

A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY

*The Book
of*

HOSEA

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**In the name of the Father, the Son and
the Holy Spirit
one God.
Amen**

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INTRODUCTION

THE MINOR PROPHETS:

This term “Minor Prophets” came in the septuagenarian version and in the Vulgate, but not in the Hebrew version. This nomination is not due to a lesser importance of those prophets among the other prophets of the Old Testament, but to the small size of their books of prophecy.

The Jews gave so much importance to those books that they put them together in one book as they serve one integral goal. That is covering the dark period through which both kingdoms, Israel and Judah, lived, whether prior to the captivation of Israel by Assyria or the captivation of Judah by Babylon, during those periods of captivation, and after them. We have already distributed the periods of those prophets’ ministries over the long captivation period.

HOSEA:

“Hosea” is a Hebrew word meaning (**Jehovah saves**), from which the name “Joshua” or “Jesus” was derived. “Hosea” was one of the prophets before the captivity who witnessed the captivation of Israel or the fall of Samaria by Assyria in the year 722 B.C. He was also a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah (See Hosea 1: 1; Isaiah 1: 1), Micah in Judah; and Amos in Israel.

Mentioning ‘Ephraim’, does not refer to the tribe of Ephraim alone, but to the northern kingdom of Israel as a whole. Yet mentioning it 36 times, would probably hint that he was a citizen of Mount Ephraim.

Hosea is considered a prophet of Israel. The fact that his prophecies sometimes include Judah is explicable as it is claimed that he lived his last days in Judah and prophesied there.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS PROPHECY:

1. This book gives us an idea about the extent of the ethical and religious collapse that prevailed after the second reign of Jeroboam II. In his prophecies, there is a clear echo of the chaos events, murders, idolatry, pride and adultery. The prophecy also describes the situation of spiritual stagnancy that prevailed over the people of all levels, whether the religious and civil leaderships, or the general congregation, who forgot the Lord (Hosea 13: 6). Those circumstances led Hosea to talk about Israel as a land: *“For like a wanton this land is unfaithful to the Lord”* (Hosea 1: 2); *“There is no good faith or mutual trust, no knowledge of god in the land”* (Hosea 4: 1); *“Therefore the land shall be dried up”* (Hosea 4: 3) etc...

Israel became ‘land’ and ‘ashes’ because of its corruption. Hosea concentrated in several locations on its deprivation of the knowledge of God (Hosea 4: 1, 6; 5: 4; 6: 3, 6); although he, in faithfulness, betrothed it to himself, so as to make it know the Lord (Hosea 2: 20).

2. The prophet Hosea was contemporary of six kings of Israel and of about eleven years during which the throne was vacant; as indicated by his words: *“Well may they say, “We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord”* (Hosea 10: 3)

Because of those unsettled situations and because of the nearby Assyrian attack, his prophecy came with such harsh and concise words.

FEATURES OF THE BOOK:

1. The most important feature of this book of Hosea is **revealing the relationship of the Lord with His people**. Although it likened Israel to a harlot wife, it revealed God's longing for humanity as being His bride, with whom He seeks to unite, to live together with Him in His heavens, His unique house of matrimony, and to give Him children who are holy in the truth. She is the one bride! All believers are members in that one bride, to whom He talks, not as individuals assembled, but as members of one body!

Because the relationship between God and humanity is based upon the personal internal relationship binding God to man, He commands us, saying "*When you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place...*" (Matthew 6: 6). However, this relationship is not based upon isolated individualism, but God encounters us as being members of His holy bride. That is why He provided us with His "Lord's prayer" as a living model of the accepted prayer, in which we do not find a single individual supplication; but each member prays in the name and to the account of the whole congregation. It says "**Our** Father who art in heaven", and not 'My Father'; "*Give us this day our bread of the morrow*", and not 'my bread'; and "*Forgive us our trespasses*", and not 'my trespasses', and so on. It is as though the Lord provides us, through this prayer, with a collective spiritual way of thinking; abolishing any tendencies of isolation.

This tendency is confirmed not only in the book of Hosea, but also in the entire Holy Bible, especially in the books of the prophets. Here, the prophet talks about Israel as one congregation, committed to a collective holy life in the Lord; counting the tendency to selfishness and isolation as their major sin; saying: "*For, like a wild ass that has left the herd, they have run to Assyria*" (Hosea 8: 9)

2. If this book introduces the people of God as His bride; yet she was inflicted with a sickness (Hosea 5: 13), and being her Groom, **He approaches her as the true Physician, who alone, can cure her** (Hosea 14: 4). So promising her, He had to expose to her the nature and extent of her sickness, that once she realizes the seriousness of her condition, she would accept from His hand the scalpel that cuts to cure; and that hurts to bring comfort.

In short, we can set the broad lines of the **sickness of the people** as introduced by the book of Hosea in the following points:

First: The lack of knowledge: *“My people destroyed for lack of knowledge”* (Hosea 4: 6). Sin has corrupted the insight of both the congregation and their shepherds. Everyone has become like blind, unable to behold God and recognize His secrets. If this book, in its essence, is a call to repentance and returning to God in order to enjoy life with Him, through rising from the death of sin (6: 2) it would be through knowing Him (6: 3). Have the knowledge of the bride raised from the dead to live in the bosom of her groom – the grantor of resurrection. That is why we should not marvel to hear Him confirm to His bride, who is sick with the lack of knowledge: God desires *“not whole-offerings but the knowledge of God”* (Hosea 6: 6).

Second: The attachment to the land: Israel’s lack of knowledge of its heavenly groom has drawn it to another, namely to the ‘Baal’ through whom it bowed with all its energies to the carnal lusts and the love of the earthly things, that it became itself a ‘land’. That is why He calls it ‘land’ instead of ‘Israel’; saying: *“For like a wanton this land is unfaithful to the Lord”* (Hosea 1: 2). It forsook the Heavenly, to be confined to the earthly; and, instead of having a heavenly heart, it turned into a ‘land’, in which case the heavenly Physician is needed, who alone, can bring it back from that corrupt nature. *“I will heal their apostasy”* (Hosea 14: 4)

Third: Its loss of fulfillment: Bowing toward the land, with the assumption that it would enjoy temporal pleasures, it did not realize that it was actually losing every pleasure and fulfillment to become in bitterness, hunger, and thirst. God diagnosed its sickness saying: *“They shall eat but never be satisfied, behave wantonly but their lust will never be overtaxed, for they have forsaken the Lord”* (Hosea 4: 10); *“Israel sows the wind and reaps the whirlwind”* (Hosea 8: 7); and, *“Their root is withered, and they yield no fruit”* (Hosea 9: 16).

Instead of the hear rejoicing fruit, *“thorns and thistles grow over her altars”* (Hosea 10: 8). Instead of delight, they taste bitterness: *“Litigation spreads like a poisonous weed along the furrows of the fields”* (Hosea 10: 4). As to the true groom, namely God, His fruit is sweet (Songs 2: 3), His words are sweet (Psalms 119: 103), His light is sweet (Ecclesiastes 11: 7), even His yoke is sweet to the soul (Matthew 11: 30).

Fourth: The disability of differentiation: The desire of the heart of the heavenly groom is to see His bride like Him, bearing His Holy Spirit, that of wisdom and distinction. Having rejected Him, and bowed down to feed on the dust, it would never feel saturated. It became a *“wild as a heifer”* (Hosea 4: 16), a *“silly senseless pigeon”* (Hosea 7: 11). About the princes of Judah, He says that they became like those *“who remove their neighbor’s boundary”* (Hosea 5: 10) which means that they removed the distinctive marks between the kingdom of God and that of the devil, between the worship of the living God and that of ‘Baal’, and between the good and the evil. They lost the spirit of distinction commanded by God: *“between sacred and profane, between clean and unclean”* (Leviticus 10: 10); and *“between living creatures that may be eaten and living creatures that may not be eaten”* (Leviticus 11: 47).

Fifth: Nonchalance: Every weakness would draw the bride to another weakness, and every sin would cast her into another sin. Losing the spirit of distinction, leads to a loss of seriousness in life and of the longing for eternity, this would make one walk carelessly for anything. Man would hear the voice of God calling him without responding (Hosea 7: 1, 2).

Sixth: Pride: *“Israel’s arrogance cries out against him”* (Hosea 5: 5). Instead of submitting to God in abidance and accepting His counsel to be healed, Israel chose its destiny by its own mind, resorted to others than its healing Groom. *“When Ephraim found that he was sick, Judah that he was covered with sores, Ephraim went to Assyria, he went in haste to the Great King; but he has no power to cure you or to heal your sores”* (Hosea 5: 13). In all their affairs, they refused to humble themselves before God: *“They make kings, but not by my will; they set up officers, but without my knowledge”* (Hosea 8: 4).

Seventh: Seeking His gifts, and not to unify with Him: As much as God proclaimed His love for His bride though being a harlot, to make her holy anew, and even while angry with her because of her increasing evils, He says: *“My heart is changed within me, my remorse kindles already”* (Hosea 11: 8). Israel, His bride, met His flaring jealousy with great unconcern. When she cried out to God in hardship, He says, *“There is no sincerity in their cry to me; for all their howling on their pallets and gashing of themselves over corn and new wine, they are turning away from me”*. (Hosea 7: 14) It is as if they ask for His gratuity and not for their uniting with Him. They ask Him to save them, yet would not give Him their hearts.

These are some of the symptoms of the sickness in the beloved patient, as revealed by her true Physician, neither to expose her, nor to justify His chastisements against her, but to bring her back to Him by love.

3. Seeing how the people have diverted to the worship of Baal, and plunged into its rites, including drinking wine and eating cakes made of discs of pressed raisins and figs. Hosea saw that, instead of being a holy vine, or a blessed fig tree (Hosea 8), the people have become raisins and figs eaten to the account of the demons. What brings grief to the heart of God, is that what should have been holy for Him, became unclean and used for evil. What should have brought pleasure to Him, brought joy to the devil. The Lord says, *“I came upon Israel like grapes in the wilderness, I looked on their forefathers with joy like the first ripe figs; but they resorted to Ball-peor and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame”* (Hosea 9: 10).

When God sees His church – the new Israel – as a vineyard in the middle of a barren wilderness; or as a virgin fig tree among the world fruitless trees, He rejoices in her, and says: *“The green figs will ripen on the fig trees and the blossom vines give forth their fragrance.”* (Songs 2: 13) It is His own fig tree and His own vineyard! Yet, unfortunately, it sometimes presents itself as food for His enemy – Baal Peor, namely, “master or lord of abominations”. Instead of presenting herself to her true Planter, who watered her with His precious blood, and refreshed her with His Holy Spirit, being the Firstfruit of the whole humanity, she delivers herself to abomination, to become a corrupt grape and fig! That is why He says: *“I will ravage the vines and the fig-trees, which she says are the fee with which her lovers have hired her, and turn them into jungle where wild beasts shall feed”* (Hosea 2: 12).

4. The sin of Israel at that time concentrated more on the worship of Baal, with what it included: of practicing magic, adultery, and all kinds of

abominations. It also tended toward leaning upon the human arm. This way it entered into a continuous debate between being allied to the Pharaoh of Egypt or the king of Assyria, to have the support of the one against the other. The prophet Hosea was a contemporary when Israel made an alliance with Assyria against Egypt; as well as when it cast itself into the bosom of the Pharaoh of Egypt against the king of Assyria. In either ways, Israel did not resort to God by repentance and returning to him through a holy life, but it leant upon the human arm instead, and rejected its true King. It became like a nation with no king, or as though it has chosen for itself kings according to her own whims, who do not walk according to the Spirit of God. *“Well may they say, ‘We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord; and what can the king do for us?’”* (Hosea 10: 3). Also: *“But Israel is utterly loathsome; and therefore he shall run before the enemy. They make kings, but not by my will; they set up officers, but without y knowledge”* (Hosea 8: 3, 4)

5. Having sometimes resorted to the Pharaoh of Egypt to support it against the king of Assyria, instead of resorting to God, God rebukes Israel, reminding it of the time when He saved it from the bondage of Pharaoh, when he was just a child. God brought it out to the wilderness to shepherd it by Himself, brought it to the promised land, and set for it fortified cities. How could it now get back to Pharaoh to seek his protection?!

The Lord admonishes His people, saying: *“When Israel was a boy, I loved him; I called my son out of Egypt”* (Hosea 11: 1). *“Their guilt will be remembered and their sins punished. They shall go back to Egypt, or in Assyria they shall eat unclean food”* (Hosea 8: 13, 14)

“For look, they have fled from a scene of devastation: Egypt shall receive them, Memphis shall be their grave” (Hosea 9: 6).

“He makes treaty with Assyria and carries tribute of oil to Egypt” (12: 1)

“Yet I have been the Lord your God since your days in Egypt; I will make you live in tents yet again, as in the old days” (12: 9)

6. The book of Hosea is one of the most prominent books of the Holy Bible that deals with the issue of ‘repentance’, and demonstrates its concepts, especially in its last chapter.

This book is characterized by a spirit of hope, given to all sinners amid divine threats of firm and bitter chastisements; saying: *“Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us and will heal us, he has struck us and he will bind up our wounds”* (Hosea 6: 1). In the first chapter, God threatens to chasten them and not to have mercy, to forsake them, and warning them that neither they will be His people anymore, nor will He be their God. Then, in the same talk, He gets back to open before them the door of hope saying: *“The Israelites shall become countless as the sands of the sea which can neither be measured nor numbered; it shall no longer be said, ‘They are not my people’, they shall be called Sons of the Living God”* (Hosea 1: 10). With all love, He says about His rebellious bride (Israel): *“But now listen, I will woo her, I will go with her into the wilderness and comfort her”* (Hosea 2: 14). As to the subject of her hope is the Lord Christ who grants her the resurrection at the dawn of the third day: *“After two days he will revive us, on the third day he will restore us, that in his presence we may live... whose justice dawns like morning light”*(Hosea 6: 2, 3). He will grant us His Holy Spirit in the fullness of time *“like spring rains that water the earth”* (Hosea 6: 3).

If this book has demonstrated how far the people have reached in their evil until they came to be in a state of near death, yet the curtain has not yet fallen in this chapter, but the prophet reveals the greatness of the salvation granted to us, that would swallow death to the end. He said,

“Oh, for your plagues, O death! Oh, for your sting, Sheol!” (Hosea 13: 14)

7. On the one hand, God connects between His firm chastisements and the hope open before all sinners, lest anyone would fall in despair. On the other hand, God, while proclaiming His unlimited love for His people, reveals His bitterness because of their betrayal. Although He loves His bride, yet He does not accept her betrayal, and would never truce her. He seeks her hand, sanctifying her from spiritual adultery. By this, He takes away from sinners any probability of taking the sin lightly. Neither would the firmness of God close the door before hope, nor would His love lead us to slothfulness.

8. Man’s betrayal to His God cannot be separated from his betrayal to his fellow man (Hosea 4: 1-4). Betrayal is a nature that, if one falls in it, he would practice it, even in his relationship with himself! Hence, the repentance of man, and his return to God, does not imply a mere change in his outer behavior, but also an inner change that touches the inner nature of man. He says, *“Sow for yourselves in justice, and you will reap what loyalty deserves”* (Hosea 10: 12). I pray that the Lord Christ Himself would sow the true righteousness, so that we would reap His goodness in us, and would bear His features working inside us.

THE BOOK OF HOSEA AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD:

This book spoke often about the knowledge of God who brought the following charge against His people: *“no knowledge of God in the land”* (Hosea 4: 1). He considered the sin of harlotry that prevailed among them, as connected to, and caused by their lack of knowledge of God; saying: *“For a wanton spirit is in them, and they care nothing for the Lord”* (Hosea 5: 4). To the priests, He concentrated on the same charge,

saying, *“My people destroyed for lack of knowledge. You have rejected knowledge and I will reject you from serving me as priest.”* (Hosea 4: 6) Because of their lack of knowledge, God did not receive their sacrifices or offerings: God desires *“not whole-offerings but the knowledge of God”* (Hosea 6: 6).

This is regarding the negative aspect. Regarding the positive aspect, this book, being a book of the spiritual matrimonial unity between God and His people, proclaims the goal of this unity: *“I will betroth you to myself forever, betroth you in lawful wedlock with unfailing devotion and love; ... you shall know the Lord”* (Hosea 2: 19, 20). The church acquires this knowledge through its enjoyment of the resurrection together with its Savior, according to His words *“On the third day he will restore us, that in his presence we may live. Let us humble ourselves, let us strive to know the Lord”* (Hosea 6: 2, 3).

We would hopefully acquire the knowledge of God in us, to hear Him say: *“But I have been the Lord your God since your days in Egypt”* (Hosea 13: 4).

So, what does it mean, “To know God”? This knowledge presented by God to His bride, raised up from the dead, who is the ultimate goal of His unity with her. The unity without which, He would reject the priests and would not receive the offerings of the people.

Our study of this book will give us a clear answer to this question. What is to be confirmed here is that the knowledge of God does not mean a mere recognition of Him. It is neither through a bare dogmatic mental study, nor through a realization of His divine secrets by human logic. On the contrary, it is recognizing Him through uniting with Him in Jesus Christ. It is realizing the secrets of His love and care, which work in our

life. Knowing Him is sharing His exalted divine features and entering into His hidden glories... Or, in short – according to St. Erinaos it is: *“Lifting man up to the life of God”*. According to St. Clement of Alexandria it is entering into: *“The perfection of Christ”*.

If God is dwelling in an unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6: 16), and no one is able to see His face (The book of prophet Ezekiel 33: 20), then we cannot recognize His nature, as it is beyond our comprehension. However, according to the saying of St. Erinaos, God makes Himself known to us, proclaiming Himself through His condescension, granting this great gift to His elect, according to the richness of His exalted grace. *“Although no man can behold God, yet, wishing for men to behold Him, He lets Himself be seen by the elect, when and in the way He chooses”*. If we cannot lift ourselves up to comprehend His high secrets, He, in His love, gets down, proclaiming Himself inside us and setting His kingdom within us to let us comprehend the incomprehensible and the unutterable things. St. Clement of Alexandria said: *“The pious, knowledgeable Christian Gnostic can realize what others could not, because he believes that there is nothing unrealizable for the Son of God and nothing that could not be learned. So, He who suffered for the sake of loving us, would not keep from us any knowledge necessary for our edification”*. He also says, *“Whoever believes in the Word, would know the truth of things, as the Word is the Truth”*.

St. Oghris says, *“Know that the Holy Spirit would not make Himself known through watching the carnal beings, nor through contemplating in the spiritual ones. On the contrary, it is through the condescension of grace in the soul, to provide that knowledge... While the creation came to being from naught, the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is essential and incomprehensible”*.

Moses desired to see God face to face, and said to Him: *“Show me thy glory”* (Exodus 33: 18). God responded: *“My face you cannot see, for no mortal man may see me and live”* (Exodus 33: 20). However, that does not mean the deprivation of man of encountering God and seeing His glory, for God has found a solution to that. He said to Moses: *“Here is a place beside me”*. It is as though He says to him, ‘The door is open for you to realize your heart’s desire! I have prepared for you a place where you can see me and get to know me’ ... What was that place by God? *“Take your stand on the rock and when my glory passes by, I will put you in a crevice of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”* (Exodus 33: 20-23) Our teacher the apostle Paul said that the rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10: 4). The Lord Christ is the place for the prophet Moses or for humanity, through which the Father can be seen. It is said about the Christ: *“God’s only Son, he who is nearest to the Father’s heart, he has made him known”* (John 1: 18). The Lord Himself says, *“No one knows the Father but the Son and those to whom the Son may choose to reveal him”* (Matthew 11: 27). So, we can recognize the Father in the Lord Christ, the Son.

Therefore, let us enter together with the prophet Moses into the cleft of the Rock, namely, into the inside of Christ, the Rock of ages, through His pierced side, in order to get in touch with the heart of His fire flaring love, to realize the work of His exalted grace and to comprehend His secrets toward us.

Let us recognize the Father and behold Him in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, through the holy inner insight, namely, by the pure heart, according to the promise of the Lord: *“How blest are those whose hearts are pure; they shall see God”* (Matthew 5: 8). We can recognize and behold God by the true holiness, whereas by sin, our insight would be

blind and we would not be able to recognize Him. By sin we would be counted unworthy to be known by Him. That is how knowledge is connected to the holy life, both in worship and behavior. Father Oghris says about that: *“If you are a Theologian (namely a Gnostic), you would be truly praying; and if you truly pray, you would be a Theologian”*. Besides, as said by St. Anthony: *“Whoever knows God, would be good. And in case someone is not good, that would mean that he does not know God, and is not known by God, as goodness is the only way to know God”*. St. Mark the Hermit says: *“If you love knowledge, you should love work as well, because knowledge without work puffs man up”*. He also says, *“If you wish to be saved and to reach the knowledge of the Truth, admonish yourself to exalt above the sensed things and hold fast, hoping for God alone”*. Moreover, St. Clement of Alexandria says, *“By the Son, we would enjoy love and recognize the Father, who is Love; as the like is known by the like”*.

By that, we may know God – By uniting with Him in Jesus Christ who sanctifies us by His Holy Spirit, granting us the enlightened spiritual insight, to recognize the exalted secrets. That would be a life we live with God, and with which we get practically in touch.

THE BOOK OF HOSEA AND THE NEW TESTAMENT:

The New Testament quoted much from this book. For instance:

1. In the epistle to the Romans, it came: *“As it says in the Book of Hosea: ‘Those who were not my people I will call My People, and the unloved nation I will call My Beloved’”* (Romans 9: 25; Hosea 9: 10).

2. In the gospel of Matthew it came: *“And there he stayed till Herod’s death. This was to fulfill what the Lord had declared through the prophet: ‘I called my son out of Egypt’”* (Matthew 2: 15; Hosea 11: 1).

3. The Lord says, *“I require mercy, not sacrifice”* (Matthew 9: 13; 12: 7; Hosea 6: 6).

4. In a talk by the apostle Paul concerning the resurrection of the Lord Christ, working in us, he says, *“Oh Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?”* (1 Corinthians 15: 55; Hosea 13: 14).

5. In the book of Revelation, it came: *“They called out to the mountains and the crags, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits on the throne’”* (Revelation 6: 16; Hosea 10: 8).

THE BOOK OF HOSEA AND THE PROPHECIES OF JEREMIAH AND EZEKIEL:

Both prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were influenced by the prophet Hosea and quoted from his writings. The prophet Jeremiah was influenced by what the prophet Hosea revealed about the relationship of God with His people as being like that between a groom and His bride. Hosea also showed that sin destroys this matrimonial unity and, thus, abolishes the voice of joy and turns the land into desolation. So, it came in Jeremiah’s book: *“From the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem I will banish all sounds of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride; for the land shall become desert”* (Jeremiah 7: 34), (See also Jeremiah 16: 9; 25: 10). Ezekiel as well quoted the same thought, saying: *“I will silence the clamor of your songs, and the sound of your harps shall be heard no more”* (Ezekiel 26: 13). While Hosea says, *“I will put a stop to her merrymaking, her pilgrimages and new moons,*

her sab-baths and festivals... I will woo her, I will go with her into the wilderness and comfort her... I will betroth you to myself forever.” (Hosea 2: 11, 14, 19)

In the book of Ezekiel, God admonishes His people who took from His hands gifts and blessings, and used them to the account of evil: *“You took the splendid ornaments of gold and silver which I had given you, and made for yourself male images with which you committed fornication. You covered them with your robes of brocade and offered up my oil and my incense before them. You took the food I had given you, the flour, the oil, and the honey, with which I had fed you, and set it before the as an offering of soothing odor.”* (Ezekiel 16: 17, 19). Those were the same words, which God used to admonish His people in the book of Hosea. (2: 8, 9)

In Ezekiel, God also talks about the east wind that dried the fruitage of the land, that is it corrupted Israel, it dried and broke its strong branches and consumed it by fire (Ezekiel 19: 11). Hosea spoke about the same east wind: *“Though he flourishes among the reeds, and east wind shall come, a blast from the Lord, rising over the desert; Ephraim’s spring will fail and his fountain run dry. It will carry away as spoil his whole store of costly treasures.”* (Hosea 13: 15)

Ezekiel also quoted Hosea’s description of Israel as a dry land deprived of the rain that waters the soul, meaning that it is deprived of the work of the Holy Spirit: *“Now it is replanted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land”* (Ezekiel 19: 13). In Hosea it came: *“I will make her bare as the wilderness, parched as the desert”* (Hosea 2: 3).

Jeremiah talked to us about the salvation granted to Israel through David, their king, that is through *“the Son of David – the Savior Messiah”*

(Jeremiah 30: 9). This was confirmed by Ezekiel after him (Ezekiel 34: 23), and preceded by Hosea in (3: 5).

THE BOOK OF HOSEA FROM A LITERATURE STANDPOINT:

1. This book came poetic in most of its parts, with short and concentrated sentences and expressions like serious, quick, and strong warnings, against an eminent danger.

2. This book is packed with analogies like: fire (8: 14), light (6: 5), water (5: 10), rain (6: 2), morning cloud and early dew (6: 4; 13: 3), moth (5: 12), rottenness (5: 12), lion and young lion (5: 14), lion, leopard, and bear (13: 7, 8), wild donkey (8: 9), birds of the air (7: 12, 9: 11), silly dove (7: 11), eagle 8: 11), sparrow (11: 11), wind and whirlwind (8: 7), cloud, dew, and smoke (13: 3; 14: 4), loved for reward (9: 1), a woman in childbirth (13: 13), a snare and a net (5: 1; 7: 12), an oven (&: 4-7), bow (7: 16), a miscarrying womb and dry breasts (9: 14), Lily (14: 5), an olive tree (14: 6), grain, vine, and wine (14: 7), the green forests of Lebanon (14: 5):thorns (9: 6), ...

DIVISIONS OF THE BOOK:

- | | |
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROPHET AND THE HARLOT WIFE

God used every possible analogy to reveal His close relationship with humanity and His love for it. He also revealed the bitterness of His soul because of every sin committed by man to hurt that relationship. This book presents the people of God as an unfaithful bride to her heavenly groom, yet the groom presents all His divine possibilities to bring her back to Him, after sanctifying her.

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4.	Longing for return	10 - 11

1- INTRODUCTION:

Although Hosea is considered a prophet to Israel (the northern kingdom), yet, the Holy Book dates the time of his prophecy by the kings of Judah, mentioning only one of the kings of Israel. If that man of God was called to minister to the people of the kingdom of Israel and to warn them against captivation, yet his heart was spacious with love for the salvation of all; and so rejoices in God's work with all, "*Then the people of Judah and of Israel shall be reunited*" (Hosea 1: 11). This shows that whoever ministers to God knows no limit to love, but desires the service of everyone and the salvation of all.

Some scholars believe that Hosea mentioned only one of the kings of Israel, because all the kings of Israel were evil and not worthy of mentioning. He mentioned only one who, although was equally evil, yet was honored to be designated as "*the one who saved his people*" (2 Kings 14: 27). His reign was characterized by a series of riots, assassinations, and chaos that ended by captivation.

The prophet starts his book by ***“The word of the Lord which came to Hosea son of Beeri”*** (Hosea 1: 1), as if he wants to prove that his book is not from him, but it is “the word of the Lord”. Hosea only transfers the word of God to the people and testifies it.

Being described in this book as a desolate land and a barren wilderness, whose *“spring will fail and his fountain run dry”* (Hosea 13: 15), Israel became in need of sitting together with the Savior by the well like the Samaritan woman, to quench her thirst from the water of His spring that never dries up. Hosea’s words of salvation are from that divine well, *“Whoever drinks the water that I shall give him will never suffer thirst any more”* (John 4: 14).

2- GOMER, THE DAUGHTER OF DIBLAIM:

Some people may wonder, how could God command His prophet to take for himself a harlot in marriage, and to beget from her children of harlotry telling him: ***“Go, take a wanton for your wife and get children of her wantonness; for like a wanton this land is unfaithful to the Lord”*** (Hosea 1: 2).

First: As this term is translated in English as ‘harlot’ and not as ‘adulteress’, some believe that it may not mean a woman who practices adultery according to the general concept, but may mean one whose life is dedicated to Baal, and hence is counted as a ‘harlot’ especially that worshipping the Baal is related to practicing adultery. Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, was probably one of those who dedicated their life to the account of Baal.

As Idol-worship was actually called ‘harlotry’, so being related to the worshippers of Baal was enough to be called a ‘harlot’, even without practicing harlotry. This concept is probably true, as most of the Israelite women at that time, if not all of them, were connected to idol-worship, that it was almost impossible for the prophet to find for himself a wife who was not, although not all of them practiced actual physical adultery.

Second: A few scholars believe that what came in this chapter and in chapter 3 is just a vision or a symbolic portrait presented to the people, so as to reveal the horror of their fall, their diversion from the worship of the living God and their betrayal to Him. That was what they did instead of committing themselves to their covenant with Him, despite which He still seeks them, and longs for their return and for sanctifying them.

However, the majority of scholars believe that what came in these chapters are facts through which, on the one aspect, God intended for His prophet to experience, together with Him, the great bitterness He feels because of the diversion of Israel, and on another aspect, to proclaim to humanity the extent of His love and care for man.

And as said by father ‘Sherimon’: *“The divine Word portrayed the extent of God’s care for us on the tongue of the prophet Hosea, by symbolizing Jerusalem as a harlot, who diverted in a zeal, full of denial... He compares Jerusalem (the human soul) to a harlot wife who seeks another man; and compares His love for us to someone who loves his bride until death. God persist on proclaiming that His goodness and love for all men are only overcome on our part through forsaking our own care for our salvation, and fleeing from God’s care for us. In other words, they are overcome by our evils. It could only be compared to someone consumed by the fire of his love for his wife, despite seeing how she keeps on despising him”*.

Third: Most scholars believe that the prophet Hosea got married to Gomer, and loved her immensely and only then did he discover her harlotry (whether according to the general physical concept, or as a mere connection to Baal-worship). He chose to keep her as his wife and did not divorce her. On the other hand, some scholars believe that the prophet was aware of her past and of her harlotry, yet he consented to marry her for the sake of the divine command; realizing, by his own life, a symbolic portrait of what was actually the case between God and His people.

Fourth: The word ‘Gomer’ in Hebrew means “the end of perfection” especially the perfection of futility, whereas the word ‘Geblaim’ means “a double cake of pressed fig or raisin discs”. This type of cake was used in the feasts of idol-worship, as it was said about the people of Israel: *“They resort to other gods and love the raisin-cakes offered to their idols”* (Hosea 3: 1). Thus, Hosea’s marriage to Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, refers to the connection to the people of Israel who reached the end of blamelessness (Gomer), begotten to the idol-worship with all its abominations (Diblaim). Or as though Israel, having become ‘Gomer’, she is but a daughter to ‘Diblaim’, which means that she is a daughter to the filthy feasts that prevailed on the whole land. She became as a cake offered to Baal, a filthy food, and an unclean banquet for the devil and his followers!

As ‘Gomer’ kept on her evil ways, giving birth to children of harlotry despite her marriage to a pure man and a blessed prophet; so also Israel kept on its spiritual harlotry, despite God’s proclamations about His unity with it. Although Hosea was not defiled by his marriage, Gomer’s judgment, on the other hand, would become more severe, because of her marriage to the prophet, unless she returns remorsefully in purity to her man. The punishment of Israel will be also greater and bitterer, unless it returns to God by faith.

St. Jerome sees in ‘Gomer’ a symbolic image of the church: *“What shall I say about the prophet’s marriage to a harlot, which is a symbol of the church formed, either of the Gentiles or of the Jews?!... It was first set by Abraham – an idol-worshipper, and now, having denied the Savior, confirms its betrayal to God. Consequently, it will be denied of its altar, its priests and its prophets. And it will remain as such for a long time until she returns to its first man (Hosea 2: 7; 3: 11), as by the fullness of the Gentiles, Israel would be saved (Romans 11: 25, 26)”*.

St. John Chrysostom says, *“Like in the past, when they took harlots as their wives, God accepted nature that played the role of a harlot as His (blameless) bride. The prophets proclaimed from the beginning that this happened in the Jewish Sanhedrin (Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 23:4, 5, 11). Yet, this bride has been a denier concerning her Man, whereas the church, having got rid of the evils it inherited from its fathers, remained embraced by her Groom”*.

The Lord says to Hosea ***“For like a wanton this land is unfaithful to the Lord”*** (Hosea 1: 2). It is as though adultery is a natural status for man by his departure from the Lord and by forsaking the unity with the eternal Groom of his soul. It is strange that God says *“For the land”* instead of *“For Israel”*. As mentioned in the introduction, Israel has become “land” with no heaven by bowing toward the earthly things. Regarding us, by melding with the dust, we would hear the voice of God saying: *“Dust you are, to dust you shall return”* (Genesis 3: 19). We would return to where and what our heart longed to be. On the contrary, if we take off our ancient earthly man that we wore through our relation to the earthly Adam, and if we put on the new man, the image of our heavenly Jesus, we would hear the divine voice saying: *“Because you are heaven, to heaven you will return”*. In yourself, you have carried the

heavenly, and your inner man has become heaven, that is why you will return to where you longed to be, and to what you have become – to heaven itself.

We have become a land by having forsaken our heavenly groom, so what would this groom do to us, his bride? He has carried our earthly body, yet with no corruption, and came down to the earth to which our heart got attached. Temporal things had no place in his heart. He did all this in order to make out of us *“a new heaven and a new earth”* (Revelation 21: 1). It is said that this earth is dwelt by the righteousness itself, namely by the heavenly Lord, the secret of our justification.

3- CHILDREN OF HARLOTRY:

The Lord not only commanded his prophet to marry a harlot, but to have from her children of harlotry as well. God gave them the names: “Jezreel”, “Lo-ruhamah”, and “Lo-ammi”. Calling them “children of harlotry” does not mean that they are the fruit of harlotry, but the fact that they are born from a harlot mother who was connected to Baal (idol-worship) is the reason for calling them by that name, although they are actually the children of the prophet. They would have this name until they accept the message of their father and reject the old spirit of their mother.

1. **“Jezreel”** means *“God plants”*. He is the first child of Hosea and Gomer. His name refers to that the chastisements that God plants in us are the fruit of our doing. “Jezreel” reminds us of what “Jeho” did to “Joram”, the son of “Ahab” and of the wicked “Jezebel”, who murdered and took possession of the vineyard of “Naboth the Jezreelite” by force. The dogs licked her blood in the same field that she grabbed (1 Kings 22: 38). The way she sought and possessed the field by force and shed innocent blood in order to have was how she got her heart’s desire, and,

thus, she perished at the same location as a natural fruit of her deed. The Lord says about the children of Israel: *“became as loathsome as the thing he loved”* (Hosea 9: 10). Man gets what he loves, together with its natural fruits. Whoever loves the mortal earth and the corrupt body lusts would get corruption and would become earth himself. On the contrary, he who loves the eternal heavenly God will enjoy the everlasting life.

2. **“Lo-ruhamah”** means *“I shall have no mercy”*. When man has no mercy on himself, he falls by being connected to idol-worship, and so he shall not expect mercy from God, because who despises the longsuffering and mercy of God is like: *“you are laying up for yourself a store of retribution for the day of retribution”* (Romans 2: 5).

The Lord says, ***“For I will never again show love to Israel, never again forgive them. Then I will love Judah and will save them. I will save them not by bow or sword or weapon of war, by horses or by horsemen, but by the Lord their God.”*** (Hosea 1: 6, 7)

Israel plunged in evil and forsook God its Savior. It cannot be saved by bow, by sword, by horses or by horsemen. On the other hand, Judah will get salvation by the Lord her God. That is because it refers to the church of the New Testament, which is the body of Christ, who comes out of the tribe of Judah.

About the Savior, He says, *“The Lord their God”*. He refers Himself to them as being their God, in case they are sanctified. Moreover, he would be proud of them just as He calls Himself *“The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”*. God does not refer Himself to the wicked, to whom He says: *“I will not be your God”* (Hosea 1: 9). According to the Greek version, it is *“To you, I am not Jehovah”*.

The Lord says, *“I will save them by the Lord their God”*. Here, God, the Father, talks about God, the Son and the Savior. As said by father Novatian: *“If God says that He saves by God, and as He does not save except by Christ, so how could anyone hesitate to call Christ “God”, as proclaimed by the Father Himself in the Holy Book?! Yes, if God, the Father, does not save except by God, so no-one could be saved by God, the Father, unless he confesses that Christ is God; in whom, and by whom, God promises to grant His salvation”*.

3. **“Lo-ammi”** means *“not my uncle”* or *“not my people”*, as the word “am” in Chaldean means “people” or “tribe”. Therefore, if sin produces “no mercy”, so the bitterness of “no mercy” is for man either to be denied of being referred to God, or of God being referred to him. How can someone referred to God if he is referred to Baal? Our highest reward will be to enjoy *“new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God”* (Revelation 21: 2) which is *“Now at last God has his dwelling among men! He will dwell among them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them.”* (Revelation 21: 3)

4- LONGING FOR RETURN:

God combines chastisement with hope as He proclaims here that His chastisements would not be absolute and that rejecting them would not last forever, but until a certain time. He anticipates their return to Him to give them more splendor and glory... to make them one strong and great kingdom, planted in Him and enjoying childhood to Him. To them, He will be the Head: ***“The Israelites shall become countless as the sands of the sea which can neither be measured nor numbered; it shall no longer be said, ‘They are not my people’, they shall be called Sons of the Living God. Then the people of Judah and of Israel shall be reunited and shall choose for themselves a single head, and they shall***

become masters of the earth; for great shall be the day of Jezreel.
(Hosea 1: 10, 11)

Amid the bitter chastisement, God offers a new promise, and enters with his people into a new covenant that was realized not by their return from captivity, but more by their enjoyment of the Messianic era whose features are:

First: *“The Israelites shall become countless as the sands of the sea which can neither be measured nor numbered”*. That way He realizes the promise previously given to Abraham, namely: *“I will bless you abundantly and greatly multiply your descendants until they are as numerous as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the sea-shore”* (Genesis 22: 17). It is the promise that Jacob held fast and said to the Lord: *“But thou didst say, I will prosper you and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which is beyond all counting”* (Genesis 32: 12).

Indeed, *“He may punish cruelly, yet he will have compassion in the fullness of his love”* (Lamentations 3: 32). By our Lord Jesus Christ, the failing soul, and the dry bones will turn into *“a mighty host”* (Ezekiel 37: 10). It would not be like Jerusalem, *“majestic as the starry heavens”* (Songs 6: 4) that the devil, with all his hosts and deceit, would not be able to take up for himself, but would be like a multitude of strong horses that carry the divine chariot in the procession of conquest. That is why the Groom says to his bride (the human soul): *“I would compare you, my dearest, to Pharaoh’s chariot-horses”* (Songs 1: 9).

The apostle Paul says: *“with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day”* (2 Peter 3: 8). The believer, being like one day that passed, would become in Jesus Christ as a thousand years. He would carry the heavenly feature (thousand) with

strong and mighty energies in the spirit. Instead of being one day, he becomes many years with no limit, and instead of his human weakness, he would carry the qualities and qualifications of Christ: his mind, will, features, and glory!

That is the feature of the Messianic era, which transformed our human life into “a life in Jesus Christ”. Instead of the debasement, we came to have an inner supernal glory and instead of the temporal mind, we came to live in the heavenliness.

Second: Mercy does not stop at the abundance (quantity) or at the strength (quality), but what brings pleasure to our heart is being referred to God as His children: ***“It shall no longer be said, ‘They are not my people’, they shall be called Sons of the Living God”*** (Hosea 1: 10). Instead of being rejected, we shall be counted as children and heirs of God, heirs together with Christ, the only-begotten Son! We have become the children of the living God and we would be living by our living Father. The Jews carried the dead nature of their parents, by calling the dead Baal their father and his wife “Ishtarouth” their mother. God’s promise was given, not only to the Jews who after being rejected will be received at the end of time when they receive the Savior Messiah, but it touches our lives as well, we, the Gentiles, who were previously rejected because of our past rejection of Him. Now, the door of childhood to God is open to us. In addition, as said by St. Augustine: *“The apostle understood that promise, as a prophetic testimony about the call of the Gentiles, who were before not referred to God. But now, having spiritually become children of Abraham, they are truly called “Israel”. That is why he goes on saying: “The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head” (Hosea 1: 11)”*.

Third: The exalted mercies of God are proclaimed in the Messianic era through our unity together in Jesus Christ, the “single head” (Hosea 1: 11). By accepting faith in Jesus Christ and the enjoying our childhood to God through baptism, we would all have the “single head”.

He does not say, “they will be gathered together under one king”, but he demonstrates the perfection of unity in having the Savior as a “Head” from which the body cannot separate! It is an exalted love and an inexpressible bond between the Creator and His beloved creation!

Fourth: Through that heavenly bond, we shall bear His high nature, and rise above our earthly nature: ***“They shall become masters of the earth”*** (Hosea 1: 11). The apostle says: *“Were you not raised to life with Christ? Then aspire to the realm above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and let your thoughts dwell on that higher realm, not on this earthly life”* (Colossians 3: 1, 2). We *“do not belong to the world”* (John 15: 19), but *“are citizens of heaven”* (Philippians 3: 20).

By Jesus Christ, we ascend above our old earthly nature to enjoy the new heavenly one, which resembles the image of our Creator, and truly sing: *“Let us go and ascend to the mountain of God”*. It is an exodus, not from the land of Egypt to the land of promise, but it is a new exodus from the earth, that enslaved the soul and received Pharaoh (the devil) as king to enslave the people. It is ascension under the leadership of the Lord Christ Himself, not to bring us forth to the Mount of Sinai where lightning, thunder, and a mountain up in smoke are, but to be united with the Lord Christ, the Holy Mountain, and to bring us over by His Holy Spirit to the bosom of his Father.

Fifth: He ends the promise by saying: ***“For great shall be the day of Jezreel”*** (Hosea 1: 11). After representing threat and bitterness, as God

chastises us through the fruit of our sins, Jezreel came to represent a promise, as the word “Jezreel” means “God plants”. He would sow us with His hands a new plant, a “*sacred pole*” (Isaiah 6: 13). He would sow us members in the body of His only-begotten Son to be watered by the waters of the Holy Spirit and carry the holiness of Christ in us. He would place us in His stabbed side to feed upon life itself, instead of the death that we had. That is what God confirms by saying: “*Israel shall be my new sowing in the land, and I will show love to Lo-ruhamah and say to Lo-ammi, ‘You are my people’, and he will say, ‘Thou art my God’.*” (Hosea 2: 23).

CHAPTER 2

THE FRUITS OF MATRIMONIAL BETRAYAL

In the first chapter, God proclaimed Israel’s betrayal of the covenant between them and God, which lead to their becoming a wife of harlotry who gives birth to children of harlotry. In this chapter, He reveals the fruits of this matrimonial betrayal, opening the door of return anew to Him.

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| 1. Bringing charges against the mother | 1 – 4 |
| 2. Seeking vanity | 5 – 7 |
| 3. Defiling the gifts of God | 8 – 13 |
| 4. A call for return | 14 – 23 |

1- BRINGING CHARGES AGAINST THE MOTHER:

“Then you will say to your brothers, ‘You are my people’, and to your sisters, ‘You are loved’. Plead my cause with your mother, for she is no longer my wife nor I her husband. Plead with her to forswear those wanton looks, to banish the lovers from her bosom.” (Hosea 2: 1, 2)

Having proclaimed that this nation has committed harlotry and forsaken its true God to unite to the Baal, God could no more call it His wife, because He has divorced it for its betrayal. He calls it “their mother” to provoke it into repentance and into returning to Him, on both, a collective and an individual level of each of its members. Despite all Israel’s evils, God begins His talk through the prophet, and ends it, by proclaiming the renewal of His covenant with it. He declares that they are His people and the object of His mercy. The apostle Paul says with this spirit: *“Brothers, my deepest desire and my prayer to God is for their salvation.”* (Romans 10: 1).

To whom does He address His talk: *“say to your brothers, ‘You are my people’, and to your sisters, ‘You are loved’”*? (Hosea 2: 1). If Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, gave birth to Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi, there are a few remnants among the people who are sanctified for the Lord, or at least longing to the holy life in the Lord. God addresses His talk to those, to open the door of hope before their fallen siblings, proclaiming that He longs to embrace them, to have mercy on them and to make them His people. Yet, it shall not be without sanctification or strife, as He says, *“Plead”*.

Bringing charges against their mother who has lost her relation to God, and so has become His wife no more, because of her harlotry and adultery. It is a trial, taking place within the soul by the Holy Spirit, in

which man judges himself before being exposed in the great day of the Lord. Each of us should say to himself, *“Plead my cause with your mother”*. We should judge ourselves before being judged. I hope we do not stay still regarding the corruption of our soul, the bride of the Lord. Or then we would hear, inside us, what St. Basil the Great wrote to a fallen virgin: *“If John the Baptist daringly rebuked the king until death when he saw a wedding that should not have been, how much more would his reaction be, if he sees such a defilement of a wedding that concerns the Lord?! You have cast away from yourself the yoke of the divine unity. You have run away from the holy matrimony of the true King. You have fallen into that corrupt and defiled perdition. Who would not sadly say, “How the faithful city has played the whore” (Isaiah 1: 21)”*.

The goal of this trial is ***“To forswear those wanton looks, to banish the lovers from her bosom”*** (Hosea 2: 2). For when we judge ourselves, we put disgrace away from our sight and feel ashamed of our weakness, and then we seek to be covered by His grace. We would then hear the voice of our heavenly groom saying to us: *“Rise up, my darling; my fairest, come away. My dove, that hides in holes in the cliffs or in crannies on the high ledges, let e see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is pleasant, your face is lovely”* (Songs 2: 13, 14). He would grant us the strength of His resurrection, saying *“Rise up”*. That is the way through which each defilement that has smeared our face would die away, and His divine features and His sight would be seen in our eyes, glorified by His resurrection and adorned with the work of His Holy Spirit.

Let Him take away the adulteries from between our breasts with His Holy Spirit. Let Him take them away from inside our hearts, so we would be able to sing to Him, and say: *“He lies on my breast”* (Songs 1: 13). As

the Holy cannot lie where corruption is “*Can light consort with darkness? Can Christ agree with Belial?*” (2 Corinthians 6: 14).

What does it mean to put away adulteries from between the breasts? If the heavenly Groom has two breasts; namely, the Old and the New Testaments, then these would be the breasts of His bride as well, being the Holy Book of the church. It is to be befitting for the church to present its Holy Book through its holy life in the Lord, and to keep anyone from corrupting its mission by his evil life which might cause missteps to others in enjoying the Holy Book and taking it as food for their souls. In this sense, St. Jerome wrote: “*Give him your breasts, to suckle from your pierced bosom, and to find comfort in his heritage*”. By this, he wanted to encourage the monk ‘Bamachius’ to study the Holy Book.

If we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged. On the contrary, if we are slothful with ourselves concerning sin, we shall fall under this same judgment: “***Or I will strip her and expose her naked as the day she was born; I will make her bare as the wilderness, parched as the desert, and leave her to die of thirst. I will show no love for her children; they are the offspring of wantonness***” (Hosea 2: 3, 4).

What is meant by “*Or I will strip her and expose her naked as the day she was born*”? If she forsakes Him by her own will, she would not be bound to Him and would thus lose Him as a shelter for her inner life. If she rejects Him, she would lose Him as a garment of righteousness by which she gets clothed. This would expose her in her corrupt nature, as she was on the day of her carnal birth, with nothing to cover her weakness. She would deprive herself of the Lord Christ by her own doing. She would deprive herself from the Lord with whom she is clothed, according to the words of the apostle (Galatians 3: 27).

As to the saying: *“I will make her bare as the wilderness, parched as the desert, and leave her to die of thirst.”* (Hosea 2: 3), that is because she rejects God and does not accept His Holy Spirit. This which pours on our desolate land like rain to water it, and turns its barren wilderness into a fruitful paradise to make it say to its groom: *“My beloved may come to his garden and enjoy its rare fruits”* (Songs 4: 16).

And as to saying: *“I will show no love for her children; they are the offspring of wantonness”* (Hosea 2: 4) refers to the fruit that grows in us by ourselves, not by our union with the heavenly Groom. The fruit about which the Lord Christ says: *“Any plant that is not of my heavenly Father’s planting will be rooted up”* (Matthew 15: 13) as it is alien from the kingdom of God and is worthy of being burnt by fire! Those doings that are not from God are *“the offspring of wantonness”*, whereas those works planted by God are connected to him, and cannot be touched by the devil. Those ‘by God made’ works would accompany us during all our eternity according to the words of the church: *“Happy are the dead who die in the faith of Christ! Henceforth, says the Spirit, they may rest from their labors; for they take with them the record of their deeds”* (Revelation 14: 13).

2- **SEEKING VANITY:**

Seeking His bride, threatening her against refusal or rather warning her that she would end up naked, barren and denied of His mercy, God reveals that what happens to her is not cruelty on His part. Actually, it is a natural fruit of her forsaking the truth, which is the secret of her life and fulfillment. It is also a consequence of seeking vanity, which would bring only death and deprivation.

God says: ***“And their mother is a wanton. She who conceived them is shameless; she says, ‘I will go after y lovers; they give me my food and drink, my wool and flax, my oil and my perfumes’*** (Hosea 2: 5). He revealed to her that the secret behind her perdition is her harlotry and putting herself to shame, not in the general physical sense, but doing it first internally in the heart where her needs dwell: giving her food, drink (my food and drink), clothing (my wool and flax), medications and her pleasure (my oil and perfumes). That is the spiritual harlotry, when man leans on somebody else other than on God, the Groom of his soul, to seek his needs and find his fulfillment and pleasure. Working on our return to Him, God narrows the way before us, in order to let us realize that going after others would only bring us mirage, saying: ***“Therefore I will block her road with thorn-bushes and obstruct her path with a wall, so that she can no longer follow her old ways. When she pursues her lovers she will not overtake them, when she looks for them she will not find them”*** (Hosea 2: 6, 7). If sin brings to humans “thorns and thistles” (Genesis 3: 18) and ***“The crooked man’s path is set with snares and pitfalls”*** (Proverbs 22: 5) as said by the wise Solomon, God, in His love, would let these thorns block our way, hoping that we would realize our fault and return to Him. It is said that God ***“With the savage man thou showest thyself savage”*** (Psalm 18: 26) and that ***“If after all this you have not learnt discipline but still defy me, I in turn will defy you”*** (Leviticus 26: 23, 24). He does so, firstly as a natural fruit of our evil, which we would reap, and secondly as a sign of His divine love, for He chastises us, so that we forsake our wrong ways. If we still do not care, He would set for us a wall of afflictions and troubles to shut before us our perverted way and to let us realize that walking on it is only vain.

Through this affliction, we realize the vanity of going after the others, as we would come close to our lovers and seek them, but not find them. Who are those lovers? By them, He probably meant the king of

Assyria, the Pharaoh of Egypt and the like. Joining forces with one of them against the other out of fear, is a vanity, because what they all do is actually for their own interest and benefit. They exploited Israel and Judah, but never helped them at the time of affliction. They were like “*a splintered cane*” (2 Kings 18: 21). He might have also meant the Baal, ‘Ishtarouth’ and the magic that accompanied the pagan worship. Israel has dedicated all its life, energies, and feelings to all those, although they were incapable of helping or saving it.

The goal of all these troubles is to bring the bride back to her wisdom, to forsake her harlotry and return to her true man, “***Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my husband again; I was better off with him than I am now’***” (Hosea 2: 7). As though she is the prodigal son who said, “*I will set off and go to my father*” (Luke 15: 18).

3- ***DEFILING THE GIFTS OF GOD:***

In our study of the book of Ezekiel, we saw that God admonishes His bride, not only for betraying Him, but also for taking His treasures and sanctuaries and using them in her betrayal. Here, God comments that His bride takes His grain, new wine, oil, gold and silver, and offers them to Baal. She uses the divine gifts to serve evil. The symbols and spiritual concepts of these gifts were previously explained in some detail.

As to the fruits of this behavior, they are:

First: God takes away His gifts in due time: “***Therefore I will take back my corn at the harvest and my new wine at the vintage, and I will take away the wool and the flax which I gave her to cover her naked body***” (Hosea 2: 9). Despite misusing His gifts and talents, God lets His bride do what she likes with them, in the hope that she may eventually

realize her fault and return to Him. Yet, this would only be temporary because, in due time, He would take back what He gave her, to leave her hungry, thirsty, and naked. That is the way she would be consequently exposed to her lovers. God is longsuffering with us, however, if we go far in misusing His gifts to us, He would take away what He had given us and would make us a cause for ridicule, even among the wicked. The prophet Jeremiah realized that when Jerusalem was captivated and said: *“All those who had honored her held her cheap, for they had seen her nakedness. What could she do but sigh and turn away? Uncleanness clung to her skirts, and she gave no thought to her fate. Her fall was beyond belief and there was no one to comfort her.”* (Lamentations 1: 8, 9)

Second: She will not only lose the gifts and talents, but also both her temporal and eternal joy and peace: ***“I will put a stop to her merrymaking, her pilgrimages and new moons, her sab-baths and festivals”*** (Hosea 2: 11). He causes her to enter into a perpetual bitterness, depression and anguish; and to know no more joy or feasts, whereas the believer, even while bearing the cross, his heart would be drawn to the rejoicing and power of resurrection. Amid his sufferings, he would taste the inner comfort on a heavenly level, and amid his grief, he would rejoice, and no one can take his joy away from him.

St. John Chrysostom confirmed in more than one occasion that man’s peace and joy evolve from his own inner depths, through his holy life in the Lord. Moreover, his harm does not result from outside sources, but from his own sin. He said, *“That is why I do not fear the plots of enemies, but I fear only one thing – the sin... I want to teach you a lesson. Have no fear from the deceits of those with authority, but fear rather the authority of sin. Nobody can harm you, if you do not harm yourself by your own. If you do no wrong, even if ten thousands of swords threaten*

you, God will save you from them, that not even one of them would approach you. Nevertheless, if you do evil, even if you were in paradise, you would be driven out of it”.

Third: “I will ravage the vines and the fig-trees” (Hosea 2: 12). In the introduction of this interpretation, we saw that the vine and the fig tree are two symbols of the suffering church, yet featured by the unity of the Spirit. It is as though whoever forsakes the Groom of his soul would lose the features of the church and his fellowship in it. It would even: ***“turn them into jungle where wild beasts shall feed”*** (Hosea 2: 12), namely, become a prey to the devil and a banquet to the sin.

Fourth: The end of all that would be getting her divine punishment: ***“I will punish her for the holy days when she burnt sacrifices to the Baalim, when she decked herself with earrings and necklaces, ran after her lovers and forgot me. This is the very word of the Lord.”*** (Hosea 2: 13) God would elaborately punish her for burning incense to the idols of Baal, for adorning herself for them with earrings and jewelry, and for going after her lovers to commit adultery, leaving God, the source of holiness. She Burnt incense as a symbol of praying and resorting to Baal, adorned herself as a sign of her wish to bring him pleasure and unite with him, and went after her lovers as a sign of having her heart attached to them... By offering all her possibilities to Baal instead of her groom, whom she completely forgot, she became worthy of falling under the eternal punishment.

4- A CALL FOR RETURN:

After proclaiming the evil committed by the betraying bride, who scattered the gifts of her groom to the account of His enemy, and after revealing the fruits of her vain behavior, He proclaimed His desire for her

return to Him in compassion and gentleness. This can be read in his saying: ***“But now listen, I will woo her, I will go with her into the wilderness and comfort her”*** (Hosea 2: 14).

Is it possible to find a groom who so treats his bride after her betrayal, and after scattering His gifts to the account of another?! That is the extent, to which God longs for man. He shows the human compassion hoping that he/she would return and unite with Him. Sanctifying human freedom, God does not commit man to return to Him, but He allures him to the wilderness. There he would not find a helper but God treating him with such compassion, love and care, like what He did to the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai.

How does God allure His bride to return to him?

First: “There I will restore her vineyards” (Hosea 2: 15). Even though He takes her to the wilderness, yet, He would give her, her vineyards there. These vineyards would give her food (grapes), drink (grape juice), and joyful wine in return. Those vineyards that the Lord gives are Himself: *“I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener”* (John 15: 1). It is as if He gives her His life for fulfillment and joy and for enjoying Him, for he is the bread coming down from heaven (John 6: 50). He offers Himself, so that she drinks from Him, being the living fountain (Jeremiah 2: 13), and gets even drunk by His love and sings: *“Your love is more fragrant than wine”* (Songs 1: 2).

Even if the world has become a barren wilderness with nothing to offer us, yet in it, we can find the true vine that came down to us. We can acquire it and even be attached to it as branches and so it produces more fruits (John 15: 5). This is the secret of our joy, and our hearts’ rejoice in the midst of the wilderness of this world.

Second: *“Turning Emeck-achor (the Vale of Trouble) to Pethah-tikvah (the Gate of Hope), and there she will answer as in her youth, when she came up out of Egypt”* (Hosea 2: 15). The word ‘Achor’ means “trouble” or “anguish”. It is the valley where Achan, the son of Zerah was stoned (Joshua 7: 26), ten miles south of Jericho. This means that God takes His bride into the wilderness and offers her Himself as “vineyards” there. At the same time, she accepts sufferings together with the vineyards (according to the meaning of the word “Achor”). Whoever receives the Lord Christ in the wilderness of this world, would receive him to fulfill his soul, but not without anguish. As St. John Chrysostom says, *“Where is Christ, there is also the anti-Christ”*.

“Achor” is God’s grant. The apostle Paul said about the gift of suffering: *“For you have been granted the privilege not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for him”* (Philippians 1: 29). St. John Chrysostom also said, *“He exalts our souls, counting our sufferings as His own. So, what joy would cover us, to become fellows of Christ, and to suffer for His sake?”*, and *“As He suffered from others, we suffer together with Him... Therefore, it would be befitting for you, not to be disturbed by these sufferings, but rather to rejoice”*.

Which is strange is that God grants us “Achor as a door of hope”. In the midst of suffering, the door of hope opens to us. We taste the strength and joy of resurrection through the cross together with the Lord Christ, which takes us back to the days of our renewing youth, opens our mouth with praise and turns our life into a praise of inner joy. *“There she will answer as in her youth, when she came up out of Egypt”* (Hosea 2: 15).

Third: The bride would enjoy the unity with her heavenly Groom *“On that day she shall call me ‘My husband’ and shall no more call me*

‘My Baal’” (Hosea 2: 16). This means that she will accept the unity with God, without using the pagan vocabulary (Such as “Baal” or “Master”). He would sanctify her completely, even the terms she uses: *“And I will wipe from her lips the very names of the Baalim; never again shall their names be heard”* (Hosea 2: 17).

She would enter with Him into a matrimonial covenant that sanctifies her body and mind, and grants her an exalted peace, even at the time of her departure from this world. ***“Then I will make a covenant on behalf of Israel with the wild beasts, the birds of the air, and the things that creep on the earth, and I will break bow and sword and weapon of war and sweep them off the earth, so that all living creatures may lie down without fear”*** (Hosea 2: 18).

It is “That day” when the Lord Christ came to this world, and was hanged on the cross for our salvation, offering His blood as a new covenant, through which our sanctification would be realized that even the beasts of the wilderness in us would become domesticated. The birds of the air, namely, the thoughts of our minds would become holy, and even the creeping things of the ground, namely the lowest carnal energies, would become blessed. He would destroy the bow of the sin, and the devil’s sword using His cross and would snatch the war from the body (the ground), as both body and soul would be sanctified in Him. He would bring peace even when we lie down in the grave, so neither can Hades take us by force, nor can death destroy our peace!

The secret of this divine work in our life is His saying three times: ***“I will betroth you to myself forever”*** (Hosea 2: 19, 20), confirming ***“to myself”***, because God grants us Himself. As said by St. John Chrysostom to the church on the tongue of the Lord Christ, *“I promise you the Kingdom... Yes, I have granted you the greatest portion, I have given you*

even the Lord of the Kingdom". The features of this heavenly betrothal are:

a. "I will betroth you to myself forever" (Hosea 2: 19). It is an eternal betrothal, which cannot be dissolved by time or death. A betrothal founded upon love, that "*many waters cannot quench*" (Songs 8: 7).

b. "betroth you in lawful wedlock with unfailing devotion and love" (Hosea 2: 19). What is lawful wedlock, devotion, love and mercy but the person of the Lord Christ who came down to us, so that humanity can enjoy the wedding in Him. God, the Father, approached us by the Lord Christ to bear us in His bosom, and in Him we, in turn, approach the Father as a bride for the only-begotten Son, with the right of childhood to Him and the unity with Him. By uniting with the heavenly groom, we carry His features, which are "*lawful wedlock with unfailing devotion and love*" to become heavenly, too. St. John Chrysostom says, "*Contemplate: What did the Spirit do? Finding the earth full of demons, He turned it into heaven*".

c. "I will betroth you to myself to have and to hold, and you shall know the Lord" (Hosea 2: 20). The foundation of this betrothal is faith, by which we are united with the groom who brings us forth to his Father to recognize Him. It is the type of knowledge, which is not by dry thought, but rather by life and unity. The Lord Christ Himself proclaimed previously about this knowledge: "*No one know the Father but the Son and those to whom the Son may choose to reveal him*" (Matthew 11: 27). If not knowing God is the fruit of uniting with the Baal, then the aim of uniting with the Son is to enter into the bosom of the Father, recognize Him and be attached to Him!

Fourth: ***“At that time I will give answer, says the Lord, I will answer for the heavens and they will answer for the earth”*** (Hosea 2: 21). The heavens symbolize the soul, which carries the Lord Christ inside it as its groom. The Father responds to the soul that unites to the heavenly groom, as He can smell the fragrance of pleasure in it. The soul would become the subject of His gladness. As to the earth, namely the body, it will become holy together with the soul, and will no more oppose the work of God, but will rather become a tool working on His account. Hence, the Lord will respond to this holy earth, in which the righteousness dwells. Neither will earth oppose heaven, nor will the body wrestle against the holy soul. On the contrary, it will respond to it and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, which God Himself plants: ***“The earth will answer for the corn, the new wine, and the oil, and they will answer for Jezreel”*** (Hosea 2: 22).

Finally, God ends the blessings of this Messianic era, in which man returns to His groom, by confirming the favor of God’s grace upon us. He says, ***“Israel shall be my new sowing in the land, and I will show love to Lo-ruhamah and say to Lo-ammi, ‘You are my people’, and he will say, ‘Thou art my God’”*** (Hosea 2: 23). The hand of God Himself will stretch to plant us, so we will no more be with no mercy, and no more rejected to be His people. On the contrary, we will enjoy His mercy and our relationship with Him.

“Jezreel” turned into a promise after it had been a threat. It became a sign of the God’s work, who plants His church by Himself, instead of being a sign of the vineyard that was taken by force by the wicked Jezebel. As to His promise: ***“I will show love to Lo-ruhamah and say to Lo-ammi, ‘You are my people’”***, the apostle Paul quoted it in his epistle to the Romans. He saw it as a prophecy about the call to the Gentiles who had not obtained mercy and were not the people of God: ***“As it says in the***

Book of Hosea: "Those who were not my people I will call My People, and the unloved nation I will call My Beloved" (Romans 9: 25).

CHAPTER 3

GOD'S PRACTICAL LOVE FOR MAN

After the divine inspiration had demonstrated the fruits of matrimonial betrayal or those of breaking the covenant between God and man, it again confirms God's love for man and His longing for uniting with him after sanctifying him.

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| 1. Marriage to a harlot | 1 |
| 2. Buying the harlot | 2 |
| 3. Sanctifying the harlot | 3, 4 |
| 4. A return to the Groom | 5 |

1- MARRIAGE TO A HARLOT:

The scholars refuse to consider what came here as a second marriage, different than the one mentioned in the first chapter. So, why is the repetition of the episode of marrying a harlot?

First: Some scholars believe that the prophet's wife Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, deserted the house of matrimony, sold herself to corruption and became a slave. However, the prophet bought her back for himself as his wife (Hosea 3: 2).

Second: Other scholars believe that what came here in this chapter is the same like in the first chapter. They believe that what came in the first chapter was a command from God to the prophet to marry a harlot. On the other hand, they believe that in this chapter we are told about the real story that the prophet has experienced himself.

Third: A few scholars believe that the first talk was directed to the northern kingdom (Israel), whereas here it is directed to the southern kingdom (Judah) despite saying “*the Israelites*” (Hosea 3: 1). That is because the first kingdom was divorced and captivated, while the second kingdom remained another century and then, it was divorced and captivated as well.

Fourth: Some others believe that what came here is nothing but a repetition of what came in the first chapter, as a conformation of the love of God for His fallen bride and as giving her more than one chance to consider the love of her first man.

In the first chapter, God said to Hosea: “*Go, take a wanton for your wife*” whereas here, He says to him: “*Go again and love a woman loved by another man, an adulteress*”. He is commanded by the Lord not only to marry her, but also to love her despite his knowledge that she is loved by another and is a harlot. By that, God intended for Hosea to enter into the fellowship of love toward His people, despite what they did, “*love her as I, the Lord, love the Israelites although they resort to other gods and love the raisin-cakes offered to their idols*” (Hosea 3: 1).

2- BUYING A HARLOT:

“*So I bought her for fifteen pieces of silver, a homer of barely and a measure of wine*” (Hosea 3: 2).

This woman has sold herself to the account of evil, became a humble slave for the price of fifteen shekels of silver, which is less than the regular price of a slave. The lusts of her heart let her run after her lovers and dedicate her life to them, and so she became worthless of any price. She has lost her honor, her glory and the image in which her God created her, through which she used to resemble Him.

Anyway, as Hosea is a symbol of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, buying a harlot refers to Jesus Christ who purchased us by His precious blood, and saved us from the bondage, under which we captivated ourselves by ourselves.

Hosea says, “***I bought her***” for Himself. He did as our Lord Jesus has acquired us to Him as a bride to dedicate all her energies to His account, and not to the account of the world or the devil.

As to the price paid by Hosea for that woman, it was very modest: fifteen shekels of silver, which is less than the price of a slave (Exodus 21: 22). In addition, he paid one and one-half homers, not of wheat (Psalm 81: 16), but of barley, the food of the poor or of the beasts. In his eyes and the world’s eyes, she is not worth more than that. Our Lord Jesus Christ acquired us, not for gold or silver, nor for wheat or barley, but for His precious blood. The apostle said regarding to that: “*Well you know that it was no perishable stuff, like gold or silver that bought your freedom from the empty folly of your traditional ways. The price was paid in precious blood, as it were of a lamb without mark or blemish – the blood of Christ*” (1 Peter 1: 18, 19).

3- SANCTIFYING THE HARLOT:

God, with His great love for the harlot humanity, seeks and redeems it with His blood. He does that to sanctify it and prepare it for the heavenly wedding: ***“And I said to her, ‘Many a long day you shall live in my house and not play the wanton, and have no intercourse with a man, nor I will you’”*** (Hosea 3: 3). The Holy Son of God dedicated His life to the account of this wedding, saying, *“I will also be toward you”*. More clearly, He said, *“For their sake I now consecrate myself, that they too may be consecrated in truth”* (John 17: 19). The Holy Son sanctified His life and dedicated it for our salvation. He did that to sanctify us by Him, and so we would present our lives to Him through the sanctification by His blood through His Holy Spirit. It is remarkable that the spiritual matrimony of the soul to God not only takes away its defilement or its spiritual harlotry, but also grants it “virginity”. St. John Chrysostom said, *“The church is called a virgin, although it was before a harlot. This is the miracle done by the groom: He took the church as a harlot and turned it into a virgin! What an amazing and new thing! By marriage, we loose our virginity, whereas by marriage, God gives virginity back to the church... When we hear these things, we shall not carnally conceive them, but shall consider them thoughtfully, as the church that we live, is spiritual and not material.”*

The prophet goes on to say, ***“For the Israelites shall live many a long day without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without image or household gods”*** (Hosea 3: 4). This is a reference to the period of captivity, during which the people were deprived of the freedom to worship God, of all their privileges and of every appearance of being a nation or a church. God probably allowed that to happen, as a preparatory period for them to be able to receive the true worship, especially after their deprivation of it because of their evils. God, in His glory, may sometimes deny man the blessings, for a certain time, to receive them in a greater and more pure way.

4- A RETURN TO THE GROOM:

God ends His talk about receiving the harlot with matrimonial love by the return of the Jewish people to the knowledge of God. The scholar Origen believes that the period of deprivation does not only refer to the period of captivity, but also to the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews. However, at the end of time they will receive faith and join as members in the body of Christ to enjoy salvation: ***“But after that they will again seek the Lord their God and David their king, and turn anxiously to the Lord for his bounty in days to come”*** (Hosea 3: 5). At the end of time they will come ‘*in fear*’ or ‘*trembling*’ to the Lord.

Why does he say “*turn anxiously to the Lord*”? Probably, because they would realize what sin has done to their king David, namely to the Lord Christ who is “*the scion and offspring of David*” (Revelation 22: 16). They will hasten to Him to consummate their salvation “*in fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2: 12).

CHAPTER 4

DECLARATION OF THE TRIAL

God revealed to Israel its position in His heart as the bride He loved and to whom He presented all the possibilities to live with Him, yet this bride betrayed Him and broke the covenant. He opens the door of hope several times to her, namely through repentance especially in the Messianic era. With great love, He does not give her any commands, but

enters with her into a conversation, a debate, and even a trial, not to overcome, but rather to proclaim His loving fatherhood and to make it clear to her that He is the non-despotic groom. In this chapter, He starts by declaring a trial against Israel, and in particular, against its corrupt religious leadership.

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| 1. Declaration of the trial | 1 – 3 |
| 2. The priests' rejection of knowledge | 4 – 10 |
| 3. The pagan abominations | 11 – 19 |

1. DECLARATION OF THE TRIAL:

God brings charges against the children of Israel, calling them 'land' or 'the inhabitants of the land':

“Hear the word of the Lord, O Israel; for the Lord has a charge to bring against the people of the land: There is no good faith or mutual trust, no knowledge of God in the land, oaths are imposed and broken, they kill and rob; there is nothing but adultery and license, one deed of blood after another.” (Hosea 4: 1, 2)

Having connected themselves to the love of earthly objects and affairs, they became 'land' themselves. The accusation is:

First: On the negative aspect, He says, “*no good faith or mutual trust, no knowledge of God in the land*”. Israel entered into the trial, being a land that lost its unity with the heavenly groom, because it has no truth, mercy, or the knowledge of God. Without this inseparable trinity in the life of man, he would go down to the mortal earthly nature.

He starts with the faithfulness or 'truth', about which the lord Christ in His farewell prayer said: "*Consecrate them by the truth; thy word is truth*" (John 17: 17). They have rejected the truth by rejecting the word of God, although it is not far from them: "*The word is near you: it is upon your lips and in your heart. This means the word of faith which we proclaim*" (Romans 10: 8). This truth should be welded with mercy, so that the word of God or the faith in it would not be just words known by bare mental thought, but should rather touch our life. As the truth in us turns to work, our knowledge of God would grow, and our insight would accordingly, be more enlightened. That is how the truth reacts with work and knowledge. The three of them represent interacting aspects that concern our life in Jesus Christ.

Second: Having lost this trinity; faith, work, and spiritual knowledge, Israel produced corruption: "***Oaths are imposed and broken, they kill and rob; there is nothing but adultery and license, one deed of blood after another***" (Hosea 4: 2).

This list of sins proclaim their breaking of the Ten Commandments (Commandments 3, 9, 6, 8, and 7); namely breaking the covenant with God. As to saying: "*breaking all restraint*", it means the use of violence, which is contrary to the meek Spirit of God. It probably also means, violently crossing their limits with God, or that they challenge the mind, the conscience, or the law by through their sins; not out of weakness, or lack of strong will, but deliberately and violently. As to saying: "*one deed of blood after another*", He probably means shedding the blood of Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, who was stoned at the commandment of king Joash, in the court of the house of the Lord (2 Chronicles 24: 21). His innocent blood was mixed with that of the animal sacrifices, which they used to offer with a spirit far from being straight.

Third: He ends His charges against the children of Israel by saying: ***“Therefore the land shall be dried up, and all who live in it shall pine away, and with them the wild beasts and the birds of the air; even the fish shall be swept from the sea”*** (Hosea 4: 3). By breaking the covenant of God, Israel will turn into a wilderness that knows no joy or peace, but only mourning and disturbance. It will have no fruits, but only draught and dryness. Even the beasts of the wilderness, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, will find no food. Everything will waste away. The fruits of breaking the covenant are a complete desolation that prevails over the whole land, with its beasts, birds, and fish.

He says: *“The land shall be dried up”*. If the ‘land’ refers to our body, for whose sake and pleasure we commit evil, then the fruit of this evil will be the body’s deprivation of comfort and joy, to remain mournful! This is the fruit of breaking the covenant with God, the Grantor of peace, whereas unity with Him grants man true peace. Father John of Kornstadt says, *“When Christ dwells in the heart by faith, peace and joy would likewise dwell in it. It is not without cause to say that God is Holy and finds comfort in His saints”*. He also says, *“With the eyes of my heart, I see how, I can mentally breathe Christ in my heart... How when He enters into it, He promptly grants it peace and joy. Therefore, do not let me dwell alone without You, O Grantor of Life, my breath and my joy! It is difficult for me to be forsaken by You”*.

“All who live in it shall pine away”. All the energies and talents of man would waste away and scatter, just as what happened to the younger brother who scattered his wealth in a wasteful way and ended up like a valueless and lifeless body. Whereas the real believer would truly praise: *“Thou dost visit the earth and give it abundance, as often as thou dost enrich it, brimming in their channels, ... leveling its ridges, ... the pastures in the wild are rich with blessing and the hills wreathed in happiness, the*

valleys mantled in corn, so that they shout, they break into song.” (Psalm 65: 9-13) It is as though he says to God: “Although I am a dry land, yet You take care of it, make it flow with holy abundance. You sanctify the talents You have given me and You increase them. You fill my life with the water of the Holy Spirit that flares all the energies to the account of Your kingdom. You bless my inner produce, which are Your fruits in me. You make my life fruitful, filled with joy and gladness, to utter praises and spiritual songs”.

Saying, ***“And with them the wild beasts and the birds of the air; even the fish shall be swept from the sea”*** refers to the corruption of man’s life on all aspect: the land with the beasts, the air with the birds and the sea with the fish. It is an overall desolation, that even the animals that are used to live in the barren wilderness are unable to survive the severe drought, the birds find nothing to feed on and the fish migrate to far away waters.

On the one hand, God probably intended by this trial to reveal the serious consequences of sin and the extension of the desolation even to the irrational creation like the beasts, the birds, and the fish. This is the way it happened at the beginning of human life, when the earth was cursed because of the sin of Adam and Eve, to bring forth thorns and thistles. On the other hand, the beasts probably refer to the carnal life, the birds to the mind, which is supposed to soar up with heavenly thoughts, and the fish of the sea refers to faith. It is as though man destroys his life on all aspects (body, mind, and spirit) by forsaking his heavenly groom, and so loses everything.

2. THE PRIESTS’ REJECTION OF KNOWLEDGE:

God also confirms the trial of the priests and the false prophets, as being responsible for everything the people have reached. He says:

“But it is not for any man to bring a charge, it is not for him to prove a case and your people are like those who quarrel with a priest. By day and by night you blunder on, you and the prophet with you. Your mother is destroyed.” (Hosea 4: 4, 5) He probably means that everyone is responsible for himself. No-one should justify the actions of a priest, just because he is a priest. The priests stumble during the day, and the false prophets during the night through vain dreams, and so all of them partake of the desolation of Samaria, the capital of their mother Israel. The wicked priests have joined forces with the false prophets to stumble together, destroying the whole people.

Some believe that the talk here is addressed to the people, as God demands from those who truly rebuke to keep quiet and stop their endeavor, because nobody head their rebuke. Everyone rejects guidance, even when directed by a priest. Everyone is against an outspoken priest and may even persecute him, just like what Joash and his people did when they stoned Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest in the Lord’s house, because he uttered the words of God (2 Chronicles 24: 21).

God addresses His talk to the priests, proclaiming to them that they have destroyed the people because of their lack of knowledge: ***“My people destroyed for lack of knowledge. You have rejected knowledge, and I will reject you from serving me as priest.”*** (Hosea 4: 6) What is meant by knowledge of God was already clarified in the introduction to the book. It was also explained how it is connected to the holy pious life in the Lord. The priests have forsaken the life of fellowship with God and preoccupied themselves with their own interests, and so they lost the pious knowledge and became as though in the darkness of ignorance. He

did not say, “Because you are ignorant”, but said, “*You have rejected knowledge*”. As though He says to him: You have no excuse, because knowledge is available to you, and the light is set before you, but it is you who reject the knowledge, and do not want to receive the light. “*To God they say, ‘Leave us alone; we do not want to know your ways’*” (Job 21: 14). The secret of their rejection of knowledge is that they have forsaken the word of God and His commandment: “***You have forgotten the teaching of God, and I, your God, will forget your sons***” (Hosea 4: 6). Here, He connects the knowledge of God with the law of God, the latter being its source. Father Kronstadt says, “*The Holy Book is the center of God’s wisdom, His word, and His Spirit. In it, He proclaims by Himself: ‘The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life’*” (John 6: 63). *In the Holy Book we see God face to face, and see ourselves as we actually are. We know ourselves through it and perpetually walk in the God’s presence.*”

If we take it on the allegorical side, who is the priest, whose people would be destroyed because of his rejection of the knowledge of God? Who is that priest whose children will be forgotten by God, because he forgets God’s law? He is the heart, that, instead of being the center of the God’s kingdom in man, it is bound to the world and the temporal things. This heart loses its purity and becomes unable to behold God. It is as though, becoming in a state of spiritual blindness, with no living knowledge, it would forget God’s commandment. This heart, rejecting knowledge through purity, would cause the destruction of the whole people, namely, the entire body with all its energies and possibilities. Forgetting the divine commandment, the commandment would have no fruition in it, and would thus become as though it has forgotten his children.

By this, we reconfirm what we have previously said, that knowledge is not acquired by reading alone, but through the holy pious life of worship in the Lord; through the inner priest in man, the pure heart that intercedes for the whole body before the Lord.

The Lord goes on admonishing the priests, saying: ***“The more priests there are, the more they sin against me; their dignity I will turn into dishonor. They feed on the sin of my people and batten on their iniquity. But people and priest shall be treated alike. I will punish them for their conduct and repay them for their deeds: they shall eat but never be satisfied, behave wantonly but their lust will never be overtaxed, for they have forsaken the Lord”*** (Hosea 4: 7-10). Because they depended on their great number, or on the quantity and not the quality of their work, *“the more priests there are, the more they sin against me”*. Instead of their inner sanctification and their true testimony of God before the people, they sinned more against God. Because they preoccupied themselves with the pagan banquets and fell into abominations, they will be judged with no partiality together with their people.

“They feed on the sin of my people” which means that they eat up the sacrifices of sin offered by the people. They do not care for the repentance of the people or for their return from evil, on the contrary, they are happy about the sacrifices offer, for the sake of their enjoyment of those sacrifices. The more the people sin, the more would be their portion of the sacrifices they offer! Therefore, because they only cared for filling their bellies with the meat of the sacrifices at the expense of the sanctification of the people, they shall eat, but not have enough. Moreover, because they commit harlotry through taking concubines, blessing will be taken away from them. Such a horrible portrait does not fit for the priest. Father Kronstadt warns us saying, *“As the priest is an*

angel, more than being a man, it is fitting for him to cast every worldly thing away from him and behind his back. "Let thy priests be clothed in righteousness" (Psalm 132: 9). Let them always remember the greatness of their call. Let them not fall in the snares of this world, and of the devil, but get away from "worldly cares and the false glamour of wealth and all kinds of evil desire" (Mark 4: 19) entering into their hearts".

3. THE PAGAN ABOMINATIONS:

After declaring the trial of all the Israelis, especially the religious leaderships, He reveals the abominations in which all of them have fallen:

First: ***"Prostitution, new wine and old embolden my people"*** (Hosea 4: 11). Their deviation from the worship of God to that of the Baal is caused by their bodily lusts. St. Augustine said that behind every atheism, there is a lust left with no control. The lusts of the body would corrupt the heart, kill in it every longing toward God as the groom of the soul; and would make man flee from God, considering Him as a suppressor of his breath and a destructor of his personality.

Second: When people let themselves fall into the enjoyment of bodily lusts with no control, they go down into unbecoming and unacceptable behaviors like the works of magic, which were connected at that time with the worship of Baal. God says, ***"They ask advice from a block of wood and take their orders from a fetish"*** (Hosea 4: 12). Instead of resorting to God for counsel, they turned to the idol of Baal and the works of magic to show them the way and inform them about the future. Everyone who forsakes the word of God and resorts to the world and to men, would be like someone asking counsel of a piece of wood or a staff.

Third: They rush to-idol worship: “*You men sacrifice on mountain-tops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak and poplar and the terebinth’s pleasant shade*” (Hosea 4: 13). There were mountains on Israel, that should have been a “*holy mountain*” (Jeremiah 31: 23), toward which those who seek salvation should flee (Genesis 19: 17). Mountains, on which the heavenly groom would come leaping (Songs 2: 8) and on which the city of Jerusalem would be set (Matthew 5: 14) and could never disappear. On those mountains, the Lord Christ would ascend (John 6: 3), which will let those mountains drip of new wine and incessant spiritual juice (Joel 3: 18). Instead of all that, those mountains turned into the account of the devil, and defiled altars were built on them.

Other than those mighty mountains that turned to the account of the Baal, Israel also had smaller souls, namely smaller hills, on which the Lord Christ should have come leaping (Songs 2: 8). These became corrupt as well and bore the smell of abhorrent incense.

The same thing that was said about the mountains and hills is also said about the oaks, poplars, and terebinth’s trees that became centers serving the kingdom of darkness, instead of glorifying God.

The Jews chose the high places like the mountains and hills, not to raise their thoughts above the earthly things, but assumed that, on them, they were closer to heaven. What actually happened was that they slid down to the pit. They chose the dense trees believing that their great shade would help them in their spiritual contemplations, instead of resorting to the cross and finding comfort in the pierced side.

Finally, Hosea presents a horrible portrait of the extent of harlotry and adultery in their life, mentioning the following features of their defiled life:

a. Both, the unmarried girls and the married brides, committed this sin. It is as though it became a general thing among all women, that they do not feel ashamed of.

b. It is as though God despaired in them. They commit sin, out of neither weakness, nor ignorance, but they sin continuously and shamelessly, with their own free will, God no more chastens them. That is the worst punishment that man may come under; namely, to be denied the fatherhood of God, who refuses to chasten him, saying, ***“I will not punish your daughters for playing the wanton, nor your sons’ brides of their adultery”*** (Hosea 4: 14). Father Theodor says, *“God is like an able Physician, who used all the possible ways to cure, and has nothing more to apply. He became fed up of their oppression, had to stop His gentle chastisements and tend to expose them, saying: “Then I will abate my fury, and my jealousy will turn away from you. I will be calm and will no longer be provoked to anger” (Ezekiel 16: 42).”*

St. Jerome also said, *“Lucky is the man who becomes chastened in this life; As “God’s affliction will not rise up a second time” (Nahum 1: 9). How great would be the wrath of God, when He stops punishing us here, and keeps us like bulls for slaughtering. He says to Jerusalem, ‘because of its many sins and great evil, He will no more be jealous on it, or angry against it’ (Ezekiel 16: 42).” In other words, He says, ‘When you were a mere harlot, I loved you, and I was jealous on you, but when you came to be with many lovers, I despised you and stopped being jealous on or angry with you’. He will say no more: “I will visit your transgression with the rod” (Psalm 89: 32), but will say: “I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry” (Hosea 4: 14).*

c. What the girls and the brides do is a natural fruit of the horrible things done by the men, about whom He says: ***“Because your men resort to wanton women and sacrifice with temple-prostitutes. A people without understanding comes to grief.”*** (Hosea 4: 14). Because men go to the altars of Baal distributed all over the country, *“go apart with harlots”* and offer evil sacrifices with the priestesses, who dedicated their life to the account of Baal. They behave with no understanding and fall under such horrible sin that God delivered their daughters and brides to these lusts, saying: ***“Therefore your daughters play the wanton and your sons’ brides commit adultery”*** (Hosea 4: 13). That is the bitter way, God chastens the adulterers to let them recognize the horror of their behavior, like what He did when He punished David by defiling his wives (2 Samuel 12: 11).

d. God likens Israel to a stubborn calf (Hosea 4: 16) that refuses to be under yoke, but stumbles and goes backwards, instead of forward. The people rejected the yoke of the commandment of God and went madly after their own will, which grabbed them backwards instead of forwards.

They set forth to the locations where harlotry and idol-worships prevailed, like Gilgal and Beth Aven (House of vanity). They behaved like the lambs that feed in a spacious pasture to be prepared for slaughter, *“grows fat and kick”* (Deuteronomy 32: 15).

e. He says, ***“Ephraim, keeping company with idols, has held a drunken orgy”*** (Hosea 4: 17). He so bound himself to idols that he became their fellow and carried their features. His heart became of stone, just as the idols are of stone and he delivered himself to perdition and vanity, because the idols are nothing but false and fake.

Ephraim was so connected to the idols and became as if he was chained to their servitude and could not set himself free of them and could no more listen to any sound advice. This is the nature of sin, and as said by St. Anthony the Great, “When the soul is ignorant of the sin, she loves it, and in its bondage it becomes captivated”.

f. When will all this end? How will this bitter drinking end up? ***“They have preferred dishonor to glory. The wind shall sweep them away, wrapped in its wings, and they will find their sacrifices a delusion”*** (Hosea 4: 18, 19). They dearly loved dishonor, namely, corruption and earned shame. Finally, when they will be carried away by the wind, as though on the wings of evil to captivity to bring them over to the humiliation of bondage, they will then be ashamed because of their pagan sacrifices that could not save them.

Having long lived by the spirit of the Gentiles and worshipped their idols, they will get their heart’s desire and be carried away as captives to where those idols are, where there is deprivation of Jerusalem, and the temple of the Lord. They will taste the bitterness of their doing.

CHAPTER 5

JUDAH JOINS ISRAEL IN THE TRIAL

If Israel and its priests were corrupted because of rejecting the divine knowledge, Judah were diverted as well, despite all the privileges they had, being the royal tribe set in Jerusalem and worshipping in the temple of the Lord. Because they also diverted like Israel, God entered with them in an adversity, debated against them, admonished them, revealed to them their wounds, and chastised them.

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| 1. God chastises with no partiality | 1 – 5 |
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1- GOD CHASTISES WITH NO PARTIALITY:

God confirms His impartiality for one category at the expense of the other, or for one person at the expense of another. Everybody has fallen into iniquity when having sinned. God said, “***I will punish them all***” (Hosea 5: 2). He will punish the Israelis, because they started evil by setting for themselves a temple other than God’s temple in Jerusalem, and diverted to paganism. At the same time, He will punish Judah, despite all the privileges it has like being the royal tribe, having Jerusalem as its

capital and the temple of God in it, because its people have sinned, even if later than Israel: ***“Israel’s arrogance cries out against him; Ephraim’s guilt is his undoing, and Judah no less is undone.”*** (Hosea 5: 5)

If a trial was declared, against the priests in particular in the previous chapter, because the people of God were destroyed for lack of knowledge, although this is the main responsibility of the priests, yet the people themselves (*the house of Israel*) are not excused: ***“Hear this, you priests, and listen, all Israel”*** (Hosea 5: 1). In addition, He says to those of honor, ***“Let the royal house mark my words; sentence is passed on you”*** (Hosea 5: 1).

He judges all; as He searches the hearts and minds, and nothing is hidden from Him; He says: ***“I have cared for Ephraim and I have not neglected Israel”*** (Hosea 5: 3). He started with Ephraim, meaning either all the kingdom of Israel, or Ephraim himself, who was the head of the rebels, because of whom the rest of the ten tribes got defiled. Therefore, he is worthy of punishment more than the others.

What does God know about them?

First: “Because you have been a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread out on Tabor” (Hosea 5: 1). Here, He probably addresses the leaderships, who were supposed to support the weak and keep them from falling. Instead of that, they became snares and nets set by the enemy to catch them to the account of evil. Instead of guiding them to repentance, they seduced them to fall and drew them with every possible way to

idol-worship. Some believe that they used to place spies on the intersections of roads, and in particular on the two mountains ‘Mizpah’ and ‘Tabor’ during the days of feasts, in order to watch those who go to Jerusalem and inform about them to be trialed.

It is not well known here, if ‘Mizpah’ is the one in ‘Gilead’ at ‘Tel-Remeth’ (Judges 11), where Jacob and Laban set a heap of stones as a testimony to the covenant made between them (Genesis 31: 49), the children of Israel assembled together to fight the Ammonites (Judge 10: 17), and ‘Jephthah’ encountered his daughter (Judges 11: 34). The other possibility is that ‘Mizpah’ is the one in Benjamin, where Saul was chosen to be king (1 Samuel 10: 17-21), the one enforced by Asa, king of Judah (1 Kings 15: 32), and where Gedaliah was killed (2 Kings 25: 23, 25). It is also said to be the village, from which Prophet Samuel comes. Anyway, Mizpah and Tabor, were at that time two centers of idol-worship, and became two symbols of the desolation that dwelt because of the pagan worship.

Second: Their persistence on committing the sin with no repentance, as it comes from their depths, and because of their lack of knowledge of the Lord: ***“Their misdeeds have barred their way back to their God; for a wanton spirit is in them, and they care nothing for the Lord”*** (Hosea 5: 4). They are stubborn and insist ignorantly on adjuring from God.

Third: Their haughtiness and the pride of their hearts made them despise the words of the Lord, uttered on the tongues of His prophets:

“Israel’s arrogance cries out against them” (Hosea 5: 5). Indeed, *“Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.”* (Proverbs 16: 18, 19) God proclaimed His hate towards pride: *“The Lord God has sworn by Himself, The Lord God of hosts says: ‘I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his palaces; Therefore I will deliver up the city, and all that is in it’”* (Amos 6: 8). Also: *“Thus will I spoil the gross pride of Judah, the gross pride of Jerusalem”* (Jeremiah 13: 9, 10).

2- GOD WITHDRAWS HIMSELF FROM THEM:

In their pride and ignorance, they thought that they could bring pleasure to God by the material offerings and the sacrifices, without actually changing their hearts. That is why He says: ***“They go with sacrifices of sheep and cattle to seek the Lord, but do not find him. He has withdrawn himself from them.”*** (Hosea 5: 6). They approach Him, but not with their hearts, hence, they do not find Him. He would not be present or be seen except by the heart: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”* (Matthew 5: 8).

God withdrew himself from them, because they betrayed Him, and broke the covenant between Him and them. Instead of uniting with Him to give forth the fruits of the Spirit, that bring pleasure to the heart of God, they united with evil and have begotten foreign children; namely fruits that are foreign to God. ***“They have been unfaithful to Him, and their sons are bastards.”*** (Hosea 5: 7).

He ends His talk by: ***“Now an invader shall devour their fields.”*** (Hosea 5: 7). He probably means, that they do not get fulfilled with the spiritual fruits, rejoice in the Lord or let the Lord rejoice in them, although they practice the rite of the feast. However, they would lose everything, even their possessions (their heritage or portion), or the defiled banquets that they set to celebrate the Baal, the thing that has become their portion, instead of God and His kingdom. This portion that they have chosen is mortal, which is why they will lose.

3- THE DECLARATION OF A GENERAL STATE OF CHASTISEMENT:

Horns were usually used in case of wars. However, God demanded the ram's horns to be blown in both Israel and Judah, as though He intended to proclaim to them what sin does to them. Sin shows them God as an enemy fighting against them instead of a Loving God. Anyway, He demanded the horns to be blown in Gibeah as well as in Ramah, and asked them to cry out in Beth Aven (8)

“Gibeah” means a “hill” and *“Ramah”* means a “height”. It is as though God demands the horns to be blown on very high places, where they think they are strong. He wants them to realize that they are in a state of war. By accepting the idol-worship, they have entered into animosity with God, who accordingly allowed them to be chastised by attacks of their enemies who also worship the Baal. Those enemies will rob and captivate them. They loved the Baal, his banquets, and his pleasures, so let them accept servitude to his worshippers.

Gibeah, which is in Judah, is very close to Ramah, which is in Israel. It is as though desolation would dwell upon both kingdoms, as they both were corrupted. As to “Beth Aven” or “The house of vanity”, there is no need to blow horns, as it has completely gone down and has fallen hopelessly. Nothing is heard in it but the cries of defeat, after the enemy had taken it over.

He consummates His talk by saying, **“Look behind you, O Benjamin”** (Hosea 5: 8), and according to some versions: *“Get terrified, O Benjamin”*. As the enemy has taken over the Mountain of Ephraim and came very near to the boundaries of Benjamin, there is no need to blow the horn in Benjamin, but it is enough to look at their back to get terrified and repent, returning to the Lord, lest what dwelt upon Ephraim would also dwell upon them.

Then He goes on to say, **“On the tribes of Israel I have proclaimed this unalterable doom... The rulers of Judah act like men who move their neighbor’s boundary; on them will I pour out my wrath like a flood”** (Hosea 5: 9, 10). God has proclaimed what is sure in Israel; namely, the chastisement that would surely dwell upon them and not mere threats without action as they presumed. As to the rulers of Judah, God would pour on them His wrath like water, because they became like those who remove the landmarks. That is they remove the marks designating the kingdom of God from that of the Baal. They have lost the spirit of the discernment between the Egyptians (symbolic) and Israel (symbolic). There is nothing more grieving to God’s heart than seeing the spiritual

leaders lose the spirit of discernment, which should be obtained by each believer within him.

Removing the landmarks would also mean greed or taking by force, about which the commandment came to say: *“You shall not remove your neighbor’s landmark, which the men of old have set in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess”* (Deuteronomy 1: 14). No tribe may take over a part of another tribe’s land, but each tribe owns what God has given it.

“Ephraim is an oppressor trampling on justice, doggedly pursuing what is worthless. But I am a festering sore to Ephraim, a canker to the house of Judah” (Hosea 5: 8, 9). Ephraim has fallen under oppression and was completely crushed that there is no breath of life in it anymore. He has also lost his strength, privileges and rights, because he willingly went after the commandment of ‘Jeroboam’ and the kings who followed him, who committed their people to vain worship of the Baal. That is why the word “the commandment” came as “the vanity” in the Septuagint version, which means that Ephraim chose to go after the vanity instead of after the commandment of God, which is the truth. That behavior made people lose the blessings of God in their life and, to them God would be like moth that devours the garment, and would expose their nakedness and shame. To Judah, He would be like termites that rot the wooden pillars of the house, so it will collapse. Judah would become homeless.

4- THEY DID NOT RETURN TO GOD:

Those chastisements revealed the sickness of Israel and the wounds of Judah. It was befitting for them to return to God by repentance, but Israel resorted to Assyria for support (Hosea 5: 13). Then, Assyria and its men showed up to be “*miserable comforters*” (Job 16: 2), “*worthless physicians*” (Job 13: 4) and they afflicted them instead of supporting them (2 Chronicles 28: 16, 18). Having not benefited from the chastisement, Israel entered under more cruel and bitter chastisement. God is no more like moth or rottenness to them, but is like a lion and a young lion. Despite all that, God hopes that they return to Him: “***I will maul the prey and go, carry it off beyond hope of rescue – I, the Lord. I will go away and return to My place until in their horror they seek Me, and look earnestly for Me in their distress***” (Hosea 5: 14, 15).

What does He mean by saying: “*I will go away and return to My place*”? He probably means to clarify, that at the moments of chastisement or punishment of the wicked, He seems as though He got out of His place (Isaiah 26: 21), looking cruel, while returning again to His place means His longing to proclaim His love and compassion towards them.

Finally, affliction makes the soul hasten to go early to God, which is why the apostle advises us: “*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.*” (James 5: 13) As said by Father Kronstadt: “We mostly resort to God with all our hearts in the time of affliction, as no-one but God could save us from it. Nevertheless, in the time of abundance and prosperity, especially when we thirst for riches and glory; we lose the faith from our hearts, forget God, our Judge, the eternity of our souls, and forget our

commitment to love God from all our hearts and to love our relatives like ourselves”.

CHAPTER 6

A TALK ABOUT SALVATION

If God has chastised them all in His love, and yet neither Israel nor Judah returned to Him, but leaned upon the kings of the world instead, God allowed those firm strikes to grant healing through His salvation in Jesus Christ, the grantor of resurrection.

1. Our resurrection with Him
2. An inner divine reform

1. ***OUR RESURRECTION WITH HIM:***

As God makes it hard on His fallen children, *“they will diligently seek Him”* (Hosea 5: 15): ***“Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us and will heal us, he has struck us and he will bind up our wounds”*** (Hosea 6: 1). He tears us as a lion to heal us, and strikes us to heal our wounds. St. John Chrysostom wrote to a young widow, wounded by the death of her beloved husband, which was allowed by God: “I send you this message to be the first and greatest testimony about God’s providence toward you, lest grief would swallow you up, and your thoughts would destroy you. ... It is written: *“He has torn us and He will heal us”* (Hosea 6: 1). God has taken your husband, and He will take up his place for you”. His hand that firmly holds the scalpel to wound

actually exposes our depths that carry the stench of death and corruption. His hand will remain stretched out to bind the wounds and grant us the resurrection from the death we suffer from. He goes on to say, ***“After two days He will revive us, on the third day He will restore us that in his presence we may live in His sight”*** (Hosea 6: 2).

Saying, *“They will diligently seek Him”* (Hosea 5: 15) means that they stand early before the Lord Christ, who is raised from the dead, to find a resurrection for themselves in His resurrection. Indeed, it is befitting for us to enter together with Him into His holy Sepulcher, and to be buried “two days” together with Him, to raise us up on the third day; in order to live before Him, bearing His features in us. We shall no more fear the tomb, as long as we are members in the body of the Lord Christ, that will see no corruption, and death will not be able to take hold of Him.

That way, the prophet saw the secret of the spiritual strength in the resurrection of the Lord from the dead more than 700 years before the coming of the Lord Christ... He will *“revive us”*, *“in his presence we may live”* and *“let us strive to know the Lord”* (Hosea 6: 2, 3). We would enjoy the new life in Him by His resurrection. We get to know the Lord by this high heavenly life. It is as though we would be like the two disciples of Emaos, whom the Lord accompanied after rising from the dead. While talking to them, their eyes were opened and they knew Him: *“Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road and while He opened the Scripture to us”* (Luke 24: 32).

By his spirit of prophecy, Hosea gave us the time of the Lord's resurrection; namely, as the dawn of the third day breaks: "*On the third day He will restore us... and its dawning is as sure as the sunrise*" (Hosea 6: 3). The church is used to mentioning His resurrection all the time since the era of the apostles, especially in the first hour prayer. St. Cyprian says, "*We should also, always pray early at dawn to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord*".

The Lord was raised at dawn on the third day, to raise us up at the dawn of our spiritual life. When we seek Him, He perpetually proclaims the power of His resurrection in our lives.

Saying, "*Its dawning is as sure as the sunrise*" confirms that He will appear and scatter the darkness. According to the Septuagint version, it came as "*His going forth is established as the morning*" (Hosea 6: 3). St. Augustine said that God is always there even if we do not realize Him, "*He was in the world, but the world, though it owed its being to him, did not recognize Him*" (John 1: 10). "*Come back to me, and I will come back to you, says the Lord of Hosts*" (Zechariah 1: 3). St. John Chrysostom: "*The prophet refers to the continuous readiness of His goodness ... As we approach Him we find Him waiting for our move*".

After declaring the resurrection of the Lord at dawn of the third day as the secret of our salvation, He introduces to us the work of the Holy Spirit, which was provided to us later on "in the fullness of time" after the ascension of the Lord Christ. "***It will come to us like a shower, like spring rains that water the earth***" (Hosea 6: 3). His Holy Spirit comes to

us, dwells upon us like the rain and transforms us from draught to a joyful paradise that bears the fruits of the Spirit, which bring joy to the Father's heart. The soul would hear the praise of the groom: "*My sister, my bride, is a garden close-locked*" (Songs 4: 12).

St. Hypoletes the Roman believes that this rain refers to the Lord Christ Himself. In his essay about the holy "Theophany" (Baptism of the Lord), he spoke about the honor of the water into which the Lord Christ was baptized: "Concerning water, there is a fact greater than anything else. That is that Christ, the Creator of everything, came to us "*like a shower*" (Hosea 6: 3), was known as a "*spring always welling up for eternal life*" (John 4: 14), flows like a river of living water (John 7: 38) and "*arrived at the Jordan... t be baptized*" (Matthew 3: 13)... Isn't it incredible that He, who is a limitless river (Psalm 46: 4), plunges in a little water? He is the one who makes the city of God glad. How is it possible that He, who is the endless fountain, the one who bears life for all mankind becomes covered by some modest and temporary water? He, who is present all over and everywhere all the time, and He who cannot be fathomed by the angels or seen by humans, came to be baptized with His good will".

2- AN INNER, DIVINE REFORM:

God Himself is our savior. He is risen from the dead to raise us up together with Him, He grants us His Holy Spirit like a latter rain that takes away our draught and grants us His fruits in us. That is why He said: "***O Ephraim, how shall I deal with you? How shall I deal with you,***

Judah? Your loyalty to me is like the morning mist, like dew that vanishes early” (Hosea 6: 4). Ephraim and Judah have forgotten the Lord, their God, and thought that they were capable of faithfulness or goodness on their own. However, this goodness was no more than a morning cloud or early dew that was unable to stand before temptations and afflictions. It is as though God says to them: ‘What shall I do to you? I have given you My resurrection as a secret of yours and granted you My Holy Spirit to water your hearts. So why do you deprive yourselves of such gifts of Mine, leaning on your self righteousness, which is like the morning cloud or early dew that would soon go away?! St. John Chrysostom said, on the tongue of the Lord, “As to Me, I really gave you everything, but the hot sun eventually comes, scatters your cloud and lets you end in nothing. Your evil deprives you of My unutterable goodness”.

Then the Lord goes on to say, *“Therefore have I lashed you through the prophets and torn you to shreds with My words”* (Hosea 6: 5). According to the Septuagint version; *“I hew (cut) your prophets; I slay them with the words of My mouth”*. They have leaned upon false prophets, who calmed down their consciences by their sweet lies. Therefore God chastens those wicked prophets with His judgments that would be like a killer to them or like light that would expose their darkness. As said, *“His mouth shall be a rod to strike down the ruthless, and with a word he shall slay the wicked”* (Isaiah 11: 4).

If the words of God are the grantors of life, they are the killers of evil and death likewise. By His words, He takes away and kills the falsity

in the heart, shines His light to scatter darkness inside us, goes forth with His judgment in us and destroys evil to build up virtue.

Man cannot materialize the inner reform of the heart. He can indeed present sacrifices, burnt offerings and worship rites, but it is only God, who grants mercy, love, the knowledge of God and faithfulness to the covenant! That is why He says: ***“Loyalty is my desire, not sacrifice, not whole-offerings but the knowledge of God. At Admah (Adam) they have broken my covenant; there they have played me false”*** (Hosea 6: 6, 7). He demands the inner works and the heartily change, which they would be unable to reach on their own, as it is the work of God Himself.

God is the one who works inside us to grant us “mercy” or “abiding love”, which brings gladness to His heart. The Lord Christ’s message came to concentrate on bearing His features in use and changing our cruel nature to the likeness of His nature, which is filled with love and compassion.

St. John Chrysostom says about this mercy demanded by God in us: “Now is not the time for judgment, but for mercy. We shall not demand account, but demonstrate love. We should not bring forth charges, but forsake them. It is not the time for vengeance, but for mercy and doing goodness”. This mercy is the nature of God Himself, as written by St. Ambrose in his essay on “repentance”, against the followers of ‘Novatius’ who close the doors of God’s mercies before those who commit certain sins. He says: “We should know that God is a God of mercy, who leans toward forgiveness and not on cruelty. That is why it is written: *“I desire*

mercy and not sacrifices". So, how would God receive your offerings, you who deny mercy?! It was said about God that He has no desire in any man's death, but He rather desires the return of sinners (Ezekiel 18: 32)".

We get to know God through the divine mercy that we bear in us. It is the knowledge of our fellowship of His features, something that God demands. He desires "*not whole-offerings but the knowledge of God*". That is how we bear within us faithfulness towards the covenant set between God and us. Moreover, we would not be counted as transgressors against Him or as dealing treacherously with Him.

Let our reform be divine from within us, lest it would be said about us: "*At Admah they have broken my covenant, there they have played me false. Gilead is a haunt of evildoers, marked by a trail of blood*" (Hosea 6: 7, 8). Let us not be like Adam who transgressed the divine covenant while he was in the paradise set for him by God, and was thus counted as having dealt treacherously with His Creator. Let us enjoy His gifts and not deny His Person. I wish we would not become like Gilead, the city of evildoers, defiled with blood. It is probably 'Ramoah Gilead', one of the three cities of refuge across the Jordan, and a city of Levites. Although its men are of the holy tribe, they were evildoers and defiled themselves with blood through oppression and corruption. They used to have the appearance of piety and worship as Levites, yet in their depths, they were evil. I wish we would not be like the priests, who wear the splendid garments of priesthood and practice the outer formalities of worship with no inner life inside them. They are "***like robbers lying in wait for a man, priests are banded together to do murder on the road to Shechem; their***

deeds are outrageous.” (Hosea 6: 9). Let us not be like them, like robbers bearing the spirit of murder and perdition, covering it with the clothes of priests.

CHAPTER 7

REJECTION OF THE PHYSICIAN

The Lord debates His people frankly and clearly, approaches them as a physician intending to heal their wounds after uncovering, and proclaiming them to the patient, which should convince him (the patient) to accept the treatment. Unfortunately, they rejected the true physician and His treatment.

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| 1. The Physician proclaims the ailment | 1 – 2 |
| 2. The ailment of the leaderships | 3 – 7 |
| 3. The ailment of the people | 8 – 12 |
| 4. Rejection of the Physician | 13 – 16 |

1- THE PHYSICIAN PROCLAIMS THE AILMENT:

As God approaches the souls as a physician intending to heal them, He has to declare the nature of the ailment and reveal its extent and

danger to convince the patients to receive His treatments: ***“When I would heal Israel, then the guilt of Ephraim stands revealed, and all the wickedness of Samaria; they have not kept faith. They are thieves, they break into houses; they are robbers, they strip people in the street”*** (Hosea 7: 1).

By healing Israel, He revealed the corruption of Ephraim, the tribe that occupied the foremost position in evil; and exposed the wicked deeds of Samaria, the capital. As a physician, He does not compliment or flatter, but He exposes the ailment, in order to stretch His hand with the scalpel and cut, firmly but with love. He proclaims the iniquity of the most evil tribe, and the most corrupt city, with no partiality on the expense of healing them! The type of decease that inflicted them was that “they have kept no faith” (Hosea 7: 1). This is the most dangerous ailment that could inflict man, namely, to deceive others, probably himself, his conscience, and to assume that he can deceive God as well. His heart is full of robbery, while his attire is priestly. His city is like Gilead, embraces men of God, “the Levites”, yet in the truth, they are “a *haunt of evildoers*” (Hosea 6: 8). Israel masked its iniquity by presenting offerings and sacrifices to God, and practicing rites of worship, while its heart was apostate and far away from God.

Israel intended to deceive others by outer appearances, yet its inner corruption was also reflected upon its apparent behavior. It was destroyed from both the inside and the outside: ***“They are thieves, they break into houses; they are robbers, they strip people in the street”*** (Hosea 7: 1). Decease crawled like a thief to the inside and the hidden depths, so the

door was wide open to the invaders and robbers from the outside. Man has become corrupted as a whole. On the one hand, his heart, mind and intention need to be healed from inside; and on the other hand the apparent behavior and dealings from outside need healing as well.

The most serious side in their condition was not their ailment itself, but rather their disregard of it and their assumption that it was not a big deal. They thought that their sin is not worth remembering or caring, not even by God: ***“Little thinking that I have their wickedness ever in mind. Now their misdeeds beset them and stare me in the face.”*** (Hosea 7: 2) If their iniquities are hidden from their eyes or do not preoccupy their minds, yet they are in front of the face of God. He remembers their sins in order to take them away.

They might ask: Why should God reveal the iniquity of Ephraim and uncover the wickedness of Samaria? To this, He answers: ***“Now their misdeeds beset them”*** (Hosea 7: 2). It is as though He says to them: ‘Do not get offended against Me, because I reveal your weaknesses, but you should rather be offended against yourselves, because of your wicked behavior. If I expose your wounds, it is to heal them, whereas you are making your ailment incurable by disregarding it.

2- THE AILMENT OF THE LEADERSHIPS:

In the fourth chapter, God declared His trial of the priests because of their lack of knowledge and it was explained how they represent the impure heart, which cannot behold God and would bring the whole body

into the darkness of ignorance and lack of knowledge. Here, He judges the king and the princes. The king refers to the corrupt, evil human will, which would direct man as a whole toward corruption and evil. The rulers refer to leadership centers in the soul and the energies and talents that it bears.

He says, ***“They win over the king with their wickedness and princes with their treachery”*** (Hosea 7: 3). This is the most horrible portrait of leadership, which is not only evil, but is also glad with the wickedness and lies of others... ***“King after king falls from power, but not one of them calls upon me”*** (Hosea 7: 7). Their gladness is temporal and temporary, and thus does not fulfill their life or support their souls, but makes them fall and deprives them of resorting to God. It makes them lose the true source of their life and joy.

He describes those kings and princes (namely, man’s inner leaderships), as being: ***“lecherous all of them, hot as an oven over the fire which the baker does not stir”*** (Hosea 7: 4). The defiled soul becomes like a heated oven, ignited by evil lusts and uncontrolled emotions. St. Jerome describes this soul: *“A heated oven that would not be quenched by God’s mercies, together with intense fasting (because of their lack of repentance); and like “fiery darts” (Ephesians 6: 16), by which the devil wounds men, and make them as though on fire. In such a fire, the king of Babylon put the three young men, among whom a fourth appeared in the image of the Son of God. He calmed down the horrible fire, and made the heated oven cool”*.

St. Jerome believes that this fiery oven, flared by evil lusts, cannot be quenched except by the fiery Holy Spirit of God, who would consume the corrupt fire and flare the holy fire of God in the heart instead. He says, *“The heart cannot overcome the lust, unless it is flared by the Holy Spirit, which flares the heart and consumes the fire of lust”*. About the Holy Fire, he says, *“Let us pray to the Lord, to transform any cruelty in us into compassion, and to wipe out our sins, so that we become like fire that amputates the coolness of the devil from our hearts, and we grow in the warmth by the Holy Spirit”*.

Not only them, but also their evil plans and hidden plots have become like a heated oven: ***“While they are relaxed all night long their passion slumbers, but in the morning it flares up like a blazing fire”*** (Hosea 7: 6). Those wicked people go to sleep all night after throwing around their fuel of evil counsels, to find out in proper time that the oven has become a flaming fire, just like the baker throws the wood inside the oven, goes to sleep all night, and wakes up in the morning to find it a flaming fire.

“They all grow feverish, hot as an oven, and devour their rulers.” (Hosea 7: 7). They have devoured the few remnants of good judges who used to condemn their evil deeds... They turned into a consuming fire, not for the evil, but for the just judges.

3- THE AILMENT OF THE PEOPLE:

Having revealed the ailment of the leaderships, who became as an oven heated by the fire of evil lusts, consuming their good judges, He also reveals to the people their ailment, saying:

a. “Ephraim and his aliens make a sorry mixture; Ephraim has become a cake half-baked” (Hosea 7: 8). The boundaries that separate Ephraim from the pagan nations have been removed, although God’s prior confirmation: *“I see a people that dwells alone, that has not made itself one with the nations.”* (Numbers 23: 9), *“They mingled with the nations, learning their ways”* (Psalm 106: 35). It is a bitter portrait of the church, which embraces the world’s spirit in it, living with a temporal earthly mind and not realizing its commitment of leading people to the kingdom of heaven. It is indeed befitting for the church not to separate itself from the world in pride or take a position of self-justification. It shall rather bow down with love and wash every foot, like its Lord. It shall open its heart and show compassion toward everyone, in order to lift all people to the heavenly life rather than taking itself down to the carnal earthly thoughts.

As to saying that it *“has become a cake half-baked”*, it refers to the bread, whose upper side would become leavened, while its lower side would not, because it was not turned over before being put in the oven. By doing this, its upper side would be well done, while its lower side would remain raw. Ephraim is like this bread, as it has a religious appearance because of the sacrifices it offers and the worship it practices, while its hidden face bears an apostasy from God. Hypocrisy makes an

evil man like unturned bread”. What the face shows is contrary to what the hidden heart bears.

An evil person, especially a hypocritical person resembles the unturned bread. In this case, the devil is like a baker who brings over the person into his oven, which is heated with the fire of lusts. While the Lord Christ enters with His holy body into the oven of his divine love, bears in His body the wounds of love and the signs of the cross, to offer it to us as “*the bread which came down from heaven*” (John 6: 41). On the contrary, the devil intends to catch us, take us into the oven of his evil and make out of us an unturned cake, which he covets, plays with and despises!

b. “Foreigners fed on his strength, but he was unaware” (Hosea 7: 9). Those foreigners represent the nations’ kings, on whom the people of God have leaned. Those kings devoured them and took away their riches instead of saving them, like “*all the rest the king of Aram had destroyed and made like dust under foot*” (2 Kings 13: 7). The Pharaoh of Egypt and the kings of Assyria did likewise as well. Whoever does not return to God, his savior, would become a spoil for foreigners.

Those foreigners are also the devil, his demons and his works (the sins). When the soul opens the door to them, they captivate it and take away its most precious possession, i.e. its eternal life. That way, the devil is counted as an alien or a foreigner, because he refers the world to himself although he has not created it, and wishes to possess every soul, bring it over into his heated oven, turn it into “an unturned cake”, devour and play with.

c. ***“Even his grey hairs turned white, but he was unaware”*** (Hosea 7: 9). They entered into a state of spiritual aging and were about to vanish away (Hebrew 8: 13). Father Moses said, *“Many have crossed over to old age, because of their slothfulness”*.

The believer’s heart, on the other hand, never gets old, but *“Though our outward humanity is in decay, yet day by day we are inwardly renewed”* (2 Corinthians 4: 16); *“my youth is ever new like an eagle’s”* (Psalm 103: 5). Such a person does not bear the aging of the hair or of the heart, which indicate the deterioration of the body and soul, but carries the gray hair of wisdom, according to the words of the wise Solomon: *“Understanding is gray hair for anyone, and a blameless life is ripe old age”* (Wisdom 4: 9). The dignity of old age is not shown by the gray hair of the head, but rather by the wisdom of virtuous life, and reaching the road of perfection in our Lord Jesus Christ.

d. They were proud and had self-esteem, instead of leaning on God: ***“So Israel’s arrogance cries out against them; but they do not return to the Lord their God nor seek him, in spite of it all.”*** (Hosea 7: 10). God had already rebuked them for that in (Hosea 5: 5).

e. ***“Ephraim is a silly senseless pigeon, now calling upon Egypt, now turning to Assyria for help.”*** (Hosea 7: 11). The kingdom of Israel was always perplexed by forsaking its true nest (the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem). It once set a temple for itself in Samaria according to its own desire, and now it joins forces with the Pharaoh of Egypt against the king

of Assyria, and vice versa, while actually both of them use it for their own account.

It is a silly dove, with no dignity or wisdom, and it does not have the heart where it shall bear the spirit of love for God, who would take it to heaven without perplexity. On the other hand, the true church is the one about which God says: *“My dove, that hides in holes in the cliffs or in crannies on the high ledges”* (Songs 2: 14). It hides in the Lord Christ, the Rock of ages, walking in dignity and wisdom, and bearing a heart that loves both the heavenliest and the earthliest.

Let us not be like that silly dove that knows no resting place, but let us rather resort to the Lord through His holy altar to encounter Him in His sacrifice, which grants salvation. Let us all say with David: *“Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow has her nest, where she rears her brood beside thy altars, O Lord of Hosts, my Kind and y god. Happy are those who dwell in thy house; they never cease from praising thee”* (Psalm 84: 3, 4).

4- REJECTION OF THE PHYSICIAN:

They did not accept the revelation of their wounds by the divine Physician or his declaration of the ailment on the level of both the leadership and the people, and they proclaimed their rebellion: ***“Woe betide them, for they have strayed from Me! May disaster befall them for rebelling against Me!”*** (Hosea 7: 13). He tried to heal them, but they counted Him as an enemy, fled from Him like a silly dove that flees to go

astray, having no place to rest. By that, they insulted God, their Shepherd, and transgressed against Him. Because they paid back His love with rebellion, and His compassion with animosity, He admonishes them, saying: ***“I long to deliver them, but they tell lies about me.”*** (Hosea 7: 13). When they fell under anguish, they reacted by telling lies against God. They returned to Him only to have their anguish taken away and not by truth. They came to God, for the sake of His temporal gifts, while their hearts were far away from Him: ***“There is no sincerity in their cry to me; for all their howling on their pallets and gashing of themselves over corn and new wine (because of the lack of rain), they are turning away from me.”*** (Hosea 7: 14).

They cried out with their lips, while their hearts were far away from God. They forgot how God listened and responded to Moses and to the cries of his heart, although he did not utter a word with his lips (Exodus 14: 15).

“Though I support them, though I give them strength of arm, they plot evil against me.” (Hosea 7: 15). That is why they do not return to God or seek Him from their hearts; on the contrary, they only pretend to be doing that. They have become ***“like a bow gone slack”*** (Hosea 7: 16). They assemble and cry out, but instead of striking their enemy with the sword and the bow, they destroy themselves and their inner energies: ***“Their talk is all lies, and so their princes shall fall by the sword”*** (Hosea 7: 16). Then they resort to the Pharaoh of Egypt, where they will be in derision, because God has forsaken them.

CHAPTER 8

GOD'S CHASTISEMENTS AGAINST THEM

Having submitted themselves to the ailment and rejected God as their physician, God committed them to anguish, so that once they feel the bitterness of their state, they might seek Him.

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| 1. Chastising them by enemy attacks | 1 |
| 2. Destroying themselves by themselves | 2 – 6 |
| 3. Deprivation of fulfillment and joy | 7 – 10 |
| 4. Delivering them to their past servitude | 11 – 14 |

1- CHASTISING THEM BY ENEMY ATTACKS:

“Put the trumpet to your lips! A vulture hovers over the sanctuary of the Lord” (Hosea 8: 1). God opened the insight of the prophet to realize the bitterness that would come over the people, because of their rejection to be treated on the hand of their true Physician. His soul moaned inside him and he did not know what to do. God commanded him to set the trumpet to his mouth, because the hour of warning was at hand. He commanded him to blow the trumpet to call the whole people to assemble, so that they watch the enemy coming down like a swift eagle against a prey.

God confirmed that the enemy would come like “*a vulture hovers over the sanctuary of the Lord*”, so that the people do not assume that God would never allow their captivity, because they are the people elected by Him. It is as though He is saying to them: “I know that you are My household (Hebrew 3: 6), yet I allowed the enemy to come down against you like an eagle, because you have defiled My sanctuary. I do love my house, dwell in it, and keep it by My angels, but I shall send the enemy to come like an eagle against it to snatch and fly up, in case you dare to defile my sanctuaries.”

2- ***THEY DESTROYED THEMSELVES BY THEMSELVES:***

Although God allows what dwells upon them, yet it is they, who destroyed themselves by themselves. That is what God proclaims, explaining the reasons of their chastisement as follows:

First: “*They have broken my covenant and rebelled against my instruction.*” (Hosea 8: 1). It is as though He says to them: ‘I have chosen you to be My bride, and set with you a covenant of matrimony, yet you broke the covenant and betrayed Me. I have chosen you to be My children and provided you with My canon as a fatherly commandment, but you disobeyed My commandment and despised My fatherhood.

Second: While betraying the covenant and disobeying the commandment, they masked themselves with the outer appearances of spiritless worship. God says to them: “*They cry to me for help: ‘We*

know thee, God of Israel’.” (Hosea 8: 2). They reject Him with their deeds and hearts, yet they seek Him with their lips. They give Him their backs in their daily life. Nevertheless, they assemble in worship to say “*We know thee, God of Israel*”; as though they want to remind Him that they are His chosen people, whom He would never allow to be harmed, as they assume.

Third: Their betrayal of the matrimonial covenant and their disobedience of the fatherly commandment are not out of weakness or by mere chance, but come out of an unclean heart, an evil will and an intense hatred for the holy life: “***But Israel is utterly loathsome; and therefore he shall run before the enemy***” (Hosea 8: 3). Having hated the holy life, God delivered His house; namely, His people Israel, who were supposed to be holy to God, to the king of Assyria who invaded the northern kingdom. When Judah hated the Lord as well, He delivered Judah including the city of Jerusalem and His temple to the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Anyway, if we reject God, He will deliver us to chastisement, even if He acknowledges us as His special people: “*For you alone have I cared among all the nations of the world; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities*” (Amos 3: 2).

Fourth: He adds the following transgression to their hatred for goodness: “***They make kings, but not by my will; they set up officers, but without my knowledge***” (Hosea 8: 4). In our study of the seventh chapter, we saw that the ‘king’ refers to the human will that reigns over man as a whole, and the princes or officers refer to his energies and talents, particularly those of leadership. Saying that “*they make kings, but*

not by my will”, refers to their behaving according to their own will and controlling the things of their life without resorting to God or asking for His counsel. As to saying: *“they set up officers, but without my knowledge”*, means that their talents and energies did not support the Kingdom of God to the extent that they become aliens to God, did not know Him, and were not worthy to be known by Him.

God loves us very much and wants us to return to Him in every thing. We shall not set kings or princes without His counsel, but rather do like ‘Jephthah’: *“And at Mizpah, in the presence of the Lord, Jephthah repeated all that he had said”* (Judges 11: 11), lest it would be said about us: *“do not look to the Holy One of Israel or seek guidance of the Lord”* (Isaiah 31: 1). St. John Chrysostom says, *“He longs for us to perpetually take refuge in Him, ask Him for everything, and do nothing or utter a word without His consent. This is what those who love demand from their beloved ones.”*

What we say concerning the kings and princes within the soul; namely, the human will, energies, and talents, we say also about the church as a congregation of believers. It is not befitting to set a bishop or priest without asking the counsel of the Lord. St. Cyprian wrote in one of his messages about the heretics: *“There are among you bishops, who are not set according to the will of God, contrary to the system and tradition of the gospel. The Lord says through His prophet about them: ‘Oh, rebel sons! says the Lord, you make plans, but not of my devising, you weave schemes, but not inspired by me, piling sin upon sin’ (Isaiah 30: 1)”*. In another message, he wrote, *“Sometimes, unworthy bishops are ordained,*

not according to the will of God, but according to human ordinances, in a way which is neither legal, nor pious; something that brings grief to God, as He proclaims through the prophet Hosea”.

Carrying on His admonition of His people, the Lord says, ***“They have made themselves idols of their silver and gold”*** (Hosea 8: 4). By doing that, they lost the silver and gold they possessed, to acquire instead the wrath of God. As though they purchase with their silver and gold what would be for their destruction and perdition.

Silver refers to the words of God purified seven times, and gold refers to the spiritual life, some people often misuse them for their perdition instead of their spiritual edification. It happens that way, when the word of sermon or the monastic life is practiced by some, not with the spirit of humility before God, but with an egoistic spirit in favor of their own dignity.

He also says, ***“Your calf-gods stink. O Samaria; my anger flares up against them.”*** (Hosea 8: 5). He refers to the beginning of the revolt, when Jeroboam dissented from the kingdom of David and made two calves of gold, set one in Bethel and the other in Dan, because he feared that people’s hearts would turn back to Jerusalem and then they might kill him and go back to Rehoboam, king of Judah. Jeroboam then said to the people, *“It is too much trouble for you to go up to Jerusalem; here are your gods, Israel, that brought you up from Egypt”* (1 kings 12: 28). It seems that making calves was not meant to worship them as idols at the beginning, but they probably assumed that ‘Jehovah’ would dwell upon

them, but it turned gradually into actual idol-worship. It also seems that the calf set in Dan was moved to Samaria, when it became the capital of the northern kingdom. Anyway, even if God allowed Jeroboam to consummate His counsel against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, as a chastisement for the sake of the sins committed by His father Solomon, yet Jeroboam was condemned for setting sanctuaries out of Jerusalem, the thing that turned into serious centers of idol-worship with all its abominations.

The calf of Samaria was rejected and it lost its splendor even in the sight of its worshippers, as it could not save itself nor save them from the hands of the king of Assyria. ***“the calf of Samaria will be broken in fragments”*** (Hosea 8: 6). They made for themselves a god with their hands, which was destroyed and destroyed them, too. It is a bitter portrait of many of us, who set for themselves a god in their ‘Samaria’ out of their gold. They namely set themselves and their ‘ego’ gods in their corrupt hearts. This ‘ego’ that has become a god and occupied the position of the living God on their inner Jerusalem, will fall down from the height of its haughtiness and be *“broken in fragments”*.

God’s *“anger flares up against them”* (Hosea 8: 5), because they took His gold, set out of it an ugly, breakable calf in their ‘Samaria’, instead of using it to the account of the glory of God. As they rejected the Holy God, He says to them: *“Long will it be before they prove innocent”* (Hosea 8: 5).

3-

DEPRIVATION OF FULFILMENT AND JOY:

After proclaiming to them that they will be chastised through the attack of the enemy, who will take away everything they possess; and after revealing to them the reasons behind this chastisement, He ends His talk by saying that evil would never give man fulfillment, nor bring him joy: ***“Israel sows the wind and reaps the whirlwind”*** (Hosea 8: 7). They labored much to sow, but they sowed the wind, and when they intended to reap, they reaped a whirlwind of worries and disturbances. Indeed, they *“toil in vain”* (Isaiah 65: 23), their *“labor is all for the wind”* (Ecclesiastes 5: 16), and *“weary themselves for a mere nothing!”* (Habakkuk 2: 13). The apostle also says, *“If he sows seed in the field of his lower nature, he will reap from it a harvest of corruption”* (Galatians 6: 8).

“There are no heads on the standing corn, it yields no grain” (Hosea 8: 7). After so much labor to sow and plant, they did not reap grain that produces meal to feed on. They reaped ears of grains, thin and blighted by the east wind, as those seen by the Pharaoh of Egypt in his dream.

“And, if it yielded any, strangers would swallow it up” (Hosea 8: 7). They have delivered themselves to foreign gods, who do not give but swallow, do not bless but defile!

Not only was their sowing and reaping in vain, and their harvest swallowed by aliens, but they also lost their dignity by being despised by the nations whose gods they intended to worship and whose evil ways

they imitated. ***“Israel is now swallowed up, lost among the nations, a worthless nothing. For, like a wild ass that has left the herd, they have run to Assyria”*** (Hosea 8: 8, 9). Assyria, from which they sought refuge, observed them as a wild donkey alone by itself. Having lost their compassion, love, gentleness by forsaking their God, the Grantor of the holy and virtuous life, they became like a wild donkey. Instead of bearing the spirit of love, which shall salt the earth, so that it does not get corrupted, they bore the spirit of isolation and have become themselves corrupted. They have become salt that ***“is now good for nothing but to be thrown away and trodden underfoot”*** (Matthew 5: 13).

Sin takes away the spiritual splendor from the soul even in the eyes of the wicked, and creates in it the spirit of inner isolationism and selfishness, instead of the giving true love.

“Ephraim has bargained for lovers” (Hosea 8: 9). This means that Ephraim offered much to the nations to gain their friendship and favor, however, his evil made him lose his splendor and spiritual beauty, even in the eyes of those he hired. When the right time came, those hired friends did not support Ephraim or Israel, but swallowed them up (Hosea 8: 8). Now, Israel did not need a human hand, but only God’s strong hand to save them from the cruel servitude: ***“I will now round them up, and then they will soon abandon this setting up of kings and princes.”*** (Hosea 8: 10).

4- DELIVERING THEM TO THEIR PAST SERVITUDE:

As the Israelis intended to gain the nations' friendship and favor, they made pagan altars in which they practiced abominations, beside their worship of God. Therefore, God rejected their worship and offerings and counted their sacrifices as mere flesh (meat) and food: ***“Though they sacrifice flesh as offerings to me and eat them, I, the Lord, will not accept them”*** (Hosea 8: 13). Because they have forsaken God, their Savior, and leaned upon the nations, God will forsake them to return to their past servitude, from which He had previously saved them: ***“Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces, Judah has multiplied walled cities; but I will set fire to his cities, and it shall devour his castles”*** (Hosea 8: 14).

CHAPTER 9

THE VAIN JOY

Israel thought that it would rejoice like the other nations, if it set forth from worshipping the living God to the pagan worships. They did like the prodigal son when he demanded his portion from his father to join his friends and pass the days in pleasure and fun. That kind of joy is vain, and is accompanied by an inner bitterness and depression of the soul, because of the following reasons:

1. Their worship will turn like the bread of mourners 1 – 6
 2. The day of punishment has come 7 – 9
 3. They will produce no fruition 1 – 14
 4. They will be driven out before the Lord 15 –
- 17

1. THEIR WORSHIP WILL TURN LIKE THE BREAD OF MOURNERS:

“Do not rejoice, Israel, do not exult like other peoples; for like a wanton you have forsaken your God, you have loved an idol on every threshing-floor and winepress shall know them no more, new wine shall disown them.” (Hosea 9: 1, 2).

The Israelis assumed that the surrounding nations with their pagan worship, characterized by several banquets and abominations, were

happier and more joyful. Therefore, they longed to follow suit and walk their ways. Even if those nations rejoiced and had fun in their abominations, it is only an outer appearance accompanied by inner grief and depression. By imitating those nations, Israel was counted as an adulterer against its God, and will fall under bitter chastisement. God has chosen the Israelis as His own people, who should be committed to His holy law, so if they divert and play the harlot, they would be worthy of stoning. God deals the same way with us nowadays, so if a believer falls into sin, his chastisement would be quicker and firmer than that of an evildoer, because he was chosen by God to be His son and should be disciplined. The Psalmist says: ***“Do not strive to outdo the evildoers or emulate those who do wrong... Depend upon the Lord, and he will grant you your heart’s desire”*** (Psalm 37: 1, 4).

Individuals sometimes assume that going after lusts would fulfill them: *“I will go after my lovers; they give me my food and drink, my wool and flax, my oil and my perfumes”* (Hosea 2: 5). This reward that one longs to get from the other gods, may look better in his eyes than the blessing of the Lord, *“proclaimed in all the threshing floors”*. By seeking the temporal reward, and not the perpetual blessing of the Lord in the storehouses of wheat that fulfill his soul, he would lose both. The threshing floor and the winepress will not feed him, and the new wine will fail him, although he thought that it would be his joy and gladness.

Historically, this happened in the life of the Israelis, who hastened after the abominations of the surrounding nations. This happened specifically when they fell into the captivity of Assyria and were deprived

of their freedom, possessions, the good produce of their land, as well as losing their worship to the living God. They lost both the earthly pleasures and the spiritual blessings.

Their deprivation of joy was a natural consequence of their playing the harlot against their God, who therefore rejected their worship, their wine offerings (a sign of joy), and their sacrifices, which did not please Him. Their sacrifices have turned to *'bread of mourners'* that returns to them to eat it in bitterness, instead of accepting it as a pleasing scent.

The punishment was not only depriving them of fulfillment and joy, but it went far to an ultimate expulsion from the land of the Lord, that he had previously granted them as a promised land, that flows of milk and honey. ***"They shall not dwell in the Lord's land"*** (Hosea 9: 3). They would be carried over to captivity, where they shall be deprived of everything: ***"They shall pour out no wine to the Lord, they shall not bring their sacrifices to him; that would be mourners' fare for them, and all who ate it would be polluted. For their food shall only stay their hunger; it shall not be offered in the house of the Lord."*** (Hosea 9: 4). In the land of captivity, they lived as though on a defiled land, and had nothing pure to offer to the holy Lord! They have been on the holy land of the Lord before, but when their hearts drew out of His house, and brought abominations into the sanctuaries, they were driven out of it and were deprived of the right to practice a pure worship accepted by the Lord.

It is a bitter portrait of the unfaithful soul that the Lord does not bring it over to the Promised Land, but sets in it His kingdom, gives it His holy blood as a sign of its salvation and grants it His Spirit to dwell in it. Yet, in lack of faithfulness, this soul breaks the new covenant, and binds itself to the abominations, despising the exalted gifts of God. As said by the apostle: *“If a man disregards the Law of Moses, he is put to death without pity on the evidence of two or three witnesses. Think how much more severe a penalty that man will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was consecrated, and affronted God’s gracious Spirit!”* (Hebrew 10: 28, 29) Such a person loses God’s gifts to him, and the blessings of the new covenant would become the secret of judgment and a testimony against him. If such a soul offers worship, – whatever it is – God would reject it as long as the soul is persistent on its betrayal to the covenant and on the uncleanness of its heart. Its worship would be returned to it as bread of mourners. About this St. John Chrysostom said, *“It is not fitting to offer a sacrifice of something unclean, as it would be counted as firstfruit of other works. I hope we would offer our hands, feet, mouths, and all our other organs as firstfruit to God in purity, which would please Him.”*

St Cyprian also spoke about the sacrifices rejected by God, and returned to those who offer them as bread of mourners and said that they were the teachings, worship and baptism of the heretics. Specifically, he said, *“Here He teaches us clearly about those who are bound to sin, and are defiled by the sacrifice of an evil priest”*. He said as well: *“Here He teaches us about those who get united to judged leaders, being defiled together with them by their crimes”*.

The priests of Israel offered sacrifices to the Lord, while their hearts were bound to the Baal, so God returned their sacrifices to them as bread of mourners and drove them completely out of His house by their captivation to Assyria. Lest the listeners might say that what the prophet says are just theoretical threats that would never really happen, He goes on to say, ***“What will you do for the festal day, the day of the Lord’s pilgrim-feast? For look, they have fled from a scene of devastation: Egypt shall receive them, Memphis shall be their grave; the sands of Syrtes shall wreck them, weeds shall inherit their land, thorns shall grow in their dwellings”*** (Hosea 9: 5, 6).

They may say: In every appointed day and in the feasts of the Lord, we assemble in the house of the Lord, rejoice by psalms and praises, and spend these days in joy and gladness, and not in grief or bitterness, so how can the prophet say that our sacrifices will be returned to us like bread of mourners? To this, the prophet responds by saying that he foresees the desolation coming swiftly from Assyria. The prophet continues to say that they would seek refuge in the Pharaoh of Egypt, flee to the land out of which the Lord had previously brought them, and die in its capital Memphis. Therefore, they would lose the promises of God to them, namely His word (the silver), instead of which they would inherit the nettles (the rust), and their tents (the houses) in the Promised Land will turn into wilderness that produce thorns and thistles.

Although God’s promises to us are like silver that would never rust, and the spiritual houses he has set for us give us joy and security, yet the

diversion of our hearts from Him would turn us from silver to rust, and from houses to a wilderness with thorns and thistles! Therefore, one would lose the inner peace of God, together with the joy and gladness of heart. He would even lose his life, be buried in ‘Memphis’ like a stranger, his life would turn into rust, and his inner tent into a wilderness!

On a symbolic aspect, silver refers to the soul, and the tent to the body in which it dwells. By seeking the temporal joy and pleasure like the pagan nations, one’s soul would become rust, and the holiness of his body would fall anew under curse and produce thorns and thistles!

2. THE DAY OF PUNISHMENT HAS COME:

Israel wrongly assumed that it lives in the pleasures and lusts of this world in joy and rejoice; and did not realize that: ***“The days of punishment are come; the days of vengeance are come”*** (Hosea 9: 7). The day has come, on which Israel shall be punished for its evil, and the prophets recompensed for their true testimony and for enduring the reproaches and sufferings: ***“Israel shall be humbled. Then the prophet shall be made a fool and the inspired seer a madman by your great guilt.”*** (Hosea 9: 7) The Israelis will know that the one they considered as a fool was the bearer of the spirit of wisdom, and that whom they saw as mad was the man of the Spirit! They will know that their great iniquity and hostility have blinded their insight from recognizing the prophet, the true man of the Spirit. On the other hand, they will realize that the false prophet who flattered them by his smooth words saying, *“All is well”* although *“All is well? Nothing is well!”* (Jeremiah 6: 14), was the real

fool, who has given Israel false comfort at the expense of the truth! By that, the true prophet will be recognized, even though he may have inflicted wound by words of truth for the sake of edification from the false prophet, who is *“a fowler’s trap by all their paths”* (Hosea 9: 8).

The day of recompense has come, for Israel to realize that they were lead *“deep into sin as at the tie of Gibeah”* (Hosea 9: 8). While a certain Levite sojourned in the remote mountains of Ephraim, he spent the night in Gibeah in the land of Benjamin. Then, the men of the city took his concubine, knew her and abused her all night. They let her go when the day began to break, so she fell down and died with her hands on the threshold of the house where her master was. The man took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, dismembered her into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel to let them know the horror that took place in that place (Judges 19). If this event of Gibeah uncovered the evil, the day of punishment has also come to expose the hidden wickedness of the people!

3. THEY WILL PRODUCE NO FRUITION:

Israel has lost the inner, spiritual joy for the following reasons:

First: They sought the joy and the pleasure of the nations and committed adultery toward their God. Their worship turned into mourners’ bread (1 – 6).

Second: The day of punishment has come, and they shall realize the falsity of their measures. The one, whom they assumed to be fool and

mad, proved to be the true prophet, whereas he, who gave them false hope, was the mad and fool prophet (7 – 9).

Third: The change that happened to the nature of Israel: ***“I came upon Israel like grapes in the wilderness, I looked on their forefathers with joy like the first ripe figs; but they resorted to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame, and Ephraim became as loathsome as the thing he loved”*** (Hosea 9: 10).

Instead of being joyful grapes to God in a dark wilderness, Israel delivered itself by its free will to Satan – Baal Peor, ‘the master of abomination’. Its nature turned from the state of fruition, joyful to God and to itself, into a state of barrenness; and from a joyful nature into one full of depression and bitterness of soul.

Israel’s binding to Baal Peor destroyed their nature, took away their honor, and brought them over to shame and disgrace: ***“Ephraim became as loathsome as the thing he loved. Their honor shall fly away like a bird: no childbirth, no fruitful womb, no conceiving; even if they rear their children, I will make them childless, without posterity.”*** (Hosea 9: 11, 12). Because of its evil, Ephraim has become like a bird flying all the time, as it has no nest to settle down, lay its eggs or have offspring! It is a painful portrait of a person, who is taken away from his true nest (the altar of the Lord of hosts) by sin, and so flies around in the air with no place to settle down, spends the days of his sojourn with no comfort or security. Moreover, he would have no offspring, meaning that he would have no spiritual fruition to maintain his name in eternity. This barrenness

is a natural product of fleeing away from the divine nest and departing from God, the Grantor of fruition. By departing from Him, He departs from Israel, and they would fall under the eternal woe: ***“Woe to them indeed when I turn away from them!”*** (Hosea 9: 12).

Israel fell into a state of barrenness through their worship of Baal and Ishtarouth, believing that those were the gods of fruition and fertility. Hence, the prophet says: ***“Give them, O Lord – what wilt thou give them? Give them a womb that miscarries and dry breasts”*** (Hosea 9: 14).

4. THEY WILL BE DRIVEN OUT BEFORE THE LORD:

Finally, what is bitterer than having a miscarrying womb and a dry breast instead of fruition and fertility, is that God would drive Israel out before His face, and deprive them of His holy house: ***“For their evil deeds I will drive them from my house, I will love them no more”*** (Hosea 9: 15). They shall bear no fruit. Moreover, if they bore children, God would kill the beloved fruit of their womb. He will cast them away, because they did not obey Him. They shall be wanderers among the nations” (Hosea 9: 16, 17). This is the portrait of the soul of every believer, who forgets the law of his God and seeks the pleasures of this world. He would lose everything and become a fugitive in the world with no goal or aim.

CHAPTER 10

THE WITHERING VINE

God has often likened His people to a vine (Isaiah 5; Matthew 21: 33), seeking from it grapes to the account of His kingdom, as a fruit of His labor and care for it. However, despite its enjoyment of a multitude of gifts and of very divine possibilities, it did not provide the owner of the vine with its fruits, but gave them to the devil, the enemy of the Lord. That is why He issues on Israel a verdict of dryness and barrenness, so that it seeks a basic change in its being from Him, once it realizes its weakness and the corruption of its nature

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1. DIVERSION OF THE VINE:

In order to reveal the extent of the people's corruption when they divert from God, or the extent of corruption of the human soul through its apostasy from its savior, God used several analogies in the book of Hosea. For instance: "*A woman loved by another man, an adulteress*" (3: 1), "*wild as a heifer*" (4: 16), "*lambs in a broad meadow*" (4: 16), "*men who move their neighbor's boundary*" (5: 10), "*hot as an oven over the fire*" (7: 4), "*a cake half-baked*" (7: 8). Also "*a silly senseless pigeon*" (7: 11), "*a wild ass that has left the herd*" (8: 9), "*a bird: no childbirth,*

no fruitful womb, no conceiving” (9: 11), *“lion-cubs emerge only to be hunted”* (9: 13); *“a shepherd whose flock is but wind, a hunter chasing the east wind all day”* (12: 1)... Here He likens them to *“A vine”*, which He provided with all the possibilities of abundant fruition, so it fruited, not to His account, but to that of sin and abominations: ***“Israel is like a rank vine ripening its fruit”*** (Hosea 10: 1). It is a vine that has no excuse, because God created it with a good nature and provided it with the strength of growth, so that it can have an abundance of branches that carry its fruits, however, it brought forth fruits for itself and according to its self-mind, and not in submission to its true Vine-Dresser.

It is astonishing that we use our possibilities and energies, which were actually granted to us by God, to fulfill the lusts of our evil body and according to our own mind, instead of using them for the glory of His name. ***“His fruit grows more and more, and more and more his altars; the fairer his land becomes, the fairer he makes his sacred pillars (idols).”*** (Hosea 10: 1) Denial is the way, how one pays back the generosity of God.

“They are crazy now, they are mad” (Hosea 10: 2). Some of them diverted to a certain god, while others diverted to another, or may be their hearts were divided between their love for lusts that were connected to the worship of Baal, and their desire for giving comfort to their conscience by practicing the worship of the living God, yet spiritless and only in a formal way. Because they faltered between both ways, and their hearts were not upright, they cried out to God, yet not with their whole hearts

and so, they did not find Him, as a divided heart could never encounter the Holy One or recognize Him.

The division of the inner heart causes it to lose the fear of the Lord, which has consequences in the life of the congregation as a whole, as well as in that of everyone of its members in particular. Concerning the congregation, they would lose their submission to temporal authority and would have no leader to ordain their interests, if they lost the fear of the Lord: ***“We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord; and what can the king do for us?”*** (Hosea 10: 3). As to the individual member, losing the fear of the Lord through the divisions of his heart, he would lose his true, holy will, which was symbolized by the king. Moreover, he would walk as though with no will, live in humiliation to every lust, and in submission to every evil habit. Therefore, he would be unable to take a spiritual decision or to free himself of the bondage of the devil... He would walk as though he was with no king. On the contrary, the real believer would have an undivided, pure heart and carry authority like a spiritual king. He would have the power to allow this thought to come in, so it does, and to that thought to go out, so it does. By the Lord, he would have a strong authority on his thoughts, looks, feelings, and emotions.

When a person loses his spiritual authority, as well as his royal (heavenly) nature, he turns from an active man of God to one of vain words: ***“There is nothing but talk, imposing of oaths and making of treaties, all to no purpose; and litigation spreads like a poisonous weed along the furrows of the fields.”*** (Hosea 10: 4). Such people turn to men of mere words without action. As they feel their weakness, they confirm

their words with empty oaths that they cannot fulfill, and make covenants that they would soon break. The litigation becomes like a plowed field that brings forth poisonous, bitter weeds. Therefore, when they assemble in courts of justice, everyone makes false oaths, and covenants they cannot fulfill. The place of security would turn into a bitterness of soul.

That will be the case of the spreading vine, to which God provided a multitude of abilities for fruition, if it shuts itself up around itself, to bring forth fruits to the account of the 'ego' and the Baal; refusing to produce fruits for the true Vine-Dresser. It loses the fear of the Lord, enters into a division of the heart, which ends up in a deprivation of the king (the holy will) and in taking away every authority. It would not stop at this point, but its life would turn up to wailing and terror, when it loses its inner glory and watches the gods that it had chosen for herself, falling before her eyes. The prophet says: ***“The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf-god of Beth-Aven; the people mourn over it and its priestlings howl, distressed for their image, their glory, which is carried away into exile”*** (Hosea 10: 5). What is meant by this phrase? The inhabitants of Samaria (the capital) watch how the calf of Beth-Aven (the house of vanity) has lost its glory and how it has been helpless in saving the people from the affliction, under which they have fallen. The inhabitants of Samaria would fear, lest what dwelt upon Beth-Aven would also dwell upon them, and the priests would become terrified, lest they lose their dignity and the offerings.

After having lost their hope in the Baal, the inhabitants of Samaria went to the king of Assyria, offering him gifts to gain his satisfaction,

instead of returning to God by repentance and confessing their sins. ***“It shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the Great King”*** (Hosea 10: 6).

What would be the end of this diverted vine? ***“Disgrace shall overtake Ephraim and Israel shall feel the shame of their disobedience. Samaria and her king are swept away like flotsam on the water; the hill-shrines of Aven are wiped out, the shrines where Israel sinned; thorns and thistles grow over her altars. So they will say to the mountains, ‘Cover us’, and to the hills, ‘Fall on us’.”*** (Hosea 10: 6).

In short, we say that its end will be as follows:

a- “Disgrace shall overtake Ephraim”. The tribe that took the lead in adopting the movement of idol-worship will be ashamed before all the other tribes, because its gods appear weak facing the enemy.

b- “Israel shall feel the shame of their disobedience”. Israel suggested paying tributes to the king of Assyria. Now it should feel ashamed, because Assyria humiliated and despised it.

c- “Samaria and her king are swept away like flotsam on the water”. The kings of Samaria, who dissented from the house of David arrogantly, became like a twig on the surface of the water. Their kingdom ended up in captivation by Assyria. One would eventually end up like a twig floating on the surface of the water as a cause of every dissension, no matter the honors that he gets at the beginning.

d- “The hill-shrines of Aven are wiped out, the shrines where Israel sinned”. The places that were high and unapproachable will be destroyed, and the glory of the golden calves of Beth-Aven will collapse. There will be desolation instead of the banquets.

e- The people will fall under curse: “Thorns and thistles grow over her altars”. On the great day of the Lord, *“they will say to the mountains, ‘Cover us’, and to the hills, ‘Fall on us’”*, because “it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrew 10: 31). Besides, it came in the book of Revelation: *“And they called out to the mountains and the crags, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the vengeance of the Lamb”* (Revelation 6: 16).

2. INNER CORRUPTION:

God confirms that Israel’s corruption was not only regarding the outer appearances, but it is also regarding its inner life. Therefore, the treatment should go into the depth of its nature: *“Since the day of Gibeah Israel has sinned”* (Hosea 10: 9). It is a long period – about six centuries – of war between the tribes, one against the other, which means that danger was not from an outer enemy, but from an inner corruption. We have seen how the men of Benjamin did evil with a daughter of Israel (Judges 19, 20). Therefore, if God chastens them by an affliction on the outside, they should not concentrate their eyes on the affliction itself, but on the inner corruption, in order to be sanctified by the Lord, who would save them from the affliction. *“I have come against the rebels to chastise*

them, and the peoples shall mass against them in hordes for their two deeds of shame” (Hosea 10: 10).

Finally, He shows how Israel has submitted itself to the inner humiliation, bowed its head under the yoke of sin and became like a trained heifer that loves to thresh grain and feed on what it threshes (Hosea 10: 11).

3. THE NEED FOR A NEW PLANTATION:

If the vine has become barren because of its inner corruption, the need is urgent for a new plantation by the Lord Himself to grant it the fruit of knowledge and righteousness: ***“Sow for yourselves in justice, and you will reap what loyalty deserves. Break up your fallow; for it is time to seek the Lord, seeking him till he comes and gives you just measure of rain”*** (Hosea 10: 11). If the Lord Christ is our ‘righteousness’, then it is time for a new plantation, as the Lord Christ dwells in us, as though He would be planted inside us to renew our nature, which will make us bear the fruit of life and will open our eyes by His Holy Spirit to enlighten our insight. Thus, He confirms, *“seeking him till he comes and gives you just measure of rain”*, as the righteousness we get is not of our own, but it is the work of the Lord in us.

Yet, God does not work in the lazy and the slothful, which is why He says *“sow”, “reap”, “break up your fallow”, “seek”*. This confirms our positive role to gain the work in us. Commenting on the phrase *“Enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge”*, Father Nestor says,

“You are committed to strive diligently to read, which I see you are doing, together with seeking seriously to gain the practical knowledge by actual experience; namely the knowledge by behavior, without which no theoretical purity could be acquired”.

Let us seek the Lord Himself, who would grant us the fruit of His righteousness, and let us not lean upon ourselves or upon our human abilities, lest we hear the words of reproach. ***“You have ploughed wickedness into your soil, and the crop is mischief; you have eaten the fruit of treachery, because you have trusted in your chariots, in the number of your warriors.”*** (Hosea 10: 13) Whoever leans upon his own way or upon the multitude of his mighty men, would plow wickedness, reap iniquity and eat the fruit of lies. Israel leaned upon its own counsel without returning to God, and so caused the people to face tumult and disturbance and lose their fortresses. Moreover, women and children fell under the cruelty of Shalmanezzar, the king of Assyria: ***“The tumult of war shall arise against your people, and all your fortresses shall be razed as Shalman (Shalmanezzar) razed Beth-Arbel in the day of battle, dashing the mother to the ground with her babes.”*** (Hosea 10: 14). Whoever leans upon himself would have a life turned into a tumult, lose his spiritual fortresses and become a victim of the devil, who would captivate him, as Shalmanezzar did to many.

Then He ends His talk by saying: ***“So it shall be done to you, Bethel, because of your evil scheming; as sure as day dawns, the king of Israel shall be swept away.”*** (Hosea 10: 15). As though He says, that what dwells upon them is not by the king of Assyria, but actually by

Bethel, which became a snare for you to catch and deliver you to the pagan abominations. Do not lean upon the king of Israel, as he shall be cut off in the morning; namely, shall be defeated at the beginning of the battle. He would fall and never rise again!

CHAPTER 11

GOD, OUR REFUGE

The pagan idolatry has caused Israel to lose every heavenly wisdom and become like a silly dove (7: 11), sometime seeking refuge in the Pharaoh of Egypt to protect it from the king of Assyria, and some other times in the king of Assyria to support it against the Pharaoh of Egypt. Actually, it is God alone who is its true refuge, who adopted it, cared for it while still in the womb, and supported it until He brought it over to the perfection of the true freedom. If the Pharaoh of Egypt or the king of Assyria have stretched their hands, it was to set snares and nets, whereas the Lord alone is the true support and help for the soul.

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1. *GOD'S CARE FOR HIS CHILD:*

In the introduction of this chapter, God talks about Israel, His people, or about the human soul as a child beloved by God, whom He longs to set free out of the bondage of the Pharaoh of Egypt for being His own child. He calls on this child to accept Him as his Father, holds his hands like a compassionate governess to teach him how to walk along the way of truth and bandages every wound in his depths, which inflicted him during his servitude. God also draws him by the ropes of compassion, binds him by the bonds of love, lifts him up, caresses his soft cheeks and stretches His hands to feed him. It is an exalted portrait of compassion toward the human soul. God never let it in need of anything and raised it until He brought it up from the weak infancy to maturity.

Here are the very words of the Lord Himself: ***“When Israel was a boy, I loved him; I called my son out of Egypt”*** (Hosea 11: 1). Israel was an unaware child and unable to offer anything on his part, so God loved him and called him out of the land of bondage, offering him His fatherhood. That is how God also loved Jacob, since he has been in the womb and has not still done good or evil (Romans 9: 11). Moreover, the Lord said to Jeremiah *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you for my own; before you were born I consecrated you”* (Jeremiah 1: 5). The apostle Paul confirms that it is God who *“loved us beforehand”*.

Although God loved His child Israel, and set him free from the bondage of Pharaoh, Israel’s heart stayed bound to servitude like a patient who loves his sickness or a prisoner, whose heart remains connected to the darkness of the prison. Although the Lord Jesus Christ set us free

from the servitude of the devil – the true Pharaoh – granting us the childhood to the Father by baptism, yet our hearts often bring us back to the land of bondage and makes us covet the leeks and the onion of Egypt, the way the children of Israel did. They cried, *“Think of it! In Egypt, we had fish for the asking, cucumbers and watermelons, leeks and onions and garlic. Now our throats are parched; there is nothing wherever we look except this manna”* (Numbers 11: 5, 6). Their souls dried by the manna coming down from heaven, and coveted free tiny fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic! There is no wonder, because when one is connected to the earth, he becomes earth, his soul gets bored by the heavenly things, and covets the earthly things. It sees dryness in the heavenly, and joy and gladness of heart in the earthly affairs.

The Evangelist St. Matthew saw in the divine words: *“I called My son out of Egypt”* a clear prophecy about the escape of the infant Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, to Egypt, which was one of the greatest centers of the world at that time. This was a symbol of God’s acceptance of all the Gentile nations, and of sanctifying our land. The place that was before a center of paganism turned into a place of comfort for the savior of the world. The Lord still enters our inner Egypt to turn it from its paganism to a sanctuary for Himself, where He would set His divine altar (Isaiah 19: 19). Let us recognize Him, and present to Him a sacrifice and an offering of love (Isaiah 19: 21) to hear the divine voice, saying: *“A blessing be upon Egypt my people”* (Isaiah 19: 25).

Going back to God’s care for His child Israel, whom He called from the land of servitude to be His son, we see the reaction of this son to that

care: ***“The more I called, the further they went from me; they must needs sacrifice to the Baalim and burn offerings before carved images”*** (Hosea 11: 2). Israel has been like a rebellious son, whom his father calls offering him every protection, but he refuses and flees from his father’s face to his enemy, the Baal, and the carved images. Israel has been rebellious against God since his years as a child, paying back God’s love with stiffness, and His care with arrogance. Despite that, God did not stop loving him: ***“It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I who had taken them in my arms, but they did not know that I harnessed them in leading-strings”*** (Hosea 11: 3). He taught them like a governess who holds the uncooperative child’s hand to teach him how to walk, so that he grows and matures. He loved them: ***“And led them with bonds of love, that I have lifted the like a little child to my cheek that I had bent down to feed them.”*** (Hosea 11: 4). Is there any greater love?! He offered us all his love as our Father to enter into us, make us resort to Him and become one with Him. St. Jerome said, *“Christ stands every day at the door of our heart, longing to enter. Let us open our heart wide to Him, so that He enters and becomes our guest, dwell in us, and dine with us”*.

2. ISRAEL’S POSITION TOWARD GOD:

“Back they shall go to Egypt; the Assyrian shall be their king” (Hosea 11: 5). The Israelis have paid back God’s care with stiffness, although it was He, who brought them out of the land of bondage. They longed to return back there anew and take refuge under the shadow of Pharaoh from the king of Assyria. Yet, even if they manage to escape, they will be captivated by Assyria and will submit under its reign. This is

a portrait of the humanity's situation towards God, who called on people with love, but they disobeyed Him, and went further from Him (Hosea 11: 2). They stood with their backs to Him, instead of with their faces, and they sacrificed to the Baalim, instead of offering God sacrifices of love. That is, they sacrificed to one Baal, then to another Baal, then to a third one, and so on, never considering returning to God. That is why He admonishes them bitterly: *"bent on rebellion as they are"* (Hosea 11: 7). They have a strong tendency towards apostasy. God says that He sent to them messengers calling them to return to Him, but *"the have refused to return to me"* (5). Confronting such a resistance by Israel, God had to resort to chastisement: ***"How can I give you up, Ephraim, how surrender you, Israel? How can I make you like Admah or treat you as Zeboyim?"*** (Hosea 11: 8). Admah and Zeboyim were two cities in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah, that were consumed with fire because of their evil.

3. GOD IS THE ONLY REFUGE:

Even at the moments of chastisement, God does not bear to see His people getting hurt: ***"My heart is changed within me, my remorse kindles already. I will not let loose my fury; I will not turn round and destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst."*** (Hosea 11: 8, 9)

If God is *"like a roaring lion"* (Hosea 11: 10) in His chastisement, which makes His children hasten in terror and flee to the Pharaoh of Egypt or the king of Assyria, yet He brings them back in mercy. He does

not do that through their strength or sword, but in their weakness and helplessness: *“They will come speedily, flying like birds out of Egypt, like pigeons from Assyria, and I will settle them in their own homes. This is the very word of the Lord.”* (Hosea 11: 11). God would return them with love to their home, and they would be like a humble bird, which He takes from the enemy’s land back to its home. God is the refuge of the weak... He protects the bird, and supports the dove!

CHAPTER 12

GOD, OUR SHEPHERD

Israel boasts about their reference to great fathers, so here God presents to them their father “Jacob” as a typical example of strife with God, and the enjoyment of His care. God compares Jacob to them, showing them that they have deceitful scales in their hands, did not realize God’s care for them and did not return to Him as well.

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1. THEY FORSOOK THE GOOD SHEPHERD:

God says in bitter admonition: ***“Ephraim is a shepherd whose flock is but wind, a hunter chasing the east wind all day; he makes a treaty with Assyria and carries tribute of oil to Egypt”*** (Hosea 12: 1).

Ephraim forsook his good shepherd, the grantor of true welfare, went out feeding on the wind and acquired nothing in return. How miserable is Ephraim, as he labored for no benefit... Moreover, it is not just any wind, but “the east wind”, about which St. Hypoletes the Roman says, that it refers to the “anti-Christ”, who appears in the east as an opponent of the Lord Christ in His church. Specifically, he said: *“What could be the burning wind coming from the east, except the anti-Christ, who destroys and dries the springs of water, and the fruits of the trees in his days (Hosea 13: 15), as people put their hearts on his works! While he destroys them because of the truth, they serve him by their cruelty”*. Therefore, Ephraim turned from the kingdom of Christ to that of the anti-Christ, carrying the features of his new master; namely, telling lies, desolation, and making covenants with the world, instead of with God...

2. A NEED FOR A SERIOUS RETURN TO GOD:

As the Israelis were proud in particular because of their reference to their father Jacob, God presented him to them as an example of strife, with both God and people. By his strife, he encountered with God, who loves those who strive. ***“Even in the womb Jacob overreached his brother”*** (Hosea 12: 3). While still in his mother’s womb, and before getting out to the world, he took his twin brother by the heel, drew him backwards, and took from him by force the birthright and the blessing.

“In manhood he strove with God. The divine angel stood firm and held his own; Jacob wept and begged favor for himself.” (Hosea 12: 3, 4) Jacob demonstrated a magnificent example of strife, as he struggled with God until dawn, to be taught the strife and the spirit of conquest. Finally, when he realized that conquest was a gift from God, and not by the strength of his arms, he wept and cried, so God had mercy on him and proclaimed Himself to Jacob: ***“Then God met him at Bethel and there spoke with him. The Lord the God of Hosts, the Lord is his name.”*** (Hosea 12: 4, 5)

3. FORSAKING THE DECEITFUL MEASURES:

Israel did not have the spirit of discernment, by which it could discern between the true shepherd and grantor of goods, and the other deceitful shepherds. That is why God demands from the Israelis to forsake their deceitful measures, and contemplate in the true care of God.

“False scales are in merchants’ hands, and they love to cheat” (Hosea 12: 7). He lost his nature as a son of God, and became like a gentile, who has no wisdom, loves to oppress and deceives God and even himself. Having deceitful scales in his hand is a sign of believing that he is rich and in no need for God: ***“So Ephraim says, ‘Surely I have become a rich man, I have made my fortune’; but all his gains will not pay for the guilt of his sins.”*** (Hosea 12: 8). He forgot that it was God, who released him from the land of bondage, sent him prophets, and talked to him in every way to teach and train him: ***“Yet I have been the Lord your***

God since your days in Egypt; I will make you live in tents yet again, as in the old days. I spoke to the prophets, it was I who gave vision after vision; I spoke through the prophets in parables.” (Hosea 12: 10).

4. JACOB’S SERVICE FOR THE SAKE OF A WIFE:

If Jacob, their father, spent many years in the desert of Aram serving for the sake of a woman, would it not be fitting for his children to serve in the wilderness of this world for the sake of their true Shepherd, the groom of their souls?! *“Jacob fled to the land of Aram; Israel did service to win a wife; to win a wife he tended sheep”* (Hosea 12: 12).

CHAPTER 13

GOD, OUR SAVIOR

In this chapter, God presents Himself to His people as a true king, who can alone save them from the servitude of sin, destroying the authority of death under their feet, especially after they have diverted, corrupted, and even died spiritually.

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1. THEIR DIVERSION EVEN TO DEATH:

In order to present Himself as a king and a savior of their souls, God reveals to them what sin and the worship of Baal in particular has done to them: ***“When Ephraimites mumbled their prayers, God himself denounced Israel; they were guilty of Baal-worship and died.”*** (Hosea 13: 1).

When Ephraim lived with the holy fear of God like his father Jacob, he was exalted among the tribes and everyone was trembling before him. God would exalt those, who humble themselves before Him. Nevertheless, when Ephraim got bound to the iniquity of worshipping the Baal, he did not only lose his reputation and dignity, but he also *“died”*... Therefore, he became in need for a savior capable of raising him from the dead.

It is remarkable how sin draws one’s heart more from one sin to another, instead of drawing him to remorse on what he came to be, in spite of the death it bears: ***“Yet now they sin more and more”*** (Hosea 13: 2). This makes them lose the work of God’s word within them: ***“They have made themselves an image of cast metal, they have fashioned their silver into idols”*** (Hosea 13: 2). They made their gods according to their skill, understanding and their own desire, not submitting to the mind of God.

They built idols to worship, ***“Men say of them, ‘Those who kiss calf-images offer human sacrifice’*** (Hosea 13: 2). This most probably

means that the people told the priests, who actually killed them with their corruption and impurity, to offer the most expensive animals as sacrifice for the Baal... The priests were evil and the sacrifices were profane no matter how expensive they were.

He describes those who behave that way, as if they were in apostasy from God their Savior: ***“Therefore they shall be like the morning mist or like dew that vanishes early, like chaff blown from the threshing-floor or smoke from a chimney”*** (Hosea 13: 3). They appear to be like the cloud that gives good news of probable rain (a sign of God’s grace), while they are actually more like the deceiving morning cloud, which disappears utterly once the sun rises. They are like the early dew that passes away without irrigating the land, like the valueless light chaff scattered everywhere, and like the smoke from a chimney that is soon driven away (Psalm 68: 2).

2. THEIR SALVATION FROM SERVITUDE:

To confirm His salvation work to them, God presented a practical lesson from the life of their fathers, whom He saved from the bondage of Pharaoh, and for whom He cared and fulfilled their needs in the wilderness. ***“But I have been the Lord your God since your days in Egypt, when you knew no other savior than me, no god but me. I cared for you in the wilderness, in a land of burning heat, as if you were in pasture. So they were filled”*** (Hosea 13: 4-6). He gave them food and supported them in the land of thirst, when they were in big trouble. But

when they got saturated from God's hands, they denied Him: ***“And, being filled, grew proud; and so they forgot me”*** (Hosea 13: 6).

When the person's body gets fulfilled, he forgets God, his Creator, and his soul exalts in haughtiness. As it came in the book of Deuteronomy, ***“Jeshurun grew fat and unruly, he grew fat, he grew bloated and sleek. He forsook God who made him and dishonored the Rock of his salvation.”*** (Deuteronomy 32: 15).

God stood firmly before them to confront their denial. He said, ***“So now I will be like a panther to them, I will prowl like a leopard by the wayside; I will meet them like a she-bear robbed of her cubs and tear their ribs apart, like a lioness I will devour them on the spot, I will rip them up like a wild beast”*** (Hosea 13: 7, 8). According to what Isaiah said, ***“Yet they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit; only then was he changed into their enemy and himself fought against them”*** (Isaiah 63: 10). In the bitterness of soul, God sends on His denying children His fierce chastisement, which will devour them like wild beasts, because they became ***“vessels which were objects of retribution”*** (Romans 9: 22).

3. THEIR REJECTION OF THE SAVIOR KING:

“I have destroyed you, O Israel; who is there to help you?” (Hosea 13: 9). What dwells upon Israel is because of its destructive behavior, which led to its death; whereas its salvation is in the Lord their God and King, whom they have rejected and forgotten, asking for a king pleasing their own hearts. He says to them: ***“Where now is your king that he may***

save you, or the rulers in all your cities for whom you asked me, begging for king and princes_ I gave you a king in my anger, and in my fury took him away” (Hosea 9-11).

By this, He probably refers to the time when they coveted to have a king to judge them like all other nations (1 Samuel 8: 5), which was a request that grieved Prophet Samuel’s soul. Still God gave them Saul to be king according to the desire of their hearts, then, took him away in His wrath because of Saul’s wickedness. To chastise us, God may allow us to get our desire, so that we realize our need to accept His will, and not to have things according to the desire of our hearts.

They got a ‘king’ according to their heart’s desire and their iniquity increased: *“Ephraim’s guilt is tied up in a scroll; his sins are kept on record. When the pangs of his birth came over his mother, he showed himself a senseless child; for at the proper time he could not present himself at the mouth of the womb”* (Hosea 13: 12, 13). They did as Apostle Paul said, *“You are laying up for yourself a store of retribution for the day of retribution”* (Romans 2: 5), and that is how they were destroying themselves. Their sins were bound up to their account, God would never forget them and they were stored up in a secure place until the day of reckoning. They assumed that their sins were hidden, that no one could see them, and that they would be forgotten by time. They did not realize that their sins would be stored for their destruction, because they did not have them in mind, seeking forgiveness. They became like a woman who carries a fetus inside her, and to whom childbirth is certain to come. Ephraim was unwise and fled from thinking about or

contemplating in what awaits him of the pangs because of sin, so that he could get to know the reason of his suffering and to be saved of it by God, his Savior.

4. THEIR SALVATION FROM DEATH:

He, who redeemed their fathers from the servitude of Pharaoh, is the only one capable of redeeming them even from death and from Sheol (the pit): ***“Shall I redeem him from Sheol_ Shall I ransom him from death_ Oh, you’re your plagues, O death! Oh, for your sting, Sheol! I will put compassion out of my sight.”*** (Hosea 13: 14)

God realizes for them what any other king cannot realize. He would not only release them from captivity, but He has the authority to bring them forth from the pit (Sheol) as well and save them from death, which was actually realized when the Savior put Himself to death to destroy its authority. St. Jerome said, *“We have the consolation, that the Word of God has slain death... Our Lord Jesus died, so that, by His death, He brings death itself to death”*. Talking to death, he said, *“You have swallowed our Jonah (our Christ), yet He is alive even in your belly. You carried Him as dead, in order that the storm of the world would calm down, and that our Nineveh would be saved through preaching Him. Yes, He has overcome and slain you... By His death, you yourself were brought to death, and by His death, we became alive... You swallowed Him, to find yourself swallowed! While being consumed by longing to get your claws on the body He took, as a prey for your greed, you were wounded inside yourself”*.

That was God's promise to us... He granted us the authority over death, and He would never have remorse. He said, "***I will put compassion out of my sight***"; namely, 'I shall not go back on My promise.

5. THE DESTRUCTIVE EAST WIND:

If the Lord Christ grants life by His death, bringing death to death; yet He would allow an east wind to blow, dry up the fountain of the Holy Spirit inside man, and let him lose all His fruits. "***Though he flourishes among the reeds, an east wind shall come, a blast from the Lord, rising over the desert; Ephraim's spring will fail and his fountain run dry. It will carry away as spoil hi whole store of costly treasures. Samaria will become desolate because she has rebelled against her God; her babes will fall by the sword and be dashed to the ground, her women with child shall be ripped up***" (Hosea 13: 15, 16). This talk was literally realized, with the Assyrian captivity, which came from the east and utterly destroyed Israel with its capital Samaria. It will be realized at the end of time as well, when the wind of the anti-Christ blows, coming from the east. It is called "*the wind of the Lord*", because it is allowed by Him.

CHAPTER 14

FRUITS OF REPENTANCE

If this book, in its essence is the book of ‘the divine wedding’, in which God proclaims His longing for His people, as a Groom seeking His bride; revealing to her, openly and clearly, her sins and iniquities, demanding her return to Him; He ends it with an ultimate call on the part of the divine Groom, demanding the return of His adulteress bride, showing His work with her in a very rejoiceful way; something that you rarely find in any other book in the Old Testament, to end in such a way. In this ultimate call for her return, He also demonstrates her human role; as well as the divine role in sanctifying and glorifying her.

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1- THE HUMAN ROLE IN REPENTANCE:

In this ultimate call, it came:

“O Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity; Take words with you, and return to the Lord”

(Hosea 14: 1, 2)

Our heavenly Groom so keeps on calling us all the days of our sojourn, up till our last breath, provoking us to return to Him. Yet, He does not commit us to return against our will, but lovingly tries to arouse our emotions, and to draw our hearts by His consistent calls and proclamations. And as said by father Mark the hermit: [No power on the earth can force us to do good or bad; But whoever is, to whom we are to be carried through our free will – whether God or Satan – would provoke us to do according to what concerns his kingdom].

He calls us, and keeps calling us, but would never commit us; He appreciates our human freedom, and deals with us on the level of mutual love, and not as dumb tools in His hands. And as said by St. John Chrysostom: [Being our own masters, we can turn every member in us into, either a tool for evil, or for righteousness (by Jesus Christ)]. As a man of iniquity acts in his free will, it would be likewise befitting for him to return to the Lord his God also with his free will, seeking the divine help to support him to return.

The start of the way to repentance is a feeling of remorse; saying: [*“For you have stumbled (fallen) because of your iniquity”*]; It would be fitting for you to return to the Lord your God, *“taking words with you”*; namely a confession of your iniquity]. As he, who realizes in his depths that he has fallen because of his iniquity, will not lack words, nor wonder, saying: ‘What shall I confess?’, or ‘How shall I confess?’ The Holy Spirit who exposes his iniquities, will support him in his confession of those iniquities.

Here, we wish to confirm that confession is not just doing a census of sins or iniquities that we have committed; But it is, before anything else, a feeling of bitterness because of what we have done. And as is said by father Mark the hermit: [A man of experience, who has a knowledge of the truth, confesses his sins to God; not through doing a mere census of what he has done, but through the bitterness of his soul because of them]. And as said by father John of kronstadt: [Let us hasten to draw God’s mercy by our tears and repentance. Let us enter into our souls, and look carefully at our unclean hearts, to see how the multitudes of our transgressions are keeping the grace of God away from us, and to realize how spiritually dead we have become].

This confession bears two integral aspects: A confession of sin, and a faith in God, the grantor of goodness. And as said by St. Augustine: [We confess to God our sins, as we confess His work in us as well, giving Him praise.

“Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity; (Accept that which is good), and we will offer the (fruits) of our lips”

(Hosea 14: 2).

We seek from Him to take away from us every iniquity we have committed, and to grant us all what is good, that we may have lost; offering as sacrifices of thanksgiving, the fruits of our lips, or the (calves of our lips), according to the Septuagint version.

Our realization of the iniquity that killed our hearts, and brought our inner souls to death; And our confession of God, as the Grantor of the virtuous life; will bind us to Him as a sole Savior; and that we should not lean upon a human arm, whoever he may be; saying:

“Assyria shall not save us; We will not ride on horses, nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, ‘You are our gods’”

(Hosea 14: 3).

As far as the people of Israel at that time are concerned, They realized that Assyria, upon whom they have leaned, failed to save them, but rather destroyed and captivated them; That their military might (the horses), were incapable of saving them from the wrath of God, that dwelt upon them because of their wickedness; And that the idols of the Baal, the work of their own hands, were not the true gods capable of supporting them.

On another aspect, God intended to proclaim, for the sake of the separation of the political side from the spiritual one, that salvation would not be realized by a human arm, whatever his might is; by greatness, or authority, like Assyria; by a temporal power like that of horses; nor by the gods, that are the works of our own hands ... But salvation is only from God. In other words, I wish we do not lean upon Assyria; namely upon others, nor upon our own ability, talents, or possibilities (horses); nor upon our own righteousness (our inner gods); But we should say:

“In You, the fatherless finds mercy”

(Hosea 14: 3)

Namely, without You, I have become fatherless, with no heavenly Father; Who, but You, will have mercy upon me?! And as said by St. Jerome: [The fatherless are those who lost God, their divine Father].

2- THE DIVINE ROLE IN SANCTIFICATION:

If Israel has reached a condition of sickness that is impossible to cure; yet it is God alone who can deal with it; saying:

“I will heal their backsliding”

(Hosea 14: 4)

St. Pavnotius says: [The true saints would never say, that the perfect progress which they have reached, walking on the way of virtue, is realized by their own strife, but by the grace of God, saying: *“Lead me in Your truth and teach me”* (Psalm 25: 5)].

God, motivated by His totally free love, approaches us as a true Physician, to heal the backsliding soul:

*“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them
freely, for My anger has turned away from him”*

(Hosea 14: 4)

The divine Physician proclaiming His healing love, says: *“For
God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have
everlasting life”* (John 3: 16).

What did the divine Physician provide His beloved patients?

*“I will be like dew to Israel; He shall blossom like
the lily, He shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon.*

*His shoots shall spread out, His beauty shall be
like the olive tree, and his fragrance like that of
Lebanon.*

*They shall again live beneath My shadow. They
shall flourish as a garden; They shall blossom like
the vine.*

Their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

*Ephraim shall say, ‘What have I to do anymore
with idols?’”*

(Hosea 14: 5-8).

In short, we can say that God gives Himself to them like dew coming down from heaven: to water them, and to revive them like the blossoming lily; To renew them internally; making their hidden roots go deep; To let them spiritually grow, spreading out their shoots with no limits; To grant them spiritual beauty and glory, to become like an olive tree in splendor; To pour His fragrance in them to make them smell like Lebanon; To use them for the comfort of many, embracing many beneath their shadow, and for the joy of many, blossoming like a vine; And never to cut off their good remembrance.

(1) "***I will be like dew to Israel***" (5). In the old, God said to Moses: "*I am going to rain bread from heaven for you*" (Exodus 16: 4); And it was said: "*When the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna would fall with it*" (Numbers 11: 9). Now, however, He does not rain bread from heaven for us, But He Himself descended to us, providing

us with His holy body as heavenly bread to fulfill the heart; He descended to us like dew that quenches the fire of lusts; He dwells upon our inner camp to make it His camp and dwelling place; He descends upon us secretly in the night, to turn our darkness into a bright day.

When the three young men were cast into the furnace of fire, the Word of God appeared with them, turning the fire like dew for them. Likewise, As the world became a furnace and fire, the Lord Christ transfiguring in us, transforms our life like dew!

(2) “***Blossoms like lilies***”. The heavenly Groom says: “*I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley*” (Songs 2: 1); And here He makes, out of His people blossoming lilies. And as said by the scholar Origen: [He becomes “*the lily of the valley*” to make His beloved bride, as well, a lily like He is ... Namely, that every soul that approaches Him, and follows His lead,

would also become a lily}. And St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa believes that the soul, as a lily, will ascend upright to the Messiah, her true Vinedresser, who lifts her up above the worries of this world, above the thorns of sin that strangle the soul (Mark 4: 18), and above the dust of this life, to spare her from getting defiled. The Lord Christ will revive His church, granting her “*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*” (Ephesians 1: 3); to bear His heavenly features, and to realize His mission in her.

(3) “***He shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon***” If the church, through being connected to the Lord Christ, shall bear His uprightness and the fellowship of His nature, to be counted as a lily in the wilderness among the thorns; The secret is its hidden roots that enjoy His grace, and bear His life in them; to say on the tongue of the apostle Paul: “*By the grace of God, I*

am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15: 10).

(4) The deeper the roots strike in the ground, to bear in them “the life of Christ, the farther up the shoots shall spread out, to bear in abundance the fruits of the Holy Spirit; knowing no barrenness or non-fruitation.

(5) “*His beauty shall be like the olive tree*”.

The believer thus, will bear the features of the Lord and His life through the roots, His fruits on the shoots, as well as His splendor and glory inside and outside. And as the Lord says to His bride: “*You grew exceedingly beautiful, fit to be a queen. Your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of my splendor that I had bestowed on you’, says the Lord God*” (Ezekiel 16, 13, 14).

The true believer, anticipating the fellowship of the glory of Christ in eternity, tastes that glory and that splendor in his inner life. And as said by St. Maccar the Great: [What he is to get in the future, will only be an extension of the down-payment he enjoyed inside him].

(6) ***“His fragrance will be like that of Lebanon”***. Bearing the splendor of God like a fruitful olive tree, In him the fragrance of Christ will appear. And as said by the apostle: *“Through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing”* (2 Corinthians 2: 14, 15).

(7) ***“They shall again live beneath My shadow; They shall flourish as a garden; They shall blossom like the vine; Their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon”***. They shall bear a heart spacious

with love, to draw many to join them
beneath the shadow of the Lord, offering
them spiritual food, and joyful drink; And
their behavior will remain a good
everlasting memory, testifying to their
heavenly Groom.

(8) ***“Ephraim shall say: ‘What have I to do
anymore with idols’.*** If Ephraim was the
tribe that provoked the rest of the tribes to
worship the idols, He will also be the tribe
that shows remorse on that action, and
proclaims his hatred of evil. Thus the
energies of evil in man will turn into
energies of edification, to the account of the
kingdom of the true heavenly Groom.

This is a simplified portrait of God’s work in the life of his
people, and in that of every individual of them, when he returns
to Him with repentance, and delivers his life in His hands to
work in him. God responds to our repentance and to our return
to Him, saying: *“I have heard and observed him”* (8); As
though He has been anticipating our return, observing

everything going on inside us, and waiting for the least movement on our part, to move toward us with His love. And as said by the apostle: “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you*” (James 4: 8).

The Lord draws near to us “*like (an ever-green) Cypress tree*” (8). He cover us with His shadow, and protects us from the harm of the sun of temptations. He also confirms to us that He is the Grantor of fruition in our life, saying: “*Your fruitfulness comes from Me*”.(8).

Finally, Hosea ends the book by an advice He gives to all of us, to be reasonable and return to the Lord in repentance, in order to gain its fruit:

*“Who is wise? Let him understand these things.
Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways
of the Lord are right; The righteous walk in them;
But transgressors stumble in them”*

(Hosea 14: 9).

By this, He flares the longing in us to understand the ways of the Lord, and to walk in them with wisdom and prudence, so as

not to stumble. And as said by father Theophilos: [Whoever has the wish to learn, will learn well. Therefore, It is befitting of you to strive to join me in listening to the living voice, in order to conceive the truth].

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