in their outer appearance, and in few of their religious practices; but, in their hearts and minds, they are still chained by the earthly bonds, having never attained the comfort in God, and the peace of the heavenly Spirit in their hearts; for they did not seek it from God; and did not believe that He will grant these things to them.

(St. Maccari the Great)

*“And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king’s house, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria” (8).*

Although God provided Ahaz with confirmations to put his heart at ease; and in great love and exalted care, He said to him: *“Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above. But Ahaz said: ‘I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord’”* (Isaiah 7: 12). Although He presented to him and to his people a unique sign, and an exalted prophecy, saying: *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son; and shall call his name Emmanuel”*.(Isaiah 7: 14). And was given, as well, another sign of God’s exalted care for him, saying: *“Before the child shall have knowledge to cry, ‘ my father’ and ‘my mother’, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away from the king of Assyria”* (Isaiah 8: 4). Although He confirmed to him that the two kingdoms will not prevail on him, but, by the Lord he will prevail on them, and enjoy their riches and spoils, despite all that, he resorted to the help of the king of Assyria, and paid as a price, silver and gold of the treasures of the house of the Lord, and those of the king’s house; namely all what he inherited from his ancestors.

Here, the failure of Ahaz, politically and military, are apparent; In his lack of faith he robbed the temple of the Lord, to purchase protection and security from the king of Assyria; and unknowingly delivered the sanctities and the treasures to his enemies.

How amazing! ... The evil man resorts to human arms for support and protection, with so huge a price; and rejects the free protection of God, with what go together with it of temporal goods and fatherly blessings

The secret of the failure of Ahaz was his lack of faith; as he was told by the prophet Isaiah, while delivering to him the message of God of the conquest over the two kings: *“If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established”* (Isaiah 7: 9). If Ahaz, despite having such a clear message of God, still felt insecure, and resorted to the king of Assyria, the secret was his lack of faith.

Ahaz, in this, was a symbol of the Jews, who, because of their denial, rejected the divine salvation; rejected the sign, the Lord Himself presented to them; and

counted Emmanuel the chief of the demons.. They were inflicted by ignorance and lack of understanding, despite the appearance of the divine Truth so strongly. ... What the pagan Magi accepted through the preaching of a star of heaven, the children of Abraham rejected the preaching of the prophets along the generations.

We are in need of faith, to be enlightened and to enjoy the understanding of God's promises and works; and to accept the prophecies of the prophets. The true faith and the sound understanding are close brethren.

- + It is vital for us to perceive that the expression, saying: "*If you do not believe, surely you shall not be established*", means that those who read it, will not only need understanding, but to have faith as well; And they will not only need to have faith, but to have also understanding. Those in circumcision, who do not believe in the Christ of God; still hear these words, but do not understand the issue of this prophecy; because they do not listen with their mind. The secret for their lack of understanding is their lack of faith; for the prophecy is clearly proclaimed about and for them.

(Eusabius, bishop of Caesarius)

*"So the king of Assyria heeded him; for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, carried its people captive to Kir, and killed Rezin" (9)*

The king of Assyria heard what was said concerning him: "*Also Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to him and distressed him, and did not assist him. For Ahaz took part of the treasuries from the house of the Lord, from the house of the king, and from the leaders, and he gave it to the king of Assyria; but he did not help him*" (2 Chronicles 28: 20, 21)..That is why the king of Assyria sent a military campaign (734-732 BC), before which Damascus fell in the year 732 BC, killed

its king Rezin, and set Hoshea a king instead of Pekah on the throne of Israel in the same year. Tiglath-Pileser also put a tribute on both Hashea and Ahaz.

Damascus is considered one of the most ancient cities, mentioned in the days of Abraham (Genesis 14-15); invaded by king David, who put a garrison in it (2 Samuel 8: 5-6; 1 Chronicles 18: 5-6). Roson could establish the Syrian kingdom, between which and Israel, war continued for a long time; but they joined forces later on, against Judah and Assyria. Syria was however defeated several times. In the year 843 BC, Shalmaneser attacked Damascus and defeated Hazael its king; and it was attacked likewise by Tiglath-Pileser in the year 732 BC, who killed Rezin its king, and led its people into captivity (2 kings 16: 5-9; Isaiah 7: 1-8; Amos 1: 3-5). After that, Syria moved from being under the authority of the Assyrians to that of the Chaldeans, the Persians, the Macedonian Greeks, and the Romans on the hand of Mittelos in the year 64 BC, then became a Roman province in the year 63 BC.

If the king of Assyria took a stand against Damascus, that joined forces with Israel against Ahaz; yet he did not support Ahaz against the Philistines, nor helped him against Israel. He might have helped Ahaz just a little, but he robbed a plenty and applied pressure on him.

In that period it so seems that Pekah king of Israel destroyed Judah. In (2 Chronicles 28: 6, 8) it came that he killed 120,000 men of valor in one day, captivated 200,000 women, boys, and girls; and took a plenty of spoils to Samaria. But, with the entrance of the army with the captives, a certain prophet of the Lord by the name of 'Oded' came to encounter them, and said to them: *"Because the Lord God of your fathers was angry with Judah, He has delivered them into your hand; but you have killed them in a rage that reaches up to heaven. And now you propose to force the children of Judah and Jerusalem to be your male and female slaves; but, are you also not guilty before the Lord your God? Now hear me therefore, and return the captives whom you have taken captives from your brethren, for fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you"* (2

Chronicles 28: 9-11). Then some of the heads of the children of Ephraim, refused to let the captives be brought into the city, took the captives, and from the spoil, they clothed all who were naked among them, gave them sandals, food and drink, anointed them, let all the feeble ones ride on donkeys, and brought them to their brethren in Jericho.

So God chastised Judah for their apostasy from faith; and at the same time, Yet He allowed for some in Israel to refuse the entrance of the captives into the city, and to give help to them... He chastise, yet He has compassion.

#### **5- AHAZ ENCOUNTERS TIGLATH-PILESER:**

*“Now King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus; and King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the design of the altar and its pattern, according to all its workmanship” (10).*

Having resorted to the king of Assyria to save him from Aram and Israel, Ahaz was committed to go together with the other kings submitted to Assyria, to Damascus the capital of Aram, to congratulate king Toglath-Pileser on his victory, to show their submission to him, and to pay the designated tributes. For fear that the king of Assyria might go forth toward the south, Ahaz trusted in paying him money, instead of trusting in God by repentance and return to Him. Actually, Tiglath-Pileser caused so much trouble to Judah, that Ahaz regretted that he ever resorted to his help (2 Chronicles 18: 20-21).

There in Damascus, Ahaz so much admired the altar of the idol; that he did not wait for his arrival to Jerusalem, but sent a drawing plan of it to Urijah the priest in Jerusalem to build an altar like it. By that Ahaz, not only perverted from the statute of the Lord; but even provoked Urijah the faithful priest to go along with him; and sacrificed to the gods of Damascus (2 Chronicles 28: 23). That was a natural price for trusting in the human arm, and not in the arm of God..

Even though Urijah the priest was one of two witnesses, chosen by the prophet Isaiah, to prophesy that the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Israel will be brought before the king of Assyria (Isaiah 8: 2); yet, obeying the instruction of the evil king, the apostate from faith, was a treason against the living Lord; particularly that he set it close to the bronze altar, and on it, Ahaz at his arrival offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus, and not to the living God.

#### **6- AHAZ ADMIRES THE PAGAN ALTAR:**

*“Then Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus. So Urijah the priest made it before King Ahaz came back from Damascus” (11).*

“And when the king came back from Damascus, the king saw the altar; and the king approached the altar and made offerings on it” (12).

After his arrival from Damascus, Ahaz offered a burnt offering and grain offering and drink offerings, and sprinkled all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice, on the pagan altar. . By that he mixed between the worship of the living God and the idol-worship; committed wrong actions in the house of the Lord (14-18; 2 Chronicles 28: 2-4; 22-25), that carried apostasy; and he even closed the gate of the temple (2 Chronicles 28: 24).

By a divine command, the prophet Isaiah took a large scroll, and wrote on it with a man’s pen, in large letters ‘Maher-Shalal-Baz; meaning (Hasten to rob and to steal). He put the scroll in a prominent place in the temple for everyone to read; and let two witnesses testify to it: Uriah and Zechariah ... Urijah was the high priest in the days of Ahaz, his spiritual counselor, and partner in idol-worship.

When the prophet Moses set the tabernacle of meeting, he set it according to the heavenly model given to him by the Lord, to let the people live as though in

heaven during their worship. ... Ahaz, on the other hand, was drawn to set a new altar, not perceiving that the real renewal should be in the heart, where he would enjoy the experience of the heavenly life, perpetually renewed.

Up to our present day, some, wishing for renewal, accept everything new without discernment, study, nor a desire to enjoy the divine truth. And some others, hold fast to the old, just for the sake of being old, without renewal of the depths, and having renewable experiences.

Binding between the old and the new, the prophet Jeremiah says: *"Because the Lord's compassions fail not; they are new every morning"* (Lamentation 22, 23)

God grants every man his heart's desire; to him who loves the world, He grants the world, to collapse together with it; And to him who loves the truth, He let him be attached to it, and be glorified together with Christ "the Truth". The psalmist says: *"Delight yourself in the Lord; and he shall give the desires of your heart"* (Psalm 37: 4); *"And He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul"* (Psalm 106: 15)..

And speaking of captivity, the Lord said to Jeremiah: *"And it will be when they say, 'Why does the Lord our God do all these things to us', then you shall answer them, 'Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours'"* (Jeremiah 5: 19)

+ The people of Israel have for sure possessed the holy land, and the temple, the house of prayer; and it was befitting of them to serve God; But, having disobeyed the divine commandment, and worshipped the idols, whether those they made after those in Damascus, as it came in the books of the kings, or those they brought forth from other pagan nations to the holy land. Having received those idols, they were qualified to be driven forth to the land of those idols, to dwell there, where they would worship them..

(The scholar Origen)

*“So he burned his burnt offering and his grain offering; and he poured his drink offering and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings on the altar” (13)*

Whatever worship he offered, even though it was in the temple of the Lord, yet it was not offered to the Lord, but to the god’s of Damascus, in which he was pleased.

*“He also brought the bronze altar which was before the LORD, from the front of the temple—from between the new altar and the house of the LORD—and put it on the north side*

*of the new altar” (14)*

The king gave his command to move the bronze altar to be on the northern side, in a place less prominent than that of the altar made like the one of the god of Damascus; which he ordered to be put directly in front of the temple, ... he moved the bronze altar from its place; so as to remove it gradually from the temple altogether...

What was called ‘The sundial of Ahaz’ (2 Kings 20: 11), were those of the altar of Ahaz.,

It so seem that as the king, having admired what he saw in Damascus concerning the pagan altar and temple, intended to make those alterations, to have the temple in Jerusalem conform to what he saw in Damascus; and to change the divine worship to conform to what he saw there. He intended to honor the pagan worship instead of the God of heaven; so that about him it is written: *“He provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers” (2 Chronicles 28: 25).* .

*“Then King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, “On the great new altar burn the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the king’s burnt sacrifice, and his grain*

*offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the*

*sacrifice. And the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by.”*

(15)

King Ahaz gave his command to the priest to burn burnt offerings on the Assyrian altar, to please the king of Assyria.

*“Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that King Ahaz commanded” (16).*

‘Urijah’ whose name means (Jehovah is my light) was known for his obedience to every command by king Ahaz; who intended to develop the altar according to his human taste, regardless of that the temple and all what it include have been made according to a divine command (Exodus 25: 40; 26: 30; 27: 1; 1 Chronicles 28: 19)..

*“And King Ahaz cut off the panels of the carts, and removed the lavers from them; and he took down the Sea from the bronze oxen that were under it, and put it on a pavement of stones” (17)*

It is claimed that the king cut the panels of the carts, to use as bases for a statue by which he intended to adorn his own palace..

*“Also he removed the Sabbath pavilion which they had built in the temple, and he removed the king’s outer entrance from the house of the LORD, on account of the king of Assyria” (18).*

**The Sabbath pavilion.** Was a pavilion with pillars at the entrance of the building, through which the priests used to enter into the temple in the Sabbaths.

**The king's outer entrance,** Was an entrance for the king to use to enter into the temple in secret, to have the counsel of the prophet who was cast aside for long by the king and the people.

By removing those things, the king probably had the intention, in case of an Assyrian siege, that the temple would remain secure to a certain extent; when the Assyrians do not enter through those openings.

While insulting the Lord, His house, and statutes, Ahaz honored the gods of Assyria. In 2 Chronicles 28: 24, it came that Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut them in pieces, shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every single city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods. He replaced the altar for serving the true God by a pagan altar to please the king of Assyria; as though setting for himself a god in which he trusts instead of trusting in the living God. Instead of putting the altar to serve God, Ahaz turned it to a pagan altar to please the king of Assyria; as though he sets for himself a god to trust instead of the true God.

Do not marvel, then that such a weak king who cares to please men and not God, would have a high priest like him, weak and humbly cares to please the king and not God.

Ahaz destroyed the house of God gradually. He did not give the order to break it down, nor to turn it to a pagan temple; but did it by corrupting the worship in a gradual way:

- a- He gave his command to Orijah to make an altar according to that he saw and admired in Damascus

- b- He moved the bronze altar aside, and put the new altar in a more prominent place.
- c- He offered burnt offerings, and sacrifices on the new altar, and left the bronze altar to inquire from the Lord in exception cases.
- d- He cut off the panels of the carts, and removed the lavers ...
- e- He removed the priests' pavilion (or the Sabbath pavilion).
- f- He removed the king's outer entrance to the temple

His plan came conforming to that of the devil, who gradually crawls to take away from the heart of man its holiness, under glittering names, like 'renewal', non-committal to a specific rite, etc. without demanding from the believer to quit the worship of the true God; by which he manages to fulfill his goal.

#### **7- AHAZ DIES AND HIS SON HEZEKIAH SITS ON THE THRONE:**

*"Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" (19)*

*" So Ahaz rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Hezekiah his son reigned in his place" (20)*

St. Augustine presents to us a practical counsel to know how to deal with the idol-worshippers; saying:

[When you have a legitimate authority, do not fail to do what is mentioned in Deuteronomy 7: 1-5. But if you do not have it, do not do it. .... Knowing that the idol-worshippers have abominations in their possessions; Shall we go and destroy them?.... We should first begin by destroying the idols in their hearts; for then, they will start to be Christians. Then, they will either ask us to consummate

the good work, or will do it themselves before us. What we should do is to pray for their sake, and not to treat them with anger].

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 16.**

### **CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD**

+ Azariah and his son Jotham neglected to remove the high places for one reason or another;

Out of them came Ahaz to plunge with his whole heart in the pagan worship;

By what the grandfather and the father neglected, the son and the grandson stumbled;

They have no excuse; for they, unknowingly, provided the son with the venom.

And the son, likewise has no excuse; for corruption reigned upon his whole being.

+ A clean heart create in me, O God;

To offer You all my love, feelings, and senses;

I shall not leave anything in my depths to the account of the enemy;

I shall not give him a place to crawl into;

I shall not be an offense to anyone because of my negligence.

+ Grant me. O Son of David, to imitate David the king and prophet;

Who, despite his own weaknesses, he used to flee to You;  
In You, he hid and took refuge, walking by Your Holy Spirit;  
All the adversary circumstances could never corrupt his feelings of Your divine presence;  
The throne and all the royal authority could never draw his life away from you;  
He fell into weaknesses, yet he hastened to draw his heart to Your heavens.

+ King Ahaz forsook You; yet in his affliction You did not forsake him;  
You sent to him Your prophet Isaiah to support him and put his heart at ease;

Yet, instead of offering You a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
He resorted to the king of Assyria, to defend and protect him;  
He trusted in the pagan king, and not in You, O Mighty One;  
Grant me to resort to You; for You are the stronghold of my life;  
You are my hope, the source of my joy, and the gladness of my heart  
Your dwelling in my depths, raises me, as though to Your heavens;  
There, no enemy can reach me, or force himself on me;  
In Your perpetual presence, no sin can crawl into me;  
Your transfiguring turns my depths into pure sanctuaries.

+ Your dwelling in my depths turns them into a new heaven, walled by divine fire;

Your dwelling satisfies my soul; to be in need of no human help;  
Your presence takes humiliation away from me;

And brings me forth to exalted glories.

+ Grant me to believe in You, to become secure;  
Open my mind up, to be enlightened with knowledge and understanding;  
To enjoy the deposit of heaven, and to experience their sanctity;  
Open my heart and my insight up, so that the understanding would embrace faith;  
That I do not seek understanding without faith in You; nor faith without understanding.

+ Grant me, O Lord, the clean heart;  
That finds no pleasure except in Your divine bosoms;  
Together with purity, grant me wisdom and seriousness;  
So that the devil would not find a gap through which to crawl into my heart;  
Together with purity, grant me the inner continuous renewal;  
Grant me to practice the rite by a heavenly mind;  
Not to fall into the deadly letter, nor the corruptive slothfulness;  
Grant me a heavenly purity by the work of Your fiery Holy Spirit;  
To experience the deposit of heaven, with every breath in my life.

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# CHAPTER 17

## THE FALL OF SAMARIA

Since the division of the kingdom, after the death of king Solomon, God showed longsuffering on the two kingdoms, particularly on that of Israel; in which, all along its history, not one single good king was found. God used every possible way, sometimes by compassion and other times by chastisement; and yet Israel persisted on apostasy and rebellion. Now the time came for God to call on Assyria to take His people Israel into captivity; to drive a multitude out of their land; and to send foreigners from the Gentiles to intermarry with the remnant that remained in Israel; to end up to a generation that feel no real belonging to Israel, but are a mixture of Jews and Gentiles; and to take away from Samaria the capital, its Jewish features as the people of God.

In This final chapter of the history of Israel, concerning their ultimate captivity, the Word of God reveals the reasons that ended up in their captivation, as a lesson to all generations, and to every believer, not to fall into what the kingdom of Israel has fallen; and a lesson to the kingdom of Judah, that it unfortunately did not heed.

The secret behind that chastisement was:

- a- Forgetting the mercies of God and His dealings with them (7)
- b- Imitating the pagan nations in worshipping idols, and practicing unbecoming abominations; done by those nations that God has driven away before His people (8-12).
- c- Closing their ears, not to hear the voice of the Lord on the mouths of His prophets (13-14)
- d- Rejecting the statutes of the Lord and His covenant with their fathers, and walking in vanity, that made them vain (15-17)

e- Fearing the Lord without forsaking the idol-worship; namely mixing between the worship of God and idol-worship (32-33).

1- Hoshea reigns in Israel, and the ultimate captivation of Israel	1 - 6
2- Forgetting the dealings of God in the past	7
3- Imitating the pagan nations	
8 - 12	
4- Rejecting the voice of the Lord on the mouth of His prophets	13 -
14	
5- Rejecting the statutes and covenants of the Lord	
15 - 17	
6- Walking in the sins of Jeroboam	18 -
23	
7- Bringing foreigners to dwell in the cities of Samaria	24
8- The lions attack the cities of Samaria	25 -
28	
9- Mixing the worship of God and idol-worship	29 -
41	

## **1- HOSHEA REIGN IN ISRAEL, AND THE ULTIMATE CAPTIVATION OF ISRAEL:**

King Shalmaneser, mentioned here was most probably Shalmaneser the fifth after Tiglath-Pileser (727-722 BC); who put such an exaggerated heavy tribute money on the Northern kingdom, that king Hoshea decided to rebel against Assyria, and join forces with 'So' king of Egypt (17: 4); an action, not only foolish, but lacks faith in God who protects His children. To crush that plot, Shalmaneser attacked Samaria and put it under siege three times; but died before it fell, and his successor Sargon took it over, put an ultimate end to the kingdom of Israel, and captivated its people.

“In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, *and he reigned nine years*”  
(1)

**Hoshea**, means (salvation). Hoshea assassinated Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel and reigned in his place (2 kings 15: 30); yet he could not sit on the throne except seven or eight years after killing Pekah.

Hoseah sat on the throne in the year 732 BC; namely, the 12 mentioned years mentioned in verse (1), refer to his partnership with his father Ahaz on the throne; probably through pressure from the first campaign by Tiglath-Pileser (744-743 BC). .

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel who were before him”* (2)

Hoshea, who was the nineteenth and the last king over Israel, even though he was better than some of his predecessors; yet the fall of the kingdom happened in his days; not because of the sins of a specific king, but because of the sins of all the kings from Jeroboam to Hoshea; beside the sins of the civil and religious leaderships and the people. According to some, even though Hoshea was the best of the kings of Israel, all of whom were evil. He did not dedicate his life to worship the two golden calves in Dan and Bethel; and he lifted the ban put by the kings to keep the people from going to Jerusalem to worship the true God in His temple. Yet, even though he actually gave his people the freedom not to worship the two calves, and allowed them to go to Jerusalem to worship the true God; they did not benefit from that, but increased their evil; and the captivation came to chastise them on their persistence on evil..

“Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against him; and Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute money” (3)

**Shalmaneser**, An Assyrian name meaning (Shalman is the chief). Here he refers to Shalmaneser the fifth, son and successor of Tiglath-Pileser; who reigned from 727 to 722 BC, followed by Sargon. According to Josiphus he reigned over Phoenicia in the year 725 BC; The prophet Hosea calls him 'Shalman' (Hosea 10: 14).

King Hoshea submitted to Tiglath-Pileser, but, because he rebelled against his successor Shalmaneser, the later came up against him, Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute money. Hoshea used the chance of Shalmaneser's preoccupation with his war against Phoenicia, and putting the new city of Tyre under siege, to join forces with 'So' king of Egypt, with hope that he may be able to get rid of the authority of Assyria. Although the prophet Hosea warned him against such an alliance (Hosea 7: 1; 1 Chronicles 12: 1); he did not heed his warning. Shalmaneser came up against Samaria for the second time; but died before taking it over. His successor Sargon put it under siege for three years.

After saying about Hoshea: "*He did evil in the sight of the Lord*" (2), it came that he became a vassal to the king of Assyria, and paid him tribute (2)... It is a bitter portrait of man whom God created to be a king of authority, and to practice the blessed royal life, to become, by sin, a vassal to the devil; and to deliver what God granted him as a tribute to him.

- + God, being good, loving, and generous, granted man the liberty to choose between good and evil, granted him the mind by which, looking at the world and all what it contains, can recognize God who created everything for his sake.... The evil man; although he may wish for the knowledge of God, yet he lacks the understanding, and perishes because of his lack of faith, and of his way of thinking that contradicts the truth.
- + We cannot consider free, those who are as such according to their status in the society, but those who are truly free in their life and behavior ... The

liberty and the blessing of the soul, are a result of the true purity, and despise of the temporal things.

- + The free man is he, whom the evil pleasures cannot enslave, but he who can control his body with chastity and good discernment; and who is satisfied with what God grants him, however few it is; giving Him thanks from all his heart.

(St. Anthony the Great)

*“And the king of Assyria uncovered a conspiracy by Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to ‘So’, king of Egypt, and brought no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year*

*by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison” (4)*

According to some interpreters, the talk here is addressed to Ephraim; as what came in (2 kings 17: 4) concerns his rebellion against Assyria, and his refusal to pay tributes to him, more than concerning a treaty between Hoshea the son of Elah king of Israel (Ephraim) and ‘So’ king of Egypt,... But the rest of the talk is a divine talk addressed to Judah and Jerusalem; and to every man who disregards God and trusts in human arm.

Sargon, king of Assyria sent the leader of his army to Ashdod as a message to ‘Su’ king of Egypt 4); for Ashdod, on the frontier of Palestine, was considered the key to enter into Egypt.

The modern studies revealed that ‘So’ is not the name of a specific Pharaoh, but of a leader of a garrison in the delta by the name of ‘Siba’; or of the name of a city in West Delta by the name ‘Sais’, used by ‘Tefnakht’ as his residence. The

appearance in Egypt of a person like 'Tefnakht' as the Pharaoh of Egypt, of the twenty-four dynasty provoked Hoshea to feel that the time was right to rebel against Assyria, and to make in an alliance with the new king of Egypt.

When Shameser king of Assyria came to fight against Hoshea king of Israel, he uncovered a conspiracy initiated by the later, who "*sent messengers to 'So, king of Egypt'*". But beside this phrase there was no other mention of a king of Egypt by the name 'So'. .....Was there a mistake?!

The answer is that the name translated as 'So', could also be translated as 'Sais', the name of a city, the capital of 'Tefnakht' king of Egypt in the days of Hoshea king of Israel. If we, therefore read this phrase in the following way: 'Hoshea sent messengers to 'Sais' king of Egypt'. There will be no mistake here.

Hoshea forgot God as his Savior, and put before his eyes the option to attach himself, either to the king of Egypt or to the king of Assyria; and in both cases he would be a slave who loses much of his liberty, honor, and possessions. He forgot the role Of God and His possibilities in protection and giving the gift of liberty.

Unfortunately, we often get confused between enslaving ourselves to one sin or another, and forget the righteousness of Christ our Savior, the Liberator, and Grantor of the eternal glories.

+ "*Jesus answered them: 'Most assuredly I say to you: whoever commits sin is a slave of sin'*" (John 8: 34).... It would be better for him to be a slave of a man, rather than to be a slave of sin! ... Who would not be terrified by such words?!. The Lord, our God grants us – you and I – to express, by befitting ways, this liberty, to search for it, and to avoid such a miserable bondage... When man suffers bondage of a wicked master, he may seek to change the Master.... What will the slave of sin do?... To whom shall he plead his case? ... Of whom shall he seek salvation? ... Where shall he flee? For he bears his Master in himself wherever he goes. ... Yes, he

cannot withdraw from himself, for the sin he commits is inside him; he commits it to get some kind of carnal pleasure; but the pleasure will eventually pass away, and the sin will stay; the thorn will remain; ... What an evil bondage!

Let us all flee to Christ; being our Savior. Let us be sold, to be saved by His blood; *“For thus says the Lord: ‘You have sold yourselves for nothing; and you shall be redeemed without money’* (Isaiah 52: 3). Thus says the Lord, because it is Him who paid the price, not by money, but by His precious blood; or else we would be always in need.

+ We were slaves of evil desire; but being liberated from them, we became slaves of love. According to the apostle: *“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh; but through love, serve one another”* (Galatians 5: 13).

Therefore, the Christian should not say: ‘I am free, I was called to liberty. I was a slave, but now I am saved, and by my salvation, I became free to do whatever I choose to do; no one has authority over me, as long as I am free’ ... Do not spoil your liberty by sin, but use it to commit no sin. For as long as your will is godly, it will then be free. You will be free, only if you are liberated from sin and a servant of righteousness. As according to the apostle: *“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness; ... but now, having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life”* (Romans 6: 20, 22).

*“Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years” (5)*

After three years siege, Samaria fell into the hands of the Assyrians in the year 722 BC. And Sargon, the leader of the army of Shalmaneser the fifth, and who succeeded him on the throne, claimed that he was the one who took it. It was the custom in those days to carry along into captivity a multitude of prominent men of the defeated nation, to lessen the possibility of a counter rebellion (25: 11-12; Ezekiel 1: 2-3). The siege lasting for three years indicates that the city was strongly fortified; and by it, the king of Assyria intended to let the leaders and the people fall into despair, through denying them the ability and the enjoyment of moving in and out; and denying them the necessary food and drink.

Man, through his behavior, often cast himself into the snare of the devil, and come to be under siege, losing the taste of food and drink; and his life would turn into what is like a permanent dark prison, destructible to his soul.

- + Do not be disturbed by the imaginary fantasies; for the power of the devil is nothing before liberty. He would not be able to force himself and apply pressure on the soul, but is only able to fight her with anxiety and seduction. Not knowing which snares would catch man, he uses a diversity of snares to reach his goal

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (6).*

In the Assyrian inscriptions it came that 27,290 captives, and 50 chariots were taken. That was the third and the last invasion by Assyria on Israel. The first and the second ones were mentioned in (2 kings 5: 19; 15: 29). The first invasion was meant to warn Israel against provoking another one, by paying tribute and avoiding rebellion. The second invasion was allowed by God, when the people did not perceive that the troubles came upon them because of their corruption. And by the third invasion, the utter captivity took place, the Northern kingdom came to an end; and foreigners were brought to dwell in the land. God warned them of what would dwell upon them because of their disobedience and unfaithfulness in keeping His covenant (Deuteronomy 28).

About that invasion it was prophesied: *“Samaria is held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword; their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with a child ripped open” (Hosea 13: 16); and, “I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the field; places for planting a vineyard; I will pour down her stones into the valley; and I will uncover her foundations. All her carved images shall be beaten to peaces; and all haer pay as a harlot shall be burned with the fire; All her idols I will lay desolate, for she gathered it from*

*the pay of a harlot; and they shall return to the pay of a harlot” (Micah 1: 6- 7);* which indicates how extremely vicious the Assyrian captivity has been.

By that the Northern kingdom came to an end, after 254 years from the death of king Solomon, and the division adopted by Jeroboam, up to taking Samaria by Shalmaneser, in the ninth year of the reign of Hoshea.

## **2- FORGETTING GOD’S DEALINGS IN THE PAST:**

*“ For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt;*

*and they had feared other gods” (7),*

The reason why Samaria fell, and the Northern kingdom came to an end, was their spiritual failure, by forsaking the living God and worshipping the idols; despite the continuous warnings to the two kingdoms through the prophets (13, 14, 23). Israel practiced all kinds of pagan worship, and all sorts of abominations to provoke God to anger (11). They foolishly worshipped gods that were unable to save their own worshippers; and preferred their ugly worship to the worship of the living God.

## **3- IMITATING THE PAGAN NATIONS:**

*“and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made” (8)*

The people were responsible for the sins committed by their kings ; for they were the ones who set them kings, and approved of their behavior.

*“Also the children of Israel secretly did against the LORD their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city” (9)*

Although they acted in secret, as far as men are concerned (Isaiah 8: 19; Ezekiel 8: 7-12); yet the Lord see everything. Acting in secret was an indication that they perceived that it was sin, and unbecoming to do.

**From watchtower to fortified city”** means that idol-worship became common everywhere, from the large city to the little village; from the watchtower to the cottage of the shepherd.

*“They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree” (10).*

*‘There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the LORD had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger” (11),*

*“ for they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, “You shall not do this thing.” (12)*

#### **4- REJECTING THE VOICE OF THE LORD ON THE MOUTH OF THE PROPHETS:**

*“Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes,*

*according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.” (13)*

**“And the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah”**; There was no more justification of the sins of Israel or Judah; for it was God Himself who testified against them. There was no more place for forgiveness, unless they listen to the voice of His prophets, return to Him with their whole hearts, and take away from themselves the idol-worship.

Prophets continuously came to Israel and to Judah. In Judah there were Shemaiah; Eddo; Azariah; Hanani, Jehaziel; Eliazar; Zechariah, another Zechariah, Joel; Micah; Isaiah, and others. And in Israel, there were Achiah; Jehu; Eijah; Micah; Elisha; Jonah; Hosea; Amos, Oded’.

*“Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God” !4).*

**“Stiffened their necks”**, refers to the untamed horse, whose rider cannot rein.(See Exodus 32: 9)

According to the Old Testament, not believing in the living God was behind every sin; for man would walk according to his human mind, regardless of the wisdom of God and His true promises; and not looking to the unseen things, but only the seen ones

## **5- REJECTING THE STATUTES AND COVENANTS OF THE LORD:**

*“And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters,*

*and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them that they should not do like them (15).*

*“ So they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and*

*served Baal” (16)l.*

This is the first time in this book to mention the two **golden calves** in Israel; one in Bethel, and the other in Dan (Amos 4: 4; 7: 13; 8: 14), of **the wooden images**, by which they worshipped the moon, the queen of heaven or Venus (Jeremiah 44: 17-19). Thirdly **the hosts of heaven, namely the stars**, they learned to worship from the Assyrians; And fourthly **the Baal**, whose symbol was the sun (Ezekiel 8: 16).

+ *“Lift up your heads, O you gates” (Psalm 24: 9 LXX). ... Let us hasten to go to heaven; the trumpet of the prophet cries out loud: ... O you rulers of the air, lift up the gates which are in the minds of those who worship the hosts of heaven (16); ... Lift up you everlasting doors of righteousness, the doors of love, and purity, through which, the soul loves the true One God, and does not walk oppressively together with many who are called gods.*

(St. Augustine)

*“And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger” (17)*

**Witchcraft**, is prophesying future events without divine inspiration, done by watching the stars, clouds, flying of birds, the intestines of animals, etc.

**Soothsaying**, is getting optimist and pessimist by certain events; to get pessimist; when a morsel of food falls from the mouth; a cane drops from the

hand, a child screams after his father, a raven howls overhead; a deer crosses the road in front of someone, etc.

Instead of delivering themselves into the hand of God, they sold themselves to the devil to move them according to his wish.

## **6- WALKING IN THE SINS OF JEROBOAM:**

*“Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone” (18).*

As, in the presence of the Lord, all goods will gather together; so before Him evil will flee; and the evil ones will be counted as non-existent in His presence.

By Judah here, is meant the tribe of Judah, and those who joined them, namely the tribes of Benjamin, the Levites, and also those who forsook idol-worship from the ten tribes, to worship the true God.

*“Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made” (19).*

*“And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight” (20)*

*“For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD, and made them commit a great sin” (21).*

Having sinned by getting drunk, 'Lot' brought bitterness upon himself, and his descendants, to several generations; by giving birth, through his two daughters to 'Moab' and 'Ammon', who produced two peoples who had one goal, namely to oppress the Lord and His people along the centuries. ... So it was with what Jeroboam the son of Nabat did, by splitting Israel from the house of David, and by setting the two golden calves in Dan and Bethel, to keep the people from longing to go back to the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. The fruits of his sin kept working in the Northern kingdom until the last moments, when it was destroyed by the Assyrian captivity. Those fruits extended from the death of king Solomon to the campaign of Assyria (725-722 BC), when Shalmaneser moved in the year 725 BC to put Samaria three years under siege, and ended by the fall of Samaria, and the ultimate collapse of the kingdom.

The division of the kingdom, beside the sin of Jeroboam, was the fruit of the ignorance and haughtiness of Rehoboam the son of Solomon (1 kings 11: 31)..

+ It is said that the wrath of the Lord was so great that He delivered them to perdition, for they walked away from unity, and set a king for themselves

(St. Cyprian)

*“ For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them” (23)*

*“until the LORD removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day” (24).*

## **7- BRINGING FOREIGNERS TO DWELL IN SAMARIA:**

*“Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and*

*they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities” (24).*

According to some, the prophet refers here to the desolation of Israel by Assarhaddon who brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel, to put an utter end to Israel (24). The king of Assyria here, is most probably Sargon the second (722-705 BC). But the action of bringing foreigners to dwell in Samaria instead of the children of Israel continued; and they mixed with the remnants who were left in Samaria; for all to be called ‘Samaritans’, whose dogmas and thoughts were a mixture of the worship of the living God and the idol-worship.. The policy of the kings of Assyria was to evacuate of the land they defeat of most of its population, and bring foreigners to dwell in their place, mix with the remnants; in an attempt to weaken their loyalty to the homeland, and submit to Assyria.

In Gerzim, where a temple was built by Sanballat together with Manasseh his father-in-law, on Mount Ebal, to respond to the wish of the Samaritans not to partake of one worship with the Jews of Jerusalem; and, because those who were there, were mostly foreigners, brought by the Assyrians after they captivated the Samaritans (24-41) It was well known at the time, that ‘the hospitable Zeus’ is a refuge for the strangers and the foreigners. On another aspect, according to Josephus, the Samaritans pleaded to Antiochus Epifanius, to spare them of the persecution; and to change the name of their temple, on account of that they do not partake of one worship with the Jews. Hence the book looks at ‘those who forsook the holy covenant, mentioned in (Daniel 11: 32), as being Samaritans. . But by choosing ‘Zeus Xenios’, the Samaritans saw in it one of the features of the God of Israel, namely, caring for the strangers (Deuteronomy 10: 18 – Compare with Psalm 146: 9); And according to an old

interpretation of the Torah, Abraham, the father of fathers was well received in Mount Gerzim.

The most serious the devil can do to us is to make us lose our identity,... to make us forget that we are the children of God, ... that heaven is our dwelling place, ... that love is our language,... that the law of Christ is our law,... that the cross of the Savior is our weapon, ... that the heavenly hosts are our friends, ... that leaning on God's chest, and our entrance into the divine bosoms is our settlement and security.

+ Do not marvel, O man, that you become a son by grace; and be born from God, according to His Word; For the Word himself chose to be born from man, to let you be born from God according to salvation. Say to yourself: It is not for no reason that God intended to be born from man; but because He counted me of such importance, to make me eternal; For my sake He was born as a mortal man.

(St. Augustine)

**Cuthah**, most probably refers to (Cush); on account of that the Chaldeans and the Syrians replace the letter 'sh', by 't' or 'Th"

## **8- THE LIONS ATTACK THE CITIES OF SAMARIA:**

*"And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them" (25*

Lions were found in Palestine until the twelfth century AD, then became extinct. They used to roam in forests on the two banks of the Jordan (49: 19; 50: 44); and

were also found in Mount Hermon (Songs 4: 8), in Samaria (25), and in the wilderness south of Judah (Isaiah 30: 6). Hunting lions was the preferred sport of the kings of Assyria. And the images of lions were used in the temple of Solomon (1 kings 7: 29, 36), and to decorate his throne (1 kings 10: 19-20)..

The lion was used as a symbol of God's care and protection of His children (Revelation 5: 5); as well as of His wrath (25: 30). And it was used, as well as a symbol of the ferocious devil (1 Peter 5: 8); of the destructive false prophets (Ezekiel 22: 5), and of an angry king.

*“So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, “The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He*

*has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land.”*  
(26)

He who created the world out of land *“without form and void”* (Genesis 1: 2), is capable of punishing its inhabitants by sending on them vicious and horrible beasts, as it happened in Samaria, (26).. It was only natural, that with the decrease of the number of inhabitants, God allows for the increase of the number of lions (Leviticus 26: 21-22).

- + They thought of God as being limited to a certain place, and divisible; or that was at least how they worshipped Him. By such a spirit, they proclaimed to the Assyrians that “the God of the land” is angry with them (26). . Because such a concept about God was not different from their concept about the idols; they kept on worshipping the evil spirit together with God, binding things that could never conform together. Most of the Jews, however, on the other hand, being free of such corruption, knew that He is the God of the whole universe, even if not all are believers.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + By thinking that God is limited to a certain place, and worshipping Him with such a concept, they sent to the Assyrians proclaiming that “God of the land is angry on us” (26), they think of God as not more exalted than their idols, and kept on worshipping Him together with the demons; binding the befitting with the unbecoming.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, “Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land” (27)*

The way they counted that every land has its own ruler, so it has its god that has His own rituals; which if not observed, he would get angry on them.

*“Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD” (28)*

Despite calling for a priest to come and teach them the rituals of the god of the land, the result was a mixture of diverse kinds of worship. Together with an apostasy from the worship of the living God; even with practicing some of His rituals; and recognizing only the five books of Moses. the Jews in the time of the Lord Christ rejected, despised, and had a kind of animosity against the Samaritans (John 4: 9; 8: 48).

That priest was probably from Bethel, who returned home, and came here to minister, in an attempt to quench the anger of God on the inhabitants of the land.

## **9- MIXING THE WORSHIP OF THE LIVING GOD AND IDOL-WORSHIP:**

*“However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwell”*  
(29)

**“Every nation continued to make gods of its own”**, Instead of believing in God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and who created man according to His image and likeness, the nations made gods of their own to worship, and to let those gods realize their specific evil desires..

Those of the region of Samaria, who used to hate both Judah and Benjamin, were the descendants of the peoples that settled down in the Northern kingdom, sent by the kings of Assyria from different regions to the capital in the year 722 BC, to replace the multitude of Israelites taken away into captivity. They mixed with the remnants of the Jews, and between the worship of the living God and idol-worship

+ The whole region was called ‘Samaria’, ... what is the origin of this name?

The mountain is called “Samer”, after the name of its possessor “Shamer” (1 Kings 16: 24).

Its inhabitants were not called ‘Samaritans’ but ‘Israelites’. But with time, having disobeyed the Lord in the days of king Pekah, Tiglath-Pileser came up and took over many cities (2 Kings 15: 29). After attacking and

killing ‘Elah’, the throne was given to Hoshea. Then, lately, came Shalmaneser and took over other cities, submitted them and put tributes on them. Although Hoshea submitted at the beginning, yet, because he rebelled

later on, and resorted to the Egyptians (2 kings 17: 4), the Assyrians sent a campaign, took captives, and refused to depart, for fear of another rebellion.

The inhabitants were removed to Babylon and Made, and other peoples were brought to replace them in Samaria from many surrounding provinces; to give peace of mind to Assyria that its dominion would stay in the

future, and that the inhabitants will always be loyal to Assyria.

Intending to show His authority, and that He was the One who delivered the Jews, not out of weakness on His part, but because of the sins of those He delivered to their enemies, God sent lions to devour the

Barbarians.. When the king of Assyria received a report about that, he sent a priest to teach them the statutes of God; and yet the inhabitants there, were not completely liberated from their evil, but only partly. Even

though with time they forsook the idols and worshipped the living God. But the Jews kept on bearing the spirit of animosity against them, counted them as foreigners and enemies, and called them 'Samaritans' after

the name of the mount on which the city was built.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ As the Jews call the watchman 'a Somer', in their tradition it came that the Samaritan took that name, for the Assyrian king sent them as 'watchmen' on the land of Israel after captivity.

(The scholar Origen)

*"The men of Babylon made Succoth Benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima" (30)*

**"Succoth Benoth"**, literally translated as (the dwelling place of girls) or their tents or huts, claimed to be places where the girls crawled to practice certain unclean rites of worship to the gods of Babylon, like the prostitutes of the temple

of Venus there. According to Sir H. Rawlinson, the word represents a Chaldean goddess called 'Zir-Bamit', worshipped in Babylon, also called (the queen of the location). And according to Gesenius the name is pronounced as 'Succoth-Bamoth'. Referring to huts where the idols were kept.

**“Nergal”**, a well-known Assyrian god; the name means (a champion) or (a great man); were called by diverse names: 'the great brother', 'the ruler of storm', 'god of battles', and 'god of hunting'. On account of that the last is the main name; for he was considered as the 'Intercessor of hunting'; that led some to claim that it represented 'Nimrod' the champion, who thinks of himself as God. The name 'Nergel' often showed on Assyrian seals, was symbolized as man in the image of a lion; or a lion with the head of a man, and wings of an eagle. According to Astronomy, Nergel conforms to 'Mars'. Nergel for the Babylonians was the god of war and pesticide; its temple was in 'Cuth', and its idol was in the form of a lion with two wings, and the face of a man. By its name, men were called like 'Nergal-Sharezer' (Jeremiah 39: 3).

**“Ashima”**, god of the people of Hamath. According to most Jewish authors, this god was worshipped in the form of a goat without wool, and sometimes of a lamb. Goats were found among the holy animals on the memorial statutes in Babylon; which makes 'Ashima' conform to 'Mendes'..... According to some authors 'Ashima' is itself the Phoenician god 'Esmun', and 'Esculapius, that bore the same features of the god 'Pan. ..

*“and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim” (31).*

**“Nibhaz”**, god of the 'Avites', nothing much is known about the features of its idol; but claimed to have the form of man with the head of a dog.. The dog was worshipped by the Egyptians; and according to some scholars their god 'Anubis'

had the form of a man with the head of a dog, although, according to 'Wilkinson' the head is that of a fox.

**“Tartak”**, Also a god of the Avites. According to some Jewish authors, its idol had the form of a donkey. The name (champion of darkness); refers to a star with destructive tendencies like Mars or Saturn.

*“So they feared the LORD, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places” (32).*

The Samaritans were not committed to the divine command that the priests had to be of the seed of Aaron, but appointed for themselves priests of their own.

*“They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods— according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away” (33).*

They feared the Lord by apparent rites of worship, without the spirituality of the heart.

*“To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD*

*had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel” (34)*

The book summarized the faults of the Samaritans in two things: They did not fear the Lord; and they rejected His statutes and divine commandment. By that they broke the covenant with Him.

The Samaritans became three categories:

- 1- Those who worshipped the two golden calves, set by Jeroboam – few in number.
- 2- The Israelites who added to the worship of the two calves, what they took after the pagans.
- 3- The pagans who added to their idol;-worship, what they took after the Israelites.

Many of the Samaritans came to believe in the Lord Christ (John 4: 39-42; Acts 8: 5, 25).

*“with whom the LORD had made a covenant and charged them, saying: “You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them” (35);*

*“but the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, Him you shall worship, and to Him you shall offer sacrifice” (36).*

The main reason for worshipping the Lord is that He saved them from their enemies by great power and mighty arm; and that no other power can stand before Him or resist Him.

*“And the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall be careful to observe forever; you shall not fear other gods” (37).*

*“And the covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods” (38).*

*“But the LORD your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies” (39)*

*“However they did not obey, but they followed their former rituals. So these nations feared the LORD, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children’s children*

*have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day”*  
(40)

*“So these nations feared the Lord, yet they served their carved images; also their children and their children’s children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day”* (41).

How could those nations fear the true God, and still worship false gods?!. He clearly say that *“These nations feared the Lord”* (32); but added *“They served their carved images”* (33).

The answer is: The word “fear” is used with diverse meanings. They feared God in general way, but not in this specific one. Being pagans, they did not worship the One God; but according to verse 41, *“These nations feared the Lord, but served their carved images”*.

- + He says that Samaria will be surrounded by, and put under siege by enemies, who will, not only butt their cheeks with their heads, which could be endured; but they will strike them with the rod, which is particularly cruel. and refers to the insulting misery of captivity. By being ruled by the tribe of Ephraim; Samaria endured reproach and sufferings. Anyway, those hands will cease to strike; and that misery will be no more, if they do their best to take away the wrath of God, that came upon all because of their disobedience, and persistence to commit sins, something hated by the Lord. If they, instead, honor Him by practicing a virtuous life, they will certainly enjoy prosperity, and will live a joyful commendable life.

(St. Cyril the Great)

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 17**

### **LIBERATE ME, O LORD, FROM THE CAPTIVITY OF THE DEVIL**

- + My soul moans because of the bitter captivity of sin;  
The devil caught me in his snare;  
He put me into his cruel captivity;  
He destroys my image every day;  
He makes me lose the feature of the children of God; to live as his slave.
  
- + Why should I blame the devil, and not blame myself?  
He would not be able to crawl into my depths;  
Unless I open before him the doors of my heart;  
His snares would not be able to catch me,  
Unless I withdraw my hand from Yours;  
  
Let me say, together with Nehemiah: "I and my father's house have sinned"  
  
We did not keep the statutes, commandments, and judgments, which You gave to Your servant Moses (Nehemiah 1: 6-7)
  
- + O my God! I confess that I have forgotten Your exalted love and amazing care;

You brought me out, not on Moses' hand;  
But You, the Lord of Moses came down to liberate my depths;  
You let me cross, not over the Red Sea,  
But, by Your own blood, You opened before me the way to heaven;  
You granted me Your Holy Spirit;  
To perpetually renew my life  
By Baptism, You presented to me a paradise, more beautiful than the  
garden of Eden;  
You presented to me Your righteousness, a splendid attire for my soul;  
You granted me Your body and blood an eternal life;  
To engrave in my heart Your amazing love and dealings;  
To walk in them, O amazing Heavenly One.

+ I confess to You that I often had the intention to flee;  
As the prodigal son fled from his father's house;  
I assumed that there is happiness, to imitate those who walk in the evil  
desires of the world;  
I scattered your goods in corruption;  
I turned my love for heaven into love for evil desires;  
Instead of friendship with the heavenlies;  
I attached myself to the evil desires of the world;  
Instead of singing praise together with the heavenlies;  
I searched for the mortal joy of the world;  
I set inside myself idols to worship;

Liberate me, O Holy One, by Your grace.

+ I confess to You, that I did not listen to Your joyful gospel;  
Instead of the joyful gospel , I sought the human counsel;  
Grant me to acquire You, O Wisdom of God;  
To satisfy my soul by You, and to despise the honey of the false wisdom;'  
Let Your Word work in me;  
Set out of me a holy son of Yours;  
Let Your law become my pleasure, guide, treasure, and glory.

+ O my God, I assumed that there is happiness in everything new;  
I forsook the way of my fathers, secure by Your grace;  
I walked in vanity, to end up becoming vanity;  
Grant me to gather together with the whole church, from Adam to the end  
of time  
To walk in the wilderness of this world together with my fathers who walk  
with the Spirit.  
Be a cloud to shade me against the heat of sin in the shining light of the  
day;  
Be for me a pillar of light by night;  
Your light, will scatter my darkness;  
By Your divine flame, You will take away from me every negligence and  
slothfulness.

+ O my God! Grant me now the strength, so that by Your guidance, I may  
have my destiny;

By Your grace, I pledge to cast myself into Your bosoms;  
And by Your strength, I shall never falter between two ways;  
I find pleasure in worshipping You;  
I shall never leave a place for a pagan worship in my depths;  
You are mine, and with You I seek nothing else from heaven;  
For You and with You; I shall not debate with the serpent, as my mother  
Eve did.

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# THE FOURTH SECTION

## JUDAH UNTIL THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

(CHAPTERS 18 to 25)

After the Assyrian captivity and the annihilation of the kingdom of Israel, there were some good kings in Judah, like Hezekiah and Josiah; but the greatest majority were wicked, and their evil so increased more than that of the kingdom of Israel; about which the prophet Jeremiah rebuked the people.

On another aspect, the reform carried out by certain good kings like Josiah, concerned the temple and practicing the rites in a literal way, without a reform of the heart, nor a serious intention to return to the Lord. That is what we strongly notice in the book of the prophet Jeremiah; whose talks concentrated on the heart and its circumcision.

# CHAPTER 18

## HEZEKIAH AND REMOVING THE IDOL- WORSHIP

The Holy Book gave a wide range to talk about Hezekiah king of Judah, more than it did to any other king since the death of king Solomon; On one aspect because his life presents a living testimony about God's dealings with the believers, particularly those who wish to attach themselves to Him. And on another aspect, because it shows that, whatever the extent of the holiness of man may reach, and his care to walk with the Spirit, he may be subject to weaknesses into which someone less holy than him, may not fall. It is as though the life of king Hezekiah is counted as a warning to every believer, not to think of himself as something, to trust in himself, and not in God.. For falling, only for few moments, as a result of negligence or trust in his own capabilities or in the purity of his life, may destroy much of what he has acquired; and may cause harm to many.

The biography of king Hezekiah came in (2 kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 36: 39).

When Hezekiah sat on the throne, Judah was a State under the authority of Assyria.

Hezekiah was considered as one of the kings who had a great role in reform; who led a campaign against all forms of idol-worship.

1- The good king Hezekiah and removing the idol-worship	1 - 6
2- Hezekiah rebels against Assyria	7
3- Hezekiah subdues the Philistines	8
4- The Assyrian captivation of Samaria	9 - 12
5- The first attack by Sennacherib against Judah	13 - 16
6- The second attack by Sennacherib against Judah	17 – 37

### **1- THE GOOD HEZEKIAH AND REMOVING THE IDOL WORSHIP:**

King Hezekiah was the first to keep the Lord's commandments since the days of king David (6). He intended to bring back the true upright worship of the Lord on the level of the people. But when he revealed the treasures to the messengers of the king of Babylon, probably with pride, the divine command came for Judah to fall into captivity.

*“Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign” (1)*

The third year of Hoshea is the year 729 BC.... The twenty-nine years of Hezekiah's reign include the 13 years period, he was a partner of his father Ahaz before he reigned alone (716-699 BC).

**Hezekiah**, the name literally means (God gives strength)..

*“He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah” (2).*

*“And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD,  
according to all that his father David had done” (3)*

Despite what characterized his father Ahaz of evil, corruption, and failure, we find that Hezekiah walked in the fear of God; yet, unfortunately, his own son disobeyed God’s commandment, to confront the temptation of captivity. ... Neither the spiritual life nor the holy, or the corrupt ethical principles are inherited; and everyone has the complete freedom to obey or disobey the Lord’s commandments.

About king Hezekiah it is said: *“He did what was right in the sight of God, according to all that his father David has done”*; as it was said about king Asa (1 kings 15: 11), and about king Josiah ( ). Other than those three kings, whose fathers were evil, that was not said concerning any other king of Judah.

It so seems that the prophet Isaiah was a counselor of Hezekiah in his youth before he sat on the throne, and was influenced by him.

*“He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars,  
cut down the wooden imag and broke in pieces the bronze serpent  
that Moses had made; for until those days the children  
of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan” (4)*

The previous kings sinned by disregarding the high places, and not removing their idols; to end up turning into centers of abominations, unbefitting of the believers. King Hezekiah, on the other hand, not only broke down the idols, but, seeing how the believers honored and burned incense to the bronze serpent they kept since the days of the prophet Moses in the wilderness, he broke it into pieces.

Although some of the kings of Judah were good kings, who did what is right in the sight of God, yet they were not concerned with removing the high places.

According to St. Augustine, Hezekiah was the first to remove them.. In his works to correct the thoughts of the Donatists, St. Augustine made it clear that a king or a ruler worships God with fear (Psalm 2: 1-2;. 10-11) in two ways: As a believing man, himself, who worships God with fear through his practical life of faith; And as a king, who worships God by issuing laws that command his subjects to walk in righteousness; and by punishing whoever does otherwise So did Hezekiah as a godly king, when he removed the high places and broke the idols to pieces.

+ So Hezekiah did by removing the temples of the idols and the high places; that were set contrary to the commandments of God (2 kings 18: 4) a testimony for giving him a great credit. So did king Josiah by practicing the same works (2 Kings 23: 4; 20);... So did the king of Nineveh, by committing the whole city to please the Lord (Jonah 3: 6-9); ... So did Darius by delivering the statue to Daniel to break it down (Daniel and the dragon 42); ... And so did Nebuchadnezzar by issuing an awesome law that forbade anyone of his subjects to blaspheme God (Daniel 3: 29). ... By so doing, the kings can serve the Lord as kings, when they practice what they, otherwise, cannot do, if they were not kings.

(St. Augustine)

God commanded the prophet Moses to make a bronze statue of a fiery serpent, and to lift it up on a pillar in the wilderness, to heal whoever looks at it (Numbers 21: 4-9). That bronze serpent bore a symbol of the work of the

Lord Christ, the crucified Savior of the world, according to the words of the Lord Himself, saying: "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so, the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but has eternal life*" (John 3: 14, 15). But once the people of Israel abused the concept of that bronze serpent, and worshipped it as an idol, offering it sacrifices, that serpent lost its spiritual and symbolic concept,

because of the corrupt minds and hearts of the people; and king Hezekiah crushed it (2 Kings 18: 4). He so did by a living conscience, seriously, and without flattery nor fear; something that was not easy to do, on account

of that that serpent had so much popularity on the level of the Jewish leaderships and the people; but Hezekiah did not care for anything beside resisting any wrong thoughts, contrary to God's statutes; by which his godliness

was greatly admired...

During the sanctification of the sacrament of Eucharist; if the bishop is present, a deacon holds the staff of the bishop that ends up with a golden cross surrounded by two golden serpents. (This staff is different from the one continuously held by the bishop, as a sign of his apostolic shepherding).

In (2 Chronicles 29) it came that in the first year of Hezekiah's reign, he opened up the gates of the house of the Lord; the priests cleansed the house of the Lord, and offered sacrifices, and the Levites sang praises; made a Passover to the Lord, to which he invited Israel, Judah, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Zebulun. And when he consummated all that (2 Chronicles 31: 1), all Israel came out to the cities of Judah, and broke down the high places, the sacred pillars, and the wooden images (1 Kings 14: 23)

*"He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him" (5).*

It is amazing that king Hezekiah who surpassed all the kings before and after him (except for king David), had an evil father – Ahaz – He was even justified by his rejection of his father's evil way for the sake of the Lord.

If the Northern kingdom collapsed before Assyria, because of breaking the divine commandment, and their treason of the covenant with God, Hezekiah, king of Judah, the southern kingdom, could confront Assyria's might by his

godliness, and trust in God. He confronted the last campaign of Sennacherib in the year 701 BC, by a divine help.

*“For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses” (6).*

## **2- HEZEKIAH’S REBELS AGAINST ASSYRIA:**

*“The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him” (7).*

Hezekiah’s refusal to serve Assyria with humiliation; and defeating the Philistines; helped Judah as an independent nation to carry a new power in the region; and to suffer no more fear of any threat from the surrounding nations.

Judah at that time, being located between two major worldly powers; namely Assyria and Egypt; and embracing the main ways of universal commerce in the Middle East; each of Assyria and Egypt competed to have it under its authority. On another aspect, whenever there was war between the two powers, one of them would cross over to the other through Judah, destroying it. Judah was considered as a buffer that protects each of the two powers against the other. The nation, that could have the authority over Judah, would, therefore, gain commercial and military advantage over its competitor.

When Hezekiah became king, Judah was under the authority of Assyria; yet by his faith, and by the power of God, he could rebel against that mighty nation, something that would be seen as humanly impossible to achieve. He probably rebelled against the king of Assyria at the beginning of his reign, but the later did not fight against him, for he was then preoccupied with wars against Samaria,

Tyre, and Egypt; and probably because Hezekiah fought against and defeated the Philistines.

### **3- HEZEKIAH SUBDUES THE PHILISTINES:**

*“He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city” (8).*

Because Sennacherib gave a part of Judah to the king of Gaza, the war made by Hezekiah against the Philistines was probably to get it back. Some Philistines were on Assyria’s side, and some were against him. Hezekiah made war against the former, and helped the later.

### **4- THE ASSYRIAN CAPTIVATION OF SAMARIA:**

*“Now it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against*

*Samaria and besieged it” (9).*

*“And at the end of three years they took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is, the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken” (10).*

*“Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away captive to Assyria, and put them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (11),*

*“because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant and all that Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded; and they would neither*

*hear nor do them” (12)*

**Moses the servant of the Lord”,** The godly men of the old covenant used to cherish being called the “servants of Jehovah” (Psalm 27: 9; 31: 16; 89: 50). Now, as all have become in Jesus Christ, enjoy His righteousness and fear, they are all qualified for being the “servants of Jesus Christ”, to boast in him and in no other. By this title, those who played a role in the history of salvation through serving Jehovah, were referred, like Moses ((12), Joshua (Judges 2: 8); and Abraham (Psalm 105: 41). And as Paul the apostle, was separated for the gospel of God, and played a role in the history of salvation, an extension of that played by the fathers and prophets of the old covenant, he often called himself “a *servant of Jesus Christ*” (Revelation 1: 1; see Galatians 1: 10; Philippians 1: 1; Colossians 4: 12).

#### **5-. THE FIRST ATTACK OF SENNACHERIB AGAINST JUDAH: .**

*“And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them” (13).*

Hezekiah reigned together with his father Ahaz for 13 years (729-716BC); reigned alone for 18 years (716-796 BC); and with his son Manasseh 11 years (796-686 BC); so that the whole duration of his reign was 43 years. The 29 years, recorded in (2 kings 18: 1-2) refers to the period during which Hezekiah had full authority over the kingdom.

The details of the condition of rebellion that provoked Sennacherib to attack the western part of his empire, was mentioned in his records, and in them it came that Hezekiah was completely preoccupied with his own affairs.

It happened in the year 701 BC, four years after Sennacherib son of Sargon the second, who took the people of Israel into captivity; sat on the throne of Assyria, that the king of Judah, in order to keep Assyria from attacking his kingdom, used to pay Sargon an annual tribute; then stopped paying it when Sennacherib became a king. When Sennacherib attacked him, Hezekiah perceived his fault and paid again the annual tribute to Assyria (14); Sennacherib, however, attacked him in retaliation (19-20). ... Even though Sennacherib attacked Judah, yet he was not fond of war like his predecessor, , but preferred to concentrate most of his time and effort on building and beautifying his capital 'Nineveh'. That tendency, gave the chance for Hzekiah to make his many reforms, and to strengthen his kingdom.

What came at the end of the twentieth chapter of this book, is similar to what came in Isaiah 36 to 39; for the sak, beside its historical significance, of its important relationship with the previous prophecies concerning Assyria,

What came in the second book of the kings, but not in Isaiah, was telling how Hezekiah, perceiving his fault, resumed paying the tribute to the king of Assyria (14-16). And what came in Isaiah and not in the second book of the kings , was the praise sung to God by Hezekiah after being healed from his illness (Isaiah 38: 9-20).

- + As it is already said, Sennacherib is a symbol of the devil, as confirmed by the words haughtily uttered by Rabshakeh against God; when he proclaimed to the people of Judah false promises, in an attempt to take away from God, His exalted power, and to offer confirmations of fertile land and an abundance of crops, to exhort the people to depart from the land given to them by God, to a new dwelling location promised by the Assyrians;

In a like way, the messengers and partners of the devil seek in the first place, to deceive the simple souls; by attempting to uproot the thoughts inspired by the divine care.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, “I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay.” And the king of*

*Assyria assessed Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.” (14)*

The excavations of the royal palace of Nineveh testify to the defeat of ‘Lachish’ in the records pertaining to the siege into which the kingdom of Judah was put, in the days of king Hezekiah. The book in (2 kings 18: 13), says: *“In the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, king Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them”*. But before taking Israel completely over, “the angel of the Lord destroyed them, and Sennacherib retreated (2 kings 20: 35; 2 Chronicles 32)..

Having refused to submit to Assyria; the records of Sennacherib came to portray the overall attack upon Judah. Feeling the great danger about to come over him, after Lachish was actually put under siege, Hezekiah consented to pay a huge tribute to Assyria; which even made Sennacherib go ahead in his greed, by putting Jerusalem under siege (18: 13-19: 30).

That brought all back to some memories of things that happened a century before; and reminded them of similar words uttered by the prophet ‘Micah of Moresheth (Micah 3: 12), And because the king and the people did not despise them, but feared the Lord, and sought His face,.they enjoyed the divine mercies.

God allowed for that affliction to happen in the days of Hezekiah, who did so many reforms among the people; even though many civil and religious leaders, cared for external rather than for internal reform , and for the formalities rather than for the holy life. ... To justify Hezekiah, God turned the affliction to glorify him. Yet, on another aspect God intended to reveal his weakness before himself; when his trust in God was not complete, and he lost his courage. But through the temptation, he confessed his weakness and his faith and trust in God increased.

*“ So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king’s house” (15).*

The yoke put by Sennacherib king of Assyria upon Hezekiah king of Judah (kings 18: 14), by which a huge amounts of gold, silver, and precious items were moved from the temple to Assyria; was followed by what Jehoash king of Israel did, when he attacked Jerusalem, broke down a large portion of its wall, and robbed what was in the treasuries of the temple (14: 14).

*“At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria” (16)*

The priority in the mind of king Hezekiah was not the gold of the temple, as much as it was keeping what is left of the kingdom of Judah (19: 4).

## **7- THE SECOND ATTACK OF SENNACHERIB AGAINST JUDAH:**

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*“ Then the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh from Lachish, with a great army against Jerusalem, to King Hezekiah. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. When they had come up, they went and stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool, which was on the highway to the Fuller’s Field’ . (17)*

Those were three prominent officers in the great Assyrian army, which was the greatest army in the Middle East at that time. That army came to camp in Judah, on the highway to the Fuller’s field, north-west of the city corner; by which the whole region was prone to fall at the first attack.

According to some, “Rabshakeh” was not a person’s name, but a title like the ‘chief cup-bearer’, who tastes the wine before the king does, lest the king would be poisoned by any attempt against his life; beside other duties in the royal palace..

Sennacherib broke the covenant, when, despite the huge tribute he put upon Hezekiah, he sent his army to attack Judah (2 Kings 18: 4, 17).

+ According to the Jews, ‘Rabshekeh’, who talked in Hebrew, was the son of the prophet Isaiah, who was a traitor (beside another son of Isaiah, called’ Jashub’). And according to others, that ‘Rabshakeh’ being a Samaritan, knew how to talk in Hebrew, and insolently blasphemed against the Lord..

(St. Jerome)

*“And when they had called to the king, Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came out to them” (18).*

Although Hezekiah made civil and religious reforms, had a growing relationship with God, grew in the strong life of prayer, and was counted as a hero in the book of proverbs (Proverbs 25: 1); yet, of his points of weakness was his lack of wisdom in planning for the future to keep the spiritual heritage for the following generations. That was beside his foolish act of boasting his wealth before the messengers sent by the king of Babylon.

According to ‘Damien Maky’, in the light of what came in the book of ‘Judith’, ‘Eliakim’, being the chief officer or the (Major-domo) of the royal court, was over the household (18). In the Assyrian records, his name came as ‘Akhi’ instead of ‘Eliakim’, and he was the governor of Ashdod or ‘Lachish’ ; and according to some, he previously was a high priest before being appointed a governor of Lachish. It is to be mentioned that, in the days of king Solomon, a series of ex-high priests were appointed as governors of the fortified stronghold of Lachish – as well as of other locations (1 kings 4: 2).

St. Cyril the Great, longed to see every believer ‘The new Eliakim’, for he saw ‘Eliakim’ in every man who enjoys the glorious resurrected life in the church of Christ.

- + When God says: *“I will call My servant ‘Eliakim’”* (Isaiah 22: 10); the name ‘Eliakim, meaning (the resurrection of God), everyone who is glorified in His Father’s house, is ‘Eliakim’. ... Who are those glorified there? They are those who put their trust in Christ, even if they according to this world, are not glorified, but humble, But God, being just, will grant everyone according to his spiritual stature (maturity). By that, some are fathers, while others still toddlers, suckling, and adolescents.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + **Eliakim the son of Hilkiah**, who was over the household, came out to them, together with Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder. He was the same Eliakim about whom we read in the vision seen by Isaiah in the Valley of Zion: *“I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Helekiah; I will clothe him with your robe, and strength him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility in his hand; he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah”* (Isaiah 22: 20-21)

(St. Jerome)

**Shebna**, About his position in Hezekiah’s royal court, there is controversy of opinion; here, being the officer responsible for the king’s treasury, he is called ‘the scribe’; whereas, according to others he was a

counselor of the king, or a minister; anyway, he was one with great authority, seemed to be of foreign race, and an evil man, who, to eternize his memorial, he dug for himself a great tomb in the same rock where the kings of

Judah were buried; for which the prophet Isaiah rebuke him, calling him ‘a disgrace to the king’s court’, and prophesied that he will be fired, and replaced by Eliakim; which was realized in about the year 701 BC.

According to St. Jerome, that Shebna, mentioned here, who was in the company of Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, is not the same Shebna, mentioned in (Isaiah 22: 15),

whom Isaiah rebuked, and called ‘a disgrace to the king’s court’ (Isaiah 22: 18).

“Then *the* Rabshakeh said to them, “Say now to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: “*What confidence is this in which you trust?*” (19)

The title “the great king”, was used in the Near East to refer to the king with the greatest authority in the region. What Rabshakeh meant to say is that before the king of Assyria, no other power could stand.... The way the prophets of God say, strongly and with authority: “*So says the Lord*”, here the speaker, insolently does the same thing; as though the great king of Assyria sends his messenger, the way God sends His prophets. Here, Rabshakeh counts the king of Assyria on the same level like God, counts himself on the same level as the prophets; and even counts himself capable of challenging God.

The Lord confirms to king Hezekiah and to his men, that He will break the yoke, and will cut off the bonds of Sennacherib who, by his army, violently attacked many of the cities and villages of Judah. He confirms to them that Jerusalem, helpless to defend them; like a city shackled with chains, will enjoy freedom; and the Assyrian army will attack it no more, for it will become weak when 185, 000 of its men will be killed by the angel of the Lord, to become as though extinct.

**“What confidence is this in which you trust?”** Rabshakeh addressed his question to the children of Israel. ... But the fact is, when king Ahaz trusted in Egypt, and made an alliance with her, to protect him against the king of Assyria, he ended up by falling into captivity. Whereas, when Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, He lifted the siege from him.

It is befitting of the believer to ask himself: Am I like Ahaz, or like Hezekiah?... “*What confidence is this in which I trust?*”.... Is it my education, my social status, my power, or my scientific progress, etc? ... But all that are divine gifts that are sanctified, if we attach ourselves to God, and trust in Him.

+ After taking over many cities of Judah, Sennacherib started to direct many threats against Israel through his messenger Rabshakeh; Then what

turned him away from his goal, to concentrate on the Ethiopians, was nothing but fasting. And what destroyed 185,000 of his men in one night on the hand of an angel of the Lord, was nothing but the humility of king Hezekiah.

(The scholar Tertullian)

*“ You speak of having plans and power for war; but they are mere words. And in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me?”*

(20)

- + Whoever dares to say there is no God, is surely ignorant, and lacks the understanding. That describes Rabshekah who said: *“If the gods of the nations failed to save their lands and those who worship them, How can your God protect you and your city?”* ... By their hearts and conscience they meant to say: [There is no God], as revealed to the prophet, by an inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

We also say that those who deny the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, are, likewise, ignorant; for they deny His obvious great achievements that confirm it.. So are those who say: Yes, God is there, the Creator of

everything, yet He no more cares for His creation; for they, in ignorance, trust in the human might.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“ Now look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed,  
Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it.  
So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him” (21)*

As Assyria considered Egypt as her adversary power, Rabshakeh expected that king Hezekiah would most probably, resort to Egypt to protect him against Assyria. According to ‘Theodoret’, bishop of Cyrus, Rabshakeh, here, accuses the Egyptians of weakness and evil, likens them to a weak reed that grows on the bank of the river; if they are so helpless to defend itself, how could it protect any other; and to a broken reed, on which, if a man leans on it, it will go into his hand and pierce it. ... The prophet Isaiah used the same analogy in different ways (Isaiah 30: 3-5; 31: 1-3).

Through such affliction, according to ‘Theodoret’, man may perceive the vanity of seeking others; and of searching for the loved ones, with no avail. ... By those loved ones, he probably means the king of Assyria, the Pharaoh of Egypt and the like; Making alliance of any of them, for fear of the other, would be a vain alliance; for they all actually work for their own benefit; misuse Israel and Judah, and will never help them in the time of need; *“like leaning upon a broken reed “* (21)... We actually find nowhere in history that Hezekiah ever sought help from the Pharaoh of Egypt. ... Mentioning that, was probably a kind of guessing on the part of Rabshakeh; that the natural refuge for whomever is attacked by Assyria is the adversary power – Egypt.

*“But if you say to me, ‘We trust in the LORD our God,’ is it not  
He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away,  
and said to Judah and Jerusalem, ‘You shall worship*

*before this altar in Jerusalem?’” (22)*

Those words said by Rabshakeh, that Hezekiah always lean upon his God, came as a reaction to Hezekiah’s fame as a godly man who worship and trusts in the Lord (5). It was a kind of psychological war against Hezekiah; to make it clear to

him that no power on earth or up in heaven could save him from the hand of Assyria.

Then Rabshakeh uttered the truth, when he said: *“But if you say to me, We trust in the Lord our God”; Is it not He whose high places and whose altars, Hezekiah has taken away?”* (22). For it actually happened that Hezekiah took away the high places and the altars, even those in which they used to worship the true God; on account of that, because those altars were defiled by mixing the worship of God with idol-worship; Hezekiah preferred to destroy anything that might cause offense, and might open the way to idol-worship. ... But Rabshakeh deceptively portrayed all what Hezekiah did, as done against the worship of God, and not an attempt to cleanse the way of worshipping Him.

According to ‘Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus, Rabshakeh here, accuses king Hezekiah, who claims to trust in God, to be, himself, the one who does wrong to the truth of God, by taking away the places where God was worshipped on the high places, even if it was together with idol-worship; and accuses him, as well, that he limited the worship to be done in Jerusalem. With that he accused Hezekiah of not following the lead of the kings who preceded him, who worshipped the Lord, but disregarded the high places, on account of that they included places assigned to worship God..

*“Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses—if you are able on your part to put riders on them!”* (23)

With scoffing and ridicule, Rabshakeh challenged Hezekiah, that he was ready to provide him with two thousand horses, if he is able on his part to put riders on them in battle; hinting to the fact that Hezekiah, in truth, did not have horsemen; and that his army are not trained on using horses in battle.

*“How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master’s servants, and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen?” (24)*

According to Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus, “*one captain of the least of his master’s servants*”, came in the Septuagint version to refer to the Aramites; For when Damascus intended to attack Hezekiah, he, in fear, resorted to Assyria, and paid tribute to defend him; ... How could Hezekiah now resort to Egypt to protect him against the king of Assyria himself?!

- + When Rabshakeh challenged Hezekiah to find riders for 2000 horses, he promised to provide him; he did not say it foolishly, but through his knowledge that the Jewish people do not have the expertise of riding horse, for their perception of the Lord’s commandment to the prophet Moses, that the king of Israel, “*shall not multiply horses for himself; ... neither shall multiply wives for himself*” (Deuteronomy 17: 16-17). .... It is as though Rabshakeh says:: If you cannot stand before me, I the least of the servants of Sennacherib, how will you stand before the great power of my king?... And anticipating the expected response from Hezekiah to be: ‘We trust in the Lord’, Rabshakeh cleverly says that he did not come on his own, but according to the command of the Lord: “*The Lord said to me: Go up against this land, and destroy it*” (25). He intends to say: I could not have come unless this was the will of the Lord. But having come and taken over many countries, if Jerusalem is not yet touched, it is obvious that it is His will that I come now to do it..

(St. Jerome)

*“Have I now come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, ‘Go up against this land, and destroy it.’” (25)*

It so seem that, because the Assyrians were aware of, the prophecies concerning God’s judgments to chastise His people (Isaiah 10: 5-11); Rabshakeh counted that campaign to attack Judah was allowed by God. By that he intended to put terror in the hearts of the inhabitants of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32: 18) that even the Lord, their God, is against them.

According to Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus, Rabshakeh could not be Assyrian; for his talk reveal that he was not a stranger from Israel; having perceived that delivering the ten tribes to the Assyrian captivation is a divine command to chastise them for opposing God.

*“Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, “Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; and do not speak to us in Hebrew<sup>1</sup>*

*in the hearing of the people who are on the wall.” (26)*

As the Aramaic at that time was the language used in international relations; the deputies of king Hezekiah expected that Rabshakeh was going to speak in Aramaic and not in Hebrew spoken by the common people. But the Assyrians were only interested in destroying the psyche of the king together with his people..

*“ But the Rabshakeh said to them, “Has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their*

*own waste with you?”(27)*

By speaking in Hebrew, it was the intention of Rabshakeh to provoke the people to revolt against the king and his men; Yet, at the same time he uttered words that were unbecoming of a responsible officer of the king; words of the street, saying: *“men, ... who will eat and drink their own waste with you” (27).*

Rabshakeh, having so insolently reproached the living God, it was high time for God to proclaim His glory and might to the remnants, faithful to Him, according to the words of the psalmist: *“O God, how long will the adversary reproach?” (Psalm 74: 10).*

Concerning those lowly words spoken by Rabshakeh, that the people under siege will have to eat and drink their own waste; ... St. John Chrysostom, while talking to those in his congregation who used to go to the lowly theaters, said to them: [Hearing the songs of the prostitutes, you put waste in your ears].

- + Whoever says: ‘There is no God’, distances himself from the true faith, and falls in atheism; for he corrupts what God has planted in the hearts of men of upright dogma and the sound doctrine; For faith will only be set by works; as it was with ‘Cornelius’ and others, who because of their pure behavior and good works, they were enlightened by the light of the upright faith, against which, anything contrary would be corrupt.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out with a loud voice in Hebrew, and spoke, saying, “Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria!” (28)*

*“Thus says the king: ‘Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you from his hand’ (29)*

Rabshakeh intended to provoke the people of Jerusalem to forget their trust in the Lord, and in their own king, and to trust in Sennacherib the king of Assyria instead. By repeating the phrase: *“Do not let Hezekiah deceive you; and the like (22, 29, 30)*, he intended to persuade the people to revolt against their king; with the promise that the king of Assyria has already prepared for them a better place to live than what they already have.

*“nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, ‘The LORD will surely deliver us; this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’”*

Having so insolently reproached the Lord God, He sent His angel to terrify them (2 kings 18)

Whoever calls on God, not for God's own sake, but for temporal things, loses his joy in the gladness of salvation; and instead of peace, he will have fear for no other cause, but for having denied himself God, the source of peace

+ By Rabshakeh's accusation against Hezekiah, it is obvious that, even after Assyria has taken over the cities of Judah (Isaiah 36: 1), Hezekiah still trusted in the Lord, for he said to the people: *“Do not fear or be dismayed by the king of Assyria and all those with him; for if he trusts in the human arm, we, on the other hand trust in the Lord our God, who fights for us”*. And, because the people were encouraged by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah, Rabshakeh, intending to corrupt what Hezekiah did, said to the people: *“Do not let Hezekiah deceive you ... nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord” (29-30)*

(St. Jerome)

*“Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria:  
‘Make peace with me, ... and come out to me; and every one of  
you eat from his own vine and every one*

*from his own fig tree, and every one of you drink the waters  
of his own cistern” (31)*

Commenting on Rabshakeh’s military plan, St. Jerome says that he started by threatening king Hezekiah, his leaders, and his people; then followed the threats by seductions, by giving promises to the people; by which he attempted to provoke them to revolt against their own king, and be prepared to accept the submission to the king of Assyria.

- + By seductions, he intended to deceive, those who were not terrified by threats; saying to them on behalf of the king of Assyria: *“Make peace with me, and come out to me”* (31; Isaiah 36: 16); namely: Do what is for your benefit, to have more blessing. Or in other words: ‘Bless and praise the king of Assyria, Have him as your Lord, to earn his rewards; Live in your own cities, and enjoy your own crops, until I come back from Egypt, or until I take back the robbed ‘Libnah’; I shall then *“take you to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards”* (32). He did not say the name of this land; for there is no land on earth equal to the promised land.

(St. Jerome)

**The cisterns;** On account of the scarcity of rain, most of the year, the majority of houses in Jerusalem had their own cisterns (2 Kings 18: 31; Proverbs 5: 15), to store the water collected from rain or from springs; those

cisterns were usually pear-shaped, with a small upper opening to make it easy to cover it, as a protection against pollution. The house-owners and field-owners, in the old, used to cherish their cisterns and the wells they dig,

as very precious possessions (Jeremiah 38: 6). By the year 1200 BC, the cisterns were strengthened by cement, like that of 'Camran'

According to St. Cyril the Great, flirting with the hearts and senses of the people of Jerusalem by referring to the vineyard, the fig tree, and the cisterns ; Rabshakeh followed the double way by which the devil provokes

us to plunge in evil pleasures; whether those outside us, or pleasures naturally embedded in us.

*"until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive groves and honey, that you may live and not*

*die. But do not listen to Hezekiah, lest he persuade you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us." (32)*

By saying: "*Until I come and take you away*", Rabshakeh, according to Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus, had a list of nations and peoples, he planned to attack, and submit, before he comes back to Jerusalem.

*"Has any of the gods of the nations at all delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria?" (33)*

*"Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim and Hena and Ivah? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand?" (34)*

According to Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus, by mentioning 'Samaria' in particular, he intended to draw their attention to that no king, nor leader could stand against his master.

“Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?”  
(35)

- + Hate haughtiness, for it is the fruit, full of death;  
Eating from it in the garden of Eden, gave Adam death;  
By it the devil has fallen in the beginning;  
Nothing is cheaper and hateful to God, like haughtiness and pride.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“But the people held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king’s commandment was, “Do not answer him” (36)*

While Rabeshakeh refused to keep silent, and spoke in Hebrew to provoke the people to blaspheme against God; ... Jesus, the Lord of glory, held His peace during the vain trials, under which He was put, to carry the burden of His people, and to bring them forth to the knowledge of the divine Truth.

The way the people here, were committed to the command of king Hezekiah, not to answer Rabeshakeh who reproached God, When ‘Sanbalat’, by the same spirit, wanted to enter into a debate with Nehemiah, with the intention to delay the work of construction, saying: *“Come, let us meet together”*, the later said to him: *“No such thing as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart”* (Nehemiah 6: 8).....Rabeshakeh expected that the people might proclaim their revolution against their king; but they held their peace, waiting for the instructions of the king, in trust and obedience to his command not to enter into a debate with him, lest they might fall into weakness, the way Eve did by entering into a debate with the ancient serpent. According to St. John Chrysostom: [Eve, instead of keeping silent; she foolishly gave the devil a great chance ... Look how much evil would we deliver ourselves into the hands of our enemies and those

who plot against us. Such is the nature of the deceivers.]. .... And according to St. Augustine, [Not being able to offer to us something practical, the deceptive devil offers promises in vain words].

[God is our Leader, and the devil is our predator. While the Leader offers his counsel; the predator suggests deception. ... Shall we listen to the counsel, or to the deception"?)]

As an example, when someone inquires about what he considers as contradictions in the Holy Book. In case this person does it for mocking purpose, the debate with him would turn into foolish discussion. But if he is serious in seeking knowledge, the debate with him would be necessary; as according to the apostle Peter: *"Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"* (1 Peter 3: 15).

The same thing in case the debate is with an atheist who denies the existence of God. The decision to debate with him or to refrain, would depend upon our perception of his intention. By refraining to answer him, we would not slide into his foolishness; And by answering him we would intend to keep him from his foolishness..

According to Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus: [Having heard Rabechakeh's blasphemy against God, Eliakim and his companions did not answer him by a single word, but tore up their clothes before they hasten to go to the godly king to tell him about it by their words and by their appearance. Hearing them, the king, in turn, tore up his royal clothes, put on sackcloth, and hastened to approach the Creator of the universe whom the Assyrian reproached]. .

+ The people kept silent, no none uttered a word; in obedience to the king's instructions. The righteous man who acted with faithfulness and wisdom, instructed his people not to answer the Assyrian blasphemer, lest he would be stirred up to greater blasphemy; according to the words of

'Sirach': "*Do not kindle the coals of sinners*" (Sirach 8: 10); and of the psalmist: "*I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me. I was mute with silence; I held my peace even from good*" (Psalm 39: 2-3 – the Septuagint version); And, "*Set a guard, O Lord over my mouth; Keep watch over the doors of my lips*" (Psalm 141: 3 – the Septuagint version).

(St. Jerome)

- + It is befitting of us to learn our faith well; to be able to give the right answer to everyone who may ask us concerning our faith; in meekness and fear of the Lord. For then, the Lord would be listening to what he says.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

*"Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh" (37).*

Going back to the godly king to see how he responded to the words said by Rabshakeh: "*So it was, when king Hezekiah heard it that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord*" (2 kings 19: 1), a sign of his sadness and humility before God.

Hezekiah sent Eliakin, Shebnah and the elder priests, covered with sackcloth to the prophet Isaiah (2). The situation totally changed; .... After the civil and religious leaderships used to mock Isaiah when they saw him walk barefooted

and naked; warning them that Pharaoh and his men will not be able to help them (Isaiah 21); Now, behold, they come to him covered with sackcloth in bitterness, to proclaim their need for his prayers and counsel. They perceived that, as it is “*a day of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy*” (3). Let it be a day of repentance and prayer. They felt that: “*The children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth*” (3). Who can help in such a situation, except God through prayers?! Pharaoh, with all his possibilities cannot give the pregnant woman the ability to deliver, until the time comes. Prayer is the giver of mercy that realizes childbirth.

The custom of tearing the outer clothes, that expresses intense grief, like when a close relative dies, was common in many nations; and until recently in the villages of Upper Egypt. For the Jews, this custom was more practiced when they hear blasphemy against God, by which the listener proclaims his innocence from such a blasphemy, and that he does not endure to hear it; the way the high priest did during the trial of the Lord Christ; as a proclamation that Jesus was a blasphemer.

According to St. John Chrysostom: [Nothing is equal to prayer. It turns the impossible possible; and the difficult easy. ... Whoever prays will never fall into sin]. ... And according to father Theophan the hermit: [Prayer is everything, and the summary of everything:: faith, life according to faith, salvation, etc.]. ....He also says: [Prayer is (the breath of the Spirit);... It is (the measure of the spiritual life), .... the whole church breathes by prayer].

+ King Hezekiah could never rejoice on the calamity of captivity dwelling upon his children; yet he could not object against God's will; and, being a humble servant, he received His commend with perseverance.

## **THE PERSONALITY OF KING HEZEKIAH**

(2 kings 18-20), (2 Chronicles 29-33), and (Isaiah 36-39)

### **WHO WAS HEZEKIAH?**

The word 'Hezekiah' means (The Lord gives strength)

He reigned 29 years over Judah (715-686 BC). The son of Ahaz, and father of Manasseh who succeeded him. The days of his reign were considered of the best after those of king David.

Several men were called by the name 'Hezekiah': like that who came back from the Babylonian captivity, together with Ezra (Nehemiah 1: 17; Ezra 2: 16); Hezekiah of the royal family of Judah (1 Chronicles 3: 23), the great grandfather of the prophet Zephaniah (Zephaniah 1: 11).

### **HIS ACHIEVEMENTS:**

Trusting in God's work more than any other king in Judah (2 Chronicles 32: 27), he translated his faith into several living works: he led religious, civil, political, and military movements:

- 1- He called for repentance among his people; removed the idol-worship, its centers, and rites; proclaimed his practical faith in God, through breaking down all the altars built by his father Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28: 22-25); renewed the covenant with the Lord (2 Chronicles 29: 10); and his faithfulness went forth to break down the bronze serpent, an important symbol for the people of Israel, for the sake of using it in the idol-worship. ... He has done all that to proclaim that God alone has the right to be worshipped.
- 2- The people listened to him; as it is written: "*They obeyed the command of the king*" (2 Chronicles 30: 11, 12). They obeyed his command, not by pressure, but by their own free will.
- 3- During Hezekiah's reign, there was a spiritual reform, for God gave the people "*the singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders at the word of the Lord*" (2 Chronicles 30: 12). That unity to obey God and to renew the covenant with Him, helped to take away the spirit of scattering and division that prevailed in the days of Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 10: 1-9). Hezekiah called upon the remnants in the Northern kingdom to join their brethren in Judah (2 Chronicles 30: 6-9), but few received the call well (2 Chronicles 30: 10-11). The reason for the obedience of the people to walk in the way of the Lord with the unity of heart, was that Hezekiah, himself, was a good role model, according to the testimony of the Holy Book, that, in all works he did to minister to the Lord, "*He did it with his whole heart*". Hezekiah committed himself to minister to the Lord and to men with one heart.
- 4- He renewed the temple of the Lord, established the worship in it; renewed the ministry of the Levites, and sanctified them to the Lord (2 Chronicles 29: 1-36).
- 5- He made Passover for the Lord; led by himself its offering, encouraged the people to offer sacrifices and offerings; and called the remnants in the Northern kingdom to come and partake of the celebration (2 Chronicles 29: 30).

- 6- Despite the military might of Assyria, and its continuous attempts to break down the psyche of the people of Judah (2 Chronicles 22: 9-19); Hezekiah persisted on trusting in God alone, and did not resort to alliance with any of the surrounding nations (2 Chronicles 19: 14-19); contrary to what his father did. For that, God honored his faith by an exalted miracle, that drove away the king of Assyria and his army (2 Chronicles 19: 35-36). At the same time, Hezekiah, through his faith and trust in God, took practical steps to strengthen the defensive strongholds of Jerusalem; and dug springs to provide the city with water in case of siege (2 Chronicles 32: 30)
- 7- He was saved from the siege by Sennacherib king of Assyria on Jerusalem in the year 701 BC (2 Chronicles 32: 30).

### **HIS WEAKNESSES:**

He showed all his treasures to a delegation from Babylon (2 Kings 20: 21; 2 Kings 32: 31); which reveals an inner pride and foolishness that had their effect on those who succeeded him on the throne.

### **WHO WAS SENNACHERIB?**

His name means (god of the moon). He was the leader of the Assyrian army; then became king after the death of his father (705 – 681 BC). He was the son of Sargon the second, and the father of 'Esarhaddon', who succeeded him on the throne after his father was killed by his two brothers.(2 Kings 19: 37). His capital city was 'Nineveh', where he built a palace, he claimed to be indestructible. He did many reforms.

He led his campaign against Judah in the year 701 BC; took over Lashich and 45 other cities from Judah; put Jerusalem under siege, led about 200,000 into captivity. He used to mock Hezekiah's weakness in front of his soldiers (2 Kings 18: 17-36; 2 Chronicles 32: 9-22; Isaiah 36: 1-21).

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 18**

### **THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU CAME OVER ME**

- + Hezekiah forsook his wicked father and attached himself to You;  
Yet he did not hate his father nor uttered a bad word against him;  
But he hated the evil connected to him;  
He challenged the corruption that dwelt upon him;  
And did not inherit the spirit of failure from him;  
He removed the high places that his father and grandfather failed to remove;  
He left no chance for an apostasy to idol-worship;  
And he broke down the bronze serpent which the people turned into an idol to worship;
  
- + The devil did not stand tied-handed;  
But by his long experience set a plan to destroy him;  
He stirred up against him Aram, of a foreign race, to destroy him;  
And stirred up Israel, of his same race, to get rid of him;  
The foreigners joined forces with the kinsmen under the leadership of the devil;  
In weakness, Hezekiah resorted to Assyria to protect him;  
Instead of resorting to You;  
As the war was against the devil himself;

- + Who will support me against the devil, my only enemy?  
In case the foreigners and the kinsmen stirred up animosity against me?  
For the real enemy is the devil with his hidden tricks;  
Be my support and my refuge;  
For who can stand against the devil, but You?
  
- + Assyria succeeded in killing Rezin king of Aram;  
Put Samaria under siege and took it over;  
Humiliated Israel, and led the people captives;  
Made Israel lose her identity as the people of God;  
Made her an example of utter destruction;  
Took over many nations, peoples, and cities;  
And even took over fortified cities of Judah.
  
- + Jerusalem no more represented power in the sight of Assyria;  
For it previously humiliated her with tribute;  
Made Samaria an example before her;  
Nations with their gods collapsed before it;  
The king of Assyria counted himself mightier than the God of Jerusalem;  
Who could protect Hezekiah, his leaders, and his people?
  
- + The Assyrian king Sennacherib sent Rabbeshakeh and his companions;

With the assumption that it would be only a little while, for Judah, her king, and people, to surrender;

Rabbeshakeh assumed that he was the ambassador of the greatest king on earth;

If Hezekiah, king of Judah listened to the voice of his God through the prophets;

The whole world listens to Sennacherib, greater than all gods, through him;

+ Rabbeshakeh was a tool, not in the hands of Sennacherib, but in the hands of the devil;

With pride and arrogance, he stood before the Jews, and uttered serious blasphemes;

As the terror and threats could have no effect on the delegates of Hezekiah;

Rabbeshakeh resorted to deception and smooth words;

He promised the people of Judah to rid them of Hezekiah's deception;

And to provide them with a secure and a happy life in a city he did not mention by name;

He tried to convince them that he came according to the command of their God to chastise Hezekiah;

He portrayed Hezekiah as an enemy of God, whose high places he removed, where the people worshipped God;

Hezekiah's delegates tore off their clothes;

And in bitterness so did king Hezekiah

+ O my God, the devil will never cease to reproach me;

The reproaches of those who reproached You, came over me;

Who will save me from the threats of the devil?

Who will lead me, so that I do not fall in his diverse nets;

He sometimes uses threats, and other times use smooth words to destroy me;

He does his best to provoke in me the spirit of fear, failure, and anxiety;

It is a war between You and him; between Your righteousness and his evil;

Nobody can save me from his tricks but You;

Let Your Holy Spirit protect me, and lift me up above the temptations of the enemy;

Let Him open the gates of heaven; that my soul would be filled with joyful hope;

By You I will overcome; and the hosts of darkness would not prevail on me;

For You are the Light, the Grantor of life, conquest, and glory.

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# CHAPTER 19

## THE DEFEAT OF SENNACHERIB

Having captivated Israel, Assyria intended to captivate Judah as well. The people of Judah were divided into three groups: one saw it better to surrender to Assyria to save themselves from being utterly destroyed; a second group preferred to make an alliance with Egypt against Assyria; and a very small group, intended to put their trust in God who is capable of saving them. King Hezekiah, being of the third group, resorted to prayer, and God sent the prophet Isaiah to confirm to him that his prayer was heard.

1- Hezekiah resorts to Isaiah the man of God	1 - 7
2- Rabshakeh's temporary retreat	8 - 9
3- Rabshakeh's message to Hezekiah	10 - 13
4- Hezekiah displays Rabshakeh's message before the Lord	14 - 19
5- The Lord sends the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah	20 - 34
6- The angel of the Lord strikes the Assyrian army	35
7- Sennacherib's retreat and death	36 – 37

### 1- HEZEKIAH RESORTS TO ISAIAH THE MAN OF GOD:

*“ And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD” (1).*

Having heard Rabshakeh's insolent reproach against the living God, as well as against the king and the leaders, Hezekiah tore his clothes, a sign of intense grief (6: 30), as well as of remorse and repentance (Joel 2: 12 – 13). Tearing his royal clothes, and putting on sackcloth is counted a great deal for a king; but as the living God, Himself, is reproached by such words of blasphemy by Rabbeshakeh,

the king, not enduring the situation ; expressed the bitterness of his soul by tearing his royal clothes and covering himself with sackcloth.

Believing that the Lord is God of the impossible, king Hezekiah expressed his trust in God by presenting repentance, and by going into the house of the Lord to seek His counsel and help.... The problems, indeed, are golden opportunities to make God intervene in our life.

The king did not enter into the house of the Lord to inquire how he should respond to that blasphemer; but to deliver the whole matter into the Lord's hand.

+ Faith without temporal protection, is armed by God.

Through the power of faith, Hezekiah proved that, by his weakness, he is mightier than Sennacherib king of Assyria and of Ninevah.

Sennacherib brought forth the armies of Assyria and Mades

By his huge armies he destroyed the surrounding nations; and headed toward the holy city of the Lord, and concentrated all his possibilities against her;

He sent to Jerusalem a rude message that carried arrogant threats;

Hezekiah received it with grief, carried it to the Lord in His house; cast himself down, together with his people, read aloud the arrogant words, drenched the message with his tears, and trusted in the Lord;

By prayer alone, Hezekiah got conquest over the Assyrians, who suffered serious defeat by the intervention of God;

Once the tears expressed his complaint; ... Once his godly lamentation rose up from a humble heart, ... crossed over the stars of heaven, ... and rushed to the ears of the High Father, the divine gates were shaken and

were opened wide; and an angel with his wings came down, armed with the sword of the Word, and stroke the evil hosts. God was glorified by slaying 185,000 of the sleeping enemy, in one day.

(Fr. Paulinus, bishop of Nola)

*“ Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz” (2)*

Isaiah’s prophetic ministry started in the year Uziah or Azariah died (Isaiah 6: 1), 40 years ago (740 BC). He prophesied in the days of Uziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. ... While Ahaz disregarded Isaiah, Hezekiah, on the other hand, listened to his counsel.

Although Assyria was the greatest universal power at that time, yet it could not overcome Judah, as long as Isaiah was the counselor of the kings.

Eliakim and Shebna, having personally heard the words of blasphemy, insolently uttered by Rabbashakeh, they were the best messengers to be sent by the king to the prophet Isaiah, to express, by their words, attitude, feelings, and the sackcloth by which they covered their bodies, what the wicked Rabbeshakeh said .

*“And they said to him, “Thus says Hezekiah: ‘This day is a day of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth” (3).*

Hezekiah confessed that the kingdom of Judah was helpless in a time she needed to be very strong to confront Assyria, the greatest power on earth.

What preoccupied the heart of Hezekiah was not only the daring of Rabshakeh to reproach the living God, but that the day was a day of trouble, rebuke, and blasphemy on Judah and Jerusalem. He likened that day to the day of childbirth, when there is no more strength to bring the newborn forth; and the matter was in need of the intervention of God Himself, the wonder-Maker

Hezekiah and his men counted that what dwelt upon them and the people, was a chastisement they deserve for their sins. Before complaining against Rabbeshakeh, and the king of Assyria as blasphemers, they did against themselves as sinners who were worthy of chastisement.. They did not suggest a solution to the problem, nor a revenge against Assyria, but sought from the man of God to put the whole case in the hands of God, to do according to His will.

*“ It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the words of the Rabshakeh,)whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach*

*the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left” (4)*

The king seeks from the prophet Isaiah to pray to God to listen to the reproaches of Rabshakeh who was sent by the king of Assyria.

By **“the remnant that is left”**, Assyria has already led Israel (the ten tribes) into captivity. The kingdom of Judah with its two tribes: Judah and Benjamin only remained as “a very few remnant” that needed a divine help and a heavenly intervention to be saved. Although Hezekiah sought from Isaiah to pray for his sake and that of the kingdom, Yet, on his part, he himself went to the house of the Lord, spread the message before Him. ... So it is befitting of us, when we seek from our beloved, whether the living or the departed, to pray for our sake; to pray together with them with the spirit of humility and repentance.

Hezekiah seeks help and support from the “the living God” whom Rabshakeh and Sennacherib reproach; before whom Assyria cannot stand.

“So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah” (5).

*“And Isaiah said to them, “Thus you shall say to your master, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria*

*have blasphemed Me” (6).*

God assures Hezekiah that what the servants of the king of Assyria, were just empty word (6), Even if it sounds fiery and loud, it lacks power. Assyria cannot stand before the Spirit sent upon him (7).

“ Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land” (7)

If Hezekiah, terrified before the threat of Assyria, resorted to God; And the man of God proclaimed to him that Sennacherib will not only fail to enter into Jerusalem, but God will put in him the spirit of terror, and let him hear a rumor that makes him hasten to return to his own land, where he will fall by the sword on the hands of his own sons..

The solution of that problem needs only a spirit, a wind, or a breath from the Lord to blow on the king of Assyria , to be scattered and to perish.

In this prophecy, Isaiah presents four warnings to the king of Assyria:

- 1- God will send on him a spirit, or a breath, that will disturb him, concerning ‘Tirhaka’, king of Ethiopia

- 2- He will hear the horrible news that 185,000 men of his army were killed in one night, without a single soldier lost to Judah
- 3- He will hasten to return to his land in a disgraceful defeat, that he never experienced before.
- 4- He will fall by the sword, not as a hero in a battle, but in the temple of the idol, on the hands of his own sons.

## **2- RABSHAKEH'S TEMPORARY RETREAT:**

“Then *the* Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he heard that he had departed from Lachish” (8)

Rabshakeh did his best to enter Jerusalem by putting it under siege without need to fight a battle; but having returned after addressing the deputies of king Hezekiah, he found out that the king of Assyria has entered into another war against Libnah, drawing the army with him from Lashich, Both locations: Libnah and Lashich are close to each other on Mount Judah south of Jerusalem.

“And the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, “Look, he has come out to make war with you.” So he again sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, ...” (9)

The movement of the Assyrian army was so quick and unexpected, that when Rabshakeh went to Lashich where Sennacherib was fighting, he found out that he has already left it, on account that the king of Ethiopia came to make war against him. And lest Hezekiah would use it as a chance to do any attempt, Rabshakeh sent to him a message mocking and a warning that he will besiege him soon, and seeking from him to surrender, .

As it is well known that 'Tirhaka' has not become a king before the year 690 BC; the one mentioned by the Holy Book was most probably another king of Cush or the Sothern part of Egypt, for by the name 'Tirhaka', many kings of Cush were called at that time.

'Tirhakah' was the king of Upper Egypt. While So (Sabaco) was the king of Lower Egypt; He was a strong king who left many antiquities that reveal his greatness. His name was inscribed in a temple in the city of 'Abou', that he had a multitude of captives of war. The news of Tirhakah' coming with a great army to fight against Assyria, was most probably just a rumor, as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah (7). Which was not strange to the ears of Sennacherib and Rabshekah, who always anticipated an alliance to be made between Judah and Egypt against Assyria.. Rabshekeh previously warned Judah againt such an alliance; likening Egypt to a staff of broken reed, on which, if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it (2 kings 18: 21)

At the same time, moving to confront a battle against Egypt, lest Hezekiah might make any attempt during his absence or preoccupation with another battle, Rabshakeh sent a message to warn Hezekiah, in an attempt to confuse and disturb him, and to confirm to him that Assyria will have a sure and swift victory on Egypt, after which it will come back to put Jerusalem under siege;. That message came attacking the God of Hezekiah; as though the battle was between God and the devil.

### **3- RABSHAKEH'S MESSAGE TO HEZEKIAH:; .**

*"Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying:  
'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying,  
"Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria"  
(10)*

Assuming that he would soon return to put Jerusalem under siege, and to enter into it, his message to Hezekiah conformed to how he previously addressed to him in (2 kings 18: 29)

*“ Look! You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by utterly destroying them; and shall you be delivered?” (11)*

*“Have the gods of the nations delivered those whom my fathers have destroyed, Gozan and Haran and Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar?” (12)*

“**Eden**” here, does not refer to the garden of Eden that came in the Book of Genesis, but refers to another location known nowadays as ‘Bit-Adini’ south of Haran (Ezekiel 27: 23; Amos 1: 5).

*“Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?” (13)*

#### **4- HEZEKIAH SPREADS RABSHAKEH’S MESSAGE BEFORE THE LORD:**

*“And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD” (14).*

Although Hezekiah believed that God is Omnipresent, hears the voice of His believers wherever they are, sees everything, and nothing is hidden before His eyes, Yet the temple, being His own dwelling place, had its honor in His sight. Like a simple child who trusts in his father’s love, wisdom, and ability, Hezekiah hastened to Him in His house, as though to the divine bosom, to be under His protection and mercy.

Hezekiah put the messages that was delivered to him by his delegates, before the Lord Himself in His own holy temple; with complete confidence that, although the Lord was aware of what came to them, but by spreading them before Him, he proclaims his utter trust in the Lord, and puts the serious problem with all its details before the divine Helper, seeking salvation. So it is befitting of every believer to put his own problems with openness and faith before the Lord in His Holy Temple, to anticipate His response and help..

*“Then Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said: “O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth.*

*You have made heaven and earth” (15)*

When Hezekiah resorted to the Supreme King, who is greater than the king of Assyria (18-19); and prayed with faith; the King of kings responded to him. Hezekiah’s prayer is considered an example of the true prayer. For, together with his daring before God, He spoke with the language of reverence.

*“Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God” (16)*

With bitterness, king Hezekiah cried out to the Lord who sits on the cherubim: *“Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear, Open Your eyes, O Lord, and see”*. An expression that the psalmist, as well, kept on saying (Psalm 17: 6; 31: 2; 45: 10); said by someone who feels like a child on his father’s chest, and whispers in his ears; by someone meek and humble, in whom the Lord finds pleasure to hear and see, He who says: *“Learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart”* (Mathew 11: 29)

By saying: *“Incline Your ear, O Lord”*, the believer intends to say to Him: I am unable to express what go on in me by my mouth and tongue; and no one can

hear the moans of my heart, perceive what is in my depths, and partake of my feelings, except You.

- + He will incline His ears if you do not lift up your neck up high. He is close to the humble, and far from the haughty... Even though He is up high, and we are down below; yet we are not forsaken. *“For when we were still (sinners), in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man, will one die; yet perhaps for a good man, someone would even dare to die”* Romans 5: 7, 8); but our Lord died for the sake of the wicked. When we had no worthiness to offer *“For I am poor and needy”* (Psalm 86: 1), the Son of God revealed His great mercy, and died for our sake. The Lord inclines His ear, not to the rich, but to the poor and the needy, namely to the humble who confesses that he is in need of His mercy, and not to the one who feels satisfied, who lifts himself up with pride, as though in need of nothing; he who says: *“God, I thank You that I am not like this tax-collector”*. The Pharisee boasted his worthiness, and the tax-collector confessed his sins. (Luke 18: 11-13).

Do not take what I say, O brethren, that God does not incline His ears to those with gold, silver, and land. Abraham with his riches was poor in spirit and humble, honored and obeyed God’s commandments; counted his riches as nothing; and was even ready to offer his own son, for whom he kept all his riches, a sacrifice according to the command of God (Genesis 22: 10); for us to learn to be poor and needy; whether we are rich or poor.

*“Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands” (17)*

*“and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men’s hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them” (18).*

*“Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone.” (19)*

#### **5- THE LORD SENDS THE PROPHET ISAIAH TO HEZEKIAH:**

*“ Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard.’” (20)*

According to St. Augustine, Whoever calls God will never fall into fear, for there is actually nothing to cause fear.: [Is there fear in losing riches? Of course not!, Yet men fear it. ... Man should rather fear to lose wisdom, which he does not. ... You

may fear to give back the riches, granted to you by God; and you do not mind to lose salvation].

- + When Hezekiah was in affliction, to be saved, he covered himself with sackcloth; ... But when he was in peace and comfort he fell into the haughtiness of heart (2 kings 19: 20) ... When the children of Israel were in affliction, they enormously increased in number; and when God left them to themselves, they went down to their destruction.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“This is the word which the LORD has spoken concerning him: ‘The virgin, the daughter of Zion, Has despised you, laughed you to scorn; The daughter of Jerusalem Has shaken*

*her head behind your back!” (21)*

Whenever God addressed His people, He used to reveal to them their sins, to exhort them to return to Him with repentance, and to enjoy His graces. But whenever He spoke about His people to their oppressors, He spoke with joy. Now, addressing Sennacherib, the Lord says to him: *“The virgin the daughter of Zion, has despised you, and laughed you to scorn, etc.”*. He calls His people *“the daughter of Zion”* (the daughter of Jerusalem); namely the daughter of God who dwells in His city, and enjoys His holy temple; whom God guards and protects, being a beloved daughter of a loving Father. She despises and mocks the king of Assyria, who thinks of himself as greater and stronger than God..

*“Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice, And lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel” (22).*

Sennecharib and his men saw Judah as a pure and beautiful virgin whom they could easily rape; saw her helpless, if compared to the mighty kingdoms that were shaken and terrified, and even surrendered to Assyria, to spare themselves the destruction of their temples, and strongholds. ... Yet the Lord's response came through Isaiah, that Judah is the daughter of Zion, pure and beautiful, in the bosom of her heavenly Father, who grants her strength, joy, and conquest over anyone who dares to stretch a hand to her or to threatens her' in the shadow of the Mighty One, she sits in peace.

Isaiah calls the Lord "*the Holy One of Israel*", he called the Lord "holy" 26 times in his book (see Isaiah 6: 3).

*By your messengers you have reproached the Lord, And said: "By the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, To the limits of Lebanon; I will cut down*

*its tall cedars And its choice cypress trees; I will enter the extremity of its borders, To its fruitful forest" (23)*

Assyria and its leaders boasted that they entered Lebanon, and cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypress trees. They did not say that they defeated its army, because it surrendered without entering into battle against Assyria. Like many other countries, it welcomed his coming, and accepted his bondage; with apparent exultation, for fear of his anger and his revenge; having destroyed even the trees.

The author gives a terrifying portrait of Sennacherib, forcing his way into any country by his many chariots, ascending mountains; and no natural obstacle could stand in his way.

According to St. Augustine, those who do not confess their sins, and in haughtiness enter as though into a battle against God, will have all their weapons on which they depend, broken down.

*"I have dug and drunk strange water, And with the soles of my feet I have dried up all the brooks of defense" (24)*

If Egypt cherishes its great river, Assyria boasts that he will not leave a drop of water for it; he will rob even its drinking water. He probably means that the multitude of foot soldiers of his army, entering any country, even Egypt, dig so many wells to get water, that the underground water will dry up underneath their feet.,

*"Did you not hear long ago How I made it, From ancient times that I formed it? Now I have brought it to pass, that you should be for crushing fortified cities into heaps of ruins" (25)*

By saying: "**Did you not hear?**", he means: Assyria should read history to perceive the long arm of the Living God, whom he dared to reproach; how He has done miracles with His people..

*"Therefore their inhabitants had little power; They were dismayed and confounded; They were as the grass of the field And the green herb, As the grass on the housetops And grain blighted before it is grown" (26).*

*"But I know your dwelling place, Your going out and your coming in, And your rage against Me" (27).*

It is befitting of Assyria to perceive that he had little knowledge of the truth of the living Holy One; ... that this God knows his dwelling place, his going out, and his coming in, and his hidden feelings; ... that he is actually too little to stand before Him in battle; .... that his possibilities are counted as nothing; ... and that Assyria is as grass of the field, as green herb, as the grass on the housetops, and as grain blighted before it is grown. .... How then can he enter into a battle against the Lord of hosts?

*“Because your rage against Me and your tumult Have come up to My ears, Therefore I will put My hook in your nose And My bridle in your lips, And I will turn you back by the way which you came” (28)*

God will put His hook in his nose, and His bridle in his lips, the way Assyria used to humiliate the captives, particularly kings, nobles, and elites; to deal ferociously with them like animals; to find pleasure in torturing them, plucking their eyes, tearing their skin off, a piece by piece, until they die. ... And, what they used to do with the captive, whom they considered as a slave, putting a hook in his nose., it will come back on them; *“For by the same measure they used with the captives, it will be measured back to them, and even more”*.(See Luke 6: 38).

In haughtiness, Sennacherib assumed that what he reached of achievements were because of his might and power; and did not perceive that it was by an allowance of God. If Assyria has humiliated nations and kings, it is befitting of him to perceive his own weakness before the living God, whom he dared to reproach and blaspheme.

+ As for me, Nebuchadnezzar brought me forth in chains to Babylon, namely to the confusion of the mind; he put on me the yoke of bondage; put a hook in my nose; and when he commanded me to sing one of the praises of Zion, I said to him: *“The Lord proclaims liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the Lord”* (See Luke 4: 18).

*“This shall be a sign to you: You shall eat this year such as grows of itself, And in the second year what springs from the same; Also in the third year sow and reap, Plant vineyards*

*and eat the fruit of them” (29)*

As a sign to His people that He will always care for them, in spite of the Assyrian campaigns, that had harmful effect on their crops; God promised that in three years time, they will sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat the full of them; because they will be living in peace from the threats of their enemies (Joel 2: 12-14' Micah 2: 12-13; Zephaniah 3: 8-20).

*“And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah Shall again take root downward, And bear fruit upward” (30)*

The greatest promise is the increasing fruit with the coming of the Messiah; to a holy remnant that believes in Him, and testifies to Him, for the sake of the salvation of all mankind. That is a divine promise; *“For the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this”*

*“ For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, And those who escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this”*  
(31)

In every generation, God cares for the faithful remnant, to the account of His kingdom; He uses them as a spark of fire; which He blows to ignite many by the divine love; and to take away from them the coolness of the lack of faith. God would never disregard a little spark in any people or in any person; For He works with the few as He does with the plenty; to save men anyway..

The prophecy said by Isaiah concerning the “remnant” was fulfilled by the incarnation of the Word of God, and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2).

*“Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: ‘He shall not come into this city, Nor shoot an arrow there, Nor come before it with shield, Nor build a siege mound against it’ (32).*

The Lord gives a promise that Sennacherib will never enter into Jerusalem, and will never use weapons against her. In spite of Sennacherib’s boasting that he has taken over 46 cities of the kingdom of Judah; and that he made Hezekiah a prisoner in Jerusalem, like a bird in a cage; Yet God in His care, did not allow him to take over Jerusalem, nor to attack her with weapons; for the sake of His promise and covenant with David, despite the unfaithfulness and blasphemies of the people (22, 23, 27, 28; 18: 34-35). God gives assurances that the king of Assyria, will, not only fail to take the city by force, but will never enter into her, will not even come at a distance that would allow his army to throw an arrow on her; to come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against her.

Where is the dwelling place of God? In Jerusalem and in Zion. ... In Jerusalem where peace dwells; and in Zion where there is a watchtower. .... I wish the human soul would have the peace of God, would enjoy meditating in Him; and be bound in the church to the Holy Books.

Surely, in it, there will be peace; and it will be the dwelling place of God and His capital. There, God would destroy the glittering arrows of the bows, aimed by the devil.

(St. Jerome)

*“By the way that he came, By the same shall he return; And he shall not come into this city,’ Says the LORD” (33).*

If Rabshakeh has threatened Hezekiah that he will come back to put Jerusalem under siege, he will not return to Jerusalem, but will return with his army to Assyria in disgrace and reproach.

*“‘For I will defend this city, to save it For My own sake and for My servant David’s sake” (34)*

**“For My own sake”**, That promise of not delivering the city to Sennacherib, was not for the sake of the worthiness of its people, but rather for God’s faithfulness, and for His covenant with His servant David. The peace of Jerusalem concerns God Himself; which He never entrusts to anyone else.

The prayers of the saints may support the striving soul that wishes for repentance. But in case she persists on her stubbornness, there will be no benefit for her from their prayers. God says to the prophet Jeremiah: *“Do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you”* (Jeremiah 7: 16; 11: 14). God who said: *“I will defend this city to save it for my own sake, and for My servant David’s sake”* (34), in the days of the righteous Hezekiah, did not utter those words in the days of increasing evil, when He delivered the city to Nebuchadnezzar. ... The formalities of worship appears in the dependence of men upon the prayers of the departed and the striving saints, with no intention for repentance nor remorse on their part. God did not forbid Jeremiah to pray for the sake of the people; for He would be pleased to find hearts open wide with love; that pray for the others with no selfishness. But He confirms to him that his prayers would be of no benefit for a people, unless they, themselves, present repentance.

The striving Jacob benefited from the prayers of his father Isaac; when he said to Laban: *“Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear (the prayers) of Isaac, had been with me, surely now, you would have sent me away empty-handed”* (Genesis 31: 42).

The intercession for the people has been a living part of the work of the prophets, and the priests. The prophet Samuel says: *“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). And in Mitzpah, when the Philistines were stirred up against them, the people said to Samuel: *“Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines”* (1 Samuel 7: 8). So did the prophet Moses, who kept interceding for his people, that the Lord said to him: *“Now, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them; and I will make of you a great nation”* (Exodus 32: 10).

And St. John Chrysostom, being a knowledgeable evangelic man, lest the people would understand the prayers of the saints as laziness and slothfulness in the spiritual strife, we find him confirm:

- How great are the prayers of the saints, if we, as well, work;..
- Yes indeed, the prayers of the saints may have great power, on condition that we repent and reform our life.
- In case we are slothful, we shall have no salvation, not even with the help of the prayers of others. On the contrary, if we are alert and watchful, we can do that even on our own.... Saying this I do not annul the value of the supplications of the saints, but to keep you from slothfully being satisfied with the trust in others, while lying on your backs asleep.

+ You may say: Why should I need the prayers of the saints, if I, myself, am alert?

If we truly think, we shall perceive that we are perpetually in need for their prayers. Paul did not say: Why should I need the prayers of others;

although those who prayed for him were unworthy to pray for him, nor were t on an equal level with him; and yet you still say: Why should I need prayers?!

You are more in need for prayers, if you feel you are not in need of it. Yes indeed! Even if you come to be like Paul, you are in need of prayers.... Do not be haughty, lest you fall.

Do you wish to know the benefits of prayer?

Listen to Jacob say to Laban: "*Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me empty-handed*" (Genesis 31: 42) ... Also listen to God say: "*I will defend this city to save it for my own sake, and for the sake of my servant David*" (34)..He so said in the days of the righteous Hezekiah. For if prayers benefit the wicked who persist on their evil, why did He not say it in the days of Nebudchadnezar, but delivered the city?.... Samuel, as well, prayed for the Israelites and was listened to by God. .... But when? ... When they, on their part pleased God, and fought the enemies. ... You may say: [Why should we need the prayers of others, if we, ourselves, please God? .....Do not say so, O man! .... Yes, there is then, more need for prayer..... Listen to God say to the friends of the righteous 'Job': "*My servant Job shall pray for you*"; (Job 42: 8), for your sins to be forgiven ... Listen to God say by the prophet: "*Even if these three men: Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they will deliver only themselves by their righteousness; they would deliver neither sons nor daughters*" (Ezekiel 14: 14, 16), for evil prevailed again. That was said concerning those three righteous men who prayed and their prayers were not received ... It is befitting of us to ask them to pray for us, to lift their hands up for our sake; but, at the same time, we, on our part, should hold fast to virtue.

- + Behold, While He is known to us, He is also known to the others; He is known to our enemies, reveal His might to them..... Remember how they attacked Hezekiah and put him under siege and made him a prisoner in the city, like a bird in the net; .....Remember how they, all of a sudden, departed, leaving 185,000 dead bodies behind them.
  
- + Huge is the goodness of God, and most probably He grants salvation to the majority for the sake of a few remnants of righteous men. Why should I say: For the sake of a few remnants of righteous men?... For even if there is no righteous in the present life, He would have compassion on the living for the sake of the virtues of those departed; and He would cry out loud: *"I will defend this city, and save it, for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David"* (2 Kings 19: 34).... Good deeds have their activity even to raise the dead. When the widows stood around their departed 'Tabitha', showing Peter what she did when she was with them (Acts 9: 39). ... The best kind of funerals for the departed, that would be of benefit both for the living and the departed, is when his friends give a part of his possessions to the poor; for by this they would make Christ his Heir together with the children of the departed.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + For the sake of David, the sins of his descendants were forgiven; and for the sake of Jesus, the sins of the world were forgiven.

## **6- THE ANGEL OF THE LORD STRIKES THE ASSYRIAN ARMY:**

*“And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose*

*early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead.” (35)*

In the same day Hezekiah got the message sent to him by Rabeshakeh by night, 185,000 of the Assyrian army were killed by one angel of the Lord, while they were asleep in peace and security.

St. Jacob El-Serougi imagines how St. Mary previously encountered Gabriel, the archangel of the Lord, when he was sent by God to deliver to her the good news of the incarnation of the divine Word in her womb (Luke 1: 26-39). It came to her knowledge, then, how the same angel has delivered to the prophet Daniel the good news of the events that will be fulfilled on the hands of her beloved Son. His joy, gladness, and features would never go away from her mind. And how the archangel Michael, the high commander of the hosts of the Lord saved the people by killing 185,000 men of the enemy in one night. But what astonished her the most was, how in the moments of the trial and crucifixion of the Lord, no one of the two archangels moved to testify or to defend Him.

According to some, by "*the angel of the Lord*" who killed 185,000 in one night, is meant the Word of God before the incarnation

Sennacherib, was utterly defeated this time, even though he previously put Hezekiah under siege, and humiliated him; as it came in one of the excavations in the ruins of the city of Nineveh; that Sennacherib attacked Hezekiah, took over 46 strongholds and little towns, captivated a multitude of young and old, males and females; and how he made Hezekiah a prisoner in his capital Jerusalem, like a bird in a cage; and put on him a double tribute.

Commenting on how, at sunset, the Assyrian army were still putting Jerusalem under siege; then, by night, the angel of the Lord came and killed 185,000 of their men; and how, when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses – all dead; In the evening the people were crying, and in the morning they were rejoicing in the salvation of God; Some say that it was a prophecy about the salvation work of the Lord, when He was crucified and died at sunset, and was risen in the early morning of Sunday. At sunset there was weeping when the Lord proclaimed by His cross, the bitterness of sin that He carried on our behalf; and in the early morning He was risen from the dead, to grant us His joyful righteousness and His resurrected life. According to Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem: [Rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Righteousness, the Jews became as though in the evening, denied of the divine light and joy; Whereas the Christians who believed in Christ, became as though in the morning, filled with joy]..

- + In the evening, crying sets its tent, when the light of wisdom was put off in the sinful man, and he fell under the verdict of death; Since that evening , the people were committed to shed tears in the midst of labor and temptations, in anticipation of the dwelling of the daylight of the Lord. It is befitting of man to wait until the morning, to testify to the joy of His resurrection, whose light emerged by the resurrection of our Lord by dawn..

(St. Augustine)

- + Concerning our Lord, the time of the evening was that of His burial; and the morning of the third day was that of His resurrection. ....You, as well, were buried by evening in paradise, and resurrected, as well, on the third day. ... How did that happen on the third day? ..... Let us portray the whole time as follows:

There was one day before the law;

Then a second day under the law;

And a third day under grace; the day that our Head revealed by His resurrection.

To apply this to you; the morning is the time for hope and joy; whereas the present time is that of endurance and tribulations.

(St. Augustine)

- + Weeping, and in tears, Mary whispered to the heavenly hosts:

Come, O Gabriel, see How your Lord is mocked, and how the wicked nail Him on the cross!

And you, O Michael, man of fire, why are you silent? Where is your sword that killed thousands of Assyrians? ... why has your spear of fire cooled down?

If the disciples fled and left the Lord alone; Why have you also left Him, o hosts of fire?

If the earthlies feared death and fled away; How would the immortal keep silent?

When two of you were insulted in the land of Sodom, they set it on fire by their wings.

How then, you did not avenge those who dared to insult your Lord?

The king is reproached, and the heavenly hosts stood silent; the Lord of the fire is hanged on the cross, and the fire is quiet;

Behold, the earthlies spat on His face, and the heavenlies are silent, while their Lord is "*numbered with the transgressors*" (Mark 15: 28)..

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

The morning probably refers to the intervention of the angel of the Lord against Sennacherib; and probably to the resurrection; when the psalmist talks about awakening in the presence of the Lord (Psalm 3: 5; 17: 15).

Rising up to pray in the early morning, is the persistent and consistent seeking of the Lord, before asking help of others. Whoever presents the firstfruit of his morning thoughts to God, will not refrain from dedicating the rest of

the day to Him.

+ The prayers are recited in the early morning, to dedicate the first movements of the soul and mind to the Lord; so as not to care the least for anything but to dedicate our rejoice, exultation, and our hearts' satisfaction

and gladness to thinking of God; before the body come to be burdened during the day by any other work; as it is written: "*To You I will pray,, my voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord*" (Psalm 5: 2-3)

(ST. Basil the Great)

Our conquest is sure as long as we are in a fellowship with the Lord of hosts, who dwells in us by His Holy Spirit; commands the stars to partake of the battle, and sends legions of angels wherever He wants; He is the Lord of

hosts to whom the whole nature submit., He commands to be obeyed.

+ The attack of the Assyrians failed; and the mighty Sennacherib utterly collapsed, by the tears, sackcloth of Hezekiah; humility and fasting of Hezekiah..

(St. Jerome)

- + Prayer sometimes brings the dead back to life; and some other times brings the living to death; like when St. Peter, by his prayer, brought the dead Tabitha back to life (Acts 9: 40); But his prayer caused the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 3-10)... Elisha, the spiritual man, brought the dead son of the Shunammite woman to life (2 kings 4: 32-36); but, by his curse two bears came out of the jungle to devour the young men who scoffed him (2 kings 23=24); ... Hezekiah, likewise, for by his prayer, God added days to his life; and by the power of the Spirit he destroyed the Assyrian army (2 kings 19: 35).

(Martyrus, or Sahdona)

St Luke, in his gospel, mentions the episode of healing the ear of the servant of the high priest, saying: *"And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, 'Permit*

*even this'. And He touched his ear and healed him"* (Luke 22: 50-51); to which St Matthew adds: *"But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword, will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I*

*cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matthew 26: 52, 53).

Here we have two comments: The first is that, If God the Father intended to save Jesus from death, as the Lord of glory Himself says, He would have provided Him with more than twelve legions of angels. If one angel killed

185,000 in one night, what would twelve legions of angels do to those who came to arrest the Lord? ... According to St. John Chrysostom, the Lord said that to His disciples because He saw them terrified to death by the

situation..

The angel of the Lord sent to destroy the Assyrians was not in need of outer tricks, nor show business; but, using his authority, he killed 185,000 of them. The demons, on the contrary, being without authority, try to bring terror

by their tricks on their victims.

(St. (Abba) Anthony the Great)

## 8- SENNACHERIB'S RETREAT AND DEATH:

*“ So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh” (36).*

Sennacherib retreated without fighting against Judah; when God sent one angel who struck 185,000 men of the Assyrian army in one night.

What happened here, happens in one way or another, hidden or manifest, in the life of the church in every generation; as well as in the life of the children of God as members in His church.

*“ Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the*

*land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place” (37)*

**Nisroch**, the traditional god of the province of 'Mesopotamia (Massisa)'. Its image was found in Assyrian excavations, with the head of an eagle, and the winged body of man.

What happened here, took place after twenty years of the salvation of Jerusalem; when Sennacherib was assassinated, and his son 'Esarhaddon' sat on the throne in his father's place (681- 668 BC)

According to some, the book of Judith recites the events that took place after the defeat of Sennacherib king of Assyria in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah (2 kings 19: 35-37; 2 Chronicles 32), when he departed and went

away defeated to Ninevah, where his own sons killed him; and was succeeded by his son Esarhaddon, who invaded many nations, including the Mades, as a revenge against their king, who was beloved by the

Jews.

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 19**

### **UNTIL WHEN WILL THE ENEMY REPROACH YOU, AND HUMILIATE ME?**

- + Sennacherib and Rabshakeh reproached You;  
Assuming that You, like the gods of the nations, are helpless to save;  
You set Assyria a tool to chastise; but he assumed that He is greater than You;  
You sent Your angel who killed 185,000 of his men in one night,
  
- + You are mightier than all the mighty;  
You are my stronghold and my salvation; Therefore whom shall I fear?  
Today is a day of good news of the eternal victory.
  
- + Until when, will the enemy put me under siege?  
And make me lose the glorious liberty of the children of God?  
Until when, will he assume that You are like any of the vain gods of the Gentiles?  
Until when will he reproach You, and humiliate me?  
Until when shall I die of hunger in the siege?  
Let me approach You, and You approach me.  
For You are my Satisfaction, my Treasure, and my Conquest;  
Let me rejoice and exult in my salvation by You;

Let me hasten and preach You, to let all enjoy it together with me;

Let me cry out: [Today is a day of good news];

How can I be slothful, when all my being is shaken?

How can I keep silent, when my life turned into an unceasing feast?

Fill my mouth with Your divine promises, to make me preach them.

=====

# CHAPTER 20

## HEZEKIAH HEALED FROM HIS SICKNESS, THEN FELL INTO VAIN PRIDE

In the last chapter we saw how king Hezekiah, by his living faith and his humility, together with putting his life in the hands of God, could defeat Sennacherib king of Assyria, not by military might, nor by joining forces with Egypt against Assyria, but through the exalted work of the Lord. We saw how he got a divine promise and a prophecy that Sennacherib will never enter into Jerusalem, nor shoot an arrow on it, or come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same way shall he return, and will be assassinated in the temple of the idol on the hands of his own sons. Now Hezekiah challenges death as the last enemy to confront man (1 Corinthians 15: 28); and gets a divine promise to add fifteen years to his age. And when he sought a sign from the prophet that this will happen, he gave it to him... .. That man, great in his faith, who fled before the roaring lion who walks about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5: 8); now falls into the deception of the serpent, namely in vain pride, when he revealed his secrets to the enemy, cherishing his house, storehouses, and his weapons. And his fall destroyed his own sons and his kingdom, even after his death.

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| 1- Hezekiah falls sick and healed                                   | 1 - 6      |
| 2- Isaiah prescribes a medication for Hezekiah                      | 7          |
| 3- Hezekiah requests a sign that the Lord will heal him             | 8 - 11     |
| 4- Berodach-Baladan king of Babylon honors Hezekiah                 | 12         |
| 5- Hezekiah falls into vain pride                                   | 13         |
| 6- The Lord chastises Hezekiah for his vain pride                   | 14 -<br>18 |
| 7- The Lord postpones the execution of His chastisement on Hezekiah | 19         |

### 1- HEZEKIAH FALLS SICK AND HEALED:

*“ In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And  
Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him,  
“Thus says the LORD: ‘Set your house in order, for you  
shall die, and not live.’” (1)*

It is clear from verse 6, that Hezekiah’s sickness happened during the time Sennacherib the Assyrian invaded Jerusalem..

Some may wonder: Could it happen that God alters His decision concerning the life of Hezekiah, as proclaimed on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah?... What God proclaimed on Isaiah’s tongue was not a divine decision, but was according to what should happen according to the natural laws, put by God, Himself, who has the right to change if He so wished. The extension of Hezekiah’s life was previously known by God , and proclaimed as a fruit of the humility shown by the king and his crying out to God. God, therefore did not alter His decision, but presented to the king what is beyond the laws of nature. For according to the sickness that inflicted him, he should die; but God, who allowed for his sickness, granted him healing.

+ Do you wish to know the power of repentance? ... Do you wish to know the strong weapon of salvation; and to perceive the power of confession?

By confession, Hezekiah struck 185,000 of his enemies (2 kings 19: 35). What an amazing thing!, yet it would be counted as nothing if compared to what I shall tell you. For by repentance, the king could get an alteration of the divine utterance already proclaimed. For when Hezekiah got sick, the prophet Isaiah said to him: *“Thus says the Lord, Set your house in order,*

*for you shall die, and not live” (1) ... Could there be any exemption after that? .....Could there be any hope for healing after he said to him: “For you shall die”?!*

But Hezekiah did not cease to repent; and by remembering what is written: *“In returning and rest (weeping) you shall be saved”* (Isaiah 30: 15), *“while in bed ,he turned his face toward the wall, lifting his mind up to heaven* (Where no wall could hinder prayers from reaching heaven), *and prayed to the Lord”* (Isaiah 38), saying to Him: Remember me O Lord, You do not **submit** to time, for You are the Creator of everything; You are the Grantor of the laws of life according to Your will; for our life does not depend upon the day we were born; nor upon the bonding of stars together in one, as some foolishly believe,

According to some fathers, God decides the age of man by His divine wisdom that is beyond the human perception; and sets the natural laws that control his age. If it is God, therefore, who sets the laws, he can over-ride them for the sake of his love for man, .....There are, as well, many other factors, among which is the spiritual life of man; It is allowed for the both the righteous and the wicked to live a long or a short life, to give every chance for the repentance of man, for his salvation, and his enjoyment of the glory.

+ *“Who were cut down before their time; whose foundations were swept away by a flood”* (Job 22: 16). Every man is taken from this life in a time already known before the time began by a divine authority; but it should be known that the Mighty God, in creating us, and His ordinance of our affairs, fixes the limits of our life according to the worthiness of each one of us. He may commit the wicked to live only a short life, lest he would harm those who live uprightly; and He may grant the good man a longer life to be of help to others by his good deeds. Or He may commit the wicked to live a longer life to add more wicked works; and the good man to practice more good works; Or He may hasten to take away the good man, lest, if he lives longer, he may corrupt his innocence.

But it should be taken into consideration that the Almighty God has prior knowledge of the time of death of everyone; no one will die before his designated time. If fifteen years were added to the life of Hezekiah (20:

38), the duration of his life exceeded the limit according to his worthiness, and God knows exactly when He will take him away.

What does it mean: "*He cuts the wicked before their time*", but that those who love the present world, and set themselves for a long life; when their time comes to be taken away from the present life, the long life they imagined would be as though cut away from them to pieces before their time. It is truly said about them: "*Their foundation is swept away by a flood*".

It was said that Cain was the first man to build a city on earth (Genesis 4: 17); In that he made it clear that, being a stranger to the eternal world; he set his foundation on earth; .....being a stranger to the higher things, he founded himself and his heart upon the lowly things, the earthly pleasures.

(Pope Gregory the Great)

- + The long suffering of God, will judge man. For by His perseverance in anticipating the repentance of the sinner, and not of his death; "*For He desires mercy and not sacrifice*" (Hosea 6: 6); He turned His sight from the destruction of the people of Nineveh, He already uttered against them (Jonah 3: 10); and granted Hezekiah an extension of his life (20: 1)

(The scholar Tertullian)

*"Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD" (2)*

Contrary to what Ahazia did when he got sick, Hezekiah resorted to Isaiah, the man of God; and not to Beelzebub, god of Ekron. Hezekiah was a man of prayer (19: 1, 14, 15)

Hezekiah, even though he perceived that there is no point of comparison between his weapons and those of Assyria; nor between his military possibilities and theirs; yet the battle does not depend on the weapons nor on the military possibilities, but rather upon the face of God He turns toward His people, to let them enjoy conquest; or turn it away from them, that the weapons in their hands would lose their might and mission, and would turn from giving protection against the enemy to the contrary. .As *“All things work together for good to those who loved God”* (Romans 8: 28); So will all things work together for the perdition of those who deny Him; and for the conquest of those who fear Him.

*“Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.”*  
*And Hezekiah wept bitterly”* (3).

The main reason for his weeping was that he still had no son to succeed him on the throne, something that caused him anxiety and confusion; as how would the divine promise to the house of David to endure forever, be fulfilled if he has no son to succeed him?. In this Hezekiah’s faith was weak, contrary to that of Abraham, who offered his only son a sacrifice without fear, trusting that God’s promise to him will surely be fulfilled by raising his son from the dead.... It so happened that Hezekiah, after having his life extended, gave birth to his son Manasseh, who, being an idol-worshipper, brought forth God’s wrath over Judah (2 kings 23: 26).

Anyway, being a man of prayer, he did not lose hope in the Lord, but prayed and wrestled; turned his face toward the wall, probably toward the temple, according to the custom of the Jews, to pray to the Lord, saying: *“Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and has done*

*what was good in Your sight*" (3). Hezekiah looked at his life as being a journey during which he walked with God (Genesis 5: 24; I kings 9: 4), with a loyal heart, though not in absolute perfection, but aiming toward it (see Mathew 5: 45), with one mind, with no hesitation nor perversion. He was only preoccupied in his severe illness, not with his authority, riches, wealth,, or pleasures, but with his faithful attachment to God.

Verecundus, an African author, who died in the year 522 AD, cared to discuss the three chapters that bore a Nesturian thought, says that God, with His mercy, looked at Hezekiah, not only to take away death that was about to dwell on him, but He added fifteen years to his life; for which Hezekiah offered Him the praise mentioned in Isaiah 38: 10-20; which he ended by a pledge to God who healed him, saying: "*The Lord was ready to save me. Therefore I will sing my songs with stringed instruments; all the days of my life, in the house of the Lord*" (Isaiah 38: 20).

+ Hearing that he was going to die, Hezekiah did not pray to God to give him more years, but to allow him to stand before God's judgment as he should. Having known how Solomon pleased God by not seeking a longer life, Hezekiah, preparing to his ultimate journey to the Lord, paraded his works, how he walked before the Lord in truth, and with a loyal heart.

Happy is the conscience that remembers the good works in the time of affliction. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Matthew 5: 8; and as is also written: "*Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?'*" (Proverb 20: 9).

To Hezekiah, the perfection of heart is referred, for he broke down the idols, removed the articles of Baal from the temple of God (2 kings 23: 4), crushed the bronze serpent (2 kings 18: 4), beside many other things mentioned in the Holy Book.

(St. Jerome)

- + Nothing is more pleasurable than the sound conscience and the good hope.

In case you want to learn this, ask an elder in the moments just before his departure from this world. If we remind him of the magnificent banquets, the glory, and the honor he enjoyed; and of the good works he did in his days; and inquire which of them would bring him more gladness; we shall see him cover his face for shame of the former, and jump with exultation for being proud of the later. So did Hezekiah when he was sick; he did not remember the magnificent royal life, but only the righteousness, saying: *“Remember, O Lord, I pray, how I walked before You in truth, and with a loyal heart”* (3)

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying...”* (4)

Despite the godliness of king Hezekiah, and his fervent prayers, yet God talked to him through His prophet Isaiah, the way He talked to Jeroboam the second through the prophet Jonah (1: 25). For the personal relationship with God, and the fiery love in the heart of the believer, does not mean his isolation from the church ordinances.

*“Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: “I have heard*

*your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the*

*third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD.” (5)*

The divine command to Isaiah to return to the king and to tell him the divine message, came very quickly; God probably talked to Isaiah mouth to mouth before he came out from the royal palace; while he was giving spiritual counsel to the men of the royal court, concerning the preparations to be taken after the anticipated death of the king.

All along a hundred years of the history of Judah (732-640 BC); Hezekiah was the only king faithful in his relationship with God; and because of his faith, prayers, and tears, God healed him. added years to his life, and saved his land from the Assyrians.

+ God is *“the Father”*, and *“the Father of mercies”* (2 Corinthians 1: 3); described in the prophets as: *“full of compassion and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth”* (Psalm 86: 15;112: 4; 145: 8; Jonah 4: 2)

In the Holy Scripture, we see in book of ‘Jonah’, the magnificent work of mercy that Lord showed to the praying people of Nineveh (Jonah 3: 8); .... Here we see His reaction before the tears of Hezekiah (2 kings 20: 3-4); ..... We see, as well, How the Lord was even ready to forgive Ahab the husband of Isabel on the blood of Naboth the Jezreelite, when His anger calmed down (1 kings 21: 27, 29); .....And how He instantly forgave David when he confessed his sin (2 Samuel 12: 13). .....God actually would rather see the repentance of the sinner, rather than his death; for His mercy, full of compassion (Ezekiel 33: 11).

+ Let us quote the words of the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 10: 6); written to make us believe that the Lord, who Himself is the keeper of the body, is above and beyond all the natural laws pertaining to the body;

(The scholar Tertullian)

- + Weeping itself can lead to the blessed laughter,

(The scholar Origen)

- + There is a (fifth) baptism, namely the baptism of the tears. Every night, David used to drench his bed with his tears.

(St. Gregory the Neizianzen)

- + Who will acquire joy, but him who often weeps; as though he gets the grace of glory to come by the price of his tears.

(St. Ambrose)

- + The increasing tears of sorrow is a gift from God, given through the diligent prayers.

(St. John El-Tabaisy)

*“And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.”*

(6)

It so seems that God has altered His words, which he has already told Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah, for the sake of his prayers and tears emerging from the depth of his heart.....

According to St. Augustine, Hezekiah should die through natural causes like illness; but that addition of fifteen years to his life, was in God's knowledge before the foundation of the world; He knew what Hezekiah was going to do, and what He was going to grant him.

What should preoccupy our minds, is not to research whether God Has already limited Hezekiah's age, then altered it by adding fifteen years to his life; but to perceive the power of prayer with the spirit of repentance in our life; which gave Hezekiah life instead of his imminent death. And that prayer, being an attachment to God, Grantor of life, is able to achieve anything; including to prevail on death, the death of sin

Is there a clearer evidence that, for the sake of mercy and goodness, God may alter His word? The way He did with Hezekiah, His firm and sudden divine utterance to the inhabitants of Nineveh came: "*Forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown*" (Jonah 3: 4 LXX), was appeased through their prayers and fasting; .

+ Having been stricken by immense fear, with the sudden approach of death, Hezekiah's tears and prayers, brought forth to him a temporary postponement of his death for an additional fifteen years (38)

(St. Jerome)

## **2- ISAIAH PRESCRIBES A MEDICATION FOR HEZEKIAH:**

“Then Isaiah said, “Take a lump of figs.” So they took and laid *it* on the boil, and he recovered” (7)

The use of figs for healing inflammations came in the records of the Middle East in the old, in tablets that go back to the twentieth century BC, in the days of 'Ras Shemra. ... In a talk by St. Basil the Great, that the art of medicine should not be forsaken, on account of being abused by some; he referred to Isaiah's request for the use of a lump of figs to heal king Hezekiah.

+ Not only should we not forsake the art of medicine on account of being abused by some, It is befitting of us not to do the same with all the arts collectively. it is befitting of us not to wrong Him who granted this divine gift, by putting all our hope for healing in the hands of the physician; and not to do like the fools who call their physician 'savior'. On another aspect, to deny the benefits we may get from the art of medicine, would be a sign of evil nature.

No doubt, Hezekiah did not assume that his healing was due to the lump of figs, but he surely glorified God who created the figs.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + The way the vineyard, in many instances, refers to the Lord Himself; the fig tree refers to the Holy Spirit; by which the Lord brings gladness into the hearts of men (Psalm 104: 5). Isaiah commanded them to use a lump of figs , which is the fruit of the Spirit, to heal Hezekiah; For, according to the apostle, healing starts by love; saying: “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,, gentleness, self-control*” Galatians 5: 22, 23). Because of the great gifts of these fruits, the prophet calls them ‘spiritual figs’. And the prophet Micah also says: “*Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid*” (Micah 4: 4). Now, therefore, those who resort to the Spirit to find comfort under His shade; and under the shade of the Word, shall never be terrified, nor shall fear from those who disturb the hearts of men.

(Father Methodeus)

### **3- A SIGN THAT THE LORD OF HEZEKIAH WILL HEAL HIM:**

*“And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “What is the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD the third day?” (8)*

*“Then Isaiah said, “This is the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing which He has spoken: Shall the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?” (9)*

Hezekiah’s longing to be healed and to have his life extended, shows by seeking a sign that the Lord will fulfill what He promised him through Isaiah the man of God. According to some, that specific gift from God was given to Hezekiah on account of that, so far, he had no son to succeed him on the throne. .... his son Manasseh actually sat on the throne while being twelve years old (2 kings 21: 2); which indicates that he was born some time during the fifteen years added to his father’s life. ... Unfortunately, because Manasseh corrupted all the good works in the Lord, that were done by His father,.Hezekiah’s persistence on his demand, therefore, seemed, not for edification. ... On another aspect, having been healed of his sickness, when an envoy from the king of Babylon came to honor him and to give him gifts, he fell into vain pride, not befitting of a godly man, as we can see in this chapter.

That shows how it is befitting of us to have our demands according to the will of God; to deliver to Him all our affairs, for we do not know what is for our edification and the edification of others.

To Isaiah’s question (9),

*“Hezekiah answered, “It is an easy thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward ten degrees” (10)*

**‘The sundial of Ahaz’**, or ‘the steps of Ahaz’, or ‘the ladder of Ahaz’. Like that of the Egyptians at that time, was little steps on which the shadow ascends and descends.

We can deduce from what came in 2 Chronicles 32: 31, how that event was so beyond nature; that when the Astronomers of Babylon, while studying the

movements of the stars, perceived that a strange unnatural phenomenon has taken place; and their investigation showed what happened with king Hezekiah, they informed their king about it.

*“So Isaiah the prophet cried out to the LORD, and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz” (11)*

Listening to Hezekiah’s prayer, seeing his tears, and remembering His promise to David his father, God gave him his heart’s desire, that he uttered with his tongue; He granted him a longer life, a salvation from the Assyrian king, and the protection of Jerusalem, the capital of his kingdom.

God gave Hezekiah a sign according to his request, by which he differed from his wicked father Ahaz, who refrained from seeking a sign from God (Isaiah 7:10).

God, the Father of all lights, who moves and guides the sun for our edification, gave a sign that He will fulfill His promise to Hezekiah, by bringing the shadow ten degrees backward (8); which some refer to an eclipse of the sun that happened on 11 January 689 BC. ... As the sun is the true measure of time, and as it is in the hand of God, who moves history, events, and time itself; God used it in the time of Joshua (Joshua 10: 12), in the days of Hezekiah; on the day the Lord of glory was crucified, and will use it before His ultimate coming, when the sun will be darkened. ... In response to Isaiah’s prayer for the sake of Hezekiah, the Lord stopped the laws of nature, and brought time backwards.

It was said: *“He commands the sun, and it does not rise; He seals off the stars”* (Job 9: 7). Nobody can imagine that the sun would ever fail to rise in its designated time put by the Lord; but, by His command, in the days of Joshua the son of Nun, it stood still to serve His people (Joshua 10: 12); a miracle that proclaims God’s amazing work through His ministers. According to St. Athanasius the apostolic, [If the sun stood still over Gibeon , and the moon, in the Valley of Aijalon, yet, that was not the work of Joshua the son of Nun, but that of

the Lord who listened to his prayer, ... He who commanded the Red Sea to divide; and, on the cross darkened the sun (Matthew 27: 45); He, alone, who can seal the stars, or hide them from our sight. By His will, He keeps the order of nature, as an extension of the process of creation., and as one of the works of the divine care.

Commenting on the amazing signs done by the Lord, both in the old and the new covenants, St. John Chrysostom says: [God can change the nature of things, as He did with the sea (John 14: 12), with the sun here, with the sun and the moon in the time of Joshua the son of Nun (Joshua 13: 10); with the furnace of fire (Daniel 3); and with the hungry lions (Daniel 6: 22). ... But the greatest sign of all, is changing the nature of man; when he said to the prophet Moses: "*I have made you as god to Pharaoh*" Exodus 7: 1); and directs us to make our souls a temple for Him (1 Corinthians 6: 19). If heaven is known as the dwelling place of God, We, as well; by Christ, have become heaven; as according to the Holy Book: "*He raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2: 6). And granted us to perform works greater than what He, Himself, has done].

### **How could the shadow be brought backward?**

Obviously it was a sign; .... for if a sign is easily performed, it would not be a sign to confirm the word of God (2 kings 20: 10). And any attempt to interpret what did happen, would be no more than guessing. God can force nature to fulfill His will in a way that challenges any natural interpretations.

It was claimed that king Hezekiah, rejoiced in God's amazing work with him, composed ten of the fifteen psalms of Ascension (Psalm 120 -134), in analogy with the ten steps of Ahaz of the sun; the sign presented to him by the prophet Isaiah, as a confirmation that God will heal him (8-10; Isaiah 38). In addition to those ten psalms, four more were written by David, and one written by Solomon, to add up to fifteen psalms, analogous to the fifteen years that the Lord added to

Hezekiah's life. ... Those psalms were sung by the priests while ascending the fifteen steps of the temple, in the feast of the tabernacles (7 steps leading up to the outer court; and 8 steps leading to the inner court). It was said the groups of Levites used to stand on each step to sing one of these psalms, as a part of the religious rite. ... According to many fathers, these psalms or praises, were the spiritual ladder on which the soul ascends in the heavenlies, from one stage to another, to settle ultimately in the bosom of the Father, ascending from glory to glory; from the land of sojourn, toward the Higher Jerusalem.

#### **4- BERODOCH-BALADAN, KING OF BABYLON HONORS HEZEKIAH:**

*“At that time Berodach-Baladan<sup>[a]</sup> the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick” (12)*

According to some scholars, the news of the healing of king Hezekiah reached Babylon, because its Astronomers, through following the movements of the stars, perceived that a strange phenomenon has happened; and through investigations they came to know about the divine sign given to king Hezekiah to confirm his healing.

And the news might have also come to Babylon through some Jews who were working as eunuchs (namely prominent officers) in the Babylonian royal court, before Babylon came to be a great empire that overcame Assyria; and before the Babylonian captivation of Judah.

Berodach-Baladan was most probably the same Berodach-Baladan, the Chaldean king who reigned twice (721-710 and 703 BC), bore a persistent animosity against Assyria, that defeated him twice; and drove him out of Babylon. He sent that message to king Hezekiah, most probably to seek alliance with

Judah against Assyria; particularly after hearing about the amazing salvation of Hezekiah from the Assyrian army (2 Chronicles 32: 31).

According to the sequence of events mentioned in 2 kings 20: 12-15, the envoy sent by Berodach-Baladan (Isaiah 39: 1), came to visit Hezekiah after Sennacherib's invasion in the year 701 BC; Yet , according to historical evidences, Berodach-Baladan fled to Elan after he was driven out of Babylon in the year 701 BC by Sennacherib. How then could the time sequence conform to those verses?

The answer would be: Although the narration concerning Sennacherib's invasion , mentioned in the second book of the kings and of Isaiah, came before the narration of the visit of the envoy of Berodach-Baladan, that does not mean that this is the right sequence of events. The second chapter of the second book of the kings, starts by the phrase: "*It came to pass when ...*"; but this does not mean that the events referred to, necessarily happened according to that time sequence. For this phrase is often used to move to a new paragraph; as we see in (Judges 17: 6; 18: 1; 19: 1; Esther 1: 2). ... The Hebrew syllable 'hem' could be translated here as (those) or (these); and the context would choose between the two. Those words could therefore be translated as "In **these** days".

The visit mentioned in (2 kings 20: 12-15) actually happened before the Sennacherib's invasion that came in (2 king 18-19); which confirms the fact that Hezekiah died sometime between the years 698 and 696 BC. And as he was given fifteen years extension of his age, it means that his illness was around the year 713 BC., a time sequence which conform to the visit of the envoy of Berodach-Baladan, who later on, driven away by Sennacherib in the year 702 BC.

## **5- HEZEKIAH FALLS INTO VAIN PRIDE:**

*“And Hezekiah was attentive to them, and showed them all the house of his treasures—the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all<sup>l</sup> his armory—all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them” (13)*

One of the distinctive features of the Holy Book is that it sometimes refers to the weaknesses of the heroes of faith like Abraham, David, and Hezekiah. ... By his spiritual wisdom, humility, and trust in God, Hezekiah was saved from the Assyrian army; and by his foolishness, having become a captive of ego, he showed all his treasures, and all his armory to foreigners.

- + When Hezekiah was in affliction, he clothed himself in sackcloth;; while when he became secure, he fell into the vanity of heart (2 kings 19: 20). Hence the Holy Book warns, saying: *“When you have eaten, and are full – then beware”* (Deuteronomy 6: 11, 12).

## 6- GOD CHASTISES HEZEKIAH FOR HIS PRIDE: .

*“ Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?” So Hezekiah said, “They came from a far country,*

*from Babylon.” (14)*

*“And he said, “What have they seen in your house?” So Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.” (15)*

*“ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD” (16):*

*‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the LORD” (17)*

AS THE PROPHET ISAIAH HAS PREVIOUSLY CONVEYED TO KING HEZEKIAH A DIVINE MESSAGE FULL OF COMPASSION AND MERCY (19; 20: 1-11); HE CONVEYS TO HIM NOW< A MESSAGE OF CHASTISEMENT FROM THE LORD.

Babylon at that time was a small nation; that no one would ever imagine that it could defeat Assyria; becomes a huge empire, invades Jerusalem, robs all her treasures, and captivates her noble men in the year 586 BC.

- + Concerning Hezekiah king of Judah, we read that he was a righteous man, perfect in every thing; and yet by one arrow of vain pride, he fell. Boasting and arrogance have overcome him who, by one prayer could have 185,000 soldiers of the Assyrian army killed in one night, by an angel of the Lord..

I shall not display the long list of Hezekiah's virtues; I shall only mention one of them. After God proclaimed, on the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, the day of his death; Hezekiah, by one prayer, could have his life extended by fifteen year; the sun was brought ten degrees backwards, after it has already advanced toward sunset; and by that huge sign that broke down the laws of nature, the day extended to two days in the whole world. and confirmed to Hezekiah that God will grant him healing and longer life.

But following those unbelievable great signs, and those evidences of Hezekiah's good nature, let us read what the Holy Book says about what brought such a great man down: *"But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor shown him, for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem"* (2 Chronicles 32: 24-26)

(St. John Cassian)

*"And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon"* (18)

That most probably happened before the rebellion of Babylon against the Assyrian empire; and before Sennacherib destroy it in the year 689 BC; His son Esarhaddon who rebuilt the city of Babylon, did not perceive that it will use the chance of the weakness of the Assyrian kings, to rebel again against Assyria, destroy it in the year 612 BC, and come to be the major power in the world.

- + Now, calm down, you who boast in yourself... Stop being arrogant! ... If your wealth lifts your heart up, it would not be greater than that of Hezekiah, whose haughtiness made it carried whole to Babylon. And if you boast in your children, they will eventually be carried to that monster, like those of king Hezekiah who became eunuchs in the royal court of Babylon (2 kings 20: 18; Isaiah 39: 7). And if you boast in your wisdom, you would never be as wise as the ruler of Tyre; to whom it was said: *"Behold, you are wiser than Daniel; There is no secret that can be hidden from you"* (Ezekiel 28: 3). And if your mind is lifted up because of your long life, its years would not be longer than those of the ruler of Tyre who reigned over his kingdom during the days of many of the kings of Judah; ... And because of the many years of the king of Tyre, his heart kept saying to him all the time: *"I am a god, and I sit in the seats of gods in the midst of the seas"* Yet the prophet Ezekiel said to him: *"You are a man, and not a god"* (Ezekiel 28: 2). ... When the king of Tyre *"walked back and forth in the midst of the fiery stones, God said to him: " You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created; till iniquity was found in you; ... I destroyed you , O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones"* (Ezekiel 28: 14, 16).

- + In the parable of the rich man who boasted of the plentiful yield of his land; *“But God said to him: :’Fool, this night your soul will be required of you; the whose will those things be which you have provided?(Luke12: 20).*The same way king Hezekiah heard from Isaiah the painful destiny of his kingdom, after he glorified himself before the envoy of the king of Babylon by boasting in his precious treasures.

(The scholar Tertullian)

## **7- POSTPONEMENT OF THE EXECUTION OF THE CHATISEMENT ON HEZEKIAH: .**

*“So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good!” For he said, “Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?” (18)*

Saying “*The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good. For He said: Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?*”; means that Hezekiah perceived that he erred by his behavior before the envoy of the king of Babylon; and with humility he bowed before God’s chastisement, although it may seem that he did not care much for the chastisement to fall upon the whole kingdom because of his own sin , as long as it will happen after his death – a pitiful attitude, not befitting of such a great leader, who should care even for the generations to come of his people.

- + Surely, the righteous Hezekiah did not rejoice in that the calamity of captivity will dwell upon his sons; but he could not protest against the will of God, but, demonstrated his virtue, being a humble servant. So it is befitting of man to receive the judgment of God with perseverance, even while in captivity; as Jeremiah’s happiness did not decrease, even while in captivity (Jeremiah 37-38); nor did Daniel (Daniel 1: 6), nor Ezra (Ezra 7: 6), nor did the happiness of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were less than before they fell in captivity (Daniel 3); into which they fell to provide the people with comfort, together with hope of being released from it.
- + Once man’s heart does not search itself, it does not perceive the extent of the losses he suffers, nor recognize their seriousness. Hezekiah did not perceive that he erred while showing off his treasures to foreigners. What

we do when we err in our hearts, may sometimes be hidden from other people's perception, but not from the sight of God.

**8- HEZEKIAH DIES, AND MANASSEH HIS SON SITS ON THE THRONE:**

*“Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah—all his might, and how he made a pool and a tunnel and brought water into the city—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (20)*

The tunnel which Hezekiah dug from the Gihon spring to Siloam pool to bring water to the Eastern part of Jerusalem, has been an achievement of great importance, particularly if it so happen that Jerusalem is put under siege.

*“So Hezekiah rested with his fathers. Then Manasseh his son reigned in his place” (21).*

Commenting on that Hezekiah was considered as a symbol of the Lord Christ, St. Aphrahat presents to us a simplified portrait of this symbol, together a comparison between Christ and Hezekiah.

+ As Hezekiah was prosecuted and reproached by Sennacherib, his enemy; So was Jesus prosecuted by the foolish people;

As by praying, Hezekiah overcame his adversary, By Jesus' cross, the devil, our adversary, was overcome;

As Hezekiah was the king of Israel, Jesus was the King of the whole world;

As when Hezekiah got ill, the shadow of the sun was brought backward ten steps; With Jesus' passion, the sun was darkened;

As Hezekiah's enemies turned into dead corpses, Jesus' enemies will be cast under His feet;

As Hezekiah was of David's household; Jesus was the Son of David, according to the flesh;

As Hezekiah said: *“Peace and truth will be in my days”* (19). Jesus said to His disciples: *“My peace I leave with you: (John 14: 27);*

As when Hezekiah prayed, he was healed of his illness, Jesus prayed, and He resurrected from the dwelling place of the dead;

As Hezekiah, after he was healed of his illness, had his life extended, Jesus, after His resurrection, has got a great glory;

While, after the extension of his life, Hezekiah eventually died; Jesus, on the other hand, after His resurrection, death had no authority on Him forever.

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 20;**

**BY YOU, I CHALLENGE THE LION; AND WITHOUT YOU, I SHALL BE  
DECEIVED BY THE SERPENT**

- + As the enemy approached like a vicious lion;  
King Hezekiah tore his clothes, and showed contrition before God;  
He resorted to the man of God to support him by his prayers;  
Sennacherib, the lion who crushed many kingdoms;

And counted himself capable of challenging the living God;  
Utterly collapsed, and could not enter into the city of God;  
He lost the might of his army, even without entering into a battle;  
The lion Sennacherib returned to his land, a laughing stock before all nations;  
His own two sons turned into enemies;  
They assassinated their own father, while worshipping his idol god.

+ Grant me, O Lord, the spirit of might, so that I would not be terrified before the roaring lion;

Let the devil wander everywhere; but he will find no place for himself in my heart;

For, as long as You dwell in me, the kingdom of darkness will not be able to crawl into me;

By You I challenge the devil, whom You crushed by Your cross.

+ Behold, the illness, with his fangs. attacks my weak body;

According to the law of nature, I cannot resist it;

But, being the heavenly Physician, Your authority is greater than all the natural laws;

You allow for the illness, but You heal by Your might;

You restore me to life, and bless every second in my life;

You grant me, not fifteen years, as a divine gift;

But You grant me Your Life , as a deposit of the eternal life;

With the spirit of conquest and exultation:

I shall sing together with the apostle,

*“O death, Where is your sting? O Hades, Where is your victory?”* (1 Corinthians 15: 55).

+ I will not seek physical healing;

Nor a long life on this earth;

But I will seek Your Holy Kingdom in my depths;

Guide my life in the holiness that is Yours;

Grant me to enjoy You, O the Way, the Truth, and the Life;

+ Let the life of Your people be in Your hands;

Lead the church by Your Spirit; and grant her power, love, and humility;

Unfortunately, Hezekiah cared for his own life to be filled with peace;

And did not care for what would dwell upon the generations to come after him;

Grant Your church love, to embrace all generations to come;

Grant Your church peace and help; until the time You come to us on the clouds;

We anticipate Your glorious coming on the clouds;

When will You come, and carry us into the bosom of Your Father?

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# CHAPTER 21

## MANASSEH THE EVIL KING, THE SON OF HEZEKIAH

Hezekiah was a good man, who cleansed the temple of all the pagan abominations. But after his death, his son Manasseh, who sat on the throne when he was 12 years of age; was the most evil of the kings, spread idol-worship, and abominations, together with violence and blood shedding; and the people came to be more evil than the nations (2-9).

Here it shows how serious it would be when the leader's heart is so defiled to defile his people; so that prayers without sound repentance would be rejected, even if they are raised by Moses, Samuel, or Jeremiah. God's wrath would dwell upon the congregation corrupted by the evil leadership.

The prophet Isaiah talks about the era of Manasseh, the king who shed so much innocent blood (21; 2 Chronicles 33), that "*The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil. He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness*" (Isaiah 57: 1, 2). This more obviously applies in the days of the antichrist, when the man of sin reigns in the temple of the Lord, and persecutes the church" (2 Thessalonians 2: 4 etc.); to be said: "*Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?*" (Revelation 13: 4); "*It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation; ... Here is the patience and the faith of the saints*" (Revelation 13: 7, 10); Before such evil, it is said: "*From the face of evil, the righteous is taken away*"; as the righteous are destroyed, persecuted, or killed.

The life of Manasseh reveals to us the personal responsibility of every man in his own relationship with God. King Manasseh, being evil, he did his best to corrupt every reform that was done by his father the good king; ... The good Josiah, was the son of the evil Manasseh; the son of the righteous Hezekiah, the son of the evil Ahaz..

God allowed for Manasseh to reign for 55 years, namely more than any king of the two kingdoms; probably to chastise the people who did not care for the reforms done by the good king Hezekiah, but they formally received them during his life; and once he died, they soon revealed their inner corruption, and their opposition of the worship of the true God.

The believer may wonder: What is my role, being someone with no authority in my society? ... It is befitting of every believer to pray for the sake of the kings, the rulers, and those with authority (1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8), for the Lord's sake.

- 1- Manasseh seduced his people to do more evil than the nations whom God had cast out before the children of Israel 1 - 9
- 2- God threatens chastisements  
10 - 18
- 3- Amon, the son of Manasseh walked in his father's evil ways  
19 - 22
- 4- Amon assassinated, and his brother Josiah reigns in his place.  
23 - 26

**1- MANASSEH SEDUCED HIS PEOPLE TO DO MORE EVIL THAN THE NATIONS WHOM GOD HAD CAST OUT BEFORE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL:**

“Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Hephzibah.” (1)

Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah reigned for 55 years (697-642), the longest reign of the divided kingdom. In his time the kingdom reached the climax of evil, although there was peace between Assyria and Judah, in the days of Esarhaddon(681-668 BC), and of Assurbanipal (668-626 BC).. Although Manasseh was not a good king, yet God intended to reveal His own faithfulness (God’s) toward His people, despite the unfaithfulness of the king, the leaders and the people.

Because Hezekiah, the good king, has been short-sighted in his care for the nation as a whole, and for his own family in particular, his son was raised, not taking after his good father, but after his evil grandfather Ahaz. He adopted the practices of the evil Babylonians and Canaanites, whom God had cast out before the children of Israel, and given the later the promised land.. Manasseh, not listening to the warnings of the prophet, led his people to sin.(2 Chronicles 33).

The righteous Joseph gave the name Manasseh to his firstborn son; saying: “*For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house*” (Genesis 41: 51).. And Hezekiah probably did the same because God healed him of his illness, and gave him seed after he feared to die childless, and therefore made him forget all his toil. When Manasseh was born, his father was 42 years old, three years after he was healed of his illness.

**“Hephzibah”, the name means** (My pleasure is in her) (Isaiah 62: 4).

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel” (2).*

Because of his young age, Manasseh boasted being a king, and counted himself wiser than his father; lived according to his own evil desires, till he became enslaved by them. But when God allowed for him to fall into captivity, he repented and returned to his kingdom (2 Chronicles 33: 12).

Although the reform done by king Hezekiah brought joy to the people (2 Chronicles 29: 36), yet temporarily and not from the heart, And once Manasseh reigned when he was only 12 years old, the leaders seduced him to return to idol-worship. Besides, it so seemed that the prophet Isaiah, who was the counselor of his father and grandfather, died..

That was the first time God allowed for the extension of the reign of such an evil king all that time, But probably because many of the leaders and the people pretended to be religious all the days of his good father; and had no fear of the Lord in their hearts, God intended to expose those evil men before their own eyes, in the hope that they might repent and return to Him. And on another aspect, God probably allowed it, so that when the evil king is captivated to Babylon, he would eventually show remorse, repent, be forgiven by the Lord, and be brought back to his throne. By that God would reveal His longsuffering with the wicked, in anticipation of their repentance.

+ Manasseh was evil to a great extent (2 kings 21: 2-7). He sawed and tore the flesh of the prophet Isaiah, was defiled with all the abominations of idol-worship, and covered Jerusalem with the blood of the innocent. But when he fell into captivity, he used his experience and knowledge to resort to repentance as a healing tool. According to the Holy Book, when he got very humble before the Lord , and prayed fervently to Him, God responded to his supplication and brought him back to his kingdom. ... If therefore, repentance saved someone who has sawn, and torn a prophet, will it not save you, who did not commit such a great evil?

+ I did not seek it from Him; but He carried me on His shoulder and brought me into His fold;

By my own free will, I was defeated, and my sins made me go astray. But, once I showed remorse, repented, and came back, Will He not open the door before me, lest I am devoured by the wolves?

In spite of having His hands nailed, He did not forsake me; for I am His beloved, although my sins alienated me from Him;

Now, being humiliated by sin, I came back; Will He receive me as a rejected branch?

O my Judge!... my Evil would never surpass Your compassion!

No My Lord, I shall not say that my evil is too great to be forgiven!

Repentance, O Compassionate, often reversed Your judgments; Having already issued Your decision to destroy Nineveh, Her great sins did not make You reject her, once she repented. ... You never rejected a

repentant..

The law-Giver said: "*It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs*" (Matthew 15: 26); but repentance say: [Yes, but it is good for the little dogs to feed on the crumbs which fall from their

masters' tables]

Hasten, O repentant soul, toward repentance, and live.... Behold, you hear your Lord vows: "*I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner*" (Ezekiel 33: 11).

Do not seek to remain in your sins, lest you die;... Return to Him as Sarah returned to Abraham;

Have no pleasure in the world, as Sarah did not prefer the king's banquet to her intimate relationship with Abraham;

If you do return, He will spread His arms, receive you, carries you, and introduce you to His Father, who will also rejoice in you, love you, and say to You:

[Behold, our lost image is found;

Behold, our kidnapped daughter has returned;

Behold, Our possessions robbed by strangers, returned to us.

There will be joy in heaven, for the angels will be glad to receive you, will rejoice in your repentance, and will praise the Father who received you; the Son; and the Holy Spirit who brought you back.

To the Holy Trinity, the glory, the praise, and the greatness, forever,  
Amen.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

- + Indeed, the wise man hastens to repent; whereas the foolish man finds pleasure to remain in them; “*The righteous accuses himself*” (Proverb 18: 17); whereas the wicked defends himself. The righteous begins his talk

by revealing his sin; whereas the other counters the accusation by more talk, in an attempt to cover them up.

(St. Ambrose)

*“For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he*

*worshiped all the host of heaven and served them” (3)*

**Baal;** The Phoenician god, in whose worship Israel fell since the era of the judges (Judges 2: 130. Manasseh set an idol of Baal in the temple of the living God (3, 5, 7)

**Worshipping all the hosts of heaven”;** probably goes back to the time of Ahaz (33; 12); taken after the Assyrians and the Chaldeans, whose Astrologists claimed to know the future by watching the movements of the stars, and that these movements have their effect upon running the issues of the world. The stars are called “*the hosts of heaven*” on account of their multitude and system. ... Here, according to some, it does not refer to the angels and the heavenly hosts, but to those hosts of heavens who have previously fallen.

Although worshipping the hosts of heaven was utterly forbidden by the law of God (Deuteronomy 4: 19; 17: 2-7); and attacked by the prophets (Isaiah 47: 13; Amos 5: 26); yet Manasseh listened, neither to the law of God, nor to the prophets (7, 8; 2 Chronicles 33: 2-10)..

*“He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, “In Jerusalem I will put My name.” (4)*

Manasseh not only built altars for the Baal, and made wooden images in the house of the Lord, but his people committed adultery, there, under the pretence of dedication to the Lord.

The house of the Lord had two courts: an inner court (1 Kings 6: 36), or 'the court of the priests' (2 Chronicles 4: 9); and an outer bigger court (1 Kings 7: 8), that included the king's palace (1 Kings 7: 9; 2 Chronicles 4: 9); and all the buildings of the temple, etc. ... Manasseh, not only built altars of Baal in outer places the way king Solomon did, but set them in the same place where God put His name

*“And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD” (5).*

Also he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke *Him* to anger” (6)

The Israelites worshipped the god 'Molech' after they entered the promised land; even king Solomon built a temple for him on the Mount of Olives (1 Kings 11: 70; and Manasseh made his son pass through the fire, to honor him. The statute of that god was made of bronze, with two hands stretched forward to receive the child offered to him as a sacrifice. They used to set fire inside the bronze statute until it becomes red-hot, then put the child on the stretched hands amid the sound of drums and dancing around; until the child burns completely. According to some, that was done to honor the star 'Saturn', god of agriculture of the Romans; while others count it as an honor to the sun, and still others refer it to the star 'Atared (in Arabic)' (god of commerce, eloquence, craftiness, and robbery, for the Romans); and according to some it was to honor the star 'Venus', god of love and beauty of the Romans, etc..

*“He even set a carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the LORD had said to David and to Solomon his son, “In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have*

*chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever” (7)*

**The carved image of Asherah** probably made according to a design taken from Assyria; was in the form of a pillar adorned with horns of rams; and on its top, an image of a palm tree, and a metal net with images of palm trees, pomegranates, and pine, all around; and signs that referred to fertility and sexual organs, to stir evil desires up.

*“and I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers—only if they are careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and*

*according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them.” (8)*

*“But they paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel” (9).*

After parading a list of the transgressions of Manasseh, from ugly practices of the abominations of the nations, to defiling the house of the Lord, by some way or another, the book said that Manasseh *“seduced his people to do more evil than the nations that God had cast out before the children of Israel”*.... They came to be more evil than those nations, on account of that, although they knew the true God, had the law, and have the prophets; yet they worshipped many and diverse gods; whereas the nations, on the other hand, each worshipped her own god.

The Lord Christ says: *“That servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself, or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few; For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more”* (Luke 12: 47, 48)

- + The servant who knows his master’s will, disregard it and does not do according to it, as a commitment he has to obey, being counted in obvious reproach, will be beaten with many stripes. ... But why does he who does not know it, be beaten? .....Because if he would care to know it, he could..

It is a strict judgment under which those who know fall; as shown by the disciple of the Lord Christ, who says: *“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment”* (James 3: 1). The spiritual gifts are abundant for the rulers of the people; according to the words written by the apostle Paul to his blessed disciple Timothy, saying: *“May the Lord give you understanding in all things”* (2 Timothy 2: 7); 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).. From this it is clear that, from those whom the Savior of all gives more, He will require more.

What are the virtues He requires from us? ... To be steadfast in faith and in the sound teaching, to be well established in hope, in unshakable perseverance, in unconquerable spiritual power; and in courage in every good progress. By that we come to be role models for others in the evangelic life. Living like that we would be worthy of the crown Christ prepares for us. By, and with whom, be the praise, and dominion to the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever, Amen.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + Notice how He seriously and clearly distinguishes between, sinning while knowing, and sinning without. ....Nevertheless, we should not seek refuge under the claim of ignorance; for there is difference between being ignorant, and not willing to know. ... *“He has ceased to be wise, and to do good”* (Psalm 36: 3); has the wrong will, and no right to excuse himself by ignorance.... Yet even ignorance does not justify man, nor save him from the eternal fire; but may make the punishment less severe; for he rightly says: *“taking vengeance on those who do not know God”* (2 Thessalonian 1: 8).

(St. Augustine)

- + What excuse do we have, who entered the royal palace, counted worthy to enter into the divine temple; and came to be partners in the enjoyment of the holy sacraments -- the forgivers of the sins; and yet we walk in evil more than the Greeks (the Gentiles), who did not partake of those privileges.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## **2- GOD THREATENS CHASTISEMENT:**

“And the LORD spoke by His servants the prophets, saying,...” (10)

*“Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols),*  
(11)

God sent to them His servants the prophets: Hosea, Joel, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Isaiah, to provide them with the counsels and instructions of God; and in case they do not listen, to provide them with prophetic warnings.

God’s talk through His prophet here, came in the form of a statement of accusation against the king and his whole kingdoms; according to which the verdict would be issued against them, if they do not return to the Lord with repentance.

By the ‘Amorites’ here, he refers to all the Canaanites (1 Kings 21: 26; Amos 2: 9, 10).

When the king sins, he who is seen by his people as a role model, they follow his example. Hence, when Manasseh worshipped the idols, all the kingdom of Judah followed suit; even though a few remnant remained faithful to the Lord.

*“Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle”* (12)

To proclaim the seriousness of His chastisement, God proclaims: *“Whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle”*, an expression that came in (1 Samuel 3: 11), when God told Samuel, the little prophet, about what will dwell upon the house of Eli the priest, that would be forever destroyed, that no sacrifice nor offering would atone.; .....Also came in (2 Kings 21: 12) when He talked about the evil that

will dwell upon Jerusalem and Judah because of the abominations done by king Manasseh, who shed innocent blood, so plentiful to fill Jerusalem;..... And used by the prophet Jeremiah against the priests and the kings, with all the people, who followed their suit. This expression refers to committing a great evil that makes whoever hears it tremble; and it usually reveals what would follow the threats of great bitterness.

In Jeremiah, it came: *“Behold, I will bring such a catastrophe on this place, that whoever hears it, his ears will tingle”* (Jeremiah 19: 3). ... Yet, speaking about the chastisement that will dwell upon them, even though God is the Lord of the heavenly hosts; he delivers His people, as though in weakness, for the sake of their eternal salvation.

If God chooses to take revenge against the wicked, whatever great is his wickedness, He would not resort to threats, but would allow for the chastisements to dwell without warning. But now, He threatens, to provoke Manasseh and those with him to repent, to lift those chastisements from them; which was confirmed by St. John Chrysostom in many situations.

*“And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down”* (13).

This parable God presents as a strong warning. If the people of Judah were terrified for what happened to Israel of bitterness; what came upon the kingdom of Israel, will also come upon the kingdom of Judah; for there is no partiality with God. The desolation of Samaria was great, it lost everything, as one wipes a dish, leaves no traces of food in it, and turns it upside down. .... In a similar way the measuring line and the plummet are used for building, as well as for demolition.

**“As one wipes a dish”**, namely, nothing will be left in Jerusalem of her glory and riches. This expression implies some kind of despise; to liken Jerusalem to a dish, and her inhabitants to dirt that should be wiped out.

The Lord says through Isaiah: *“I will make justice the measuring line , and righteousness the plummet”* (Isaiah 28: 17); And *“David measured them off with a line. With two lines he measured off those to be put to death, and with one full line those to be kept alive”* (1 Samuel 8: 2)..

*“So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies”* (14)

By saying: *“I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance”*, God does not mean to annul His covenant with David (Psalm 89: 30-37); but He means to say that Judah that was counted as a remnant of the inheritance of the kingdom of God, will not be exempted from being chastised on her sins.

God’s inheritance is His people whom He cherishes. Yet, when the kingdom of Israel dissented and rejected the Levite priesthood, of the seed of Aaron, and also rejected David’s house; the Lord rejected that part of His inheritance; and counted the kingdom of Judah the remnant of His inheritance, and so it remained for as long as 140 years, until it also fell into captivity.

*“because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day”* (15)

The Holy Book (the Old Testament), is not a record of God’s wrath upon His people, as much as it is a record of His longsuffering on them along history, since He brought them out of Egypt on the hand of the prophet Moses, anticipating from them to bear fruit; but they, instead, bore rebellion, stubbornness, and oppression against the divine Truth.

***“They have done evil in My sight”***. On the roofs of their houses they worshipped all the hosts of heaven; they poured drinks to other gods (Jeremiah 19: 13); they made cakes for the queen of heaven in the streets of Jerusalem; they built the high places of Tophet, which is in the Valley of the sons of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire (Jeremiah 7: 31). And, in the house of the Lord, there were booths of the perverted persons, where the women wove hangings for the wooden images (2 kings 23: 7). The rulers were like roaring lions, the judges like vicious wolves, the prophets were insolent and treacherous; and the priests have polluted the sanctuary, and done violence to the law (Zephaniah 3: 3-4). In the city there were plunder, violence, strife, contention, and perverse judgment (Habakkuk 1: 3-4)

*“Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD” (16)*

The believers faithful to the Lord, were subject, not only to afflictions, but also to blood-shedding (Joel 3: 19); which probably refers to the innocent children who were offered, against their will, by their own fathers as human burnt offerings to the idols,

In the tradition it came that, in the midst of the collective slaughters done by Manasseh, He sawed the prophet Isaiah into two halves, when he attempted to hide in a hollow lump of wood (Hebrew 11: 37-38); and he probably killed other prophets in that time, as well. It is clear that many of those who held fast to the worship of the living God, and rejected the idol-worship were martyred, and their blood covered the streets of Jerusalem..

*“ Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh—all that he did, and the sin that he committed—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?” (17)*

Not caring for the warnings given to him by the men of God -- the prophets, Manasseh ended up being led a prisoner by the king of Assyria; and once in captivity he returned to God; About it him it is written: *“When he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God , and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and God received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then, Manasseh knew that the Lord was God”* (2 Chronicles 33: 12-13)

- + You heard, O beloved children, how the Lord punished Manasseh for some time, for being addicted to idol-worship, and for killing a multitude of innocent people; But, once he repented, God received him, forgave his iniquities, and restored to him his kingdom. .... God, not only forgives the repentant, but restores to them their previous honors (2 Chronicles 33: 12-13).

(The by-laws of the saintly apostles)

- + Although Manasseh committed uncountable iniquities; stretched his hand to the saints, brought abominations into the house of the Lord, filled the city with blood; and did many things beyond imagination; Yet, after doing all that great evil for an extended time, he had his soul utterly cleansed through searching himself, and by repentance.. ... There is no sin that does not come under the power of repentance, nor does not open the way before it; but, rather, by the grace of Christ, if we intend to change, He will help us to do. ... If you intend to be good, nothing can stand in your way, except for the devil, who has no authority, if you choose what is best for yourself, and draw God to help you.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + If Manasseh chose to meditate in his evil deeds, he would, most probably have despaired in reform and repentance, and would have lost everything he gained later on; But meditating, instead in the limitless compassion of God, he could break up the shackles of the devil, and wrestle against him.

*“So Manasseh rested with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza. Then his son Amon reigned in his place” (18).*

**The garden of Uzza**”, It is obvious that he was not buried in the tombs of the kings of Judah; but, according to some, the garden of Uzza was a sacred sanctuary of an imaginary god.. Fifteen kings of Judah were buried in the city of David; while Manasseh and his son Amon were buried in the garden of Uzza;

and out of four others, one was buried in Egypt, two in Babylon, and one 'Jehoiakim was not buried.

### **3- AMON, THE SON OF MANASSEH WALKED IN HIS FATHER'S WAY:**

“Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah” (19)

That evil king followed the lead of his evil father; as did Ahaziah who followed that of his evil father Ahab (1 Kings 22: 51-53).

It so seems that some of the people who did not approve of idol-worship, killed Amon, to reign his eight years son, Josiah, in his lace, in an attempt to return to the worship of the living God. They surrounded him since his childhood with every way to help him bind with the faith in God.

**Jotbah;** probably the same Jotbathah mentioned in the Book of Numbers (33: 33).

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done”* (20).

*“So he walked in all the ways that his father had walked; and he served the idols that his father had served, and worshiped them”* (21).

- + No sin is more serious than idol-worship; for it is a rebellion against God; and yet even this sin could be forgiven by true repentance. ... But, in case someone takes an adversary position, and does not care for God's punishment, saying: *“I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my heart”* (Deuteronomy 29: 19); such a man will not be forgiven;; he would be like Amon the son of Manasseh ... ; who, to justify his

disobedience, he said in his heart: [Like my father who was very disobedient, then he repented in his old age; I shall also walk according to my heart's desire, then will eventually return to God, when I grow old].. He, accordingly did evil in the sight of God more so than all his predecessors, God utterly destroyed him, denied him his good land, his servants conspired against him, and killed him in his own house, after reigning only for two years.

(By-lawas of the saintly apostles)

#### **4- AMMON ASSASINATED, AND HIS SON JOSIAH REIGNED IN HIS PLACE:**

*“He forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD” (22).*

*“Then the servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his own house” (23).*

The book did not refer to the reason behind his assassination, whether because of his evil, or for some political reasons, including his relationship with Assyria.

*“ But the people of the land executed all those who had conspired against King Amon. Then the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place”.(24)*

*“ Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?” (25)*

“And he was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza. Then Josiah his son reigned in his place” (26).

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 21**

**LET YOUR WORD SHINE ITS LIGHT IN MY HEART**

**AND LET YOUR HOLY SPIRIT WORKS IN MY LIFE**

+ How could king Manasseh justify his corruption?

He was raised in the house of his godly father;

And You sent to him prophets who uttered Your Word;

And, with longsuffering, You endured him.

+ O my God! You sent to me, not an angel, an archangel, or a prophet for my salvation;

But You Yourself came down to me, and carried my reproach on the cross;

You opened the gate of paradise before me;

And let me in need of nothing, but the abundance of Your love and grace.

+ Let Your word shine its light in my heart

So that darkness would never crawl into my depths;

Let Your Holy Spirit work in my life;

For Your Word will shed light on my way

Your Spirit will carry me, and I will fly up in air;

+ Make sin bitter in my mouth, so as not to desire it;

Reveal to me the secrets of Your love;

So that I throw myself in Your bosoms, returning to You;

You are the whole love and mercy;

### **HEZEKIAH THE GOOD KING AND MANASSEH HIS EVIL SON**

<b>HEZEKIAH THE GOOD KING</b>	<b>MANASSEH, HIS EVIL SON</b>
1- He trusted in the Lord God, so that none was like him among all the kings (2 kings 18: 5)	1- He did evil in the sight of the Lord (33: 1)
2- He cared for the house of the Lord, and for the worship in it (2 Chronicles 29)	2- He rebuilt the high places which were broken down by his father
3- He celebrated again the Feast of Passover, and called to partake of it, the people from both kingdoms; and their prayers reached heaven	3- He seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to follow the lead of the Gentiles
4- He exhorted the people to obey the Lord.	4- He and his people did not heed the Word of the Lord.
5-The angel of the Lord saved him and his people from Assyria.  Hezekiah had an abundance of riches and honor, and prospered in everything he did	5- He was led captive to Babylon shackled in bronze chains.

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# CHAPTER 22

## JOSIAH, THE GOOD KING

The sitting of Josiah, the good king on Juda's throne, was the last chance given by God to Judah, that was utterly corrupted during the 57 years of the reigns of the evil kings Manasseh and his son Amon. Yes, the good Hezekiah preceded them; but, as we saw, despite the huge reforms made by him, many of the leaders and the people, who did not fear God, were not faithful in their response to Hezekiah's reforms; that once he died, they hastened to adopt a movement of corruption, through their influence upon the young king.

The extent of evil reached by the kingdom of Judah, was shown in that the temple was completely deserted; no one knew where the book of the law was kept; and finding it was a huge surprise, even to Hilkiyah the high priest, as well as to the king, and his scribe. Despite the uprightness of Josiah's heart, he had no knowledge even of the broad lines of the book of the law; and when he heard what came in it, he tore his clothes, and sought from some leaders like Hilkiyah the high priest, to go to 'Huldah' the prophetess, to ask the Lord what they should do.

Knowing the unfaithfulness of the people and of many of the leaders, the Lord proclaimed the captivity of Judah; after gathering the king to his fathers in peace; so that his eyes will not see all the calamity that will dwell upon this place.

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1- The king Josiah reigns over Judah                  | 1 – 2 |
| 2- Josiah repairs the Lord's house                    | 3 - 7 |
| 3- The book of the law discovered in the Lord's house | 8 - 9 |
| 4- The king reads the book, and his reaction to it    | 10 -  |
| 11  |       |
| 5- The king sends an envoy to 'Hulda' the prophetess  | 12 -  |
| 14  |       |

6- The wrath of the Lord proclaimed over the kingdom  
17

15 -

7- A divine proclamation that king Josiah will be gathered to his fathers  
18 – 20

## **1- THE KID JOSIAH REIGNS OVER JUDAH:**

*“Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozka” (1).*

The word ‘Josiah’ in Hebrew means (Jehovah heals) or (The Lord helps); the same as the word ‘Cyrus’ (Isaiah 44: 28; 45: 1).

Despite sitting on the throne while still a kid, Josiah was not influenced by the wickedness of his father Amon, nor by that of his grandfather Manasseh. God opened his eyes, and gave him the grace to learn from their faults. On him apply the words of the Lord to the prophet Ezekiel: *“Yet you say: Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father? Because the son has done what is lawful and right; and has kept all my statutes and observed them, he shall surely live”* (Ezekiel 18: 19).

That amazing king came to be a magnificent role model; he did not become haughty, even though he received the reign while still a little kid; probably on account of that he was surrounded by the few remnant holy for the Lord, to whose counsel he listened and responded; among whom was most probably Zephaniah the prophet.

He was one of the good king; if not the best king in Israel and Judah, since king David. He started good, continued to be good, and ended his life holy for the Lord.

Speaking about the importance of giving honor to a young bishop, St. Agnatus of Antioch presented certain examples of young personalities who were worthy of every reverence and honor; he said:

[*“There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding; Great men are not always wise; nor do the aged always understand justice”* (Job 32: 8-9). The wise Daniel, while 12 years old, had the divine Spirit, by which he muted the white-haired elders, who were false witnesses, adulterers who were guilty to desire the beauty of other men’s wives (Daniel 12). ... Samuel, while still a little kid, rebuked Eli the priest who was 90 years old, for honoring his sons more than God (1 Samuel 3: 1). ...Jeremiah received his mission from the Lord, who said to him: *“Do not say I am a youth (a kid)”* (Jeremiah 1: 7).....So did Solomon and Josiah: The former, when he became a king when he was 12 years old, issued an awesome verdict in the case of the two women concerning the disputed infant (1 kings 3: 16); and the later, who became king when he was 8 years old (2 kings 22: 23), destroyed the altars and temples of the idols.

Young age, therefore should not be despised, if it is dedicated to God; .....But, whoever has an evil mind, is despised, even though he is an elder and full of days.

To Timothy, the young bishop, bearer of Christ, his mentor St. Paul said: *“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct,...”* (1 Timothy 4: 12).

In the by-laws of the saintly apostles, it came that it is possible to ordain a young bishop, if he is of good conduct, and has a good testimony by his neighbors:

- + Solomon became king over Israel when he was 12 years old (1 kings 12 LXX); Josiah, when he was 8 years old, reigned with righteousness; and Joash, when he was seven years old (2 Chronicles 24: 1; 2 Chronicles 11: 3, 4); and all of them reigned with righteousness. Therefore, if the one

chosen for a position of leadership, is a young man, he should be meek, gentle, and tranquil; for God, through Isaiah, says: “*On this one I look: on him who is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word*” (Isaiah 66: 2). And according to the same concept, it came in the gospel: “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5: 5).

(The by-laws of the saintly apostles)

Josiah's mother, was mentioned, most probably, because she had a vital role in raising the little kid in his childhood and youth. Her name 'Jedidah' is feminine of 'Jedidiah', the second name of Solomon (2 Samuel 12: 25), given to him by the Lord through the prophet Nathan, meaning (beloved by Jehovah).;

That woman (beloved by Jehovah), who bore the spirit of the church of Christ, His beloved bride, fed her infant suckling Josiah, the pure milk of faith; whose fruits were:

- 1- Even though many of the leaders and the people were corrupt, yet he did not follow their lead, but, remaining faithful in his love for the Lord; he came to be like a shining star in the middle of a ~~xxxxxxxx~~ dark generation. By his glory inside, he challenged evil, and never made truce with it.
- 2- He was preoccupied with repairing the house of the Lord, whatever the cost would be.
- 3- Having discovered the Book of the Law, he honored it, by turning his own heart into a secure safe to accommodate it. He did not tear it off to calm his conscience, like what another king did, but tore his own royal clothes, to receive instead, by the grace of God, the attire of righteousness that sin would not be able to corrupt.
- 4- Having lived by his heart with his saintly father, king David, he was qualified by the Lord, even in the time of great tribulation, to be gathered

together with his fathers; to save him from seeing what was to dwell upon the kingdom of great calamity. So, the son beloved by God was gathered to the saints beloved in the Lord.

*“And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (2)*

Even though Josiah received the reign while still 8 years old, yet we find no other king who utterly obeyed the Lord the way he did..

The new generations are usually accused of being non-committal and immature; a view as old as man, since his fall. But Josiah, and the like, confirm that many of the new generations are wiser, more pure and holy than some of the present generation. The pure infant Josiah was not to be compared to his evil father Amon or to his grandfather Manasseh.

He began his reforms when he was 26 years of age; but his holy life in his childhood and youth, was a deposit that supported him in his great achievements.

Josiah walked in the upright way of the Lord; and kept on longing to consummate the holy will of God; never to divert outside God's love and grace to the right or to the left.

## **2- JOSIAH REPAIRS THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:**

*“Now it came to pass, in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the scribe, the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the house of the LORD, saying...” (3):*

In the eighteenth year of his reign (622 BC), Josiah began his mission to repair the house of the Lord (4-7; 2 Chronicles 34: 8-33). In 2 Chronicles 34: 3-7..... But it came that in his eighth year of age, he began seeking the God of his father David; and in the eighteenth year of age, he began to cleanse Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images and statutes; as well as the altars in Manasseh, Ephraim, Simon, and up to Nephtali. At that time, the prophet Jeremiah, starting his mission (1 Jeremiah 2), came to support the young king in his endeavor.

**Shaphan;** the official scribe of the State, under the reign of Josiah, helped the king in his efforts; was mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah; and his son 'Ahikam' stood on Jeremiah's side to save him from those who sought to put him to death (Jeremiah 26: 24; 39: 14). If that was the same 'Shaphan' mentioned in Jeremiah 25: 24, 'Gamrieh' would be the brother of Ahikam. The name 'Gamrieh' has been rather common in the seventh century BC; One of the messages of 'Lachish' (the first tablet) mentioned 'Gamrieh' in the year 519 BC. Shaphan unfortunately gave birth to a corrupt son who led idol-worship in the era of Ezekiel.

+ Josiah removed the idol-worship introduced by his grandfather Manasseh, and broke down the pagan temples and altars.. And at the eighteenth year of his reign, he gave the command to the priests to atone for the temple, and to start repairing it. He hired workers to gather together stones and other building materials; and set aside the necessary funds for the expected expenses. In this he was imitating his great grandfather Joash in his religious endeavors, and his godly zeal (2 Kings 12: 4-16). Repairing the temple at that time, was not a simple matter, after 55 years of neglect and misuse of its sanctuaries (2 Kings 21: 1-18).

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian).

*“Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may count the money which has been brought into the house of the LORD, which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people” (4).*

Hilkiah the priest played a main role in the religious reform efforts of the young king; and the repair of the temple was under his supervision.

As the house of the lord was neglected for so many years, particularly in the days of his grandfather Manasseh, whose reign extended for 55 years, as well as in the days of his father Amon, no one was preoccupied with worshipping the living God, nor with His house; And most probably a large sum of money offered to the house accumulated, without any interest to care for the building along the years. The king, therefore sent to the high priest to use the accumulated money to repair the house. Within the period since starting his reign when he was eight years old, until he reached 26 years of age, the king, together with his guardians, carried out many reforms concerning on several aspects; including the removal of all traces of idol-worship. We can say that it was a period of preparation for the repair the temple, and to care for the worship of the living God.

*“And let them deliver it into the hand of those doing the work, who are the overseers in the house of the LORD; let them give it to those who are in the house of the LORD doing the work, to repair the damages of the house” (5)*

Even though it is well known that with every good work, the devil would stir up oppressors; yet, on another aspect, it gives every man according to the worthiness of his heart, As Josiah's heart was pure, and he cleansed his kingdom of all traces of idol-worship; we heard nothing about any oppression worth mentioning; for God granted him and those working together with him, grace; and the oppression was counted as nothing, to be mentioned by the book; and God provided them with workers to repair the house of the Lord, of those who work with holy zeal and faithfulness (7)

We often plan and set accounts, that would seem difficult, if not impossible, when we seek reform; But there is an important element that controls all those things. If we sanctify ourselves, truly and secretly, to the account of the kingdom of God; We would let the Holy One, Himself, lead the movement of repair; and provide faithful men who work with strong and holy zeal.

*<sup>6</sup> to carpenters and builders and masons—and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house” (6)*

*“However there need be no accounting made with them of the money delivered into their hand, because they deal faithfully.” (7)*

### **3- THE DISCOVERY OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:**

*“Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.” And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it” (8)*

According to some, by the book of the law, most probably, is meant the five books of Moses; the book of Deuteronomy, or parts thereof (Deuteronomy 28 to Deuteronomy 31); which include the renewal of the covenant with God in the plains of Moab; by which He strongly warns those who corrupt the Word and the worship of God. This book, which was usually put beside the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 31: 26), was either hidden, or was moved to another location during the reign of the evil kings Manasseh and Amon, to protect it against their evil..

Because of a long series of evil kings, the book of the law of God was forgotten. At that time there were only few copies of the written law; which were disregarded by the evil kings; and even the priests and the Levites did their

religious services without a book. It could have been taken by someone, lest if the people happen to see and read it, they might cry on their multitude of sins.

Through God's care it was discovered in the days of Josiah, who was full of zeal toward the worship of God, the temple, and the law; .....For if it was discovered in the days of any other king, he probably would have torn it off or burned it; the way king Zedekiah did with the prophecies of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36: 23). And God allowed for its discovery in that particular time, for captivity was close at hand, but was temporarily postponed for Josiah's sake (19-20).

It was important to let the whole people at that time hear it, to perceive that the only way to return from captivity was through repentance and the return to God, and not through any human planning or military power. For captivity happens, not because of any lack or a decrease in the military possibilities, but because of the persistence upon evil, whether by the leaders or the people.

According to the statute, a copy of the law had to be kept beside the ark of the covenant in the most holy place (Deuteronomy 31: 25-26). But it disappeared during the reign of the evil kings, particularly Manasseh and Amon, for one of the following reasons:

- a- As the temple and the worship in it was neglected, and no one was preoccupied with it.....; it could have been discarded in a corner, for not knowing its value; and with time no one would remember where it was put.
- b- One of the evil kings might intentionally get rid of it, not through tearing or burning it, but simply hiding it in a secure place, lest anyone might think of reading it. And with time it will no longer see the light.
- c- With the spreading of idol-worship, one of the faithful might have intentionally hidden it, lest if it falls into the king's hand, he would tear or burn it.

d- Any way, by God and His exalted care, He allowed for it to be kept hidden, for some reason or another, to appear in the days of Josiah the good king, to be read before the kingdom come to fall into captivity.

*“So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word, saying, “Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of those who*

*do the work, who oversee the house of the LORD.” (9)*

#### **4- READING THE BOOK, AND THE KING’S REACTION TO IT:**

*“Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read it before the king” (10).*

Listening to the Word of God for the first time in his life, the young king tore his clothes in true repentance. He did not intend to keep walking in his life according to his human mind, but to start walking according to the Word of God.

*“Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes” (11)*

The Word of God has its activity in the life of the believer. Hearing the Word of God, and perceiving its might, the king tore his clothes, and instantly began to reform, and to correct the way the people were going. The saintly fathers give us their experience with the Word of God.

The king, rejoicing to find the copy of the book of the law of God, he did not intend just to keep it in his royal palace as a king of blessing; nor to keep it in the archives of the State, as a valuable original document; but he commanded his scribe Shaphan to read it before him; Hearing its contents, he tore his clothes,

and kept what he heard in his heart and mind, to enjoy repentance, and the renewal of the covenant with God.

- + The knowledge of the holy books strengthens the spirit, purifies the conscience, takes away the tyrant evil desires, deepens the virtue, exalts the mind, provides the ability to confront the unexpected surprises, protects against the strokes of the devil, moves us to heaven itself, liberates man from the body, and grants him wings to fly.
- + Great is the benefit of the holy books. Its helps bring to us every satisfaction, as proclaimed by the apostle Paul, saying: "*For whatever things were written before, were written for our learning, ... upon whom the ends of the ages have come*" (Romans 15: 4; 1 Corinthians 10: 11). The divine sayings are a treasure, a rich source of medications, by which man – if he so chooses – would quench the fire of pride, enjoy peaceful sleep, tread upon the love of Money underneath his feet, despise sufferings, enjoy confidence, and acquire perseverance.
- + If the devil cannot approach our house when the Holy Book is put in it; how much more would any evil spirit be able to enter into, or approach, a soul that bears evangelical feelings.

You, therefore should sanctify your soul and body.

Let that be in your heart and on your tongue.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Your learning is full of eyes on every side; to cleanse your way of offenses.  
  
By his humility, the king enjoyed the activity of the Word of the Lord in his life.
- + We should not read the holy books, full of humility, when we have the spirit of pride;

Unless the soul, plunges by humility, underneath the dust, it will not be able to appreciate the beauty of the holy Books.

As the books of the divine Son teaches you humility, do not read it, while puffed up with pride;

The Son of the One High up, came down from heaven; and while being above all, He was seen as the lowest of people; and He says to you: *"Learn from Me; for I am meek and humble in heart"*.

+ Before Your Word, I am like a learner; and by Your teaching I can reach the Truth.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

## **5- THE KING SENDS AN ENVOY TO 'HOLDA' THE PROPHETESS:**

*"Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Michaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, ..." (12)*

*"Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against*

*us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us" (13)*

It is obvious here that the book of the law was there at the time of their fathers, then recently lost. Hearing the words of the law, and perceiving that his kingdom had utterly perverted from God; king Josiah took practical steps toward reform. According to the apostle Paul: *"By the law is the knowledge of sin"* (Romans 3: 20). The practical treatment is to encounter the Savior, the Forgiver of sins; saying: *"The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith"* (Galatians 3; 24).

*“So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe*

*. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her” (14)*

**Huldah the prophetess:** The Holy Book mentioned a number of prophetesses, given holy gifts, like Miriam, sister of Aaron, who took the timbrel in her hand, among the women, and sang the song of conquest after crossing over the Red Sea (Exodus 15: 20) ; Deborah who judged Israel; the wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8: 3), Huldah the prophetess, (14); ‘Ana’ the daughter of Phanuel (Luke 2: 36), and the four daughters of Philip the preacher (Acts 21: 9). Talking, as well, about false prophetess; who turned the word of God into trade and material profit, the prophet Ezekiel says: *“Thus says the Lord God: ‘Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep yourselves alive? And will you profane Me among My people for handfuls of barley, and for pieces of bread; killing people who should not die, and keeping people alive, who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies?’”* (Ezekiel 13: 18, 19).

The Holy Book referred to Huldah the prophetess only here, and in 2 Chronicles 34: 22-28). But it is obvious how the spiritual leaders cherished her views and thoughts in the Lord. She was flared with the holy zeal, talked to God, who revealed to her the secrets of His plans for the kingdom. She prophesied in the days of the prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah; and it is claimed that her husband Shallum was a relative of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 22: 7-12).

The scholar Origen wonders, if the apostle Paul commands the women to keep silent in the church; How could there be prophetesses in both the old and the new covenants.

+ If the four daughters of Philip the preacher prophesied? (Acts 21: 9); why are our prophetesses not allowed to do the same?

We can answer this by saying:

- a- To be allowed to talk, our prophetesses should show signs of prophecy in them
- b- Even though the four daughters of Philip the preacher prophesied, they, however, did not do it in the church. Deborah, as well, in the old covenant, even though she was a prophetess (Judges 4: 4), there was no reference to that she ever addressed the people, like Isaiah or Jeremiah; and the same thing applies to Huldah (2 kings 22: 14)

+ (A prayer recited in the rite of the ordinance of deacons)

[O eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of man and woman; Who provided the Holy Spirit to Miriam, Deborah, Ana, and Huldah (Exodus 15: 20; Judges 4: 4; Luke 2: 36; 2 kings 22: 14); Who allowed it for His only begotten Son to be born by a woman ...

(The by-laws of the saintly apostles)

- + Women prophesied in the old, like Miriam the sister of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15: 20), Deborah (Judges 4: 4; Huldah (14); Judith (Judith 8), (the former in the days of Josiah, and the later in the days of Darius); So did St. Mary, mother of God, her relative Elizabeth, and Ana (Luke 1, 2); and in our days, the four daughters of Philip the preacher (Acts 21: 9). But those women, however, did not despise their men, but kept their honor. Now, if there are, among you those who were granted a certain gift – whether man or woman – let him be humble to please God.

(The by-laws of the saintly apostles)

- + We should not marvel to hear that Josiah king of Judah, sought the counsel of Huldah the prophetess, wife of Shallum; when the captivity was close, and the wrath of God was about to fall upon Jerusalem; for so is in the Holy Book; when the saintly men fail, women are commended to put men to shame.

(St. Jerome)

According to some, the king's command to the high priest, the scribe, and the other leader, to go to inquire from Huldah the prophetess, in his name, about how to avoid the curses included in the book of the law, is unique; when there were other prophets at the time. Yet Jeremiah who has already started his prophetic work, was in Anathoth, his home town, where it was difficult to communicate with him, because of the adversary attitude against him from the people there, who have accused him of national treason.; and the prophet Zephania has not yet started his prophetic work, had not yet started yet. Although the high priest and the scribe were aware of the holy issues, yet, the king feared, that because of their position, they might not dare to utter openly concerning the curses and the troubles that are to come on the kingdom. That is why the king preferred to resort to the prophetess; for the prophets were known to talk frankly, and not hide anything that will occur over the land because of the wrath of God.

## **6- THE WRATH OF GOD IS PROCLAIMED OVER THE KINGDOM:**

*“Then she said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to Me” (15),*

*“Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read” (16)*

*“because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath shall be aroused*

*against this place and shall not be quenched” (17)*

## 7- A DIVINE PROCLAMATION THAT KING JOSIAH WILL BE GATHERED TO HIS FATHERS:

*“But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, in this manner you shall speak to him, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel: “Concerning the words which you*

*have heard” (18)*

*““because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a*

*desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you,” says the LORD (19).*

*““Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place*

*So they brought back word to the king (20).*

Even though Josiah died in a battle (23: 29-30), yet, in the sight of God *“he was gathered to his fathers in peace”*, on account of that dying in battle is much better than to stay alive, and to have his soul be extremely bitter, when he sees the calamities that were to dwell upon his people; That is why it is said: *“The righteous is taken away from evil”* (Isaiah 57: 1).

Josiah died after reigning for 31 years, was buried in the tombs of his fathers, was mourned by all Judah and Jerusalem, and lamented by the prophet Jeremiah. He left behind a good **memory**.

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 22**

### **GATHER ME TO MY FATHERS IN YOU, O LORD**

+ I thank You, O Lord, for granting me to be born by my mother 'Jedidah', beloved by You;

For counting me worthy to be a son of Your church,

To suckle from the sound teaching a food holy to the spirit;

To anticipate reclining in Your bosoms open to me;

When my depths settle down in You, I would become beloved by You;

My soul would never find comfort until I get to love all humans;

When will all mankind gather together in You?

To carry Your Spirit, O Lover of mankind?

+ Let me flee to You, and hide in You, O the Stronghold of my life;

Where all the forces of the devil would not be able to seduce me;

Nor the ancient serpent can crawl in Eden inside me;

+ Josiah cared to repair Your house, neglected by the previous kings;

By Your fiery Spirit, set Your holy temple in my depths;

Make my soul the New Jerusalem, the icon of heaven;

The book of Your law is engraved by Your Holy Spirit in my heart;

Let me keep Your gospel, so that my heart would flare with an unceasing heavenly exultation.

+ Your Word is strong and mighty;

It carries me from glory to glory;

It gathers me to the choirs of the heavenlies;

It grants me the deposit of heaven.

+ Let me join the choirs of the heavenlies, as well as the choir of the believers;

I wonder if they are two choirs, or one choir for the heavenlies and the earthlies together!

Gather me to my fathers, and do not let me see the evil that will dwell upon men.

+ Gather me to You to abide in You;

So that my soul would be glad to see the abidance of the millions, and even the billions in You.

+ Let me not belittle myself;

For in and by You, I can do anything;

Grant me, together with the kid Josiah;

To begin well, walk well, and depart well from the world

Be for me the beginning, and walk with me all the way of my life

+ O my God, how much I desire the sanctification of the whole world;

Who could be sanctified, when the devil puts the whole world in darkness?

Grant me, O Holy One, to be sanctified;

By Your Holy Spirit, You lead all the attempts for reform;

You send holy people, zealous on Your kingdom.



# CHAPTER 23

## JOSIAH'S REFORMS AND HIS DEATH

If Josiah was the last good king in Judah, why then did the book care to mention his reforms before his death; with the confirmation that *“the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah because of all the provocations with which Manasseh has provoked Him”* (26)?

The prophet Jeremiah started his ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (626 BC); namely about five years before the great movement of religious reform mentioned in 2 kings 23. And he continued his prophetic work until about the year 586 BC, namely for as long as about 40 years.

In spite of Josiah's great strife against idol-worship, yet the torrent of corruption was so deep in the souls of the civil, the religious leaders, and the people, that they did not care for his reform with their whole hearts, other than to repair the temple, and to practice the formalities of worship without spirit, mixed with pagan abominations. That is why the call of the prophet Jeremiah concentrated on the reform of the heart.

God set that great reformer, king Josiah, to follow Manasseh and Amon the evil kings. Even though, the leaders and the people, could find an excuse to respond to Manasseh and his son Amon, God sent to them Josiah the faithful reformer, to whose reforms they responded by outer appearance; while their hearts persisted on their evil. Setting king Josiah was the last the chance for the leaders and the people to return to God, but they did not.

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|---|-------|
| 1- A collective popular pledge to gather around the Word of God | 1 - 3 |
| 2- Josiah cleansed the temple of all traces of idol-worship     | 4 - 6 |

3- Josiah tore down the ritual booths of the perverted persons	7
4- Josiah cleansed the cities of Judah and the high places	8 - 9
5- Josiah defiled Topheth	10
6- Josiah removed the chariots dedicated to the sun	11
7- Josiah removed the altars built by the evil kings	12 - 20
8- Josiah celebrated the feast of Passover	21 - 25
9- God's wrath over Judah	26 - 27
10- Josiah killed in Megiddo	28 - 30
11- Jehoahaz (Josiah's son) reigns, then taken into captivity	31 - 33
12- Jehoiakim sits on the throne	34 - 37

## **1- A COLLECTIVE POPULAR PLEDGE TO GATHER AROUND THE WORD OF GOD:**

*“Now the king sent them to gather all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him (1)*

*.”The king went up to the house of the LORD with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and*

*great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD” (2).*

The high priest discovered the book of the law in the house of God, and sent it to the king on the hand of Shaphan the scribe, who read it before the king (2 Kings 22: 10). Now the king read it aloud by himself in the house of the Lord, which seems a strange thing to do; for the reading is usually left to the high priest, or to one of the prophets like Jeremiah or Zephaniah and others, when they are present. But because of the king's zeal and of his longing for all to enter into a renewed covenant with God, he himself read it before the people.

In the last chapter we saw how all, so neglected the Word of God; that they had no knowledge of where the copy of the book of the law, dedicated to the temple, would be found. We noticed how the king, while reading what came in the book, seemed to hear it for the first time. Now, we see how he longs to make the holy law the foundation on which the whole kingdom be built, from the king, and men of his court, to the high priest, and the civil and religious leaders.

Saying “***all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem***”, does not imply that all of them came, but representatives of the people of all ranks. And by the “***prophets***” is meant all those who preach the word of the Lord, like the teachers, and those who take care of the spiritual life of the people.

“***He read in their hearing the words of the book of the law***”; The way the prophet Moses (Exodus 24: 3-8), and Joshua (8: 34-35); did, Josiah followed the lead of the old godly leaders (Deuteronomy 17: 18-20; 31: 9:-13), and assembled the people to renew the covenant with God (Joshua 34). Saying, “***He read in their hearing the words of the book of the law***”, does not mean that he read all the five books of Moses, but he read the commandments, and all what concern the duties of the people toward God.

The true reform starts by being gathered together around the Word of God. Together with our commitment to have a personal relationship with God through His Word, it is befitting of us to gather together by the spirit of love and unity. For the Word of God is the basis of any reform on the individual, as well as on the collective level of the church.

On another aspect, being gathered together, bears a call of brotherly love in the Lord; without which we would not enjoy the blessings of the divine Word. For according to St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, [it is befitting of the speaker and the listener to have love].

+ :Listen to me with love, the way I talk.. For without love it would be difficult to listen to the amazing Word.

He who loves, will find a plenty to learn; for love opens the door of the heart and the soul to receive the Word.

+ I wish love moves you to listen, as it moves me to talk; for there will be no benefit except with love.

+ Love should be set as an intermediary, for whoever listens without love, will not be able to understand.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his*

*heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant” (3)*

The king stood on the bronze podium made by king Solomon, which was usually used by the kings when they address the people (2 Chronicles 6: 13)

The goal of God is for His people to enter into a covenant with Him. It is written: *“The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: ‘Hear the words of His covenant, and speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem”* (Jeremiah 11: 1-2).

According to some, the prophet here, refers to the covenant set between God and His people on Mount ‘Horeb’ in Sinai, to which king Josiah and the elders confirmed their faithfulness; the covenant that was recorded in a scroll (book), that was found during the repair of the temple; with which they bound themselves, and promised to consummate the words written in it (3).

According to the scholar Origen, the words that came to Jeremiah from the Lord are the divine Word, saying: [If we meditate in the episode of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as narrated in the books of history; we shall find that his coming in the flesh happened

only once, through which He enlightened the whole world: "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1: 14). He was actually, "*The true Light which gives light to every man was coming to the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him; and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him*" (John 1: 9-11)

Yet, we should know that He came before that, even not in the flesh. He came in every one of the saints; And, after His coming in the flesh, He still comes to us even now. ... If you want an evidence of that, listen to the words, saying: "*The words came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: Hear...*". .... What is this word that came to Jeremiah, to Isaiah, to Ezekiel, or to other prophets from the Lord, but "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1: 1).

As far as I am concerned, I know no other word from the Lord, except that about which the Evangelic John says: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" (John 1: 1).

We have to know that the coming of the Word was also on a personal level..... For, what would be my benefit if the Word came to the world, but not to me? ... I would confirm that the Lord Christ came to Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and to everyone of the righteous men; and that the Word He said to His disciple: "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28: 20, has been actually fulfilled before His coming; .....For how could all those prophets utter the words of God, if the Word of God has not come to them? ... Now, how about us?...

The men of Judah refer to us; Christians; Christ came from the tribe of Judah, and if I made it clear that, by the word 'Judah' is meant the Lord Christ, men of Judah, therefore, will not be the Jews who did not believe in the Lord Christ, but we who believed in Him.

The issue here concerns the church; for the church is the city of God, the city of peace; where the peace of God given to us, is seen and glorified, if we are as well the children of peace.

According to the scholar Origen,; [Who would hear better the words of the covenant, commanded by God to the fathers?... those who believed in Him, or – according to the evidences we have – those who do not believe, even in Moses, having not believed in the Lord? ....To whom the Savior says: “*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will be believe My words?*” (John 5: 46, 47). Those people have not, therefore, believed in Moses. But, by our faith in the Lord Christ, we also believe in the covenant set by Moses; namely, the covenant I commanded to your fathers]

It does not show here that the Lord said nor promised His people, any thing new; but all the talk was from the people; who pledged to return to God, and to keep the law, which they have neglected; The covenant was then, not with the Lord , but before the Lord.(3). We bring the people of God to the renewal by making them listen to the Word of God and learn it. Josiah gathered together the elders and the people to listen to the Word of God; on account of that the leaders and people are all in need to live through the proclamation of the Lord.

- + It may seem that the covenant and receiving the law are one and the same thing; but I think that there is a difference between them: The law was given only once through Moses; whereas the covenant was given several times (Genesis 9: 8-17; 25: 18; 2 Samuel 23: 5). For every time the people err, they are cast away, and lose the inheritance; then supplicate to God to call them back to inherit their possessions, and to proclaim again that they are heirs.

(The scholar Origen)

By “*taking a stand for the covenant*” (3), the people showed their appreciation, reverence of the Word of God, and acceptance of all what the king read before them.

## 2- JOSIAH CLEANSED THE TEMPLE OF ALL TRACES OF IDOL-WORSHIP:

.<sup>4</sup> And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the articles that were made

for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel.” (4)

If the Word of God was lost, and had no place in the hearts of all, we should not wonder that the pagan worship and its abominations have crawled into the house of the Lord, and into all the promised land in both Judah and Israel. That is why, after listening to the Word of God, the first task of all was to get rid of that serious plague..

According to some, “*priests of the second order*”, refer to all the priests under the high priest, who is considered ‘the first order’.

Josiah, who had a close relationship with God, and a reformer like his grandfather Hezekiah; cleansed the temple, revived the obedience to the divine law, and confirmed his faith by works (James 2: 20; Jeremiah 22: 15).

By the ‘**articles**’ (4), is meant all things concerning the idol-worship, , like the altars, the priestly clothes, the statues, and the vessels, etc., All the articles were taken to the fields of ‘Kidron’, in the reforms by Asa (1 kings 15: 13); and of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29: 16; 30: 14); where they were burned, and the ashes were carried to Bethel, as a public condemnation against the pagan rites, and against the location bound to it (1 kings 12: 28-30; Amos 4: 4-5). They were burned outside Jerusalem, so that their ashes would not defile the holy city.... The Northern kingdom was also influenced by Josiah’s reforms.

According to R.E. Clements, setting the pillars was bound to the rites pertaining to fertility; as they used to consider that fertility and carnal practices, touch the power of the

secret life; and have their effect even upon the crops of plants, and the production of animals. This power is produced by practices performed between gods and goddesses; and between men and women; who, by partaking in those rites, are provided with the power of life.

Probably for this reason, those abominations were usually practiced beside altars set under every green tree on high places; to beseech the gods to give fertility to plants and animals, as well as to man.

According to them, those practices grant them, as well, the strength to struggle against the secret and hidden power of death; as though the fertility and sex represent life and death; survival and perdition. Therefore, we should not marvel that the altars and the pillars were bound to the unclean practices, and the filthy abominations, as religious rites.

**The fields of Kidron** were in the Valley of Kidron, East of Jerusalem, which separates between the city and the Mount of Olives. That location was a public burial place for the common people; The Valley of the son of ~~xxxxxxx~~ was in that vicinity.

“Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem,

and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven” (5)

The **priests of the idols**, also mentioned in Zephaniah 1: 4; were appointed by some of the previous kings. The prophet Hosea spoke about the condemnation of those priests who led the worship of the golden calf in Bethel (Hosea 10: 5).

By saying “**he removed the idolatrous priests**”, he does not mean that he killed them, but he removed them from their pagan services. ....The next step in the renewal was to take away everything foreign of the house of the Lord. For it is befitting of whoever

intends to follow the Lord to listen to His Word, to obey it, and to reject, by his whole heart the darkness and its works.

“And he brought out the wooden image from the house of the LORD, to the Brook Kidron outside Jerusalem, burned it at the Brook Kidron and ground *it* to ashes, and threw its

ashes on the graves of the common people” (6)

The” **wooden images**”, bound to the worship of ‘Sherah’, were previously removed by king Hezekiah 918: 4); But Manasseh, then Amon brought them back (21: 7; 21; 13; 6).

### **3- JOSIAH TORE DOWN THE RITUAL BOOTHS OF THE PERVERTED PERSONS:**

“Then he tore down the *ritual* booths of the perverted persons that *were* in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the wooden image” (7)

Corruption reached the extent that filthy practices were done as a part of the Canaanite worship (1 kings 14: 24; 15: 12; 22: 46). And more serious was that those perverted persons, not only did those practices in Jerusalem, but brought them into the house of the Lord; counting them as service to the gods.

### **4- JOSIAH CLEANSED THE CITIES OF JUDAH AND THE HIGH PLACES:**

“*And he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba; also he broke down the*

*high places at the gates which were at the entrance of the Gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were to the left of the city gate” (8)*

“**From Geba to Beersheba**”, means from the far North to the far South.

“**The high places at the gates**”, They used to burn incense on house roofs (Jeremiah 19: 13). At the gates of the city, there were towers, whose roofs were probably the high places referred to; like the location where Mesha, king of Moab offered his son a burnt offering (3: 270. And according to some, on those high places, pagan temples were built at the city gates as places of assembly.

+ How could the kings serve the Lord with fear, except by refraining to commit and reject what contradict His commandments with firmness? A king serves the lord in his capacity as a man, and in his capacity as a king: As a man by walking according to faith; and as a king by doing all efforts to issue by-laws that exhort goodness, and forbid anything contradictory. So were the services done by king Hezekiah by braking down the high places and the temples of the idols, that were built against the commandments of God (2 kings 18: 4; and so were the service done by king Josiah..... Kings serve God when they consummate works that no one except kings could do.

(St. Augustine)

“**The gates of Joshua the governor of the city**”; North of the city gate, the location where the governor of the city used to address the people, and makes decisions, Close to that location there were public altars on which sacrifices were offered to the true God, and sometimes to the false gods.

*“Nevertheless the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brethren” (9).*

They were called '**priests**', even though they did not practice priesthood in the temple; on account of that they ministered on the high place; but having eaten from the offerings, being descendants of Aaron; they became like priests who have defects (Leviticus 21: 21-230. "The bread of the offerings were unleavened bread" (Leviticus 6: 16-18). The sacrifices offered by those priests, although were offered in the name of the living God, yet because they were offered on the high places, and not in the house of the Lord, the priests who offered them were not worthy of ministering in the temple. But, belonging to the priesthood, they received portions of the tithes, the sacrifices, the offerings, the unleavened bread, and the grain offerings.

#### **5- JOSIAH DEFILED TOPHETH:**

"And he defiled Topheth, which *is* in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech" (10)

According to St. Jerome, 'Topheth' was a joyful location, with gardens and springs of fresh water. And according to some scholars, 'Molech' was a pagan god like 'Milkom' the abomination of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11: 5), or the Canaanite gods (Leviticus 20: 1-5); whose worship were moved into Jerusalem. And according to other scholars, 'Melcom' refers to the rite of sacrificing a child to the Baal (Jeremiah 7: 31, 32; 19: 5-6; 32: 35)..... In some excavations in Cartagena, a Phoenician city, there was found a testimony of such a kind of sacrifice.

The Arabic word 'Gohannam', namely 'Hell', is formed of two Hebrew words: 'Geh – Hinnom', namely 'inside Hinnom'. 'Hinnom' is a valley into which the trash of the sacrifices offered in the temple, were cast by special tubes; Fire unceasingly ignited to burn the trash, to protect the city against diseases. By this we can understand the expression used by the Lord Christ three times in the gospel according to St. Mark, about the torture of the wicked in hell, "*where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched*" (Mark 9: 44, 46, 48; to portray the ultimate place where the wicked will be put after being

judged. ....In that valley, Ahaz and Manasseh, made their sons pass through the fire (2 Kings 16: 3; 2 Chronicles 28: 3; 33: 6). Josiah, one of the good kings of Judah, put an end to those practices, and defiled that valley, to turn it into a trash dump for Jerusalem (2 Kings 23: 10)

**“Tophath”**. A word meaning (a furnace, or a place for burning); for there, they used to burn the remains of the sacrifices, and there they made their sons pass through fire. It was at the south-east part of the Valley of Hinnom; south and west of Jerusalem; running from the ‘Khalil’s Gate’ down to ‘Job’s well’. It is also called ‘the Valley of the son of Hinnom’ or ‘of the children of Hinnom’ – a Canaanite tribe (Isaiah 30; 33). There was a hollow bronze statute of Molech, god of the Ammonites, inside which they used to ignite fire, then put their children on its red-hot hands to burn.

#### **6- JOSIAH REMOVED THE CHARIOTS DEDICATED TO THE SUN:**

*“Then he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who was*

*in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire” (11)*

In the east, horses were dedicated to the worship of the sun, because of their speed and several other benefits. Excavations in Jerusalem, and Hazor, revealed a sanctuary dedicated to the worship of the sun, that dates back to the time of Jehopshaphat, with small horses on whose forehead was drawn the image of the sun.... The Greeks, the Romans, and others, likened the sun to a charioteer riding a chariot, running from East to West. And used chariots of the sun in their religious celebrations. ... Josiah burned those chariots and removed the horses; namely he forbade providing them to the chariots of the sun, the way his predecessor kings of Judah did.

Those horses removed by king Josiah, were either living horses that ran the chariots of the sun, or carved images thereof. . Believing that horses draw the sun along, they were sometimes offered as sacrifices to the sun; or used in the processions to honor the sun. The sun-worshippers like Ahaz, Manasseh, and their prominent leaders, sometimes rode horses every dawn to receive sunrise, out of the Eastern gate of the temple..

## **7- JOSIAH REMOVED THE ALTARS BUILT BY THE EVIL KINGS: .**

*“The altars that were on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD,*

*the king broke down and pulverized there, and threw their dust into the Brook Kidron” (12)*

Those who worshipped the sun, the moon, and the stars, used to set altars on house roofs for this purpose; like the upper room built by Ahaz on the roof of one of the buildings of the temple, from which they used to watch, and to worship the stars (Jeremiah 19: 13).

*“Then the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, which were on the south of the Mount of Corruption, which Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth*

*the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the people of Ammon”*  
(13)

**“The Mount of Corruption”**, East and South of Jerusalem; the southern part of the Mount of olives. It was so called, for being where king Solomon built temples for the idols, worshipped by his foreign women (1 kings 11).

The abominable statue of 'Ashtoreth' was erected by Manasseh the evil king in the temple of God (21: 7); Ashetoreth was often described as one of the goddesses of the sea, and as mother of several gods, including Baal.

The godly kings broke those pagan temples down. And on the Mount of Olives, our Lord Jesus often sat to teach the true worship to His disciples (Matthew 24: 3).

**“Chemosh”**; The Moabites were called ‘the nation of Chemosh’ (Numbers 21: 29), or ‘the people of Chemosh’ (Jeremiah 48: 46); and ‘Chemosh’, the abomination of the Moabites. King Solomon brought its worship into Jerusalem (1 kings 11: 7); and king Josiah removed it. The Moabite kings used to refer their conquests to ‘Chemosh’, as shown on the Moabite stone by Mesha king of Moab (2 kings 3: 4

**‘Milcom’**, There was a close relationship between ‘Chemosh’, god of the Moabites, and ‘Milcom’, god of the Ammonites; for in both, children were offered as sacrifices in fire (2 kings 3: 27).

*“And he broke in pieces the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images, and filled their places with the bones of men” (14).*

Filling their places with the bones of men, was considered a way of defilement by the Jews, as well as by the pagans; on account of that it is a sign of death and corruption; when the pagans claim that their gods are the source of life and fertility (21: 7).

*“ Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he broke down;*

*and he burned the high place and crushed it to powder, and burned the wooden image” (15)*

A man of God in the past, prophesied that the altar built by Jeroboam, the first, in Bethel will be broken down (1 kings 13: 26-32). The literal fulfillment of that prophecy, confirms that that ancient man of God was a true prophet (Deuteronomy 18: 22).

Bethel was where one of the two golden calves made by Jeroboam were worshipped (1 kings 12: 32). It is clear that the authority of Assyria on the land of Israel at that time (17: 24) was so weak; that the king of Judah broke down the altars, and slain their priests, with no reaction of Assyria which, according to historical records, was about to fall.

*“As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were there on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar, and defiled it according to the*

*word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words” (16)*

The king of Assyria probably got so preoccupied with wars against the Skythians who came from the north and entered into Asia Minor; and with the Babylonians and the Madies who stirred up troubles against Assyria; that he did not care much for what Josiah did.

As the people perverted to idol-worship, the Lord threatened them on the tongue of the prophet, that calamity will dwell upon them, in every place they used to practice evil, whether a mountain a valley, a plain, or a river; that the sword will be upon the evildoers, to turn their cities into desolation and barrenness, to remove their high places, to break down their altars. The worshippers, what they worship, and where they worship, will all be broken down. He probably burned the bones on the altar before breaking it down, and scattered their ashes on the place to defile it (2 kings 23: 16)..

That, according to St. Augustine, what happened was a fulfillment of the prophecy previously proclaimed by the man of God (1 kings 13: 2), three hundred years before, who mentioned ‘Josiah’ by name (about which Josiah did not know until after the fulfillment of the prophec).

*“Then he said, “What gravestone is this that I see?” (17)*

*“So the men of the city told him, “It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel.” (18)*

*“And he said, “Let him alone; let no one move his bones.” So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria” (19).*

By Samaria here he means all the province, and not just the city that became later on, the capital of the Northern kingdom (1 kings 13: 32 16: 23-24). .....The man of God who came from Samaria, and cried out by the word of God against the altar of Jeroboam the first in Bethel, demanded to be buried in Bethel beside the prophet from Judah (1 kings 13: 2. 32).

*“Now Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the LORD to anger; and he did to*

*them according to all the deeds he had done in Bethel” (19)*

*“He executed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned men’s bones on them; and he returned to Jerusalem” (20)*

As the priests of the high places were not Levites, they, according to the law, were sent away (Deuteronomy 17: 2-7). But the true priests who served there, after removing those sanctuaries, were not allowed to minister in the temple in Jerusalem, and were counted as priests with physical defects (Leviticus 21: 17-23).

God suffered long on those priests for 300 years; but as a multitude have perished because of them; they were executed; yet the prophet did such, seemingly cruel act, not out of personal vengeance, but by the allowance of God to save the souls; the same way

the prophet Elijah slew the priests of the Baal (1 Kings 18; 40). But now, in the era of grace, such a thing is no more allowed.

## 8- JOSIAH CELEBRATED THE FEAST OF PASSOVER: .

*“Then the king commanded all the people, saying, “Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant” (21)*

Having removed every trace of idol-worship and its abominations; namely every trace of the old leaven, the people were qualified to celebrate the feast of Passover.

It is befitting of the believer, not only to seek from God to cleanse him from corruption, but also to let him cross over from the bondage of the devil to the glorious liberty of the children of God. The Jewish feast of Passover carries a symbol of crossing over, not to the promised land, but to the heavenly Canaan.

Hezekiah previously celebrated the Passover, but with some alterations (2 Chronicles 30: 13-20); But Josiah elaborately committed himself to the law (2 Chronicles 35: 1- 19); something not done since the era of the Judges.

St. Ambrose calls us to follow the lead of king Josiah, concerning the flaring zeal in his heart..

+ Love faith; for Josiah, by his godliness and faith, was greatly beloved, even by his enemies. He celebrated the feast of Passover in the eighteenth year of his reign, with great zeal, not done by any of his predecessors. ... I exhort you, O my children, to have such a great zeal for God that would (eat him up). Let everyone of you, say: *“The zeal for Your house has eaten me up”* (Psalm 69: 9). .....ne of the disciples of the Lord was called “the zealot” (Luke 6: 15). And why should I talk about a disciple, when the Lord Himself said: *“The zeal for Your house has*

*eaten Me up*” (John 2: 17). I exhort You then to have true zeal for God, not an earthly zeal, that may produce envy.

(St. Ambrose)

*“Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah” 22)*

*.” But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was held before the LORD in Jerusalem” (23)*

One of the misconceptions, is that God intends to take away from his believers the spirit of feasts and gladness; For God actually wishes for us to practice the virtuous life in its fullness (John 10: 10); and for the life of those who love him to be turned into a perpetual feast and an unceasing celebration.

In that year, after the repair of the house of the Lord, the great assembly in Jerusalem to read the newly discovered book of the law, and to renew the covenant with God; the breaking down of the pagan altars in Jerusalem, in Judah, and in the cities of Samaria; the people were now qualified to celebrate the feast of Passover.

*“ Moreover, Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem,*

*that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD” (24)*

The teraphim, a Hebrew word meaning (that bring forth happiness), were household idols or statutes, so small to make it easy to carry along in case they have to get away in a hurry. According to a common belief, as their name indicates, they bring good omen, and

were consulted in all problems (Zechariah 10: 2). According to the Babylonian law, whoever had them, was given the right to inherit the portion of the firstborn. Those teraphim were removed together with the other idols.

“Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did

*any arise like him” (25)*

Both Hezekiel and Josiah were commended on their godliness: Josiah for being the greatest among the kings of Judah and Israel, who held fast to the divine law; and Hezekiah, for being the greatest one to trust in God with faith (18: 5).

#### **9- GOD’S WRATH OVER JUDAH:**

“Nevertheless the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh

had provoked Him” (26)

Despite all those effort exerted by Josiah, the divine judgment over Judah for their persistence on sin, was inevitable (17: 18-19; 23: 26-27; Lamentations 1: 5). Even though Manasseh repented, yet, on account of that his repentance was only temporary, he had to reap the fruits of his sins,.

The problems of Judah as a whole during the last years before the Babylonian captivation, may be summarized in two things:

- 1- The civil and religious leaders, as well as the people, did not care to repair their hearts, beside repairing the temple, and practicing the worship in spiritless formalities.
- 2- The rulers, as well as the people were wrestling between making an alliance with the Pharaoh of Egypt, or with Assyria, then later with Babylon. The greatest majority did not like Babylon, expecting their attack any time, a feeling that provoked them to throw themselves in the bosoms of the Pharaoh of Egypt; despite their past bad experience with both Egypt and Babylon. ....We can understand that controversy from what happened with the five kings who were contemporary with the prophet Jeremiah:

:

- **Josiah** (626-609 BC), whom the Egyptian killed in the battle of Megiddo.
- **Jehoahaz**; who was removed from the throne after just three months of his reign (2 Chronicles 36: 2)
- **Jehoiakim**; who was set by Pharaoh a king instead of his brother; remained faithful to Pharaoh for four years; but when he later was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim submitted to Babylon; and mysteriously died
- **Jehoiakin**; who, three months after being set a king in place of his father, was captivated by Nebuchadnezzar.
- **Zedekiah**; who was set by Nebuchadnezzar a king, instead of his nephew, wrestled between being faithful to his master in Babylon, and his attempts to please his people, who preferred to resort to the Pharaoh of Egypt to protect them from Babylon; and considered Jehoiakin, the captive in Babylon as their legitimate king. Zedekiah, having made an alliance with Pharaoh, was captivated by the king of Babylon, who put out his eyes, and took the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah captives (39: 1-7).

So Judah was between a rock and a hard place. and instead of resorting to God with repentance, to enjoy salvation, they trusted in this and that king.

“And the LORD said, “I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said,

‘My name shall be there’” (27)

Some may wonder: How could God reject the city He has chosen to build His house in it? After all those huge reforms done by Josiah, together with the obedience of the leaders and the people to all that He commanded?

Josiah tore his clothes when he heard what came in the law of God (22: 11); held a great assembly, read to them the law; celebrated the feast of Passover, almost forgotten by the people; removed the idol-worship with all its abominations, not only from the house of the Lord, but in every city of the whole kingdom; and his influence even extended to the kingdom of Israel. Yet, all that, actually came in obedience to the good king, and not with repentance and a return to God. Most probably the greatest majority, if not the whole people admired the king. But mere admiration of the pure king is not enough, nor the obedience of his commands, but what is sought is the purity of heart of the people, and their attachment to God; That is the reason His wrath was still over Judah.

#### **10- JOSIAH KILLED IN MEGIDDO:**

*“Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?” (28)*

There is no mention in the book, of the events from the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign to the end of his life, namely for 13 years; it so seems that he reigned with wisdom and in peace.

But what was mentioned in history was that the Skythians attacked Asia Minor; that the king of Egypt conquered Phoenicia; that Nineveh and the kingdom of Assyria fell; and that the kingdom of Babylon prevailed.

*“In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went to the aid of the king of Assyria, to the River Euphrates; and King Josiah went against him. And Pharaoh Necho killed him at*

*Megiddo when he confronted him” (29)*

Some may wonder, if Necho Pharaoh of Egypt went against Assyria, why did king Josiah go to fight against him; and why did he enter into a battle that ended in his death? There are several views to interpret that situation::

a- All along the years of Josiah’s reign (640- 609 BC), the power of Assyria started to fail, until Nineveh fell in the year 612 BC; as Nahum prophesied. ....And as Egypt was in alliance with Assyria, Necho set forth

northward to help the Assyrians under siege., Necho delayed his advance long enough until Haran fell from the hands of the Assyrians.

As Necho Pharaoh of Egypt set forth through the kingdom of Israel to support Assyria against the threats of Babylon, that was about to be the greatest power on earth; Josiah, for fear that the two nations would probably

join forces against him, after the Egyptian army confront Babylon; went to the Valley of Magiddo in an attempt to confront the Egyptian army, and to stop it from going through his land. But, his action cost him his life (2

Chronicles 35: 20-25). he was killed, his army was defeated, and Judah submitted to Egypt in the year 609 BC (2 Chronicles 35: 20-25).

- + We know that even the saints are sometimes inflicted by illnesses, tragedies, and need, and that they are occasionally tempted until they say: *“Surely, I have cleansed my heart in vain; and washed my hands in innocence”* (Psalm 73: 13).... If you think that your blindness is caused by your sin, and that your incurable illness is a sign of the wrath of God, You would be, as though, you count Isaac sinful, for his near blindness that made him bless someone whom he did not

intend to bless (Genesis 27)... count Jacob sinful, for his near blindness, he could not recognize Ephraim from Manasseh, the sons of Joseph (Genesis 48: 10); even though by his inner insight, and the spirit of prophecy, he could foresee the future events; and that the Messiah will come from the royal seed (Genesis 49: 10).

Is there a king more holy than Josiah? who was killed by the sword of the Egyptians (29).

Are there saints more exalted than Peter and Paul? whose blood was shed by the sword of Nero..

Let us not talk about men; .....Didn't the Son of God endure the reproach of the cross?

(St. Jerome)

+ Josiah was killed by the (crippled) Pharaoh (The Rabites translate his name as the crippled); .....and the Lord Jesus was killed by the Jewish people, who became crippled by their sins.

Josiah cleansed the land of Judah of defilement; .....And Jesus cleansed and took away defilement from the whole earth;

Josiah glorified the name of his God; .....And Jesus said to His Father: "*I glorified, and will glorify (Your name)*" (John 12: 28);

Josiah tore his clothes because of the iniquities of Israel (2 kings 22: 11, 12); .....And, because of the iniquities of the Jewish people, Jesus **split** the veil of the holy temple (Matthew 27: 51)

Josiah said: "*For great is the wrath of the Lord that is aroused against this people*" (2 kings 22: 13);..... And Jesus said: that God's anger will come upon that people, and they will fall by the sword.

Josiah removed the defilement from the holy temple; .....And Jesus drove away the defiled traders from His Father's house;

The daughters of Jerusalem wailed upon Josiah, when he died (2 Chronicles 35); .....And the daughters of Israel wailed upon Jesus; according to what is written: "*The land shall mourn, every family by itself*"

(Zechariah 12::12); Luke 23: 27-28).

(St. Aphrahat)

b- Even though Josiah did what is right in the sight of God (2 kings 22: 2.), yet he did wrong by going against Necho, Pharaoh of Egypt, on his way to make war against Assyria; and had no intention to fight Josiah; He

entered into a battle, that was not his in Megiddo and there he was killed (29-30).

It is befitting of the believer not to throw himself into situations that he can avoid; Hence our Lord commands us, if persecution dwells upon a city, to flee to another city, not out of fear of death; nor of cowardice on our part,

but to refrain from casting ourselves into temptations.

+ The Lord leaves His peace to us as He departs; and will give us His peace when He ultimately comes. ....Peace He leaves to us in this world; and peace He will grant us in the world to come;..... Peace by which we can prevail upon the enemy; .....Peace He leaves to us, when there will be no more enemies to fight against; when we reign as kings.....Peace He leaves with us, to love one another; when we do not judge one another; .....He will give it to us here on earth, when our hearts are pure; and *“each one’s praise will come from God”* (1 Corinthians 4: 5). .....In, and from Him, we get peace, whether that He will leave for us, when He departs to His Father, or what He grants us when He brings us forth to the Father.... What He will He leave for us when He departs from us, is His presence that He will never take away from us? .....*“He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken the middle wall of separation”* (Ephesians 2: 14).

Hence, He is our peace; whether when we believe in Him ; or *“when we see Him as He is”* (1 John 3: 2).

For, if while we are still in this corrupt body that weighs down on our soul, and while we walk by faith and not by sight; He does not forsake those who depart while away from Him (2 Corinthians 5: 6-7), How much more,

Would He do, when we reach that vision, when He fills us by Himself?

+ It would be befitting of us to call the peace which He leaves with us in this world, our peace rather than His peace; for He is completely sinless, with no controversy in Him. ....As far as our peace is concerned, in the

midst of which we still say: *“Forgive us our debts.”* (Matthew 6: 12)... it is not a perfect peace; for *“But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind”* (Romans 7: 23).

(St. Augustine)

c- Josiah was wrong to fight against Necho, without seeking the counsel of God. If Necho was going forth to support Assyria in alliance with her, it was not a matter of Josiah’s wrong political tendency, as much as it

was not trusting in God and seeking His counsel.

In the series of “The interpretation of the Holy Book” it came:

[When Necho set forth northwards to support the king of Assyria, that was only an excuse to take over what he intended to take. As the Holy Book shows the real intentions, and not the apparent claims; the reference to

Carchemish in (2 Chronicles 35: 20), was not intended to speak about the last defeat of Necho in the year 605 BC (Compare Jeremiah 46: 2); but rather to refer to the true goal of Necho by his invasion, namely to

reach Carchemish.

Expecting that his recently obtained independence was going to fall apart, Josiah, foolishly, intended to confront the advance of Necho; despite the fact that the later had, in his mind, what was more important than taking

over the hills of Judah (2 Chronicles 35: 21). As to the reference to Josiah’s faithfulness to his alliance with Assyria, or with Babylon, it had no foundation.

That war by Josiah, was not approved by some prophets like Jeremiah; but Josiah – like Ahab before him – listened to the prophets of the court, instead of the prophets of the Lord.

As to cutting short any further narration about Josiah, it is most probably because it was not easy for the author of the book of the kings to write about the painful news of the death of such a good king as Josiah, who has

gone astray because of trusting in himself, rather than in God. ....The fact that the battle happened in Megiddo, is a proof that Necho did not intend to invade Judah; but was taking the regular route toward the north.

*“Then his servants moved his body in a chariot from Megiddo, brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of*

*Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in his father’s place” (30).*

This verse says that Josiah died in Megiddo; whereas in some other place it is said that he died in Jerusalem. Why? ..... The answer is: that the second book of the Chronicles only mentions his death; whereas the

second book of the kings mentions in detail where he died, clearly saying: *“In his days Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt went to the aid of the king of Assyria to the River Euphrates; and king Josiah went against him; and*

*Pharaoh killed him at Magiddo when he confronted him. Then his servants moved his body in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb” (2 kings 23: 29-30).*

We should not marvel that God allowed for his evil grandfather Manasseh to reign for 55 years; and allowed for such good king as Josiah to die so quickly, while in a relatively younger age.

+ It is not befitting of us to assume that the quick death belittles the value of man, because of his unworthiness. For ‘Enoch’ was taken away by God (Genesis 5: 24), to spare him any evil desire of his heart. Whereas

Josiah, who celebrated the feast of Passover of the Lord in the eighteenth year of his reign, in a way that surpassed in godliness, all his predecessors; did not live long, with the worthiness of his faith. But, as there was

an eminent threat of a serious desolation of the Jewish people, that righteous king was taken away ahead, to spare him going through it..

(St. Ambrose)

In his lamentation on Josiah’s death, the prophet Jeremiah, says: *“Weep not for the dead, nor bemoan him; Weep bitterly for him who goes away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus says the*

*Lord concerning Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went from this place; he shall not return here any more; but he shall die in the place they have led him captive,*

*and shall see this land no more”* (Jeremiah 22: 10-12).

The “dead”, here is Josiah who was killed in the battle of Megiddo in the year 609 BC, after a good life, worthy of intense grief and sorrow. But, according to Jeremiah, we should not weep bitterly on Josiah’s death, as

much as we should, on the new young king Jehoahaz his son; who was led by Necho king of Egypt, into captivity, after three months and ten days of his reign, never to return to his native land. The prophet Jeremiah calls

him ‘Shallum’, his name before he reigns, and not by his royal name ‘Jehoahaz’; probably on account of his evil and the corruption of his life; beside being an intruder, not worthy of royalty, because he sat on the throne, even

though he was not the firstborn (2 kings 23: 34), but the third son of Josiah (24: 18; 1 Chronicles 3: 15). Josiah’s first born died; and the second son Eliakim or Jehoiakim was worth nothing; and the fourth son ‘Matniah’

(Zedekiah) sat on the throne as the last king of Judah. Jehoahaz was probably chosen because the people assumed that he was of stronger personality than his brother. Having unjustly sat on the throne, he did not

last long on it, but was captivated to Egypt, according to the prophecy that came in the book of Deuteronomy, addressed to the children of Israel, saying: “*And the Lord will take you back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which*

*I said to you, ‘You shall never see it again’, and there, you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you”* (Deuteronomy 28: 68).

it so seems that no one was captivated together with him (2 Chronicles 26: 4).

God demands from His people to mourn Jehoahaz more than they have mourned his father.

While Josiah was buried in his tomb with peace and honor, and needed no mourning; the life of his evil son was counted as death, for he was led into captivity without honor.

Yes, Josiah got a deadly wound in the battle of Megiddo; but he was carried to his land to breathe his last in his beloved city Jerusalem, that loved him dearly back; surrounded by the people whom he served for thirty

years of his 38 years life.

I wish we, as well, deliver our last breaths in our beloved city, namely, when we dwell in the kingdom of heaven; deliver our souls into the hands of our God, to whom we dedicate our whole energies and life to the account of

His kingdom; to say, together with the apostle Paul: *“For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s”* (Romans 14: 8).

We are committed to honor and desire the death of the righteous; while we feel the misery of the life of the wicked. ... About his death, the apostle Paul could say:: *“Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness,*

*which the Lord , the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearance”* (2 Timothy 4: 8). Paul’s death was not a cause for mourning, but for joy and gladness; for

he anticipated the reward prepared for him on his good strife.

## **11- JEHOAHAZ (JOSIAH’S SON) REIGNS, THEN TAKEN INTO CAPTIVITY:**

*“Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah”* (31)

Jehoahaz reigned for three months; that came to an end by the return of Necho from Haran

Presenting to us the episode of the captivity of Jehoahaz, the Babylonian history says: [When in the year 609 BC, the last Assyrian king ‘Ashur-uballit’ fell under intense affliction in Haran by the Chaldean armies, Egypt hastened to support him, out of fear of the imminent Chaldean danger, that started to appear on the stage of

history.....Pharaoh Necho came to Israel, and the region of Israel and Syria came to be under his authority. The leader of his army, who made his headquarter in Syria in 'Rablah', 47 miles south of Hamath, called Jehoahaz to encounter him in Rablah, then put him in chains, and led him to be a captive in Egypt, from where he never returned to his land, contrary to what he and his people anticipated (Jeremiah 22: 19-12)..

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done” (32)*

Although this chapter starts by parading the reforms done by Josiah, yet we find that his children and his people have all returned to their evil ways, as is shown in the book of Jeremiah. According to some, the reason of that was that Josiah performed his reform with violence, which made his children and his people, once he died, hasten to apostate to practice evil, which had a special place in their hearts; which indicates that Josiah's reforms came only on his part; while the whole people opposed them in their heart

*“Now Pharaoh Necho put him in prison at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and*

*a talent of gold” (33)*

The prophet Jeremiah said that he will not return from captivity (Jeremiah 23: 11-12); according to the Lord's proclamation at he will not see his land again; for he did not follow the lead of his good father Josiah; and because he forced himself upon his older brother's legitimate right to the throne.

### **13-JEHOIAKIM SITS ON THE THRONE:**

*“Then Pharaoh Necho made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Pharaoh took Jehoahaz and went to Egypt,*

*and he died there” (34).*

The Pharaoh of Egypt set Jehoiakim the other son of Josiah a king, and used him as a toy in his hand. And in the year 605 BC, Egypt was defeated before Babylon, and Judah came to submit to Babylon (24: 1).

*“So Jehoiakim gave the silver and gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give money according to the command of Pharaoh; he exacted the silver and gold from the people*

*of the land, from every one according to his assessment, to give it to Pharaoh Necho” (35)*

Jehoiakim, for as long as four years, burdened the people with heavy taxes to pay tribute to his Egyptian master (2 kings 23: 31-35); Besides, he worshipped the idols and committed evil.

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim’s reign, Jeremiah recorded all the prophecies he uttered all along the years, and gave them to Baruch to write in a scroll; and because Jeremiah was banned from entering into the house of God for a long time, he commanded Baruch to take the scroll to the temple, and read it before all the people who came on the occasion of fasting. When the scroll came into the king’s hand, he listened only to some of its paragraphs, then tore it and throw it in fire. Jeremiah then wrote two scrolls like the first one, with certain additions (Jeremiah 36: 27-32), according to a divine guidance; but Pashur the priest, the chief governor of the house of the Lord, and one of the enemies of Jeremiah, put the prophet in the stocks, then released him the next day (Jeremiah 20: 1 - 3).

In the year 605 BC, because Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho Pharaoh of Egypt in the battle of Carchemish (Jeremiah 46: 1-2), Jehoiakim turned his loyalty and submission from Egypt to Babylon; but a substantial part of his people, preferred to submit to Egypt, to join forces with it against Babylon; which seemed to be how Jehoiakim, himself preferred; even though the prophet Jeremiah warned him against it.

*“Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Zebudah the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah” (36)*

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done” (37)*

Jehoiakim reigned only for a short period (608-598 BC), featured by increasing evil (2 Chronicles 36: 5-8); and he actually filled the land with every kind of evil and violence (Jeremiah 18: 18-20).

Although we do not hear much about the nature of the relationship between the prophet Jeremiah and king Josiah, we hear plenty of his relationship with king Jehoiakim; about whom he said: *“Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by injustice; Who uses his neighbor’s service without wages; ... Yet your eyes and your heart are for nothing but your covetousness, for shedding innocent blood, and practicing oppression; ... he shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 22: 13-19)*. .....Of Jehoiakim’s evil deeds were the following:

- a- He was an enemy to the prophet Jeremiah, who rebuked him over his pride and oppression, contrary to his good father Josiah; and for rejecting justice and righteousness (2 kings 23: 36-37). The way the prophet Elijah confronted king Ahab, the prophet Jeremiah confronted Jehoiakim. Jeremiah stood in the court of the house of the Lord to proclaim the Lord’s judgment against His people, and to provide them with the living hope in forgiveness, in case they declare their

repentance; contrary to the deceiving and vain optimistic proclamations presented by the false prophets.

*“In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, the words of the Lord came (to Jeremiah), saying: “Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord’s house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. Perhaps everyone will listen, and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings. And you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord, ‘If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you, both rising up early and sending them (but you have not heeded). Then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth. So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord” (Jeremiah 26: 1-7).*

According to the Historian Josephus, Jehoiakim had no fear of God, nor of men; and his wife Nehoshta, whose father Elnathan, had a role in the crime of killing the prophet Uriah, the man of God, had a bad influence on him.

- b- He tore and burned the scroll with the prophesies of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36: 27-32).
- c- He killed the prophet Uriah the son of Shemaiah, the man of God, who uttered harsh words against Jerusalem and its inhabitants, like those uttered by Jeremiah. The anger of the king was so intense against him, that Uriah had to flee to Egypt; but the king brought him back, killed him by the sword, and cast his corpse into the tombs of the common people, as a revenge for his daring on him. The evil king had the intention to do the same thing to Jeremiah, if it was not for the intervention of Ahikam the son of Shaphan and others to save him (26: 20-24).

- d- Jehoiakim, a tyrant dictator, rejected the reforms done by his father Josiah; trusted in the Pharaoh of Egypt, and was a strong advocate of making an alliance with him.
- e- He was a traitor, greedy, and oppressor against his own people (Jeremiah 22: 13-19). Having been committed to pay huge tribute to the Pharaoh of Ehypt (2 kings 23: 33-35), instead of caring for the needs of his people, he committed them to build his palace in an exaggerated way. The people turned into slaves of the king, worked to his account without wages; something prohibited by the law (Leviticus 19: 13; Deuteronomy 24: 14-15). When it was befitting of the king to be the first to keep the law, and to protect it among his people, he was instead, the first one to break it; by which he came to be a bad example to them.
- f- He built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Hinnun (hell) south of Jerusalem, where the fire was always burning to consume the trash thrown by the people.
- g- In those high places, human sacrifices were offered (2 Kings 23: 10), people offered their sons and daughters, to be burned by fire, to the god Molech; For which God threatened to turn Jerusalem into another Topheth, namely, in Hebrew (a place of fire), where the bodies of many are consumed (19: 13; 30: 33).
- h- By his alliance with Egypt he rebelled against Babylon; for which Nebuchadnezzar took him captive to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36: 6); then allowed him to return to Jerusalem, where he died.

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### **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 23**

**TAKE AWAY FROM ME, O LORD, EVERY CORRUPTION**

**AND FILL MY HEART WITH YOUR HEAVENLY JOY**

+ What a magnificent scene, to see all assemble together in Your presence;

That, in me, the king would encounter the elders of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, and the prophets;

By Your presence, I shall enjoy a spiritual authority, to come to be like a king, who challenges the devil and all his hosts;

Granting me the heavenly wisdom, I shall come to be like one of the saintly elders;

I shall dwell as though in heaven, to come to be one of the inhabitants of the Higher Jerusalem, our mother;

Receive my prayers and my worship, a sacrifice of praise I offer as a priest;

To enlighten my depths, and to recognize the secrets of Your love, like a spiritual prophet.

+ Let my whole being assemble around Your holy law;

That all would renew the covenant with You;

Let all my energies assemble together in Your divine presence;

Let my mind, my heart, all my senses, and emotions assemble together;

Let all the members of my body, together with my soul, be sanctified by You, O Holy One;

Let Your word work in me, to make me truly Your holy temple;

Transfigure in me; and pour Your splendor in my depths;

+ Who can take away from me all traces of corruption but Your grace?!

Who can drive away every evil pleasure, but Your dwelling in me?!

Who can dedicate all my energies to the account of Your kingdom;

But Your Holy Spirit, dwelling in me?!:

+ Proclaim, O Lord, Your dwelling in me;

Set Your divine kingdom in me;  
Let Your peace, joy, and splendor, fill my depths;  
So that my soul comes to be an agency of heaven.

+ Let me enter with You into a new covenant;  
To celebrate a spiritual Passover, that lets my soul cross over into Your bosoms;  
And Your law would come to be the constitution of my life;  
And my depths would cry out: [You are mine, an I am Yours, O my soul's beloved!]

+ I may admire certain spiritual leaders, and imitate them;  
But, who can touch and ignite my heart with Your love, but You?!  
Who can grant me its purity, faithfulness, and width for truth, but You?!  
“Make me repent; Heal me”  
Bring me back to attach to You.

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# CHAPTER 24

## THE LAST DAYS OF JERUSALEM

### A QUICK COLLAPSE:

God allowed for setting a good king 'Josiah', after Manasseh and Amon, to proclaim that, together with setting the last good king, although the leaders and the people obeyed his commands, while their hearts were corrupt and impure. Once Manasseh died, there was a series of evil and weak kings who walked with the spirit of Manasseh, and the only remaining way to deal with the situation, was to let the kingdom of Judah follow her sister Israel, to fall into the Babylonian captivity.

The quick collapse happened by:

- a- **Jehoiakim:** who, in his nature, was one of the worst kings of Judah. ....Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years. And when he rebelled against the king of Babylon, probably through the encouragement of Necho Pharaoh of Egypt, the Lord sent the Chaldeans, the Aramites, the Moabites, and the Ammonites, to invade Judah, when he was probably wounded, led captive to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36: 6), died on the way, and his corpse was thrown away like a donkey without burial (Jeremiah 22: 19).
- b- **Jehoiakin:** Whose real name was 'Jekniah', or 'Coniah' (Jeremiah 22: 24); received the throne instead of his father Jehoiakim. Then removed by Nebuchadnezzar; although the people counted him as the legitimate king, in spite of setting Zedekiah in his place, and considered the later as an agent of Babylon.
- c- **Zedekiah:** He was set as a king, or a deputy of the king of Babylon in Judah for as long as 11 years, and persisted on his evil ways. Rebelling

against Babylon, through an encouragement by Necho Pharaoh of Egypt, Jerusalem was put under siege; Zedekiah attempted to flee, but was seized by the army of Babylon, led to their king, who killed his two sons before him, put out his eyes, and led him blind to Babylon, where he was put in prison in humiliation, until he died.

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|---|---------|
| 1- Jehoiakim and his rebellion                | 1 - 5   |
| 2- Jehoiakin and the captivation of Jerusalem | 6 - 16  |
| 3- Zedekiah (Mattaniah) and his rebellion     | 17 – 20 |

### **1- JEHOIAKIM AND HIS REBELLION:**

*“In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years. Then he turned and rebelled against him” (1).*

Babylon became the new world power, after the collapse of Assyria in the year 612 BC.

According to the prophet Jeremiah, the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim was the first year of that of Nebuchadnezzar, the year of the battle of Carchemish in the year 605 BC, in which Nebuchadnezer prevailed against the Pharaoh of Egypt, and took all what belonged to him from the Euphrates to Egypt; namely to the Valley of ‘El-Arish’ that separates between Israel and Egypt (Jeremiah 25: 1; 46: 2). As an outcome of that battle, the Egyptians were driven out; and Babylon took Judah over, to make it a part of its empire (2 kings 24: 1). That was the first of three invasions by Babylon against Judah along twenty years; the prophet Daniel was one of the captives in that invasion. The other two invasions were in the years 597 and 587 BC successively..

Nebuchadnezzar was the leader of the Babylonian army, and a deputy of his father the king; then was named a king of the Babylonian empire that took the place of the kingdom of Assyria, on every aspect.

Jehoiakim became Nebuchadnezzar's vassal for three years, then rebelled against him, probably through the encouragement of Necho Pharaoh of Egypt, who could drive the Babylonians away from the Egyptian frontier in the year 601 BC. That rebellion was against the counsel of the prophet Jeremiah..

*“And the LORD sent against him raiding bands of Chaldeans, bands of Syrians, bands of Moabites, and bands of the people of Ammon; He sent them against Judah to destroy it,*

*according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken by His servants the prophets” (2).*

Rebelling against his master, king of Assyria, Nebuleser the ruler of Babylon founded the kingdom of Babylon in the days of Josiah king of Judah; joined forces with Syaksers king of the Mades, fought against and took over Nineveh.

Then Nebuleser sent his son Nebuchadnezzar to confront Necho Pharaoh of Egypt, who invaded Carchemish. He struck him, and took all what belonged to him in Syria; removed Jehoahaz king of Judah from his throne, and set Jehoiakim in his place; then Nebuleser died, and his son Nebuchadnezzar sat on his throne.

Jehoiakim submitted to Nebuleser the king of Babylon for three years, then rebelled against him (namely against his son Nebuchadnezzar) in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign, the first year of that of Nebuchadnezzar. The later, at the time, being preoccupied with other wars far off, sent over Jehoiakim bands of Aramites, Moabites, and Ammonites, whose animosity against Judah was well known; all of them under the leadership of the Chaldeans of the south of Mesopotamia. In that battle, they led 3023 captives to Babylon (Jeremiah 52: 28).

from whom the Lord had kept His people safe, and even let them prevail on them several times.

After that, Nebuchadnezzar, himself, went against Jehoiakim, led him, chained in bronze chains, a captive to Babylon; then retracted his purpose, and sent him back to Jerusalem; but he died, or killed on the way home, and his corpse was cast aside like that of a donkey (Jeremiah 22: 19).

**The Chaldeans:** a name by which the Babylonians were called (2 kings 24-25); were a people who dwelt south of Babylon, south of 'Messisa', namely of Mesopotamia, between the city of Babylon and the Persian Gulf. Those tribes were the center of power against the Assyrians. The Babylonian army included many races beside the Chaldeans (34: 1)... In the era of the new Babylon, the Chaldeans were referred to as the Babylonians; and Babylon was called 'Chaldea'. And after the fall of the new Chaldean or the Babylonian empire, the name 'Chaldeans' referred to soothsaying (Daniel 2: 2).

**The Moabites:** According to St. Jerome, the word 'Moab', which means (from the father), became a reference to the spirit of non-discernment. For they assumed that there is no difference between the living God and the pagan idols; and, by the perdition of Judah, and the destruction of Jerusalem, they believed that there will be no more salvation. "*They say, 'Look! The house of Judah is like all the nations'*" (Ezekiel 25: 8). Whereas St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian say: [Without mud, it is not possible to build a tower. And without knowledge, there will be no virtue].

After the death of king Solomon, Moab came to be a part of the Northern kingdom; But in the days of Jehoshaphat, they attacked Judah, but were defeated (2 kings 3); after which, Moab became sometimes independent and other times a colony. At the end of the eighth century BC, they were overcome by the Assyrians; and with the collapse of the Assyrian empire, Moab came to be independent again. In the days of king Jehoiakim, Moab joined forces with the

Chaldeans against Judah (2 kings 24: 2); And after the year 582 BC, Moab collapsed before Nebuchadnezzar, then submitted to Persia and the Arabs..

*“Surely at the commandment of the LORD this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done” (3)*

**“Because of the sins of Manasseh”**: Namely, for the sake of the sins they took after Manasseh. But, surely, if they chose to repent, God would have received them. Although God is longsuffering, yet he does not endure sin, and chastise whoever persist on it.

This book narrates to us the story of bondage in much detail, for the following reasons:

- a- For it represents our bondage to sin; of which the Lord Christ came to liberate us.
- b- For these details represent living aspects that touch our life and our relationship with God
- c- For we often forget or disregard this bondage. When the Lord Christ proclaimed His message, saying: *“You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8: 32), the Jews answered him, saying: *“We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say: “You will be made free?” .....* It is strange that they so utter, at the time they were actually under bondage of the Roman Empire. But this is the nature of man; who, while he surrenders to bondage, and humbly submits to it, he still assumes he is free. That is why the bondage of those people and their liberation were recorded, to make us always remember our need for the Lord Christ as the Liberator of our souls from the bondage of sin. ... Commenting on that answer, St, Augustine says:

- + Where is the truth in claiming that “*they are descendants of Abraham, and that they have never been in bondage?*”: Was Joseph not sold (Genesis 37: 28)?... ...Haven’t the saintly prophets led into captivity (2 kings 24; Ezekiel 1: 1)?; ... Were the Jews not the nation that submitted to cruel rulers, and had to make bricks of mud in Egypt (Exodus 1: 14)? ... Even in the days of the Lord Christ, were they not still paying tribute to the Roman Empire (Matthew 22: 15-21)? ... If you have never been in bondage to anyone; why then God kept reminding you that He made you free of bondage?! ... What the Lord Christ meant is that He liberates you from the bondage of the ego, the vain pride; but they understood the liberty by a carnal concept.

*“and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the LORD would not pardon” (4).*

*“Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?” (5)*

## **2- JEHOIAKIM AND THE CAPTIVATION OF JERUSALEM:**

*“So Jehoiakim rested with his fathers. Then Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place” (6)*

Here he says that Jehoiakim rested with his father in peace; whereas in (2 Chronicles 36: 6), we read how he was led into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar; and how he died a horrible death in a foreign country. The two narratives, though, have not indicated where Jehoiakim died. ....What came in 2 Kings 24: 10-16, is different from what came in 2 Chronicles 36: 5-8; For 2 Chronicles 36: 7, refer to that Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiakim, beside some articles of the house of the Lord; Whereas 2 Kings 24: 13, refer to that Nebuchadnezzar took all the treasures in the house of the Lord, and captivated all Jerusalem, which indicate that they are two different and separate episodes. ... Probably after the first captivity, when Jehoiakim was taken to Babylon, as it came in 2 Chronicles 36, he was allowed later to return to Jerusalem, where he died. It is also probable that Jehoiakim died in captivity..... It is however obvious that the books kept silent regarding this point.

In the book of Jeremiah, it came: *“Thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah: ‘They shall not lament for him, saying: Alas, my brother, or alas my sister. They shall not lament for him, saying: Alas master, or alas his glory’. He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and cast*

*out beyond the gates of Jerusalem*" (Jeremiah 22: 18-19). Jeremiah previously said about him: "*Woe to this man*" (13), who built for himself a palace with the mammon, when his corpse will find no tomb to be buried in; nor anyone to mourn. As he did not listen to the tears of the oppressed and the needy, no one will shed one tear on him.

What does he mean by the four expressions: "*Alas my brother*", "*Alas my sister*", "*Alas master*", and, "*Alas his glory*"?

- a- According to some, the first and second expressions are said by those taking part in the funeral; none of whom will say to those around him: "*Alas my brother*", or "*Alas my sister*"; for no man or woman will feel sorrow for the death of the king. The two following expressions are addressed by those participating in the funeral, to the dead man himself; for none of them laments the king as a master or one of glory.
- b- According to some, by the expression "the master", he means 'the father'; and by 'his glory' he means 'the mother or the mistress'. Certain Phoenician excavations about king 'Azitawadda', the following expression was found: [The Baal made me a father and a mother]. It is as though, the king, according to the traditional language, takes on himself the role of a father, a mother, a brother, and a sister.; which could not be said about the present king, who was neither this or that,

**"He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey"**, namely he will not be buried in a tomb, but his corpse will be cast on a heap of trash beyond the city gates. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Nebuchadnezzar killed him in Jerusalem, and left his corpse without burial beyond the city gates.

How can we conform between what came here about the death of Jehoiakim, not being buried in a tomb; and what came in 2 king 24: 6, that "*he rested with his fathers*"? .According to some, the later statement does

not refer to his burial, but is a common expression of death, whatever its circumstances are. While, according to others, the expression said by Jeremiah: *“He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, and his corpse will be drawn and cast beyond the city of Jerusalem”* (Jeremiah 22: 18-19), refers to how he was looked at; for, in spite of having an official burial, yet, in the eyes of his people he was like a dead donkey, worthy only of being cast beyond the city gates. .

*“And the king of Egypt did not come out of his land anymore, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates”* (7)

When our souls bow down, do not look to Him who dwells high up in heaven, and seek help from those down on earth, we will surely fail. The Egyptians pretended to be their allies, when they were, themselves, helpless to support them, and even had no desire to do. It is written: *“And the king of Egypt did not come out of his land anymore, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt, from the bank of Egypt to the River Euphrates”* (2 Kings 24: 7). It was also written: *“For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose. Therefore I have called her ‘Rahab-Hem-Shebeth’* (Isaiah 30: 7)

The Jewish leaders used to look at Egypt, and the alliance with her, as a source of salvation against the Chaldeans (Jeremiah 37: 3-10). That was the point of controversy between Jeremiah and the king; and even between him and the king’s counselors, Statesmen, religious leadership, and the people. For all counted the alliance with Egypt, and not the repentance, as the hope for salvation from the attack of the Chaldeans. And when Jeremiah warned king Zedekiah against that, he put him in the dungeon of prison (Jeremiah 37: 5-21)..

*“Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother’s name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem”* (8).

“**Jehoiakim**”, means (The Lord helps). The Holy book describes him as a grown-up young man (Jeremiah 22: 24-30; Ezekiel 19: 6), 18 years old; whereas in 2 Chronicles 36: 9, it came that he was only an 8 years old kid. There two interpretations of this controversy: the first that he sat on the throne together with his father, when he was 8 years old, as it was the custom in those days. And the second was that the 8 years are counted from the time of the first captivity, namely from the time Nebuchadnezzar sat on the throne. It is most probable, though, that Jehoiakim was 18 years old when he reigned, and not 8 years old; for he, already, had wives (15); and on account of that, it was said about him: “*he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to what his father has done*” (2 kings 24: 9); which could not be applied to an 8 years old kid. Moreover, being put by the Chaldeans in prison in the year 597 BC, indicates that they dealt with him as a mature person and not as a little kid.

Jeremiah prophesied in the days of Jehoiakin, whose reign only lasted three months. Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem , and took him together with his family, the leaders of the people, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, to Babylon (2 kings 24: 8-16); where he lived a captive.

It is worth noticing that the Jewish authorities, looking at Jeremiah’s prophecies and words during the siege of Jerusalem, by a political and military eye, and not by a religious one; considered them as breaking down the **psyche** of the army and the people; and looked at him, therefore, as a national traitor.

This time, Nebuchadnezzar dealt with the situation with an unexpected mild way. He did not destroy the city, the temple, the public buildings, and not even the city walls; but he only took the evil king Jehoiakin, whose reign only lasted three months; together with his family, the leaders of the people, captives; and the treasures of the house of the Lord, to Babylon (2 kings 24: 8-16).

The heart of the prophet Ezekiel was broken to see all its articles of the temple, so beloved by him, that go back to 300 years, since the days of king Solomon,

being melted, and put in sacs by the Babylonians; And to see the new king Zedekiah, Jehoiakin's nephew (2 kings 24: 17) defile the temple; and let the uncircumcised pagans defile the sanctuaries. Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar set his nets in the land of Judah, to catch any young man he sees with a talent or gift, and took them to Babylon; among whom was Ezekiel himself; to guarantee that no revolt against him will ever happen in Judah. Leaving behind, only the farmers and the very needy, who are incapable of revolting (2 kings 25: 12).

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done” (9)*

Jehoiakin was as evil as his father (7-18), He could have lived secure with righteousness, as a precious ring in God's hand, that no one can approach; but because of his evil, God took him away after three months of his reign, when he was 18 years old, together with his household; and was led into captivity in the year 597 BC to Babylon, to live a foreign captive, deprived of his country and his people, in inner humiliation, whatever honor or possibilities he was offered in captivity. In the second book of the kings 24, it came that Jehoiakin was treated well at the end of his life, although he remained a captive, and was never sent home.

Even though he had several sons (1 Chronicles 3: 17), none of them sat on the throne of Israel; he was, therefore, considered barren.

*“At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged”.(10)*

Jehoiakin followed his father Jehoiakim on the throne, to confront the mightier army on the face of the earth at that time. Few weeks after he sat on the throne, the second Babylonian invasion took place, Jerusalem was put under siege, the temple and the king's palace were robbed, and the majority of the leaders, including the king, were led captives to Babylon..

Nebuchadnezzar set Zedekiah, one of Josiah's sons, a king on Judah; but the Jews did not recognize him, counting Jehoiakin their legitimate king.

*“And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, as his servants were besieging it” (11)*

Nebuchadnezzar's servants came first to put the city under siege; followed by Nebuchadnezzar himself, who most probably came from Tyre which he put under siege at that time.

Although Zedekiah, who came to replace king Jehkiah or Coniah (2 kings 24), saw in his predecessor the fruits of his rejection of the divine Word, yet he, and his people, did not learn from his example. The name **xxxxxxxx** was used short of Jehkiah, which hinted to some kind of rebuke. .Because the king and his servants refused to listen to the words of God on the tongue of His prophet Jeremiah, they lost their inner peace. They assumed that putting Jeremiah in prison, would bring comfort to their conscience, and conquest to their minds; but the slandered prophet remained carrying strength and inner freedom, even inside the prison; for he was attached to the divine Word; while the king felt so weak, to seek a word from the lips of Jeremiah, to give him comfort.

The prophet Jeremiah, probably, was saying in his depths, the words uttered by king David: *“I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed”* (Psalm 119: 46). Commenting on this phrase, father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem says: [A sign of your love of God, is to speak of His testimonies before kings, with courage and daring; the way the apostles and the martyrs did ... We shall not be ashamed, if our works and words are befitting to the King of kings, speaking in us; and if we utter His commandments with love and confidence, and not in boredom or slothfulness.

+ Evil is given authority over us according to our sins, as it is written: *“Who gave Jacob for plunder, and Israel to the robbers? Is it not the Lord, He against whom we have sinned?”* (Isaiah 42: 24-25). Again, when king

Solomon sinned, and forsook God's commandments and ways, it is written: "*The Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon*" (1 Kings 11: 14)

God exhorts us to say in our prayer: "*Lead us not into temptation*", to show that the adversary would not be able to do anything against us, unless God allows him to do; in order to turn our fear and obedience toward God; In our temptations, evil would not be allowed, unless it is given authority from God; as is clear from the words of the Holy Book, saying: "*And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, as his servants were besieging it*" (11 LXX); and the Lord delivered it to his hands.

*"Then Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his servants, his princes, and his officers went out to the king of Babylon; and the king of Babylon, in the eighth year of his reign, took him prisoner"* (12)

Jehoiakim died before the arrival of Nebuchadnezzar to Jerusalem; Jehoiachin reigned only for three months (8) in the year 598 BC; then he and all his household delivered themselves to the enemy to save the city from destruction. Jehoiachin was led captive, with the rest of the leaders of Judah, including the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1: 1).

It came in Jeremiah: "*The wind shall eat up all your rulers; and your lovers shall go into captivity; surely then, you will be ashamed and humiliated for all your wickedness*" (Jeremiah 22: 22). By saying "your rulers", he probably means the king of Judah and his men, who were supposed to shepherd the people, but they, instead, became in need of shepherds from outside. When they fell into captivity in the year 597 BC, Jerusalem became disgraced, humiliated, and without shepherds; to be shepherded by the vain wind.

By the 'shepherds', he might also mean those whom she thought of as her shepherds, whether the kings of the nations allied to them, or their gods; who, themselves, were in need of shepherds; when the east wind came to scatter the

people around (Jeremiah 18: 17). Through trusting in the kings and gods of the foreign nations, she received the destructive wind instead of the Holy Spirit of God, the Grantor of life, conquest and prosperity, who blows on the soul to turn her to a heavenly sanctuary that all the hosts of darkness cannot corrupt. So her evil provoked her to trust in the human arm, and in the false gods, to be destroyed together with them.

*“And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king’s house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon king*

*of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said” (13).*

In his first attack (12), he most probably carried away the light-weight articles; whereas in this attack (13), he cut into pieces all the large articles and the altars, to take the gold with which they are covered.

**“As the Lord had said”**, on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah to king Hezekiah.

Nebuchadnezzar attacked the temple three times:

- a- When he took away the small articles and vessels and put them in the temple of his god. Those were restored by king Cyrus with Ezra, when he allowed him to return from captivity.
  - b- When he cut in pieces all the large articles, and took them away.
  - c- When he destroyed the temple and took away all the bronze..
- + We are committed to confess and to repeat again and again, that it is far better to keep the souls than to keep the gold for the Lord. For He who sent the disciples to preach the Word, without gold (Matthew 10: 9), seeks from all churches not to store the gold, but to spend and use it for the sake

of the needy. ....For what is the use of keeping what is not good (in itself)?

Do not we see how the Assyrians took all the gold and silver from the temple of the Lord?

Is it not better for the priests to use the gold to support the poor, than to have robbed or defiled by the enemy?

(St. Ambrose)

*“Also he carried into captivity all Jerusalem: all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None remained except the*

*poorest people of the land” (14)*

The southern kingdom (Judah), embracing the two tribes Judah and Benjamin, were led into captivity in the year 586 BC. The figure ten thousand (14), most probably, is an approximate figure of those taken away by Nebuchadnezzar from Judah and Jerusalem, of many categories referred to in verse 16.....The Babylonians differ from the Assyrians, in the way they dealt with the defeated countries: The Assyrians used to take away the majority of the inhabitants, and bring forth people from other nationalities to mix with the few remnants who are left in the land. Whereas the Babylonians used to take away all the great, the leaders, the craftsmen and the smiths, and leave back the poorest of the poor, of whom they choose rulers to govern in their name. They used to allow the captives they take to Babylon to live together, to become an important part of the society in Babylon; a policy that helped the Jews to melt together in captivity, until the day they returned home in the days of Ezra, Zerubbabel, etc.

Looking at what dwelt upon the city of God, the psalmist cries out, saying:

*“O GOD, the nations have come into Your inheritance; Your holy temple they have defiled;*

*They have laid Jerusalem in heaps;*

*The dead bodies of Your servants, they have given as food for the birds of heavens; the flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth;*

*Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them;*

*We have become a reproach to our neighbors; a scorn, and derision to those who are around us;*

*How Long, Lord? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?”*  
(Psalm 79: 1-5)

The Babylonian probably, perceiving that those poor, had no role in the decision concerning not to surrender during the siege; they left them in the land. And on another aspect; it was wise to do favor to the poor, so that when the armies depart from Jerusalem, no revolt would happen in Jerusalem. The poor not only got back their possessions that were robbed by the rich of their own race, but got, as well, what belonged to the rich.

+ The true Nebuchadnezzar (the devil) leads me shackled in chains to Babylon – Babylon of the confused mind.

There he puts on me the yoke of bondage;

There he puts an iron hook in my nose;

There he will command me to sing one of the songs of Zion (2 kings 19: 28; Psalm 136: 3)

+ It is our sins that make the barbarians strong; It is our transgressions that caused the hosts of Rome to prevail on us;

How miserable were the Israelites, when compared to Nebuchadnezzar, he was called *'the servant of God'* (Jeremiah 27: 6)

How miserable we are, as well, when we provoke God to anger, He uses the barbarians to pour His anger on us;

Yet, once Hezekiah repented, 185000 Assyrian soldiers were slain by one angel (2 Kings 19: 35)

And when Jehoshaphat sang praises to the Lord, He granted him conquest (2 Chronicles 20: 5-25).

And when the prophet Moses fought against Amalek, he prevailed, not by the sword, but by prayer;

We therefore, if we wish to be lifted up, we should first cast ourselves down.

(St. Jerome)

+ The prophet Jeremiah prophesied that after 70 years, the captives will return to build the city of Jerusalem anew, which they mourned when it was destroyed by the enemies. At the same time, there were prophets in captivity among the people in Babylon, like Ezekiel; who anticipated the fulfillment of the promise concerning the return from captivity after 70 years, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25: 11; 29: 11).  
..... It so happened that, after 70 years, a multitude of the captives returned to Jerusalem; and the destroyed temple was rebuilt.

(St. Augustine)

*“And he carried Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. The king’s mother, the king’s wives, his officers, and the mighty of the land he carried into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon” (15).*

A relative period of tranquility came on Judah, that encouraged it to revolt against Babylon; but Nebuchadnezzar sent armies to reach Judah in the year 598 BC. At that time Jehoiakim died in an obscure way, and his 18 years old son Jehoiakin (Jekniah) was enthroned in his place. Being full of evil, his reign did not last longer than three months; Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem, took him together with his family, the leaders of the people, and the treasures of the house of the Lord to Babylon (2 Kings 24: 8-6); and there Jehoiakin lived in captivity.

After several years, in the year 562 BC, Jehoiakin was set free, but was not allowed to return to his land (Jeremiah 52: 31-34; 2 kings 25: 27-30). The crown fell down from his head and that of his mother, and they lost the kingdom. It is obvious here, that the queen mother used to have an important role in the kingdom of Judah, and had great authority in the days of king Asa, until he got rid of her (1 kings 15: 13).

When calamity dwelt, the king and the queen found no refuge in the south, namely in the city of ‘Negeb’ (the southern part of Judah), known for its fertility and many cities; because the enemy isolated Jerusalem from those cities, so that the inhabitants of Jerusalem would find no place to go. Moreover, perceiving the danger that dwelt upon Jerusalem, those cities closed their gates, fearing to open them even before the leaderships of Judah on the run.

On the historical aspect, ‘Edom’ warned the cities of ‘Negeb’, against receiving the refugees from Jerusalem, until the Babylonian invasion is complete; first for their own sake, longing for the desolation of Judah, or in collaboration with the Babylonians, as confirmed by some excavations. ....According to some, on account of that those cities, were storehouses for the king, the enemies besieged them to stop any supply from reaching Jerusalem during its siege.

The captivation of Jehoiakin came in (2 Chronicles 36: 9-10); and was prophesied by Jeremiah in (Jeremiah 22: 24-27); and contrary to what happened with Jehoahaz, who was carried to Egypt then disappeared, and never mentioned again in the holy history, the issue of setting Jehoiakin free (but not to return home), was mentioned twice in (25: 27-30; and Jeremiah 52: 31: 34). *“And I will give you into the hands of those who seek your life, and into the hands of those whose face you fear, the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and the hand of the Chaldeans”. So I will cast you out, and your mother who bore you, into another country where you were not born, and there, you shall die; but to the land to which they desire to return, there they shall not return”* (Jeremiah 22: 25-27).

Instead of having his place in the hand of God, where there is freedom and glory, Jehoiakin’s place and that of his mother ‘Nehushata, the daughter of Elnathan’ (24: 8, 15), would be in captivity in Babylon, to live in bondage and humiliation; like remains of a valueless broken earthen vessel, cast out on a heap of trash out of the gates of Jerusalem.

The false prophets, to please the statesmen and the people, and to give them hope, proclaimed that Jehoiakin, considered by many, in spite of his captivity, the legitimate king; would return from captivity But the prophet Jeremiah daringly uttered what the Lord God said.. ... Jehoiakin remained in Babylon until the days of Merdoch the son of Nebuchadnezzar; namely for more than 37 years.; ... .

*“ All the valiant men, seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths, one thousand, all who were strong and fit for war, these the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon”* (16).

In verse 14, we read that 10,000 were captivated; whereas in verse 16, we read that 7000 were captivated. To clear up this controversy, we say that, beside 7000 men of valor; 2000 of rulers, and 1000 craftsmen and smiths were captivated.

As the time of the departure of St. Gregory the wonder-maker, in the year 238 AD, from Caesaria – Palestine, after spending several years as a disciple of the scholar Origen, he made a public proclamation, he directed to his mentor; in which he likened himself to Adam as he departed from paradise, to the prodigal son as he deserted his father's house; and to the Jews led into captivity to Babylon; in which he said:

- + I am like one of those who were carried away to Babylon..... I truly feel like someone cast away from his home town, and from his father's land, where the holy statutes are proclaimed day and night; where the songs of praise and spiritual words are heard; and where we have always enjoyed approaching the sacraments of God in the perpetual sun light. And at night, in our dreams, were always preoccupied with what our souls have seen and touched during the day. ....I feel like being cast away from that city, and led into captivity in a foreign country; where I would hang my guitar on the willows, where the rivers would be the place of my sojourn; where I labor in the mire; and has no heart to sing praises, if I still remember them. ....Although I feel like being committed to depart, against my will like a captive; yet I actually depart by my own free will, and not under the pressure of any one, when I have the option to stay where I am.

### **3- ZEDEKIAH (MATTANIAH) AND HIS REBELLION: . .**

*“ Then the king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah” (17).*

In the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of his reign, the king of Babylon camped before Jerusalem, and built siege wall all around her; Yet, before the valor of her defenders, the Babylonians put her under siege, then the

approach of the Egyptians forced them to retreat for some time (Jeremiah 37: 5); to come back later on.

In the following is Zedekiah's request from the prophet Jeremiah, to ask the Lord; and the prophet's response to it, in the year 588, or at the beginning of the year 587 BC.

In Jeremiah, it came: *"Say to the king and to the queen mother, 'Humble yourselves; sit down, for your rule shall collapse, the crown of your glory. The cities of the South shall be shut up, and no one shall open them. Judah shall be carried away captive, all of it; it shall be wholly carried away captive'"* (Jeremiah 13: 18-19).

In the ninth day of the fourth month, in the eleventh year of his reign, when the food was depleted from the capital under siege, Zedekiah, together with his men, during the evening time, attempted to flee from the city; and crawled between the Babylonian strongholds, heading East toward the Jordan. But the Babylonian army pursued, overtook, caught him in the plains of Jericho, and brought him back to Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah North of Palestine, where he was tried, his sons killed before him, his eyes put out, bound in bronze fetters, and led blind to Babylon (2 Kings 24: 17-20; 25: 1-7; 2 Chronicles 36: 11-21; Jeremiah 39: 1-14); where he was put in prison until his death (52).

**Between what came in Jeremiah 52 and what came in kings 24:**

*"But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; all his army were scattered from him. So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he pronounced judgment on him. Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and he killed all the princes of Judah in Riblah.. He also put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in bronze fetters, took him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death"* (Jeremiah 52: 8-11)

What came here conformed, word by word, to what came in (2 kings 24: 18-20); and to what came in (Jeremiah 39: 1-7).

The text here does not refer to the escape of the king; although the rest of the chapter hinted to it. His escape was probably through the gate known as “between the two walls”, assuming that he could manage to go through the Chaldean siege around the region; but the Chaldean army could catch him up in the wilderness of Jericho (See Jeremiah 39: 5-7; 2 kings 25: 1-7).

Zedekiah was brought to trial before Nebuchadnezzar, who was waiting in Riblah in the land of Hamath, a Syrian city, south of Kadesh, on the River ‘Orontes’, of a strategic location, for being on the crossroads between Egypt and Mesopotamia; a location chosen by Nebuchadnezzar to keep any foreign help from reaching Judah while he invaded Jerusalem.

All the sons of the king were killed, together with many of the rulers of Judah. But those who managed to escape, returned later and gathered around ‘Gedaliah’ the new governor.

Zedekiah was put in prison, which according to Hitzig, and the Hebrew text, meant (the house of punishment) or (the house of reform); where Zedekiah was committed to work as a grinder at the millstones, like all the other prisoners, and like Samson (See Judges 16: 21). According to Ewald, this conforms to what came in the lamentations of Jeremiah, saying: “*Young men ground at the millstones*” (Lamentations 5: 13)

Because of the similarities between what came in Jeremiah 52, and what came in 2 kings 24, some assumed that Jeremiah 52, is a quotation of the second book of the kings; but the following credible evidences contradict their view:

- a- The name of the king of Babylon here is ‘Nebuchadrezzar’, the name often used by the prophet Jeremiah; whereas in the second book of the kings he came as ‘Nebuchadnezzar’..

b- In Jeremiah 52, things were mentioned that did not come in 2 Jeremiah 24, 25, like:

- (In Jeremiah 52: 10, it says that Nebuchadnezzar gave the command to kill all the rulers of Judah in Riblah; while Zedekiah was carried to Babylon where he was put in prison until the day of his death.
- In Jeremiah 52: 19-23, came details of the robbed articles of the temple, that were not mentioned in the second book of the kings; nor in the description of the building of the temple in 1 King 7.
- In Jeremiah 52: 28-30, the three departures to captivity, and the number of captives, were accurately mentioned; something we do not see in any of the historical books of the Old Testament.

Chapter 52 of the book of Jeremiah came as an annex of the book, to confirm that what Jeremiah prophesied, have been actually fulfilled. The prophet Jeremiah often talked about the desolation of Jerusalem, and of the temple; and the captivation of Judah; things that were fiercely opposed by the false prophets; and were scoffed by all, except for a very few of them; and were counted as human talk that would destroy the psyche of the people and the army. Now, the author proclaims that what they thought of, as fantasies, became actuality; have been fulfilled, and the cruel captivation has actually begun; yet together with some breaths of living hope in the work of God among His people, to bring them back to their land after chastising them. As to his talk concerning the return from captivity, the book of Jeremiah presented what happened to king Jehoiakin (Jeremiah 52: 31-34), as the first sign of hope for the sake of the future.

### **King Zedekiah:**

In 2 Chronicles 36: 10, it came that the king of Babylon summoned Jehoiakin, took him to Babylon, and made Zedekiah, his brother a king in his place. Zedekiah, himself, is Mattaniah, Jehoiakin's uncle. For the Hebrews used to call the relatives 'brothers'; as Abraham called his nephew 'Lot'. "The king of Babylon

made Mattaniah, Jehoiakim's uncle king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah" (2 Kings 24: 17); a Hebrew name, meaning (Jehovah is righteousness) or (the righteousness of Jehovah).

He was the last of the kings of Judah; his mother's name was 'Hamutal', daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah (2 Kings 24: 18); set by Nebuchadnezzar, after the first captivity, a ruler over Judah; when he was 21 years old, and reigned for 11 years in Jerusalem (597-587 BC). He did evil in the sight of the Lord. Although he was not the most evil of the kings of Judah.....He led his people to perdition through::

- a- His sins made him lose the divine help. Although he used to inquire from the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah; yet he never gave heed to His counsel, for he anticipated an answer according to his desire (2 Chronicles 36: 12; Jeremiah 37: 2). Besides, having trusted more in the promises of the Pharaoh of Egypt, his inquiry from the Lord was some kind of pretense and for the sake of appearances.. ... He actually defiled the temple (2 Chronicles 36: 14), and did not do justice.

It was not just on the spiritual or faith aspect, that Zedekiah erred by trusting in human arm, or in the Pharaoh of Egypt, but on the political aspect as well.. For about a century and a half before, in the days of the prophet Isaiah, Judah received a flood of Egyptian pledges of military help to be able to confront the Assyrians, then the Babylonians.....The Egyptians, fearing the danger of the Mesopotamian increasing power, intended to use Judah and Israel as their first line of defense against them. But as all those pledges came to no avail, and gave neither Judah nor Israel any protection, it was befitting of Zedekiah to take that into consideration.

- b- At the beginning, Zedekiah sent a delegation to Nebuchadnezzar, most probably to confirm his loyalty (39: 3). In the fourth year of his reign, he,

himself, went to Babylon 951: 59); And finally, he dared to rebel against Babylon, encouraged by the elites of Judah.

Delegates came to him from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon, to set together a collective plan of rebellion against the king of Babylon; to be relieved of paying tribute to him, but they were all unfaithful in their intentions.. By revolting against Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah broke a vow to be his ally (2 Chronicles 36: 13; Ezekiel 17: 15, 16, 18), and the king of Babylon lost his trust in the Jewish leadership, or in most of them, particularly in the royal household. ....Another provocation to that tendency to revolt, was that a new king sat on the Egyptian throne, and intended to challenge Babylon, to restore for himself, some of the lands that belonged to Egypt, and took over by Babylon.

c- His foolishness and lack of wisdom.

d- In chapters 34, 37, and 38, we saw him as a shaky personality, not suitable to be a national leader, nor a steward of Nebuchadnezzar; who, putting himself in an awkward position between (the hammer) of

Nebuchadnezzar and (the hard place) of his own people, to gain neither of them. He went to Babylon to renew his vow to be faithful to the king; then came back to revolt against him, breaking his vow (2 Kings 24: 9);

...He sought to liberate the Hebrew slaves, to let the Lord lift His wrath from him; but once, the siege on Jerusalem was lifted, he, again put them in bondage (34: 18, 16, 21); ... He, heeding the counsel of men of his royal

court; put Jeremiah in prison, then went to ask the prophet's counsel more than once, giving him every reverence.

...

*“Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah” (18).*

Nebuchadnezzar set Zedekiah a king in place of his brother (uncle) Jehoiakin (2 Kings 24: 17). But, being evil, he did not heed the words of the prophet Jeremiah, and defiled the temple. At the start of his reign, some of the men in Judah, still looking at the captive Jehoiakin as their legitimate king, longed for his return to reclaim his throne (Jeremiah 17-29). Hence, Zedekiah was in a struggle between his desire to appear loyal to his Babylonian master, and to pretend opposing him, as a show off of a false spirit of patriotism before the people.

'Mattaniah , who reigned by the name of Zedakah, sat on the throne in the year 598 BC; in the same year Jehoiakim died, and Jehoiakin was captivated. Zedekiah reigned until the fall of Jerusalem in the year 586 BC.

*“He also did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done” (19)*

*“For because of the anger of the LORD this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, that He finally cast them out from His presence. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon” (20).*

### **The revolt of Zedekiah:**

Foolishly, the king of Judah trusted in the Egyptians in the days of Pharaoh 'Apries' or 'Hophra' (Jeremiah 44: 30). And sought his help (Ezekiel 17: 15-18). Apries, who newly succeeded Psacmtik the second (594-588 BC) on the throne, had an ambitious agenda to renew the glory of Egypt, which came to no avail. He challenged Nebuchadnezzar by attacking Phoenecia, and coming to help Zedekiah, (Jeremiah 37: 5), but he failed to rescue Judah (Jeremiah 37: 7-8); and the cost was the end of his reign and of his life itself.

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## AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 24

### KEEP ME, O LORD, IN YOU, LEST THE ENEMY CAPTIVATES ME

- + In bitterness I meditate in Your longsuffering along the generations;  
The people You have chosen for Yourself, attached themselves to foreign gods;  
Idols crawled into the house You sanctified for Yourself,  
The kings You set to lead Your people to heaven,  
Became an offense, and led them to hell instead.
  
- + You allowed the enemy to besiege the city, You cherish,  
You allowed them to invade it and defile the temple  
You allowed them to rob the holy articles;  
And the treasures of the temple of gold and silver;  
King Zedekiah watched the enemy kill his two sons;  
They put his eyes out, and shackled him in bronze fetters;  
They made him the laughing stock of the pagans.
  
- + I hasten to You, lest the enemy besiege and captivate me;  
Make me repent, to return to You, and throw myself in Your bosoms;

Let Your fiery Spirit burn every corruption in my heart;  
Grants me the inner insight, to see Your exalted glory;  
Sanctify my whole being, and adorn me with Your splendor;  
Who could rob You, O Lord of the heavenly hosts?!

+ Babylon invaded Jerusalem, Your holy city;  
But, can the enemy crawl into my inner Jerusalem?  
Grant me, O Lord, the perfection of liberty, that sin would never take me  
back;  
.Shine in my depths with Your light;  
That the hosts of darkness cannot get attached to me;  
Your divine presence is my conquest, glory, and eternal joy.

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# CHAPTER 25

## THE INVADERS OF THE TEMPLE

This chapter present to us the last stage of the complete captivation of Judah by Babylon.

Having broken his vow, and was not faithful to his promise to the king of Babylon, the later came to put Jerusalem under siege for as long as a year, five months, and 29 days (Jeremiah 37: 5, 11). The city collapsed because of the famine, and Zedekiah fled together with his warriors by night, but they deserted him, and scattered from around him. The Babylonian army pursued him, caught him, and delivered him to Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah to be tried as a rebel.. They also caught the elites and the prominent members of the royal court, and killed them all in Riblah.

After destroying and robbing the temple, the king of Babylon appointed Gedaliah, a friend of Jeremiah, a governor on Judah; who was soon assassinated, and the people had to flee to Egypt.

In the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiakin, he was raise by Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, released from prison, and treated well

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| 1- Jerusalem put under siege                               | 1 - 2   |
| 2- King Zedekiah flees                                     | 3 - 5   |
| 3- King Zedekiah tried                                     | 6 - 7   |
| 4- The temple and the houses of the elites burned down     | 8 - 9   |
| 5- The ultimate captivation, and the robbing of the temple | 10 -    |
| 17   |         |
| 6- The leaders of the revolt tried                         | 18 - 21 |
| 7- Gedaliah appointed a governor over Judah                | 22 - 24 |

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| 8- Gedaliah assassinated, and the people flee to Egypt | 25 - 26 |
| 9- Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon honors Jehoiakin     | 27 – 30 |

## **1- JERUSALEM PUT UNDER SIEGE:**

*“ Now it came to pass in the ninth year of (king Zedekiah’s) reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem*

*and encamped against it; and they built a siege wall against it all around” (1)*

In the ninth year of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, he rebelled against Babylon, and most probably attempted to make an alliance with Egypt, Tyre, Sidon, and Moab, against Babylon.

The Lord assigned to the prophet Ezekiel the ninth year, the tenth month, and the tenth day of Zedekiah’s reign, as the time when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon would come to Jerusalem. and commanded him to write this date down in his records; which conformed exactly to the day, Jerusalem was put under the ultimate siege (2 kings 25: 1). By this, the Lord intended to proclaim that what will happen is not by chance, nor according to human planning, but through a divine allowance, and by an elaborate planning..

As the Assyrians previously invaded Israel on three consecutive stages, God allowed for Judah to be captivated the same way (24: 1; 25: 1, 10); to give the leaderships and the people as many chances to repent.

From what came in Jeremiah 28: 1-11, we may deduce that the Jews in Jerusalem were still anticipating the return of king Jehoiakin from captivity, and the articles of the house of the Lord from Babylon; and from what came in

Jeremiah 29: 25-28, that the captives in Babylon had the same hope. King Zedekiah sent a message to the king of Babylon (Jeremiah 39: 3), then he, himself, went to Babylon (Jeremiah 51-59), but Nebuchadnezzar did not heed his appeal. And when Zedekiah returned with failure, he provoked the kings of Tyre, Sidon, Moab, Edom, and Emmon, to unite together with him against the king of Babylon (Jeremiah 27: 3); and sent delegates to Egypt to seek support (Ezekiel 17: 15). By so doing, Zedekiah, publicly declared his rebellion against Babylon.

Saying: **“All his army”** (Jeremiah 34: 1), makes it clear that all the kingdoms of the earth under the authority of the king of Babylon, fought against Jerusalem, as one army of Babylon..

**“Against Jerusalem”**, The war at the beginning was on the cities of Judah, that all fell except for Lachish and Azekah, two fortified cities on the route to Egypt (Jeremiah 34: 7), .....Seeing the army of Babylon divided, the Egyptians used the chance, and their armies came out of Egypt; and hearing of that, the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem, retreated from around it (Jeremiah 37: 7), and joined their forces that were besieging Lachish and Azekah. The Egyptians returned with fear to their land (Ezekiel 17: 17). And Nebuchadnezzar resumed besieging Jerusalem.

**“They built a siege wall”**, They set siege mound, namely heaps of dust in front of the wall (2 Samuel 20: 15); and built towers on them, to throw arrows, spears, and rocks on the defenders of the city, where all the people and the army were besieged..

*“So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah” (2)*

## **2- KING ZEDEKIAH FLES:.**

*“By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine had become so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land” (3).*

In the fourth month (Jeremiah 52: 6), the famine was so severe, that even the elites searched the trash bins, hoping to find something to eat; the women ate their own children, one third of the inhabitants died by famine and pestilence, one third fell by the sword, and one third were led captives to Babylon (Ezekiel 5: 12).

*“Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled at night by way of the gate between two walls, which was by the king’s garden, even though the Chaldeans*

*were still encamped all around against the city. And the king went by way of the plain” (4)*

**“The king’s garden”**, is believed to be the garden of king Solomon in Etham, 6 miles south of Jerusalem, known for its beauty (2 kings 25:4; Ecclesiastes 2: 5-9; Jeremiah 39: 4; 52: 7).

The king, the noble, and the religious leaders were so preoccupied with riches and authority, to assume that they were safe inside the walls of the fortified Jerusalem; not perceiving that the time will soon come for Jerusalem to be besieged and destroyed; and for its king (Zedekiah) would be helpless to defend it. Zedekiah was the last king of the seed of David to sit on the throne of Judah, when Nebuchadnezzar took it over (2 kings 25: 1).

*“But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him” (5).*

It is obvious that king Zedekiah fled by night from the south-eastern side of the city, heading to Jericho through the wilderness; probably intending to cross the

Jordan and take refuge in Moab; but the Chaldeans pursued him, caught him, and did to him all what came in the two prophecies: the first in Jeremiah 32: 4-5; that he was going to be delivered to the hand of the king of Babylon; and the second in Ezekiel 12: 13, that he was going to be led captive to Babylon the land of the Chaldeans, but he will not see it, and there he will die.

### 3- ZEDEKIAH TRIED:.

*“So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him”*  
(6)

After being arrested, Zedekiah was taken to Riblah, on the River Orontes in Syria, the official residence and military headquarters of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon , who at the time was besieging both Jerusalem and Tyre; going sometime to this, and other times to that; and relaxing in Riblah in between. .

*“Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon”* (7).

His punishment was recorded here, but his death was recorded in Ezekiel 12: 12..

The old documents of the Near East recorded, that the last thing Zedekiah saw by his own eyes, because of his evil and foolishness, was killing his two sons in a horrible way; a portrait that stuck to his memory until his death in the Babylonian prison (Jeremiah 52: 11).

**“They bound him with two bronze fetters”**, one for his hands, and the other for his feet. ....Zedekiah’s decision to rebel against the king of Babylon after seeing what happened to Jehoiakim, could only be described as foolish; By it,

Zedekiah consummated the measure of iniquity when he broke his vow to the king of Babylon. ....The king of Babylon, however, showed some mercy, by not killing him, and leaving him in prison until the day of his death (Jeremiah 34: 5).

Jeremiah had previously given him the following counsel:

*"I also spoke to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words saying: 'bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the Lord has spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon. Therefore, do not listen to the words of the prophets who speak to you, saying, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon, for they prophesy a lie to you; for I have not sent them, says the Lord, yet they prophesy a lie in My name, that I may drive you out, and that you may perish, you and the prophets who prophesy to you'"* (Jeremiah 27: 12-15),

By saying that, the prophet Jeremiah seemed to the king and the people, as though he was an agent of the king of Babylon, and a traitor to his own land,. It was difficult for any Jew, the king in particular, to hear those words, saying: *"Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon"*; for they knew that the Lord their God is the Liberator from bondage, having promised, saying: *"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt , that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you walk upright"* (Leviticus 26: 13); .....How would He now want them to bow down to bring their necks under the yoke of the pagan king of Babylon? It has to be a sign of God's wrath, on account of that one of the curses under which the people would fall, in case they disobey God's commandment is: *"You shall serve your enemies , whom the Lord will send against you; ... He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you. The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies; a nation whose language you will not understand"* (Deuteronomy 28: : 48 etc.).

Zedekiah did not listen to Jeremiah, but put him in prison; even though we do not know for how long he remained there. ....Yet we know that the king, himself was led into captivity (587 BC), after seeing his own sons killed before his eyes, which were later put out (2 kings 25: 1-7)

The prophet Jeremiah presents to us 7 prophesies he uttered in Jerusalem in several situations (Jeremiah 21: 3-7; 24: 8-10; 25: 8-29). All of them were literally fulfilled , as it came in 2 kings 25; and 2 Chronicles 36:

- a- God will deliver the city of Jerusalem into the hands of the king of Babylon (Jeremiah 32: 4)
- b- Zedekiah, king of Judah will not escape from the hands of the Chaldeans; he will surely be delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon (Jeremiah 32: 4)
- c- Zedekiah, king of Judah, will talk to the king of Babylon, mouth to mouth; and his eyes will see his eyes (Jeremiah 32: 4)
- d- Zedekiah will be taken to Babylon (Jeremiah 32: 5)

The prophet Ezekiel prophesied that Zedekiah will never see Babylon (Ezekiel 12: 13); but here we read that he was actually taken to Babylon (5); ..... an apparent contradiction! but it is actually not, both statements are right; for, although he was taken to Babylon, he did not see it; on account of that, in Judah, his eyes were put out (2 kings 25: 4-7; Jeremiah 52: 8, 11).... Because he broke his vow to the king of Babylon, he deserved to have a double punishment: [captivity and loss of vision].

And according to St. John Chrysostom: [One of the prophets proclaims that "*Zedekiah will not see Babylon*" (Ezekiel 12: 13); while another prophet says: "*He will be taken to Babylon*" (5); There is no contradiction here, for, although he was taken to Babylon, yet he did not see it because his eyes were put out.

[Having broken his vow even to a pagan man, he deserves a double punishment: Loss of eyesight and captivity. ; how much more would it be to break the vow to

God? the soul lose its freedom, and the inner vision its light; man would submit to an inner bondage and blindness].

+ What do you think would happen to Nebuchadnezzar?..... We know from the Holy Book how he was blood-thirsty, and as ferocious as a lion?! ... how he took the bones of the kings out of their tombs (Jeremiah 8: 1; Ba 2: 25)?; .... How he led the people into captivity?! ... how he put out the eyes of the king of Judah, after letting him see his own two sons slain (2 Kings 25: 7); ...how he broke the cherubim to pieces; not the unseen cherubim – for that would never come to man’s mind – but the two carved images over the ark of the covenant, in the middle of which God spoke with His own voice; ... how he treaded with his feet the veil of the sanctuary, took the altar of incense from the house of God, and carried it to the temple of the idols (2 Chronicles 26: 7); ... how he confiscated all the offerings to the house of the Lord; ... , and how he burned the temple from its foundation?!

What punishment would he deserve for doing all that?! Would it not be tens of thousands as much?!

Let us see how compassionate was God’s love, that turned Nebuchadnezzar into a wild beast; chastised by dwelling in the wilderness to be saved; having roared over the sanctuary, he got the claws of a lion;; ate herbs like a bull; and his body got wet by dew;....

Having gone through all that, let us hear what he said: *“I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored Him, who lives forever”* (Daniel 4: 34)....

Once he came to know the Most High, he uttered thanksgiving to Him, and repented his sins; .....Once he recognized his weakness, God brought him back to the honor of his kingdom, and forgave him..

What then? When you repent; and once you live a blameless life, Will God not grant you the forgiveness of your sins and the kingdom of heaven? ... The Beneficent God, even though He shows chastisement, yet He hastens to forgive ..... I wish, therefore, no one despair of his salvation.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

#### **4- THE TEMPLE AND THE HOUSES OF THE ELITES BURNED DOWN WITH FIRE:**

*“And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a*

*servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD and the king’s house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great,*

*he burned with fire” (8).*

According to St. Bemen: [Unless Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guards of the king of Babylon comes, the house of the Lord would not be burned (2 kings 25: 8-9). Namely, Unless the pleasures of the belly, the slothfulness,

and the greed, enter into the soul, the soul would not be defeated in her war against the enemy.

*“And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls of Jerusalem all around” (9).*

When Jerusalem fell into captivity, the houses of the great were burned, and the house of the Lord was completely robbed, its pillars broken down, was burned with fire, 380 years after it was built, and the prophesies

were fulfilled (Jeremiah 21: 10; 34: 2; 38: 18, 23; Psalm 79).

+ That work done by Nebuzaradan the servant of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, was a proclamation that, having forsaken the holiness of life, the holy city deserved to be destroyed by the hands of the Gentiles.

The defilement follows greed; as testified by the prophet, who refuses to cover up such obvious things when he talks, saying: *“And all the arm of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls of Jerusalem all around”* (10), ... The **‘captain of the guard’** refers to the belly which we love, and with an exalted care, we fill it with the best of food. And **‘the walls of Jerusalem’**, refer to the virtues of the soul that rise up high, desiring the spiritual heavenly peace. So the captain of the guard destroys the walls of Jerusalem; for, once the belly swells with food, and is overcome by greed, all the virtues of the soul are defiled.

(Pope Gregory the Great)

## **5- THE ULTIMATE CAPTIVATION AND THE ROBBING OF THE TEMPLE:**

The walls of Jerusalem were destroyed, and remained as such for as long as a century and a half (Nehemiah 2: 11 – 6: 16).

*“Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive the rest of the people who remained in the city and the defectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon,*

*with the rest of the multitude”* (10)

***“The defectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon”***, were those who fled from the city during the siege, and resorted to the Babylonians.

*““But the captain of the guard left some of the poor of the land as vinedressers and farmers.” (12)*

It was the custom of the Babylonians when they captivate a people, they used to lead those with talents and abilities into captivity; and leave the poor and the needy in the land .. In our study of the book of Daniel, we noticed how the king of Babylon established an institute in his palace under the supervision of Ashpenaz (Daniel 1: 3). That institute probably included a department to provide the children of the Jewish elites with education that suits their culture and language. Such a policy to produce men of learning to serve the king, reveals the wisdom, seriousness, and broadmindedness of the king of Babylon. Choosing young men of the seed of the Jewish kings and nobles, shows his perpetual feeling of being a conqueror who brings forth those young men, not to humiliate and torture them, but to set them to serve his palace, and to run the State affairs. On another aspect; by so doing, he encourages those young men to submit to him and not to think of revolting against him, to the account of their home land; And, at the same time, to provides the common Jew captives with some satisfaction and peace of mind, that they have someone to represent them in the royal palace.....

Those young men were distinguished to have the following qualifications:

- Honorable descent
- Beautiful and strong bodies
- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Ability to convey knowledge to the others
- Qualifications to work in the royal court; namely to turn their wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to work they practice in their daily life

Together with providing them with these qualifications, the king intended to provide them with the Babylonian culture and tongue, to distance them from anything that might lead them to remember their heritage and homeland.. With wisdom, the king of Babylon did not attempt to destroy their personalities, nor to humiliate them, but to turn their energies to the account of his royal house.

Among those young men were Levites who ministered in the house of God in Jerusalem; who were asked to sing what they used to do in the temple; but it was not possible for them to praise God with joy and exultation in the land of captivity, while being denied the enjoyment of His temple. Those feelings, the psalmist expressed by saying: *“For there, those who carried us away captives asked of us a song; and those who plundered us requested mirth; saying: Sing us one of the songs of Zion”* (Psalm 137: 3).

+ We read how the enemies, when they attacked the great holy city, where the living God was worshipped, dragged along all the inhabitants, the singers, and the prophets (Like Ezekiel and Daniel) to Babylon; .....how those captives refused to sing their divine praise, when they were asked to do by their conquerors, and to play their music in a defiled land; .....how they hanged their harps on the willow trees, .....and how they wept at the rivers of Babylon.

It so seems to me that I am one of them, driven out of my city, and from my land, where the holy laws are proclaimed day and night, where the songs of praise, and spiritual words are heard; where the light of the sun perpetually shines; and where we come to be in continuous contact with the secrets of God, through alert vision by day, and dreaming by night, of what we have experienced by day. In short, where we perpetually enjoy the divine issues.

I feel as though I am driven out of that city, and come to be a captive in a foreign land, where, having no strength to play music, I, like those in the

old, would hang my harp on the willow tree; and my sojourn would be at the river banks, where, working in the mire, I would not have the heart to sing the praises for God, even if I still remember them.

(St. Gregory the wonder-maker)

*“The bronze pillars that were in the house of the LORD, and the carts and the bronze Sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried their bronze to Babylon” (13).*

The Chaldeans have already robbed Jerusalem twice before (Daniel 1: 2’ 2 kings 24: 13); And most of what remain were huge pillars covered with bronze, which they now peel off, leaving the pillars bare and ugly; as is

bitterly testified by the author.

*“They also took away the pots, the shovels, the trimmers, the spoons, and all the bronze utensils with which the priests ministered” (14).*

*“The firepans and the basins, the things of solid gold and solid silver, the captain of the guard took away” (15).*

*“The two pillars, one Sea, and the carts, which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, the bronze of all these articles was beyond measure” !6)*

Because of his great love for the house of God, and his grief on its desolation, the author went on and on talking about that issue; the way we usually do when we tend to remember the virtues of our departed beloved.

+ “Babylon” means (confusion); and the cups of gold refer to the teachings of the philosophers, and the eloquence of the speakers.... Who among us was not swayed around by the philosophers? ... Who among us was not deceived by the eloquent speakers of this world? ... Their cup is of gold,

and their eloquence is on the outside; while inside, it is full of venom, which they conceal through the shining gold.

(St. Jerome)

*“The height of one pillar was eighteen cubits, and the capital on it was of bronze. The height of the capital was three cubits, and the network and pomegranates all around the*

*capital were all of bronze. The second pillar was the same, with a network.” (17)*

The psalmist was probably describing what dwelt upon the temple, when he says: *“They seem like men who lift up axes among the thick trees; and now they break down its carved work, all at once, with axes and hammers”* (Psalm 74: 5-6).

According to St. Augustine, the invaders, to destroy the temple, held axes to break the doors and the beautiful wooden carved furniture with foolish ferocity, as though they were striking the interwoven thick trees in a forest. The full description of the destruction of the temple came in 2 Kings 25: 8-17; Jeremiah 52: 12-23.

+ Finding out that the truth is not on his side, the devil breaks down the doors of those who allow him to enter, by axes and hammers.. ... Our Savior, on the other hand, is gentle and meek. He teaches us, that if any of us intends to follow Him, and to be His disciple, he will not commit him to come to Him; but would address him as *“My sister and bride”*. .....If he opens his door before Him, He would enter; but if he does not, or delays to open it, He would depart from him.

(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)

## 6- THE LEADERS OF THE REVOLT TRIED:

*“And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the second priest, and the three doorkeepers” (18).*

**Seraiah the chief priest** who was killed in Riblah (21), and his son Jehozadak was led into captivity (1 Chronicles 6: 15). Through the seed of Jehozadak, came Ezra, the great scribe and reformer, who, one day, returned to Jerusalem, and took over the work of Seraiah his grandfather (Ezra 7: 1).

**Zephaniah the second priest;** namely the deputy chief priest; who used to carry out the duties of the chief priest in case any ritual obstacles would keep him from doing them. He might be the priest referred to by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 21: 1; 29: 5).

*“He also took out of the city an officer who had charge of the men of war, five men of the king’s close associates who were found in the city, the chief recruiting officer of the army,*

*who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the city” (19).*

By the **“the king’s close associates”** he means those counselors who gave him council to revolt against Babylon, and not any of the common people.

*“So Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, took these and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah” (20).*

*“Then the king of Babylon struck them and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah was carried away captive from its own land” 21).*

Like Israel, Judah was carried into captivity, because of her sins and apostasy..... God has previously warned His people; then allowed for the desolation and captivation of Judah (Deuteronomy 28). .... In his lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah expresses the extent of his grief to see what dwelt upon Jerusalem.

Here we see how God found out that captivation was the best way to deal with the sins of Judah. There are other stages of captivation, beside the three or four major stages; the first of which was in the seventh year of Nenuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 52: 28), or the eighth, according to (2 kings 24: 12), when Jehoiakin was captivated. The second captivation was in the eighteenth year of Nebuccadrezzar (Jeremiah 52: 29), or the nineteenth according to (2 Kings 25: 8), when Zedekiah was captivated. And the third captivation was in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, when Nebuzaradan took 745 captives (Jeremiah 52: 30).

As we notice that the number of captives varies between 2 kings 24, and Jeremiah 52; so are the dates thereof; it so seems that between one major stage of captivation and another, the army of Babylon came to Judah, and led more captives to serve in Babylon. The difference in the number of captives and dates of captivation, might be also because, every author referred the dates to some different issue than the other. And because the number of captives mentioned by one, might refer to those who actually arrived to Babylon; while the other refers to those who were taken from Jerusalem, some of whom might have died on the way.:

## **7- GEDALIAH MADE GOVERNOR OF JUDAH::**

*“ Then he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, governor over the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left” (22).*

Nebuchadnezzar made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, governor on Judah, and a steward of the king of Babylon. As we know, Ahikam was one of the five men sent by king Josiah to Huldah the prophetess to inquire about the words of the book of the law that has been discovered in the house of the Lord (2 Kings 22: 12, 14); His residence was in Mizpah, and used his influence to protect the prophet Jeremiah against his adversaries..

**Gedaliah**, a Hebrew name, meaning (Jehovah is great). His father was Ahikam, who supported Jeremiah in his stand against trusting in Egypt to confront Babylon (Jeremiah 26: 24).. Being appointed a steward on the land, might have been by a request from Jeremiah, who was honored and respected by both Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuzaradan (Jeremiah 40: 1-6)..That, beside the upbringing of Gedaliah and belonging to a family of special consideration, made him acceptable by the Babylonians. Gedaliah, even though, not of the royal seed, yet he was just, upright, and had zeal on the land. He counseled the Jews to submit to the king of Babylon (Jeremiah 38: 17-18)

Left alive (Jeremiah 39: 11-14; 40: 1-5), Jeremiah helped Gedaliah in reorganizing the issues of Judah (Jeremiah 40: 6).

An earthen seal was found, that went back to that period, was engraved with the words: ‘Belongs to Gedaliah, the ruler on the house’.

*“ Now when all the captains of the armies, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah—Ishmael the son of*

*Nethaniah, Johanan the son of Careah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men” (23)*

The captains of the army were those who scattered from around king Zedekiah after he was arrested by the Babylonians; And now they came to proclaim their submission to Babylon.

**Mizpah;** For a long time, a center of spiritual, as well as political fame (1 Samuel 10: 17; 1 Kings 15: 22), and was at that time among the peaceful regions of the land; was an ideal location for the ruling authority in the region, particularly with the collapse of Jerusalem. Nowadays, it is called ‘Tell en-Nasbeh’, 9 miles north of Jerusalem

Some may wonder if it is Mizpah in Gilead (Judges 11: 21), where Jacob and Laban made a heap and a pillar, as a witness to the covenant they made between themselves (Genesis 31: 49);; Where the children of Israel assembled to fight the Ammonites (Judges 10: 17); And where Jephthah encountered his daughter (Judges 11: 34); whose location is where ‘Tel-Remet nowadays; .....Or it is Mizpah in Benjamin, the village of the prophet Samuel, where Saul was chosen a king (1 Samuel 10: 17, 21); fortified by Asa (1 King 15: 22); and where Gedaliah was assassinated (2 Kings 25: 22, 25). .....Anyway, Nizpah and Mount Tabor, at that time, having been two important locations of idol-worship, became symbols of the desolation that dwelt over Judah because of idol-worship.

**Ishmael;** Nothing is known about him, except that, having been of the royal seed, he opposed the Babylonians, probably hoping to eventually return to authority.

**Jaazaniah;** A grandson of Helekiah the priest (1 Chronicles 5: 39); This name was found engraved on a seal in Mizpah.

. *“And Gedaliah took an oath before them and their men, and said to them, “Do not be afraid of the servants of the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon,*

*and it shall be well with you.” (24)*

Initially, the captains of the armies of Judah and their men, probably feared to be ill treated by Babylon, but had peace, when Gedaliah took an oath before them, saying: *“Do not be afraid of the servants of the Chaldeans”*, and assured to them that they will have amnesty, if they submit and surrender to his government in Mizpah, and came back to work the land. The Jews who had previously departed from the land before the attack of Babylon, and took refuge in East Jordan, returned as well.

#### **8- GEDALIAH ASSASINATED; AND THE PEOPLE FLEE TO EGYPT:**

*“But it happened in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck and killed Gedaliah, the Jews, as well*

*as the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah” (25).*

As peace started to dwell in Judah, as excellent energies gathered around Gedaliah, and as the fields started to produce crops, ‘*Baalis*’ king of the Ammonites , East of the Jordan, sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to assassinate Gedaliah and those who were with him, the representatives of the Babylonian authority, both Jews and Chaldeans. ‘*Baalis*’ was waiting to use the chance of the departure of the Babylonian armies back to their country, to reign over what remained of the land, west of the Jordan. Although the captains of the army of Judah have previously warned Gedaliah against him, confirming that

there was a plot to kill him to destroy the remnant of Judah; yet he did not heed their warning.

According to Josephus, Gedaliah was a gentle and an honorable man; but, trusting in those who were unworthy of trust, they plotted to kill him. He was wrong not to listen to the counsel of those who warned him. It was befitting of him to raise his heart in prayer to ask the counsel of God, and to resort to the prophet Jeremiah, who was close to him..... Here, trusting only in one's own views, appears to be definitely dangerous.

Ishmael's actions, assassinating Gedaliah, the role played by 'Johanan; and the events thereof, are mentioned in Jeremiah 40: 7 to 43; 7).

“And all the people, small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans” (26)

**“They went to Egypt”**, for they expected that the king of Babylon will avenge the killing of Gedaliah and the Babylonians who were with him; and that, in his revenge, he will not discern between Ishmael and his followers, and any others..... Despite the fact that the prophet Jeremiah previously informed Johanan and those with him, of the Lord's decision against their going to Egypt; yet they did not heed the words of the Lord, and departed to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them; by which the prophecy of Moses was fulfilled (Deuteronomy 28: 26).

By their own free will, they went back to the land of bondage; doing what many do, when God allows for them to go though some temptations, when they forsake

the church, and return to the land of bondage; namely to their old sins; claiming that in them they would find comfort, and forget their suffering,

### **9- EVIL-MERODACH, KING OF BABYLON HONORS JEHOIAKIN:**

*“Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evil-Merodach*

*king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison” (26)*

Evil-Merodach succeeded Nebuchadnezzar for a little while (562-560 BC).

Certain tablets were found, dating back to 594-569 BC, with Cuneiform writing, in which it came that a daily provision was given to Jehoiakin and his five sons; which obviously dating back to the days of Nebuchadnezzar, before the reign of Evil-Merodach (562-560 BC; indicates that Nebuchadnezzar treated him with some kind of appreciation as a king; and that what Evil-Merodach did was an extension of that policy.

Even after killing Gedaliah (25), the book ended by a glimpse of hope; as Evil-Merodach became the king of Babylon in the year 562 BC, namely, 24 years after the beginning of the captivation; released Jehoiakin from prison , allowed him to eat bread regularly before him (29), and gave him some kind of freedom, while still being in captivity. ... But Evil-Merodach was killed in a plot planned by his father-in-law Nerse-Shereser who succeeded him on the throne..

- + Not feeling comfortable with the less than perfect behavior of his son Evil-Merodach, it so happened that his father Nebuchadnezzar, returning from war, put him in prison for a while, for fear that he might rebel against him, in the same place Jehoiakin was, and with whom he made friendship that

endured for a long time. That is why, once Nebuchadnezzar died, and Evil-Merodach became king, he gave Jehoiakin more gifts and privileges. Because Jehoiakin obeyed and submitted to the prophecy, God did not deny him his due reward.

Evil-Merodach the son of Nebuchadnezzar ruled the kingdom badly, and caused disturbance and fierce struggle on the throne;

*“He spoke kindly to him, and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon”.*(28)

*“ So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life”* (29).

*“ And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life”* (30

The second book of the kings began by the ascension of Elijah to heaven, the heart desire of every true believer who walks in the Lord; And ended by the captivation of the people of Judah in a foreign land; to chastise them for disregarding the Lord; a fruit of whoever does not give God, the priority in his life.

But we find a glimpse of hope in the end of the book, shown in releasing Jehoiakin from prison (28); which was actually a gift from God, rather than from the king of Babylon; to let the captives of Judah know that God did not utterly forsake them; and to give them hope for salvation and return to their land. Most probably, the king of Babylon did that through the influence of Daniel and the three saintly young men.

And while the Babylonians were knocking on the gates of Jerusalem, few months later, to rob her again, Jeremiah purchased a plot of land. Even though he knew that he might not be able to settle down in it; but by so doing, he intended to confirm that sometime in the future, natural life will eventually return to Judah.

+ When you start to drown yourselves in the luxury of evil pleasures, remember how they are actually of short duration; and how it is unwise of you to spend so much on what would bring you harm, and what may cause you illness and weakness. ... Remember what happened to the

righteous Noah when he got drunk, how he came to be disgracefully naked, and how much evil came as a result of it (Genesis 9: 20) ... How Esau lost the right of his firstbirth because of his greed; and how he thought of killing his own brother Jacob ; ... And how *“the children of Israel sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play”* (Exodus 32: 6);

That is why, when the children of Israel were about to fall into evil pleasure, the Holy Scripture addressed them, saying: *“When you have eaten, and you are full – then beware, lest you forget the Lord...”* (Deuteronomy 6: 11-12).. .....And as it is written, *“But she (the widow) who live in pleasure is dead while she lives”* (1 Timothy 5: 6).

(St. John Chrysostom)

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## **AN INSPIRATION FROM 2 KINGS 25**

### **IN THE MIDST OF THE DARKNESS, YOU, O LORD, SHINES HOPE ON US**

- + The people of Israel and Judah almost lost hope;  
It so seemed to them that there was no hope of returning to the city of God;  
Nor to the temple;  
Zedekiah has lost his two sons, his eyesight, and his honor;  
And was disgracefully led, like an animal, to Babylon;  
So were the children of the noble;  
They were made to learn the Chaldean tongue;

They even lost their Hebrew names;

Jehoiakin, the king, beloved by his people, was put in prison in Babylon;

After reigning in Jerusalem, just for three months and ten days;

And now, he spent 37 years in captivity.

+ But, in the midst of such horrible affliction, Your hand was moving all;

You allowed it for the son of the king of Babylon to be imprisoned together with Jehoiakin;

And for the two of them to be bound by love;

And when that imprisoned son became a king over Babylon, after the death of his father,;

He honored his friend Jehoiakin, changed his prison garments

Gave him company on his table;

And made his chair above those of the other kings in captivity;

You, O Lord, came with humility to our land;

And lived like anyone of us;

To assure us that You will receive us as Your beloved in Your heavenly kingdom.

+ When You did not forget, even him who did evil, and thrown in prison;

Will You ever forget Your own people, whom You prepare to become Your heavenly bride?

When it so seemed that there will be no more king of David's seed;

When it so seemed that the tent of David has finally fallen;

That was when You incarnated and descended from Your heavens;

To reign on the hearts of all kinds of people;  
And instead of kings of the seed of David,  
You came, O King of kings, to make us kings;  
You granted us, not the liberty from the Babylonian captivity;  
But the glorious liberty of the children of the heavenly God.

+ In the midst of our affliction, we do not come to encounter Evil-Merodach  
the son of the king;

But we encounter You, O the only begotten Son of God;

You count us Your beloved, to partake of Your passion;

You change our prison garments, and grant us Your righteousness as a  
glorious garment;

You receive us not to eat bread on Your table;

But You present to us Your own body and blood, as an eternal life;

+ When will You come on the clouds, to release us from the bonds of this  
world?

When will You come to carry us to Your divine throne; to let us enjoy the  
perfect liberty?

Glory be to You, O Liberator of mankind from the bondage of sin.

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## **THE SUCCESSIVE STAGES OF ROBBING THE TEMPLE**

<b>THE ROBBER OF THE TEMPLE</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>WHAT HE DID</b>
1- Shishak	1 kings 14: 25	Robbed the temple and took some treasures
2- Asa	1 kings 15: 18	Gave what remained to the king of Aram
3- Athaliah	2 Chronicles 34: 7	Her sons robbed the temple
4- Joash	2 kings 12: 18	Sent the gold to the king of Aram
5- Jehoash (of Israel)	2 kings 14: 14	Robbed its treasures after Amaziah's defeat
6- Ahaz	2 kings 16: 8	Presented it a tribute to please Assyria
7- Hezekiah	2 kings 18: 13	He caused Sennacherib to retreat
8- Manasseh	2 kings 21	Built altars for the idols in the temple of God
9- Nebuchadnezzar	2 kings 24-25	He destroyed and utterly robbed it in his third invasion



## **A TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND BOOK OF THE KINGS**

Between the second and the first books of the kings; The main topic of the second book of the kings; Shining light in the midst of the darkness; The author of the book; The value of the book; The key of the book; The spiritual

lines of the book; The historical aspect of the book; The most important events in the book; Between the captivation of Judah by Assyria, and its captivation by Babylon; The division of the book.

### **AN ANNEX:**

A list of the major events in the book; A comparison between the historical books

-- An inspiration from the second book of the kings: Give me a double portion of the spirit of the prophet Elijah, to bear a fiery heart, fatherhood, and righteousness.

## **THE FIRST SECTION**

### **THE FIERY ELIJAH**

(2 kings 1)

#### **AN EXALTED AUTHORITY**

#### **THE DOOR OF HOPE IS OPEN, EVEN WITH CHASTISEMENT>**

#### **CHAPTER I: "WHAT KIND OF MAN?"**

The fiery Elijah; Between the prophet Elijah and John the Baptist; A divine leadership; Glorifying God; Trustin in God; Consummation (or fulfillment) of the will of God;

- An inspiration from 2 kings 1: A fire from heaven

## **THE SECOND SECTION**

### **ELISHA, THE WONDER-MAKER**

((Chapter 2 to 8))

#### **THE COMPASSIONATE FATHERHOOD OF ELISHA**

#### **THE MOST PROMINENT MIRACLES PERFORMED BY ELISHA, AND THEIR SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

#### **CHAPTER 2: A DOUBLE PORTION OF ELIJAH'S SPIRIT**

Elisha's splendid life qualified him for heaven; Why did Elijah conceal his coming ascension from his disciple Elisha? The Lord proclaims the ascension of Elijah; Elisha does not intend to forsake Elijah; The

Spirit reveals the coming ascension of Elijah to the sons of the prophets; A miracle at the River Jordan; Elisha seeks a double portion of Elijah's spirit; Mother Earth bids Elijah farewell; Elisha mourns Elijah's

departure; Elijah's mantle; The position of the sons of the prophets; The bad water becomes sweet; Elisha curses the young men, opponents of the truth; Elisha as a symbol of the Lord Christ.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 2: Your fiery Spirit carries me to heaven.

## CHAPTER 3: ELISHA AND THE KING OF MOAB WHO OFFERED HIS FIRSTBORN SON A BURNT OFFERING ON THE WALL

Jehoram, king of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; Moab rebels against Israel; An alliance between Jehoram king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah; Elisha confirms the victory over Aram; Moab calls

to gather the spoils; Misha, king of Moab offers his firstborn son a burnt offering.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 3: To You I resort, O God of the impossible.

## Chapter 4: *“IS IT WELL WITH YOU? IS IT WELL WITH YOUR HUSBAND? IS IT WELL WITH THE CHILD?”*

The secret of the preaching church; Elisha sustains a widow and her two sons; Elisha receives hospitality of a notable Shunamite woman; Elisha fulfills the need of the notable woman; Elisha raises the dead son

of the notable woman to life; Elisha reforms a deadly food; Elisha satisfies a hundred men with twenty loaves of bread.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 4: I shall open my mouth wide; and You will satisfy my depths with the oil of Your grace.

## CHAPTER 5: OUR GREAT JORDAN

The testimony of a captive girl; The wrong assumption of the king of Aram; The need for the Jordan; The glory of God, and not of the world; By choosing to become rich, Gehazi became poor

- An inspiration from 2 kings 5: Let me enter together with You into the River Jordan, to enjoy a new spiritual birth.

#### CHAPTER 6: FAITH IN GOD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE:

Elisha makes the iron head of the ax float; Elisha comes to know the hidden secrets of the king of Aram; The heavenly hosts are revealed to Elisha by God; Elisha foresees good things of famine.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 6: *“The place where we dwell is too small for us”*

#### CHAPTER 7: THE LORD OPENS WINDOWS IN HEAVEN.

Elisha proclaims the divine joy; A king's officer proclaims his doubts; Four lepers behave with wisdom; They let te others partake of their good fortune; The king doubts the news; God opens windows in heaven; The king's officer who proclaimed his doubts, dies.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 7: Open up, O God, I pray, windows in heaven

#### Chapter 8: ATTACHMENT TO THE LORD.

The Chemonite woman is attached to the Lord; Ben-Hadad seeks Elisha's help, but not Elisha's God; Hazaiel does not perceive the truth of his heart; The son of the good king Jehoshaphat marries a pagan wife; An alliance outside the Lord.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 8: Let me attach to You, O my faithful Shepherd.

## **THE THIRD SECTION**

(Chapters 9 – 17)

### **SIN IS THE WAY TO ETERNAL CAPTIVITY**

CHAPTER 9: The dogs devour Jezebel's flesh; Jehu is anointed to strike Ahab's house; Jehoram, king of Israel killed; Ahaziah, king of Judah killed; Isabel's violent death.

An inspiration from 2 kings 9: Grant me, O Lord, to escape to You, and not from You

Chapter 10: JEHU WAS A ROD OF CHASTISEMENT ON AHAB' S HOUSE.

Jehu kills Ahab's sons; Jehu kills all who remained alive of Ahab's house, and of his acquaintances; Jehu kills Ahazia's brothers; Jehu encounters Jehonadab; Jehu kills the worshippers of Baal; Jehu did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam; The end of Jehu..

--An inspiration from 2 kings 10: Create in me a clean heart, O God

CHAPTER !!: THE KID JOASH ANOINTED KING.

Joash saved from Athaliah's hand; Joash anointed king by Jehoiada the high priest; Athaliah killed; A return to the worship of the Lord.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 11: Set Your kingdom in me, O Holy One.

#### CHAPTER 12: JOASH AND THE REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE:

Joash under the Jehoiada's guidance; Care to repair the Lord's house; Jehoash gives Hazaiel, king of Aram the gold of the Lord's house, and of the king's house; The death of Joash

- An inspiration from 2 kings 12: Who will set Your kingdom in me but You?

#### CHAPTER 13: ELISHA'S BONES RESTORE LIFE TO THE DEAD.

Jehoahaz persists on the sins of his predecessors; Joash persists on the sins of his predecessors; The prophet Elisha's illness and death; Elisha's bones restore life to the dead; Elisha's prophecy to Joash realized

- An inspiration from 2 kings 13: Sanctify me, O Lord, and support me by Your grace.

#### CHAPTER 14: AMAZIAH, KING OF JUDAH, AND JEROBOAM THE SECOND, KING OF ISRAEL

Amaziah executes those who murdered his father; Amaziah's conquest over Edom; Amaziah defeated by Joash; Jeroboam the second reigns over Israel; Amaziah assassinated; The evil and greatness of Jeroboam the second; The defeat of Syria before Jeroboam the second; The death of Jeroboam the second.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 14: You are the First and Last in my life, O Lord.

#### CHAPTER 15: UZIAH (AZARIAH), KING OF JUDAH, AND HIS SON JOTHAM; AND ZECHARIAH, KING OF ISRAEL, UNTIL PEKAH.

Azariah reigns in Judah; Azariah struck with leprosy; Jotham reigns in Judah; Zechariah reigns in Israel; Shallum reigns in Israel; Menahim reigns in Israel; Menahim bribes the king of Assyria; Pekahiah reigns in Israel; Pekah reigns in Israel; A return to Jotham, king of Judah.

--An inspiration from 2 kings 15: Keep me, O Lord from belittling myself, and from haughtiness.

#### CHAPTER 16: AHAZ, KING OF JUDAH, AN EXAMPLE OF FAILURE:

Ahaz, the evil king; Ahaz, and the idol-worship; The king of Aram and Israel fight against Ahaz; Ahaz resorts to Tiglath-Pileser; Ahaz encounters Tiglath-Pileser; Ahaz admires the pagan altar; Ahaz dies, and his son Hezekiah sits on the throne.

-- An inspiration from 2 kings 16: Create in me a clean heart, O Lord

## CHAPTER 17: THE FALL OF SAMARIA:

Hoshea reigns in Israel, and the ultimate captivation of Israel; Forgetting the dealings of God in the past; Imitating the pagan nations; Rejecting the voice of the Lord on the mouth of His prophets; Rejecting the statutes and covenants of the Lord; Walking in the sins of Jeroboam; Bringing foreigners to dwell in the cities of Samaria; The lions attack the cities of Samaria; Mixing the worship of the living God with idol-worship.

--An inspiration from 2 kings 17: Liberate me, O Lord, from the captivity of the devil

## **THE FOURTH SECTION**

### **THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH UNTIL THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVATION**

(Chapters 18-25)

## CHAPTER 18: HEZEKIAH AND REMOVING THE IDOL-WORSHIP

The good king Hezekiah, and removing the idol-worship; Hezekiah rebels against Assyria; Hezekiah subdues the Philistines; The Assyrian captivation of Samaria; The first attack by Sennacherib against Judah; The second attack by Sennacherib against Judah.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 18: The reproaches of those who reproached You came over me.

## CHAPTER 19: THE DEFEAT OF SENNACHERIB:

Hezekiah resorts to the prophet Isaiah, the man of God; Rabshakeh's temporary retreat; Rabshakeh's message to Hezekiah; Hezekiah displays Rabshakeh's message before the Lord; The Lord sends the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah; The angel of the Lord strikes the Assyrian army; Sennacherib's retreat and death.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 19: Until when will the enemy reproach You, and humiliate me?

## CHAPTER 20: HEZEKIAH IS HEALED OF HIS SICKNESS, THEN FALLS INTO VAIN PRIDE.

Hezekiah's sickness and healing; The prophet Isaiah prescribes a medication for Hezekiah; Hezekiah requests a sign that the Lord will cure him; Berodash-Baladan, king of Babylon, honors Hezekiah; Hezekiah falls into vain pride; The Lord chastises Hezekiah for his vain pride; The Lord postpones the execution of His chastisement on Hezekiah; Hezekiah dies, and his son Manasseh sits on the throne.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 20: By You, O Lord, I challenge the lion, and without You, I shall be deceived by the serpent.

## CHAPTER 21: MANASSEH, THE EVIL KING, THE SON OF HEZEKIAH:

Manasseh provokes his people to do more evil than the nations whom God had cast out before the children of Israel; God threatens chastisement; Amon, the son of Manasseh, walks in his father's ways; Amon assassinated, and his brother Josiah reigns in his place.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 21: Let Your Eord shines light in my heart; and Your Holy Spirit works in my life.

## CHAPTER 22: JOSIAH, THE GOOD KING

The kid Josiah reigns over Judah; Josiah repairs the Lord's house; The book of the law discovered in the Lord's house; The king reads the book of the law, and his reaction to it; The king sends a delegation to 'Hulda' the prophetess; The wrath of God is proclaimed to dwell on the kingdom of Judah; A divine proclamation that king Josiah will be gathered to his father before the calamity falls on Judah

- An inspiration from 2 kings 22: Gather me to my fathers in You, O Lord.

## CHAPTER 23: JOSIAH'S REFORMS, AND HIS DEATH:

A collective popular pledge around the Word of God; Josiah cleanses the temple of all traces of idol-worship; Josiah tears down the ritual booths of the perverted persons; Josiah cleanses the cities of Judah and the high places; Josiah defiles Topeth; Josiah removes he chariots dedicated to the sun; Josiah removes the alters built by the evil kings; Josiah celebrates the feast of

Passover; God's wrath dwells over Judah; Josiah killed in Megiddo; Jehoahaz reigns, then taken into captivity; Jehoiakim sits on the throne.

-- An inspiration from 2 kings 23: Take away from me, O Lord every corruption, and fill my heart with Your heavenly joy.

#### CHAPTER 24: THE LAST DAYS OF JERUSALEM;

##### A QUICK COLLAPSE.

Jehoiakim and his rebellion; Jehoiakim and the captivation of Jerusalem; Zedekiah (Mattaniah) and his rebellion.

- An inspiration from 2 kings 24: Keep me in You, O Lord, lest the enemy captivates me.

#### CHAPTER 25: THE INVADERS OF THE TEMPLE:

Jerusalem put under siege; King Zedekiah flees; King Zedekiah tried; The temple and the houses of the king and of the Elites burned down; The ultimate captivation, and the robbing of the temple; The leaders of the revolt tried; Gedaliah appointed governor over Judah; Gedaliah assassinated, and the people flee to Egypt; Evil-Merodach honors Jehoiakin

- An inspiration from 2 kings 25: Amid the darkness, You, O Lord shines hope on us.

The stages of robbing the temple.

## A TABLE OF CONTENTS

