

A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY

*The Book
of*

GENESIS

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The Word of God is the food that the Holy Spirit grants to the Church of Christ, so that she may live perpetually renovated in her spiritual youth, without undergoing the incapacities of old age, or perishability. In the past few years, my good Lord allowed me to study the word of God; in the same way the Fathers of the early Church experienced it, as spirit and life. I began to write some of the meditations and interpretations practiced by those Fathers, in the hope that we, also, may live through the spirit and belief of the early Church; enjoying the Holy Spirit through the word of God, alive and active in us, until it elevates us to our heavenly Groom “the divine Word,” who will come on the clouds, to bestow on us His glories, and bring us into the bosom of His Father, to abide with Him eternally in His heavens.

However, in my interpretation, if I did not commit to the sequence of the books as they come in the Holy Bible; it is just because I did not intend to author a comprehensive series of interpretations, but I aspired to enter, with every soul, into the secret place of the Word, and to enjoy Him as the eternal Groom, who fills the heart, the mind and all the inner depths.

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

AN INTRODUCTORY STUDY:

INTRODUCTION TO
THE PENTATEUCH
OR
THE FIRST FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES¹

- 1- Unity of the five books.**
- 2- The prophet Moses and the five books.**
- 3- Contents of the five books.**

¹ *Due of its pure academic nature, some readers may consider this chapter hard to comprehend. I would rather advise them to skip it, if they so prefer.*

1

UNITY OF THE FIVE BOOKS

NOMENCLATURES

In the Greek language, the first five books of the Old Testament are called “The Pentateuch” “ $\rho\epsilon\nu\tau\alpha\tau\mu, \omicron\varsigma$,” meaning: “the five books,” a name used in Christianity since early times. Certain scholars tried to bind the first four books together in one unit, under the name of “*The Tetrateuch*,” considering the book of ‘*Deuteronomy*’ a sort of introduction to the history of Israel, from its initial entry into the promised land, ‘The Book of Joshua;’ While certain others tried to add the ‘Book of Joshua’ to the first five books to form a six-books unit they called “*The Hexateuch*.” Sometimes, others tried to bind the first eight books in a unit they called “*The Octateuch*,” to include the historic period up to the beginning of the era of kings. But, among scholars, the original traditional thought of binding the first five books as a historical basis on which God’s people were established still prevails.

The Jews also recognized this unity; In Hebrew, the Scripture, is divided into three units according to its authors:

- (1) **The Law, or “The Torah”:** includes the five books of Moses.
- (2) **The prophets ‘Nebiim’:** divided into ‘Former Prophets’ and ‘Latter Prophets.’ The first division includes Joshua, the Judges, Samuel and Kings; while the second division includes Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve ‘Minor prophets.’
- (3) **The “Kethubbim,”** divided in its turn into three divisions:
 - ❖ *The Poetic books:* Psalms, Proverbs, and Job.
 - ❖ “*Megilloth*” *books:* Songs of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther.
 - ❖ *Non-Prophetic Historical books:* Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

Thus, the five books of Moses appear as one unit called “The Law,” even though they carried several other names mentioned in the two Testaments, some of which are:

- * ***The Torah* or *the Law*** (Joshua 1:7; Matthew 5:17; 12:5).
- * ***The Book of the Law*** (Joshua 1:8; Galatians 3:10).
- * ***The book of the Law of Moses*** (Joshua 8:31).
- * ***The book of the Law of God*** (Joshua 24:26).
- * ***The book of Moses*** (2 Chronicles 25:4; Mark 12:26).
- * ***The Law of the Lord*** (2 Chronicles 31:3; Luke 2:23).
- * ***The Law of Moses*** (1 Kings 2:3; Ezra 7:6; Luke 2:22).

A HISTORICAL UNITY

These books represent a well correlated historical unity; that begins by the creation of the world for the sake of man; then the creation of man himself. When man fell, God planned for his salvation, electing for him the Early Fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Egypt, started the first seed for the people that God set, to fulfill, through it, salvation for the whole humanity. Then, Moses was chosen as the first leader for this people. He delivered the people from the bondage of Pharaoh. Through him, they received the Covenant on Mount Sinai. Finally, he stopped them on the eastern shore of the Jordan river to hand them over to a new leader - Joshua; as though, through the Law, he is handing us over to 'Jesus' the leader of life, and the endower of inheritance.

Thus, these books represent a complete and prime segment in the life of humanity, concerning its relationship with God; and an important role lived by man, in which he feels God's protection and the plan for his salvation. It is worthy to note, that in these books, history and faith intermingle. There is no separation between historical events and the doctrine of faith.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HISTORY AND FAITH IN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

In all the ancient nations, history has been tied to religion. Religion played a capital role in all aspects of their daily, familial, and economic life, and, in their political activities. In spite of the fact that history is influenced by doctrine, it is not representing a part of it. As for the Jews, there is no separation between history and faith; Not only history is influenced by their doctrine, but, it represents an integral part of it. In other words, the theological point of view on history and the theological point of view of doctrine are linked together.

The history of this people represents an integral part of the word of God, and an exceeding divine plan for the salvation of the whole humanity. History began with the creation of man, as he appears as God's ambassador on earth, having power and authority over everything, on and beneath earth, in the depths of the seas, in air, and even in space. He has no master, but he is the master of all creations on earth. History disclosed God's choice of the Patriarch (Fathers): Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In each action and each work that occurred at their time, God revealed Himself to us. And in our Christian concept, their life carries numerous symbols for the coming of the Lord Christ, as a Redeemer and Savior.

As Christians, we do not see, in this part of history, a past that vanished, but, rather a divine preparation for the plan of our salvation, and innumerable symbols of God's work for us, up to this very day. This is not history in its general scientific concept, but it is a history that tells us the secret of our relationship with God, it explains his mysteries and teaches us His heavenly wisdom toward us. It is an actual history carrying the power of life through our encounter with Christ our Lord, Whom this very same history revealed, and prepared for His coming.

THE SECRET OF UNITY BETWEEN THESE FIVE BOOKS

R. De Vaux¹ believes in four golden threads binding together these five books in an integral unity. These threads are: *the Divine Promise, the Divine Election, the Divine Covenants, and the Divine Law.*

1- **The Divine Promise:** The main theme of these books is the confirmation of God's Promise to man; that was especially demonstrated with Abraham, who became a father of all believers. In him we see the concrete divine promise for the salvation of Adam and his children, renewed along the successive generations.

Indeed, to start, the nation of Israel did not have a civilized culture if compared to the surrounding nations, like the Egyptians and the Babylonians. But, they obtained the divine promise, through their nomad patriarch fathers; and through this *Promise*, the nation of the Israeli people was established.

2- **The Divine Election:** the divine promise was clear in the election. Adam did not earn to be the master of the whole universe. Likewise, the patriarch fathers did not earn to be selected as men of God, neither did the people of Israel earn to be chosen as holy nation. But this election was because of God's exceeding love, and of His wisdom (Deuteronomy 7:8). Therefore, these choices are attributed to God without partiality or favoritism on the expense of the holy life.

3- **The Covenants:** Covenants were of great importance in eastern societies. As examples, the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:23), between Jacob and his father-in-law (Gen. 31: 44); and that, between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 23: 28). In the first five books, God's appreciation for man is demonstrated; exalting his value, and entering with him into a covenant, leading to successive ones. He made one with Adam, indirectly proclaimed, in Paradise, Adam was expected to realize God's love for him and return love for love. But he disobeyed Him and so spoiling the image of the covenant. For this, God renewed His covenant with 'Noah,' after renovating the earth through the water of "Baptism," and He set its sign in nature, a rainbow in the clouds (Gen. 9). As man did not still comprehend the concepts of that covenant, He set for it a sign in the body of every male, the circumcision. Finally, at Mount Sinai, God made His covenant with His people (Exodus 19), which He sealed with the blood of the sacrificial animals, as a sign for the covenant that the Father sealed, on the cross, with the blood of His beloved Son! This is the thread of love that bound the five books together, to bring us into the New Testament.

4- The Covenant was linked to **the Law:** In Sinai, the Law got mixed with the Statutes of worship, without separation between the commandment and worship, or between the laws and the sacrifices...

THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES AND THE BOOK OF PSALMS

¹ *La Genèse. Paris 1951, p.23.*

As the Law is divided into five books, the book of Psalms is divided in the same manner; each division ends with a blessing:

The first book: Psalms 1-41.

The second book: Psalms 42-72.

The third book: Psalms 73-89.

The fourth book: Psalms 90-106.

The fifth book: Psalms 107-150 (Psalm 151 in the Septuagint Version).

MOSES AND THE BOOKS

MOSES, WRITER OF THE BOOKS

In the year 1176, 'Ebn Ezra' noted the words of the Scripture: "*The Canaanites were then in the land*" (Gen. 12:6). As if the writer was reporting the events after the Canaanites had left the land. This did not happen in the days of Moses. Thus, 'Ebn Ezra' stated that the writer of these books was someone other than Moses. The seventeenth to the twentieth centuries were loaded with advanced critical studies searching the relationship of the prophet Moses to these books to find out if he was the writer through the verbal or written tradition that was given to him, or if someone else wrote the books based on manuscripts that Moses left behind, or, if there was another source besides Moses verbal or written documents... I do not intend, here, to study these opinions in details, especially with the new trend that appeared with the beginning of the twentieth century where scholars and critics reconfirm the traditional historical concept, that Moses is the writer of these five books. We prefer to expose the proofs and evidences that Moses is the writer of these books, through an inspiration of the Holy Spirit of the Lord, rather than exploring the disputing opinions.

(1) TESTIMONIES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

By the Pentateuch, one can distinguish three components of the Law, that had to be written by the prophet Moses himself, which are:

A- The book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22 - Ex. 23), and **the Ten Commandments** which represent the cornerstone of the Law (Exodus 20:1-17; 24:1-12; 31:12-18; 34:17-28). The book of Exodus mentions: "*And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord*" (Exodus 24: 4).

B- Statutes concerning the tabernacle and the service (Exodus 25:31; 35:40). This same book assured that God Himself instructed the Prophet Moses with these statutes in all their details (Exodus 25:1).

C- The book of Deuteronomy begins with a speech that Moses delivered to the new generation, before their entry into the land of Canaan. It included a brief history of how God led their way, reminding them of parts of the Law. This book mentions: "*Moses wrote this Law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel*" (Exodus 31:9; 24-26).

If the five books testify that Moses was the author of these three main components of the Law, the Old Testament, as a whole, testifies that he was the author of these books; Here are some of its excerpts:

“Then Joshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests... arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God” (Ezra 3: 2).

“They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses” (Ezra 6: 18).

“Now all the people gathered together as one man...; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel” (Nehemiah 8: 1).

“On that day, they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people” (Nehemiah 13: 1) “As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us” (Daniel 9: 13).

The Old Testament ends with the following words: *“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments” (Malachi 4: 4).*

(2) TESTIMONIES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

A- The Lord Christ quoted several expressions from the five books that He referred to Moses; as examples from the Gospels:

“See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them” (Matthew 8:4).

See Leviticus 14:4, 10;

Also compare Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:5 with Deuteronomy 24:1; Mark 7: 10 with Exodus 20: 12; 21: 17; And Mark 12: 26; Luke 20: 37 with Exodus 3: 6.

B- In His speech about the Law, Christ the Lord referred it to the prophet Moses; this was the common belief of the Jews at that time¹. If the Lord Christ saw that they were wrong, He would have corrected their concepts; or, at least, when quoting it, He would not refer it to Moses. Christ the Lord is the “Truth” (John 14:6), Who came to testify for the truth; Thus, He does not accept or approve false concepts.

C- Testimonies by men of the New Testament: who considered reading in the Law as reading in Moses (Acts 15: 21; 2 Corinthians 3: 15; See also Romans 10: 5, 19; 1 Corinthians 9: 19).

(3) We believe that divine inspiration gives credit to human mind and culture.

It never dictated to the writer of the books particular words or thoughts, but rather inflamed his heart to write, He talks in him and through him, and surrounds him to keep him from incorrectness; letting him write with his personal style. A simple man like the prophet Amos writes in a simple language, while the apostle Paul writes with a mind of spiritual

¹ *Jos. Antiq. Preface 4; Apion 8.*

philosophy... **Here, as the Spirit of God uses the prophet Moses, we find his style indicative of someone who was raised in Egypt and was learned the wisdom of the Egyptians.** The writer appears as a person well aware of the precise conditions that prevailed in Egypt at that time. It was not the case of any other person who lived in Canaan, several generations after the exodus. This was noted in details by many scholars, and which we summarize in the following points:

1- The five books contain **several Egyptian words**, like the name given by Pharaoh to Joseph, 'Zaphnath-Paaneah' (Genesis 41: 45), an Egyptian name suitable to Joseph who saved Egypt from famine, meaning: "God speaks, and He lives¹," or "the newly born shall live²;" and the name of Joseph's wife 'Asenath' (Genesis 41: 45), an Egyptian name meaning "related to the goddess Neith³." He also mentioned the city of 'Heliopolis,' center of worshipping the god sun, under its old Egyptian name, 'On' (Genesis 41: 45, 50; 46: 20). He also mentioned the Egyptian name for the city of 'Rameses' (Genesis 47: 11; Exodus 1: 11; 12: 37; Numbers 33: 3, 5); likewise 'Pi-Tum,' a name referred to in the ancient remains of the nineteenth Dynasty, that fits exactly the time of exodus; The chalice, ordered by Joseph to be put in the sack of Benjamin, was called 'a cup,' a name not used outside the five books, except in the book of Jeremiah 35:5, who lived for a while in Egypt. Beside these, there are many other Egyptian names, or Egyptian names that carried a Hebrew accent.

2- In addition to Egyptian names, these books present us with a **few typical Egyptian customs**, only known to someone who lived in Egypt in that period of time, among them the custom of "eunuchs" marriage, only referred to once in the Old Testament (Genesis 37:36, and 39:1). The word "eunuch" here, probably referred to someone occupying a high position in the court of Pharaoh (Genesis 40:20); a habit not known in Israel, that occurred only in a late period, with King Herod (Matthew 14:6; Mark 6:21). And also the Egyptian tradition of the Pharaoh offering his signet ring placing a gold chain around the neck of whom he wishes to honor (Genesis 41:42); was not known in Israel while known in Egypt, in Persia and Babylon (Isaiah 3:10, 12:8, 10; Daniel 5:29). Also, isolating Joseph's brothers from him and from the Egyptians at the dining table (Genesis 43: 32), explaining the reason by the expression "*Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for this is an abomination to the Egyptians.*" Moreover, mentioning that "*every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians*" (Genesis 46:34). The author made it clear that he is familiar with "*the land of the priests in Egypt*" (Genesis 47: 32).

3- Geographically speaking, the author is **aware of the features of the River Nile**, as well as the sand of the desert (Exodus 2:12), the Egyptian bulrushes (Exodus 2:3), the location of Ramases, Succoth (Exodus 2: 37), Etham (Exodus 13:20) and Pi-Hahiroth (Exodus 14:2). His

¹ McKenzie: *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 947.

² *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 1012.

³ *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 67.

realization of its geographic location is obvious from his saying: “the wilderness has closed them in”(Exodus 24: 3).

(4) Many scholars believe that the statutes concerning the Levites (Exodus 20-23; 25: 31; 35: 40; Numbers 5: 6; 8: 10; 15-19), and mentioned in the Book of Leviticus, carry signs that they were established in the days of Moses, and not at a later time. In this regard, some of the evidences presented by ‘Rawlinson’ are¹:

1- Prof. Maine² believes that these statutes are primitive and fitting Moses era, having been a mixture of religious, civil, behavioral and economic statutes.

2- The Statutes were characterized by a historical and events telling aspect, evidence that they were written during the journey in the wilderness.

3- Certain Statutes were fit for nomads, living in tents.

4- It is noteworthy that these statutes avoided speaking of the sun in a revering way, as in worship, proving that the writer cared about keeping them from worshipping the sun, as the Egyptians did.

(5) Some scholars believe that the Book of Deuteronomy bears in itself the testimony that it was written in the time of Moses, and not, as some others allege, during the reign of king Josiah or Manasseh. For example, the way it dealt with expelling the Canaanites from the land fits the days of Moses, and not those of the kings (Deuteronomy 20: 10- 20).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDIES OF THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

As we mentioned that in the twelfth century Bin Ezra figured out from what came in Genesis 12:6, that the writer of this Book seems to speak of the departure of the Canaanites as a past event, as though the writer had come after the prophet Moses.

In the seventeenth century (Year 1685), Richard Simon said that the five Books used Moses notes and memoirs, but that the real writer added some references. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes believes that these Books together with those of the Kings, are all written by Ezra the Scribe.

The following is a quick summary of the development of studies concerning the five Books:

1- The Old Documents Hypothesis

In summary, this hypothesis states that the prophet Moses referred to earlier documents, each of which is characterized by the use of a different title for God. H. B. Witter (Year 1711), noticed that God was sometimes called “Elohim,” and sometimes “Jehovah;” beside “creation” was mentioned twice in the Book of Genesis (1-3:24). This led him to believe in two earlier

¹ *Lex Mosica*, p. 21-26.

² *Ancient Law*, p. 16.

documents used by Moses, representing a tradition Moses received orally or in writing. The French Physician Jean Astruc (Year 1753) adopted the same hypothesis in his independent study from Witter, saying that Moses took his information after an 'Elohistic' document (that is, used the title Elohim), and a 'Yahwistic' (that used the title Jehovah). In addition there were ten other sources presenting small excerpts, with four trends. Lastly, the Book of Genesis appeared.

J. G. Eichorn, in his book 'Introduction to the Old Testament' (Year 1780-1783), also adopted the hypothesis of the existence of two documents, prior to Moses. While K. D. Ilgen called on the existence of three earlier sources, one of them used the title 'Jehovah,' while the other two used the title 'Elohim.'

2- THE FRAGMENT HYPOTHESIS

If the previous hypothesis was fundamentally based on the existence of two or three documents that the prophet Moses used for the writing of these Books, the hypothesis or the point of view adopted by 'Vater' (Year 1805 A D) and by 'Hartman' (Year 1831 A D), is based on the use of a variety of about 30 or more incomplete documents, independent of each other. This hypothesis did not find the compliance of scholars.

3- THE SUPPLEMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

It is based on the existence of several documents following the prophet Moses integrated together by the writer of these Books. This hypothesis was suggested by H. G. Ewald (Year 1831 A D), followed by Bleek (Year 1836 A D), then adopted by J. C. F. Tuch (Year 1838 A D) in his comments on the Book of Genesis; and F. Delitzsch (Year 1852 A D). Ewald believed in the existence of an 'Elohistic' document in a later time than Moses, to which was added other older parts, like the Ten Commandments, and the Book of the Covenant. Someone else caught this hypothesis and added to it parts from a Yahwistic document, using the title "Jehovah." Although Ewald was the founder of this hypothesis, yet he, himself, succeeded to destroy it, claiming in his book 'History of Israel' (Year 1843-955 A D), the existence of two trends: Elohistic and Yahwistic.

4- THE NEW DOCUMENTS HYPOTHESIS

H. Hupfeld (Year 1853 A D) presented a new trend of study of the five Books. In his study of the Book of Genesis, he claimed that the documents, being beyond the days of Moses, are not complementary to each other, but represent three integrated trends: of Elohistic origin, late Elohistic, and Yahwistic. Then came a fourth hand to bind these three trends together.

In the year 1805, Wette claimed the existence of another document pertaining to the Book of Deuteronomy, discovered in the year 1621 B.C. and it was written a little while before then. Later on, in the year 1854, E. Reuss claimed the existence of a fourth document that he called the '*Priestly Document*.' These documents were assigned the following symbols:

E, to the Elohist – divine. *J*, to the Yahwistic – Jewish.
D, to Deuteronomy - concerning the Book of Deuteronomy;
P, to the Priestly – for priesthood

Graft published this hypothesis in the year 1660, to be defended by A. Keunen (Year 1869-1870), then, given some classical expressions by J. Welhausen (Year 1878 A.D.), in his work (The History of Israel). This hypothesis was known by the name of ‘Graft - Welhausen,’ or, just ‘Welhausen,’ to which some modifications were made later on.

5- THE TRADITIONAL-HISTORICAL CRITICISM

With the beginning of the twentieth century, a strong tendency appeared, embracing the importance of returning to the authentic traditional thought: the writer of these Books is the prophet Moses himself, in spite of the few expressions added after him, as the story of his death.

This hypothesis was introduced in Scandinavia in the school of Uppsala, by I. Engel (Year 1945), who claimed that it is wrong to assume the existence of parallel documents for these Books; especially with the fact that there is no trace of such documents.

RESPONDING TO THE OBJECTIONS OF CRITICS

If the previously mentioned studies are based on a completely intellectual way of thinking, remote from the issue of faith, and the divine inspirational concept, I shall offer here a quick presentation of the objections to the authorship of Moses for these Books, and the responses of certain scholars to these objections.

1- First objection

We noticed that the main factor for the emergence of these hypotheses was the reference to God by several titles, particularly ‘Elohim’ and ‘Jehovah,’ which led the critics to the believe in the existence of more than one source for these Books.

Response

If the author was just editor for several documents, he would have no trouble using another title for God and if so, it won’t be frequent or, in the same context. In the story of creation (Genesis 1:1; 2:4), God is called ‘Elohim;’ and in the completion of the same story (Genesis 2: 4- 25), the name ‘Jehovah’ is used. Likewise, in the story of the great flood (Genesis 6:5; 9:19), the two names are successively used... This confirms that **the divine inspiration, intended to present God to believers, through more than one name**, revealing to them His work with humanity. Sometimes, the name ‘*Elohim*’ is used - a plural of the word ‘God,’ to confirm the ‘Trinitarian’ belief and to prepare humanity for the work of salvation. As the Father sends the Son to redeem us, and the Holy Spirit sets forth a fellowship between us and the Father.

Some other times, the name ‘*Jehovah*’ is used, to reveal that He is beyond any comprehension¹. The third name is ‘*Meshadai*,’ meaning the Almighty, who cares for every big and small detail in the life of His children. A fourth title is ‘*El Elyon*,’ namely, the Exalted, to lift up the hearts of His believers to the highest. Then a fifth name, ‘*El Olam*,’ namely, the Eternal, to take us beyond time so we may long to be with Him in Eternity. Briefly, the various names for God are not proofs of the existence of other documents for the Books, but their purpose is to reveal the secret of God and His characteristics that shape our faith, and interact with our life, concepts and behavior.

2- Second objection

Certain scholars object saying that Moses was an actual leader and not a writer².

Response

If we were introduced to the works of Moses as a leader, through the Holy Bible, this same Book presents him to us also as an author³. In his time, or after him, there was no man more capable of writing than him, whom the Holy Spirit could use to present the living word of God of the time along with the divine Law.

A- If Moses “*was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*” (Acts 7: 22) including writing, God, who sanctifies human gifts, granted him what is greater than the wisdom of the Egyptians. He filled him with His divine wisdom so that he can present to us these Scriptures, through the inspiration of Holy Spirit, in order for God to work through it in all generations.

B- *Moses received information pertaining to creation, from the tradition, that was probably handed over from Adam, the first man, to the last of his grandsons.* And the latter, told what he heard from Adam to the last of his own grandsons, and so on. Thus, Moses was to be the fifth person who receives the tradition after Adam. Some scholars believe that Joseph, after coming to Egypt, followed by his father, has placed the manuscripts he received from his fathers in Pharaoh’s safe, then Moses acquired them from the palace.

C- The five Books included the Ten Commandments and the Law, which Moses himself received. Moreover, *he recorded the events of the exodus and the wilderness in such details that no one else knows as much as he does.*

D- Moses lived almost 40 years in the wilderness; and although preoccupied with his responsibilities as a leader, he listened to the counsel of his father-in-law ‘Jethro’ (Exodus 18:13-26). *He handed over the small cases to the Elders, to free himself to the more important ones.* This gave him the chance and the adequate time to write.

E- The 40 years he spent as a shepherd gave him the gift of contemplating in God’s love

¹ سفر الخروج، ١٩٨١، أصحاح ٣.

² Green: *General Introduction*, N.Y. 1899, p. 9.

³ J. H. Raven: *O. T. Introduction*, 1910, p. 93.

and His ordinances, which inflamed him to write later on. If he, humbly proclaimed to be “*slow of speech and slow of tongue*” (Exodus 4:10), he, truly, became a holy living instrument in the hand of God, to provide an active leadership coherent with holy writing.

3- THIRD OBJECTION

Certain scholars object to refer these Books to the prophet Moses, because of what came in the Books, from Joshua until the captivity, giving the impression that the statutes concerning the Levites were not there; basing that view on certain phrases, the most important of which is the following:

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat. For I did not speak to your fathers or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying: ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you’” (Jeremiah 7:21-23) (and see also Amos 5:21-25; Micah 6:6-8; Isaiah 1:11-15)

These critics claim that if Moses has written the five Books that included the statutes and rites of sacrifices, Jeremiah and other prophets would not have spoken with this phrase.

Response

It should not be understood from the words of Jeremiah and others that they were unaware of the rites of sacrifices, nor that the Book of Leviticus was not yet written. These phrases should not be interpreted literally, but rather, it should be understood in the following way:

A- The Jews mixed between offering sacrifices to God and to idols. They assumed that they pleased God by offering him sacrifices, while they offered pagan sacrifices to fulfill their lusts. That is why it is said: “*They sacrificed to demons, not to God*” (Deuteronomy 32: 17). In the Book of Ezekiel, it came that the Jews practiced pagan worships with all their defilements, along with the Jewish rites; so, God counted their worship as spiteful toward Him, and His glory departed from His temple and city (See Ezekiel 10:18, 19; 11:32-33). God is not deceived by sacrifices, nor bribed by offerings from unclean evil hands, that is why He proclaims that He did not ask for sacrifices nor is He in need for offerings.

B- The silence of the prophets, concerning the statutes mentioned in the Book of Leviticus, does not imply their unawareness of that Book, on the assumption that it was not yet written, but because the backsliding in their time, was not one of disobedience of religious rites, but rather a backslide in behavior; that is why they cared for the practical behavioral side.

C- As long as sacrifices were mere symbols of that of the Messiah, God considers Himself as though He did not command them since they deviated from their goals, and became formalities, practiced only to satisfy the conscience, without eagerness for reconciliation.

D- If critics argued that the prophets knew the Book of Deuteronomy and learned from it rather than from the Book of Leviticus, this is because Deuteronomy is the recalling of the actual Laws that came in Leviticus. Moreover, the prophet Amos pointed to Leviticus (Amos 4:4-5, 5:21).

4- FOURTH OBJECTION

Some critics use geographical evidences, on the assumption that they confirm that these Books were written in a later time rather than in the time of Moses; as for instance saying: “On this side of the Jordan” (Deuteronomy 1:1, 5; 3:8; 41-49), as though the author was speaking on the west side of the Jordan, to refer to the other side (the eastern), where Moses has been. But as J. Raven says, this expression can be used by him, who was in the east of Jordan or, equally, in a foreign land; giving examples of that (Deuteronomy 3: 20, 25; Joshua 9: 1; Numbers 22: 1; 32: 32; Genesis 50: 10, 11).

Of the other geographical evidences: The five Books mention the city of ‘Dan’ instead of ‘Laish’ (Genesis 14:14; Deuteronomy 34:1); although ‘Laish’ carried this name only after the victory of the Danites following the time of Moses. Raven responds to this by saying that the ‘Dan’ mentioned in Genesis 14:14, is not necessarily ‘Laish,’ but may be another city that carries the same name. As to what came in Deuteronomy 34:1, we know that the last chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy was written after Moses’ death.

Also the region, called “*Havoth Jair, to this day*” (Deuteronomy 3:14) hints that the author of that Book came after the Prophet Moses; as this name was given at a later time (Numbers 32:41; Joshua 13:3; Judges 10:4). But Raven answers, that this name means (villages of Jair), to which Jair, son of Manasseh, gave his name, as he did in Bashan (Deuteronomy 3:14). Moreover, Jair, mentioned in the five Books, is not necessarily the one mentioned in the Book of Judges.

Likewise, the saying of Joseph: “*For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews*” (Genesis 40:5), even though the Hebrews have not yet possessed that land, not even in the days of Moses. Responding to this, the word “*Hebrews,*” used to refer to those who had not settled in their land; thus, Abraham was called “nomad” (Genesis 14: 13), although he has been recognized as a leader, “a mighty prince,” among his people (Genesis 23: 6), also Isaac (Genesis 26: 13) and Jacob were referred to in the same manner (Genesis 34). The land where these three Patriarchs lived for almost two centuries, probably carried the name ‘the land of Hebrews,’ and for the same reason, the wife of Potiphar called Joseph, in more than one occasion, ‘a Hebrew’ (Genesis 39: 14, 17).

5- Fifth objection

Certain archeological evidences were also used to object the reference of these Books to Moses; as for example the word ‘omer’ in “*An omer is one-tenth of an ephah*” (Exodus 16:36);

claiming that, archeologically, the ‘omer’ was not known in the days of Moses. To answer that, we say that, since the word ‘ephah’ was derived from the Egyptian language, it was easy for the Hebrews departing from Egypt to be familiar with it; that is why the author interpreted the ‘omer’ by the ‘ephah,’ known to Moses and his contemporaries.

Likewise the expression ‘*the shekel of the sanctuary*’ (Exodus 30:13; 38:24-26), that gives the impression that the temple and its rites were already established¹. That can be answered by saying that, since this expression was new at that time, it was repeated three times (Exodus 30:13; Leviticus 27:25; Numbers 3:47), because it was not yet used.

Moses speaks of the origin of ‘Og’ king of Bashan and of his iron bedstead (Deuteronomy 3:11), as if his readers did not know him, although, in the days of Moses, that king was defeated and killed², so why would he tell them about him? This objection can be answered by the fact that Moses was writing to the common people who most probably were not knowledgeable about these things, even though they fought and defeated that king; as well as writing to the future generations.

6- SIXTH OBJECTION

Some critics depended on certain historical evidences, to prove that Moses was not the author of the five Books, like the poetic quote that mentioned in the Book of Numbers 21:14, 15, after the ‘book of the wars of the Lord’ by ‘Arnon’... under the assumption that, as that book was contemporary to Moses, there was no need for that explanation. Scholars answer that Moses was not only writing to his contemporaries who know these things, but also to all future generations.

They also depended on the word “then” in saying that “*And the Canaanites were (then) in the land*” (Genesis 12:6; 13:7), as an evidence that the Canaanites were not in the land when that Book was written, something that was not realized until after the days of Moses. J. Raven answers that the word “then” in Genesis 12:6, was natural and necessary; as without it, the reader may wonder if the Canaanites had already departed from the land at the time that Book was written. Confirming their presence in the days of Abraham, let alone, even in the days of Moses, would give the promise a greater strength - to grant it to his descendants despite their presence. As to mentioning it in Genesis 13:7, it represents an explanation, that there was not enough space for the livestock of both Abraham and Lot, “*as the Canaanites... then dwelt in the land.*”

Likewise, it came in Genesis 36:31, that “*Now these were the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel,*” as though the author was a contemporary of the era of the Kings. This can be argued that although Moses, the author of these Books, was not a contemporary of the era of Kings, yet, talking of kings reigning in the land of Edom, he understood that God’s promise will surely be realized, through Kings reigning over the

¹ Strack: *Elinléitung in das Alte Testament, Munich, 1898. p. 25.*

² Strack: *Elinléitung in das Alte Testament, Munich, 1898. p. 25.*

children of Israel; as it was said to Abraham, “*And Kings shall come from you*” (Genesis 17:6); Jacob received the same promise (Genesis 35:11), and so prophesied in his blessing to his son ‘Judas’ (Genesis 49:10); and as also prophesied by Balaam in the days of Moses (Numbers 24:7). As it has been established in Moses’ mind, that Israeli Kings will eventually be set over the children of Israel; he presented special ordinances concerning their features and principles governing their election (Deuteronomy 17: 14-20). It is as though Moses, in his previous expression (Genesis 36:31), proclaims that, although there were eight Kings in Edom, yet God will set for His chosen people their own kings, despite the fact that so far that promise was not yet realized¹.

Some people may question: If Moses was the author of these Books, why did not he mention the name of the princess who emerged out of the water, and that of the Pharaoh who afflicted him; about the death of his wife ‘Zepporah,’ and the name of his Cushite wife; beside talking about himself as a humble man! To answer that, we say that, not mentioning the names of the princess and the Pharaoh is natural because they were his contemporaries; and if the author lived at a later time, he would have been committed to mention both names, according to the tradition among the Jews. As to his silence concerning the death of his wife Zepporah, and ignoring to mention the name of his Cushite wife, the prophet, most probably, did that intentionally, as the second marriage was not popular at that time; he only referred to it, as a symbol of the entrance into faith by the Gentiles, represented by the Cushite woman. As to calling himself ‘very humble’ that was not out of boasting on his part, but the divine inspiration led him to proclaim that the main requirement for leadership is humility. We see the Psalmist also calling himself that (Psalm 9:13, 14; 10:17). Even as a man of God, Moses did not overlook nor disregard his shortcomings, recalling God’s chastisements, and he was deprived from entering into the promised land; yet, it is only fair for inspiration to note the good abilities God granted to him.

¹ Green: *Unity of Genesis*, N. Y. 1897, p. 425-9.

CONTENTS OF THE FIVE BOOKS

These Books presented us with a historical dialogue mingled with dogma that reveal God's plan concerning man. It revealed God, as the Creator of man, who cares for his spiritual, psychological, and physical needs; He gave him authority over all things; But, as man deprived himself of that unique position, God cared for his salvation, by electing the Patriarchs (fathers), as a preparation for electing His people, and to support them in every way, to deliver them from the land of bondage and to accompany them in the wilderness, to provide them with their material food and to present them with the holy statutes of the Law; to guide them, under the leadership of His prophet Moses, to the Mountain of Moab, where, on the shore of the River Jordan, He delivered them to a new Leader, Joshua, the symbol of Lord Jesus Christ, the Grantor of inheritance.

(1) The creation is the prelude to the history of salvation:

Genesis 1-11

(2) Electing the Patriarch is a prelude for electing the people of God:

Genesis 12-50

- ❖ Abraham 12 – 25.
- ❖ Isaac 25 – 26.
- ❖ Jacob 26 – 36.
- ❖ Joseph 37 – 50.

(3) Electing His people and liberates them from slavery:

Exodus 1-18

(4) Supporting His people: Exodus 19-40, Leviticus

- ❖ Making with them the covenant of the Law 19 – 24.
- ❖ Setting a tabernacle, and priests for Himself, in their midst 25 – 31.
- ❖ Renewing the two tablets, even after defiling the holies 32 – 34.
- ❖ Erecting the tabernacle 35 – 40.
- ❖ Offering of sacrifices using special rituals Leviticus 1-7.
- ❖ Ordaining Aaron and his sons Leviticus 8- 10.

AN INTRODUCTION TO **THE BOOK OF GENESIS**

THE NAME OF THE BOOK

In Hebrew, it is called ‘Pi-Rasheet,’ which is the first Hebrew word in the Book, meaning, “*In the beginning.*” As to calling it “Genesis,” this is according to the Septuagint Version, meaning “Origin” or (Beginning of things).

ITS WRITER

The prophet Moses; It has been the belief that he wrote it in Median, as he was shepherding the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law. More likely, he wrote it after receiving the two tablets of the Law. He learned how to write from the Egyptians, and gained from their wisdom. He, who taught the disciples to speak with tongues, on the day of the Pentecost, is surely able to teach Moses how to write.

ITS GOAL AND FEATURES

1- The theme of creation has preoccupied the old world, with all its religions, philosophies, and popular cultures, and carried a mixture of legends and myths. Moses committed himself **to write about creation with some simplicity, far from the old myths and can be understood even by the illiterate.** It is noteworthy that he did not present a ‘theology pertaining to creation - *A Ktisiology,*’ but he talked to us about creation as a way to understand the redeeming work of God. The divine inspiration did not intend to present theologies and philosophies, particularly those pertaining to creation, but to introduce us to the Creator, who cares to renew creation after its corruption. And, as said by a certain scholar that in Israel, the special theology pertaining to creation, ‘*Ktisiology,*’ is considered a secondary science, that depends on the theology pertaining to salvation, ‘*Soteriology*¹.’

In his interpretation of the Book of Genesis, **St. Didymus the Blind** believes that the divine goal of speaking about creation is to correct the false concepts, in this regard, which slipped into Israel as a result of the Egyptian pagan worships.

As for **St. Basil**, he confirms that the goal of the Church is not to study the nature of creatures (i.e., the hard philosophical and mental studies), but it is to look into their functions and usefulness², and, that Moses wrote in a simple way to confirm some of the facts that were distorted by atheist philosophers; He confirmed that the world is not a product of chance³, but the work of a genius Creator; and that the world is not eternal as God, it does not share His infinity,

¹ *Jerome: Biblical Comm., p. 8.*

² *Hexaameron hom. 1:8.*

³ *Hexaameron hom. 1:2.*

but has a beginning and an end¹.

2- This Book notes an important concept that touches our relationship with God. **Man, in God's eyes, is not a mere creature, amid millions of other earthly and heavenly creatures, but he is a unique being who carries the earthly features in the body**, and the heavenly ones in the spirit. He has his special esteem in God's eyes. God granted him the free will by which he differs from other earthly creatures. The earth, with all its might, and the stars, with all their greatness, run according to physical laws put for them; the animals behave according to a physical instinct, but man is a free being, who has the option to chose his way, and to behave according to his discretion.

That is why, God created man a master over earth, having authority over everything on earth and beneath it; in the sea or in air... even in space! He granted him **His image and likeness, and set him as His own ambassador**.

God's view of us and His pride in us are demonstrated in his yearning to relate Himself to us, when we are prepared for that; calling Himself the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob... He wishes to be a special God to everyone of His children.

3- This Book showed **God's exalted fatherhood to man**; He did not create him captive, as claimed by some contemporary philosophies; nor set him in humility, controlling him according to His discretion, but He set him as a beloved son, for whose sake He created the world; prepared for him the eternal glories, to raise him to where God, his Father is, in order to have fellowship in His glories, and to enjoy exalted fatherhood. It was said, that someone, on his deathbed, joyfully smiled while addressing God: 'Did You create the world for my sake, or, was it me who created it? Now, I can say that You are capable of gratifying me and caring for me!'

This is the goal of the Book of Genesis: to present us with God, the Creator of the material world and the Founder of the spiritual one. In His compassionate fatherhood, He created the material earth and the heaven, for my sake, to prepare me for His Second Coming, to enjoy the new heaven and earth in an angelic and eternal level.

4- Some believe that this is the most important of the Holy Bible books; laying the foundation for every revelation; opening the door for us to comprehend sound theological concepts: introducing us to God and His relationship, and His divine commandment and its work in our life. It talked to us about the human family in the Lord, and how He prepared the creation of man, built a holy family, a tribe, and then the people of God. He revealed to us the concept of marriage and family life, and told us about our relationship with the body and the physical world. He unveiled the devil, and revealed his deadly plans, and his yearning for the destruction of man. Finally, this Book lays the foundation for the history of salvation and prophecy, etc.

5- God, in His love for man, **presented him with His secrets**, as far as he can hold, not for the sake of mere intellectual knowledge, but to enter with him into a fellowship; like a friend

¹ *Hexameron hom. 1:3.*

who opens His heart to his fellow, to enter with him from day to day into new levels of friendship. For instance, when God tells us about His divine titles, it is to let us get to know Him through these titles, and to enjoy His work with, and in us. We do not find in this Book, theoretical philosophical writings, hard principles, or literal laws; But **we meet God transfigured as a friend**: We meet Him walking in the garden of Eden, in the morning blowing wind, to encounter the fallen man; and in the field, we see Him debating with Cain, the murderer; and in the rebellion of Babylon, we find Him coming down to see what man was doing; and in the heat of the day, He accepts, with His two angels, the hospitality of Abraham; and along the way, He meets Jacob in a fight to destroy his self pride.

6- As sin corrupted the sight of man, and deprived him from the ability to encounter his Almighty friend, this Book presented us with the method of worshipping God by two inseparable means: the sacrifice, for the sake of reconciliation, and the live behavior sustaining the attributes of God. Thus, this Book taught us the concept of worship, as a secret of reconciliation with God, through the sacrifice, and life with Him through partaking in active love.

7- We can say that **the whole Scriptures came to reveal what this Book contained about God's conversation with the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"** (Genesis 3: 15). The Holy Bible is proclaiming the bitter struggle, between the devil and man, that ends up in man's victory through the sacrifice of the Lord Christ (the woman's seed), though some men would perish, when they become victims going down to dust, to be crushed and devoured by the serpent.

8- In its presentation of the Patriarchs, the Book did not give us bare stories of their lives, but God's dealings with them, revealing that every move of their lives, and every action, however of no apparent importance, represents a part of God's salvation plan... namely, that God utilizes His children, in all their actions, as righteousness instruments, that work for His Kingdom, in their personal and their community life. But the Book clarified two aspects: the first is **that God is working in His children, but not without them**; Thus Abraham would not have stayed Abraham with all what he carried from grace and honor, a father of fathers, without Abraham Himself. God dignifies and sanctifies human freedom, and deals with us on a level of friendship - as between equals -, not as with solid machines that He moves mechanically. The second aspect is highlighting varied and marvelous heroisms, as those of Abraham the lover of God, Jacob who violated the first-born right, and Sarah the ideal wife... However, these came through the actual reality of the human beings, **the life of the hero was not free from human weakness**. He describes them as they are without overlook their fall in sin or their human weaknesses.

9- This Book began by talking of the work of God as a Creator, creating life out of nothing, but ends with Joseph in his shrouds in Egypt (Gen. 50: 29). The life that God set was corrupted by man's evil, as he got himself (the living man) into the shrouds of darkness and

uncleanness, to be buried in Egypt. It is significant that this Book ends with the burial in Egypt, in particular, known for the pyramids, the sphinx, and the art of mummification, still an object of scientific interest... as though man, whatever great are his art and great works and achievements, cannot get away from the shrouds. **He gets buried in Egypt, until the Savior Messiah comes to it on a thin cloud, to raise him up from the shrouds, and to free him from the darkness of the tomb.**

10- The prophet Moses, wrote this Book, in a historical style, to present us with the truth, simply and clearly, **away from the fictions and myths that were then filling the world.**

PROPHECIES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

The Book of Genesis presents to us the beginning of the prophecies concerning the coming of the Lord Christ as a Savior of the world. God promised man, immediately after his fall, that the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3: 15). He did not say the seed of man, because Christ the Lord came incarnated in the womb of the Virgin St. Mary, without the seed of a man, He crushed the head of the old serpent, the Devil (Revelation 20: 2; Romans 6: 20; 1 John 3: 8)

He did not leave the accomplishment of that promise vague, but designated the seed of Abraham for its realization: *“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed”* (Gen. 22: 18; Acts 2: 25; Galatians 3: 16); and Jacob specified that He is to come from the tribe of Judah, saying: *“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the people”* (Gen 49: 10; Matthew 2: 26; Luke 1: 32, 33).

SYMBOLS IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

If Christ the Lord, as the Savior of the world, is the center of the two Testaments of the Holy Bible, Genesis presented us with much about the Savior, not only through direct prophecies, but also through several symbols, that we shall talk about in some detail in due course, the most important of which are:

1- **The tree of life** in the middle of the garden of Eden (Gen 3: 22) refers to Christ the Lord, who declares His kingdom within the heart, as a tree of life in the middle of Paradise that delights the heart of the Father, as it delights our hearts. He is the Tree that gives life to the whole world (John 3:16).

2- After the fall, worship began by offering **bloody sacrifices**, as sign for the blood of Christ the Lord, the Unique Sacrifice, through Whom our worship is accepted as a sweet and pleasing aroma to the Father.

3- **The ark of Noah** and the **great flood** are symbols of Christ the Lord, the Grantor of renewal to the world, not through the water of the flood, but through that of Baptism. As for the wooden ark, it is the Cross that embraced the believers and kept them from destruction (1 Peter

2:20, 21).

4- **The offering of Melchizedek** (Genesis 14:18-20) is a symbol of the sacrifice of Christ the Lord in the New Testament, through the bread and wine, transformed into His body and blood, granting sanctification (Hebrew 8: 5-8).

5- **Isaac's submission to his father Abraham**, carrying the wood, offering himself even unto death (Genesis 22), symbolizes the submission of the incarnated Son to His Father, carrying the wooden cross ((Philippians 2: 8).

6- **Accomplishing marriages at the water wells**, as for example choosing Rebecca and Rachel, is a symbol of choosing the Church as the bride of Christ the Lord through the water of Baptism.

7- **The ladder seen by Jacob** set up between earth and heaven (Genesis 28:12), and angels ascending and descending on it, refers to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through which the reconciliation between heaven and earth is realized (2 Corinthians 5:18; Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 1:20, 21); The ascending angels are the Holy Church lifted up by Him to the bosom of His Father; while those descending, are the Jews who rejected Him, to go down to the abyss through their denying the cross.

8- **The life of Joseph** was rich in symbols of Christ the Lord in many respects, as:

a- Joseph was **the beloved son** of his father, as Christ the Lord, the Only-begotten Son, with Whom the Father was pleased.

b- His father gave **him a colored tunic**; referring to the Father giving His Son a Church of many talents.

c- Joseph descending to **visit his brothers**, refers to the descent of the Word of God to us to seek us as brothers.

d- **Casting Joseph in the pit and selling him**, symbolize the descent of the Lord Christ into Hades, and Judas' betraying Him.

e- His falling into **slavery in Egypt** without any sin from his part, but for his brothers' hatred, is the symbol of Christ the Lord becoming a slave for our sake.

f- **Leaving his garments in the hands of the Egyptian woman**, refers to the Lord Christ leaving His shrouds in the tomb; as death could not overcome Him or hide the resurrection that is in Him.

g- Joseph's encounter, in prison, with **the king's butler who was acquitted the baker** who was sentenced to death, refers to His resurrection and death.

h- **Saving his brothers' life** refers to the glorified Lord Christ, Savior of humanity and Grantor of its life.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS AND THE HOLY BIBLE

The Book of Genesis, as the first Book in the Holy Bible, is considered as the living prelude to understanding the word of God. It gave us the broad lines that were manifested and

realized in the Books to follow. In the Book of Genesis, as God reveals His love for man through creation, He continues to talk about His love by renewing creation, until the new earth and the new heaven appear in the Book of Revelation.

In the Book of Genesis, God promised Abraham that his children will inherit the kingdom of heaven. And, in the New Testament, the kingdom was revealed in the children of Abraham... We can say with **St. Augustine**: [In the New Testament alone the Old Testament is clear, the New Testament is concealed in the Old.]

In the Book of Genesis we touch the Person of the Lord Christ as the Savior, revealed through clear prophecies and numerous symbols. Christ the Lord remains as the center of the Books, to see Him “He is Himself, yesterday, today, and till eternity.” He came to save the sinners, and to promise His Ultimate Coming to gather us to His glory as His holy bride.

OUTLINE

(1) The Early History:

- 1- Creation of the world and the fall of man. 1-3.
- 2- Murdering Abel. 4.
- 3- Noah and renewal of the world. 5-10.
- 4- The tower of Babel. 11.

(2) The First Patriarchs:

- 1- Abraham. 12-25.
- 2- Isaac. 21-27.
- 3- Jacob. 25-36.
- 4- Joseph. 37-50.

THE FIRST SECTION

THE EARLY HISTORY
CHAPTER 1 – CHAPTER 11

CHAPTER 1

CREATION OF THE WORLD

The divine inspiration began the Holy Bible by proclaiming God as a Creator, who prepared everything for the sake of man, setting him forth through love until, finally, entering with him into His eternal Kingdom, to enjoy the everlasting glories.

❖ An Introduction.

| | |
|--|--------|
| 1- God, the Creator. | 1. |
| 2- The Spirit of God hovering over the face of waters. | 2. |
| 3- The first day: “Let it be light.” | 3-5. |
| 4- The second day: The firmament. | 6-8. |
| 5- The third day: The plants. | 9-13. |
| 6- The fourth day: Creation of the great lights. | 14-19. |
| 7- The fifth day: The Reptiles, fishes, and Birds. | 20-23. |
| 8- The sixth day: The animals and man. | 24-31 |

INTRODUCTION

In this study I like to be committed to the spirit of the Church, that sees the Scripture, not as a scientific or a philosophic book, but as a source of life with God, to be enjoyed and lived by man. That is why, when **St. Basil the Great**, wrote his articles on the six days of creation ‘*The Hexaemeron*,’ he made it clear that the work of the Church is not researching the nature of things and creatures, but studying their work and benefits. Likewise, **St. Augustine** declared: [It is beyond your ability to comprehend how God created these things; as you, yourself, are created to obey Him as a slave, in order to comprehend Him as a friend¹.]

It is as though we, being creatures of God, should receive His work with joy considering ourselves to be slaves; and as He grants us wisdom and understanding of His mysteries, we would live with Him as His friends and beloved.

We can concisely introduce the following remarks on the presentation of the Book of Genesis on the creation:

a- This Book presented us with the events of creation in a simple and true way, in order to be understood and enjoyed by the simple man, and appreciated for its depth by the scientist.

b- Many western scholars confirmed that what came in the Book of Genesis, did not contradict the scientific facts according to modern thought. In their view, what came in it concerning the evolution of creation conforms to a great extent with the scientifically accepted theories in that concern. Many research studies on this issue, were published by pious scientists;

¹ On Ps. 102.

but I do not want to go into details that take us away from interpreting the word of God.

The Church of St. George, the great martyr, in Sporting, Alexandria, Egypt, published a simplified study by Professor Dr. Youssef Riad, dealing with this subject, titled, 'Conforming between modern science and the Holy Bible.' Likewise, the Diocese of Youth, issued a publication on 'The six days of creation' by Dr. Fawzi Elias.

c- It is to be noted that the word "**day**" in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, does not mean a 24-hour day, but implies a time era which may extend to millions of years. The sun, the moon, and the rest of the stars, were not yet created until the fourth era, and so, there was, then, no "time" as we have nowadays. Likewise there was day and night in the current tangible sense. Several Church Fathers confirmed this, like **St. Jerome**¹. And even after creation, the Scripture often speaks of a "day" in a sense beyond our comprehension; as for example the saying of the Psalmist, "*For a day your courts is better than a thousand*" (Psalm 84:10; also see Psalm 90: 4; and 2 Peter 3: 8).

The word "day," in the Scripture, came according to several concepts: It often implies 'eternity,' where there is no beginning, as when the Father addressed the Son saying: "*You are My Son; Today I have begotten You*" (Psalm 2:7; Acts 13:32; Hebrew 1:5); and calling the Father, "*The Ancient of days*" (Daniel 7:9), meaning "the Eternal." About the "day," in the sense of its "eternity" - beyond time - it is described as "*The day of the Lord*" (Acts 2:20); that is to say, His ultimate coming, when time comes to an end. And it is said of the Lord Jesus Christ: "To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18).

d- Some people may object to what came in the Book of Genesis concerning the creation of the first man. Based on the discovery of fossilized bones of man, dated to more than million years of age; beside the discovery of ancient art inscriptions of the early man... How can we interpret that?

1- By a simple calculation, we realize that the present population of the world, could not be the product of more than 6000 years. This is the case if we assume that every family would produce three children, and subtract a high ratio of mortality, both of natural and catastrophic causes. If we accept the theory of a million year history of man on earth, one single man in a million years would produce descendants, which thousand folds of the earth area could never accommodate.

2- Assuming that every era of time could be several millions of years long, these fossilized bones could be related to mammals that carried some human features and capabilities, but lack the "*Breath of Life*" that God gave specially to Adam and Eve. These creatures therefore are not to be counted as human, even if they carry certain similarities.

e- If this Book present to us a very concise chapter of the work of God at the beginning of creation, it means that God, who was working for our sake, still keeps on His creative work in

¹ Hom. 1.

our life, unceasingly. What He formerly did will not come to an end; He keeps on working in man's life, to make of his depths a new heaven and a new earth, to be dwelt by righteousness; according to the words of Christ our Lord: "*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working*" (John 5:17). Therefore in our present interpretation, we should seek the continuous work of God in our inner life, to create in us continually, renewing our depths.

I pray, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to be able to present the spiritual interpretation, along with the historical and literal interpretations.

1- GOD THE CREATOR

The Book of Genesis began with this simple introduction: "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1).

If the expression "*In the beginning*" does not imply a particular time; as time has not yet existed, because the stars with their precise systems were not yet there; But it means that the material world has a beginning, and not eternal, as some Philosophers claim, sharing with God His eternity. This is what **St. Basil** confirmed in His work 'The six days of creation' or the (*Hexaemeron*), saying, that the expression "In the beginning" does not imply a certain time, otherwise the beginning would have a beginning and an end; and so this beginning would have a start, thus entering into an endless series of beginnings. But, "The beginning" here, means a preliminary movement, and not a time quantity; as for example saying: "*The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*" (Proverbs 9: 10)¹. He also says: [Do not assume, man, that the seen world has no beginning, just because the celestial bodies move in a circular course; that because of the difficulty to fix a point of beginning for that circular movement, you think it is by nature, with no beginning².] He also says: [Whatever begins at a certain time, would also end at a certain time³.] This does not imply the existence of time at the beginning of the movement, but confirms the uprooting of the theory of eternity. Although there was no time, yet, there was a beginning, before which the world was naught. Science confirms the non-eternity of material⁴.

Several Church Fathers adopt, beside this literal or historical interpretation for "In the beginning," the symbolic or spiritual interpretation; believing that it means "In Jesus Christ," or "In the Word of God," the heavens and the earth were created. In the following are some of these interpretations:

❖ "The Son, Himself, is the beginning. When the Jews asked Him 'Who are You'? He answered them, saying: "*I am from the beginning*" (John 8:25)⁵.

St. Augustine

¹ *Hexaemeron hom. 1:6.*

² *Hexaemeron hom. 1:3.*

³ *Hexaemeron hom. 1:3.*

⁴ راجع د. فوزي الياس: ستة أيام الخليقة ص ١١ : ١٤ .

⁵ *PL 46:821.*

❖ “Who is the beginning of everything, other than our Lord and the Savior of all men” (1 Timothy 4: 10), Jesus Christ, “The firstborn over all creation” (Col 1: 15)? In that beginning, that is, in His Word, “God created the heavens and the earth.” And as the Evangelist John says at the beginning of His Gospel: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made, that was made*” (John 1:1-3). The Scripture does not talk about a time beginning, but about this beginning, that is the Savior, by whom the heavens and the earth were made¹.

Origen

❖ Some think of “*The beginning*” in term of time, but he who contemplates in the word “the beginning,’ would realize that it carries more than just one meaning. Sometimes it means ‘the cause,’ the meaning here would be that the heavens and the earth exist in the cause’... Actually everything was done by the “Word;” as in Jesus Christ, everything in heaven or on earth were created; the seen and the unseen things².

St. Didymus the Blind

In short, we say that God created the world in a certain beginning; and the world did not share eternity with Him. On the other hand, the Word of God is the beginning, who has no beginning, the Creator of everything. “*In the beginning ‘Elohim’ created the heavens and the earth*” (Gen 1:1)

The noun ‘*Elohim*’ came in plural, while the verb “*created*,” according to the Arabic version, came in singular; as the Creator is the Holy Trinity, the One in essence, in nature, and in Deity.

The prophet Moses confirmed that God is the Creator; thus uprooting from his people the many legends that filled the world at that time, concerning the topic of creation; as well as the claim of certain philosophers that the world came as a mere chance. Professor Dr. Youssef Riad discussed that issue in his work³.

Finally, he says that “*Elohim created the heavens and the earth*,” meaning that the heavenly, with all their hosts, were created first, to be followed by earth, and all that belong to it.

If the heavens refer to the human soul, where God chooses to dwell, as His heavens; and the body, through its sanctification becomes a holy earth, in Jesus Christ, we would enjoy these heavens and earth; that is to say, we enjoy a soul, that is a temple for the Lord, and a sanctified body that accounts of His kingdom.

¹ In Gen. hom 1:1.

² In Gen. hom 1.

³ التوافق بين العلم الحديث والكتاب المقدس، ص ٨-١٩.

2- THE SPIRIT OF GOD AND THE WATERS¹

“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1: 2)

It was said that the earth was *“without form, and void;”* and according to the Septuagint version, *“unseen, and incomplete.”* **St. Basil the Great** explains its being *“unseen”* by the fact that man was not yet been created to see it, because it was completely covered with water, and light has not yet shone on it; thus, making everything obscure. As to it being *“incomplete,”* that was because of its inability of producing plants².

At any rate, if the divine inspiration, declared that the ‘Father,’ has created the heavens and earth, by His ‘Word’; Here is revealed, the role of the Holy Spirit, that has been hovering over the face of the waters, to create, out of the formless and void earth, a good and beautiful world. The Holy Spirit, up to this very day, descends on the waters of Baptism, to sanctify it, to make man, who is corrupted by sin, that made him a ruined and void earth, incomplete and unseen because of being deprived from God’s lights, and a new heaven and a new earth; that is to say, granting us the new birth, in which we enjoy a sanctified soul, with the image of God our Creator, and a sanctified body, whose members are instruments of righteousness for God. The following are some quotes from the Church Fathers on this matter:

❖ The first waters begot life, so one should not wonder that the water of Baptism is also able to grant life... The Spirit of God was carried on the Holy waters, He who recreates whomever is baptized. The Holy One was carried on the sanctified waters, or rather on the waters that receive sanctification from Him. By that, the water was sanctified by the Spirit, and was given the ability to sanctify. That is why, if water has been the first factor in the topic of creation, it got the secret of sanctification through beseeching God³.

Tertullian

❖ The new creation is realized by the water and the Spirit, in the same way that the world was created, when the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters⁴.

St. Clement of Alexandria

❖ The water was the beginning of the world, as the Jordan was the beginning of the Gospel⁵.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ If Baptism on that day, was pre-proclaimed through the shadow, there could not be a true, and sure Baptism, without the Spirit⁶.

¹ للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، ١٩٨١، ص ٢٧.

² *Hexaemeron* 2:1.

³ *De Baptismo* 2.

⁴ *Ecol Proph* 7.

⁵ *Cat. Lect.* 3:5.

⁶ *On Ps. hom* 10.

St. Jerome

As to the expression “**hover**,” **St. Basil** says that a Syrian scholar believes that the Syrian language is capable of giving more meaning than the Hebrew; being translated as “to embrace;” as though the Spirit liken a bird embraces eggs, to provide them with life through its own warmth¹. **St. Ambrose** believes that the movement of the Spirit, here, is a continuous movement of love, for a creative work in the life of man, saying: [How can He Who has been moving before the creation of the earth cease to move after creating it?!²]

3- THE FIRST DAY: LET IT BE LIGHT

The first work presented by God, was setting forth of light: “*Then God said, ‘Let there be light;’ and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and morning were the first day*” (Gen. 1: 3-5)

In this text, it is to be noted:

(1) Until recently, some scientists objected to this statement, saying: How could light forth in the first stage, before the existence of the sun, as the prevailing thought was that the sun was the source of light. But recent research came to confirm the unexpected fact, that light materially preceded the existence of the sun. Here, the eminence of the Holy Bible and the divine inspiration were evident.

In short, it can be said that the prevailing scientific view, nowadays, is that our solar system, originated from a dark haze, widely spread in the universal space (haze is a cloud of gases existing between the stars). That is why matter of haze is extremely thin, in a state of rarefaction, but its far apart atoms are continuously moving around a point of gravity in the center of the haze; and, through the continuous movement, the haze contracts, and its density gradually increases toward the center; consequently increasing the friction of the atoms rapidly leading to an increase in the temperature of the haze. And Through continuation of temperature increase, the radiation produced by the haze becomes visible; causing lights to appear for the first time, although very faint. That was how light first appeared before the formation of the sun in its present form, that took place in the fourth stage (the Fourth day)... Light appeared when the sun was in its original state, before it was fully formed.

It is amazing how the words of **St. John Chrysostom** of the fourth century, came conforming with the discoveries of the twentieth century, saying: [The light of the sun, that was in the first day, of no form, came to have its final form on the fourth day³.]

St. Augustine, probably had the same thought, when he said that the light that emerged

¹ Hexaemeron 2:6.

² Of the Holy Spirit 2:5.

³ د. فوزي الياس، ص ١٨، ١٩.

on the first day was not produced by the sun, but probably was material light, coming from exalted places, beyond our vision¹.

(2) From the symbolic side, **St. Augustine**² believes that that light concerns the holy heavenly city that embraces the saintly angels, and where the believers enjoy eternity called by the apostle, “The Jerusalem above,... which is the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26); in which we shall have our portion, having been said, “You are the sons of light and the sons of day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:5). **St. Augustine** believes that the heavenly enjoyed that light that emerged on the first day, through watching the amazing works of God along all the successive stages; Yet if their knowledge of creation is compared with that of God, theirs is counted as (evening).

We can say that the works of God began with the setting forth of light, for the angels to behold and glorify Him. Likewise, at the onset of the new creation, the Lord shone on us with His divine light, from the holy tomb, with His resurrection, so that, as we become raised in Him, His glory would be proclaimed in us. In our new creation - in the water of Baptism - we enjoy the divine light, the light of His resurrection, working in us, as the first divine work in our life. That is the reason for calling Baptism, “*The Sacrament of Enlightenment.*”

(3) God divided the light from the darkness, so that we receive the light as children of the light and of the day, and reject the darkness, so as not to fall under the fatal night of ignorance.

God grants us the inner light to scatter the ancient darkness, according to the saying of the apostle: “*You were once darkness*” (Ephesians 5: 8). He also grants us the Spirit of discernment, so as to separate, with the Spirit of God, between light and darkness, so as not to fall under the prophetic woe, “*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter*” (Isaiah 5:20).

(4) “**Darkness**” is not a substance created by God, but it is a deprivation of light. Once light appeared, darkness was exposed and recognized. Nevertheless, as **St. Augustine** says, God orders the light, that He created, and the darkness He did not, and they obey Him³.

(5) **St. Hippolytus of Rome** believes that [On the first day, God created things out of nothingness; But other days, He did not create things out of nothingness, but, rather from things He created on the first day, transforming them according to His pleasure⁴.]

Several Fathers commented on the phrase “...said,... and there was,” that the whole, creation along the six stages, took place as a result of the divine utterance. **St. Ambrose** says: [God did not create things with instruments or art, but “*He spoke and it was done*” (Psalm 33:9); the power of action lies in the divine utterance⁵.] And **St. Basil the Great** says, [Utterance is, in

¹ *City of God 11:7.*

² *City of God 11:7.*

³ *On Ps. 10.*

⁴ *In Gen. 1:6.*

⁵ *Of the Holy Spirit 2:148.*

itself, an action¹.]

(6) **St. Basil** comments on the phrase: “*God saw the light, that it was good*” (Gen. 1:4; 12, 18, 21), that [God does not see something as good, through admiring it by eye, tasting its beauty by mind, as we usually do, but sees it as good, when it is perfect according to His will, and beneficial to the end².]

Many Fathers spoke of the ‘goodness’ of creation... “*God saw it, and it was good;*” Yet, man, by his corruption, corrupted the use of the good creation. That is why, as the Lord Christ came to renew our fallen nature, as though creating it anew, we, do no see in the world anything evil. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says about things that look corrupt, [God’s creation is not corrupt; so if it so became, you have the cure: Seal it with the sign of the cross, and give God praise and glory; then its corruption will be taken away³.]

(7) He ends His talk about the first day, or the first stage, by saying: “*So the evening and the morning were the first day.*” He started with the evening, then ended with the morning. According to the Jewish tradition, a day starts with the eve, to be followed by the morning. So, if the evening, according to **St. Augustine**, refers to the perishable body, and the morning refers to the ministry of righteousness or light, so evening precedes morning, namely, the body will be at the service of righteousness, and not the righteousness, at the service of body lusts⁴. Thus if we have started our life with the evening, let us set forth, by the Holy Spirit, to the morning, so as not to live as carnals, but as spirituals.

(8) Ending our talk about setting forth the light, we introduce what **St. Augustine** said concerning it: that it refers to the creation of the heavenly - namely the hosts of angels, who were created first. The separation of light from darkness refers to the fall of a group of these angels, through pride, to turn into darkness. **St. Augustine** believes that this separation took place before the fall, with a prior knowledge from God⁵. However, that view is not acceptable, as God does not separate, except after the fall.

4- The second day... The firmament

He probably means by ‘*firmament*’ the space directly above the earth, in which birds fly, and not the space where the stars are. We can comprehend the way that utterance of God was realized, if we know that earth was in a state of continuous boiling, and surrounded by a sheath of dense vapor. During the interval between the first and the second stages, temperature started to decrease, leading to the settling down of vapor, and clearing of the atmosphere. As to calling the firmament ‘heaven,’ this is in a sense of giving this name to anything that is exalted and high

¹ *Hexaemeron* 2:6.

² *Hexaemeron* 3:10.

³ *In 1 Tim. Hom.* 12.

⁴ *On Ps.* 71.

⁵ *City of God* 11:23.

above the earth¹.

That firmament divided the waters which were above (the clouds), from the waters which were beneath (the seas and oceans). This chapter, beside its literal realization, carries a spiritual concept, that touches man's life. Thus, if the spiritual man receives, at the beginning, a setting forth of the divine shine within his inner depths, it is fitting for him to carry the firmament that divides between waters and waters, to receive the waters of the Holy Spirit, the Exalted and Life-Giver (John 4:14); and to get high above the waters that are beneath, that is to say of the depth, dwelt by the dragon, that the ancient serpent, and the marine beast, the killer of human soul (Revelation 12:7; 20: 3). Whoever enjoys setting forth in the firmament, discerns between the grace of the Spirit, and the deceits of the devil.

Origen says: [As the believer connects himself to the waters above, that is high in the heaven, he becomes heavenly, and would seek the high and exalted things; would not have earthly thoughts, but everything heavenly; would "*seek those things that are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God*" (Colossians 3:1); to be worthy of God's praise, saying: "*God saw, it was good*".²."]

St. Augustine³ attacked what **Origen** said in his book '*De Principiis*,' that the waters above, are the good spirits, which were created by God, and remained on their goodness, on account of their attachment to God. But, once they isolated themselves from Him, they turned lowly, to be punished by God through casting them down to earth, and giving them bodies; as though the world in which we live, is a punishment given by God to fallen angels, who were clothed with bodies as a sort of chastisement. This theory was also rejected by **St. Epiphanius** and by the Fathers of the Church, as it distorts our look at the world, defiles the body, devaluates man, and gives the impression of reincarnation of the spirits.

5- THE THIRD DAY... THE PLANTS

Let us quote here the words of Professor Dr. Youssef Riad concerning the creation: [In the beginning of the Book of Genesis, we notice that the prophet Moses divided the works of God into six time periods, that end in the creation of man. Moses said that plants appeared first in the form of simple plants - grass; then developed into more complicated kinds, like legumes, then trees. Following that, animals appeared; aquatic animals obviously before birds, and these before man. This succession is the same one established by the science of Biology and Microbiology. Was Moses aware of our knowledge of the living things, in the twentieth century? Of course, not. Some will probably claim that it was a matter of pure coincidence; But, surely, it was God who granted him that knowledge.

¹ راجع دراسات في سفر التكوين للدكتور راغب عبد النور (مجلة مدارس الأحد سنة ١، ٢).

² In Gen. hom 1:2.

³ City of God 11:23.

Moses, in the Book of Genesis, wrote: “*God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear,’ and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters, He called Seas. And God saw that it was good*” (Gen. 1:9-10)

Moses wrote that God gathered the waters together, under heavens, into one place. He who contemplates in the world map, will notice that this is scientifically true, as all the seven oceans of the world have one common bottom. Yet, Moses was keen on considering the seas as separate, mentioning them in plural as ‘Seas.’ In the days of Moses, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, and probably certain parts of the Atlantic Ocean, were known to man, although the seven oceans, known nowadays, were yet to be discovered after several generations, when man built the huge ships. So how did Moses know that, although seas were separate, yet they have a common bottom?!^{1]}

Some believe that, in that stage, God ordained that the temperature of the earth falls down gradually, which led to contraction and cracking of the earth’s crust, resulting in the formation of deep troughs, rivers, lakes and seas. Seas and oceans gathered together into one place, but the seas that are now isolated, have resulted from different physical factors.

Now, we put aside the literal or historical interpretation, and consider the spiritual or symbolic one. We find **Origen** discerning between ‘dry land’ and ‘earth;’ the dry land, covered with water, refers to man, covered with sin and trespasses, turning into a land soaking with water, unfit for fruition. But, if sin retreats from it, it turns from barren dry land into fertile land capable of giving forth fruit, that can produce herbs, legume, and trees, that is, yield a spiritual crop “*some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty*” (Matthew 13:8). **Origen** says: [If we do not separate ourselves from the “*waters that are under the firmament,*” that is the sins and transgressions of our body, “*earth*” can not appear in our life, and we can not enjoy to grow in light; “*For everyone practicing evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed; but he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have done in God*” (John 3:20-21). We are not to be granted this confidence, unless we become separated from that “*waters,*” and cast off the transgressions of the body, the basis of our sins; otherwise the dried up member in us would stay dry².]

I wish that we receive God’s work in us, to have our inner dry land transformed into a sanctified one, that produces spiritual fruits pleasing God, and not to carry curse and produce thorns and thistles. **Origen** also says: [If some people are still dry and fruitless, and carry “*thorns and thistles*” (Gen 3:18), these carry curse, “*whose end is to be burned*” (Hebrew 6:8; Isaiah 9:17-18); But with strife and persistence, as they separate themselves from the “*water*” of the

¹ التوافق بين العلم الحديث والكتاب المقدس، ص ٢١، ٢٢.

² In Gen. hom 1:3.

abyss, the way of the devil, they appear as fertile land, then they become worthy of asking the Lord to move them to a land of milk and honey.] He also says, [Let us wake up, we are still, not yet a dry land! Let us present to God much and diversified fruits, to be blessed by the Lord, who may say: “The smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed” (Gen 27:27); and, in us, would be realized the saying of the apostle: “For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessings from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.” (Hebrew 6:7-8)¹.]

St. Ambrose² believes that, the earth bearing fruit, is a sign of raising the body from death. As life set forth from the earth by the order of the Lord, so, also, by His order life will be restored to our deadly body. Nature obeys Him, as well as the dried up bones, in the great day of the Lord.

6- THE FOURTH DAY: CREATION OF THE GREAT LIGHTS

For man’s benefit, God created the exalted solar systems, not to make astrologists out of us, but for the sake of our benefit and as a declaration of His love for us.

If God created the sun to illuminate man’s day, and to help him in his life, He grants us His living Word, the Sun of Righteousness, who makes of our darkness a permanent day, giving us a new inner life. He shines on the Church, to make of it a moon, to illuminate the world, and works in each of its members to make, out of him, a star to circulate in its own orbit, shedding light and splendor on the earth. **Origen** says: [Christ is the light of the world, Who illuminates the Church with His light. As the moon gets its light from the sun to illuminate the darkness, so the Church gets its light from Christ to reflect it on those who are in the darkness of ignorance³.] He also says, [Moses, one of these stars, shines in us, and his works illuminate us; So also Abraham, Isaiah, Jacob, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, all those for whom the Holy Scripture gave testimony, that they pleased God (Hebrew 11:5)⁴.] And says: [The higher we go, the better we can contemplate in the sunrise, and the better would be the splendor and warmth. In a similar way, the higher our thought is lifted up to Christ, the nearer it gets to the splendor and beauty of His light, as He, Himself, says: “‘Return to Me,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘and I will return to you’” (Zechariah 1: 3)... If we are capable of rising up with Him to the top of the mountain, like Peter, James, and John, we shall enjoy the light of Christ, and the voice of the Father, Himself⁵.]

The stars, with their different kinds, sizes, and distant locations, create in the soul an inner longing for drifting in the heaven of the Church, so that the soul would rise from glory to

¹ In Gen. hom 1:3.

² On Belief of Resur. 2:74.

³ In Gen. 1:5.

⁴ In Gen. 1:7.

⁵ In Gen. 1:7.

glory (2 Corinthians 3:18), to become, through Jesus Christ a greater star.

The Book says: “*God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth.*” (Gen. 1:17) It is as though, every spiritual star, in order to keep its nature as a star, and its work to “*give light to the earth,*” it should stay “*in the firmament,*” namely remain a bearer of the heavenly nature; as if it falls down to earth, it loses its being a star, and would harm the earth instead of giving it light. So also, every soul, for the sake of complimenting others, falls together with them into love of worldly matters, and lives with a worldly mind, would lose its heavenly nature, the light of God would darken in it, and would let many others perish with her. Therefore, let us love the earth by staying in the firmament of heaven; not out of pride or hypocrisy, but with love, reflecting the light of the sun of righteousness on others; comprehending that the secret of enlightenment is not in us, but it is in the sun of righteousness, who shines on all for free.

If earth refers to the body, when the soul carries the new heavenly nature, and rises up to the firmament of heaven as a star, it reflects the light of the Lord on the body to enlighten it; and our earth (body) would, no more, be an obstacle on the way of our salvation, but carries the light of the Savior in it. In this way, the body walks with the soul in harmony, and the words “*God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth.*”

St. Theophilus of Antioch, in the second century A D, has certain comments on the creation of great lights in the fourth day. In his opinion, the first three days refer to God, His Word, and His Wisdom - He probably meant the Holy Trinity - Then came the fourth day, referring to humanity, created by God as shining stars, committed to divine commandment. These stars are of two kinds: Steadfast and shining like the prophets and who walk in their paths, and wandering stars that alter their locations, referring to those who lost their way to God and abandoned His commandment¹.

7- THE FIFTH DAY: CREATION OF REPTILES, FISHES AND BIRDS

As circumstances were convenient to create aquatic animals, He says: “*Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures.*” (Gen 1:20) That means that the beginning of creatures that have living souls was in water. And, as **St. Ambrose** says: [As waters, by the Word of God, gave forth naturally to living creatures, in a like way, the Holy waters, now, also by the Word of God, give birth to living creatures, according to grace; living as fishes, likening Christ, the true Fish.]

St. Augustine believes that, in the emergence of living reptiles from water, is a living portrait of the emergence of the ancient people, crawling out of the Red Sea, carrying life inside them, as though out of the water of Baptism². What symbolically happened to them is being

¹ To Autolytus 2:15.

² On Ps. 81.

actually realized with us¹.

Origen believes, that in the reptiles, there is a reference to the wicked thoughts, that turns us like creatures that crawl on earth, with hearts that are bound to dust; While birds, on the other hand, refer to the good thoughts that take us up to the heavenly, saying: [Let the birds soar in the firmament of heavens, and never crawling on earth... Let us concentrate our attention on the reptiles that could harm us... If we look at a woman to lust for her, we shall be like a serpent (that crawls), but if we have more reason, even if we are desired by (the Egyptian woman), we shall be like a bird, leave our Egyptian garment, and fly with our wings away from her wicked plots (Gen. 39:7). If we deliver ourselves to thoughts of robbery, we would be adopting the work of the serpent; Otherwise, we are like a bird, soaring above the earthly, in the firmament of heavens².]

Origen wonders, if reptiles refer to the evil thoughts, why is it said that God saw that everything was good? He answers that, even in the devil's opposition to us, if we end up enjoying the crown of conquest, everything would be good³.

St. Theophilus of Antioch believes that, although some fishes are good, referring to those who enjoy the blessings of the baptismal font, and do not seek even what is theirs, namely having no private possessions, yet, some fishes are evil, the big and strong, feeding on the small and weak. The same is true for the birds: some are good and some are evil: [Those who forsake their wickedness, and live with righteousness in spirit, fly upward and please the will of God, but those who do not worship God nor know Him would be like some sort of birds who, although they possess wings, yet they are unable to fly, thus they do not soar up in exalted godly matters⁴.]

8- THE SIXTH DAY: ANIMALS AND MAN

God prepared everything for the creation of animals, then of man, presenting to them seen and unseen things.

St. Theophilus of Antioch believes that fierce beasts, did not acquire the spirit of ferocity, except after the fall of man, as a result of the corruption he indulged in through his rebellion, and was reflected on the nature of the earth, to produce thorns and thistles, and on the nature of beasts, for some to carry a kind of ferocity, that is demolished according to many righteous people, saying: [When man returns to his original condition, and does no evil, these animals also return to their original condition⁵.] History of the Church present us with innumerable examples of Saints who lived among fierce beasts; and in recent years we knew of a monk - Father Abdel Messieh the Ethiopian - who was living, unharmed, among them.

Finally, God crowned His earthly creation, by creating man, not just as a creature among

¹ On Ps. 81.

² In *Gen. hom 1:8*.

³ In *Gen. hom 1:10*.

⁴ To *Autolytus 2:16, 17*.

⁵ To *Autolytus 2:16, 17*.

innumerable creatures, but “*in His image, according to His likeness*” (Gen 1:26), and set him a master over earthly creation. In the creation of man, it is to be noticed:

(1) What draws our attention in the creation of man, is God’s saying: “*Let us make man in our image, according to our Likeness,*” “*So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him*” (Gen. 2:26-27). Something we have not heard of, in any other creation; He created a soul that carries the image of the Holy Trinity, and which is according to the likeness of God.

Before presenting comments of some Church Fathers in this concern, I like to refer concisely to contemporary atheistic philosophies, in order to show how they are based upon some misunderstanding of the true relationship between God and man, and of the significance of the creation of man in God’s image.

We know that contemporary atheism is a rejection of God, more than a denial of His existence; Contemporary atheists do not deny the existence of God, but they disregard His existence; or actually, they wish to free themselves from Him, as according to them, He enslaves man and deprives him of his humanity. That is why the German atheist ‘Henry Hane’ said: [Let us leave heaven for angels and sparrows.] And the French Poet ‘Briver’ said: [Our Father who art in heaven, stay there.] Then came Karl Marx with his atheism, in which he partly took after the views of the Philosopher Feuerbach (1804-1872), who said that the greatest point of transformation in history, will be the moment in which man means to say that the only God is man himself - *Homo homini deus*. So Feuerbach wanted man to be a god for himself, with no one to suppress his breath; then Karl Marx came to deny the existence of God, for no reason except to confirm that of man; he wrongly believed that religion is an alienation from man, by escaping to what is named God. Now, I am not intending to discuss these views here, but I shall refer the reader to the admirable research, written by Professor ‘Costi Bandali’¹. What I wish to stress is the fact that what motivated these atheist philosophers was their misunderstanding of God’s valuation for man. God is not an enemy of human freedom, as claimed by Marxists, nor His existence is set upon man’s inability and humility, but He created man in His image, to let him accept his Creator as a Friend responding to Him, not on a level of weakness and humiliation, but on that of freedom, of love, and of friendship. We shall see, in our study of the Holy Bible as a whole, that its main line is setting man in God’s image and according to His likeness, to make of him His heir with Christ, a partner with Him in eternal glory. We see God running after man to embrace him, not to destroy him, and to lift him up far above material life. Even after man’s fall, we hear the Lord Christ, the Word of God, say: “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15: 15).

¹ إله الإلحاد المعاصر، بيروت ١٩٨٦.

God's existence is not set upon denying man's life and dignity. God descended to lift us up to Him. The eastern Theology, in the early centuries, came summarized in a well-known phrase, that many fathers mentioned, in different styles: [God became man, to make of man a god.] What the contemporary atheists carry, of a longing toward Deity, is actually an inner thirst toward eternity, set through the image that only man enjoyed among all earthly creatures; and as Costi Bandali says: [The limitless hopes of man, is in man, the image of the limitless God, who invites him to share His life¹.]

Karl Marx, thought of making himself a god for himself, through his denial of existence of God; and did not realize that what he harbors inside him of yearning to Deity, is the fruit of being created in God's image, despite its deviation from its supposed course. When facing the problem of death, Marx was helpless; he tried to avoid it in his voluminous work, except once, because of his confusion before death, and realization that, then, he would lose the deity he set for himself. That became clear in his saying: [The death of my son hurt me real bad, that I still feel the bitterness of losing him like that very day².] Here, every hope he has is destroyed, and his meaning of life is lost. The Marxists, in a state of confusion, then began to debate, in their conventions, the problem of "Meaning of life and death."

If contemporary atheists thought that, in destroying the relationship with God, they are setting up the human being, we say that our unity with God Who created us in His image and according to His likeness and died to save us has granted us fellowship in His nature, and enjoyment of His glories beyond the limits of time and place. We carry His image, as if we are His personal currency, not to be confiscated by another, but to be drawn to Him, so that the image may exist with the original; and as the Lord says: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22: 12). As we are carrying His image, we yearn to return to Him and enjoy His bosom.

The following are some comments written by the Fathers of the Church about the creation of man in God's image and according to His likeness:

Notice the superiority of man as a creature that surpasses any other creature. Actually God did create man according to His own image and likeness. That is not found in the creation of heaven, or earth, or the sun, or the moon.

❖ What is created in God's image is our inner man, the unseen which is not carnal, or dead, or mortal. By these real traits, the image of God is characterized and recognized³.

Origen

❖ I mean what the Lord said when He saw the coin of Caesar: "Render to Caesar the things that

¹ إله الإلحاد المعاصر، بيروت ١٩٨٦، ص 19.

² إله الإلحاد المعاصر، بيروت ١٩٨٦، ص 51.

³ In Gen. hom 1:13.

are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:12), He means, as Caesar requests you to seal his image, God also requests the same; Thus, Caesar's coin would be given back to him; while the soul would be returned to God, enlightened and sealed with the splendor of His image¹.

- ❖ You have printed Your traits on us! You created us in Your image and according to Your likeness! You made us Your currency; yet Your coins should not remain in darkness. Send the ray of Your wisdom to scatter our darkness, for Your image to shine in us².
- ❖ Do not fetch out how to return the reward to Him... Reflect back His image; He does not ask for more... He wants His coin back... Do not offer Him something of yours, because when you do this, you would only offer Him sin³.

St. Augustine

(2) God created the human soul in His image and according to His likeness, meaning like the Holy Trinity. The human soul is an uttering being; and although being and nature are of one essence, yet being is different from uttering and from life. So, with great difference, the Father is His own being, uttering is the Word of God, and life is the Holy Spirit. God is One in essence, He is the Being, uttering by His Son, living by the Holy Spirit.

(3) Only in the creation of man, God says: "*Let us make,*" in plural, for, the Holy Trinity likes to work together with pleasure, for the sake of this beloved being.

(4) God created man at the end, to crown him as a king over creation; and as we say in the Gregorian Liturgy, that He did not let him in need of anything... He created everything for his sake and gave him authority, saying: "*Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have domination over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth*" (Gen 1:28) He did not create him as a humiliated slave; but one of authority over himself as well as over all creatures.

Origen says: [That refers to what springs of the soul, as well as whims of the heart, or to the outcome of carnal lusts and body stimulus. Saints who preserve the blessing of the Lord, have power over these things, they control man entirely by the will of the Spirit. Contrarily, the sinners fall under the power of the product of body defilement and its lusts⁴.] The true Christian, according to **St. Isaac the Syrian**, is a king, having authority over everything, who has the power to dismiss some thoughts, and to introduce others.

(5) Man was created in the sixth day, or the sixth stage. After his creation God did not only see him as "good," but as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Then, God rested on the seventh day, that is to say rejoiced in man, the object of His love. As man was created in the sixth day, Christ

¹ On Ps. 67.

² On Ps. 67.

³ On Ps. 103.

⁴ In Gen. hom 1:16.

the Lord offered His life as redemption on the cross, to restore man or to renew him spiritually on the sixth day, in the sixth hour. **St. Augustine**¹ believes that Christ the Lord came to man in the sixth stage to renew him and restore him to the image of God. **St. Augustine** divides the history of salvation into the following periods: The first, from Adam to Noah; the second, from Noah to Abraham, the third, from Abraham to David, the fourth, from David to the captivity by Babylonians, and the fifth, from the captivity by Babylonians to the mission of John the Baptist. We are, now, in the sixth stage, or, the sixth day, when the Lord Christ came to renew our creation until the world comes to an end, and we enter into His rest, in the day of the Lord, or in the seventh day.

(6) In His talk about creation, He mentioned that of man, in a very concise and accurate way, saying: “*Male and female He created them*” (Gen. 1:27); although, later on, He would deal with the creation of Adam then Eve in more detail. At the beginning He said that “*male and female He created them,*” to confirm that we have one father and one mother, binding all humanity with the bond of one blood, and to confirm another aspect, the sanctification of the sacrament of matrimony between man and woman, being the source of union between the two of them. **Origen** says: [All the works of God are accomplished by the interaction of united pairs - as heaven and earth, sun and moon, and so the Holy Scripture aimed to reveal that man is the work of God that cannot be realized without fullness and the consummation in a union that fits him².] In other words, God created man, as male and female, to have in them a movement of love, one toward the other, not in a lusty carnal way, but in what is far more exalted, as a sign of an inner life, that gives with no expectation of a return. If the Holy Trinity is the Trinity of love, eternally reacting together in a movement of love, then, God wants humanity to carry true love, because of the nature of the innate love, and not for the sake of reward. Perhaps this is the first goal of human life in general, and also that of the married couple’s life.

The Holy Scripture says: “*Then God blessed them, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have domination’*” (Gen. 1:28) And as **St. Augustine** says: [Fruitfulness and multiplying to fill the earth, are blessing gifts from God in the gift of marriage that God established from the beginning, before the fall of man, when “*male and female He created them,*” meaning that He created them as two distinctive genders³.] **Origen** says: [Man could not be fruitful and multiply without the woman; so God gave him the woman, so that he does not doubt the potential of the blessing⁴.]

God created man as male and female in order to beget children, even if they had not fallen into the sin of rebellion. And not as some people think, that begetting came as the fruit of sin.

¹ On Ps. 93.

² In Gen. hom 1:14.

³ City of God 14:22.

⁴ In Gen. hom 1:14.

That is why **St. Augustine**¹ confirms that begetting is realized, not as a fruit of lust, but as a part of the glory of marriage, set by God Himself. He also rejects the thought that the sin committed by the first parents has been the lust of the body that stripped their purity, but he says that lust came as one of the fruits of disobedience.

Finally, **Origen**² gives another allegoric interpretation, seeing in man a symbol of mind, and in woman that of spirit, as though mind and spirit together must be united in a holy life, as two harmonious factors, to beget children with power over the earth, in particular, over the body and all its energies. In other words, there is no spiritual life without the mind or without the spirit. In fact, the two should get along and act in harmony, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be fruitful in the Lord with what pleases His heart.

In the New Testament, as God lifts us up to a heavenly angelic life, some people prefer a life of virginity, not to despise marriage or stand against it, but as dedication of their life to worship or serve, according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord - how he may please the Lord. But he who is married, cares about the things of the world - how he may please his wife”* (1 Corinthians 7: 32-33). The apostle is not despising marriage, but he is commending virginity. And as **St. Jerome** says: [While we allow marriage, we prefer virginity originating from it... Is it an insult to the tree, if its apples are preferred to its root or leaves?!³]

¹ *City of God* 14:21.

² *In Gen. hom* 1:14.

³ *Ep.* 48:2.

CHAPTER 2

ADAM IN PARADISE

After that quick presentation of the creation of the whole world, and the sanctification of the seventh day in which God rested, the divine inspiration manifested the condition of the first man in paradise, revealing the extent of God's care for his happiness.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------|
| 1- Sanctification of the Sabbath | 1 – 3. |
| 2- Adam in paradise | 4 – 14. |
| 3- God's commandment to Adam | 15 – 17. |
| 4- Creation of Eve | 18 – 25. |

1- SANCTIFICATION OF THE SABBATH

“Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done” (Gen. 2: 1-3)

What is the meaning of *“He rested on the seventh day”*? Surely, rest here does not imply stopping work, but He rested in the rest of His creation. And as said by **St. Augustine**: [The rest of God means the rest of those who find rest in Him¹.] His rest, as a heavenly Father, is to find His beloved enjoying the true inner rest. That is why **St. Augustine** says: [We rest when we do good deeds. As an example of this, it was written about God that He *“rested on the seventh day,”* when He *“saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good.”* He did not get tired, or got in need for rest, nor stopped working up till now. In this concern Christ the Lord frankly says: *“My Father has been working until now”* (John 5:17)².]

God ended His talk about the work of creation, by proclaiming His rest in His creation that carried the signs of His love, especially man who carried His image and likeness. God remains in His rest, as long as man also rests in the bosom of His heavenly Father. That is why many Fathers believe that the commandment of *“keeping the Sabbath,”* which means in Hebrew *“the rest,”* is actually a symbol of abiding in the Lord Christ, being the rest of the Father, in whom He finds His pleasure concerning us, as well as our own rest, as in Him we enter into the bosom of the Father. As if Christ the Lord, Himself, is our true Sabbath³. This is the source of God's care for keeping the commandment of the Sabbath, and for making it a main line in His plan for the salvation of His people; whoever breaks would be the breaker of the divine covenant, and would deny himself fellowship in the holy congregation. Let us then keep the true Sabbath as the source of our true rest, by accepting the Lord Christ risen from the dead. Let us accept Him as

¹ *City of God* 11:8.

² *On Ps.* 93.

³ للمؤلف: المسيح في سر الإفخارستيا، ك ١، "سر السبت".

risen from the dead, by keeping the Sabbath all our life, especially on the first day of the week; as the apostles used to get together on each Sunday, to practice the collective worship around the Sacrament of the Eucharist, as the object of their true rest.

If the Lord Christ is the “Seventh Day” or the “*True Sabbath*” in Whom we were reconciled with the Father by the blood of His cross, so as we abide in Him, we carry His characteristics in us, and get filled with His righteousness and thus become ourselves an object of rest, a “Sabbath” or a “seventh day.” As **St. Augustine** says: [We become, ourselves, a seventh day, when we enjoy and get filled with God’s blessings and sanctification¹.]

It is to be noted that the Holy Scripture did not mention the seventh day saying “It was the eve and the morning were the seventh day;” and as **St. Augustine** says: [We find no evening in the Sabbath, because our rest has no end, while the evening necessitates an end².]

2- ADAM IN PARADISE

When God created everything for man: earth, firmament, space, stars, etc., it was to make him feel the Fatherhood of God and His exceeding nurturing. He revealed this Fatherhood later on, when talking in more details about the creation of man, and establishing the Garden of Eden to the east, for his sake.

In the second century, it seems that **Origen** believed that the story of Adam and Eve, and all what happened to them, was a purely symbolic story, presented by the divine inspiration, to reveal spiritual concepts that touch Adam’s life in relationship to God; that the Garden was not on earth but in the third heavens, where Adam and Eve, before their fall, were two spirits with no real bodies; that they descended from paradise to earth as a result of their sin; and that the bodies they acquired were a kind of punishment. **St. Epiphanius of Salamis** at Cyprus, attacked these views in his correspondence to St. John of Jerusalem³.

These views are totally unacceptable by the Church, as they distort the look at the world created by God as a sign of His love for us, and they corrupt our belief in the sanctification of the body. Christ the Lord, as well as His saintly apostles, proclaimed the early incidents of creation as actual and not as symbolic incidents.

(1) Both Testaments of the Holy Scripture are built on the revelation of the sacrifice of salvation that humanity needed, after the fall of our parents Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden... (See Romans 5); and on the fact that the fall of Adam had necessitated the redemptive work of Christ, to save man as a whole - spirit and body, and not to save his spirit alone. For if the human body is the product of sins that the spirit has committed earlier in separation from the body, there would be no need for the Divine Incarnation and for the salvation of the body

¹ *City of God* 22:30.

² *On Ps. 93*.

³ *Cf. St. Jerome: Ep 51*.

together with the spirit.

(2) When Christ the Lord talked, Himself, about marriage, He referred to it on the basis of what happened at the onset of creation, as a historical truth, in order to prohibit divorce (Matthew 19: 3-6; Mark 10:2-9).

(3) Christ referred to the episode of the fall of our parents on the onset of creation, clarifying the role of the devil and his deceit (John 8:44).

(4) When the apostle Paul talked about the Church as the bride of the Lord Christ, he mentioned the serpent's deceit of Eve as an actual episode (1 Corinthians 11:3).

(5) In the genealogy of Christ the Lord, the Evangelist Luke mentioned Adam as the first man created (Luke 3:38).

(6) The apostle Paul talked about Abel (son of Adam and Eve), as an actual person and not as a symbol (Hebrew 11: 4).

While we do not deny the existence of that Garden, as actual history lived by Adam, yet we also see in that Garden, a symbol of Christ the Lord who came to us from the East, into Whom Adam enters, to find in Him his fulfillment and the joy of his heart. As the word 'Eden' means "joy" or "paradise," therefore, Christ our Lord is the True Joy and the Source of our eternal Paradise.

If the Garden symbolizes Christ the Lord as the Source of our joy, on the other hand, it symbolizes the Church, as the body of Christ that carries, on the inside and in her midst, the 'Tree of Life,' symbol of Christ the Lord, the Head of the Church and the Source of her life.

Christ the Lord descended to the world, to proclaim Himself as the **Tree of Life** planted in His Church. Whoever enjoys Him would enjoy life and wisdom. And as **St. Jerome** said: [Solomon, talking about wisdom, says: "*She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her*" (Proverb 3:18). So, if wisdom is the tree of life, wisdom is truly Christ the Lord... If that tree is planted in the Garden of Eden, we are all planted there¹.] In other words, we would never be allowed as living trees planted in the Paradise, if the Tree of Life had not descended in its midst, and proclaimed Himself as the Source of life, for us.

As to the '*Tree of Knowledge of good and evil*,' this refers to 'knowledge' that is, in itself, grace and blessing; yet, if it be deviated to the experience of evil, it will become a cause for doom. **St. Theophilus of Antioch** says: [The tree of Knowledge is good in itself, with good fruits. That tree had not carried death as some assume, but it is the rebellion that carried death inside it. There is nothing inside that fruit but Knowledge alone, that is good if used prudently².]

Watering that garden was a river, about which is said: "*A river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads*" (Gen. 2:10). If the Tree of Life refers to Christ the Lord, the Grantor of life, the river that watered the garden refers to the Holy

¹ On Ps. hom 1.

² To Autolytus 2:25.

Spirit that floods our earth, through the water of the Holy Spirit, to turn our desert into a paradise that pleases the heart of God. Christ talked about that river, saying: *“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”* (John 7:38). The Evangelist comments on these divine words, saying: *“This He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given”* (John 7:39). As to its partition into four riverheads, that refers to the Spirit overflowing the Church in the world, from the east to the west, and from the north to the south.

If the river refers to the Holy Spirit that descends on the believers to sanctify them, its partition into four riverheads, would refer to its sanctification of the body that is symbolized by the figure 4, being derived from the earth (of four corners). It is as though man, in his relationship with God becomes, by the power of the Holy Spirit, a new Garden of Eden sanctified by the Holy Spirit Who works in the human soul, as well as in the body.

As far as the location of the garden is concerned, theologians and geographers have not come to a definite decision. Some assume it has been in Armenia, where the rivers Euphrates and Tigris originate. The prevailing view is, however, that the River of Eden that parted into four riverheads was the River Euphrates- Tigris that flows into Arabian Bank, then into the Persian Gulf, parted into several riverheads. The Garden of Eden, as they believe, was in the fertile southern region of Iraq; referring to the fact that the Land of ‘Havilah,’ where there is gold (Gen. 2:11), is a region of the Island of Arabia, in the neighborhood of the south west of Iraq. As to the Land of ‘Cush’ (Gen. 2:13), it is most probably the Land of ‘Elam,’ known for a long time as ‘*Cashshu, Cossean;*’ The valley of Babylon was also known as ‘*Edinu*¹.’

3- GOD’S COMMANDMENT TO ADAM

“Then the Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (Gen. 2 15). Before presenting the commandment of love and obedience, God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. If, by setting the Garden, He declared His love and care for man, in giving him the responsibility to tend and keep it, is a proclamation of appreciation for man... He provided him with all possibilities of comfort, as well as of thought and prudence. Thus, He did not let him dwell in the Garden just to eat, drink, and have fun, but He set him as a being who has responsibility and esteem in the eyes of God.

That was how God sanctified labor, through setting His most perfect earthly creature to labor, and through granting him wisdom to tend and keep the Garden, as though God had set a personal steward to carry out the work with a joy of heart and prudence.

Granting him this gift, that of tending and keeping the garden, He presented him with this commandment: *“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Gen.

¹ Concerning the site of the Garden of Eden see: “New Westminster Dict. Of the Bible, P. 238, 239.”

2:16-17).

Some may ask: **Is there a need for that commandment?** We answer that the commandment raises the value of man, as it proclaims the freedom of his will. God wanted to deal with him on a supernatural level. He gave him that commandment to open up the door for practical debate with him, so that Adam's obedience to God would not be an instinctive automatic obedience, governed by laws of nature as is the case with other creatures, but based upon his sanctified humanity, and his true love springing up from his depths, with his complete freedom. A commandment is not a deprivation or suppression to man, but a way to enjoy the sanctification of the free will. We have dealt with that issue in a separate work - "**Commandment and Love.**"

Some believe that God granted man great gifts, but even after setting him in the Garden, He intended to commend him and honor him with greater gifts - probably by allowing him to eat from the tree of life - in case he had lived in obedience of the divine commandment, showing his practical love for his Creator and Supreme Friend. **St. Theophilus of Antioch** says: [God wanted to justify man through submission to the commandment; but, at the same time, He wished for man to stay as a child in simplicity and loyalty, for a longer time¹.]

As the cost of rebellion had been "*You shall surely die,*" some assumed that the episode of the fall of our first parents was symbolic, saying that the cost was too harsh compared to the commandment not to eat from a particular tree. Some scholars answer this by saying:

(1) The punishment was not for the kind of commandment, but because of the inner intention that met God's supreme love and care for man by ingratitude. Punishment is a natural consequence of sin, whatever it is; as Paradise in its original joy is suitable for the state of man who is attached to his God.

(2) The harshness of punishment is in relation to the extent of the gift of human freedom, and God's appreciation of man.

(3) The harshness of punishment highlights the power of salvation that God offers to man, by delivering His Only-Begotten Son.

(4) It is amazing that the punishment fell with all its weight upon the earth and the serpent, as God did not curse Adam or Eve, but cursed the serpent for deceiving man, and the earth because of who dwelt in it! God, in His love demonstrated the bitterness of sin, but He did not curse man... What greater love than this?!

4- THE CREATION OF EVE

"And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'" (Gen. 2:18)

While the creation of the world needed millions of years, yet the divine inspiration

¹ To Autolytus 2:25.

recorded it very concisely in one chapter, in order that the Holy Scripture would concentrate on God's care for man in particular for he is the center of the world in the eyes of God; He cared for his material, psychological, and spiritual needs etc. And now, seeing him lonely in paradise, He intended to make him a helper comparable to him. The expression "*comparable to him*" came to reveal the concept of the life of marriage, the relationship of Adam with Eve, or that of man and woman. A wife is the helper for her husband, as well as the man for his wife. She is also his equal, not above him or more humble! Married life is based upon a true union through mutual respect.

He told us about the creation of Eve as a sole wife for Adam, made by God from Adam's side after causing a deep sleep to fall on him... Adam said: "*This is new bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man*" (Gen 2:23). Through that situation, the Holy Scripture established the main principle of marriage: "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh*" (Gen. 2:24)

The episode of the creation of Eve came to carry a symbol of the creation of the Church, the bride of Christ, for whom the Groom humbled Himself to be joined to her, and to carry her to His heavens. The writings of the early Fathers brought us a flood of talk about the creation of Eve, and her relationship to the Church, the bride of Christ; from these writing we shall quote some of the words by **St. Augustine** on this subject:

[When was Eve created? When Adam slept!

When have the mysteries of the Church flowed from Christ's side? When He slept on the cross!¹]

[If Christ joins Himself to His Church to become one body, how did He leave His Father and mother? He left His Father in the sense that "*Being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of man*" (Philippians 2: 6). In this sense, He left His Father, not that He forgot Him or separated Himself from Him, but in His coming in the likeness of man. Now, How did He leave His mother? By leaving the synagogue of the Jews, from which He was begotten according to the flesh, to join the Church that He assembled from all nations².]

[(In his talk about the secret of unity between Christ and His Church, as a Groom and His bride), the apostle Paul says: "*This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church*" (Ephesians 5:32)... We are with Him in heaven with hope, and He is with us on earth with love³.]

[Christ, our Lord, talks in Person as being our head; Likewise, He talks in the Body,

¹ On Ps. 41 (See On Ps. 127).

² In Ioan, tr 2:25.

³ On Ps. 55.

which is us, His Church. So words are uttered as though from one mouth; The Head and the body being integrally united together, not separated from one another, the same as in marriage, of which is said: “*And they become one flesh*” (Gen. 2:24)¹.]

We end our conversation with the words of **St. Ambrose** who sees in the “One flesh” a unity of will through the love between man and woman, saying, [God has put the feelings of good will in man and woman, proclaiming that they would be one flesh; and to this it can be added: “one spirit².”]

Finally after talking about the creation of Eve and her joining Adam with love, he said: “*They were both naked, the man and the wife, and they were not ashamed*” (Gen. 2:25). They were bodily naked, yet spiritually covered, thus there was no cause for shame; as what makes one ashamed is not his body, but the corruption that got into it because of sin. That is why some Fathers consider that entering naked into the font of Baptism is a return to Paradise, where man was, in his purity of heart, naked according to the body, yet not ashamed.

¹ *On Ps. 41.*

² *Duties of clergy 1:32.*

CHAPTER 3

FALL OF MAN

God, having provided man with all possibilities of life as the master of earth with all its resources, He granted him the greatest of gifts - human freedom, as a sign of God's appreciation for the most perfect creature on earth. Yet, man soon fell through his own will, under the deceit of the devil, his enemy, disregarding God's love for him:

| | |
|---|--------|
| 1- The deceitful serpent | 1-6. |
| 2- Opening of their eyes | 7. |
| 3- God's care for man | 8-13. |
| 4- Cursing the serpent | 14. |
| 5- Promise of salvation | 15. |
| 6- Chastening man | 16-19. |
| 7- Coats of skin | 20-21. |
| 8- God sent man forth out of the Garden of Eden | 23-24. |

1- THE DECEITFUL SERPENT

God, having presented man with everything, He set him in Paradise, and gave him the commandment to render obedience in return for love. It was, likely, God's intention to grant man greater gifts, as a reward for keeping the commandment continuously. But the devil envied man, and desired to make him fall into death, using the serpent to enter with man into a dooming debate. The Scripture says: "*The serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said: You shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said to the serpent: We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said: You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die'*" (Gen 3:1-3)

The enemy used the good creation made by God, as a tool to destroy man. The problem was not in the means, but in man who agreed to enter into a vain dispute with the serpent, especially that the woman started to distort the words of God, claiming that He commanded them not to touch the fruit; this was an exaggeration! For this reason, Saint Paul the Apostle advises us to avoid such disputes, corruptive to the mind and soul. He said: "*Avoid foolish and ignorant disputes*" (2 Timothy 2:23).

St. John Chrysostom often confirms, that the devil could not have been able to infiltrate into us, and to overcome us, if we did not give him the chance through negligence or entering with him into a vain dispute. Of his words:

[Somebody may say: Did not the devil harm Adam, corrupting him and causing him to loose the Paradise? No! The responsibility for that was the negligence of him who was harmed,

his lack of self-control, and of strife. The devil with his diversified tricks could not overcome Job; so how could he, by a lesser way, overcome Adam, if the latter had not overcome himself by himself?^{1]}

[Negligence and laziness, and not the devil, are the means to overcome the non-alert... through both the devil is given the opportunity to go far with his evil ways^{2].}

[I do not say this to claim the innocence of the devil, but in order to warn you against laziness. The devil wants us to put the blame upon him when we do wrong... By that, we drown ourselves in all kinds of evil, increase our punishment, and deprive ourselves of forgiveness; through throwing the responsibility upon him, (without presenting repentance^{3].})

Concerning the vain dispute that Eve entered with the serpent, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [She should have kept silent, and should not have conversed with it. She foolishly revealed God's commandment, so giving the devil a great break... Consider the extent of evil, when we deliver ourselves in the hands of our enemies, and those who plot against us! That is why the Lord Christ says: "*Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces*" (Matthew 7:6). That is what happened with Eve; She gave what is holy to dogs and swine; so they trampled them under their feet, turned, and tore the woman^{4].}

I wish that we do not fear the devil, as he is not capable of violently forcing his way into our hearts; but we should fear ourselves, as we accept his tricks and vanities; as we allow him to infiltrate into our depths, to take over the leadership of our will, and the control over our heart, thought, and senses; thus falling under his bitter servitude.

In that dispute between Eve and the serpent, the devil did not present to man anything but promises, saying: "*You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Gen. 3:4-5). A mere promise, that they would be like God (pride!), and get knowledge; but he did not present them with anything for their own good. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [The devil did not offer any good deed - few or much - but deceived the woman with mere words, and provided her with vain hope. Despite that, she considered the devil more trust worthy than God, although God had proved His good will through His deeds^{5].} And as he says: [As the devil was not capable of presenting anything practical, he presented words of promise; that is how deceivers are^{6].}

¹ من يقدر أن يؤذيك؟ ١٩٦٥، ص ١٢.

² هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ (مقال ٢: لماذا لم يُنزع الشيطان عن العالم؟).

³ هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ (مقال ٢: لماذا لم يُنزع الشيطان عن العالم؟)، مقال 2.

⁴ هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ (مقال ٢: لماذا لم يُنزع الشيطان عن العالم؟)، مقال 3.

⁵ هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ (مقال ٢: لماذا لم يُنزع الشيطان عن العالم؟)، مقال 3.

⁶ In 2 Tim, hom 8.

Indeed, it was possible for Eve to recognize the deceit of the devil, and to realize his opposition to God and resistance to His words. While God says to Adam: “*You shall surely die,*” the devil says: “*You will not surely die.*” And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [How is it fitting for man to recognize an enemy and opponent, except by such answer that contradicts the words of God?! It was more fitting for Eve to escape right away from the bait and retreat from the snare¹.] In other words, I wish we receive God as the leader of our life, and reject the devil as a deceiver and a destroyer of our souls. And as **St. Augustine** says: [God is our leader and the devil is our destroyer; a leader presents a commandment while the destroyer would suggest a trick. Shall we then listen to the commandment or to the deceit².]

The Fathers of the Church told us about the devil’s deceit to Adam (and to Eve), and saw in that deceit three main sins, presented by the enemy to destroy the whole humanity. Then he came back to fight the second Adam (Christ the Master) with the same sins, assuming that he is capable of ensnaring Him in his nets; and as said by **St. Serapion**: [It was necessary for our Lord to get tempted in the same way Adam did, when he was in the image of God before corrupting it, namely by greed, conceit, and pride, that were intermingled and multiplied, after he challenged the commandment, and corrupted the image and likeness of God. Adam had been tempted by greed, as he ate from the forbidden tree; and by conceit, when he was told: “*Your eyes will be opened;*” and by pride when it was said to him: “*You will be like God Knowing good and evil*” (Gen. 3:5). Our Savior had been likewise tempted by these three sins: by greed, when the devil said to Him: “*Command that these stones become bread*” (Matthew 4:3), and by pride when he said to Him: “*If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down;*” and by conceit, when he showed Him “*all the kingdoms of the world and their glory*” and said to Him: “*All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me*” (Matthew 4: 9). The Lord gave us Himself as an example on how we could be victorious as He was victorious, when He was tempted. They were both called “Adam,” one was the first in doom and death, while the Other was the First in resurrection and life. Through the first the whole humanity came under judgment, while through the Second it was set free³.]

Several Fathers concentrated on the sin of pride, as the top of sins, by which Satan and his hosts were destroyed, and he is using the same way to destroy humanity. **St. Augustine** said about our first two parents who were deceived by the devil through the sin of pride: [They listened to the voice of the deceiver who told them: “*You will be like God;*” so they deserted God, who wished to make them gods, not through their isolation from Him, but through their fellowship with Him⁴.] He also says: [With pride we fail to reach this eternity... If through pride

¹ هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ مقال ٣.

² On Ps. 71.

³ Cassian: Conf. 5:6.

⁴ City of God 22:30.

we were wounded, through humility we would be cured. God came in humility to cure man from the dangerous wound of pride¹.]

So our Fathers revealed to us the deceit of the enemy, the devil, who conned Eve through the serpent, so that she, in turn, would draw her man to fall with her; “*She took of its fruit and ate. She also gave her husband with her, and he ate*” (Gen. 3:6). By that, Eve lost her original mission as a helper (Gen. 2:18), and became a snare for her man and a destroyer of his life.

St. Didymus the Blind, believes that the devil or Satan worked through the serpent that deceived the woman, who, in turn, drew her husband with her. The enemy, in his war, starts through lust, as a serpent that sneaks to us, to deceive the senses (represented by the woman); and those in turn would act on the mind (the man), which would end up losing its balance and wisdom, and would deviate to evil.

2- OPENING OF THEIR EYES

“*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings*” (Gen. 3:7)

What does “*their eyes were opened to know that they were naked*” mean, except that man, through sin, would realize that he entered into a state of corruption appearing through uncontrollable sensations and lusts of the body?! By that, man acquires a new knowledge - the experience of evil, that mingled with his life and completely corrupted his body; He is uncovering his body that became inclemently evil without control.

St. Augustine says: [They experienced a new sensation in their bodies that became rebellious against them, as a firm repayment for their rebellion against God. The rebellious soul as to the ministry to God, despising that work with its free will, would lose its former authority over the body².] And he says: [Their eyes were opened, not to see, as they used to see before, but to discern between the good that they lost, and the evil they fell into³.] [They knew that they were naked, of that grace that kept them from the shame of body nakedness; while the law of sin presented them with unsteadiness of their minds⁴.]

St. Ambrose says: [You have knowledge that you are naked, because you lost the cloth of good faith. These are the leaves by which you want to cover your nakedness. You rejected the fruits, and sought to hide behind the leaves of the Law, but you were deceived⁵.]

Thus, when man sees that he became naked from the fruit of divine grace that works in the depths of the inner heart, he hides behind the literality of the Law, and behind apparent formalities, without enjoyment of the inner change. **St. Didymus the Blind** believes that man

¹ *On Ps. 36.*

² *City of God 13:13.*

³ *City of God 14:17.*

⁴ *City of God 14:17.*

⁵ *Ep 20:7.*

resorts to the fig leaves, sewing them together into coverings for himself, that can not do the job, by looking for weak excuses for his deeds, saying: [Sometimes the sinner sews for himself excuses for his sins. Is that not what we see with many people?! The angry person, for instance, invents excuses to justify his anger, to try to prove that he is right, quoting sometimes from the Holy Scripture. That is what is meant by “*sewed together fig leaves*,” by rejecting the fruits, and resorting to incomplete protection as coverings. The angry person, for instance, mentions Elijah as a role model, when he got angry and destroyed the captain of fifty (2 Kings 1:9-12)¹.]

3- GOD’S CARE FOR MAN

If man paid back the love of God by rebellion, God still treats man with love, to draw his heart away from sickness that overcame him, and to raise him up from the death that reigned over him (Romans 5:14). The sound of God came walking in the garden, to encounter the fallen man. The Scripture says: “*They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the cool of the day*” (Gen. 3:8). They heard the sound of God walking, although the sound does not walk; Yet it is “the sound of God,” namely, “His Word,” the Only-Begotten Son who came with love, in order to pick up and raise the fallen man. He came as the wind of the day was blowing - according to the Arabic Version - to encounter Him through the Holy Spirit; as the two words: Spirit and wind in Hebrew, are the same. He came in the cool of the day, to recognize Him through His light. And as the Psalmist said: “*By Your light O Lord, we see the light*,” namely, We will not hear the sound of God walking in us, unless he blows His Holy Spirit on His garden in our depths, and shines His divine light, as though in the middle of the day.

God did not wait for man to come to Him to apologize for his sins, but He approached him, so that, by love He would draw him to recognize his sins and to confess them. With the same spirit, our Lord Jesus commends you “*to go yourself to your brother who sinned against you, to tell him his fault between you and him alone*,” and not to wait for him to come to you (Matthew 18:15). And as **St. John Chrysostom** says, the sinner, would refrain from coming because he feels ashamed. So it is proper for us to go to him, alone at first, to gain him back to us by love, while he, himself, gains back his soul.

Thus, the Word of God took the initiation in giving love to Adam, so He called him, on saying: “*Where are you?*” (Gen. 3:9). He was not unaware of his location, but wanted to enter with him into a dialogue, revealing to him that he is no longer worthy of being the subject of God’s knowledge, as though he became invisible to the divine light. **St. Augustine** says that the wicked, by his wickedness, gets out of the circle of God’s light, and becomes as the one who is out of God’s knowledge; not in the sense that God does not know him, but He does not know him in the sense of friendship and fellowship with Him. That is why the Lord tells the foolish virgins: “*Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you*” (Matthew 25:12). **St. Jerome** says: [We

¹ In Gen. 85.

heard that God does not know the sinners. Let us contemplate in how He knows the righteous.]

Now, What was the situation of man in response to that divine initiation?

(1) “*Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden*” (Gen. 3:8). This escape is a natural consequence of rebellion and of the separation from the circle of God, as the darkness can not afford to look at the light. And as Adam says: “*I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself*” (Gen. 3:10).

St. Ambrose talks to us about the cause of the sinner’s escape from the presence of the Lord, saying: [The guilty conscience is usually heavily laden, so that it punishes itself by itself without need for a judge; seeking to get covered, but would be naked before God¹.] It is as though the sin deprives man from his inner peace, and drives him into a state of terror. **St. Didymus the Blind** explains why Adam hid himself, saying that man sought knowledge through the experience of evil; so he hid from the presence of God, by distancing himself from the pure knowledge of God. **Origen** believes that the wicked people disappear from the presence of God; as it was said: “*They have turned their back to me, and not their face*” (Jeremiah 2:27); while the righteous confidently stand before Him, to be granted the sanctified life (1 John 3:21), with Elisha, “*As the Lord Lives, before whom I stand*” (2 kings 5:16).

Thus Adam hid himself after his fall, and could not face God, not because God is fearful and causes horror, but because man in his evil has lost the inner image of God, which draws him with love toward his Creator, the Lover of mankind. So, God became for him a means of terror and his Judge. The fault is in man who lost the purity of nature, and the enlightenment of his insight. Therefore, **St. Didymus the Blind** comments on Adam’s action of hiding himself as follows: [Adam gives his nakedness as an excuse for his fear, that nakedness resulting from his loss of virtue that used to cover him. Virtue, assuredly is a divine garment; as preached by the apostle: “*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 13:14); “*Put on tender mercies*” (Colossians 3:12), namely, adorn yourselves with practicing mercy according to Christ; or “*Let us put on the armor of light*” (Romans 13:12), to be able to fight the (spiritual) enemies².]

(2) When God encountered man through His making the first step towards him in love, despite his fear and hiding, man did not deny his sin, yet justified it by throwing the blame on others. Adam said: “*The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate*” (Gen. 3:12), and the woman said: “*The serpent deceived me, and I ate*” (Gen. 3:3). And so Adam threw the blame upon Eve, and even upon God who gave her to him; and the woman threw it upon the serpent. None of them apologized for what he or she has done. **St. Didymus the Blind** comments on Adam’s answer by saying: [It was fitting for him, first to think that he

¹ *Conc. Repentance 2:103.*

² *In Gen. 92.*

got her from the Lord for his own good, and that he did not get her to give him lessons, but to follow his example¹.] And he comments on the answer of Eve, saying, [Now, she admits that she had been deceived... This is how those deceived behave, they do not realize evil except after it is done. Lust conceals truth from them, and deprives them of knowledge².]

4- CURSING THE SERPENT

“So the Lord said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field. On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life’” (Gen. 3:14)

Carrying on the deceptions of the devil for man, the serpent got the curse. So will be every man who accepts to be an instrument in the hands of the evil one and surrenders to his seduction. As for the curse, it is as follows: *“On your belly you shall go and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.”* He will resemble the serpent in going on its belly and loving the earthly. He will have no feet to lift him over the dust, nor wings to take him forth above the worldly. He will love to fill up his stomach with dust, will crawl on his belly, to get his guts full with what he craves. Besides, on the other hand, whoever accepts the counsel of the serpent, will lust for the earthly, to become, himself, earth and dust; namely, he will be food for the serpent to devour. While whoever has the wings of the Holy Spirit, will rise above the dust, setting forth toward heaven, where the serpent, crawling on the earth, cannot approach or devour him.

St. Augustine says: [The wicked get attached to the earthly; and being created from earth, they think of it; and being earth, they become food for the serpent³.] He also says [As the enemy tramples on my life he turns to be earth and subsequently is the suitable food for him⁴.] [If you do not want to become food for the serpent, do not be dust! And how could that be? If you do not enjoy feeding on the earthly⁵.]

5- PROMISE OF SALVATION

Having cursed the serpent that deceived man, to make us reject it and its features in us, God presented to us the first promise of salvation, addressing the serpent, saying: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel”* (Gen. 3:15)

The serpent became a representative of the devil himself, who was called, *“serpent of the old”* (Revelation 20:2). God put enmity between the devil and the woman, until the Lord Christ comes from the seed of the woman - without human intervention - to bruise the head of the

¹ In Gen. 93.

² In Gen. 95.

³ On Ps. 62.

⁴ On Ps. 7.

⁵ On Ps. 104.

serpent that bruised the heel of humanity. Christ - the seed of woman - bruised the head of the serpent with His cross, according to the words of the apostle: *“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in (the cross)”* (Colossians 2:15); But the serpent will bruise every man who falls down from the exalted life in the Lord, to become a (heel) attached to dust.

St. Augustine believes that the head of the serpent is pride, that lower man’s life to turn it into a heel, to be bruised by the serpent, as he says: [The serpent has his eyes on you, as you fall down with pride; you should watch his head, namely the pride, being the head of all sins¹.] He also believes that the serpent’s head is the start of sin in us, through the wicked thought, therefore we should (bruise) it in its beginning, before it gets us down to the heel and kills us. He says: [What is this head? It is the beginning of every evil suggestion. When the enemy suggests to you an evil thought, cast it away before the lust gets hold of you leading you to accept it. Avoid its head, so that it would not bruise your heel².]

6- CHASTENING MAN

Having offered the promise of salvation, He proclaimed His chastisement of man. He opened the door of hope, through declaring salvation, before bringing forth the bitter chastisement, so that man would not fall under the weight of despair. He declared His chastisement, first for the woman, then for the man.

(1) *“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”*(Gen. 3:16). This chastisement, under which Eve fell because of the sin, was transformed, by mercy, into a blessing, when the Church - the new Eve - accepted to bring forth spiritual children for God, through her pains. **St. Augustine** says: [The Church – the bride of Christ - conceives and labors with children, so that she, like Eve, is called *“the mother of all living”* (Gen. 3:20). A member of this Church that labor says: *“My children for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you... “* (Galatians 4:9). But the Church does not labor in vain, and does not deliver in vain, for she will get the holy seeds on the resurrection from the dead, she will get the righteous who are now suffering pain all over the world³.]

Whatever pain, the Church - the new Eve - suffers in conceiving her spiritual children, and bringing them forth in the Lord, is also suffered by every soul, as a Church, as she conceives with the fruits of the Spirit, to bring forth children who please God. And as **St. Didymus the Blind** said, [The Church brings forth children, while in the world, through pain, as virtue necessitates sorrow, that *“produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted”* (2 Corinthians

¹ On Ps. 37.

² On Ps. 49.

³ On Ps. 127.

7:10)... “Narrow is the gate, and difficult is the way which leads to life” (Matthew 7:14); but “Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it” (Matthew 7:13). As to tears, they are praised¹.]

And as bringing forth children in pain, has been transformed into a blessing, through the new Eve, accepting pain to bring children forth in the Lord, so the other chastisement: “*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*” has been, likewise, transformed into a spiritual blessing, when the incarnated Word of God came to the new Eve as her man, ruling and prevailing over her by the exerted love, and she desires Him, to enjoy Him and His characteristics, as the Source of her life, and to enter with Him into His eternal glories.

(2) “*Cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field, In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; For dust you are, and to dust you shall return*” (Gen. 3:17-19).

For the sake of man, God created earth, and because of him He blessed it; then, having rebelled against the Lord, it came under curse to bring forth thorns and thistles, comparable to his rebellion or his inner thoughts. What literally happened to the earth was realized in the symbolic earth, namely the body. Because our rebellion against God, caused the body to lose its balance and sanctity, and came to bring forth for us thorns and thistles, that corrupt and destroy the soul, so our earth stayed with no spiritual fruits, until it was the time and Virgin St. Mary came, to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit, through receiving the divine promise, to produce for us the Firstborn Who pleases the heart of the Father, and brings joy to our life. And as **St. Jerome** says: [What earth lost in the Garden of Eden, it gained in the Son².]

Thus, through the incarnation of the Word of God, our earth could produce fruits instead of thorns and thistles, especially since the Lord has carried these thorns on His forehead in place of our earth (body), in order to give back joy to us.

Earth carried the curse because of our sins, making life of man - after his fall - difficult and miserable, as it is said, “*In the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread.*”

Finally, as man lusts for earth or dust instead of for heaven, he is told: “*For you are dust, and to dust you shall return;*” and through that he became food for the serpent, to which it was said: “*You shall eat dust all the days of your life.*” For that, the heavenly Word of God came to rid us of our earthly nature, granting us the heavenly features; and **St. Jerome** said: [As it is said to the sinner, ‘*You are dust, and to dust you shall return,*’ likewise, to the saint it will be said, ‘*You are heaven, and to heaven you shall return*’³.’]

¹ *In Gen. 102.*

² *On Ps. hom 6.*

³ *On Ps. hom 46.*

7- COATS OF SKIN

“And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

If Adam and Eve fell under chastisement, yet, they are our first parents. In Adam we find a father of all humanity, and in Eve a mother of all living. But through this parenthood, sin infiltrated us, and we fell with them under the same chastisement, until the Second Adam came to grant the true life to believers, and His wife - the new Eve - the true mother to all living. **St. Didymus the Blind**, says: [The Church is the mother of believers, and Christ is their Father, in whom all fatherhood springs, what is in heaven and on earth¹.] **St. Jerome** says: [As there is only one Eve, the mother of all living, there is likewise, only one Church, the mother of all Christians².]

And now, as our first parents fell under divine chastisement, God proclaimed His love for them, before driving them out of the garden, “*He made coats of skin, and clothed them*” (Gen. 3:21), in place of the fig leaves they sewed together to make themselves coverings. These coats, probably, proclaimed God’s revelation to the first man about the importance of sacrifice as a symbol of that of salvation... It is as though God has given Adam and Eve the rite of the bloody sacrifice. As to the coat of skin, that do not get dry, it symbolizes the slain Lord Christ, Whom we put on as a cover for our sins, and a remover of the disgrace of our old nature.

St. Ambrose sees in the coats of skin a symbol for the labor of the works of repentance, saying: [God clothed them with coats of skin, and not of silk³.]

8- SENDING MAN FORTH OUT OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN

God, after making coats of skin for man and clothing him, declaring His supreme care for him, through the sacrifice of the Cross, and covering him, not with the skin of dead animals, but with the Lord Christ Himself, the Grantor of life, Who hides and covers him inside Him, He sent him out of the garden of Eden.. Why?

(1) If God sent us out of Paradise, we actually took ourselves by ourselves out, as through rebellion, our corrupted nature came to be unfit for the holy paradisiacal life, but fit for earth that brings forth thorns and thistles. That is why **St. John Chrysostom** says: [God granted us Paradise out of His compassionate care; and as we demonstrated our unworthiness for that gift, because of our negligence, He took it away from the unworthy, out of His goodness. (Because He is All-good He can’t accept any deviation from the perfection.)⁴]

(2) Driving man out of Paradise, does not imply a complete deprivation of what God once

¹ In Gen. 106.

² Ep 123:12.

³ Conc. Repent. 2:11 (99).

⁴ هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ ١٩٧٢، ص ١٩.

granted him, but preparing him for an enjoyment of a greater Paradise, and an unending eternal life. **St. Theophilus of Antioch** says that driving man out, even if it is a punishment, yet it carried goodness on God's part; He intended to punish sin, and to get man back after renewing him¹. **St. Ambrose** says: [Death was given as a remedy, as it puts a limit to evils².] With the same sense **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Just imagine what would be the situation of Cain if he stayed in Paradise in his condition as a blood-shedder?! Paradise was given to man, and when he proved not worthy of it, he was driven out, for staying out and feeling insulted, he would turn to a better condition (through repentance), to be worthy of returning. That actually happened, as the Lord said to him (the thief): "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Look how, not only giving us the Paradise, but also sending us out of it, is a sign of great care and compassion! If man did not suffer being driven out of Paradise, he would not have been worthy of it again³.]

God knew it was alarming for man to eat from the tree of life, while corrupted in his nature, lest he would stay in his evil eternally. The Scripture says: "*The man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever*" (Gen. 3:22).

It seems that the speaker here, is the Holy Trinity, as He says: "*became like one of Us*" concerning knowledge of good and evil. But man has got that knowledge through the fatal experience of evil.

Abbot. Chaeremon comments on that experience, saying: [We should not assume that man was totally ignorant of the 'good,' or he would be as one of the dumb unreasonable creatures; something completely foreign from the faith of the (Catholic) Church.

Moreover, the wise Solomon says: "*God made man upright*" (Ecclesiastes 7:29); namely, he, alone, always enjoyed the knowledge of good. But once acquired, the knowledge of good and evil, "*they have sought out many schemes*" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Adam, after his fall, acquired the knowledge of evil that he had never known before, but he did not lose his knowledge of the good that he used to know⁴.]

Finally, as man was driven out of Paradise, God placed a Cherub to guard the way to the tree of life, until the time came when He, Himself, who is sitting on the Cherubim, came to carry us in His pierced side, to take us along with Him, into His heavenly Paradise.

¹ *To Aytolycus* 2:26.

² *On Belief of Resur.* 2:38.

³ هل للشيطان سلطان عليك؟ ١٩٧٢، ص ١٩، ٢٢، ٢٣.

⁴ *Cassian: Conf.* 13:12.

CHAPTER 4

ABEL AND CAIN

The sin, having set forth, from Eve to Adam, through the deceit of the serpent, all their seed came carrying its microbe in their nature. And as the apostle says: “ *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...*” (Romans 5:12). This was strongly demonstrated in Cain, who, not bearing to see God accepting the offering of his brother, he committed the first homicide in the history of the world. Many Fathers were concerned with the episode of Abel and Cain, being the story of the fallen humanity that harbored hate toward one another

- 1- Accepting the offering of Abel** 1-7.
- 2- Murdering Abel** 8-16.
- 3- Children of Cain** 17-24.
- 4- Birth of Seth** 25-26.

1- ACCEPTING THE OFFERING OF ABEL

“*Now Adam knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, ‘I have gotten a man from the Lord’*” (Gen. 4:1).

Philo, the Jew from Alexandria, believed that Abel and Cain were twins, a view not well received by the early Fathers of the Church.

Some **Origenists** depended on this text in our hands to declare that Adam started to ‘Know’ Eve as his wife, after the fall; as though the marital body relationship, according to them, is a fruit of the fall. Some of them even went as far as saying that the fall itself was nothing but the practice of that relationship. This extreme view was strongly rejected, and even attacked, by the Church since its appearance. The Fathers confirmed that God was the Founder of marital life in its complete form; that, with or without fall, this relationship would have been consummated between our first parents, to beget children. Yet this would not have occurred through an evil lust, but as a fruit of pure love. Many Fathers also rejected the view that the fall of our parents has been their carnal union, as that view defiles the concept of the life of marriage.

Eve apprehending that her child was a divine gift, she called him “Cain,” saying, “ *I have gotten a man from the Lord*” (Gen. 4:1).

Her joy was probably, because she assumed that the coming of the promised Savior from her seed drew very near, and, would probably be realized in her days. Eve felt that her child was acquired from the Lord; and as **St. Ambrose** says in his work, ‘*Cain and Abel*’: [It is fitting for us to apprehend that God is the Creator, as Eve did, and referred the work to the Lord; as though she said that to teach us to follow her example in similar situations, and not to count any success

to be a result of our own doing, but to refer it completely to God¹.]

“Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel” (Gen. 4: 2)

St. Ambrose believes that Cain represents the pure reasoning thought, or the school of reasoning. He probably means the ‘Gnostics,’ who put the reasonable knowledge, as the sole way to salvation, instead of faith, considering that man is capable, by his mind, without any divine help, of reaching the knowledge of God, and apprehending his mysteries, through his intellect, senses, feelings, and emotions. Abel, on the other hand symbolizes the school of faith that depends upon God’s grace, to enjoy God’s mysteries through faith granted to man, without disregarding his mind. Faith does not contradict the mind, but rather lifts it up, and exalts it, through God’s proclamations to man; these two schools, despite their apparent contradiction, are closely connected, as though two brothers are begotten of one same womb, although not able to live together for a long time.

The episode of Abel and Cain also presents to us a living portrait of the story of the Spirit and the body as ‘first fruits.’ Although Cain was the first-born to Adam and Eve according to the flesh, yet he lost his status as a result of his evil. That of Abel has been spiritually demonstrated by God’s respect of his offering but rather his whole life was well-pleasing to God contrary to his brother’s. Thus, **St. Augustine** sees in Cain a symbol of the first Adam, the first-born of humanity according to the flesh, who lost his status to the true Abel - the Lord Christ - the second Adam, as truly a First-born to humanity, in Whom the Father receives us as a sweet aroma. From the words of **St. Augustine**, the following: [From those first parents of mankind, Cain has been a firstborn, referred to the “city of men;” then Abel was born, referred to the “city of God.” And as it is with individuals, it is also on the level of the human race as a whole; it is said in an apostolic expression discerning the truth: *“However the spiritual is not first but the natural, and afterwards the spiritual”* (1 Corinthians 15:46). So it happens that every man, detached from his condemned origin, is first born from Adam, the wicked carnal, and afterward becomes good and spiritual, as he is renewed in Christ (by Baptism). So it is for the human race as a whole, as we find people of this world born first (meaning the old man within us), then followed by those foreign to it (the new man we became in Christ), namely those referred to the (city of God), who by grace are designated, by grace are chosen, by grace lived as foreigners here, and by grace lived as citizens high up there... God, as a Potter, from the same lump of clay, makes one vessel for honor and another for dishonor (Romans 9:21); but He made first the one for dishonor then the one for honor².] This corresponds to the verse in St. Paul’s epistle (1 Cor. 15:49) “And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.” That is next to the first image where we become a new creation deserving to be a vessel of honor.

It is amazing how this issue of the body and Spirit as firstborns extended along the

¹ *Cain and Abel, 1:1.*

² *City of God 15:1.*

generations. So we find that God elected Abraham as a father to all peoples, although he was not the firstborn among his brothers; and elected Isaac, who was younger than Ishmael; and Jacob who was younger than Esau; then the Lord Christ from the seed of Perez, born by Tamar - Perez breached his brother Zerah, while still in his mother's womb to take away his right as firstborn (Gen 38:27-30). The genealogy of the Lord Christ came presenting a great group of fathers, who were not firstborn according to the flesh. We have previously dealt with the concept of the firstborn and its relation to the Lord Christ, the Firstborn, in our study of the Book of Numbers¹.

St. Ambrose believes that Cain symbolizes the Jews who were the firstborn according to the knowledge of God, but denied faith in the Savior, and had their synagogue spoiled by the blood of the innocent. Then came Abel as a representative of the Church of the New Testament that embraces members of the Gentiles, to take over her identity as a firstborn, and to be counted as the Church of the Firstborn (Hebrew 12:23), through her union with the Lord, the Firstborn. **St. Ambrose** says: [In Cain we see the Jewish people, spoiled by the blood of their Lord, their Creator, and also their Friend; and in Abel we apprehend the Christian man, attached to God, according to the words of David: *"But it is good for me to draw near to God"* (Psalm 73:28), namely, his soul would become connected to the heavenly, and would avoid the earthly; who also says: *"My soul faints for Your salvation"* (Psalm 119:81), which shows that the law of his life was directed to contemplating in the Word (Christ), and not in the lusts of the world².]

When the Holy Scripture spoke of carnal birth, it started with Cain, the firstborn according to the flesh, then Abel. Yet, as each of them got settled in his preferred work, Abel came to take over the forward position, as though breaching his brother's firstborn position; as it was said: *"Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground"* (Gen. 4:2). And as **St. Ambrose** said, the Holy Scripture did not mention Abel first for no reason, despite his birth after Cain, but: [He mentioned the younger first, as he referred to work, efficiency and natural gift, to realize the differences between their professions. According to our experience, tending and tilling the ground come first, yet of a less position than keeping the sheep³.] Tilling the ground probably refers to the carnal man, who concentrates his eyes and all his energies on the earthly and the worldly; while keeping the sheep refers to someone who is interested in caring, ordaining, and controlling the flesh with all its energies (the sheep). That is why it is fitting for us, not to be tillers of the ground, caring for the flesh and its lusts, but its spiritual caretakers for the sake of the kingdom of God.

St. Didymus the Blind discerns between the professions of Abel and Cain, seeing Abel as a keeper of the sheep, one who controls his body; while Cain was a "tiller" of the ground, and not a "farmer" as was Noah (Gen. 9:20), discerning between a laborer and farmer: a farmer is one

¹ سفر العدد، ١٩٨١.

² *Cain and Abel, 1:2.*

³ *Cain and Abel, 1:3.*

who supervises the agricultural work, knows when to till, when to sow the seeds, and when to reap the harvest with wisdom and prudence. The laborer, on the other hand is a worker in the land who does not make use of these qualifications as if they are absent. **St. Didymus** says: [The Scripture did not say that Cain was a farmer, but a tiller of the ground, not as Noah who was a farmer (Gen. 9:20)... Abel was a keeper of sheep, namely, a controller of senses, who submits his knowledge and controls his emotions and lusts, and one of prudence as a leader; while Cain was connected to the earth and earthly, not as a farmer but as a tiller of the ground, as a friend of the flesh, who works with no prudence or ordinance... according to the saying: “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*” (Isaiah 22:13; 1 Corinthians 15:32). As to the one who does these things according to a divine ordinance, he is following the principle saying: “*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*” (I Corinthians 10:31)¹.]

“*And in the process of time, it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell*” (Gen. 4:3-5)

Why did not God respect Cain and his offering?

(1) **St. Didymus the Blind**, and **St. Ambrose**, both believe that the expression: “*And in the process of time*” refers to the fact that he probably lacked enthusiasm in his offering, and did it with a motive other than love. As the first one says: [Cain presented his offering with negligence, while Abel offered it with honesty².] The other said: [Cain’s offering came “*in the process of time*’... and not promptly and with longing; hence the commandment: “*When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it*” (Deuteronomy 23:21); and: “*When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it... It is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay*” (Ecclesiastes 5:4)³.]

(2) God probably rejected Cain’s offering because it was “*of the fruit of the ground,*” and not of its “*first-fruit;*” he did not offer the best he has. While Abel presented “*of the firstlings of his flock and their fat.*”.. He gave God the priority!

(3) Cain’s offering was of the fruit of the ground, incapable of reconciliation between God and man; While that of Abel was a blood sacrifice, that carries a symbol of the that of the Lord Christ, who is alone capable of reconciling us with the Father, through shedding His blood for our sake.

(4) **St. Jerome** believes that Cain offered the fruit of the ground, and did not offer his heart; namely, he presented an outer offering and not something from within.

As to how Cain knew that God respected Abel’s offering and not his, this can be, as **St.**

¹ In Gen. 119, 120.

² In Gen. 121.

³ Cain and Abel, 1:7.

Didymus the Blind, says, because a fire probably came down and consumed the offering, as it happened with Aaron and his children, when *“Fire came out from before Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces”* (Leviticus 9:24); and as it happened with the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18:38-40)¹.

The first consequence of the rejection of that offering was: *“Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell”* (Gen. 4:5)

Sin corrupts and destroys man’s peace, to live in anger and misery; and lets his countenance fall to the dust, instead of rising to heaven. And as the wise Solomon says: *“A man’s wisdom makes his face shine”* (Ecclesiastes 8:1); and *“A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken”* (Proverbs 15:13). By sin man’s countenance falls with grief, and by Christ Jesus, it rises merrily, to say: *“We all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Now, as Cain’s countenance fell, God did not forsake him, but approached him asking: *“Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door, and its desire is for you, but you should rule over it”* (Gen. Gen. 4:7).

Indeed He did not accept his offering because it did not come from a pure heart, yet he does not forsake him in his fallen condition, but approaches him with love and converses with him frankly and clearly: *“If you do well, will you not be accepted?!”*, as though he admonishes him, saying: If you do well, wouldn’t I accept you anew?! Why do you surrender yourself to anger, and why should you let your countenance fall?! And warns him, saying: *“And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door, and its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”* As though He is telling him: I behold the sin of murder lying at the door, desiring to infiltrate your depths, although you can rule over it, namely you are the one with authority and will. It is up to you to accept or to reject it. You are still a master of it, but if you accept it, you will fall down under its servitude. As long as it lies at the door, it is weak, but if it gets inside, you would be weaker before it, and would bow before it with the spirit of servitude.

2- MURDERING ABEL

“Now Cain talked with Abel his brother. And it came to pass, when they where in the field, that Cain rose against Abel his brother and killed him... Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’, and he said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper? ‘And He said, ‘what have you done / The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground” (Gen. 4:8-10).

Cain assumed that by killing his brother, he had nothing more to worry about, but God came to inquire, to persuade him to repent. He does not want us to cover up our sins by an outer

¹ In Gen. 121.

cover, while corruption is still digging in the depths, but as a spiritual Physician, He intends to reveal and expose the wounds to heal them. From another side, God wanted to confirm to Cain that He is the God of Abel, who does not forget him even if he got killed. And as **St. Didymus the Blind** says on the Lord's tongue: [Do not think that your crime escaped My eye that never wink¹.] And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [He got rid of him because he saw how he was beloved, assuming that by killing him he deprives him of love; yet what he did made him more beloved by God, who sought him, asking Cain: '*Where is Abel your brother?*'²]

Cain hid his brother's body, but he could not suppress the voice of the soul crying to God, expressed by God, saying: "*The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground.*" The blood refers to the soul, being a sign of life. If blood is shed, the soul stays crying, through the blood unfairly shed on the ground. That crying voice is that of every man afflicted for the sake of Truth, to be counted as a witness or a martyr for the Truth. His cries would remain screaming beyond the earth (the place) and the death (the time). About that voice, **St. Ambrose** says: [Blood has a loud voice, that reaches from earth to heaven³.] Affliction does not suppress the tongue of the soul, but on the contrary, makes it more unified with the living and crucified Word of God, acquiring the voice, that is never to be overcome by death, or shut in by the grave. It is as though, the source of the blood unfairly shed, is the unification of man with the Living Crucified One. **St. Clement of Alexandria** saw in the blood of Abel, the righteous, a symbol of that of Christ, whose atoning voice or work would never cease, saying: [It was not possible for the blood to utter a voice, unless we see it referred to the incarnated Word; Abel, the righteous man of the old, was a symbol of the new Righteous One (Christ, the Word of God); and what the old blood intercedes for, is to be realized through the new blood, that cries to the Father that the Word is suffering⁴.]

If Cain had destroyed his brother's body, and silenced his tongue completely, yet it was impossible for him to silence the tongue of his heart, and his inner screams, listened to by God, who hears the hidden sighs. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [Moses was in grief, and prayed with his heart, to which God responded by saying: 'Why do you cry to Me?' (Exodus 14:15); although he did not cry with his mouth; So also did Hannah, whose voice, although not heard, yet she got all she prayed for, as her heart was crying loud (1 Samuel 1:13). Abel, even when dead, his blood cried with a voice louder than a trumpet⁵.]

Cain disregarded his brother's life; thus disregarding God Himself in his talk to Him. Every sin directed to our brothers, makes us err against God Himself; and as said by **St. John**

¹ In Gen. 129.

² In Rom. hom 8.

³ Ep. 22:23.

⁴ Instr. 1:6.

⁵ In Matt. Hom 19:4.

Chrysostom: [I wish we do not despise one another, as that makes us as though despising God Himself, who commanded us to care for others... When Cain despised his brother, he instantly disregarded God Himself¹.]

If the rebellion of Adam and Eve has carried a tangible punishment, that is still reminding humanity of the bitterness of disobedience, the first crime presented Abel with an effective punishment that reveals to him what got into his depths, as he was told:

“When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you” (Gen. 4:12). Because of his crime, the land was affected by a kind of barrenness, to reveal what also affected the (land) of man, namely his body, that, through sin became barren, and does not yield a fitting spiritual fruit.

St. Didymus the Blind, comments on that divine chastisement, by saying: [It happens sometimes that, because of man’s sins, the land becomes barren and cease to yield fruit, as is said, *“The land will mourn, and everyone who dwells there will waste away”* (Hosea 4:3). The land was granted to yield fruit, for those who keep their minds uncorrupted... but the fruits get less by the will of God, until men forsake their corruption².]

If land refers to the body, that loses its authentic work, to become of no spiritual fruit, so also the soul, as it loses its inner peace; As he is told: *“A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth”* (Gen. 4:12). It is as though, the soul that submitted to the earthly body, will find it barren, to live in it with no peace or comfort, but in a condition of fear and loss. That is confirmed by the Holy Scripture, saying: *“Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden”* (Gen. 4:16)

Namely, the soul goes out of the bosom of its Lord, the source of its peace, to dwell in the land of ‘Nod,’ which means getting lost and confused. And as **St. Didymus the Blind** says, [Nod means confusion; and there, dwells who forsakes the peaceful virtue to get into confusion³.]

St. Jerome says: [Nod is translated as ‘getting lost;’ thus getting put away from the presence of God, Cain naturally dwelt in Nod and got lost. So also the Jews, having crucified their Lord, they wandered here and there, seeking their sustenance; They got into a Diaspora all over the world away from their own land. They beg for spiritual fulfillment, as they have no prophets, Law, priests, nor sacrifice; they became beggars in every sense of the word⁴.] The cause of losing their way is their going out of the presence of the Lord (Gen. 4:16); not place-wise, but out of fellowship with Him and enjoying Him.

St. Didymus the Blind says: [We should not take it as though Cain has gone away from God place-wise, but we say that every sinner is out of the Lord in the same sense, carried by the expression: *“Come before His presence with singing”* (Psalm 100:2). When we come before His

¹ In 2 Tim. hom 7.

² In Gen. 129.

³ In Gen. 136.

⁴ On Ps. hom 35.

presence, we cast away every outer thing, namely sins, in order to enjoy other things that are out of this world, to partake of the knowledge of God. God is not confined to a certain place, despite setting a temple for Him. Cain went out, because he counted himself as unworthy of beholding the face of the Lord; as he has, not any more the thought of the Lord¹.]

St. Basil the Great believes that the harshest punishment that man would fall under, is being deprived of the presence of the Lord².

Cain realized the seriousness of his situation, so he confessed to the Lord, saying: *“My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me. And the Lord said to him, ‘Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him’”* (Gen. 4:13-15).

It is obvious from Cain’s confession, that he felt remorse, not out of hate for sin, but out of fear from earthly punishment. And yet, God opened before him a door of hope. He did not promise that he would not get killed, but whoever kills him would be bitterly punished - sevenfold; setting a mark on him, lest anyone finding him should kill him. Thus, God starts by treating Cain with love, hoping for him to return and throw himself into His bosom, through true repentance.

St. Basil the Great³ believes that Cain committed seven sins, and deserved seven chastisements. His seven sins were: [envying his brother Abel; lying to God; deceiving Abel into going to the field; and what is more horrible is killing his brother, offering a terrible example to humanity at the dawn of its history; and erring to his parents by killing their son.] As to the seven chastisements, they are: [Because of him the earth was cursed, turning into an enemy to him, denying him its fruits; he lives in grief and in terror. Subsequently he is driven out to live lost on earth; and to be alienated from the face of the Lord.]

As to the mark set by God for Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him, it probably is that of the sign of the cross, in which a sinner is hidden, to find security and peace, through his reconciliation with God. This is the mark by which the children of God, who are not defiled, are marked, to get protected from the angel of destruction, as was seen by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 9:6).

St. Augustine believes it to be the mark of the covenant, that was given to people of the Old Testament, as a shadow of the cross, as proclaimed in their Law and rites; saying: [This mark is for the Jews as they kept their Law, got circumcised; kept the Sabbath, sacrificed the Passover,

¹ *In Gen. 135.*

² *Ep. 260:4.*

³ *Ep. 260.*

and ate unleavened bread¹.]

3- CHILDREN OF CAIN

God opened the door of hope before Cain, despite the horrible evil he committed against God and men. Yet, instead of returning to Him with repentance to restore his peace, Cain built a city he called after the name of his son - Enoch (Gen. 4:17), so that his children would not live like him as fugitives. In that he was following the example of his parents, who sewed beforehand fig leaves for themselves to cover their nakedness (Gen 3:7); leaving the inner corruption with no cure.

That was the first city built by man, to resort to it away from God's decrees and chastisements; or in other words to resort away from the loss he brought upon himself; That is why **St. Jerome** says: [The great city built by Cain and called after the name of his son Enoch, symbolizes this world, built by the devil through evil, supported it by crime and filled it by wickedness².] And **St. Augustine** says: [It was recorded that Cain built a city, while his brother, as a transient, built nothing for himself, because the city of saints is up there; although it begets for itself citizens here below, to depart in due time to their permanent home; where they gather together, in the day of resurrection, to be granted the promised kingdom, where they reign with the King of all ages, Amen³.]

While Cain begot 'Enoch,' and built for him an earthly city to protect him from loss, instead of spiritual blessings; the Scripture presents us with a succession of Cain's descendants, until it reaches Lamech, a husband of two wives: Adah and Zillah; from the first wife he begot Jabal and Jubal, and from the second, Tobal and his sister Naamah. **St. Jerome** sees in Lamech the first to marry two women, a reference to the action of heretics, who divide the Church into churches that are deviated from faith⁴. Anyhow, if Cain presented the worst example of crime at the dawn of humanity, by killing his brother, the fruit of this crime is heresy that corrupts the Church of God, deviates it away from faith, and leads it to atheism.]

Some⁵ see Lamech's life with these two women, as representing an atheist or forsaking God. So if Adah in Hebrew means "beauty" or "adornment;" and "Zillah" means "shadow," the first refers to the lust of the eye, while the second refers to the lust of the body. The first with its beauty or adornment deviates the eye away from looking up to heavenly, while the other as a shadow, draws the soul toward servitude to the lusts of the body, which represents just a shadow that would soon vanish; namely, draws it to temporary worldly things.

In Assyrian language Adah is a derivative from 'Adhato,' meaning "darkness," while

¹ On Ps. 49.

² Ep. 46:7.

³ City of God 15:1.

⁴ Ep. 123:2.

⁵ Edersheim: The Bible History, V. 1. p. 30.

'Zillah,' is a derivative from 'Zillato,' meaning "shadows of the night." It is as though Lamech, in his wickedness, chose to unite with darkness and night shadows, through his evil life.

Before speaking about what Lamech said to his two wives, we shall explain the meaning of the names mentioned in this chapter:

a- Irad, son of Enoch; The name Irad is a derivative from the Hebrew word 'Ir,' meaning a "city," probably because Cain built the first city in the world, that he called after the name of his son - Enoch. Some believe that the word 'Ir' in Hebrew means a "colt" or "cautious."

b- Mehujael, son of Irad, a name that means "stricken by the Lord."

c- Methushael, son of Mehujael, a name that means "Hero of God" or "Man of God."

d- Lamech means "strong."

Lamech addressed his two wives with the first poetry in Hebrew literature, called the 'the song of the sword by Lamech,' in which he said: "*O wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold*" (Gen. 4:23-24). In this song you feel the spirit of pride and self-esteem, through self-defense, and confidence in man's strength and violence. Some see Lamech proclaiming to his two wives that he is using the sword that was invented by his son Tubal, who was described as an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron (Gen 4: 22); and as he uses it to defend himself, he would be considered innocent if he happens to kill someone in the process; so if Cain, as a killer of his brother is avenged sevenfold, Lamech, as a defender of himself would be avenged seventy-sevenfold.

As interpretation of that song, some believe that Lamech, almost blind with old age, and guided by his grandson during a hunting mission, killed his grandfather Cain unintentionally; and when the grandson screamed proclaiming the death of Cain, Lamech also killed the boy; that is why he said: "*I have killed a man (Cain) for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me.*" He realized that, as a killer, he would surely be killed; yet because he did that unintentionally, God will avenge him seventy-sevenfold.

Some believe that the figure 77 reminds us with the genealogy of the Lord Christ, as it came in the gospel of Luke (3:23-38); sin and justice would be avenged through the coming of the Savior, who will pay the whole price on the cross.

4- BIRTH OF SETH

As Eve got Cain from the Lord, she thought of him as a blessing to all generations; but soon he had his life corrupted and killed his righteous brother. God did not leave Eve broken-hearted, but granted her a new beginning through begetting Seth in place of Abel. Seth in Hebrew means a "substitute" or a "helper;" as though God brought him as a substitute for Abel, and set him as head of a sanctified generation. Actually Seth begot a son, by the name of Enosh, meaning "human;" "*Then men began to call on the name of the Lord*" (Gen 4:26).

CHAPTER 5

DEATH

Through sin, spiritual as well as physical death entered into the life of man. Whatever the life of man would be, on earth, he will not escape from death... “*Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*” (Romans 5:12). But amid this dark portrait, there was Enoch, who was “taken by God” because he was righteous.

1- Descendants of Adam (and their death) 1-20.

2- The righteous Enoch 21-24.

3- Methuselah 25-27.

4- Noah 28-32.

1- DESCENDANTS OF ADAM (AND THEIR DEATH)

Before talking about the renewal of the world through the great flood and the ark, the divine inspiration presented us with the genealogy of Adam’s descendants, starting with Adam and ending with Noah, when the world starts anew through the Baptism of the great flood.

Edersheim presented the following table, from Adam to the renewal of the world (Noah)¹:

| NAME | AGE AT BIRTH OF HIS SON | AGE AT YEAR OF DEATH | BIRTH AS TO WORLD HISTORY | HIS DEATH AS TO WORLD HISTORY |
|------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Adam | 130 | 930 | 1 | 930 |
| Seth | 105 | 912 | 130 | 1042 |
| Enos | 90 | 905 | 235 | 1140 |
| Cainan | 70 | 910 | 325 | 1235 |
| Mahalaleel | 65 | 895 | 395 | 1290 |
| Jared | 162 | 962 | 460 | 1422 |
| Enoch | 65 | 365 | 622 | 987 |
| Methuselah | 187 | 969 | 687 | 1656 |
| Lamech | 182 | 777 | 784 | 1651 |
| Noah | 500 | 950 | 1056 | 2006 |

In this genealogy, it is to be noted that:

a- The name of Abel, who died before having any children, was not included. In spite of his memory being omitted because of his bearing no children, yet, “*though dead still speaks*” (Hebrew 11:4). The name of Cain and his descendants was also disregarded, as he chose to

¹ Edersheim: *The Bible History*, V. 1. p. 34.

condemn himself to death, while still living.

b- Although man with his wickedness lost likeness to God's image, yet, in the beginning of the genealogy of fathers, he says: "*In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God*" (Gen. 5:1). Even though man got defiled by transgression, yet God is hoping to get him back to his original image in which He created him. This genealogy probably aims to present us with the Person of the Savior, by Whom believers would enjoy that gift, namely this of carrying God's image in them.

c- As He mentions the birth of 'Seth,' he says: "*And Adam begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth*" (Gen. 5:3), in other words, a human being. By being in his father's likeness and image, he probably means that he carries the same hope that was of his father Adam, for enjoying the promised salvation, and not as Cain, who lived without hope, lost on earth.

d- It is to be noted that Enoch came as a descendant of Seth, "*who walked with God, and he was not, for God took him*" (Gen. 5:24). He is not the one with the same name - Enoch, of Cain's descendants, after whose name the first city on earth was built. It is as though God set a seed that carries the heavenly features, in place of that seed that was attached to the earthly. In the same sense, we find here, Lamech, the seventh in Seth's genealogy, begetting Noah, a sign of spiritual comfort in the Lord, in place of Lamech, of Cain descendants, who got married to two women: "darkness" and "shadow of night," who was known for his violence. In other words, even if the devil is doing his best to corrupt humanity for the sake of his kingdom, yet God sets for Himself witnesses in every generation, beloved to Him, to enjoy the fellowship of His glories.

e- Concerning the ages of these fathers, many scholars presented various interpretations: Some said that numbers in Hebrew were obscure and difficult to translate; while others said that the ages mentioned are not to concern the fathers, but concern their tribes. Anyhow, the Holy Scripture is not a historical one, and does not claim, by its divine words, to register man's history according to our literal concept; although we can not deny its accuracy, and the possibility of long life at the beginning of creation.

f- Probably, this genealogy aims to confirm that man, in spite of the length his life is, eventually dies, leaving to his children the promise of salvation, to look forward to the new life that is undefeatable by death.

2- THE RIGHTEOUS ENOCH

Among this genealogy, there is a man, whose life history did not end by the phrase, "and he died," but "*was not, for God took him*" (Gen. 5:24). Yet "*before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God*" (Hebrew 11:5). So, if the other genealogies represent the believing humanity that enjoyed hope in the promised coming of the Savior, to transfer it from death to life, Enoch represents members of the Church, that will not experience death by the coming of our Lord Christ, but "shall be caught up with Him in the clouds" (I Thessalonians

4:14-17), to enjoy the glorious eternal life.

What came here concerning Enoch along the course of genealogy of other fathers is probably a confirmation that the source of man's happiness is not in the long duration of his life on earth, but is rather in his passing to the presence of God to live with Him face-to-face. It is as though Enoch represents man's restoration of his first paradisiacal state, through setting forth from the earth that became corrupted to the sanctuaries of God. And as the apostle Jude said: "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, '*Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him*'" (Jude 14- 15). Enoch's passing to God, is a practical prophecy about the eternal life, and a testimonial against the ungodly and their coming judgment; That is beside his uttered prophecy that was delivered to the Jewish Church through oral tradition, and registered by the apostle Jude.

Enoch represents the heart that unifies with God and becomes the subject of his pleasure in Christ Jesus, the beloved Son; in whom the spiritual death will not find a place, but would be in a continuous setting forth to eternity; whom the enemy will never be capable of grasping or taking over.

We know of Enoch's life nothing more than this phrase, "*Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him*" (Gen. 5:24); the Scripture did not tell us anything about his behavior nor dealings; yet through his hidden life, he drew, along the generations, the lives of many, to repentance and life with God. Ben Sirach says: "Enoch had been transferred as an example of repentance for all generations" (44: 16). And **St. Ambrose** saw in him a portrait of apostolic life, that could not be overcome by death, saying: [Indeed the apostles did not know death as they were told by the Lord: "Assuredly I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (See Matthew 16:28). Whoever has nothing that needs to die within him, (mainly sin and lusts) would live (eternally); he, who, in him, has nothing from Egypt (metaphorically), but, has cast all that off (carnal desires) before forsaking the ministry of body. It is not Enoch alone who was taken away while still living, the apostle Paul was also lifted up to encounter the Lord Christ (while also still alive)¹.]

With the same sense, **St. Cyprian** believes that Enoch is a living example of those who are taken early to the Lord, as they have abandoned their love for the worldly: [You, like Enoch, would have pleased the Lord, being found worthy of letting the world behind. The Spirit has taught Solomon that those who please God are early taken and quickly liberated, lest, by staying longer, they would get defiled by the filth of the world. And as said, He took him away, lest evil would change his mind; He was pleasing the Lord, so He loved him and took him from among the wicked (see Wisd. 4:11). And in the Psalms, the soul, dedicated to her God, hastens to Him

¹ On Belief of Resur. 2:94.

saying: “*How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord!*” (Psalm 84:1)¹.]

St. John Chrysostom believes that Enoch surpassed Abel in his faith, saying: [That man surpassed Abel in his faith. You will probably ask: How? Because despite his coming after him, yet what happened to Abel did not affect him in a bad way; He did not say to himself: what is the use of labor?!²] Enoch was great in his faith although he had no role model to follow, and despite what he heard about all that happened to Abel, he walked righteously with the Lord, to become worthy of being taken by Him.

3- METHUSELAH

Methuselah is a name meaning “man with weapon,” a son of Enoch, who died in the year of the great flood, after 969 of age. Although the longest in the Holy Scripture, yet it ended with death. And as **St. Jerome** said: [Even if we live for 900 years or more, as people of the pre-flood era; even if we are granted the age of Methuselah, yet, when that long lapse of time comes to an end, it will be counted as nothing. Whether man lives ten years or 1000 years, when life is over, and the inevitable death is realized, the past - short or long - is counted the same; although he, who lived longer, would be burdened with a heavier load of sins to carry with him³.]

However as long as this long live be in the Lord, one will be more and more blessed every day. He will a blessing to everyone he meets through out his live as God once promised Abraham.

4- NOAH

Along the genealogy of the fathers, the divine inspiration declared the birth of Noah, as a sign of “comfort” that would be enjoyed by the world through its renewal by the water of the great flood,. the Scripture will present this in some detail in the following chapters. The sons of Noah “Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (Gen. 5:32) came as heads of all peoples of the world, following the great flood.

¹ *On Mortality* 23.

² *In Heb Hom* 22.

³ *Ep. 60:14.*

CHAPTER 6

THE ARK OF NOAH

Death infiltrated into the human race, to reveal another, more dangerous, hidden death, namely the inner death of the soul and its corruption, demonstrated in the withdrawal of the hearts of the sons of God toward the daughters of men, and in the corruption of the earth. The earth became in need of renewal through the great flood and the ark of Noah.

*** An introduction to the ark and the flood.**

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1- The sons of God and the daughters of men | 1-4. |
| 2- The righteous Noah | 5-10. |
| 3- Corruption of the earth | 11-12. |
| 4- The ark of Noah | 13-22. |

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ARK AND THE FLOOD

The episode of the great flood occupied a main position in the history of salvation and the renewal of the world by water; as God declared: *“The end of all flesh has come before Me”* (Gen. 6:13), not to abolish man, but to renew the world; to turn the catastrophe of the great flood into a better goodness for humanity that delivered itself to eternal corruption. The outer great flood came to reveal the flood of sin, destructive to the soul within.

Humanity inherited that episode, and presented it to peoples in various forms, which deviated from its original goal, and got mixed with numerous legends. The following is a concise account of some of the old traditions concerning that episode, revealed by the remains of ancient civilizations:

a- The Babylonian antiquities: It came in the old monuments of Babylon, about the Egyptian priest ‘Perosos,’ of the third century B.C., that, in the days of King ‘Xisuthras,’ there had been a great flood, and the king built an ark, in which he escaped that flood together with his family and his close friends. He also took with them a number of birds and animals. As the rain stopped, he sent out some of the birds that came back with their feet covered with mud. The same happened for the second time. Then by the third time, it did not return. The ark landed at Aridina.

The oldest tradition concerning the great flood was that of ‘*Gilgamesh*,’ in which Gilgamesh asking ‘Athnafishteem’ about the secret behind his reaching the eternal life, he narrated to him the story of the great flood, and how four gods decided to destroy the world by a great flood. Yet the god of wisdom instructed him to build an ark to escape therein from this flood, together with his family. He sent out some birds, some of which returned carrying olive leaves. After his exit, he offered thanksgiving sacrifices, and the god of wisdom came to bless him and his family and to grant them eternal life.

b- The Indian antiquities: A picture of Noah inside the ark was discovered in one of the

temples of Buddha. The goddess Coanin looks at him with compassion. Likewise, the drawing includes a dove flying towards the ark carrying a branch from an olive tree.

Indian stories tell that the god Brahma appeared to Mano in the form of a fish, instructing him to build an ark, to enter in it together with seven righteous individuals. He tied the ark to the horns of a fish that swam dragging it for several generations; and coming out of that ark, he was instructed to recreate the world anew.

c- The Greek antiquities: It came that the god Jupiter instructed Diocalion, the righteous, to enter into an ark, together with his wife and the rest of his family. And as the ark landed on the mountain of Partasus, a dove told him that the rain had come to an end. So he came out to offer thanksgiving sacrifices.

d- Monuments of Phrygia in Asia Minor: It was said that ‘Apachus,’ which is a word thought to be derived from ‘Noah,’ when he heard of the great flood, he cried for people’s sake. In ‘Apamia’ in Phrygia, some coins were discovered, on which the image of an ark with people inside, were engraved; with birds outside the ark, one of which carries a branch from an olive tree. On the side of the ark there was a picture of the same people offering thanksgiving sacrifices for their safety. The name ‘Noah’ was engraved on these coins. The old name of that city was ‘Kepotosh,’ meaning “ark,” for its people believed that the ark landed at their city.

e- In Persia, China, Phoenicia, Syria, Armenia and the tribes of Mexican Indians: other similar stories were found among the remains of the peoples.

These old traditions, although mixed with legends, yet they reveal the existence of a real actual episode, delivered to humanity, but distorted through pagan worships.

1- SONS OF GOD AND DAUGHTERS OF MEN

“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful, and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose” (Gen. 6:1-2).

St. Augustine, in his work *“The City of God,”* mentioned two cities, one of them is earthly while the other is heavenly. The first represents the wicked, attached to the earthly, while the other represents the believers attached to the heavenly. That is why when dealing with that phrase before us, he saw in the marriage of the sons of God to the daughters of men, a mixing of the two cities, something that would corrupt the citizens of the heavenly city. Against this issue the apostle Paul warned saying: *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial?”* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

The expression “Sons of God” in the Septuagint version came as Angels, while the exact translation from the Hebrew is “Sons of gods.”.. That is why **St. Augustine**, who depends more on the Septuagint translation, asked himself: Could angels marry human women? And as his

answer was a somewhat long one, I shall concisely present its main points¹:

(1) The word '*Angelos*' in Greek, means a "messenger." So, the word 'Angels' may refer to the ministers of God, thus the Sons of God or His ministers were preoccupied with marriage to wicked women instead of being preoccupied with the ministry to God.

(2) **St. Augustine** says that, in his days, certain myths appeared among pagans claiming that some demons assaulted on women carnally with profanity - this could never be attributed to the angels of God. So the saying of the apostle Peter: "*For if God did not spare the angels who sinned but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment*" (2 Peter 2:4), does not imply their fall into carnal lusts with human women, but their fall into the sin of pride, before the creation of man.

(3) The expression "the sons of gods" came in the translation of 'Aquila.' It applies to believers, of whom was said: "I said '*You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High*'" (Psalm 92:6). In other words, what the Holy Scripture referred to, either by angels or sons of gods, are the descendants of 'Seth,' who were supposed to live like angels and ministers of God, inflamed with the divine fire of love, or like sons of God. But it happened that they were attracted to the wicked daughters of Cain, because of their beauty. Through that, the righteous intermixed with the wicked, and all were corrupted. And there was need for a general renewal of the whole creation through the water of the great flood. The Lord declared his dissatisfaction by saying: "*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years*" (Gen. 6:3). As man deviated to wickedness, God declared that His Spirit shall not strive with him forever. Namely, it will not abide in him as long as his conduct is evil, and that his days shall be shortened to 120 years. That was realized gradually after the great flood; and although He allowed some to live longer, yet they lived with no vitality (for they abode in evil). The 120 years probably meant the duration it took Noah to warn the people before he finally entered into the ark.

His saying "*My Spirit shall not strive with man*" probably meant that, as long as man insisted on his evil and stubbornness, he will be deprived of the admonition of the Holy Spirit, for God will deliver him to an outcast spirit. Some believe that the expression "*My Spirit*" does not apply to the Holy Spirit of God, but to the spirit that God granted to man for it wouldn't remain in the body forever, but He would withdraw it after 120 years. However, this view is not acceptable.

It is to be noted, that as man deviated to carnal lust, God called him "flesh;" or "body" as in the Septuagint version. It is as though, with his carnal behavior, he became like a body with no spirit; because the body with its lusts enslaves the spirit as well, and leads it according to its ways. Concerning this, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [As those with the wings of the Spirit, make

¹ قامت الدكتورة أمينة كمال متري بترجمة الكتاب الخامس عشر من "مدينة الله". *City of God* 15:23.

the body spiritual; so also those who deviate and become slaves to their bellies and their lusts, would make the soul carnal, not in the sense of its essence, but would corrupt its noble origin¹.] He also says: [Although they have souls, yet, as they became dead in them, He called them “flesh.” With a similar sense, the pious, although they have bodies, we say that they are all souls or all spirits... The apostle Paul says about those who did not consummate the works of the flesh: “*But you are not in the flesh*” (Romans 8:9). Whoever lives in luxury, is not living in soul nor in spirit, but in flesh².]

Thus, as the sons of God preoccupied themselves with matters of the flesh getting attached to the daughters of men, they turned into flesh and became non-spiritual. The fruit of that action was begetting giant children, who are fond of contemporary dignity, saying: “*There were giants on the earth in those days... Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown*” (Gen. 6:4). It is as though, every sin would drag on another; or as if man, delivering himself to weaknesses, would become sins’ toy, each throwing him to the other. The sons of God started by looking and admiring the carnal beauty of the sons of men; then they disregarded their spiritual mission, and turned to carnal thoughts; they became “body,” and begot violence, love of contemporary dignity, instead of the fruits of the Spirit, compassion, meekness and humility!

2- THE RIGHTEOUS NOAH

“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and the beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’” (Gen. 6:5-7)

It was not possible for God, the Holy One, to bear the evil that prevailed on the earth, or to accept encountering the soul He created as His dwelling place, to see that every intent of its thoughts was only evil continually. That is why He was sorry that He had made man on the earth. When the Scripture says: “was sorry” or “was grieved in heart,” we are not to understand these expressions as reactions of anger; but it is the language of the Scripture directed to us humans, to understand and comprehend the bitterness of sin in itself, and the impossibility of fellowship between the divine holiness and the human corruption. **St. Augustine** interprets the meaning of God’s regret that He had made man by saying: [The wrath of God is not a reaction that could disturb the clarity of His mind (God forbids!), but it is rather a verdict through which sin will be condemned³.] And he says: [The unchangeable (God), changes things, and does not regret - like man about anything He did; as His decision in everything is steadfast, and His knowledge of the

¹ *In Rom. hom 8.*

² *In 1 Tim. hom 13.*

³ *City of God 15:25.*

future is a sure thing; But, in case, He does not use such expressions, it would not be possible be apprehended by people who need to be addressed in a way familiar to their minds, for their own benefit; in order to warn the arrogant, to wake up the loose, and to satisfy the prudent. That would never be realized unless He first bows, descends to where they are, and talks in their language. By proclaiming that all animals on the earth and in the air will die, he meant to reveal the enormity of the catastrophe that was about to happen. That does not imply that the dumb animals have committed any sin¹.] Thus, **St. Augustine** sees in God's proclamation that He was sorry that He had created man, a way of modestly addressing us in our own language, in order to realize how far it became impossible to keep our fellowship with God, the source of our life, not because of a change of God's heart toward us, but because of our own change, through accepting the corruption which is foreign to God insistently. As to His threatening to destroy all animal and bird life, that was out of His supreme love, in the hope that we would reconsider our situation, and would appreciate its seriousness. So in case we repent He would accept us.

It is amazing, that, amid this painful portrait, declared by God to human kind, He does not disregard a single individual who walked in righteousness amid a wicked generation; as the Holy Bible says: "*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord*" (Gen. 6:8). In the middle of that pitch darkness, He does not disregard a beautiful shining, even if it seems to be a small and pale. In every generation, God rejoices in His saints, even if they were a small remnant amid the corruption that fills the earth. God testifies to Noah, "*Noah was a just man, perfect in his generation*" (Gen. 6:9). As to saying, "*in his generation,*" this reveals that his righteousness and perfection were not absolute; but if compared to the corruption that prevailed in his days, for man's righteousness is relative.

3- CORRUPTION OF THE EARTH

"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence... For all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth" (Gen. 6:11-12).

It is to be noted that the word "earth" is repeated several times in this chapter, especially between the verses 5 and 13, being mentioned 7 times. This repetition reveals how God longed to see in the human life a heavenly mark, yet as man got corrupted, he became a dusty earth carrying corruption. And in order not to think that the material of the earth, or what it carried of resources and fruits etc. had been corrupted, He confirmed: "*for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth,*" namely, that the corruption of man had distorted all the dumb creatures.

4- THE ARK OF NOAH

God revealed to His servant Noah what He was going to do, saying to him: "*The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I*

¹ *City of God 15:25.*

will destroy them with the earth” (Gen. 6:13).

God could have instructed Noah to build the ark, and he could have obeyed in faith and trust. But God, with His love for mankind, longs not to be the One who commands and is to be obeyed, but rather a loving Friend, who converses with man, to reveal to him His wisdom and mysteries, and as said by the Psalmist: *“The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant”* (Psalm 25:14).

He revealed to him that, although He is destroying them together with the earth, destruction is the natural consequence of the corruption they have chosen by themselves. That is obvious in His saying: *“The end of all flesh has come before Me,”* as though He is saying: I did not want it that way, but they have created for themselves a destruction that would bring about their end; they have chosen it with their own free will.

Now, although the wicked have done that to themselves, bringing destruction even to the whole earth, yet God, in order not to let His children be destroyed together with them, He instructed Noah to build an ark for his deliverance. The Holy Scripture presented to us a very detailed and accurate account of the story of the ark, and with some detail because of the symbolic significance of the ark in connection to our salvation by the cross.

(1) Importance of the ark: In our study of Baptism¹, we noticed how the liturgies of the Church, and the sayings of the Fathers, have cast the light on the ark of Noah, on account that the great flood was a symbol of the true work of renewal of the human nature, and the ark, a symbol of the cross that carried Christ nailed for our sake, thus carrying in Him the Church, which is His holy body. The old man had to be destroyed in the water of Baptism, so that the new man, that had been made in the image of its Creator, would be set to carry the newness of life, or that life raised from the dead in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:3-4). It is as though the great flood, as a symbol of Baptism, separates between the old life of darkness, and the life shining with the light of the resurrection of the Lord Christ Jesus. That thought of Church Fathers came as an extension of the apostolic thought; as the apostle Peter says: *“When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism, not the removal of filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 3:20- 21).

Since we have already presented the liturgical and patristic thought in this concern², I shall only mention few more words:

❖ God created man from dust, renewed him by water, let him grow by His Spirit, and trained him by the word of adoption and salvation, guiding him by the holy commandments, in order

¹ للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، ١٩٨١، ص ٢٩-٣٢.

² للمؤلف: الروح القدس بين الميلاد الجديد والتجديد المستمر، ١٩٨١، ص ٢٩-٣٢.

to turn man, born of dust, into a heavenly sanctified being, on His coming¹.

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ In the great flood - in the days of Noah - all people died, except for Noah and his family... So, the outer man perishes, but the inner one is renewed. This does not only happen in the water of Baptism, but also by repentance, when the lusts of the flesh perish, and the spirit grows. As we are taught by the apostolic authority, saying: *“For indeed as absent in body, but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”* (1 Corinthians 5:3-5)².

St. Ambrose

(2) Material of the ark: *“Make yourself an ark of gopherwood”* (Gen. 6:14). According to the Septuagint version “of square boards.” **St. Augustine** believes that it refers to the Church³, or to the steadfast and well-established life of saints as the square boards, whatever their movement is, remain standing upright⁴.

St. Ambrose says: [You see water, wood, and a dove! Do not get confused! In the water, the body is emerged to get all its sins cleansed, and all its evil buried. On the wood, the Lord has been nailed as He suffered for our sake. And in the appearance of a dove, the Holy Spirit descended, as we read in the New Testament. He who grants peace to your soul and mind and the raven is a symbol of sin that goes not to return, as righteousness is kept in you in the side and outside⁵.]

Origen⁶ sees in the wooden square boards with right angles a reference to the prophets and apostles, through whom the library of divine knowledge is set in the soul. Seeing in the ark a symbol of entrance into the secrets of the knowledge of God through His Divine Word.

(3) Dimensions of the ark: If the ark refers to enjoyment of free salvation of the Lord Christ, and to entrance into knowledge of exalted secrets of God through the cross; to be called by **Origen** “the library of divine words” or “the library of divine knowledge,” that is why its dimensions, from length, to width, to height, would refer to faith, love, and hope, as he says: [Whoever is capable of listening to the words of God, and to the divine commandments, despite the burden of evil and the enormity of transgressions, disregarding the corruptible things, would be able to build in his heart an ark of deliverance, and to dedicate in his soul a library of divine words; and so would be granted faith, love, and hope, as length, width and height. Faith in the Holy Trinity is the length that extends to eternity; the width is love displayed in delicate

¹ *Paedagogus* 1:7.

² *Duties of the Clergy* 3:18 (108).

³ *On Ps.* 87.

⁴ *City of God* 15:26.

⁵ *On Mystr.* 3:11.

⁶ *In Gen. hom* 2:6.

emotions; and height is hope that would carry him to where heavenly Truth is, as while we are on earth, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20)¹.] In more detail he says that length is 300 cubits, as the figure 100 refers to the reasonable flock of Christ (Luke 15:4-5), of which the Lord Christ is keen not to lose a single sheep; that flock is sanctified through its knowledge of the Holy Trinity (100 x 3), or faith in Him. As for the width of the ark, it was 50 cubits, and as we saw in our study of the Book of Exodus, and that of Numbers, that the figure 50 refers to forgiveness of sins², as what used to occur in the year of the Jubilee (50 years), when a general amnesty is proclaimed, together with a liberation of slaves and land. And as also happened on the day of the Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended over the disciples in the upper room, to grant the Church a heavenly nature, free from sin. Width refers to love, that forgiving love of God, and our love that covers the weaknesses of others. As to the height of 30 cubits, that refers to the rise of man to God, as Joseph did, when he set forth, at the age of 30 years, from the prison to the palace, to take over the government of Egypt. Therefore, let the spiritual ark be built in us, so that we would have the true experimental knowledge: its length being the living faith in the Holy Trinity; its width, the true love for God and men, and its height, the hope in heavenly.

St. Augustine³ sees in the dimensions of the ark (300 x 50 x 30), a symbol of the body of the Lord Christ: A mature man, according to this saint has a length equal to 6 times his width between his sides (300 x 50), and 10 times his height (his thickness from the back to the chest) (300 x 30). It is as though the ark refers to the Incarnated Word of God, who carried us in Him to deliver us from the great flood, to His new land.

(4) Covering it inside and outside with pitch: As **Origen** says: [He wants us to be saints from outside, and with pure heart inside, well protected from every side with the virtue of fulfillment (the outer pitch), and purity (the inner pitch)⁴.]

(5) The side door: **St. Augustine** says: [This, no doubt refers to the wound by the spear, in the side of the crucified, through which those coming to Him would enter, and from it secrets by which believers in Him would enter into His fellowship would pour out⁵.]

(6) The three decks: **St. Augustine**⁶ sees in these three decks a living portrait of the Church assembled of all peoples and from all nations, consummated from the descendants of the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The three decks may also refer to the three virtues instructed by the apostle Paul: faith, hope, and love. He also sees in them the believers who delivered three different quantities of crop: hundred-, sixty-, and thirty fold (Matthew 13:23;

¹ *In Gen. hom 2:6.*

² الخروج، ١٩٨١، ص ١٨٢؛ العدد ١٩٨١، ص ٣٣، ٣٤.

³ *City of God 15:26.*

⁴ *In Gen. hom 2:4.*

⁵ *City of God 15:26.*

⁶ *City of God 15:26.*

Mark 4:8), or represents the heavenly city or eternal Church, that embraces in its membership pure married people, as well as widows, and pure virgins.

Origen¹ sees in the three decks a reference to the three ways of interpretation: the literal, the moral or ethical, and the spiritual interpretations. Whoever stops at the literal interpretation, will be like him who settled down in the lower deck, together with the animals; while he, who rises to the moral then enjoys the spiritual interpretation, will be like the righteous Noah and his family in an encounter with God.

(7) Noah and his family in the ark: **Origen** says: [Through ascending the successive decks of the ark, we reach Noah himself whose name means (comfort) or (righteousness); Noah is Jesus Christ, as, the words of his father Lamech do not apply on the old Noah, “*This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed*” (Gen. 5:29... Look at our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom is said: “*Behold; The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29); “*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’*” (Galatians 3:3). And He also says, “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). Here you are, seeing Him as truly granting rest to humanity, and redeeming the earth from the curse².]

And St. Peter, the apostle, noticed that the souls saved by the ark were eight (1 Peter 3:20-21); This figure refers to the Church hidden in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ; or refers to its heavenly nature, and its new features, through its enjoyment of the resurrected life in Jesus Christ. We know that figure 8 refers to life after time; as the figure 7 refers to the days of the week, the figure 8 signifies crossing the frontier of time.

¹ In Gen. hom 2:6.

² In Gen. hom 2:3.

CHAPTER 7

THE GREAT FLOOD

Amid the corruption of the earth, the Lord declared His redemption of humanity, through the events of the great flood and the renewal of the earth, the matter that carried a symbol of the salvation work of the Lord Christ.

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- God's care for Noah | 1-5. |
| 2-Entering the ark | 6-9. |
| 3- The great flood | 10-16. |
| 4- Water rising high above the earth | 17-24. |

1- GOD'S CARE FOR NOAH

In His exalted care for His children, God says: "*Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation*" (Gen. 7:1). How wonderful it is to see God testifying to His children, with such a true testimony! If humanity, in those days, brought destruction over itself and the whole world, yet God remains testifying to the righteousness of Noah; and for his sake, He cares for him and his household, planning his deliverance through the ark with such great accuracy, fixing its dimensions, the kind of wood to use, number of its decks, number and locations of windows etc.; then the number of clean and unclean beasts and birds together with everything that creeps on the earth, besides the necessary provisions. He also instructed him to let all this in, within 7 days, and fixed 40 days and nights for the rain to pour on the earth (Gen. 7:4). All that for the sake of one righteous man, to establish a covenant with him (Gen. 6:18); and here we notice:

a- Some believe that it took Noah 120 years to warn the wicked people, while he was busy building the ark before their eyes, to confirm the truth of God's warnings. Those depend for their view on the phrase, "*Yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years*" (Gen. 6:3). A view also adopted by many others, even in the days of **St. Augustine**¹. Anyhow, Noah, in his age of 600 years was a subject of people's ridicule, to build such a huge ark in his old age to escape a great flood, that was, according to them, a product of his imagination. Unfortunately, many people took part in building it, earning wages for their work from the righteous man, and did not think about entering it to deliver themselves. In that, they represent some of the ministers of the word, who preach the evangelic truth as a job to earn their living; and as they do not live it, they perish, while others are saved, receiving the word from them in faith! That is why, the apostle Paul proceeded cautiously in his preaching, saying: "*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

¹ Cf. *City of God* 15:27.

b- “Then the Lord said to Noah... ‘You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal,...; two each of animals that are unclean,; also seven each of birds of the air, a male and his female of each’” (Gen. 7:3). Some see that thus, the number is too great to be accommodated by the ark. So they claimed that the great flood had to be local and not general over all the regions of the earth, therefore Noah committed himself to animals and birds that only live in his surroundings. But those vast and far continents that were still uninhabited by man, embraced animals and birds that survived until after the great flood. **St. Augustine**, on the other hand, believes that the ark was so huge, and that the cubit mentioned here, was a geographic cubit, that measured six times as the regular cubit; the ark thus could accommodate all animals and birds, etc.¹

c- Some believe that the phrase “seven each of every clean animal, a male and a female,” indicates that Noah took, of every kind, seven males and seven females, probably to offer of them sacrifices to the Lord, besides feeding on their flesh, he and his household. Others believe that that phrase can be interpreted, that he took seven of each kind: three males and three females, beside a seventh animal to be offered as a sacrifice to the Lord.

d- God did not instruct Noah about which of the animals are clean and which of them are unclean; As the Mosaic Law was not yet declared. Therefore, some believe that the statute of clean and unclean animals was given by God orally to Adam, and was delivered by tradition to successive generations. And when the Mosaic Law came it registered what was already set, but with more details.

e- The rain poured for forty days and forty nights; which is the same period of fasting by the Lord Christ, and also by Moses and Elijah. In our study of the gospel according to the Evangelist Matthew², we saw that the figure 40 refers to the days of our life on earth; as though that as long as we are living on earth, we ought to be hidden in the ark from the waters of the great flood to remain protected in the Church of Christ by faith, so we do not perish. If the great flood refers to Baptism, then the old man would have been destroyed, and we wouldn’t enjoy the new man. The pouring of rain for a duration of 40 days and 40 nights, refers to the commitment of the believer to remain all his life on earth reacting with the blessings of Baptism, through continuous repentance, in order to practice the renewed life, not all at once for a limited time, but for a lifetime, with no end. His outer man perishing every day, while his inner man is renewed, setting forth stronger and stronger, and from glory to glory!

2- ENTERING THE ARK

Noah, 600 years of age, entered into the ark with his wife, his sons and his son’s wives, beside all animals and birds... “as God has commanded Noah” (Gen. 7:9). There was probably

¹ Cf. *City of God* 15:27.

² الإنجيل بحسب متى ١٩٨٣.

no natural indication of any flood, yet the procession started and continued to proceed to the ark as for seven days, motivated only by God's commandment to Noah, and the obedience to it with faith in God's promises. While the world was mocking Noah, he was torn with grief for his brothers' sake, yearning to take all of them into the ark to be saved. The seven days duration of the procession, it refers to the Church that opens the doors of hope before all men for all days of the week, namely, all days of our sojourn on earth. For it receives every human being, even at the last breath of his life!

It is to be noticed that Noah and his sons were married, each to only one wife, like their father Adam.

3- THE GREAT FLOOD

The Holy Scripture described the event of the great flood with great accuracy. It started on the seventeenth day of the second month of the 600th. Year of Noah's age (Gen. 7:10), that is the year 1656 of world history, or about the year 2349 BC according to the Hebrew calendar - in the middle or the end of the month of November¹. Rain kept pouring for 40 days (Gen. 7:12), "*and water prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days*" (Gen. 7:24). Water dried up from the earth after 371 days from the beginning of the great flood, when God commanded Noah to leave the ark (Gen. 8:13-16), on the 27th. day of the second month of the 601st. year of Noah's age (Gen. 8:14), counting the year as 360 days according to lunar months.

In the present context we notice the following:

a- The expression "*All the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened*" (Gen. 7:11), indicates that great flood was not only caused by the heavy rains, but the whole earth became, as though it turned into fountains and springs gushing water with no end. Anyhow, if the believer, in his life, carries a consistent great flood, through continuous life of repentance, God will draw out of his earth (body), fountains of great deep, to sweep away and destroy every evil, and will grant his heavens (soul) incessant spiritual rains, to work with the same spirit together with the body, that is, sanctified in the Lord. Thus, the sanctified body in the Lord, would work together with the soul, by the Holy Spirit of God, through the continuous repentance, in order that all features of the old life would come to an end in him, and he would always enjoy the strength of the new life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

b- The Holy Scripture says: "*And the Lord shut him in*" (Gen. 7:16). The door remained open 7 days to receive the procession coming to enjoy the fullness of salvation; but as the days of our life come to an end, the door will be shut out. However, those inside will be kept safe and doom cannot cross over to them, while those, still outside, will be denied enjoyment of the glories inside. This is what the Lord Christ proclaimed in His talk about the kingdom of heaven,

¹ Edersheim: *The Bible History*, V. 1. p. 45.

simulating it to virgins entering with the Bridegroom; and as time comes, with the arrival of the Bridegroom, “*Those who were ready went in with Him to the wedding and the door was shut*” (Matthew 25:10).

It is amazing that God, Himself shuts the door; as it is said, “And the Lord shut him in.” He, alone, “*has the keys of David; He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens*” (Revelation 3:7). He opened for us the gates of Paradise by the key of His cross, to enter with and in Him in the fellowship of His glories; and he shuts us in, eternally with Him, so as the evil enemy would never approach us.

4- WATER RISING HIGH ABOVE THE EARTH

The phrase: “*Water rose high above the earth,*” or phrases that have the same meaning are often repeated often (Gen. 7:17, 18, 19, 20, 24) - and the higher the water rose, the higher the ark moved about on the surface of the water (Gen. 7:18), rising above the high mountains under heaven (Gen. 7: 19). Water remained so risen above the earth for 150 days.

If man, in his love for the earthly, became (earth) and (dust), the water of Baptism can cover him up, to kill in him works of the old man, with his soul rising high, by the cross, seeking the heavenly. And if man, in his pride became a mighty and solid mountain, water would entirely cleanse him to become a holy mountain, carrying the fragrance of life, that is in Jesus Christ, instead of that old life characterized by pride.

We can say, that the more the believer is subjected to temptations that resemble the water of a great flood yet as we are indeed inside the ark - the Church of Christ, even if the ark is shaken for some time, yet temptations surround us, but would never enter into us. They would attack us but would lift us up as water did with the ark; and the believer would remain, through temptations, elevated in the eyes of God, so that when the days of affliction comes to an end, he would settle down on the top of a mountain, and thus stays glorified in the Lord.

CHAPTER 8

NOAH'S SALVATION BY THE ARK

As the old world perished by the water of the great flood, the new world was set, represented by Noah and the members of his family. God Himself cared for their salvation and the renewal of the earth, and received the sacrifice of man as a pleasing fragrance, to enter with him into a new covenant.

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1- Wind passing over the earth | 1-5. |
| 2- Sending out a raven and a dove | 6-12. |
| 3- Removing the covering of the ark | 13-14. |
| 4- Noah gets out to the new earth | 15-19. |
| 5- Building an altar for the Lord | 20-22. |

1- WIND PASSING OVER THE EARTH

“Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with him in the ark; and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided... decreased continually until the tenth of the month. In the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen” (Gen. 8:1, 5).

If God has shut Noah in, yet He will never forget him amid the waters, but, like a Potter, who watches over a clay pot inside the furnace, to take it out in due time as a pot of dignity. For God's aim is that all of us be a pot of dignity, so He waits for due time that this may be fulfilled but not against our will. For the sake of the righteous Noah, fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, to cleanse and renew the earth for him, to let him enjoy a new world in place of the old one. And for him, He shut him in, to protect him against all surrounding currents. For his sake, he also made a wind to pass over the earth. We know that the two words: “wind” and “spirit” in Hebrew are one and the same... It is as though God, amid the water of Baptism, pass with His Holy Spirit, to sanctify our earth; to set us as members of the body of Christ, and a temple for His Holy Spirit.

St. Clement of Alexandria says: [God creates man from dust, renew him by water, and let him grow by the Spirit¹.]

Now, as the water quieted down and retreated, the ark rested, on the seventeenth day of the seventh month, on the Mountain of Ararat in Armenia - its name derived from the Acadian word, “*Ararto*,” meaning a high place - It probably is the summit now called in Turkish, “*Aghri-Dah*,” that is 16916 feet above the sea level.

On the first day of the tenth month, the tops of mountains of lesser height began to show.

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الإلهي، 1967، ص ٨٦٦.

If figure 10 refers to the Law, as man starts his life with the commandment (the spiritual Law), in him will appear the tops of the mountains of virtue that were previously covered and disappeared because of our sins. If the ark - Christ - rests inside us as though on the mighty and solid Mountain of Ararat, He would transfigure inside us, and the pious life would appear in our depths, as tops of living mountains, when we receive His spiritual Law, to be as though on the first day of the tenth month.

2- SENDING OUT A RAVEN AND A DOVE

“It came to pass, at the end of forty days, that Noah opened a window of the ark which he had made. Then he sent out a raven, which kept going to and fro” (Gen. 8:6, 7) setting forth to where the corrupt corpses are, then to return to stand outside the ark. *“He also sent out a dove... But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, she returned into the ark to him... so he put out his hand and took her, and drew her into the ark to himself. And he waited yet another 7 days, and again he sent the dove out from the ark. Then the dove came to him in the evening, and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf was in her mouth... So he waited yet another 7 days and sent out the dove, which did not return again to him anymore”* (Gen. 8:8-12).

St. Augustine says: [If the ark refers to the Church, both the dove and the raven were found therein. Noah had sent those two species of birds, he had the raven and dove two... If the ark is truly a type of the Church it is seen, by necessity, through the great flood of this world, to include both the doves and the ravens. What are the ravens? Those who seek their own. And what the doves? Those who seek the things which are of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:21)¹.]

The raven refers to the sin which must be cast away; to set forth and so never returns to the ark, but keeps going to and fro, hesitating between the corrupt corpses and the ark from outside. Noah would not put out his hand to take it in as he did with the dove.

St. Ambrose says: [The raven is a symbol of sin that goes never to return. If righteousness is kept in you inside and outside².] And **St. Jerome** says: [The raven was sent out of the ark, and did not return; Afterward the dove proclaimed peace on earth. Likewise, in baptism, the devil, the meanest of birds, is driven away, then, the dove of the Holy Spirit proclaims peace on our earth³.] And he also says: [If the world falls into sin, nothing would be able to cleanse it, but the water of a great flood. The dove of the Holy Spirit flew to Noah after the raven went far away, and became as though it was heading toward Christ in the Jordan (Matthew 3:16); came carrying with her beak a branch that symbolizes to reform and light, to give the whole world the good news of peace⁴.]

If the raven has found food and a resting place for the sole of its feet, among the corrupt

¹ *In Ioan. Tr. 6:2.*

² *In Mystr. 3.*

³ *Dial. adv. Lucif 22.*

⁴ *Ep. 96:6.*

corpses, Yet the dove (the believing soul) would never find rest except in the hands of Noah... It came out of the ark three times:

a- The first time it found no resting place for the sole of its feet; as a reference to the soul, inflamed by the Holy Spirit - the heavenly dove - which cannot settle down or rest among the corrupt corpses; it is attracted in her exile toward the ark, to find the hand of her Christ put out to carry her in His bosom, as her resting place.

b- In the second time, it went out to the world, to return proclaiming the peace of Christ through the new world, after the disappearance of corpses and uprooting of corruption, through the new life in Jesus Christ. **St. Augustine**¹ sees in the olive branch a symbol of peace from several aspects; the first is that the olive tree is evergreen, as though it represents man filled with peace, who would never lose his greenness by storms. From another aspect, if another fluid like water is poured on olive oil, it would not corrupt, but would float over the other fluid without mixing with it. It is as though, like man, who when knocked over by temptations, would overcome them by floating over affliction.

c- In the third time, it went out of the ark, but did not return; not to desert Noah, but to proclaim the setting forth of the whole procession toward the new earth; as though representing man, set forth toward eternity, as a new life, not to be anymore in body in the Church seen on earth, but, being a member in it, he sets forth to where he encounters the whole procession on the clouds, to enter to the glories.

3- REMOVING THE COVERING OF THE ARK

“Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and indeed the surface of the ground was dry” (Gen. 8:13).

That was in the six hundred and first year of Noah’s age, in the first month, the first day of the month..., as though Noah ends the six hundred years, to begin the seventh generation of his age, by removing the cover of the ark, and looking at the new earth through the ark. By that he refers to the Lord Christ - the true Noah - the Leader of the Church, who dwells in its midst for her comfort. He works the 6 days for the sake of salvation of his flock of 100 sheep (Luke 15:4), all along the days of the Church life in strangeness on earth ($6 \times 100 = 600$), up until the time comes to an end, and the seventh day comes, which is the day of rest, God removes every cover, to encounter Him face to face. And as said by the apostle Paul: *“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known”* (1 Corinthians 13:2). Thus, despite all what the apostle Paul enjoyed of divine proclamations, fellowship with God, and a taste of heavenly life, he counted himself, in all this, as though seeing dimly in a mirror, if compared to what he is to gain in the eternal encounter with God, face to face.

¹ *On Christian Doctrine 2:16.*

St. John Chrysostom says: [God is hastening now to us, so that being attached to him, we would know many things considered so far as secrets, and to enjoy the very blessed life and wisdom¹.]

4- NOAH GETS OUT TO THE NEW EARTH

In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was completely dried, and God commanded Noah to get out; that was 8 weeks after removing the covering from the ark, and by the end of the fifty-third week from the onset of the great flood. The following is a simplified timetable of the events of the great flood:

- 1- Noah enters into the ark and the great flood begins (17 / 2 / 600 of his age).
[Seven days after the instruction to gather the animals and birds (17 / 2 / 600).
- 2- The duration of the pouring of rain and breaking of all fountains of the deep. **40 days**
- 3- Water prevailed on earth for 150 days, including the 40 days of the flood. **110 days**
- 4- Waters decreased, and the tops of the mountains were seen (1 / 10 / 600) **74 days**
- 5- Sending the raven out after 40 days (Gen 8:6-7) **40 days**
- 6- Sending the dove out for the first time after 7 days **7 days**
- 7- Sending the dove out for the second time **7 days**
- 8- Sending the dove out for the third time **7 days**
- 9- From sending the dove out to removing the covering of the ark (1 / 1 / 601) **29 days**
- 10- From removing the covering of the ark to the coming out of Noah (7 / 2 / 601) **57 days**

—————
371 days

The duration of events of the great flood, from its beginning to Noah's coming out of the ark (a year, 360 days, according to lunar calendar and 11 days = 371 days }

5- BUILDING AN ALTAR TO THE LORD

The first thing that Noah did after he came out of the ark, was building an altar to the Lord on the new earth that was cleansed by the waters of the great flood. As though the Church can not offer the sacrifice of the Lord Christ (the Eucharist), before the enjoyment of Baptism. For this reason, we find the Holy Scripture proclaiming for the first time the building of an altar to the Lord; although sacrifices to the Lord were surely offered to the Lord after man came out of Paradise.

God declared His pleasure with man after smelling a soothing aroma through the sacrifice of reconciliation; confirming that He will never again curse the ground for man's sake, because of his weakness. How amazing is the forgiveness of the Lord!

The new life began with worship through the sacrifice, as though through the cross. So

¹ In 1 Cor. hom 34:2.

the curse was removed from the earth (Gen. 8:21)... Then man started to work for his daily needs.

Finally, the offering of Noah was a symbol of the sacrificing work of Christ the Lord in His Church. And as the priest says in the Liturgy: [Who ascended His own, a sacrifice accepted on the Cross for the salvation of our race. He was as a sweet aroma to His Good Father in the evening, in Golgotha¹.]

¹ *The Coptic Vesper and Matins Services.*

CHAPTER 9

RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT

As God smelled the soothing aroma from the renewed man's offering, He blessed humanity, presenting it with a law to submit to, a covenant to attach it to Him, and a mark to support him in the days of its sojourn on earth.

- 1- God blesses Noah and his sons 1.
- 2- The Law of Noah 2-7.
- 3- Renewal of the Covenant 8-17.
- 4- Noah and his nakedness 18-23.
- 5- Noah's prophesy on Canaan, Shem, and Japheth 24-28.

1- GOD BLESSES NOAH AND HIS SONS

"God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth' "(Gen. 9: 1)

As Noah and his sons left the ark to the earth, renewed by the water of the great flood, God blessed them and granted them what He previously granted Adam and Eve: *"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."*.. as though man has started anew; or as though the world set forth anew through Noah in place of the first Adam. This blessing is actually a symbol of the blessing that the Church gained in the New Testament through the true Noah - our Lord Jesus, the Grantor of comfort and rest. So in place of the first Adam, we got the Second Adam; and in place of the first Eve, we got the Church as a new Eve, through whom children of God would be born, multiply and greatly grow. Through the first Adam, we got the carnal birth, and through the New Adam or the New Noah, we got the spiritual birth.

St. Jacob of Serug says:

[Our first father was smitten by the serpent, that took him down to Hades, where he is humiliatingly thrown amid mud and worms.

This is our first father, and that is where he is.

If this destiny didn't change then we would have been in great humiliation...

Get away, O listeners, from that horrible humiliation, and seek another Father in heavens.

Hasten to Baptism and seek her as your mother. She will present you with a rich Father filled with all goodness.

She will give birth to you, even if you are an old man, to make of you a son beloved to your royal Father¹.]

St. Augustine says:

¹ ميمر عن المعمودية المقدسة.

[We have two births: One of them earthly and the other heavenly; one from the body, and the other from the Spirit; one of a corruptible nature and the other of an eternal nature; one from a man and a woman, and the other from God and the Church; one make us sons of the body, and the other makes us sons of the Spirit; one makes us sons of death, and the other makes us sons of resurrection; one makes us sons of the world, and the other makes us sons of God; one makes us sons of curse and wrath, and the other makes us sons of blessing and love; one will bind us with chains of sin, and the other will set us free of all its bonds¹.]

2- THE LAW OF NOAH

If God granted humanity, through the water of Baptism, a blessing, to begin a new setting forth, through Noah in place of Adam, He set for it a law in place of the commandment He previously gave to Adam. That law, which could be called, “the Law of Noah,” came to include the following items:

(1) Allowing eating flesh of animals, birds, and fish, He said to them: “*The fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea, they are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green Herbs*” (Gen. 9:2, 3). Man was before, a vegetarian, but now he was allowed to feed on animals, birds, and fish. Why? To prepare the way for receiving the Mosaic Law, by which a priest is committed to eat from sacrifices, as a symbol of enjoying the flesh and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His saying: “*For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood, abides in Me and I in him... and will live forever*” (John 6:54, 55). A sacrifice is not, as some pagans think, to avoid the wrath of God, as God does not find pleasure in burnt offerings, and does not feed on flesh or fat, but the Holy Sacrifice proclaiming the reconciliation of God with man, is a gift to man, by which his soul and heart are fulfilled, on an exalted supernatural spiritual level.

(2) Having allowed the eating of flesh, He was warned against eating it with its blood, to prepare the way to reveal the importance of the blood shed for our sake, as an essential factor for atonement and redemption; as “*Without shedding of blood, there is no remission*” (Hebrew 9:22), and “*With the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1 Peter 1:19).

Physically, forbidding man to eat or drink blood, was for protecting his own health; and behaviorally, to protect him against being savage and violent. But, spiritually, it is meant to sanctify blood, as representing life delivered for the sake of salvation of man.

(3) Perhaps God considers that if man is allowed to eat flesh of animals, that he would attack his fellow man, so He warned against shedding man’s blood.

¹ In Ioan. hom 19.

3- RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT

God established a covenant with Noah and his children, and made the rainbow a sign of that covenant between Him and them, and between Him and their descendants after them. As the chastisement came through nature (the great flood), God set the sign likewise, openly in nature (the rainbow). Yet in the New Testament, as Christ the Lord carried our chastisement in His body, He made the sign in Him through the wounds of the cross.

A rainbow appears around the divine throne (Revelation 4:3; 10:1). That is because the glory of God is not just might and greatness, but it is also love without limit. The rainbow is the sign of love given by God as He set with Noah a covenant after the great flood. And God remains, in His love for mankind, presenting to us love through His covenant with us. That rainbow has several colors, proclaiming the numerous gifts of God. As a bow, it refers to the weapon that was used in wars, as though God defends us by His bow, yet without an arrow, as He does not like shedding of blood; by Him we overcome sin, and tread over the devil¹.

It is amazing how God, in His love for man, is proud of His covenant with him, saying: “My covenant,” and “My rainbow” (Gen. 9:11, 13)

3- NOAH AND HIS NAKEDNESS

Coming out to the new earth, that was cleansed by the water of the great flood, “*Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard*” (Gen. 9:20). He was not “*a tiller of the ground*” (Gen. 4:2) as was Cain before him, but “*a Farmer who planted a vineyard.*” Cain refers to man who puts his work in the earth and earthly, and his energies in the worldly; but Noah, on the other hand, refers to Christ the Lord, who came to us as a Farmer to plant His vineyard anew; that is the Church that became as a new land, irrigated by the waters of the Holy Spirit, and cleansed by the holy blood of the Lord Christ. In a Jewish tradition, it came that Noah found a little vine branch that fell from Paradise, and he planted it².

Anyhow, Noah most probably was not aware of the action of the fermented juice of vine., that is why some Fathers believe that he was the first man to experience it³. Yet, if he became drunk, aware or not aware of its action, he “*became uncovered in his tent*” (Gen. 9:21). The Holy Scripture underscored that weakness, to confirm to us that salvation was not because of Noah’s self-righteousness; if he was righteous, that was because of God’s exceeding grace that supported him in his strife.

That situation revealed the following:

² Edersheim: *The Bible History*, V. 1. p. 55.

¹ للمؤلف: حزقيال، ١٩٨١، ص ٣٧، ٣٨.

³ من هؤلاء الآباء القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم والقديس جيروم (رسالة ٢٢).

(1) Danger of drinking liquor that deprive man of his dignity, and bares him even before his children. **St. Jerome** says: [Nobody should say that drinking is not a sin; we read that Noah got drunk once; but God warns us not to think of him as an addicted drunkard¹.] He also says: [One hour of drinking, has bared Noah who, for 600 years remained dignified².]

St. Ambrose says: [How far the authority of wine goes; it made him, whom the water of the great flood could not overcome, naked³.]

Sin is truly the liquor that bares and disgraces the soul. But Christ the Lord is the splendid clothing that covers the soul against its eternal disgrace. **St. Jerome** says: [We are the garment of Christ; as he puts us on through our faith in Him, we also put Him on as a garment for us.] And as the apostle Paul says: "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Galatians 3: 27). As we put on Christ, He also puts us on⁴.]

(2) As Noah was bared, Ham saw his father's nakedness; but Shem and Japheth, inspired by the natural Law, were keen not to do the same. Here, the unity of the natural and the written laws is revealed, as the law warns against exposing the nakedness of the father or the mother. This should not be understood literally, as it probably warns man against desecrating his step-mother, or a girl, against committing evil with her step-father!... But what Ham did was ridiculing his naked father in the literal sense of the word.

If we, in faith consider everyone as our father, mother, brother, or sister, it is fitting for us not to bare anyone, but, as far as possible, cover him or her in love, in Jesus Christ, who covers our sins.

(3) If Noah did wrong by getting drunk and naked, yet God, in His love did not cover up the weaknesses of His men, but is turning these weaknesses to the good; as He did when He turned the evil plan of Joseph's brothers against him to his and their good.

St. Jerome sees in this story of Noah, a symbolic portrait of what was to happen to the Lord Christ, who drank the cup of passion, got naked for our sake on the cross, and was ridiculed by the wicked (Ham), while the Gentiles (Shem and Japheth) believed in Him. And as said by **St. Jerome**: [All this was said as a symbol of the Savior who drank the cup of passion on the cross, saying: "*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me*" (Matthew 26:39); He drank, got naked, and was ridiculed by His elder son (Ham), namely the Jewish people, while His younger one, namely the Gentiles, covered up His sufferings... And as the Lord got drunk through His passion, so also the saints get drunk by the fragrance of their faith, get drunk by the Holy Spirit. Finally, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples, and filled them, they talked in several tongues, to be accused to be "*full of new wine*"⁵.]

¹ *On Forgiveness of Sins and Baptism 12.*

² *Ep. 69:6.*

³ *Conc. Virgins 1:9 (53).*

⁴ *On Ps. 45.*

⁵ *On Ps. hom 13.*

It is to be noted that **St. Jerome** counted Ham as the elder brother to Shem and Japheth, representatives of the Gentiles. Anyhow, there is much controversy as to the right order of seniority of Noah's sons: Some talk of them as Shem, Ham, then Japheth, based on the fact that they were mentioned as such in many locations in the Holy Scripture. And yet some others believe that, although Shem was not the firstborn, yet he was put first, because from him, the great fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob came, and from him came the ancient people, out of whom the Lord Christ was born according to the flesh. What confirms this, is that, in chapter 10, the sons of Japheth were presented first, followed by those of Ham, then of Shem.

5- NOAH'S PROPHECY ON CANAAN, SHEM, AND JAPHETH

"So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him" (Gen. 9:24). Some believe that the younger son here, is Canaan the grandson of Noah from his son Ham. But it is more probably Ham himself.

Origen believes that Canaan saw the nakedness of his grandfather and told his father Ham. Ben Ezra says that Canaan went too far in ridiculing his grandfather. Anyhow, it seems that Ham and his son Canaan both took part in mocking Noah; representing by that those who *"crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame"* (Hebrew 6:6), by their wicked deeds. Noah cursed his grandson Canaan, blessed the God of Shem, and prayed for the goods for Japheth. His word came to bear a prophecy concerning the future generations, in which the following are to be noticed:

(1) Noah did not curse his son Ham, but his grandson Canaan; probably because his grandson did the most ridicule. **St. Justine**¹ believes that the son, who was previously blessed, together with his brothers, by the mouth of God, could not be cursed. From another side, calling Canaan *"a servant of servants,"* namely the lowliest of the servants, is a prophecy about the Canaanites who challenged God, and deviated to the defilements of the pagans, as for instance sacrificing their children to the idols (Leviticus 18:25-28; Deuteronomy 20:17-18).

(2) When He talked about Shem, he blessed the *"God of Shem;"* as the Lord was referred to the descendants of Shem, from whom came Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And as **St. Augustine**² said, that prophecy was realized by the birth of the Lord Christ from them according to the flesh. If the name 'Shem,' means 'high' or 'exalted,' what name would be so, more than the Lord Christ, whose fragrance was all over the world?!

(3) The prophecy concerning Japheth, whose name means 'enlargement,' or 'fulfillment,' that *"May God enlarge (him), and may he dwell in the tents of Shem."* Shem's dwellings - the Church of Christ - were enlarged to receive the Gentiles, namely to receive Japheth in it.

¹ *Dial. ad. Trypho 139.*

² *City of God 16:2.*

CHAPTER 10

THE NEW EARTH

After the renewal of the earth by the waters of the great flood, God filled it by the descendants of Noah. But, despite that renewal, man got back to abiding in evil that prevailed over the whole world.

In this chapter, the divine inspiration presents to us a genealogy of Noah's descendants, that reveals the origin of old nations. Professor Kautysch of Haile says that it is an absolutely unique record in this concern, that was supported by all archeological discoveries¹. It was formerly claimed that there are certain discrepancies or flaws in that genealogy as far as the origin of peoples is concerned, but modern discoveries came to be in accordance with this chapter.

The goal of this Scripture is not to display the origin of nations, as much as to introduce us to the origin of the old nation, from which the Lord Christ, Savior of world, came.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|
| 1- Descendants of Japheth | 1-5. |
| 2- Descendants of Ham | 6-20. |
| 3- Descendants of Shem | 21-31. |

1- DESCENDANTS OF JAPHETH

'Japheth,' meaning 'Let it be enlarged or extended²,' was born to the 500 years old Noah (Gen. 5:32; 6:10). When his father got drunk and naked, he, together with his brother Shem, behaved respectfully and wisely. That earned them a seemingly obscure blessing (Gen. 9:27). That proclaimed a movement of the non-Semitic nations (descendants of Japheth), to dwell in the tents of Shem, which, as some believe, refer to the movements, more than once, of certain peoples and nations, to the bosom of Christ or to His Church - He who came incarnated, a descendant of Shem, opening the doors of His Church before all peoples and nations. Japheth generally represents the Indo-European people³.

Here, seven sons of Japheth were mentioned. After whose names several peoples were called, from which several others were derived. We shall not go here into their details. His seven sons are:

(1) **Gomer**: a name that means in Hebrew 'highest perfection,' especially that of failure!⁴ The wife of the prophet 'Hosea' carried that same name 'Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim.' The descendants of Gomer inhabited the north, to be called by the Greek Historian Homer, 'People of

¹ الأرشدياكون نجيب جرجس: سفر التكوين، ١٩٧٣، ص ١٦١.

² *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 446; *McKenzie: Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 413.

³ *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 446.

⁴ للمؤلف: هوشع، صفحة ٢٠.

the far north¹. Herodotus mentioned that they came to Asia from regions beyond the land of the Caucasians², and settled down in Capaducia, where they presented a threat to the Assyrian Empire, until defeated by Aserheddon. Moving west, they occupied Asia Minor, where they entered more than once into battles with ‘Guges,’ the King of Lydia, at the end of which he was eventually killed. He was probably the one called by the Holy Scripture by the name of ‘Gog’³. Afterwards, they were driven out of Asia (Lydia), by the Alyattes⁴.

(2) **Magog:** A Hebrew name meaning ‘the land of Gog.’ The name Magog was connected to Gog; the two names symbolized opposition to Christian faith (Revelation 20: 7-9).

In the Middle Ages, the Syrians called the land of the Tatar, ‘Magog;’ while the Arabs gave that name to the land located between the Caspian Sea and the Dead Sea.

(3) **Madai:** From whose descent the empire of the Madies, that united with Persia, came. They dwelt south and south-west of the Caspian Sea - of an area of about 150, 000 square miles; known as Madies or Media.

(4) **Javan:** Father of the Greeks. the word ‘Javan’ in the Holy Scripture (Zechariah 9:13), means the Greek or Macedonian people, whose land was also called ‘Eonia.’

(5) **Tubal:** mentioned together with Javan (Isaiah 66:19) and Meshech (Ezekiel 27:13), in connection with slave trading. Gog had been the head of Meshech and Tubal, the two people have been connected together, and known in Assyrian history by the two names: ‘*Mushbi*’ and ‘*Tabali*,’ as very strong opponents of Assyria in the twelfth century B.C. The descendants of Tubal probably dwelt in the land east of Asia Minor.

(6) **Meshech:** It is believed that his descendants dwelt in the region next to where Tigris and Euphrates rivers spring (Psalm 120:5; Ezekiel 32:26). Then moved to the vicinity of the Dead Sea and the Caspian Sea; they were traders with Tyre (Ezekiel 27:13).

(7) **Tiras:** From whose descendants, the ‘Tirasian’ people came. They dwelt on the islands and coasts of the Aegean Sea; they are probably the pirates of Turusha, who invaded Egypt and Syria in the thirteenth century B.C., and were mentioned in the records of Ramses the Third⁵.

From the descendants of these seven sons, came other peoples and nations, actually this is not the right place to discuss them.

2- DESCENDANTS OF HAM

The word ‘Ham’ means ‘hot.’ That is why the god of the sun was called ‘*Hammu*,’ because of the heat of the sun and its warmth.

¹ *Odyssey 11:14.*

² *Herod. 4:11-12.*

⁴ *Herod. 1:16.*

⁵ *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, p. 951.*

³ راجع للمؤلف: حزقيال، ١٩٨١، ص ٢٦٠، ٢٦١.

Ham was born to Noah when he was 500 years old (Genesis 5:32; 6:10; 9:24). He, and his son Canaan behaved unwisely toward Noah, bringing a curse to Canaan (9:23-27).

From Ham, through his four sons, came peoples that dwelt in south Arabia, Nubia, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Land of Canaan; although Egypt had been called by the name of 'Ham' in old poetry (Psalms 78:51; 105:23, 27; 106:22). His four sons are Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan:

(1) **Cush:** The word 'Cush,' in Hebrew, means 'black.' Cush, the firstborn of Ham, gave birth to five sons who produced five peoples: Seba (meaning man), Havilah (meaning province), Sebta (meaning striker), Raamah (meaning trembling) and Sabtechah (meaning striker¹). These peoples dwelt in mid and south Arabia. But Seba departed to Africa (Ethiopia). That is why 'Cush,' in the Old Testament, mostly designates Ethiopia and Nubia (south of Egypt), and sometimes south and middle of the Arabian Peninsula. In several dictionaries of the Holy Bible, Cush is considered only as Ethiopia.

The descendants of Ham generally produced peoples and nations that were opponents to the work of God and His people in the Old Testament. That is why the Old Testament came to proclaim the divine wrath on these peoples, being symbols of evil; **Cush** referred to the darkness of ignorance. And **Egypt** to the love of the world that enslaves the soul. Besides that **Canaan** refers to the devilish work etc. Yet prophecies of the Old Testament did not leave these peoples without hope, but proclaiming the rejection of God's people of faith, **they also proclaimed the entrance of these nations into the divine covenant**. Thus, these nations that were under curse because of their idolatry and defilement, became the sanctified bride preparing for the eternal life in the bosom of the heavenly Father.

If the Holy Bible reveals that through the seed of Shem, the Son of God would come incarnate as a descendant of Abraham, it likewise reveals the work of the evil one, especially through the descendants of 'Nimrod,' and through that of Canaan who represented who opposed the work of God. Concerning Nimrod, the son of Cush, it was said: "*He began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said: 'like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord'*" (Gen. 10:8-9). That mighty hunter established a reigning dynasty in Babylon, Shinar and Accad. And, most probably, he was himself 'Gelgamish' the Accadian, or the Babylonian. Anyhow, Babylon turned to become later a symbol of pride and challenge to God, as well as to the spiritual fornication (Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:1-5). Babylon referred, according to **St. Augustine**², to wickedness, and to the kingdom of the deceitful antichrist³.

² On Ps. 26.

¹ الأرشدياكون نجيب جرجس: سفر التكوين، ١٩٧٣، ص ١٦٦، ١٦٧.

³ راجع سفر رؤيا يوحنا اللاهوتي ١٩٧٩، ص ١٦٣، ١٦٤.

The word 'Nimrod' means 'mighty' or 'Mutinous.' As to the saying "A mighty hunter before the Lord," it probably means that he was an arrogant, taking pride in his might in hunting and his opposition to the Lord. Strangely enough, many of those opponents to the Lord, were beast hunters like Esau; that is why **St. Jerome** says: [Esau also has been a beast hunter and a transgressor. In all the Holy Scripture, while we do not find a good hunter, we encounter many good fishermen¹.]

The kingdom of Nimrod was in the land of Shinar, meaning 'Two Rivers,' probably because of its location between Tigris and Euphrates, the plains of the land of Babylon. That kingdom included four principal cities at that time: Babylon, meaning 'Gate of God;' Erech meaning 'permanent;' Accad, meaning 'straight;' and Calneh, namely 'a fortress.'

Nimrod and his tribe were not satisfied with that region, but set forth to Assyria, Nineveh 'dwelling place of the god Nin,' Rehoboth Ir 'the spacious city,' Calah 'old age,' and Resen.

(2) **Mizraim:** This name in Hebrew designating a double sense, is attributed by some to Egypt being formed of two sections: Upper and Lower, or because the River Nile divides it into two sides: east and west. But the most accepted view is that it was called 'Misr' in Arabic, after 'Mizraim' in Hebrew, who inhabited it with his children, before extending to the neighboring lands. His children are:

Ludim: From whom the people of Lud, or the Ludians came; they are different from the Luds, descendants of Shem (Gen. 10:22). They dwelt west of the Nile, close to Libya.

Anamim: The tribe of his descendants dwelt in Libya.

Lehabim: The tribe of Lehabim seems to be that of Lubim (the Lubians), Africans who originated in Egypt.

Naphtuhim: His descendants dwelt in Middle Egypt, close to Memphis, center of god

Petah: one of them might have immigrated to Ethiopia.

Pathrusim: Dwelt in Phetros in Upper Egypt; the word 'Phetros' means the Land of the South.

Casluhim: meaning 'fortified;' his descendants most probably dwelt in 'Kesionis,' a mountainous region east of 'Balsam,' on the frontier of Egypt with Palestine. From Casluhim came Philistines, whose descendants moved to Philistine, to form the old Philistinian people. The word 'Philistine' is probably derived from Philistines, meaning a foreigner or immigrant. From Casluhim also came "Caphtorim," meaning 'crowns,' whose descendants dwelt in Caphtor, thought by some to have been in Cappadocia in Asia Minor; while some others believe it to be Cyprus or the Island of Crete; still others believe that it has been in the Nile Delta near Memphis, where there was a city called 'Capet-Hur,' or most probably 'Caphtor.'

(3) **Canaan:** The younger son of Ham; from whose descendants came the Canaanite

¹ On Ps. hom 20.

tribes. We spoke concisely of some of these tribes in the introduction to the Book of Joshua¹.

3- DESCENDANTS OF SHEM

'Shem' is a Hebrew name that means 'high.' Behaving wisely, together with his brother Japheth, when their father Noah drank and got naked, he was blessed by his father. His five sons dwelt in the region extending between the west of Asia and the east of the Mediterranean Sea. From his descendants came the Jews, the Arameans, the Assyrians, and the Arabs; That is why the languages spoken by the descendants of Shem, are called the Semite languages, like the Arabic and the Hebrew languages. The five sons of Shem are:

Elam: In Acadian language, it means 'heights.' To him the Elamites and the Persians are referred. The land of Elam extends beyond the Tigris River, east of the kingdom of Babylon, south of Assyria and Media, and south-east of the kingdom of Persia. The capital city of that kingdom was 'Shushan.' Its people were thus the Elamites and were called the 'Shushamites.' Elam was the center of an old empire that used to have an active political role in the history of the ancient empires of the east. Although the Elamites contributed to the fall of the kingdom of Babylon (Isaiah 21:2), yet the Medes included it in their empire (Persia and Medes), and made it a province of theirs, and made Shushan its capital (Daniel 8: 2). We hear about the Elamites in the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2:9); Now it constitutes a part of Iran, known as Khozestan.

Asshur: He was the father of the Assyrians. Assyria is located at the upper reaches of River Tigris; its capital was Asshur, known today as 'the citadel of Sharkat,' on the west bank of the Tigris. The capital was moved later on to Nineveh. Assyria had been in continual conflict with the Babylonians in the south, and the Hittites in the north-west. Israel together with Judas, both submitted to Assyria, and paid taxes to it. Israel fell under the captivity of Assyria as prophesied by Amos (Amos 5:27; 6:14), and by Hosea (Hosea 10:6; 11:5). God fought for Hezekiah, king of Judah, when attacked by Sennacherib, king of Assyria (Isaiah 36, 37). Finally, they were defeated by the Medes and the Babylonians.

Arphaxad: The grandfather of the Arab Yaktan tribes. Josephus believes that he was also the grandfather of the Caldeans, who dwelt in the southern parts of the province of Mesopotamia.

Lud: Grandfather of the Ludians; who were different from the other Ludians, descendants of Mizraim, who dwelt west of the River Nile in North Africa. Those, who were descendants of Shem, dwelt in the region of Lydia, west of Asia Minor.

Aram: meaning the 'high ground': The Aramaic language was the old Syrian language. Aram has been a group of little countries or provinces, of which are, Aram, Mesopotamia (Gen. 24: 10), Aram, Damascus, Aram Soba (1 Samuel 14), Aram Maaka (Joshua 12), and Aram Beth-Rehob (Judges 18:28) etc.

Moses was keen to mention the descendants of Arphaxad, who begot Salah, who begot

¹ يشوع، ١٩٨٢، ص ٢٣ - ٣٠.

Eber, who begot Peleg, who begot Reu, who begot Serug, who begot Nahor, who begot Terah, who begot Abram (the Patriarch), who took Sarai as his wife. Moses also mentioned that Lot was the nephew of Abram, son of Haran, son of Terah.

St. Augustine interpret the verse¹, “*The name of one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided* “ (Gen. 10:24), that division referred to diversity of languages. As in the days of Peleg, many languages began to appear on earth, after they were speaking the single language that was spoken by all, later on was called “Hebrew.”

¹ *City of God 16:10, 11.*

CHAPTER 11

THE TOWER OF BABEL

If God intervened to renew the world by the water of the great flood, so, instead of responding by love and by leaning on the bosom of God, man leaned on himself, and started to build for himself a tower to resort to it from God's resolutions against him. That tower actually represents contemporary philosophies - especially Existentialism - that sees God as suppressing and depriving man of his freedom; as though the glory of God is based on the humiliation of man, and His power is on the expense of man's dignity. They saw it inevitable, in order to get rid of that God, to deify themselves, and to escape, to enjoy complete freedom.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| 1- The Tower of Babel | 1-9. |
| 2- The descendants of Shem | 10-26. |
| 3- Abram and Lot | 27-33. |

1- THE TOWER OF BABEL

"The whole earth had one language and one speech" (Gen. 11 1)

Having spoken in the previous chapter of the descendants of Noah, and the appearance of nations and peoples, each with its own speech, He is explaining here, how the whole earth had one language and one speech; then how that language was confused, and every nation began to have its own speech or language.

It has been natural for all people to speak one language, thought by some scholars to be the Hebrew tongue, basing their view on the fact that the early names like Adam, Eve, Eden, etc. were Hebrew; while others proclaimed that the first language was the Chaldean (the Syrian), on account of that, all the languages of the east were derived from one source; and the Hebrew was just a branch of that language; especially that the early fathers dwelt in the land of the Tigris and Euphrates, seat of the Chaldean people. Anyhow, although it is difficult to decide what language the early world spoke, yet it is safe to say that it was only one language¹.

We do not know how man started to speak a human language. But we know that the early man used to utter the language of love that knows no division. Adam and Eve communicated by the spirit of love and union, through the meekness of the spirit, thus, man has been a helper of his brother. Through the language of love, the first man knew how to address God, His angels, and all the heavenly, and to discern their heavenly voices. And through the language of love, man was in harmony, even with the dumb creation, all uttering together with the spirit of thanksgiving and praise for God. But now, as man fell into rebellion, he lost the language of love and union. He dissented even over himself, his body speaking a language other than that of his spirit, and

¹ الأرشدياكون نجيب جرجس: سفر التكوين، ١٩٧٣، ص ١٨١، ١٨٢.

entered into a bitter inner schism. He, no longer could talk to God with joy, nor partake of the heavenly in their liturgies, or be in harmony with the dumb creation.. Man lost the one tongue, and the one inner language, even though humanity remained for sometime using one concrete language! Thus, it was inevitable, for that apparent unity of language to collapse, after its inner unity did. It was as though, what occurred after the episode of the Tower of Babel, has been only a natural consequence, and a revelation of the inner depths, that man lost the one tongue and one language. In other words, the confusion of tongues that happened came to expose the inner confusion, in hope that man would begin to look inside himself, to seek the union of the language of love and spirit, before seeking that of the apparent tongue.

“And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They had bricks for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens. Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:3-4)

Following the great flood, after the ark settled down on the Mountain of Ararat, they journeyed eastward to the land of Shinar, that is the plain of Tigris and Euphrates, south-east of that mountain. There, they found the climate suitable to make red bricks, in the way it is still done in Egypt. As to cement, they used a kind of mineral mortar, that when solidified, it is called asphalt, which is common in the plains of Euphrates.

Their human plan has been to arrange for building a city and a high tower, so that, in case of another great flood, they would find for themselves a resort against God’s severe chastisements, in the same manner as for the Canaanite cities: *“Great and fortified up to heaven”* (Deuteronomy 1:28).

The evil did not lie in building the city itself, or in the desire to build a high tower, but in the purpose of the work, *“To make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth,”* as though they had no confidence in God’s covenant with their father Noah, counting God as not honest in keeping His promises. Nonetheless, it would have been proper for them, instead, to return to God with love, in order to find in Him their heavenly city, and a true Tower; and by Him, they would have made for themselves a name, not only over the face of the earth, but even in heaven!

By their intention to build an earthly city to protect them from the wrath of God, they rejected the heavenly city, which, in its essence, is resorting to the bosom of their heavenly Father. **St. Augustine** believes that it was ‘Nimrud’ who built that city called Babel (Gen. 10:9-10), saying: [‘Babel’ means ‘confusion;’ When the Holy Scripture spoke of Nimrud, it said *“The beginning of his kingdom was Babel”* (Gen. 10:10). Babel had the authority over the rest of cities, having been a capital or a royal seat, although it did not reach the standard put for it by the arrogance and evil of its builder. The plan for the tops of its buildings was to reach heaven. What

was the goal of those daring arrogant people? How could they fancy doing something higher than God, when they build it on the top of all mountains or even over the clouds of heavens? What, materially or spiritually, could harm God? The true and safe way to heaven is to be established by humility, that lifts the heart up to God, and not against Him, as was said of that mighty man, who was “*a mighty hunter before God*” (Gen. 10:9). This verse was misinterpreted by some, owing to the obscurity of the Greek word that was not translated as “against God” but “before God.” This word can carry both meanings: “against” and “before.” In the Psalm, it was used as “before,” in: “*Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker*” (Psalm 95:6); and in Job, as “Against” in: “*That you turn your spirit against God*” (Job 15:13). So it is to be understood here, that that hunter was “against God.” What does the word “hunter” designate, but the deceiver, the opponent, and killer of animals? He and his people built that tower against God, as an expression of their evil arrogance, and were justly punished, although their plan failed. What was the nature of their punishment? As the tongue was the instrument of their authority, it became the object of punishment, so that the man who did not wish to understand God who gives the commandments, He would not, himself, become understood as he issues orders¹.]

Because of pride, man lost his binding unity; and as **St. Augustine** says: [Through pride, tongues were divided; and through the humble apostles, tongues were united².] Because of pride, man lost his inner unity; so if he, in his pride, did not understand the language of God, full of love, in consequence, the body would not understand the language of the Spirit; and the Spirit would have a language against that of the body. Here the apostle Paul says about man who is outside the circle of the Holy Spirit, Grantor of unity: “*For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish*” (Galatians 5:17).

St. Augustine comments on the verse, “*The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built*” (Gen. 11:5) saying that those who were building were the sons of men: [They were not the sons of God; they were living in an earthly way, in what we call “an earthly city.”] As to saying: “*The Lord came down to see,*” this does not mean the literal concept of this phrase, [God is, in his wholeness everywhere, and does not need to move from one place to another; but it is said that He comes down, when He does something extraordinary on earth, as though by that His presence could be felt. In the same way, saying “to see” does not mean that He would learn something new, as there is nothing that he does not know, but it is said, “to see,” or to “know,” in a sense, to let others see and know³.] And as we previously said, that He, in His love, talks to us in our human language, so that we can understand His ordinances

¹ *City of God 16:4.*

² *On Ps. 55.*

³ *City of God 16:5.*

and secrets as much as we can. **St. Augustine**¹ believes that God descends to us through the coming down of His angels, being His dwelling place, and His “*fellow-workers*” (1 Corinthians 3 9).

2- DESCENDANTS OF SHEM

St. Augustine presents us with an interpretation of mentioning the descendants of Shem, directly after the talk about the great flood and the building of the city of Babel, saying that, as from the descendants of Ham came he, who built Babel, the symbol of the earthly city, so also, from the descendants of Shem came He Who builds the city of God: [It was necessary to keep the genealogy of the generations descending from Shem, to reveal the city of God after the great flood, as it was already paraded, the genealogy of generations that descended from him before the flood. And now, after the Holy Scripture revealed the earthly city, ‘Babel or confusion,’ it gets back to father Shem to save the generations descending from him down to Abram, recording the age of each father when he begot the son mentioned in the genealogy, as well as all the years of his life².]

St. Augustine³ believes that the whole world was speaking one language, that was later called ‘Hebrew;’ and that in the days of ‘Peleg,’ the earth was divided, and other languages appeared beside the Hebrew. Yet the line connecting between Shem and Abram, kept speaking the Hebrew, while the other branches adopted other languages, those about whom is said: “*begot sons and daughters*” (Gen. 11:17, 19, 21, 23, 25); the son every father begot, was handed the inheritance including hope in God’s promise, and the language, while the rest of sons and daughters behaved according to a different spirit, and talked another language different from that of their father.

3- ABRAM AND LOT

After parading the descendants of Shem, He reached to Abram and his nephew Lot, who were dwelling in Ur of the Chaldeans. And by the appearance of Abram, appeared the Patriarch to gain a promise and a covenant from God, that in him, “*All the families of the earth shall be blessed,*” that will be dealt with in the following chapters.

Abram appeared in Ur of the Chaldeans; and it seems that his family worshipped other gods, only Abram worshipped the living God, as it is said: “*Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the river in the old times; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river, led him throughout the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac*” (Joshua 24:2-3).

¹ *City of God* 16:5.

² *City of God* 16:10.

³ *City of God* 16:11.

The topic of the immigration of Abraham, Sarah, Lot, and Nahor, to Haran (Gen. 11:31), will be dealt with in the next chapter.

THE SECOND SECTION

THE EARLY PATRIARCHS

CHAPTER 12 - CHAPTER 50

THE ERA OF THE PATRIARCHS

The era of the Patriarchs (the fathers), began as a preparatory to the entrance of God with humanity into successive covenants, that were sealed by the covenant set by God with man in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Blood on the cross. It started by calling Abraham as the father of fathers. Through him, all humanity - the circumcised and uncircumcised - got the promise of blessing. Faith was accounted to Abraham while he was uncircumcised (Romans 4:9), and he got the circumcision as a seal for this faith. So Abraham carried a natural fatherhood to the circumcised, and a spiritual one to who walk according to his faith.

Christ the Lord proclaimed that Abraham rejoiced to see His day (John 8:56). That is why whoever accept Christ and apprehend the secret of His redeeming work, would enjoy sonship to Abraham, and the rejoicing of his heart.

CHAPTERS 12-25

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ABRAHAM

To be able to follow up what came in the Book of Genesis (Chapters 12 to 25), it is proper for us to present the main lines of God's dealings with our father Abraham before the study of each of these chapters.

(1) HIS LIFE BEFORE REACHING CANAAN

1- He lived with his father Terah and his brothers in the land of the Chaldeans, where he got married to Sarai, his sister from his father, and not from his mother (Genesis 20:12). He departed with his wife, and his nephew Lot, under the leadership of his father Terah, heading to Canaan. They reached Haran where they settled down (Genesis 11:31), and where Terah died. Whatever the motive for that immigration was, St. Stephen proclaimed that it was based on a call by God to Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, before dwelling in Haran (Acts 7:3).

2- When Abraham was 75 years old, he was called to depart to Canaan (Genesis 13:1); He probably took the way of Damascus, as Eliezer of Damascus, "the heir of his house" has been from there (Genesis 15:2); and because the way between Mesopotamia and Canaan through Damascus was paved. He probably did not stop much on the way.

(2) HIS UNSETTLED LIFE IN CANAAN

He dwelt first in Shechem (Gen. 12:6); then went to Bethel (Gen. 12:8), and south to Negeb (Gen. 12:8). Because of a famine, he went down to Egypt, where he said of Sarai that she was his sister, out of fear of Pharaoh (Gen. 12:10-20). He returned to the land, south of Palestine (Gen. 13:1), went to Bethel (Gen. 13: 3), where he separated from Lot to move to the terebinth trees of Mamre in Hebron (Gen. 13:12-18).

(3) DWELLING IN THE TEREBINTH OF MAMRE

Abraham dwelt in the terebinth of Mamre between 15 and 25 years, during which he was allied with the kings of the Amorites (Gen. 14:13); defeated Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, to rescue Lot and his household (Gen. 14:1-16). On his way back, he was blessed by, king of Salem (Gen. 14:17-24).

There, God appeared to him to confirm His promise that he would inherit the land (Gen. 15:7); and Hagar gave birth to Ishmael (Gen. 16). When he reached 99 years of age, God appeared to him, entered with him in the covenant of circumcision, confirmed to him the birth of Isaac from Sarah (Gen. 17). He also played as a host to God and his two angels, to get another confirmation of the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18); and there too, he had a talk with God concerning the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18).

(4) DWELLING IN THE LAND OF THE SOUTH

He moved from the terebinth of Mamra southward; and there, Abimelech, king of Gerar sent to take Sarah as his wife, but was stopped by God (Gen. 21).

God tested Abraham's faith, by asking him to offer his own son Isaac as a burnt offering on the Mountain of Moriah; and after Abraham's faith was confirmed, he moved with his son Isaac to Beersheba (Gen. 22:1-19).

(5) IN HEBRON

Abraham returned to Hebron, where Sarah died and was buried in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23).

(6) PROBABLY IN THE LAND OF THE SOUTH

After the death of Sarah, Abraham, who was now 140 years old (Gen. 24:67; 25:20), sent his servant to Mesopotamia to choose a bride for his son Isaac (Gen. 24). Abraham took Keturah a second wife, died at the age of 175 years, and was buried in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 25:1-9).

CHAPTER 12

A CALL ON ABRAM

Humanity, even after the great flood, persisted on dealing with God as an enemy and not as a loving friend; Yet God, with His love, did not give us His back, but searched until He found among people, one single man, worthy of His call to become a father to the people of God, in whom “*all the families on the earth shall be blessed.*” That father, Abram, was called to “*get out of his country, from his kindred, and from his father’s house,*” to set forth with humanity, in its relationship with God with a new start.

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- A call to Abram | 1. |
| 2- Abram, a blessing for all nations | 2. |
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1- A CALL TO ABRAM

Abram was the tenth in the succession of fathers born to Shem after the great flood. ‘Abram,’ a word meaning ‘a respectable father,’ was changed to ‘Abraham,’ that means ‘*A father of many nations*’ (Gen. 17:5). As he started his life as a dignified and respectable father, and God made him a father of fathers, a father of many nations.

Abraham lived with his father Terah and the rest of the family in Ur of the Chaldeans, in a city known as Uri, south of Babel, of which few ruins remain called nowadays as (El-Mogheir). Recent discoveries indicate that it existed 1000 years before the time of Abraham, and that it was before on the coast of the Gulf. It was reputed for its god ‘Nanar,’ god of the moon, whose worship was tinted with bitter defilements. Although Abram lived in that flourishing business atmosphere, with its heathen uncleanness, yet he stayed faithful in his testimony to God during his life. God testified to him, saying: “*Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac*” (Joshua 24:2-3).

In that region, the descendants of Shem lived attached to those of Ham, adopting their evil ways; that in the whole area, if not in the whole world at that time, there was no one who truly worshipped God, except Abram, who remained a witness to the Lord, drawing to him his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot, to live a sanctified life in the Lord.

Seeing Abram’s faithfulness, God called on him to get out of Ur of the Chaldeans, then repeated the call in Haran, where he lived for a long time with his father, his wife, and his nephew, before his father died (Gen. 11:31-32). Indeed, the Book of Genesis did not mention that

call to get out from Ur of the Chaldeans, mentioning only that call he got later on in Haran, yet the Scripture confirms that earlier divine call in Ur of the Chaldeans, before he went to Haran (Acts 7:2).

God did not disregard a single man, faithful in a whole city, even in a whole world at that time, but made of him a rock out of which believers are cut; and as said by Isaiah: *“Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, You who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you. For I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him. For the Lord will comfort Zion”* (Isaiah 51:1-3)

God requests from those who follow righteousness and who seek the Lord, to look upon their father Abraham, as a rock from which they are cut, to be truly “the children of Abraham,” to see how God called him, not disregarding his single status, but turned him into a multitude, and a comfort to the heavenly Zion. God loved him so much, that he called Himself *“God of Abraham,”* and counted His heavenly Paradise as *“the bosom of Abraham.”*

Amid that dark heathen atmosphere, God saw one sole heart, yearning to encounter Him. So He called on him to get out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and later of Haran, the two cities were centers of moon worship. He called on him to leave in order to make his descendants a “Holy Church.”

The divine call to Abraham came as such: *“Get out of your country, from your kindred, and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you”* (Gen. 12:1).

St. Jerome commented on that divine call saying: [He got out of Ur of the Chaldeans and from Mesopotamia, and went on to seek a land he did not know, in order not to lose Him, whom he found (God). He found it difficult to keep both his land and his God at the same time. Since his youth, he has been ready to realize the words of the prophet: *“I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were”* (Psalm 39:12). He was called a ‘Hebrew,’ meaning ‘a transient,’ as he was not content with the contemporary privileges, but, used to *“forget those things which are behind, and reach forward to those things which are ahead”* (Philippians 3:13); putting before his eyes the words of the Psalmist: *“They go from strength to strength”* (Psalm 84:7). Thus his name carried a secret meaning; opening the way before you to seek what is others’ and not what is yours¹.]

He also says: [The Patriarch was called on to forsake Ur of the Chaldeans, and the city of Babel ‘confusion’ and Rehoboth (the spacious places) (Gen. 10:11). And also to forsake the plain of Shinar, where the tower of pride whose top was in the heavens (Gen. 11:2-4). It was fitting for him to cross over the waves of this world and its rivers, where the saints *“sat down and wept when they remembered Zion”* (Psalm 137:1), to dwell in the land of promise, irrigated by water from above, and not like Egypt, irrigated by water from below (Deuteronomy 11:10)... seeking

¹ Ep. 71:2.

“*the early rain and the latter rain*” (Deuteronomy 11:14)¹.]

This divine call is directed to every human soul, not to set forth from a certain location, or kindred, or household, but to set forth with the heart out of the love of the world and self, to encounter the heavenly Lord, and to live in His bosom. It is a call to all generations that drew the hearts of a multitude of fathers, who realized that it is a divine call that touches their personal lives. The following is a concise account of the comments of fathers on it:

Abbot Paphnotius believes that it is a divine call to practice ascetic life, through which one forsakes his land, namely love of worldly riches; his kindred, namely his old life with all evil habits; his earthly father’s house, to seek that of the heavenly Father. Of his words: [He first said to him: “*Get out of your Country (land),*” namely, of the love of worldly possessions and riches. Secondly, He said, “*From your kindred,*” namely, of your previous life, with everything it embraced, of habits and sins, that attached to you since your birth, as though in a bond of friendship and blood relationship. And thirdly, “*From your father’s house,*” namely, of all what you see in the world. As far as the fathers are concerned, he should forsake the one and seek the other; according to what the Psalmist David says: “*Listen O daughter, consider and incline your ear. Forget your own people also, and your father’s house*” (Psalm 45:10). Whoever says: “*Listen O daughter,*” is surely a father².]

This Saint believes that the call is directed to enjoy the three stages of asceticism: A carnal abstention: forsaking the old behavior; and a liberation of the spirit from the worldly, and preoccupation with the heavenly. It is not sufficient for man to forsake his land, but he must practice fasting and all other carnal and concrete asceticism and forsake his old evil habits. But he should also get out of his old father’s house, to enter into the bosom of his heavenly Father, saying: “*For our citizenship is in heaven*” (Philippians 3: 20).

Fr. Caesarius of Arles believes that this divine call is realized in the water of Baptism through the Holy Spirit, who uproots from our land (flesh), its sins, and abolishes its evil habits (kindred); it takes us away from our old father’s house (the devil), to dwell in our new Father’s house. Of his words: [We believe and apprehend that all these things have been realized in us, brothers, through the sacrament of Baptism. Our land is our flesh. So, we respectfully exit our land, by forsaking our carnal behavior to follow Christ. Shouldn’t man count himself as out of his land, namely his ‘self,’ when he becomes humble after pride; patient after quick temper; when he forsakes perversion to pursue abstinence; when he lets greed turn to generosity and envy to compassion; and ferocity to meekness? Truly, brothers, whoever so changes, through his love to God, would be as though he has forsaken his land... Our Land, namely, our flesh, before baptism, is counted as the land of the dead, yet through baptism, it turns to the land of the living, like that referred to by the Psalmist, saying: “*I would have lost heart, unless I had believed, that I*

¹ Ep. 46:2.

² Cassian Conf. 3.

would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Psalm 27:13). Through baptism we become the land of the living instead of the land of the dead; namely the land of virtues instead of that of wickedness... The Lord says: “*To a land that I will show you*” (Gen. 12:1). We shall joyfully come to a land that God will show us, if we, by His help, cast sins and wickedness away from our land, namely, our flesh.

“*Get out of your kindred;*” Here, ‘kindred’ is understood as transgressions and sins that are partly and somehow born with us, then increased and flourished after childhood through our wicked habits. We get out of our kindred, if we, through the grace of baptism, rid ourselves of sins... and do not, like dogs, “go back to our vomit.”

“*Get out of your father’s house.*” Let us take this phrase in a spiritual concept. The devil, before the grace of Christ, has been our father, of whom the Lord in the Holy Gospel speaks, as He rebukes the Jews, saying: “*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do*” (John 8:44)... That is why, O brothers, it is fitting for us to become worthy of these things through the grace of baptism, and not through our own strength, to get out of our land, namely, the lusts of our flesh; out of our kindred, namely of sins and wickedness (habits); and of the house of the devil (our father). Let us do our best, by His help, not to resume our fellowship and friendship with the devil,... but to follow the example of Abraham’s faith, to do the good things all the time, not only to gain forgiveness of our sins, but also to enter with God into a relationship of friendship and fellowship. Let us contemplate with fear and apprehension, in what God told Moses in this concern, “*Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst*” (Exodus 34:12). Now, we believe that through baptism, we take away all sins and transgressions; but if we get back to make a covenant with them, it would be a snare to us¹.]

Abraham’s departure was not an easy one, having lived in a coastal city, known for its richness, progress, and culture, besides his attachment to his family, especially that that call came to him in an advanced age. He got out of Haran when he was 75 years old, that is in an age when he is in need of settling down. He had no son to inherit him or to care for him in his old age. We know that man tends to move around, more easily, when he is young, but this becomes difficult, as he grows older, particularly when his movement implies an extensive alteration in his life’s style and system. Yet, despite that, Abraham, in the flexibility of childhood, responded obediently to God. **St. Ambrose** says: [Here is our father Abraham, who is to become a role model to the future generations, when he was commanded to get out of his land, his kindred, and his father’s house, despite all his family commitments, didn’t he prove that he without hesitation, decided to go ahead and overcome all difficulties, with no intention to look for excuses².]

With such attitude Abraham accepted and obeyed the divine call, despite all difficulties

¹ *Serm. 81:1-4.*

² *Duties of the Clergy 1:24.*

and human emotions. And strangely enough, God did reveal to him the destination where he is going to settle in, but says to him: “(Go) to a land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). What is the land the God will show us, in exchange of forsaking our old life, but our enjoyment of entering His new heavens and new earth! He does not intend to let man be in deprivation, but He gives us far more than we leave behind. He grants us a new earth, or as **St. Paphnotius** tells us: [It is not a land that you can know or discover through your own effort, but is a land that I will show you, a land that you know nothing about¹.] **St. Gregory of Nyssa** believes, that the goal of that departure, is entering into a new land, namely an enjoyment of knowing God, saying: [If we can, with the exalted spirit of the apostle, take these words according to their symbolic concept, to get down into the secret meaning of history, without losing the true concept of its events, we shall surely find that Abraham, the father of faith, got out, according to the divine commandment, of his land and kindred, into a trip worthy of a prophet, who is thirsty to the knowledge of God; As I think that the blessings he was found worthy of getting, were not proportional of a simple immigration from one place to another; his getting out of his ‘self’ and of his land - as I understand - is a departure from his earthly and carnal thoughts, and an exaltation to a level that is much higher than normal nature; to have his eyes opened to unseen things, with no sensed hindrance; there would be nothing to hear or to see, that would distract the mind, but to walk according to faith, according to what the apostle say, that Abraham was lifted up, through his exalted knowledge, to reach to what is considered as the top of human perfection, recognition of God, of all that is possible for the limited human possibilities to apprehend².]

2- ABRAM, A BLESSING FOR ALL NATIONS

If the divine call has come carrying numerous difficulties, yet these difficulties could not be compared with God’s promises. With every call or commandment, God gives a promise; When He says: “*Come out from among them and be separate,*” His promise is: “*I will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters*” (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). God called the childless Abram and promised him: “*I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great*” (Gen. 12:2). And when He commanded him to forsake the richness of Ur of the Chaldeans, he promised him: “*You shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you.*” And when He commanded him to get out of his kindred and from his father’s house, He said to him: “*In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (Gen. 12:3). God would not be indebted to any man, but seeks a chance to give him abundantly; He wishes that all His children be in real fulfillment, and not in need.

Abram, probably got used to his position as denied of a son of his own to inherit him. But God is not only granting him a son, He is also “making him a great blessed nation.” He is not

¹ *Cassian Conf. 3:10.*

² *Answer to Eunomius 2.*

only promising to bless his possessions, of which he would lose much by his continuous moving, but he will make him a blessing. He is not only promising him new relatives and friends, but that, in him, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

God wishes to give his children abundantly and with no limits, not just blessing them, but to make each of them “a blessing.” When we carry God in us, our life turns into “light” for the world, and a “yeast” to raise the whole dough. He wishes to give Himself to us, to be a blessing, if we, like Abram, truly get out of our land, our kindred, and our old father’s house; Even our name, we forsake it, to carry the name “Abraham” in place of “Abram,” namely, forsake the old carnal name, to carry a new one in the Lord.

Origen says: [He could not get the covenant with God, and the sign of circumcision..., and enjoy the talk full of mysteries..., while he still is in his father’s house, and amid his carnal kindred, carrying the name “Abram,” as long as he stays connected to blood and flesh¹.]

It is amazing, that when one forsakes everything, he would not be in need for anything, but would enjoy the promises of God, not only for himself, but for the sake of his whole congregation, and even the whole humanity; as it is said to Abram: “*In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,*” which was realized through the coming of the Lord Christ, as a descendant of Abram, by whom all nations of the earth were blessed. It would be also realized in another way, in the life of every believer, who enjoys the configuration of the Lord Christ on the (mountain) of his inner heart, to become a blessing for many. That is what the Lord Christ proclaimed in His famous sermon by saying: “*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world*” (Matthew 5: 13, 14).

St. Augustine speaks about the blessing that Abram got, saying: [We notice that Abram got two promises: The first that his descendants would inherit the Land of Canaan, referred to by saying, “*I will make you a great nation;*” and the second promise was even much greater, as it was not a carnal promise, but a spiritual one, through which he would be a father, not only for the Israeli nation, but for all nations that follow his steps².]

3- ABRAM, PRACTICAL IN HIS FAITH

Abram did not stop, in his faith, just at acknowledging God through theoretical thoughts, that he knows by heart and defends, or at interpreting that knowledge through offering certain worshipping rites, but in his faith he obeyed God as a great friend; The Holy Scripture says: “*So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him, And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan*” (Gen. 12:4-5).

¹ *In Gen. hom 3:3.*

² *City of God 16:16.*

The apostle Paul says: “*By faith Abram obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance*” (Hebrew 11:8). By faith, Abram’s heart set forth out of Ur of the Chaldeans, as he latter did, out of Haran. He was looking forward to “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10)

Although Abram’s obedience was complete in his heart, yet it was partial in its execution. He first departed from Ur of the Chaldeans, together with his father Tareh. We do not know why did Tareh go with him. Is it because he was closely attached to his son Abram, or he had found it a chance to forsake the pagan worship?... Anyhow, Abram departed with Tareh to Haran, where the procession stayed for 15 years; Abram could not set forth from it before the death of his father Tareh, who could not move easily, so hindered the whole procession.

I wish we would not have in our departure from Ur of the Chaldeans, the company of Terah, so as not to stop in Haran for so long a time; but let us swiftly set forth toward the heavenly Canaan, to enjoy God’s promises without hindrance.

If the word “Ur” means ‘brightness¹,’ the word “Terah” probably means ‘mountain goat,’ and the word “Haran” means ‘Mountainous²,’ it is fitting for us to depart from the shining and attractive ‘light’ of the Chaldeans, setting forth, without any attachment to trifle things, like the ‘mountain goats,’ so as not to go to Haran, namely to the ‘mountainous land,’ but set forth to Canaan the is flooded with honey and milk.

Finally, Terah died; and after fifteen years Abram could obey the divine call, not partially but with great zeal, setting forth to Canaan, which he probably reached in less than a year.

The first city Abram reached in the land of Canaan was “Shechem,” that means ‘shoulder,’ inhabited by Canaanites with an opposing shoulder to God. And, with an opposing shoulder, Joseph’s brothers left Shechem setting forth to Dothan, that means ‘mutiny’ (Gen. 37:14-17). But later on, it turned to represent a shoulder bowing under burdens, in love for the Lord, becoming a part of the land of promise, assigned to the tribe of Levi, and a city of refuge.

Shechem was a walled city (Gen. 33:18; 34:20), below Mount Gerizim (Judges 9:7). When Jacob returned to Canaan, he found the Hivites dwelling there (Gen. 34: 2), “he bought a parcel of land where he pitched his tent (Gen. 33:18-19). There, the bones of Joseph were buried (Joshua 24:32). When Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite misbehaved with Dinah, daughter of Jacob, her brothers Simeon and Levi killed every male in the city (Gen. 34:25-29). Close to Shechem, Joseph’s brothers came to feed their father’s flock of sheep (Gen. 37:12, 13); and in front of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, Joshua read the Book of the Law (Joshua 8:30-35). It was chosen as a city of refuge (Joshua 20:7, 21:21); and there, Joshua called the tribes to listen to his farewell speech (Joshua 24:1). Shechem became the capital of Israel in the days of Jeroboam who led the ten tribes in a revolt against Rehoboam (1 Kings 12); and following the fall of the

¹ *Hastings: Dictionary of the Hebrew Words ... (Ur).*

² *Ibid (Haran).*

northern Kingdom, Shechem survived (Jeremiah 41: 5), and became the capital of Samaria¹.

Shechem or Nables, is 41 miles north of Jerusalem, 5.5 miles south-east of Samaria; It is located in the high valley, surrounded by Mount Ebal from the north, and Mount Gerizim from the south. The valley was known as ‘Mabartha,’ meaning a ‘passage,’ having been a passage between the coast and the Jordan River.

It seems that Abram did not enter Shechem but pitched his tent close to its wall, then crossed to the terebinth tree of Moreh (Gen. 12:7), meaning ‘terebinth of the teacher’ or ‘of the diviner,’ after a certain diviner who was living and meeting with people there.

In that location Abram built an altar to the Lord (Gen. 12:7), for the first time in the land of Canaan; and it is said that Jacob buried all the foreign gods in his family’s hands, and all their earrings which were in their ears (Gen. 35:4), that they brought from Haran. And there, Joshua took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord, and said to all the people. *“Behold this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God”* (Joshua 24:26-27).

The location was sanctified, as Abram offered a thanksgiving sacrifice to God who brought him to the land of Canaan, that He promised to give him and to his descendants after him where God is glorified, and the foreign gods are buried, to turn the place into a preaching location for the true Joshua, where people would listen to the Divine Word.

That was the first time we hear that God appeared to a man (Gen. 12:7), to confirm his promise to Abram; *“To your descendants I will give this land”* (Gen. 12:7). There was nothing for Abram to do but to build an altar to the Lord, to offer on it a thanksgiving sacrifice, to Him who called him, and accompanied him on his way, and cared for him.

Abram moved to ‘Bethel’... *“There he built an altar to the Lord, and called on the name of the Lord”* (Gen. 12:8). Then he *“Journeyed, going on still toward the south (El-Negeb).”*

4- ABRAM IN EGYPT

“Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land” (Gen. 12:10).

Famines were frequent in the land of Canaan, in which case its people used to go down to Egypt, where the River Nile is.

Although the aged Abram had not been long in the land of promise when that famine happened, he did not feel that he did wrong by getting out of his land, his kindred, and his father’s house; He did not harbor any bitter feeling toward God; nor any lowly thought of God’s promise to give him and his descendants that land prone to famines

Egypt was blessed to receive Abram, the Patriarch, to subsist in the time of famine, and to

¹ *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, P 861; Jos. Antiq. 11:8, 6.*

receive his grandson Jacob and his family, for the people of Israel to set forth eventually from it. Yet, what was even greater than all was when the infant Lord Jesus Christ blessed it by taking refuge in it (Matthew 2:13), realizing the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 19). But there were many who believed that Abram did wrong by going down to Egypt, with no direct command from God, as what happened later on with his grandson Jacob, to whom God said: *“I will go down with you to Egypt”* (Gen. 46:4). According to them, what Abram did, represents someone who, after entering the land of promise, soon relied on human arm, and sought human and not divine help. As Isaiah said: *“Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong. But who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord”* (Isaiah 31:1).

As much as the Scripture magnificently portrayed Abram, as he was departing in obedience to the divine call, leaning in faith upon God’s promise, it, likewise, revealed his painfully human weakness, as he leaned on Egypt for help. And when, in apprehension of what was known about the Egyptians of carnal lusts, he feared and thus asked his wife to pretend that she was his sister, *“that it may be well with me for your sake, and I may live because of you”* (Gen. 12:13).

When the Holy Bible talked about the famine, it said: *“There was a famine in the land”* (Gen. 12:10), and did not say: *“the famine was severe upon Abram,”* as it did say of the famine, that later befell the Egyptians, because the famine was severe upon them (Gen. 47:20). What was said of the famine in the days of Abram was also said of that in the days of his grandson Jacob: *“The famine was severe in the land”* (Gen. 43:10). The believers could be surrounded with famines, yet they only touch the land, namely the flesh; while they would break non-believers, upon whom *“the famine would be severe”* (Gen. 47:10). And as **Origen** said: [The famine was not severe upon Abram nor upon Jacob and his sons, but was severe upon *“the land.”* In the days of Isaac, it was also said: *“There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham”* (Gen. 26:1). Yet that famine was not capable of overcoming Isaac, to whom God said: *“Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you; sojourn in this land, and I will be with you”* (Gen. 26:2-3). In my opinion, that remark corresponds with the saying of David: *“I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread”* (Psalm 37:25). And also with Solomon’s saying: *“The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish”* (Proverbs 10:3). All these texts proclaim that the earth may suffer famine, and likewise those who *“set their minds on earthly things”* (Philippians 3:19). But those who have the bread with which *“they do the will of the heavenly Father”* (Matthew 7:21); and those whose souls rejoice by *“the bread that comes down from heaven”* (John 6:51), would never suffer from famine¹.]

So, You should never be afraid of famine, that affects the land and the earthly; while

¹ In Gen. hom 16:3.

those who are attached to the Lord, and who receive His Holy Body as spiritual food, would never famish; as they eat from the tree of life (Revelation 2:7), and drink from the true vine (John 15:1), “*new in the Father’s kingdom*” (Matthew 26:29). So let us cease to be land; then we would never suffer famine; and let us enjoy the heavenly life, to have eternal fulfillment.

5- SARAI AND PHARAOH

Abram did wrong by going down to Egypt without referring to God or waiting for His proclamations; and that fault led to successive ones. Its natural consequence was a temporary deprivation of his wife, having been taken over by Pharaoh. The strange thing is, while Abram was unable to proclaim that Sarai was his wife, it was proclaimed by God to Pharaoh to give her back to him unharmed, together with gifts and dignity.

Amazingly, God does not deal with man according to his weaknesses; If God allowed Pharaoh to touch Abram’s wife, the latter would have suffered a guilty conscience for the rest of his life, whatever were the blessings and gifts he would have had. That is why God kept her safe from Pharaoh’s hands, besides all the riches and dignity that Abram got. So let us say with the Psalmist: “*He has not dealt with us according to our sins; nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him*” (Psalm 103:10-11). Abram had been one of those who feared and loved God; that is why he enjoyed the mercies, high above the earth. And in him, was realized the saying: “*Do not touch My anointed ones; and do My prophets no harm*” (Psalm 105:15). And as **St. Augustine**¹ says, Abram was anticipating God’s work with him, and got what he anticipated.

¹ *City of God 16:19.*

CHAPTER 13

ABRAM SEPARATES FROM LOT

Abram was trained on giving up earthly things for the sake of the Lord. Now, as he returned from Egypt, and became very rich, he asked his nephew Lot to be separated from him, giving Lot the privilege to choose whatever portion he pleases; preferring to endure to be separated from Lot, his companion in the walk of faith, for the sake of making peace with him.

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| 1- Going out from Egypt | 1-4. |
| 2- Separation from Lot | 5-9. |
| 3- Lot chooses Sodom | 10-13. |
| 4- God blesses Abram | 14-18 |

1- GOING OUT FROM EGYPT

“Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South (Negeb)” (Gen. 13:1).

If Abram went down to Egypt because of the famine, and was about to lose his wife Sarai, yet, because of the purity of his heart, God did not leave him while he was in Egypt, but guarded his wife, besides, he found favor in Pharaoh’s eyes, who persuaded him to go up from Egypt, saying to him: *“Now, here is your wife, take her and go your way. So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had”* (Gen. 12:19-20).

This time, God did not appear to command him to go out, but addressed him through Pharaoh, in whose land Abram sought refuge, as though He is addressing him in the language that suited him then. That is how God deals with man. He talks with every man according to what man chooses for himself. When Abram has been very simple in his faith, God appeared and talked to him directly; but **as he sought refuge in Pharaoh’s protection, He talked to him through Pharaoh.** And when ‘Balaam’ became as ignorant as a donkey, He talked to him through his donkey (Numbers 22:28-30); And, when Saul of Tarsus went too far in his violence, He talked to him through a temporary loss of his vision (Acts 9:8-9). And as the wise men from the East were preoccupied with astrological studies, He talked to them through a star. That is how God addresses man with his language. *“Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him”* (Gen. 13:1). Thus, it is fitting for us, even if we got down to leaning on human arm (Pharaoh), we should not remain in weakness, but go up, everyone together with his wife, all that he has, and all kindred; namely, he should set forth with his spirit, as well as with his body (his wife), and with all his energies. He should not leave behind anything that he has on getting preoccupied with worldly things. In other words, our going out should be complete, to set forth to the land of promise, to live under the wings of our Lord! Abram got out

of his temptation that revealed his weakness, with many blessings. He apprehended God's great care for him that prohibited Pharaoh to touch his wife; besides becoming "*very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold*" (Gen. 13:2). What is the source of that prosperity? If Abram fell down out of weakness, yet, by the strength of Spirit, he did not surrender to fall; as though he is saying: "*Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall I will rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light for me*" (Micah 7:8). The believing soul, filled with hope, even its weaknesses would turn into possibilities to gain greater richness. When 'Theodore' fell in love with a beautiful Jewish woman, and left his ascetic life, **St. John Chrysostom** wrote to him to confirm that his despair is far more bitter than adultery. He sent him two letters until he repented and became a Priest, then a Bishop on the region of Mesopotamia. Of the words of **St. John Chrysostom** to him: [If the devil has got such a power to pull you from your exalted height and virtue, down to such extent of evil, so how much would be God's power to lift you back to your original status? He would not only get you back to what you were, but would make you far better. Do not despair, and do not throw away the good hope; Do not fall as the atheists did; It is not the great number of sins, that leads to despair, but the lack of pious soul¹.] Another time he says: [God is offended by our unwillingness to change, far more than the magnitude of evil we have committed; Whoever sinned, would fall into human weakness, but he, who persist on sinning, would cancel his humanity to turn into a devil².]

If Abram lost time through his going down to Egypt and returning from it toward the land of the South, then to Bethel "*to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai*" (Gen. 13:3), namely he returned to where he had been before. Yet, he came out of his temptation with great benefit and prosperity! The children of God would never cease to grow and to enter into spiritual richness, even if they get subjected in their life, to weaknesses or falls, and assumed that they lost the years, to start again from where they have been before.

The Scripture testifies that Abram "*was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold*" (Gen. 13:2). That richness could not occupy his inner heart, nor confuse his mind; Abram enjoyed both worldly richness and the joyful richness of spirit. **St. Augustine** says: [In order to know that richness in itself is not something to blame, Abraham was very rich, with a great wealth of gold, silver, livestock, and slaves; yet he carried Lazarus, the poor beggar, to his bosom (Luke 16: 22); The poor was found in the bosom of the rich; are they not both rich in the eyes of God?³]

2- HIS SEPARATION FROM LOT

"Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. Now, the land was not

¹ سنعود بقوة أعظم، ١٩٦٧، ص ٥، ٦.

² سنعود بقوة أعظم، ١٩٦٧، ص ٤١.

³ On Ps. 52.

able to support them that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land. So Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left'' (Gen. 13:5-9).

Some believe that the word 'Lot' means 'cover' or 'veil'¹. So if Lot accompanied Abram along his walk of faith, yet, the difference between them was, Abram carried a simple and exposed heart, what is inside it is proclaimed by what is outside; that is why he persistently grew in knowledge; Lot, on the other hand, was walking with the procession of faith with a closed heart, carrying inside it some of his selfishness and connection to the world; **while from outside, he seemed as though a man of faith, and a companion of the greatest father.** That is why time and temptations exposed his weaknesses, and was falling apart, day after day; until he lost his wife and possessions, and got defiled with his daughters. We cannot, however deny him certain good sides.

Lot had been a companion of Abram, and both became very rich; Yet, Lot, in his richness, "*had flocks, herds, and tents*" (Gen. 13:5), and did not have "*silver and gold*" like Abram (Gen. 13:2). If silver refers to the word of God, and gold to the Spirit or to heavenly life, Abram, in his richness, was holding fast to the word of God, or to the commandment, as a secret of inner richness. And as the Psalmist says: "*I have rejoiced in the ways of your testimonies, as much as in all riches*" (Psalm 119: 14); He was also holding fast to spiritual riches or heavenly life (gold); livestock did not distract him away of eternity.

Although Abram had been rich in livestock, yet he had his heart open on God's commandment and His heavenly kingdom; Lot, on the other hand, had been preoccupied with sheep, cows and tents, having a heart, closed to the heavenly kingdom.

When Abram saw what happened between the herdsmen of his livestock, and those of his nephew Lot, in love and for the sake of brotherly peace, he asked his nephew to separate from him to whatever place he prefers. And as **St. Augustine** says: [Probably from this came the peace-seeking tradition, for the older to divide, and the younger to choose².]

Abram, the older, yielded the right of choice, to the younger party, with joy and content, something that revealed his faithful heart, and exposed Lot's materialistic heart, as though temptation testified to Abram, but exposed Lot. **St. John Chrysostom** speaks of Abram, the prominent in dignity, how he was not disturbed, as his nephew accepted to be given the right to choose, and took for himself the first best portion, leaving to his uncle the second best portion

¹ J. Strong., article 3876.

² City of God 16:20.

saying: [When it ended up for the older to lose his first portion, he did not get angry... but was satisfied with his second best portion. When his younger nephew did him wrong, he loved him, and gave him help in the time of need¹.] He also says: [Abram, not seeking his own benefit, but that of others, put himself in harm's way; and interceded on behalf of those with whom he had no relationship. His nephew on the other hand, hearing his uncle saying, "*If you take the left, I will go to the right.*" He accepted the right to choose, and sought his own benefit, to lose eventually all his possessions, as the whole region burnt up (Genesis 19), while all the surrounding regions came to no harm².]

3- LOT CHOOSES SODOM

"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah), like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tents even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord" (Gen. 13:10-13).

Abram and his nephew probably stood on one of the mounts of Bethel. Abram lifted his eyes to recall Eden that man was deprived of because of the envy of the devil. So, he lovingly embraced Lot to his heart saying to him: "*We are brethren*" (Gen. 13:8); while Lot, on the other hand, lifted his eyes "*To see all the plains of Jordan that was well watered everywhere*" (Gen. 13:10). One and the same scenery drew Abram's heart to brotherly love, and that of Lot to selfishness; the first longed for Paradise, while the other sought the watered land.

Lot lifted his eyes to see the land "*like the land of Egypt.*" He recalled 'Eden,' yet, not in its inner peace and the encounter of man with the Lord, but in its being watered and fertile like the land of Egypt. Thus in him, the spirituals were intermixed with the worldly with no separation or discernment. Here, he represents the religious person, who has the theoretical knowledge and the formal practices, while his heart is drowned in the love of the world, crawling on the ground.

The third fault committed by Lot, besides his selfishness and lack of discernment between spiritual and worldly things, was the fact that he did not care for the inhabitants of that land, as they were "*exceedingly wicked and sinful before the Lord*" (Gen. 13:13). An attitude that made him and his family loose much, spiritually and materially.

4- THE LORD BLESSES ABRAM

If Lot, with his materialistic attitude, had his eyes drawn to the well watered land, that made him recall the land of Egypt (Gen. 13:10), then by his separation from Abram, the later

¹ In 1 Cor. hom 35.

² In 1 Cor. hom 25.

enjoyed the exalted promises of God. *“Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are, - northward, southward, eastward, and westward. Arise, walk in the land, through its length and its width, for I give it to you”* (Gen. 13:17).

God did not wish to confine Abram to one direction, but commanded him to look toward the four directions, to behold the exalted love of Christ, in its length, width, depth, and height constraining him (2 Corinthians 5:14; Ephesians 3:18). By looking toward the four directions, he probably, by faith, also saw the cross by which the Lord Christ, a descendant of Abram, reigns over the nations and peoples who, through their pagan worship became like land.

Concerning his saying, “arise, walk in the land, through its length and width” it reveals God’s work in those resurrected in the Lord from the dead. Those who do not cease walking until they completely reign. And as **St. Ambrose** says: [He did not promise to reward the reluctant and lazy, but those who strive¹.]

At the time when Abram received a promise for his innumerable descendants to inherit the land, he had not yet had a son. He, in faith, non argumentatively, accepted the promises: *“moved his tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to the Lord”* (Gen. 13: 18).

There, by the terebinth of Mamre, he received God and His two angels, and thus a promise of the birth of Isaac (Genesis 18). We wish here to refer to: Hebron” as meaning, according to **Origen**, (union) or (wedding), while, according to others, it means (fellowship). With every true encounter with God, and enjoyment of His promises, we enter into a deeper (life of fellowship), through which we reject union with love of worldly, for the slaying of the Groom of our souls Lord Jesus Christ.

Lot departed to Sodom and Gomorrah to live on the well-watered land among the wicked, to lose eventually everything. While Abram departed to the terebinths of Mamre, which is in Hebron, to receive God and His two angels, and to enjoy a life of fellowship with God on a deeper level. Our life is a persistent unstoping departure: either to Sodom, where doom is, or to the terebinths of Mamre, where we would have an encounter with the Grantor of life!

¹ *Cain and Abel 1:4 (12).*

CHAPTER 14

THE BATTLE OF CHEDORLAOMER

Abram demonstrated his obedience to God by his departure from Ur of the Chaldeans and from Haran, to Canaan. And as the land was not wide enough to accommodate his herdsmen and those of his nephew, he gave to the latter the right of choice. And now, as his nephew fell into captivity, Abram set forth with his men to free him and those who were with him from the hand of Chedorlaomer, rejecting any human reward, to get from God what is greater.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- Captivation of Lot and his family | 1-12. |
| 2- Abram rescues Lot | 13-16. |
| 3- An encounter with Melchizedek | 17-20. |
| 4- Abram rejects the human reward | 21-24. |

1 CAPTIVATION OF LOT AND HIS FAMILY

Lot chose the region of Sodom that was within the domain of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and paying taxes to him¹.

Chedorlaomer is a name that means ‘Servant of Laomer,’ one of the gods of Elam. He was known for his violence and domineering, having swept all kingdoms of the South, submitted all the valley of the Jordan, and had control on the main road between Egypt and Damascus. After twelve years of humiliation, five kings rebelled against him, and refrained from paying him taxes: Kings of Sodom, of Gommorah, of Admah, of Zeboiim, and of Bela (Zoar). Chedorlaomer had to make war to chastise these rebellious kings, joined by three other kings: of Shinar, of Ellasar, and of Jobim, and they swept the region. That war was fought in the vicinity of Sodom, which, despite its natural immunity, and the bitter soul of its inhabitants, was defeated because of its corruption that destroyed it. Its king had to escape while Lot and his family were captivated and their possessions were confiscated.

2- ABRAM RESCUES LOT

Someone who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew that his nephew was taken into captivity: “*When Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people*” (Gen. 14:14-16).

Lot sought what is his, so he lost everything. But Abram, used to seek what is others’ and

¹ Cf. our commentary on chapter 10 (*Descendants of Shem*).

could not bear to hear that Lot and his family were taken captives. His heart flaring with love could not have rested, while others are suffering. So, he set forth with 318 of his trained servants to make war against him who defeated five kings.

It is not strange that Abram here, was called “*the Hebrew*,” as he lived as a transient, that is to say, a stranger, he could, with the spirit of a stranger, rescue Sodom, its king, together with Lot and his family. While Lot, who dwelt in Sodom, could not rescue anyone, including himself. The world is in need, not for people like Lot, who live attached to the wicked in mind, but like Abram, who although seeming isolated and a transient stranger, yet he is able to support the falling souls, through his sanctified life in the Lord.

Lot dwelt in a city that enclosed his mind to be concerned only in earthly things, merely dust; while Abram dwelt in the terebinths of Mamra, meaning (terebinth of vision), anticipating the vision of God. That did not keep him from serving others; but on the contrary, motivated him more toward working for the salvation of all.

St. Clement of Alexandria¹ believes that the Scripture mentioned the number of servants, who fought together with Abram as 318, for a certain reason. The figure 300 in Greek starts with the letter (*Yota*), a symbol of the sign of Jesus Christ; and the figure 18 with (*Ita*), that refers to the name of the Savior; as though those servants who fought together with Abram, were those who enjoyed the salvation of our Lord Jesus, who resorted to His sign and name.

3- AN ENCOUNTER WITH MELCHIZEDEK

We have previously dealt with that encounter, in our interpretation of the seventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. We saw that the episode of the encounter of Abram, the Patriarch, with Melchizedek, after defeating Chedorlaomer, represents a puzzle with no solution to the Jews. As how would the Patriarch, who had in him the priesthood of Levi, offer the tithes to a stranger? And why, that king and priest, all of a sudden, appeared and disappeared in the Scripture, with no indication of the name of his father, mother or descent? And why didn't he offer a bloody sacrifice, as it was the custom in those days?

These are questions for which the Jews have no answer. But the apostle reveals its secret by proclaiming that Melchizedek, being a symbol of the Lord Christ, surpassed the person of Abram who had in him the priesthood of Levi. We can refer to the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 7. I shall quote here some comments of the Fathers in this concern:

- ❖ Who is the “Priest of God Most High,” other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered a sacrifice to God the Father, presenting the same things Melchizedek did: Bread and Wine, namely His Body and Blood?! As for Abram, the blessing he gained concerned his people².

¹ *Strom.* 6:11.

² *Ep.* 62:4.

St. Cyprian

- ❖ This is our Melchizedek who offered the sacrifice that is ours; He is the One who says: “*He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood*” (John 6:55), granting us that sacrament according to the order of Melchizedek¹.

St. Jerome

St. Ambrose² stated that Melchizedek has been a holy man and a priest, a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ; and was not an angel as some Jews claimed.

We shall concisely present a correlation between the Lord Christ and Melchizedek:

- a- The name, ‘Melchizedek’ means ‘King of righteousness’.
- b- Concerning his work, “the king of Salem” means ‘King of Peace’.
- c- He has been a king and priest at the same time, something that can not be realized for the Jews, for whom the kings were from the tribe of Judah, while the priests were from the tribe of Levi. In Christ Jesus, both were realized.
- d- The offer of Melchizedek was individual in nature, referring to the sacrifice of the Lord Christ.
- e- We know nothing of his father or mother; his kingdom has no beginning or end; referring to the Lord Christ, who has no biological father, and no mother, from a Divine origin, with no beginning of days. He is eternal.
- f- The Lord Christ came, a Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek; as though the Levitic priesthood came to an end, to be replaced by a new priesthood.
- g- Abram, who was a Levi origin who collected the tithes, presented, himself, the tithes to Melchizedek who is the symbol of the Lord Christ. What then is this symbol? And how great would be the person symbolized?

4- ABRAM REJECTS THE HUMAN REWARD

It was Abram’s right to get a reward for his labor. As the king of Sodom heard that Abram rescued his people from Chedorlaomer, he came out of his hiding place to meet him (Gen. 14:17); and said to him: “*Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself.*’ *But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich - except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; Let them take their portion’*” (Gen 14:21-24).

Abbot Theonas says: [Abram surpassed the rules of the Law, that were given later; as he, after his victory over the four kings, did not touch anything of the goods of Sodom, that were his

¹ On Ps. hom 36.

² On Christian Faith 3:88.

as a conqueror, that were offered to him by the king of Sodom himself, whom Abram rescued¹.]

St. Ambrose says: [He has been honest in war; humble in his victory; preferring not to get rich through grants from others, but through those from God².]

Abram, in his dignity, rejected the human reward, in anticipation of that of God. Yet while doing that, he did not deprive his servants from enjoying their right (their food from the king of Sodom), nor his partners in war, of getting their portion. He refused to get what was his, yet, he did not commit others to do the same. A living portrait of spiritual and mental maturity!

¹ *Cassian: Conf. 21:4.*

² *On Belief of Resur. 2:96.*

CHAPTER 15

THE DIVINE COVENANT

In honesty, Abram strove for the sake of Lot and his people; then, having conquered, he rejected the human reward, that had been his right, to be rewarded by God by what humans could not offer, namely the enjoyment of entering into a divine covenant, that his descendants would be like the stars of heaven, and that in his descendants all nations will be blessed.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- God appears to Abram | 1-2. |
| 2- A promise of blessing | 3-8. |
| 3- Animals cut down in the middle, and birds | 9-17. |
| 4- God makes a covenant with Abram | 18-19. |

1- GOD APPEARS TO ABRAM

“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.’ But Abram said, ‘Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’” (Gen. 15:1-2)

God’s words to Abram came at the right time. His saying: *“After these things”* indicates that what Abram enjoyed, of God’s words and of vision, were a continuation of the previous events. Abram presented his life and his possessions for the sake of his nephew, so enjoyed the Lord himself as a shield; and as he rejected the reward, he listened to the divine saying; *“I am your exceedingly great reward.”*

We did not hear that Abram was afraid, but that he conquered in his battle; so why did God tell him assuring him: *“Do not be afraid Abram, I am your shield.”* There is no doubt that that divine confirmation, represents a divine approach toward Abram. Abram approached God, not only through prayers and offering sacrifices, but also through strife for the sake of the benefit of others. That is why, God approaches him according to His promise: *“‘Return to Me,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘And I will return to you’ ”* (Zechariah 1:3). **Abram approached God through his practical compassion toward his brothers; so God approached him by proclaiming that He is a shield to support him. Abram, likewise, approached God through rejecting the human reward; so God approached him by a promise of an exceedingly great reward.**

Let us approach God, not only by prayers, tears, prostrating, and offerings, but also through a whole life filled with love, for Him and all humanity. When we approach him by action, His approach toward us would be a practical one.

The more God approached Abram, the more Abram approached Him; He spoke to Him, not formally, but boldly and lovingly, saying: *“Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”* He did not ask Him directly for a

son to abolish his disgrace, and to inherit him, but lovingly he admonishingly asked Him: What would be the use of such great gifts, for a childless man, who would be inherited by a stranger? God's dealings with Abram gave the latter the privilege to talk to him frankly, and with an open heart, to be called "the friend of God."

2- A PROMISE OF BLESSING

Abram's life was actually a continuous series of encounters with God, and enjoyment of promises. That was not favoritism, but Abram was found worthy of these divine gifts, because of his practical living faith, and his obedience to God in everything.

Abram lovingly admonished the Lord, for so great gifts without a son to inherit him. God's answer to him was: "*This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.*" Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the star if you are able to number them;' and He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 4-6).

According to nature, that promise seemed impossible to be fulfilled; Yet Abram "*believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*" That was the first time we hear the word "*believed.*" Men of God often quoted this verse "*Believed in the Lord*" (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23); as though Abram, the Patriarch had opened before us, his children, the way of righteousness through faith. As the apostle says: "*Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead*" (Romans 4:23-24).

3- ANIMALS CUT DOWN IN THE MIDDLE, AND BIRDS

With an exalted friendship between Abram and God, having been granted a promise he believed, to be accounted to him for righteousness, Abram lovingly asked for a sign, "*Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?*" (Gen. 15:8)

His request for a sign did not imply doubt in God's promises, but it implied the opening of Abram's heart to God, and his friendship with Him. That sign came to reveal the mystery of the Church coming out of the person of Abram. God promising to grant him descendants from his body, innumerable like the stars in heaven, is now revealing to him that these descendants, who will be a Holy Church to God, will embrace in her fellowship, members from both circumcised as well as uncircumcised nations.

God commanded him to "*(cut in two down the middle), a 3-year old heifer, a 3-year old female goat, a 3-year old ram, and place each piece opposite the other; beside a whole*

turtledove and a young pigeon. When the vultures came down on the carcasses Abram drove them away. Now, when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: 'Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. When the sun came down and it was dark..., there was a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between these pieces" (Gen. 15:9-17).

What is the meaning of all that? **Fr. Caesarius of Arles** believes that vision to concern the Catholic Church which is to embrace members of all nations, to become children to Abram, not according to the flesh, but in faith. Yet, some of them would, unfortunately be carnal and others spiritual. **Fr. Caesarius of Arles** says:

[Abraham was called '*Father of many nations*'" (Gen. 17:5). As nations would believe in Christ, and become children to Abram through following the example of his faith, and not according to the flesh. The Jews, denying faith, would become children to the devil, to be called in the Scripture, "*Generation of vipers*" (Matthew 3:7); while the nations, believing in Christ would be worthy of being called "Children of Abraham"

The turtledove and the pigeon, together with the heifer, the goat, and the ram, refer to all nations; describing the animals as being 3-years old, refers to their belief in the Holy Trinity. The Church embraces spiritual members, symbolized by the turtledove and the pigeon, besides carnal ones, symbolized by the three animals. Although some believe in the Holy Trinity, yet they are carnal, being reluctant to forsake their sins and wickedness.

Notice that Abram was commanded to cut the three animals in two down the middle, then to place each piece opposite the other. As to the birds, the Scripture says: "*He did not cut the birds in two*" (Gen. 15:10). Why was that? Because in the Catholic Church there are carnal members that are cut, namely divided, while the spiritual members would never be so. The reason for that division, is that the world-loving wicked people would never cease to oppose one another, while the spiritual souls, would never divide, because they are 'of one heart and one soul' (Acts 4:32). Surely, the turtledove and the pigeon referred to, are these souls, as the turtledove represents purity, while the pigeon represents simplicity. All people fearing God are pure and simple, who say with the Psalmist: "*Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest*" (Psalm 55:6); and, "*Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young*" (Psalm 84:3). The carnals, divided between themselves, are burdened by the heavy chains of sin, while the spirituals are lifted up to the heights, setting forth toward heaven, by virtues, as though by two wings: the two commandments of love for the Lord and love for one another. These can say with the apostle: "*Our citizenship is in heaven*" (Philippians 3:20). And as the Priest says "Lift up your hearts," they can humbly and surely say that they already lifted them up to the Lord. Unfortunately, very

few and rare in the Church, can truly say and confirm it¹.]

Fr. Caesarius also says: [I wish we reveal the simplicity of the pigeon and the purity of the turtledove, in order to be lifted up to heaven by the spiritual wings of virtue, according to the words of the apostle: “We shall all be abducted in the clouds to encounter the Lord in air².]

Let us now think of Abram and how strange he looked before his wife and his servants! That respectable elder standing over the slain animals and birds, cut and arranged according to a certain pattern, without offering them on an altar, or requesting them to be cooked. All day long watching and driving away the vultures coming down on the carcasses attempting to snatch pieces of them! I wonder how did Abram and all others feel.

These animals and birds refer to the Catholic Church in its purity and its carrying the weak in her, as well as referring to the life of everyone of its members. Abram refers to the alert spiritual soul, that, although unable to forbid the unclean birds of prey from roaming around him, yet he can keep them from settling down on him, or snatching something of his own. That is confirmed by many of the Fathers of the Church, that the believer cannot forbid sins from attacking him. Yet, when they find him alert, they cannot enter into him or infiltrate his mind and heart. So they stay outside; roaming around, but unable to touch him.

He remained the whole day, obediently driving the vultures away, not hearing nor seeing a thing; then horror and great darkness fell upon him... Why? He saw the fruit of sin in man’s life, how it corrupts and enslaves him. He heard how his descendants would become enslaved to a strange nation for four hundred years... It is a painful portrait of the soul that falls under sin, to come into the servitude and humiliation of Pharaoh. But God, by sunset, namely by the fulfillment of days, sets forth humanity by the cross from that servitude, granting it great possessions, saying: “*They shall come out with great possessions*” (Gen. 15:14) “*And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there was a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between these pieces*” (Gen. 15:17) A reference to salvation of men by the Lord, and their enlightenment by the fiery Holy Spirit.

We can say that what happened to Abram here, refers to the redeeming work of the Lord Christ; When sun went down, at the fulfillment of time, deep sleep fell upon the Lord, as He yielded up His Spirit on the cross, proclaiming the bitterness of sin, that brought us down to hell, and delivered us to servitude for some time. But the Lord sleeping on the cross, as He descends into hell, He carries us upon His shoulders, and let us come out as though with great possessions, carrying His riches and granting us the riches of the Spirit, so that, when the world and the time come to an end, He proclaims the salvation of our bodies, and proclaims His great day as though by fire.

St. Augustine presents us with the following magnificent interpretation of this vision: [It

¹ Ser. 82:1, 2.

² Ser. 82:3.

is enough to say that, after saying that Abram believed in God, and that was accounted to him for righteousness, it was not a failure of Abram's faith when he said to God: "*How shall I know that I will inherit it?*" (Gen. 15:8). He did not mean to imply that he does not believe that he would inherit it, but said "*How shall I know?*" Namely, He asks for a sign to know the way by which, what he believed to gain would be realized. In this He is like the Virgin St. Mary who asked, not in disbelief, "*How can this be, since I do not know a man?*" (Luke 1:34). She was asking about the way by which what is to occur, would be realized; to be answered: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the highest will overshadow you*" (Luke 1:35). Here too, he was given an accurate symbol by which to know the way that thing, which he did not doubt, would be realized. That symbol includes three animals: A heifer, a goat, and a ram, and two birds: a turtledove and a pigeon.

The heifer refers to the people who would submit to the Law; the goat refers to the fact that they are sinful people; and the ram refers to that they would reign. (It was said that these animals were three years old; and that is, because there are three well defined epochs of time: From Adam to Noah; from Noah to Abraham; and from Abraham to David, who would set up the kingdom of Israel according to God's will, following the rejection of Saul. These animals could be carrying other convenient significance, but I have no doubt that they carry symbols of spiritual meanings, together with the turtledove and the pigeon.

It was said: "*He did not cut the birds in two*" (Gen. 15:10); as the carnals are divided against each others, while the spirituals are never so, whether they are like the turtledove, isolated from the numerous disputes with people, or are, like the pigeon living among them, both birds being simple and harmless.

As to the birds of prey that came down on the cut carcasses, these do not represent a good thing, but the spirits of the air, that seek for themselves some gain, through the schism of the carnals.

Abram's sitting close to them refers to the fact that, even amid the divisions of the carnals, the true believers would be kept safe up to the end.

The horror and fear that fell upon Abram because of the great darkness, refer to the fact that at the end of time, believers will be, as proclaimed by the Lord Christ, in "*great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time; no, nor ever shall be*" (Matthew 24:21)

As to what was said to Abram, that his descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years; It is obvious that that is a prophecy about the people of Israel who were to be enslaved in Egypt.

As to saying: "*When the sun went down and it was dark, there was a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between these pieces*" (Gen. 15:17), that refers to the fact that the

carnal would be judged at the end of the world¹.]

4- GOD MAKES A COVENANT WITH ABRAM

“On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates’ (Gen. 15:18).

God, having revealed to Abram, the sign of salvation for all nations, through the deep sleep that fell upon the Lord just before sunset at the fulfillment of days, and transformed the darkness to a “*smoking oven*” (a reference to the burning of the sacrifice), and a burning torch that passes amid his people. He confirmed the promise that he is giving Abram’s descendants the land. It is though He is confirming to him, that all what he enjoys of encounters with God, visions and proclamations, are for the sake of the enjoyment of his descendants of the spiritual inheritance in Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world.

This covenant have two integrated aspects: First, the enjoyment of Abram’s descendants of the land, and secondly, driving out the pagan nations from it; which He counted ten of them (Gen. 15:19-21). **Fr. Serapion**² believes that these driven out nations refer to the eight main sins, that we enjoy overcoming: greed, adultery, love for wealth, anger, grief, spiritual lukewarmness, conceit, pride; in addition to idol worship and blasphemy.

¹ *City of God* 16:24.

² *Cassian: Conf.* 5:22.

CHAPTER 16

ABRAM AND HAGAR

Abram entered into a friendship with God himself, who confirmed to him His promise that his descendants will inherit the land to which he took him. But as years went by with no change, Sarai assumed that she would enjoy children through her maidservant Hagar. So she gave her to her man. Abram heeded the voice of his wife, assuming that God would realize his promise through his descendants from Hagar. But, because Sarai followed her own human counsel, out of the circle of faith, she got only loss and bitterness.

1- Sarai gives her maidservant Hagar to her man 1-5.

2- Hagar flees from her mistress Sarai 6-7.

3- Hagar returns to Sarai 8-14.

4- Birth of Ishmael 15-16.

1- SARAI GIVES HER MAIDSERVANT TO HER MAN

Sarai, remaining ten years in the land of Canaan bearing no children from Abram, as she was barren, used her own human thinking to realize God's promise. She asked her man to go to her Egyptian maidservant Hagar. Yet once Hagar conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. When Sarai blamed Abram, he put Hagar in his wife's hand to do to her as she pleases, and when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence. This situation represents how man sometimes lean on his own judgment, and plans for himself, without seeking God's counsel.

St. John Chrysostom believes that Sarai, assuming that her husband is responsible for her deprivation of children, gave him her maidservant to make sure. But as the latter conceived, Sarai was greatly distressed, because she realized that barrenness is the result of her infertility.

In any case, because Abram and Sarai were acting in faith, even their weakness, was used by God, for the glory of his name. Sarai came to represent the Church of the nations (the New Testament), that was previously barren, giving God no children; while Hagar referred to the Jews who gave birth to slaves, through their rejection of sonship to God in Christ.

At the fulfillment of time, Sarai gave birth to Isaac, providing God with many children. Sarai gave birth to her son, not according to nature, as she was barren, but according to God's promise. So her son came blessed. Hagar, on the other hand, gave birth to her son according to nature, so he became a slave. This line of thought was clearly proclaimed by the apostle Paul, saying to Christians who intended to go back to Judaism: *"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman, the other by a free woman. But he who was of a bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the free woman through promise; which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai, which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar-for*

this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children-but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: 'Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who do not travail! For, the desolate has many more children, than she who has a husband.' Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him, who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free' " (Galatians 21-31).

Sarai had been barren, referring to the nations who could not provide children to God. But she gave birth to Isaac, not according to the law of nature, nor according to legal marriage, having been in her barrenness as though under the verdict of death. But she gave birth to a son according to a promise by God to her and to her husband Abram. She gave birth to a son in the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom says: [Isaac was born, not according to the law of nature, nor through legal marriage or body strength; and yet, he is truly his son. He came from two bodies that were dead, came from a dead womb. His birth was not according to flesh, nor was he naturally conceived, as the womb was dead because of old age and barrenness, but the Word of God (the divine promise) formed him (through union of Abram and Sarai as a fruit of the promise, so he is their son and of their seed). It was not the same with the son of the bondwoman, as he came according to the law of nature. However, the one, not according to the flesh, was more dignified than him, who was born according to the flesh¹.]

He also said: [The Church was not only barren like Sarai, but also became like her a mother of many children, she conceived them in the same way, not according to nature, but according to a promise from God.] [Who is she, who was previously barren and desolate? She is the Church of the Gentiles that was deprived of the knowledge of God. And who is she, who has a husband? She is the Synagogue of the Jews. But the barren one got more children, gathering together the Greeks and the Barbarians, from sea and land and the whole world.] [As we are the children of the barren, we are free. Yet what kind of freedom is this, if the Jews chase and persecute the believers? We should not get disturbed by this situation as from the beginning the son of the bondwoman used to persecute the son of the free².]

St. Clement of Alexandria believes that Hagar represents the wisdom of the world, while Sarai represents the divine wisdom or God's knowledge. When Sarai gave Hagar to her man, this refers to God's knowledge that gives world wisdom or culture, as a maidservant to serve man, while we dignify God's wisdom as a spouse and companion. Sarai sent Hagar away

¹ In Gal. hom 4:23.

² كنيسة العذراء بالفجالة: رسالة غلاطية، أصحاح ٤.

for some time, to chasten her for submission, in reference to the rejection by man of the world wisdom, if it is not in the Lord.

Finally, **St. Augustine** presents us with a justification of Abram's behavior with Hagar, saying: [Abram was not guilty concerning the maidservant; as He used her, not to fulfill a lust, but in order to get a child; not to spite his wife, but to heed her voice; she who assumed that, by using the fruitful womb of her maidservant, in place of her barren one, she would legally root out her disgrace; the apostle says: "*The husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does*" (1 Corinthians 7:4). So, as a wife, she used her man to get a child, through another woman, when she found herself incapable of doing that herself. Here, there is no place for lust or low defilement; as the maidservant was actually given to the husband by his wife for getting a child; both of them were not committing a sin, but were seeking a good cause. That is why, when the maidservant despised her barren mistress, Sarai targeted her husband with her feminine jealousy. Although Abram, when he, unselfishly went to Hagar, he did that, not at the expense of Sarai, but heeding her voice... So he said to her: "*Your maid is in your hand, do to her as you please*" (Gen. 16:6)¹.]

St. Augustine, justifying the behavior of Abram, believes that he proved his love for his wife, by delivering the maid in her hand, to do with her as she pleases. Yet, we cannot accept such behavior in the light of the divine grace. Abram and Sarai behaved that way for the sake of getting children, anticipating that the Savior would come as their descendant, but now, we are not seeking children or descendants according to the flesh. From another aspect, if the husband does not have authority over his own body, but his wife does, she has no right to deliver her husband's body to another woman, for whatever excuse. She was given her man by the Lord, for both to live as one body in the Lord, nobody should come in between!

2- HAGAR FLEES FROM HER MISTRESS SARAI

St. Augustine² believes that 'Hagar' or 'alien,' refers to the alien soul (not a citizen) among God's people, and represents every thought, alien of faith. Hagar conceived, then despised her mistress, thus was worthy of being driven away for chastisement, to get back after hearty submission.

How numerous are 'Hagars' in our inner life, namely, how often do we have thoughts, alien to faith, that despise their mistress, thoughts of faith or God's knowledge... Let us drive away Hagar, namely, every alien thought, humiliate and chastise it, in order to bring it back to the pious life of faith.

Hagar fled, to be "*found by the Angel of the Lord, by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur*" (Gen. 16:7). She was probably on her way to Egypt, her

¹ *City of God* 16:25.

² *On Ps.* 83.

original home through the wilderness of Paran, probably near the ‘Springs of Moses’ not far from Suez, along the way of ‘Shur’ or ‘wall,’ which is a route of caravans.

It was not possible for Hagar to return to Sarai and Abram, and give birth to a son, unless she encounters the angel of the Lord by a spring of water, on the way to Shur. The angel of the Lord refers to the Lord Christ Who came to us in our barren wilderness, to encounter us by the spring of water of baptism, and to be a ‘wall’ or ‘Shur’ on our way, that that keeps us from heading to Egypt, namely to love of the world, and sends us back to the heavenly Canaan. We were driven out of Canaan, namely of Paradise, because of our sins, and came to be in isolation and bitterness in the wilderness of this world. But the Lord would never forsake us. He would bring us back through renewing us in the water of baptism. And as St. Jacob of Serug says about Baptism: [Baptism is a gate through which we get back to Paradise; through which man enters to be with God. Baptism is a new boat a carrier of the dead, by which they are risen and cross over to the land of eternity; Through baptism, in the new world, man crosses over from the dead to the land of the living¹.]

3- HAGAR RETURNS TO SARAI

The angel of the Lord commanded Hagar to return to her mistress, as though referring to the worldly wisdom, that, if sanctified, would serve faith through submitting to it. It represents the worldly philosophies, that, if received by a believer, with the spirit of piety and thought of faith, they would be at his service in the Lord, and would not be a destroyer of his faith, through the spirit of arrogance and pride.

Hagar, probably also refers to the carnal man, if he despises the Spirit ‘Sarai,’ he would be destroying himself. But if sanctified in the water of baptism, and accepted the work of the Holy Spirit in him, he would be a servant to the Lord. Concerning this, **St. Augustine** says: [Return to your mistress, O carnal soul, the arrogant maidservant; If you had endured some pain, it is for the sake of chastisement; So why rebelling? Return to your mistress, and enjoy the peace of the Church².]

The angel of the Lord commanded her to submit and to obey her mistress (Gen. 16:7), who possibly did not afflict her, but it was Hagar who had aggressively despised her mistress. And as a reward for her submission, He promised her, that her descendants would be exceedingly multiplied, yet her son would be a wild man, “*His hand shall be against every man, and every man’s hand against him*” (Gen. 16:12)

Hagar saw (the angel of the Lord). And as many scholars believe, that was one of the apparitions of the Son of God. Hagar called Him, “*You- Are- the- God- Who- Sees;*” (Gen. 16:13) for she said, “*Have I also here seen Him who sees me;*” and she called the well, at which she

¹ مخطوط بدير الأينا أنطونيوس، نُسخَت عام ١٤٨٨ ش.

² On Ep. of St. John, hom 10:10.

encountered Him, "*Beer La-hai Roi,*" namely, the well where the Living God was seen.

4- BIRTH OF ISHMAEL

Hagar bore Abram a son, and named him "Ishmael," according to what the Angel of the Lord had told her, meaning 'God listened.' Abram confirmed that name, on the assumption that God listened to him and gave him a son to inherit him (Gen. 17:18, as he did not expect Sarai to give him a son.

Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael, and 100 years old when Isaac was born; So Ishmael was 14 years senior to his half-brother Isaac.

CHAPTER 17

COVENANT OF THE CIRCUMCISION

Sarai had been thinking in a human way, watching the great wealth that flooded them. And how she and her husband grew old, with nobody to inherit them except Eliezer of Damascus. So she committed her husband to go to her maidservant, something that became to her and her descendants after her a bitterness of soul. God, however, was beholding Abram's faith, to establish a new eternal covenant with him and his descendants after him, through a sign in the flesh of every male child (Circumcision), as a way to enjoy the New Testament, set by our Lord Jesus Christ by His body on the cross, reconciling us with His heavenly Father.

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|---|---------------|
| 1- God's covenant with Abram | 1-8. |
| 2- The sign of Circumcision | 9-14. |
| 3- Sarah enjoys the blessing | 15-17. |
| 4- Between Isaac and Ishmael | 18-22. |
| 5- Realization of the Circumcision | 23-27. |

1- GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless, and will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly" (Gen. 17:1-2).

The story of God with man is one of continuous and renewed covenants, through which God proclaims His love for man, and yearns that, man would love Him in return. In all that, God seeks man, not out of need for anything, nor for a desire of control. But in his fatherhood. He opens up His bosom to him, and receives him as a son, to enjoy the fellowship of His glories.

At the beginning of creation - before falling - the covenant was set on the basis of love, with no apparent sign, man, in God's image and likeness, was responding to his Creator with love, yearned to Him and ran toward Him to hear His voice and rejoiced to behold Him. Yet, after the fall, as man started to become internally confused, and the land was cursed to produce thorns and thistles, there was need for setting a covenant between God and man, to be renewed every now and then. As the world was renewed by the water of the great flood, God proclaimed: *"I will never again curse the ground for man's sake...; I establish My covenant with you and your descendants after you"* (Gen. 8:21; 9:9), and gave a sign of that covenant, a rainbow in the clouds. Now, as God establishes a covenant with Abram, He makes that sign steady in the flesh of every male (Circumcision). Man, along the generations, saw through this sign, a shadow for a greater covenant, to be presented by our Lord Jesus Christ in His flesh, for reconciliation on an eternal level. The prophet says: *"Incline your ear and come to Me, Hear and your soul shall live. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you - the sure mercies of David. Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander of the people. Surely you shall*

call a nation you do not know, And nations who do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and the Holy One of Israel, For He has glorified you” (Isaiah 55:3-5). This call, for the nations, to enter into the divine covenant, has been realized when the Lord Christ offered His blood as a new covenant for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:38; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

St. Clement of Alexandria¹ believes that God did not just invite Abram to enter with Him into a covenant, but delivered Himself a covenant to him; the Book says: “*As for Me, Behold, My covenant is with you*” (Gen 17:4). A covenant, according to **St. Clement**, is not just oral or written promises, but it is the acceptance of God Himself, in Whom we find our peace, satisfaction, and fulfillment of all our needs.

When we say that the Lord Christ offered His Body and Blood, as a new covenant for the forgiveness of sins, actually He delivered Himself to us, so we can find in Him the Father’s complacency; and the Father finds in Him our complacency. Thus, in Christ Jesus, the Father and men, both find their true pleasure. The Father sees us in His Son, justified with His blood; and we find in Him a heavenly Father, who opens His bosom to us. Thus God Himself is an eternal covenant for us.

St. Jerome comments on the saying of God: “*No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham*” (Gen. 17:5). [His name in Ur of the Chaldeans has been ‘Abram.’ But, in heaven, he is called ‘Abraham,’ so his name is changed to ‘Abraham,’ as he became a star².]

St. Augustine believes that changing the names of Abram and Sarai, came together with the circumcision, as a sign of an overall change, saying: [What is the significance of circumcision, but the renewal of human nature through rooting out the old man? And what is the significance of the 8 days (for the circumcision), but a reference to Christ, who was raised after completing the week, namely, after the Sabbath? The names of the parents were changed, and everything is proclaimed new³.]

2- THE SIGN OF CIRCUMCISION

“This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you, and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any stranger who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house, and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My

¹ *Strom. 1:29.*

² *On Ps. hom 56.*

³ *City of God 16:26.*

covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the circumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant” (Gen. 17:10-14).

Circumcision has been of great importance, as it was the distinction between the descendants of Abraham, those with the covenant, and the Gentiles. Its importance is proclaimed in God’s words concerning the uncircumcised: “*that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.*” Circumcision had been confined to males, as a woman was sanctified in man, if he is sanctified in God. Denying circumcision of females does not imply that God underestimate her or does not care for making a covenant with her, but He wished to confirm the unity of human family; what the male does, is in the name of both of them (male and female). A proof of this is that God commanded the circumcision of slaves “*who is born in your house, and who is bought with your money*” (Gen. 17:13). Slaves could not be better than the wives, mistresses of the house. He wants to make a covenant with all: the rich and the poor, through the circumcision of every male. Medically, circumcision of males is healthy, while that of females is harmful.

The importance of circumcision in the Old Testament is demonstrated, that every time the people proclaim repentance, they return to God through three things: circumcision of every uncircumcised male, reading the Law, and keeping the Sabbath.

The issue of circumcision used to preoccupy the minds of Jews in a strong way, that they were called “***People of circumcision.***” And when they received faith in the Lord Christ, some of them insisted on the circumcision of the Gentiles before their entrance into the fellowship of the Church, something for which the apostle Paul dedicated several chapters of his epistle, confirming that, in Jesus Christ, there is no need for circumcision of the flesh, but for that of the spirit; and that circumcision is realized through baptism, by which the old man is put off, and the new man, according to the image of his Creator, is put on (Colossians 3:9-10).

Circumcision is done on the eighth day after birth of the male child, as the figure 8 refers to “eternal life” or “the second life.” The figure 7 is referring to the present life (seven days of the week), so the eighth day means entering into what is beyond the present life. Circumcision thus means the crossover to eternal life, through putting off love of the worldly, and acceptance of the eternal work of Christ and His heavenly Kingdom.

If the people put much importance on the circumcision of flesh, God, on the other hand, kept on persuading them to care for the spiritual circumcision of the heart and that of the ear (Deuteronomy 30:6; 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4). The following are some sayings of the Fathers concerning the spiritual circumcision that touches our whole life:

- ❖ The people of God get the sign of circumcision in their inner heart, as the heavenly sword cuts the (foreskin) of the mind, namely, that defilement of sin.

St. Macarius the Great

- ❖ In the plan of the God of the Law, "circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit and not in the letter" (Romans 2:29)... Thus Moses says: "Circumcise the foreskin of your hearts" (Deuteronomy 10:16 LXX)¹.

Tertullian

- ❖ Your ear is circumcised, if it does not hear insults and blasphemies; if it is closed before treachery, lies, and anger, "to listening to blood;" If it is not open to listen to unclean songs and entertainment; if it does not seek lowly things, but separates from corruptible issues. That is the circumcision of ear, presented by the Church to its children; and it is, in my opinion, the ear that the Lord Christ meant, when He said: "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*" (Matthew 13:9); as nobody can hear the pure words of the Lord, words of wisdom and truth, by an uncircumcised or impure ear.
- ❖ When we stop talking filth about others, and bridle our tongue, we would have the circumcised mouth.
- ❖ When we get inflamed with carnal lusts; when we commit adultery in our hearts (Matthew 5:28), we have uncircumcised hearts; When we welcome the thoughts of heretics, and harbor blasphemous thoughts against the knowledge of Christ, we have uncircumcised hearts. But if we keep having the purity of faith with a straightforward conscience, we are having circumcised hearts, and become worthy of hearing the voice: "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Matthew 5: 8).
- ❖ We can say that our hands, senses, and touches, all need circumcision as well. For a man of God to be perfect, all his members should be circumcised: His hands should refrain from stealing, and killing, and extend to do God's work. Legs should be circumcised, so as not to hasten to shedding blood, nor "*to the counsel of the ungodly*" (Psalm 1:1); but do not care except to reach to our God. Eyes should be circumcised, so as not to envy others for the good they have, and not to look at a woman to lust for her (Matthew 5:28)... And so on, even when we eat or drink, etc., we should do everything for the glory of God. Look how the apostle asks for the circumcision, even for taste... Actually, if our members serve oppression, they are uncircumcised, and we are not in a covenant with God. But if they serve righteousness (Romans 6:19), to reach for holiness, in them, the promise to Abraham is realized².

Origen

I wish that we, who received the spiritual circumcision by the Holy Spirit in the water of baptism, strive to stay circumcised in all our members and inner life, in order to enjoy the divine promise, and be in an eternal covenant with God.

Origen³ believes that if we confess the Lord Christ with our lips, and did not reveal His

¹ *Adv. Marc 5:14.*

² *In Gen. hom 3:5, 6.*

³ *In Gen. hom 3:7.*

covenant in our flesh through our life, we would be like the Jews who take pride in the circumcision of the flesh, and deny God by their work. He also comments on the divine verse: *“My covenant shall be in your flesh an everlasting covenant,”* by saying: [If we manage to create a balance and to set a unity in between members, in order that all our movements are going according to the Law of God, His covenant would be in our flesh; Seek how God’s covenant could work in the body be realized in it. *“If we put to death our members which care on earth”* (Col. 3:5), we would realize God’s covenant in our body. If I am *“always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus”* (2 Cor. 4:10), His covenant is in my body. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:2), and so I would reveal His covenant in my flesh¹.]

3- SARAH ENJOYS THE BLESSING

If God changed Abram’s name to ‘Abraham;’ so also Sarai enjoyed the change of her name to ‘Sarah.’ Abram had been dignified in the Lord - the word ‘Abram’ meaning a ‘dignified father;’ but, entering with God into the covenant of circumcision in the name of the whole Church, his name was changed to ‘Abraham,’ meaning ‘father of many nations’ (Gen. 17:4). The name ‘Sarai,’ meaning ‘my princess’ - as she carried the motherhood for believers - was changed to ‘Sarah,’ meaning princess.’ She is no longer just Abraham’s princess, but became for all believers a mother and a princess.

For the first time, God openly proclaims that Abraham’s heir will be from Sarah, his wife: *“I will bless her and also give you a son by her, then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her”* (Gen. 17:16).

Abraham could not hearken to this promise: *“He fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’”* (Gen. 17:17). His laughing does not imply unbelief, but rather his great astonishment at the work of God with him, God who gives a child to a man hundred years old, and to a barren woman ninety years old... A sign of his belief was his fall on his face to give thanks. Abraham did not doubt God’s promise, but as the apostle says: *“who contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be;’ and not being weak in faith he did not consider his own body, already dead, (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God”* (Romans 4:18-20). Though Sarah’s womb was as good as dead, and he was an old man, yet he, contrary to hope, in hope believed in God’s promises, to set living descendants from that death. Likewise, some believed that Sarah’s womb was like stones, lifeless and incapable of giving birth. But God set from these stones children for Abraham. Because of that, St. John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and the Sadducees: *“Do not think to say to*

¹ In Gen. hom 3:6, 7.

yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones" (Matthew 3:9). **St. John Chrysostom** says that this analogy came on account that that people were descendants of Isaac who was given to Abraham through the womb of Sarah, that was barren as though of stones¹.

4- BETWEEN ISAAC AND ISHMAEL

"And Abraham said to God, 'Oh, that Ishmael might live before you'" (Gen. 17:18).

Abraham did not feel frustrated, even when he saw that all his riches would probably be inherited by some stranger; and when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, he took it for granted that the child would be his heir. And now, as Ishmael was 13 years old, and Abraham got the promise to have a son from Sarah, he did not harbor any doubt, even though he thought of that promise as very great, which made him laugh. Now, he prays to God proclaiming his satisfaction with what God gave him through the maidservant as his heir. God, appreciating the situation of Abraham, as the first human to be given such promise - to have a child in his advanced age and from an old barren wife -, reconfirmed to him: *"No, Sarah, your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call him Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him"* (Gen. 17:19)

He confirmed to him the promise, and chose the child's name, in order to root out from his mind, any thought that the child born to him according to the power of nature (body) would be his heir. But his heir would be the son of promise, whose birth was not possible according to nature. Yet, in response to Abraham's prayer for the first child, he promised to bless him and to make him fruitful, multiply him exceedingly, and make him a great nation.

St. Augustine compares between the two sons, saying: [Here, there are far more positive promises that establishing great nations would be from Isaac, namely, the son of promise; in reference to grace and not to nature; as that child was promised for an old man and an old barren woman. Thus, if it is God, who works even in natural birth, yet, when the weakness or failure of nature is revealed, the role of God comes in, and His grace is proclaimed much more².]

Isaac is therefore represents, not him who is born according to the flesh, but according to the renewal through God's grace in the water of baptism. Because of this, if our souls are still walking according to the flesh, there is need for someone to cry out to God, as Abraham, the Patriarch did: "Oh, that they might live before you! That they might enjoy the new birth by Your grace, to become the new 'Isaac'!"

If God granted Abraham "Isaac" as a son, a name meaning 'laugh,' since Sarah laughed in some doubt, and Abraham laughed with astonishment, then our new man, gained in the water of baptism, is the true Isaac, we accept as a 'laugh' (meaning sanctified love due to exceeding

¹ راجع الإنجيل بحسب متى، ١٩٨٣، أصحاح ٣.

² City of God 16:26.

spiritual joy and astonishment), for the great gift granted to us through baptism!

5- REALIZATION OF THE CIRCUMCISION

Abraham entered into a covenant with God and was circumcised, together with Ishmael and every male in his household. The circumcision was the seal on that covenant.

CHAPTER 18

THE UNIQUE BANQUET

As Abraham entered into a covenant with God, he have actually entered into a deeper friendship, cherished by God, who calls him His friend. In His talk with Israel, He says, “*But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend*” (Isaiah 41:8). A title to be used by ‘Jehoshaphat’ in his talk to God, seeking His help for the people (2 Chronicles 20:7); and proclaimed by the apostle James, describing Abraham as being “*called the friend of God*” (James 2:23).

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|---|---------------|
| 1- By the terebinth trees of Mamre | 1-2. |
| 2- The hospitable Abraham | 3-5. |
| 3- Preparation of the banquet | 6-8. |
| 4- Sarah’s enjoyment of fruition | 9-15. |
| 5- A debate with the Lord | 16-33. |

1- BY THE TEREBINTH TREES OF MAMRE

“Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him: And when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground” (Gen. 18:1-2).

That historical encounter came to represent a true spiritual one, that every soul following the example of Abraham the Patriarch, would enjoy; and enter into a true loving friendship with God; would sit at the door of its tent by the terebinth trees of Mamre; would receive in it the Lord of heaven and His angels, to become a temple for God, proclaiming in it the kingdom of heavens.

In order to have the Lord in us, let us get out to the door of the tent, and sit there by the terebinth trees of Mamre, in the heat of the day, beneath the shade of the trees. What is getting out of the tent, but the setting forth of the soul out of the lusts of the flesh, so that the bad lust would not entrap the soul inside it, to be confused by the worldly worries; but to set forth freely, to let man live spiritually and not carnally; to submit the tent to his soul, instead of submitting his soul to the weight of the tent.

It is not enough to get out to the door of the tent, but we should also sit by the terebinth trees, namely by the cross, in the heat of the day, to contemplate in the wounds of the Lord, lifted on the cross in the sixth hour. The word ‘Mamre’ means ‘vision’ or ‘insight.’ So, by getting out, by the Holy Spirit, from the weight of the wickedness of our tent, and by our sitting by the holy terebinth trees, saying: “*I sat down in His shade with great delight, And His fruit was sweet to my taste*” (Song of Solomon 2: 3).; to enjoy Mamre, namely, the vision of God, and the enlightenment of the inner insight.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles comments on that encounter of God with Abraham by the terebinth trees of Mamre, saying: [In what location is it possible to set a banquet for the Lord? Have Abraham's vision and insight been enlightened (as Mamre means vision or insight), and his heart was pure to behold God. In such location, and with such heart, it is possible to set a banquet for the Lord¹.]

Some Jewish interpreters believe that this encounter took place after three days of the circumcision; and that the Lord came to heal Abraham of his wound. If this is true, the circumcision, a symbol of baptism, which we attain by the name of Holy Trinity, is the way to enter into the divine friendship; through which God yearns to be received by us in our tent, that is sanctified by His Holy Spirit, to find in us His joyful banquet, and hear our voice: "*Let my Beloved come to His garden and eat its pleasant fruit*" (Song of Solomon 4:16); to enter joyfully into our hearts, and say: "*I have come to My garden, My sister, My spouse; I have gathered My myrrh with My spice; I have eaten My honeycomb with My honey; I have drunk My wine with My milk. Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!*" (Song of Solomon 5:1).

Thus, our tent becomes a center of comfort for the Lord, He finds pleasure in mankind. **St. Macarius the Great** says: [The heart is the palace of Christ; In it the King gets in to find comfort, accompanied by the angels, and the spirits of saints; there He dwells, walk, and establish His kingdom².] Our tent would be transformed into a Paradise, with which the divine Groom is pleased. And as **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says: [This is for whom the bride has set her banquet. As for the table, it is a planted Paradise, living trees – ourselves - and the fruits that we offer are our souls... The food prepared is our salvation, and the fruits are our free will, that presents to God our souls, as though fruits gathered from the branch³.]

Let us stand with Abraham by the door of the tent, to host the Lord in our tent that is His palace and His Paradise, to offer Him, by our free will (our life sanctified in Him), the food that pleases Him!

Abraham, by hosting the Lord and His two angels, drew the attention of the saintly men of God. St. Paul the apostle says: "*By so doing, some have unwittingly entertained angels*" (Hebrew 13:2). The Fathers have abundantly spoken of the act of 'entertaining strangers,' as a way of entertaining the Lord in His creation. **St. Ambrose** says: [The Lord Christ is probably coming in the person of the stranger or the poor, having said: "*I was in prison and you came to Me: I was naked and you clothed Me*" (Matthew 25:3)⁴.] **St. Jerome** says: [The true temple for Christ is the believer's soul. So let us adorn it. Let us offer Him clothes, and gifts. Let us welcome Christ in him! What would be the use of walls adorned with jewels, if Christ in the

¹ Ser. 83:5.

² Hom 15.

³ Comm. on Cant. Ser. 10.

⁴ Duties of the Clergy 2:21 (107).

poor, is in danger of death because of hunger?¹]

2- THE HOSPITABLE ABRAHAM

That encounter revealed the generous nature of Abraham, who offered his heart before his food; received others in it before opening his tent to them. That was obvious when he, the old man, “*Ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground; and said, ‘My Lord, If I now found favor in your sight, do not pass on by your servant. Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant.’ And they said, ‘Do as you have said’*” (Gen. 18:2-5).

He thought they were traveling people. So he spoke to them with love and a spirit of giving and humility, offering to wash their feet, and describing the food, he is going to offer them, as just a morsel of bread, a simple sign of love that cannot be refused.

He started by washing the feet, and as **Origen** says: [He knew that it is impossible for the secrets of the Lord to be fulfilled unless we, at least, wash the feet².] **St. Ambrose** says: [It is good to have humility; as when I wash away the uncleanness of others, I am washing away my own uncleanness³.] It is as though, the beginning of hospitality is the washing, not of feet, but of uncleanness, by forgiving the wrong that others committed against us. By that, as we wash out their uncleanness, we are washing our own.

3- PREPARATION OF THE BANQUET

“*So Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.’ And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and hastened to prepare it*” (Gen. 18:6-7).

In that banquet, it is to be noted:

(1) When Abraham saw the men, he “*ran,*” despite his old age. Yet as far as doing the good deed, he ran like a kid in joy. And once the men accepted his invitation, he “*hastened*” to Sarah, to let her partake of that good deed. Having given the calf to his servant, the latter “*hastened*” to prepare it. Thus Abraham, his wife, and his servants, did not only partake of the good deed, but also hastened to do it, as though not to lose that chance. **Origen** says: [Abraham, his wife and servants, all hasten; There is no room for laziness in the house of the wise⁴.] And **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Abraham trained his servants well... Let us likewise think of and care for the salvation of those who serve us, to be good, and practice the divine works⁵.] Let our

¹ Ep. 58:7.

² In Gen. hom 4:2.

³ Duties of the Clergy 1:1 (14).

⁴ In Gen. hom 4:1.

⁵ In Acts hom. 45.

houses be like that of Abraham, who, together with his wife and servants used to work for the Lord, with an alert spirit and a fiery heart, that knows no laziness.

If Abraham represents the human soul that sets forth out of the tent, to sit by the cross, to receive all with love, Sarah, on her part, represents the body, sanctified in the Lord, who offers cakes that rejoices God's heart. By that Sarah partook of the process of hospitality; so the body partook, with the soul, of the life of union with God, and walking by His Holy Spirit. As for the servants, they refer to the energies and capacities of men that offer sacrifices of love to God, as did the servant of Abraham!

(2) Abraham asked his wife to knead three measures of fine meal. He would not offer old bread to his guests, but the best he has, done by his elderly wife, and in abundance. The three measures probably refer to "**faith, hope, and love,**" the three items, kneaded by the Church, to offer to the Lord, through the life of her children, fine bread that pleases the Lord. This is what the Church offers continuously, especially as these things are kneaded with the water of the Holy Spirit. By the Holy Spirit, as the heart is filled with faith, the soul sets forth toward her heavenly Groom. By hope it over-rides any obstacle and becomes filled with joy. Then, by love, it enters into where the throne of God is (Love Itself). This is our undivided spiritual dough, by which we come into the bosom of God, as an offer of love to Him.

The "cake" is a kind of highly esteemed bread, baked on heated coal (1 Kings 19:6). If Sarah (the Church), offers our life, a dough of three measures (faith, hope, and love), this dough is not fit to be eaten, and would not give pleasure to the Lord, except through the heated coal or tones, namely, our fellowship with the Lord in His passion, to be transformed in Him into "cakes." Passions are bitter and severe, yet with the Lord they are transformed into glories, or into an offer of precious bread to God.

(3) As he set the food before his guests, "*He stood by them under the tree as they ate*" (Gen. 18:8). Abraham, his wife, and servants, did not only hasten to prepare and offer the best they have to entertain their guests, but Abraham, the old man, stood by them as they ate. Although he had servants, slaves and maids, yet he, himself, lovingly stood to serve them!

Let us stand with Abraham under the tree of the cross, to serve others with humility and joy. We would in them serve the Lord.

4- SARAH'S ENJOYMENT OF FRUITION

In love, Abraham and Sarah offered the best they have to the Lord. And in love, the Lord accepted from man the gift, that is, as expressed by the wise Solomon, actually His. And as God could never be indebted to anyone, He gave love for love. He asked Abraham: "*Where is Sarah your wife?*" And he said, '*Here in the tent.*' And He said, '*I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son*'" (Gen. 18:9-10).

They hosted the Lord, who, in return, grants this old, well advanced in age couple, a son (Gen. 18:11); as though setting life from death, and children for Abraham from stones; He grants

them “Isaac,” meaning ‘laugh’. It is indeed ‘laugh,’ when it is said of the aged barren Sarah, that she became a mother. What is really greater, is it that, through Isaac, the Savior Messiah would come carrying the flesh as Abraham’s son, when in truth He is his God, for all nations to be blessed? It is an exalted and an incomprehensible divine work! That was the fruit that was enjoyed by Abraham and Sarah through their faith, working in love.

Abraham was at the door of the tent, while Sarah was in the tent, behind Abraham (Gen. 18:10). Abraham represented the soul, set forth in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, outside the tent, namely above all pressures of the body; while Sarah, referring to the body that has to be behind the soul, and not before it, so that the body would submit to the soul, and not the other way round. When the body submits to the soul, sanctified in the Lord, the two unite together to beget “Isaac,” meaning ‘laugh’ or ‘joy,’ so that man, in his wholeness, would rejoice, carrying in himself the fruit of the Spirit.

The divine inspiration goes on to say: “*Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age*” (Gen. 18:11). Although Abraham did not live as long as his early Fathers did, this is the first time that somebody is said to be “old and advanced in age.” **Origen** says that they were “old,” namely, filled with wisdom; and “advanced in age,” namely, they did not lose a single day of their life without spiritual fruit; their days were like a day with no night, all light, counted for them with no loss.

Origen says: [The sinner is not advanced in age, as he is not “*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead*” (Philippians 3:13); but is always “*looking back*” (Luke 9:62); so “*He is not for the kingdom of God.*” Thus if we extend to those things which are ahead, and seek perfection, we would be “*advanced in age*”¹.]

Abraham and Sarah carried the old age of wisdom and advanced age in grace and not in fragility that leads to death. They enjoyed this grace, and got that description, because they entertained the Word of God and His two angels; so their life turned into heaven, and became worthy of getting the promise to have Isaac, the symbol of Christ; and counted as old and prudent in the Lord.

“*Sarah laughed within herself, saying, ‘After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my Lord being old also?’ And the Lord said to Abraham, ‘did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.’ But Sarah denied it, saying, ‘I did not laugh,’ for she was afraid. And He said, ‘No, but you did laugh’*” (Gen. 18:12-15).

St. Clement of Alexandria believes that Sarah laughed, not because she did not believe in the promise, but out of shyness for the whole situation: to be called mother at that old age². **St.**

¹ *In Jos. hom 16:1.*

² *Strom. 6:7.*

Augustine¹ believes that she laughed out of joy, although not in complete faith.

Abraham laughed and fell on his face before the Lord (Gen. 17:17), while Sarah laughed inside herself (Gen. 18:13); So they begot Isaac, meaning 'laugh;' so that they would remember the work of God with them, every time they call his name, and would glorify God who granted them a grace beyond nature.

5- A DEBATE WITH GOD

As Abraham, met God's love by love, God talked with him as a friend, saying: "*Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing; since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?*" (Gen. 18:17-18)

God, with His love for man, does not wish to hide His secrets from him. The prophet David says that God's secret is for those who fear Him. And Amos says: "*Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets*" (Amos 3:7).

As God sets Abraham as a great nation, and lets him enjoy the coming of the Lord Christ as his descendant, so that all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. He talks to him frankly and with an open heart, to teach his children the fellowship with God.

God proclaimed the transgressions of Sodom and Gomorrah, saying: "*Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not I will know*" (Gen. 18: 20-21)

The hideousness of man was revealed in the extent of man's evil. The sins were so manifest, asking for chastening their doers. And the earth - the voiceless creation - is no longer standing that corruption, so it is moaning to God, seeking His judgment against man, as did Abel's blood who cried out to God from the ground because of his brother's evil crime (Gen. 4:10). It is also like the detained wages of the harvesters, crying out against the injustice of their employers (James 5:4).

Sodom and Gomorrah were two cities close to the Dead Sea, where Lot dwelt. Sodom means 'Burning up,' while Gomorrah means 'flood².' So these two cities became symbols of sin that lead the soul, as though to get burnt in fire or drowned in flood.

As to the expression "*I will go down now and see,*" this should not be literally understood; as God is Omnipresent, but it is an expression that fits our humanity to reveal God's justice. He does not hasten to punish, but it is as though He waits to go down and see by Himself what man did... He is preoccupied with all humanity.

God came down to us to see our sins. And as **Origen** says: [In order to carry it, as He

¹ *City of God* 16:31.

² *New Westminster Dic.* p. 339.

takes the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7)¹.] He comes down to us to carry our heavy and bitter burdens, and to pay back the debts on our behalf, and to lift us up with Him, as He did on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9: 2).

Following that conversation, the two angels departed to Sodom and Gomorrah, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. Lovingly, he came near and said: “*Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city...?*” (Gen. 18:23-24)

He did not speak with God about himself or his wife, concerning God’s promise to grant them a child, but all his feelings were absorbed in what was going to happen to those prone to doom. So he tried to intercede on their behalf! It is a living portrait of mature love of man toward his brothers, asking for them more than he does for himself, even if they are wicked and deserve death. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Abraham truly looked as if he was asking for the righteous, although he was in fact asking for all. The souls of saints are very tender and loving, for the sake of their own salvation, as well as of others².]

If God entered into a dialogue with His friend Abraham, yet Abraham committed himself to the spirit of humility in his talking with the Lord, and as **St. Augustine** said: [When Abraham tried to intercede for the sake of Sodom and Gomorrah with no avail, he finally said: “*I am dust and ashes*”! How great is the humility of the great saints!³] **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Let us be humble, to be lifted up; as vain glory would get man down; the same way Pharaoh did when he said: “*I do not know the Lord*” (Exodus 5:2), to become less than flies, frogs, and locusts; then to drown together with his army and chariots in the sea. On the contrary, when Abraham said: “*I am dust and ashes,*” he defeated Barbarians; and when he fell in Pharaoh’s hands, he returned to his land with more riches and glories than he originally had. By keeping that virtue, he grew to more exalted status⁴.] **St. Ambrose** says: [When Job sat in the midst of ashes God restored all his losses to him (Job 2:8; 42:10)⁵.]

¹ In Gen. hom 4:5.

² In Rom hom 29.

³ On Ps. 147.

⁴ In Matt hom 65:6.

⁵ Conc. Repent. 2:1 (4).

CHAPTER 19

BURNING UP SODOM

While Abraham enjoyed to entertain God with two angels, Lot only entertained the two angels, who rescued him from the destruction that befell Sodom, although having lost his wife, and unwittingly defiled with his own daughters.

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|--|---------------|
| 1- Lot entertains the two angel | 1-3. |
| 2- Agitation of the people against the two angels | 4-11. |
| 3- Saving Lot and his family | 12-22. |
| 4- Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah | 23-25. |
| 5- Lot's wife becomes a pillar of salt | 26. |
| 6- Abraham looks toward Sodom and Gomorrah | 27-29. |
| 7- Lot's daughters do wrong with their father | 30-38. |

1- ENTERTAINING THE TWO ANGEL

“Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. And he said, ‘Here now my lords, please turn in to your servant’s house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way.’ And they said, ‘No, but we will spend the night in the open square.’ But he insisted strongly. So they turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate” (Gen. 19:1-3).

Nobody can disregard Lot’s virtues and life of faith, although incomparable to those of the great man Abraham. If Lot represents the era of Law, Abraham represents that of grace. It is appropriate for us to compare what was mentioned in the last chapter, concerning how Abraham entertained the Lord and His two angels, which is mentioned here, concerning how Lot entertained the two angels:

(1) Abraham with his great soul and living faith, was worthy of receiving the Word of God and His two angels, *“in the heat of the day,”* as though he is, like the men of the New Covenant who encountered the Savior by the cross, in the daylight to behold the heaven open, and the heavenly being reconciled with the earthly. Lot, on the other hand, because of his weak faith, and not his lack of faith, had barely encountered two angels *“in the evening,”* who came to rescue him from the destruction that was about to befall the city where he chose to dwell with his family.

Origen says: [Three men came to Abraham in the heat of the day (Gen. 18:1), but to Lot, two angels came in the evening (Gen. 19:1), as it was not possible for Lot to get the whole splendor of the daylight, that Abraham could get. To Abraham, the Lord came with the two

angels. While to Lot, only the two angels came. Lot received the two destroyers (Gen. 19:13), while Abraham received the Savior together with the destroyers¹.]

Fr. Caesarius, as usual, quoted certain of the phrases written by **Origen**, saying: [Lot could not bear the full impact of the mid-day sun; But Abraham could stand in its whole splendor².]

The Fathers did not underestimate Lot, for he, despite his relative lower stature, compared to Abraham, he used to carry some of his virtues. And as **St. Ambrose** said: [Lot, the nephew of Abraham, has been close to him, not only as far as blood relationship is concerned, but also in virtue. Because of his readiness to receive strangers, he, together with his family, was saved from the punishment that befell Sodom³.] And in a comment on that, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Because of him, angels came down to mankind; and men were lifted up to them⁴.]

(2) Comparing Abraham's feast with that of Lot, **Fr. Caesarius** says that three men came to Abraham and "*stood by him*" (Gen. 18:2); while to Lot, the two men came and *stood in the open square*." We can say that the Lord and the two angels stood by Abraham "*in the tent door*;" or let us say that the Lord and His angels found in Abraham a heavenly life, so they came into his place. As to Lot, they encountered him as he was sitting "*in the gate of Sodom*."

Let us be like our father Abraham, worthy of encountering the Lord and His hosts, not "*in the gate of the city*," but within our inner depths, being His well-beloved heavens.

(3) There is a great difference between Abraham and Lot. The first, when he asked the Lord and His angels to come to him, they instantly responded, saying: "*We shall do as you have said*" (Gen. 18:5). But, with Lot, they wished to spend the night in the open square, then responding to his strong insistence, they turned in to him and entered his house (Gen. 19:3).

(4) Abraham acknowledging the mystery of the Holy Trinity, did not only encounter three men, but he also asked Sarah to prepare three measures of fine meal; as though he is asking the Church, to enjoy the faith in the Holy Trinity, in order to be worthy, like the three measures of fine meal, of becoming heavenly bread.

(5) Abraham's encounter was crowned with his getting together with Sarah, the divine blessing and promise of a son; while that of Lot, barely ended with being saved together with his daughters, excluding his wife. The first was promised that his descendants would enjoy the land of promise, while the second got out of the city empty-handed and homeless!

(6) In this encounter, Abraham, lovingly interceded for others - the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, while Lot entreated the two angels, for his own and his daughters' sake, to allow them to dwell in the city of Zoar.

¹ In *Gen. hom 4:1*.

² *Ser. 83:2*.

³ *Duties of the Clergy 2:21 (105)*.

⁴ In *Col. hom 3*.

2- AGITATION OF THE PEOPLE AGAINST THE TWO ANGELS

Lot, having received the two men (angels), had his house surrounded by the people of the city, old and young, who wanted to know his guests carnally (i.e. sexually), a portrait of the extent of uncleanness and wickedness, reached by the whole population of that city; so that this sin became to be named after them ‘Sodomism.’

Lot trying to defend his guests, proposed to bring out his two daughters to the mob, to do with them as they may wish, probably to shame them. Refusing that proposal, pressing hard against the man Lot, and coming near to break down the door, the two men reached out their hands, pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door; then they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, so that they became weary trying to find the door (Gen. 19:9-11).

Even if Lot has been a hospitable man, and insisted wisely on not surrendering his two guests to evil, yet he was to blame for proposing to surrender his daughters as a ransom for the guests. Anyhow, God acknowledged Lot’s heart. He did not let him keep the strangers, but the strangers kept him and his family from the wicked people.

We did not hear of any agitation accompanying the appearance of the Lord and His two angels to Abraham, because Abraham represents the era of grace, while Lot, on the other hand, represents that of falling under the Law. The first enjoys a joyful encounter with God, in which the soul is lifted up above passion, and enjoys life on a heavenly level, while the second enters in a narrow and bitter affliction, and exposes his energies and capacities (his two daughters) to corruption. Yet, even in the era of the Law, heaven interceded, and grabbed man into his house, and shut him in against the wicked. The first brought on his body – Sarah - (laugh) or spiritual joy in the Lord, while the second entered into bitterness of soul.

Finally, if God condemned Sodom and Gomorrah with abolishment, yet He did that after He said: “*I will go down and see*” (Gen. 18:21). Namely He gave the verdict after deliberation. He probably allowed the presence of Lot among them, to be a living role model for them, as well as a witness against them. But now, having done what they did, they had no excuse

If Abraham in his dialogue with the Lord said to Him: “*Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?*” (Gen. 18:25), God revealed His justice and love. He sent His angels to testify against the wicked, and to save Lot and his family! He did not destroy the righteous with the wicked.

3- SAVING LOT AND HIS FAMILY

The two angels proclaim God’s salvation plan, and instructed Lot to get out together with his wife, daughters, and sons-in-law; but “*to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking*” (Gen. 19:14). The sons-in-law could have been saved even in the last moments, but as it is in all generations, the wicked always sees God’s ultimatums as jokes, and become contemptuous. Finally, “*when the morning dawned,*” the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying: “*Arise, take your wife and two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city*” (Gen.

19:15). The angels' invitation, "*when the morning dawned*" was "*arise;*" as though it is a heavenly invitation to us to arise together with Christ the Lord, risen from the dead in the dawn of Sunday, to arise with our souls and our bodies (wives), and our energies and capacities (daughters), through their sanctification in the Lord.

Lot lingered, probably because of his married daughters and their men, or his house and possessions, but the two angels brought him out and set him outside the city, and instructed them to escape for their lives.

The two angels told Lot to escape to the mountains; yet as he was not able to do so, he begged them to allow him to escape to a little city called Zoar, so named, as it has been the smallest in the whole neighborhood. Its name was 'Baleh,' and was most probably on the eastern coast of the lake of 'Lot.' God responded to his request, and did not commit him to go to the mountains, but to that city 'Zoar.' Yet by that, Lot's loss was great! God wants us to escape to the holy mountain, to be lifted up, by His Holy Spirit, to the exalted summits. Yet we, in our weakness, are satisfied with Zoar!

St. Jerome says about Zoar, chosen by Lot for himself: [It was named 'Zoar' because of the little faith that Lot had. Who went far to dwell in Gomorrah, was not capable of reaching the land of 'noon,' reached by Abraham, the friend of God (James 2:23), and of the angels (Gen. 18:1)¹.]

St. Jerome was probably impressed by the words of **Origen** in his homily on the Book of Genesis: [Lot was never capable of dwelling in the heights with Abraham.]

What is that holy mountain, to which we escape for our life, but the Scripture, in which we find a strong fortress against the attacks of the evil enemy, the devil?! That is why, when the Lord Christ went through the temptation on the Mount on our account, and as a role model for us, He responded to every attack of the devil, by verses from the Scripture, as though they are holy mountains, to which he lifts us up, so that the enemy, with all his tricks, could not climb to us. That mountain also refers to the Word of God, Himself, of whom the prophet Daniel, said: "*A stone was cut out without hands which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces..., and the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth*" (Daniel 2:34-35). Christ - the Word of God, is the Stone, cut out without hands, as He is not of human seed; He is capable of striking the image of evil within our depths; and as He occupies our inner ground, He would become a great mountain to fill our whole heart!

4- DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

"The sun had risen upon the earth when Lot entered Zoar. Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens" (Gen. 19:23-24).

If 'Zoar' means 'little,' we can not enjoy the spirit of humility and get the feeling of our

¹ Ep. 122:1.

little size, unless the Sun of righteousness rises on our inner ground, and proclaims the kingdom of His humility and love in us.

It is amazing how God did not rain the brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, except after Lot entered Zoar; He was very keen on Lot as a righteous man.

Here, the mystery of Trinity is revealed, in saying: “*The Lord rained... from the Lord.*” The Son, the Word had rained from the Lord.

5- LOT’S WIFE BECOMES A PILLAR OF SALT

“*But his wife (Lot’s) looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt*” (Gen. 19:26).

Some scholars interpreted that literally, or that she suffocated by the vapor and smoke, then got covered by the salt that turned into a grave for her, while others believe that earthquakes caused some rocks to drop over Lot’s wife to turn her into a pillar of salt. Anyhow, she became, according to the Book of wisdom “*An example for unbelievers*” (Wisdom 10:7). And as the Lord Christ said to His disciples, “*Remember Lot’s wife*” (Luke 17:32).

The following are comments of Fathers on the episode of Lot’s wife:

❖ Looking back, she turned into a memorial of the unbelieving soul¹.

St. Jerome

❖ Lot’s wife lost her nature itself, by looking back, by looking toward what was unclean, even by looking with clean eyes².

St. Ambrose

❖ After being saved from Sodom, she looked back. In the place she did that, there she remained³.

St. Augustine

❖ “*No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*” (Luke 9:62). Lot’s wife, after being saved, looked back against the commandment, so lost what she gained by her escape.

Let us not look back, and not heed Satan’s invitation to withdraw; but look ahead to where the Lord Christ invites us. Let us lift our eyes up toward heaven, so as not to be deceived by the earth with its vain pleasures⁴.

St. Cyprian

6- ABRAHAM LOOKS TOWARD SODOM AND GOMORRAH

“*And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the*

¹ Ep. 122:1.

² Conc. Virgins 2:4 (29).

³ On Ps. 76.

⁴ Ep. 7:7.

Lord. Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace; and it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow” (Gen. 19: 27-29).

The day before, Abraham enjoyed entertaining the Lord and His angels, and got a promise to have a son. That, however, did not distract him from interceding for the sake of Sodom and Gomorrah, being with such a big and fatherly heart, he did not ask for himself, but for others. **In his intercession, he committed himself objectively; he did not say a word concerning Lot and his family, but was talking with his heart, mind, emotions, and feelings, not heard except by the Lord himself, Who listened to him, as is said: “God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow.”** What Lot enjoyed was actually because of Abraham! The big soul, in God’s eye, casts its shade over the little souls, with love, prayers, and inner moans of the heart, to become for them the source of blessing. As an example for that, we mention the soul of Joseph, the young slave. In the eye of the Lord, his soul was great and blessed. Because of this God blessed even the house of the Egyptian ‘Potiphar,’ *“The Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field” (Gen. 39:5).* It is not the blessing of Abraham nor of Joseph themselves, but the blessing of the Lord that fills the heart!

7- LOT’S DAUGHTERS DO WRONG WITH THEIR FATHER

The Scripture ends the last chapter of Lot’s life with an extremely painful incident that was a natural fruit that Lot reaped out of the seeds he sowed. He chose Sodom a dwelling place, so his daughters drank the spirit of evil from its inhabitants. If Canaan got cursed because of ridiculing his grandfather Noah, when the latter got drunk and exposed, Lot’s daughters made their father drink wine, not just to get him exposed, but to have children from him. Some scholars tried to present excuses for these daughters, having seen the whole world in their eyes going up in flames, and their mother turning into a pillar of salt. So the only solution to preserve the lineage of their father, and of mankind, was to get children from their father; as though what they did was not for the sake of carnal lust. **Origen** says that many women do not have control over themselves with their men, even while pregnant; yet these two daughters did not seek lust. **St. Didymus the Blind**, bases his defense for the two girls, on the fact that, on the next day, the firstborn asked the younger to go in and lie with her father; and that the two of them never sought any further connection with him after having conceived.

However, many Fathers rejected this view. They believe that they should not have resorted to a human way to solve the problem, disregarding God’s power to create children out of stones. In a lack of belief, they fell in the worst imaginable sin, so that they became the symbol of the corruption of Israel and Judah, as they rejected the Lord, and counted like the harlot sisters, ‘Oholah’ and ‘Oholibah,’ whom we have dealt with in our interpretation of the Book of Ezekiel

(Ezekiel 23).

St. Augustine believes that these two daughters represent a bitter portrait of those who misuse the Law (the father), and attach to him carnally, namely literally and not spiritually, to produce fruits that are not in the Lord; as these daughters bore sons from their father: 'Moab' and 'Ammon,' the heads of two wicked nations: the 'Moabites' and the 'Ammonites,' we dealt with in our interpretation of the Book of Ezekiel (Chapter 25); with everything they represent. **St. Jerome** puts the blame on Lot, even if what he did has been unwittingly.

❖ It is far better for us to remain fruitless, rather than becoming mothers by such a way! That was a symbol of those who corrupt the Law, by misusing it to produce the 'Moabites,' symbols of wicked deeds¹.

St. Augustine

❖ Although Lot had been unaware of what he unwittingly did, yet it was counted to him a great sin, having become a father of the Moabites and the Ammonites, the enemies of Israel².

St. Jerome

Finally we say that Lot represents the mature mind escaping from evil, yet reluctantly. His wife refers to the body retreating back, because of lusts; and the daughters refer to vain glory and conceit.

¹ *On Ps. 60.*

² *Ep. 22:8.*

CHAPTER 20

SARAH AND ABIMELECH

When Abraham moved to Gerar, he said of Sarah his wife, *'She is my sister.'* And Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah to take her as his wife; but God forbade him to come near her:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1- Abimelech and Sarah | 1-7. |
| 2- Abimelech sends for Abraham | 8-13. |
| 3- Abimelech honors Abraham | 14-18. |

1- ABIMELECH AND SARAH

After about 23 years, Abraham departed from the terebinth trees of Mamre, and went to Gerar, probably because he was so troubled by what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, that he wanted to leave the whole region; or because his herd of cattle and sheep grew larger, so he had to look for another pasture; or because of some famine that could have happened in his area. Whatever was the motive, he moved, and claimed that Sarah was his sister; so Abimelech sent to take her as his wife. By that time, she was 90 years old. God "Elohim" came to Abimelech in a dream by night to rebuke him: *"Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman you have taken, for she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, 'Lord, will you slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister /' And she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.' And God said to him in a dream, 'Yes I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me. Therefore, I did not let you touch her.' Now, therefore restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours'"* (Gen. 20:3-7).

The word *'Abimelech'* means 'Father of the king.' He had been a king of the Philistines. Although he was heathen, yet he was privileged with beautiful characters and incredible decency in his conversation with God - who came to him in a dream, and in his dealings with Abraham and with Sarah.

Because Abimelech did what he did in integrity of heart and innocence of hands, God withheld him from sinning against Him, and did not let him touch her. God probably struck him with some disease that prevented him from coming near her, that disease was surely not a divine wrath upon him, but a kind of care for him, to withhold him from doing wrong with Sarah, the wife of God's friend, Abraham. Abraham previously had some arrangement with his wife to hide her relationship from him as his wife; as what happened a long time ago during their visit to Egypt, when Pharaoh took Sarah for himself (Gen. 12:14-20), then punished severely by God, to

stop him from touching her. Although Pharaoh rebuked Abram because he hid the true nature of his relationship to Sarah, yet Abram remained on his weakness, to repeat it again, in his old age with Abimelech. It is as though God is warning us, that even if we remained a long time not doing a certain weakness, yet, probably in our old age we come to fall in what we have once fell before! If Abraham, the man of God, after all these dealings with God fell, is it not appropriate for us to beware of ourselves?!

Abraham, who saw God's salvation and care, clearly demonstrated in the incident between Sarah and Pharaoh, and who was granted the grace of saving his nephew Lot from the hands of the kings (Gen. 14); who got a divine promise to have a son from Sarah, who would enjoy inheritance and blessing, after entertaining God and his two angels. After all that, he should have not hidden his marital relationship with Sarah! Anyhow, the Scripture did not hide his weakness, despite presenting his life as the father of all believers.

Now, going back to Abimelech, king of Gerar; the word 'Gerar' means a 'jar'¹. It was an old city near the southern frontier of Palestine, 5 or 6 miles far from 'Gaza,' inhabited by the Philistines in early times (Gen. 26:1). It is probably located where the place called 'Kherbet-Om-Gerar' is now. It is located 13 miles south-west of 'Kadesh,' according to some, or 19 miles south-west of 'Bet-Gebrin (Elitropolis), and 14.5 miles far from 'Tel-Gomaa.' It seems likely that the word 'Abimelech' was not the name of a particular king, but most probably was a title of the majority of the kings of Gerar, the same way 'Pharaoh' was in Egypt.

Origen presents us with an allegoric interpretation of this incident, in connection with the previous one with the Pharaoh of Egypt. He believes Sarah to symbolize spiritual virtue or divine wisdom, acquired by Abraham as a wife, that neither Pharaoh nor Abimelech could acquire: the first because of his lack of integrity of heart, and the second because her husband was still alive. So, if Abraham represented the Law, nobody could acquire spiritual wisdom, as long as the Law was still alive. And as the apostle Paul says: "*The law has dominion over a man as long as he lives. For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband*" (Romans 7:1-2).

Of the words of **Origen** in this concern: [I believe that Sarah represents the spiritual virtue. The wise and honest man is bound to this virtue; that wise man of whom the Book of Wisdom says: "*I wish I acquire her as a wife*" (Wisdom 8:2). So also God says to Abraham: "*Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice*" (Gen. 21:12)... When we have spiritual virtue in us (as a wife and bride), and become perfect, we would be in a position to teach others, and would introduce her as a sister to be sought after by others to have in marriage; those to whom is said: "*Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister'*" (Wisdom 7:4). That is why Abraham said of Sarah that she was his sister, as though he represents the perfect man, who presents virtue to the one who seeks it. In the old days, Pharaoh wanted to have Sarah, yet with no "integrity of heart"

¹ *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 324.

(Gen. 20:5); which is no way to acquire virtue; That is why the Scripture says that God struck him and his house with great plagues (Gen. 12:7). As to Abimelech, if he sought the virtue with “integrity of heart’ as a wife, why then does the Book say that God did not let him touch her? It seems to me that Abimelech represents the wise people of this world, and the philosophy lovers, without plety. Abraham wished he could give the divine virtue (Sarah) to the Gentile wise (Abimelech), but the time was not yet ripe to have that divine grace. So virtue remained with Abraham, remained with people of circumcision, until the time comes, when absolute and consummated virtue cross over to the Church of the Gentiles¹.]

2- ABIMELECH SENDS FOR ABRAHAM

Despite the fact that Abimelech and his men were heathens, yet their hearts were ready to hear the word of God. So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing, and “*the men were very afraid*” (Gen. 20:8).

If God raised Abraham’s dignity in the eyes of Abimelech, saying to him: “*He is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live*” (Gen. 20:7, yet He allowed the heathen Abimelech to rebuke and admonish his prophet, saying: “*What have you done to us? How have I offended you that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done*” (Gen. 20:9); as though he is saying to him: ‘I have not done you any wrong; so why did you deceive me, and bring on me that divine wrath?! If you had said the truth, that she is your wife, she would have stayed with you, and you would have spared us all that trouble.’

It is strange, that Abraham, instead of admitting that he did wrong, he presented, as an excuse for his deed, another offense, saying: “*Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place, and they will kill me on account of my wife*” (Gen. 20:11). He accused the people of the place, of having no fear of God for sure, and assumed that they would kill him. Thus, he fell to the sin of judgment and haste, despite what those people demonstrated otherwise. The second excuse was that she was actually his sister, the daughter of his father, but not the daughter of his mother, then became his wife. That, however, did not justify hiding their real relationship as husband and wife, as long as that behavior would cause others to err with her.

3- ABIMELECH HONORS ABRAHAM

Abimelech intensively honored Abraham, not only through material gifts, but also through proclaiming his great love and respect toward him, saying: “*See, my land is before you, dwell where it pleases you*” (Gen. 20:15).

If he had rebuked Abraham because he put his life and his kingdom at risk, yet he showed great generosity, when he gave him back his wife, offering him both his heart and his land. He

¹ In Gen. hom 6.

responded to Abraham's offense with practical love, something that some believers could not easily do.

In an amiable admonishment he said to Sarah: "*Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who are with you and before others.*" (Gen. 20: 16)

He called Abraham 'her brother' in amiable reproof, but gave him generously for her sake, as a sort of vindication before everyone. Some believe that saying, "*this vindicates you before all,*" does not mean the silver, but Abraham himself, who would protect her against everyone who may have evil intentions toward her.

Finally, Abraham prayed to God, who healed Abimelech, his wife and his maidservants; for the Lord had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah.

CHAPTER 21

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC

Though Abraham left Sarah in the hands of the heathen king Abimelech, through failing to proclaim the marital nature of their relationship, however, God did not allow any harm to touch her, and brought her back to her husband to give birth to Isaac, the son of the promise, through whose descendants, all nations will be blessed.

- 1- The birth of Isaac 1-3.
- 2- The circumcision of Isaac 4-7.
- 3- The weaning of Isaac 8.
- 4- The son of inheritance and the son of the flesh 9-13.
- 5- Hagar and the well of water 14-21.
- 6- A covenant between Abraham and Abimelech 22-34.

1- THE BIRTH OF ISAAC

“And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to Him” (Gen. 21:1- 2).

If Isaac came of Abraham’s seed, yet he was truly the gift of God to him and to Sarah, a fruit of God’s visiting to Sarah, and His promises to her and to her husband. That is why the Fathers saw Isaac, not as a natural son to Abraham, but as the *“son of the promise.”* The Scripture confirms: *“The Lord visited Sarah,”* and proclaims: *“Sarah bore Abraham a son in his old age.”* Namely, he is truly Abraham’s son yet he came in his old age, after God took away Sarah’s barrenness. And as we previously said, Sarah’s womb was as though dead, or like stones. From it came Isaac as a symbol of the Church of the New Testament, that was born from the new Sarah, and her members came from the Gentiles, as though from stones. And as **St. Cyprian** says: [We see in the Bible that *“God raised up children to Abraham from stones,”* having been gathered together from the Gentiles¹.]

Abraham and Sarah remained childless for a long time. Then God visited them with a son on a level fitting for the divine promise, to bring joy to their old age, and to the hearts of all mankind. He came at the time designated by God. God’s promises are true and honest; to be received in the right time, if we faithfully wait for them. That is why the apostle Paul confirms: *“Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”* (Galatians 6:9). We shall reap our true Isaac, namely the transfiguration of the Lord Christ within us, if we do not lose heart in our spiritual strife, springing from the living faith that does not fade away.

¹ Ep. 62:4.

2- THE CIRCUMCISION OF ISAAC

In the eighth day, Abraham circumcised Isaac “*As God had commanded him*” (Gen. 21:4), as though Sarah is representing the Church, rejoicing in the spiritual birth of her children, through their circumcision, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, through the water of baptism. When man, by the Holy Spirit, takes off the old man, and puts on the new, that is according to the image of his Creator, the Church will be filled with spiritual ‘laughing,’ as she has got a son who brings joy to heaven.

3- WEANING OF ISAAC

“*So the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned*” (Gen. 21:8).

Abraham did not make a great feast on the day Isaac was born, but on the day he was weaned. Although we can not deny the great joy that filled the hearts of Abraham and Sarah and everyone on the day the child was born, yet Abraham wished to see Isaac grow from one stage to another, to reach maturity.

I wish we are like Abraham, rejoicing not only for the birth of Isaac, but also for his weaning and maturation; namely to rejoice for every spiritual growth of our inner man, who is renewed continuously, hopefully, “*to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*” (Ephesians 4:13).

Origen comments on the weaning of Isaac, saying: [Isaac means (laugh) or (joy). Who can give birth to such a son?! The apostle Paul said to those he gave birth to, in the Bible, “*You are our glory and joy*” (1 Thessalonians 2:20). When those born are weaned, we make a feast and greatly rejoice, as they no longer need to feed on milk, but on solid food (Hebrew 5:12), and “*have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” (Hebrew 5:14). A great feast is made on the day they are weaned; but there would not be any feast or joy for those of whom the apostle says: “*I fed you with milk and not solid food, for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still unable, for you are still carnal...; I could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ*” (1 Corinthians 3:2-1)¹.]

4- THE SON OF THE INHERITANCE AND THE SON OF THE FLESH

The great feast that Abraham made on the day Isaac was weaned had flared bitter feelings in Hagar and her son. Until recently Hagar saw her son as the sole heir to Abraham. These feelings were manifested in her son’s life, who scoffed at Isaac (Gen. 21:9), revealing a bitterness of soul, that he could not manage to hide; described by the apostle Paul as ‘persecution’ (Galatians 4:29); that led Sarah to request casting him out together with his mother, saying: “*The son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son Isaac*” (Gen. 21: 10).

¹ In Gen. hom 7:1.

The matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight, counting it as unfair of Sarah. He could not disregard his own son, even though from a bondwoman. But God said to him: "*Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of the bondwoman. Whatever Sarah had said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yes, I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed*" (Gen. 21:12-13).

There is no doubt that Abraham's heart got attached to his son, whom, for a long time saw as his only begotten. So when Isaac was born, it was not easy for him to cast the firstborn out. Yet, the divine command came that he is not to inherit. The apostle Paul interpreted for us what that command carried of a symbolic prophecy. The firstborn and older son came according to the flesh, while the second one came according to God's promise, so represents children by spirit. The first refers to the Jews who held fast to the literality and formalities of the Law, and lived according to the flesh and not to the spirit, so they were cast out. The Church of the New Testament coming as the fruit of divine grace has the right to inheritance. Clearly, the apostle says: "*He who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise; which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the son from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar... Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, the children of promise. But as he, who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.'* So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free" (Galatians 4:23-31).

As we received faith in the Lord Christ, we became by the Holy Spirit, children of Sarah the free (Church of the New Testament). But if we walk through the killing literality of the Law, and the spiritless formalities, we are retreating to the spirit of bondage, to be referred to the bondwoman. **Origen** says: [If you walk according to the flesh you become children of Hagar, so contradictory to those living according to the Spirit¹.]

If we walk according to the killing letter, and lived according to the flesh, we become like the carnal son, who represents the earthly first man. But if we walk by the Spirit, we become firstborn, not according to the flesh, but to the Spirit, and counted as spiritual. And as the apostle Paul says: "*However the Spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man*" (1 Corinthians 15:46-49).

As we get Isaac within us, namely we bear the spirit of the living Bible, the killing letter of the Law would be cast out!

¹ In Gen. hom 7:2.

5- HAGAR AND THE WELL OF WATER

In obedience to the divine command, Abraham sent Hagar and her 16 years old son away after providing them with bread and a skin of water, then bade them farewell early in the morning, hoping that they would find a shelter before the heat of the day. They headed south and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. As the water in the skin was used up, Hagar placed the boy exhausted of thirst, in the shade of one of the shrubs, saying to herself: *“Let me not see the death of the boy”* (Gen. 21:16), so she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept.

While the infant Isaac has been satisfying his thirst through drinking from the springs of his parents’ love, the son of Hagar was drinking of a container made of the skin of dead animals. It could not satisfy his thirst for long, so that he remained in a condition of exhaustion and dehydration, close to death. It is a portrait that demonstrates the difference between the spirit of biblical life, and the carnal thought originating from the literality of the Law. If we receive the spirit of the Bible, we dwell in the tent, to satisfy our thirst from the spring of the love of God, our Father, and the Church, our mother. We would be like Isaac, satisfied by the love of Abraham and Sarah. But if we walked according to the killing letter, we shall wander in the wilderness, drinking from the dead skin, water that would soon dry up; then our inner souls would be subject to spiritual death.

It is amazing that Hagar lifted her voice and wept, while the boy was too worn out to be able to talk or cry. However the silence of the boy had a louder voice to be heard by God, than the crying of his mother, as it is said: *“God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, ‘What ails you Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is* (Gen. 21:17).

If Hagar represents the literality of the Law, those fallen under the Law, if they comprehend the death they face and cry out in their heart, they would be heard. Their eyes would be opened to see *“a well of water”* (Gen. 21:10), to drink from the living water that they denied themselves. The Scripture says: *“And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. Then she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink”* (Gen. 21:19).

And as **Origen** says: [Today, the Jews, although close to the wells, yet their eyes are blinded, so that they can not drink out of the wells of the Law and the prophets¹.] And he also says: [Our eyes are opened, and the veil of the literality of the Law is lifted up; but I fear that we would shut them ourselves anew, through deep sleep, our unawareness of the spiritual meaning, and our laziness in watching, and keeping the sleep away from our eyes, in order to contemplate in the spirituals, so as not to be deceived; lest we would be like carnal people, who although sitting by the water wells, yet they can not see them. Therefore, let us watch together with the prophet, saying: *“I will not give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for*

¹ In Gen. hom 7:5.

the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty God of Jacob” (Psalm 132:4-5)¹.]

Finally, Ishmael dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt, a daughter of her own people.

6- A COVENANT BETWEEN ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH

We know how Abimelech had been very generous to Abraham, and allowed him to dwell on his land. Yet, as he saw him grow greater and greater, he realized that God was the secret behind his greatness and success, so he became apprehensive of him. That is why he came, accompanied by Phicol, the commander of his army, to ask Abraham to make a covenant with him, so that he would not deal falsely with him, with his offspring, or with his posterity.

We previously talked of the great kindness with which that heathen king dealt with Abraham; and how, when he took Sarah, he did that in integrity of heart and innocence of hands, then how he generously treated both of them. And now, as he saw the great success of Abraham, he attributed that success to his relationship with God, and in place of envy and jealousy, he came prudently to ask for a covenant.

We said that the word ‘Abimelech’ most probably was a title of the kings of Gerar, in order to let the people see the king as a father. ‘Abimelech’ thus meant ‘Father of a king.’ As to the commander of the army, he was usually called ‘Phicol,’ meaning ‘the mouth of all.’ He was probably like a prime minister, who speaks for the whole people.

When Abimelech requested a covenant with Abraham, the latter reproved Abimelech because of a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had seized. Prudently and amiably, Abimelech assured Abraham that he knew nothing about it, and had not heard of it until that day. After making a covenant, Abraham gave sheep and oxen to Abimelech as a gift of love. Then he set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. When Abimelech inquired about the reason for that, Abraham said: *“You will take these seven ewe lambs from my hands, that they may be my witness that I have dug this well”* (Gen. 21:30). It is called ‘Beersheba, namely ‘the well of the seven lambs,’ up to this day. And in order to confirm his possession, Abraham planted, there, tamarisk trees, to set his tents under their shade.

“There, Abraham called on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. And he sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days” (Gen. 21:33-34).

We know of the great generosity of Abraham, and his persistent feeling as a foreigner that made him refrain from possessing anything. Why then did he reprove Abimelech for that well? Why did he insist on possessing it? Why did he call it ‘Beersheba,’ and why did he plant tamarisk trees around it?

The ‘well’ surely refers to the Church, filled with the water of the Holy Spirit, granted by the Lord Christ from the Father. That is why Abraham presented the seven ewe lambs as a

¹ In Gen. hom 7:5.

testimony of his possession of the well, as though he is selling everything, in order to acquire the fellowship of the Church, and to drink from the water of the Holy Spirit. As to calling it 'Beersheba,' that refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, especially in the seven sacraments. Planting the tamarisk trees around it, refers to the believers who gather around the waters of the Holy Spirit, and enjoy it in them (Ezekiel 48:7). By this, the everlasting God is glorified in them, and His name is given to them, even if the believers sojourned as foreigners in the world with Abraham many days.

CHAPTER 22

SACRIFICING ISAAC

If the star of Abraham had so twinkled in the heaven of the Spirit that was because of his faith that lifted him up above events. Gifts motivated him to thank God more and more, without ever clinging to them, and the afflictions justified him before all. He experienced all along his years as a foreigner, a series of continuous conquests; and now, having rejoiced together with his wife Sarah at the birth of Isaac, the son of promise, whom they received in their old age, an exalted divine gift, God asks Abraham to offer the beloved boy as a burnt offering of love. Yet, despite the great harshness of that temptation, Abraham and Isaac were glorified, to become a living portrait of the redeeming work of God, through the sacrifice of the Cross, and the proclamation of the resurrection of the Messiah.

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1- GOD TESTS ABRAHAM

If the Church treasures the Feast of ‘Maundy Thursday’ or the ‘Thursday of the Covenant,’ in which it remembers how our Lord Christ offered His self-sacrifice to His disciples; the Church did not find a more perfect living portrait of the work of the cross, on which God, the Father, offers His Son as redemption of the world, than Abraham’s offering of his son to the Lord. That is why the ‘Fraction’ of the Liturgy of the Maundy Thursday deals with the sacrifice of Isaac. The ages will see in this work of faith a living and an exalted example that reveals the sacrifice of Christ the Lord. The Scripture says: “*It came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ and he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you*” (Gen. 22: 1, 2).

God’s testing of Abraham, does not imply His not knowing his heart, as He is aware of all our inner secrets. Yet he allowed for that test in order to justify him before all, and to proclaim his hidden piety of faith, to make out of him a living example for all. And as **St. Augustine** says: [Abraham has been tested by offering his beloved son Isaac to proclaim his piety of obedience, not to God, but to the world. Not every temptation is meant as a reproof, but it could be as a commendation¹.] **Origen** believes that that temptation revealed the depths and hidden thoughts of Abraham, concerning his belief in the resurrection, saying: [By Spirit, the apostle Paul, most

¹ *City of God* 16:32.

probably knew the emotions and thoughts of Abraham, proclaiming them by saying: “*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead*” (Hebrew 11:17-19). The apostle provided us with the thoughts of that man of faith concerning Isaac; and that was the first time that faith in resurrection was revealed, demonstrated in Abraham’s hope in the resurrection of Isaac¹.] Thus the temptation revealed the heart of Abraham, the Patriarch, as a man who believed in resurrection from the dead.

If Abraham went through the severest temptation that could happen to an old man, that is offering his beloved only begotten son, as a burnt offering, by his own hands, yet he enjoyed, amid that temptation, the visualization of the Lord Christ risen up from the dead, through a particular sign, that filled his heart with joy, according to the words of the Lord Himself: “*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad*” (John 8:56). Thus, if he, by faith set forth with his son to the altar, he came back from the temptation carrying Isaac as though risen up from the dead, a symbol of the slain Christ the Lord risen from the dead.

The Scripture starts to tell about that temptation, saying: “*It came to pass after these things*” (Gen. 22:1), as though God did not allow Abraham to be tested, except after appearing to him at the terebinths of Mamre, confirming his promise concerning Isaac. And after he made a covenant with Abimelech, revealing to him how He granted him prestige and respect even before kings. In other words, God prepared him in different ways, and as the apostle says: “*But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*” (1 Corinthians 10:13). He prepared his heart, his thought, and his whole life to receive the temptation. He accompanied and supported him as well, during the temptation in a secret way. Therefore, before, during, and after every temptation, God Himself will support us, in order to realize His goal in us, if we accept His work in our lives.

Why did God ask Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering, when the Mosaic Law was going to forbid human sacrifices?

The heathens used to offer their firstborns as sacrifices to their idols. Yet these practices were not done out of love, as much as out of despair in the hearts of those who offered them, wishing for forgiveness of their sins, for whatever price. Besides wishing to please their blood-thirsty gods! But God requested from his friend Abraham that offer, in order to reveal to believers how much Abraham loves Him, being ready to offer Him the dearest thing he possess. At the same time, as God presented a ram to be sacrificed instead of Isaac, He proclaimed His refusal of human sacrifices, not because of any lack of love for God on the part of believers, but in appreciation of man. God does not stand human sacrifices, as He is a lover of mankind,

¹ *In Gen. hom 8:1.*

wishing for their life and not for their doom, presenting His Only-Begotten Son to redeem them, He who, even though becoming Man, yet He is the Only One on whom death cannot reign, nor corruption can approach!

St. Augustine says: [Abraham never believed that God would accept a human sacrifice. Yet, once he heard the divine command for offering his son Isaac, he instantly obeyed. Abraham was worthy of commendation, as he surly believed that after offering his son as a burnt sacrifice, he would eventually be risen up, according to God's saying, when Abraham did not intend to abide to his wife's wish to send the bondmaid and her son away: "*In Isaac your seed shall be called*" (Gen. 21:12)... That is why, as the father was holding fast, since the beginning, to the promise of what is to be realized through that son, whom God commanded to be slain, he never doubted that he, whom he was never hoping for, would be risen up after being offered as a burnt offering¹.] In other words, Abraham realized the difference between offering his son as a sacrifice, and the human sacrifices that were offered to the idols. He believed that God, who gave him Isaac, from Sarah's womb that was like stones, and counted his birth to be like rising from the dead, is capable of raising him after offering him as a burnt offering. But the pagans were offering their firstborns to please their blood- thirsty idols; offering them without hope.

Finally, Abraham was commanded to offer his son as a burnt offering on the land of 'Moriah,' on one of the mountains that God would tell him. Some believe that the mountain on which Abraham built the altar to offer his son, was the threshing floor of 'Araunah the Jebusite' (2 Samuel 24:24; 1 Chronicles 21:24); namely on the location where the temple was built, where sacrifices were continually offered, in anticipation of the unique sacrifice of the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Samaritan tradition, the land of Moriah, is located within the region of Mount Gerzim, north of Jerusalem. **Fr. Caesarius of Arles** says that **Jerome**, the Priest, confirmed during his encounters with Jewish elders, that the Lord Christ was crucified on the same location, where Isaac was to be offered as a burnt sacrifice².

As to the word 'Moriah,' it means 'God is seeing, or setting,' as God set the ram for the burnt offering; and probably also means 'God is instructing,' as He instructed us on the practical love through the sacrifice of His Only-Begotten Son.

2- ISAAC ON THE WAY

"So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him" (Gen. 22:3). Although the divine command that Abraham heard, seemed contradictory to God's previous promises, he obediently arose to follow it. He rose "early in the morning" without hesitation, discussion, nor doubt in God's

¹ *City of God* 16:32.

² *Ser.* 83:5.

promises.

Abraham was amazing in his obedience, the same way his young son was amazing in his submission to his father. Abraham hastened to do according to the divine command, with Isaac, not raising any objection.

St. John Chrysostom comments on how Abraham refrained from consulting his wife Sarah concerning that issue, saying: [Abraham, not knowing what would happen, and deciding to offer his son according to God's command, refrained from telling his wife what was going on... That teaches us to keep our works of love, even from those dear to us, unless it is absolutely necessary¹.]

St. Ambrose comments on the positive role of Isaac, in his obedience to his father in the Lord, saying: [Isaac feared God, and having been truly Abraham's son, he submitted to his father, even to the limit of death; so also Joseph, despite seeing in a dream the sun, the moon, and the stars, bowed down to him, he also submitted completely to his father (Genesis 37:12)².]

Thus, as Abraham was obedient to God, in exalted love, He gave him Isaac, also obedient with true love, as though God rewarded Abraham in his son, before granting him the eternal reward.

It is amazing, how Abraham split the wood in the early morning, before going on his way, to avoid anything that could keep him from executing the command of God. If that wood referred to the cross on which the real Isaac would be lifted up, splitting it by the hands of Abraham before going on his way, this refers to the proclamations of God the Father, concerning the cross, through the symbols and prophecies of the Old Testament, before being carried by the Lord Christ, then lifted up on it as a burnt offering! God revealed the mystery of the cross in various ways, but the eyes of many were blinded to behold it.

"Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off" (Gen 22: 4). Abraham did not go for just one or two days, but for three days, before seeing the place from afar off. And as said by **Origen**, that the third day refers to the resurrection of the Lord Christ, as though Abraham had entered with the Lord into the tomb, after sharing His passions, until the light of His resurrection shone on the dawn of Sunday (the third day), when *"he lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off."* His eyes were previously relatively lowered down and humbled; the enemy probably fought and tempted him by thoughts of Sarah, whom he left back in the tent unaware of his departure nor intentions; and probably also by his emotions toward his beloved son. Nevertheless, he did not stop his walking for three days; as though he is like the children of Israel, who were commanded by God to go three days journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord (Exodus 5:3); as no sacrifice is to be accepted outside the circle of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, on the third day, Abraham, by some way or another, saw the sign of the

¹ In 1 Tim hom 14.

² Duties of the Clergy 1:17.

resurrection, so he lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. What is that place, but the Lord Christ Himself, in whom Abraham sees his son Isaac, raised from the dead, with and also by Him!

We have already spoken of the mystery of the three days¹, through which we enjoy, not the sacrifice of Isaac, but that of Christ the Lord risen from the dead. **St. Clement of Alexandria** believes that these three days, that are proper for us to go through, in order to see the place afar off, are nothing but: looking forward to good things, good desires of the soul, and its comprehension of spiritual things. It is as though the soul is not able to behold the mystery of the sacrifice of the cross, unless it looks to the good things, lusts for them, and understands them. The One to help opening the eyes to behold these mysteries is the Lord Christ Himself, the Teacher, raised from the dead².]

Thus, amid the temptation, and the pressures of pains and worries, Abraham's soul got comforted by the opening of his inner insight, on the third day, to behold the mystery of the Crucified, risen from the dead; then he rejoiced to see the day of the Lord (John 8:56). The furnace of temptation was transformed into heavenly dew, through the revelation of the crucified Christ risen from the dead, before the insight of Abraham, the Patriarch.

“Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey, the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you” (Gen. 22:5)

Fr. Caesarius says: [The two young men whom Abraham ordered to stay with the donkey, refer to the Jewish people, who could not go up to the place of the sacrifice, having rejected faith in Christ. The donkey refers to the Jewish Synagogue, and the ram, caught in a thicket by its horns, probably refers to the Lord; as Christ was caught in the thicket by horns, as He was raised and nailed on the cross³.]

The two young men saw Isaac, and the wood being split by Abraham, yet they could not set forth to where Isaac was to be offered as a sacrifice, as though they are the Jewish people, who saw the Lord according to the flesh, and saw the cross, yet were not able to realize its power. And as the apostle said: *“We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”* (1 Corinthians 1:23, 25).

The two young men stayed with the donkey, and did not set forth with Abraham and Isaac to behold the mystery of God; that is how everyone who is bound to the earthly thought, and live on account of his belly and lusts of his body, would be as though staying with the donkey, unable to set forth to know the spiritual mystery of God, that raises him to the heavenly.

“So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he

¹ سفر الخروج، ١٩٨١، ص ٣٦ - ٣٨.

² *Stromata* 5:11.

³ *Ser.* 84:3.

took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together” (Gen. 22:6).

Isaac was a young man, probably 25 years old, so Abraham laid the wood on him; then the two of them went to the place revealed by God. And as said by **Fr. Caesarius**: [When Isaac carried the wood of the burnt offering, he was a symbol of the Lord Christ who carried the cross to the place of His passion. This mystery was previously proclaimed by the prophets, as for example... *“and the government will be upon His shoulder”* (Isaiah 9:6). The government of Christ was upon His shoulder, carrying the cross in an amazing humility. It is not unfitting to refer to the cross as Christ’s government, as by it He had overcome the devil, and called the whole world to know Christ and to enjoy His grace¹.] **St. Augustine** says: [Isaac carried the wood of his burnt offering to the place he would be sacrificed, as Christ carried His cross².]

As to saying: *“The two of them went together,”* this refers to the fact that this sacrifice is that of Abraham as well as of Isaac. Abraham offered his only-begotten son through exalted love; while the son offered himself through complete obedience; so the sacrifice was counted as from both of them together. On a similar level, we say that the sacrifice of the Lord Christ is that of God the Father, who offered His Son for our redemption; and it is the sacrifice of the Son, who obeyed even to death, death of the cross... This is the sacrifice of love, offered by God the Father, in His Son, the Only-Begotten. That is confirmed by Christ the Lord Himself saying: *“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). And the apostle Paul also says: *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?!”* (Romans 8:32). And as the Lord Christ, in His crucifixion, offered the sacrifice of God the Father in His Son, He likewise offered His own sacrifice, as it is said: *“Who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20); *“As Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma”* (Ephesians 5:2); and *“Just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it”* (Eph. 5:25).

If saying, *“The two of them went together,”* refers to God the Father and God the Son, setting forth together to offer the sacrifice of the cross: the Father offering it through His man-loving will, and the Son through His practical obedience; this phrase also refers to God and the Church setting forth together toward the cross: God proclaims His love for mankind, by offering His Son as redemption for the sake of humanity; and the Church proclaims her love for God the Father, through her delivered Head; thus God the Father smells in the sacrifice of the cross, an aroma of pleasure; that is the sacrifice of the Church that also gives her life through her union with Christ Jesus who delivered His life!

As Isaac walked with Abraham toward the altar, the son started to address his father: *“My father!”* and Abraham said, *‘Here I am my son.’* Isaac said: *‘Look, the fire and the wood,*

¹ *City of God* 16:32.

² *City of God* 84:5.

but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’” (Gen. 22:7.)

And as **Origen** says: [At this moment, in the word of the son “*My father!*” embodies the severest situation of that experience. Imagine to what extent does the voice of the son to be slain tear out the heart of his father! Yet Abraham’s steadfast faith did not keep him from saying tenderly: “*Here I am my son!*”¹]

With faith in God who is able to rise from the dead, Abraham said: “*My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering*” (Gen. 22:8). Abraham saw the true Lamb, “Jesus Christ,” to be offered, not as a ransom for Isaac alone but for the whole world. In his saying, “*God will provide,*” Abraham proclaimed his complete trust in God’s salvation plan, that is not the work of man but a divine ordainment. God, alone, would provide, by His own exalted means.

3- SETTING THE ALTAR AND OFFERING THE SACRIFICE

Everything was set: Abraham came to the place of which God had told him, the altar was built, the wood carried by Isaac was placed in order, Isaac was bound by his father’s hands, and laid on the altar upon the wood, and Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. Everything was going on in an atmosphere of inner calm: Abraham believing that God would never forsake His promises, and Isaac, in obedience submits to being slain. It was only few moments for the slaying to take place and the burnt offering to be offered.

It was counted for Abraham, that he actually offered his son, as he was hastening in doing his task without fear; His offering was accepted, even if it was not literally finished. And as **St. Ambrose** says: [The father had actually offered his son; as God does not seek blood, but exalted obedience².]

Isaac, on his part, was counted a son of obedience, having faithfully accepted the cross. And as **St. Jerome** says: [Isaac, in his readiness to die, had carried the cross of the Gospel before the Gospel came³.]

In the crucial moment and amid complete quiet, the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said: “*Abraham, Abraham!... Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me*” (Gen. 22:11-12)

Saying, “*Now I know,*” as said by **St. Augustine**, does not mean that God did not know beforehand the heart of Abraham, but He wished to reveal to Abraham himself his own inner

¹ *In Gen. hom 8.*

² *On Belief of Resur. 2:98.*

³ *Ep. 66:7.*

depths of heart¹. Thus, Abraham was revealed to himself as a lover of God, and to all generations, it became revealed that he had not been attached to worldly life.

Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. He took it and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. It was a symbol of Christ the Lord who was raised on the cross, and nailed with His outstretched hands, for the sake of the salvation of the world.

Abraham called the name of the place “*The Lord will provide,*” namely, ‘*The Lord will see for Himself.*’ Thus God appeared to Abraham at the location of the sacrifice; as in it, God was reconciled with man, and we got the right to see Him as children who have a place in the bosom of God the Father. Through the sacrifice, the Holy Spirit will lift us up, and set forth with us toward the divine bosom, to enjoy a divine vision, not on a level of worldly insight, but beholding the union with God and eternally enjoying the fellowship of His glories. Thus, the altar in the Church of the New Testament has come to represent heaven itself, the place where God encounters man in the slain Son.

4- RENEWAL OF THE DIVINE PROMISE

Through the sacrifice, Abraham enjoyed beholding the Lord, as well as the renewal of the promise in a way that surpassed the previous times:

(1) **Origen** believes that the previous promises, have been tending more to confirm Abraham’s fatherhood of the people of circumcision, while not disregarding his spiritual fatherhood for all believers of all nations and peoples; But, here, the promise highlights his spiritual fatherhood, saying: [It was fitting for him to become a father of “*those who are of faith*” (Galatians 3:9), and to enter the inheritance through the passion and resurrection of Christ... The first promise concerned the first people, when the “Divine Voice” was on the earth; the Scripture saying: “*He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven and count the stars if you are able to number them,’ and He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be’*” (Gen. 15:9). In the renewal of the promise, on the other hand, the Scripture reveals that the voice came from heaven (Gen. 22:11). The first came from the earth, while the second came from heaven. Is not there a symbol, as expressed by the apostle: “*The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven*” (1 Corinthians 15:47)? The promise concerning the people of faith comes from heaven, while that concerning the other people (the Jews), is from earth².]

(2) When the divine promise concerned more the inheritance of earth, the voice came from the earth, and it concerned the eternal inheritance of the people of the New Testament. The voice came from heaven, and was also confirmed by a divine oath, something that strongly moved the emotions of the apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 6:17).

(3) In confirming His promise to us, God is also confirming our commitment to renewing

¹ On Ps. 44.

² In Gen. hom 9:1.

our covenant with Him, as **Origen**¹ says. As the believer enters with God into a covenant in the waters of baptism, by which he denies Satan and all his evil work, and proclaims his acceptance of God and His redeeming works, his true fellowship in the Church, and his anticipation of eternal life. He renews daily that covenant through continuous repentance, saying in the prayer of the first hour: “Let us start well,” counting every morning a new start of a deeper life with God, his Savior.

God having renewed His promises to Abraham, the later returned to his young men and they rose and returned together to Beersheba, where he dwelt. If Beersheba, as we said before, refers to the waters of baptism and to the work of the Holy Spirit in and through it, Abraham having offered the sacrifice and enjoyed the divine promises, he set forth to his two young men, as though to his body, submitted to him with all his energies and capacities, to settle down all his days by the water of baptism, recalling the work of divine sonship, and responding to the work of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is not just a rite to be practiced at the beginning of the road, then to come to an end, but it is rather a life lived by the believer all his days on earth; He enters into the water to encounter with the Lord Christ, the buried and resurrected from the dead, to live all his days by the Holy Spirit, enjoying that life, as though dwelling in Beersheba with Abraham, namely in the waters of baptism.

When we are captivated by sin, we sit down as though by the rivers of Babylon, to weep as we remember Zion, with our tongues, we are not able to sing the songs and praises of Zion (Psalm 137). But, having received faith in the sacrifice of the true Isaac, and having enjoyed the new divine promise, we are going to dwell in Beersheba by the waters of baptism, together with our young men, to praise the Lord with our hearts as well as with our tongues.

The two young men, finally setting forth to Beersheba, together with Abraham and Isaac, probably refer to the return of the Jews, at the end of times, to the belief in Christ the Lord, Whose sacrifice they could not understand before, to approach, at the end of times the waters of baptism, and to accept Him Whom they have denied.

5- THE FAMILY OF NAHOR

The Scripture mentioned the children born to Nahor, the brother of Abraham from his wife Milcah, in order to reveal the relationship of Rebecca to her husband Isaac. Her father, having been the nephew of Abraham, she was the daughter of his cousin. If the Scripture cared for the men of faith and for their genealogies, it likewise cares for the women of faith and their genealogies, and their roles in the history of salvation.

¹ *In Gen. hom 9:2.*

CHAPTER 23

THE DEATH OF SARAH

Sarah, as a wife, represents the flesh in relation to the soul. She as a companion to her man in his spiritual strife, does not represent a burden that would hinder his growth, but a helper to support him all the days of his life; setting forth with him from 'Ur' of the Chaldeans to live the life of a stranger; sharing with him hospitality to guests, listening and responding to him; she rather represents the flesh, that being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, does not hinder the soul in its setting forth toward heaven, but supports it through living practices, from prayer, to fasting, to worshipping, etc. Now Sarah is dead, to be buried by her man Abraham in the hope of resurrection.

1- The death of Sarah

1-2.

2- Purchasing the cave of Machpelah

3-20.

1- THE DEATH OF SARAH

Abraham returned together with Isaac, alive and as though risen from the dead. Abraham believing in God, capable of raising from the dead, got, in his son, the confirmation of the divine promise, with an oath, that his descendants would be like the stars of heaven. Yet, death had to come to that blessed family, to snatch the body of Sarah, leaving Abraham's heart and descendants attached to God, who is capable of raising the soul together with the body.

It is worth noting that the Scripture cared to mention the age of Sarah when she died, and the details of purchasing a property for a burial place, to have her buried in the land of Canaan, saying: "*Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her*" (Gen. 23:1-2).

Sarah lived 127 fruitful years, although in her first 90 years, she was barren, but by faith, she was called the "mother of believers" (Isaiah 51:2); sharing with her man Abraham, the "father of believers" all the years of his strife, carrying with him the hardships and receiving with him the divine promises. She walked with the spirit of obedience, so that the apostle Peter asked the women believers to follow her example, saying: "*As Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and not afraid with any terror*" (1 Peter 3:6).

It seems that Abraham was not in his tent when Sarah died, and as he heard the sad news, he stood before her recalling the long years they have been together. She was the last one of his household who departed with him from Ur of the Chaldeans to live with him wherever he chose. He stood before her to get in touch with the companion of his life, in great grief. That was the first time to hear that Abraham, the old and respectable man, wept or grieved. We did not hear that he wept as he left his folks back in Ur of the Chaldeans, when Lot was captivated, nor as he

set forth for three days to slay his son; yet he is now standing before Sarah weeping and grieving.

If Abraham's faith raised him above events; as by faith he fought the kings to set his nephew Lot free; and by faith he took his son Isaac to the land of Moriah to slay him; Yet that faith does not contradict the human tender feelings that drove the fountains of tears before the body of Sarah! Faith does not deprive us from emotions, but sanctifies them and makes them grow. That is what we see in Abraham our father, the man of faith, and what we know about the apostles and disciples; and even in the Lord Christ Himself, who could not help weeping as he saw the tears of Mary and Martha when their brother Lazarus died; that the Jews said: "*See how He loved him!*" (John 11:35-36). The epistles of the apostle Paul came loaded with holy human emotions: we see him several times recalling how his disciple Timothy wept for the departure or imprisonment of his mentor (2 Timothy 1:3-4).

2- THE PURCHASE OF THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH

In these bitter moments when Abraham profusely wept proclaiming his feelings toward Sarah, he behaved with faith and wisdom, as for instance:

(1) He did not think to bury his wife in the land of his ancestors; If he, by faith departed with Sarah from Ur of the Chaldeans, he persisted on that faith until his last breath. Instead of taking the body of Sarah back to the land of his ancestors, he purchased a cave in Canaan to bury her, and to be his future burial place, and that of Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, and Lea.

(2) "*And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying: 'I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you. Give me a property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.'* And the sons of Heth answered Abraham saying to him; '*Hear us my Lord. You are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold from you his burial place, that you may bury your dead.'* Then Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth" (Gen. 23:3-7).

The Scripture demonstrates Abraham's humility. So while the sons of Heth look at him as a 'mighty prince' from the Lord among them, yet he calls himself a '*foreigner and sojourner*' among them. In appreciation of their love and generosity, he bowed himself to them. The children of God are indeed recognized, not by their love of authority and self esteem, but by the spirit of love, meekness, and humility; according to the words, "*A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden*" (Matthew 5:14); not the hill of haughtiness, but that of God, set and established upon the Lord Christ Himself, the Grantor of humility!

Abraham lived for a long time among the 'Hittites,' the people of Heth, descendants of Heth son of Canaan (Gen. 10:15). They looked at him as a mighty prince from the Lord among them, not that they gave him an official leading status, but through feeling submission to him, because of what he enjoyed of fellowship with God. As for him, he kept on feeling in the depths of his heart, that he was a foreigner and a sojourner, something that surfaced up when Sarah died.

By this spirit, the true children of Abraham lived, that the prophet David, in his last days, as he set everything for his son Solomon to build the temple: *“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from you, and of your own we have given You. For we are aliens and pilgrims before you, as were all our fathers. Our days on earth are as a shadow, and without hope”* (1 Chronicles 29:14-15). The apostle Paul summarizes the life of the men of faith, the children of Abraham, saying: *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth”* (Hebrews 11:13).

(3) The sons of Heth were so deeply moved by that old man who lost his wife, that they proclaimed their love and respect for him by putting at his disposition the best burial lot from their burial place. Yet he, as **St. John Chrysostom** says, [did not misuse that love, but in integrity of heart, begged them to let the owner of the cave accept the price¹.]

I wish every servant and minister of God in the Church, when he sees how the congregation is eager to give love, does not misuse this love, but, in integrity of heart, and in innocence of hand, covet nothing!

(4) **St. Irenaeus** commented on the thought of faith, lived by our father Abraham, and strongly proclaimed by refusing to accept the cave as a free gift from anybody, in patient anticipation for his descendants to receive the whole land - the land of promise - from the hand of God, he said: [The promise of God remained steadfast, saying to him: *“Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are - northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever”* (Gen. 13:14-15). And he also said: *“Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you”* (Gen. 13:17). However, *“God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on”* (Acts 7:5). He stayed a foreigner and sojourner all his days. And when his wife Sarah died, as the sons of Heth wanted to give him a burial place for free, he refused to take it as a gift, but paid 400 silver Shekels for the cave owned by Ephron the Hittite. He, thus, patiently anticipated the realization of God’s promise, and refused to accept from anybody something that God promised to give him, when He said to him: *“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates”* (Gen. 15:18). So, if he was promised by God to inherit the land, yet did not get it during his days, he will surely do, in the resurrection of the righteous, he and his descendants, namely, the believers and those who fear God. Those descendants are the Church that enjoyed sonship to God in the Lord; according to the words of St. John the Baptist: *“God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones”* (Matthew 3:9). So, the apostle also says in his epistle to the Galatians: *“Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise”* (Galatians 4:28). In the same epistle, he clearly proclaims, that those who believed in Christ, receive Christ as being the promise given to Abraham, saying: *“Now to Abraham and his Seed*

¹ In 1 Cor. hom 35:10.

were the promises made. He does not say, 'and to seeds,' as of many, but as of One, 'and to your Seed,' who is Christ" (Galatians 3:16). Thus, then, those who are of faith are blessed together with Abraham the faithful, the children of Abraham¹.]

(5) **St. Basil the Great**, believes that Abraham, as a man of faith, did not own a thing. All he owned, in all his life, was a place of burial for himself, his wife, and his children. As though proclaiming that all he demands of land, is no more than what is wide enough for his dead body, in anticipation of the resurrection from the dead!

(6) Abraham purchased the burial cave with silver; so if silver refers to the word of God (Psalm 12:6), he thus insists to have no possession on earth, except what is to be purchased by the word of God.

Finally, the cave of Machpelah, is a double cave, consisting of an inner an outer compartments, in the city of Hebron, owned by Ephron the Hittite, whom Abraham did not seem to know, as is obvious from the context of talk between Abraham and the sons of Heth (Gen. 23:13). Ephron, however knew who Abraham was, and was keen on giving the cave, and the field around it, to him as a free gift (Gen. 23:11).

¹ *Adv. Haer. 32.*

CHAPTER 24

A BRIDE FOR ISAAC

The succession of events carried a symbolic portrait of those of salvation. If the slaying of Isaac, the firstborn of Sarah, refers to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ the Lord, the death of Sarah bears, from one side, the rejection and non-acceptance of the Jewish nation, that gave birth, according to the flesh, to the Lord Christ. As to dispatching the ruler of Abraham's house, to bring Rebecca a wife for Isaac, from the city of Haran, that, refers to the work of the Holy Spirit who attracted the nations (the Gentiles) from their wicked land - worshippers of idols - to set her a bride for the true Isaac, our Lord Jesus Christ, instead of Sarah.

- 1- Dispatching the chief servant in Abraham's house 1-9.**
- 2- In the city of Nahor 10-14.**
- 3- An encounter with Rebecca 15-27.**
- 4- In Rebecca's house 28-40.**
- 5- Success of the mission of the chief servant in Abraham's house 50-60.**
- 6- Rebecca, wife of Isaac 61-67.**

1- DISPATCHING THE CHIEF SERVANT IN ABRAHAM'S HOUSE

Sarah died 127 years old, as Abraham was 137 years old. After three years of Sarah's death, Abraham said to the chief servant in his house: *"Please put your hand under my thigh; and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country (Mesopotamia) and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac. And the servant said to him, 'Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land (Canaan). Must I take your son back to the land from which you had come?' But Abraham said to him, 'Beware that you do not take my son back there. The Lord God of heaven. who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land, will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there'"* (Gen. 24:2-7).

What does putting the hand under the thigh mean? **St. Augustine** says that it refers to the oath by Him who would be incarnated from His seed¹. It is as though Abraham was proclaiming by the spirit of prophecy, that the Lord, God of heaven and earth, will be incarnated through him.

Abraham departed from Ur of the Chaldeans, from his kindred, putting in his heart through his obedience to the divine command, never to return to it, nor to bury his wife, or to send his son to marry. Indeed, he requested that his son should marry a wife from his kindred, so as not to be attached to a Canaanite, who may deviate his heart away from the love of God;

¹ In Ioan tr 43:16.

believing that God Who called him, will surely send to his son, the wife that would help him in God's way, the way Sarah did to him.

Abraham did not care for his son's wife to be rich or pretty, but his main concern was that she should be a believer, who would support his son in his spiritual life, and not an obstacle along his way; that is why God granted Isaac 'Rebecca,' a woman of pretty face and spirit; who was a comfort and joy to him all his days.

2- IN THE CITY OF NAHOR

The city of Nahor is close to Haran, north-west of 'Mesa' (Mesopotamia), known in the Assyrian documents and those of Mari. Its name probably came after 'Nahor' the grandfather of Abraham (Gen. 11: 22-25), or after his brother, the grandfather of Rebecca (Gen. 11:22-25), or after the name of the tribe as a whole. Nahor appears as the ancestor of a number of Aramite tribes (Gen. 22:20-24)¹.]

"Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, for all his master's goods were in his hand. And he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. Then he said, 'O Lord God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. (Gen. 24:10-12)

The messenger of Abraham refers to the Holy Spirit, sent by the Only-begotten Son from the Father, He came to our life as though to the city of Nahor, to set forth with us, from our land, on the camels of our Master, toward His land, namely, to carry us to His heavens, to be eternally with the heavenly Groom.

If the figure 10 refers to the ten commandments, so the Holy Spirit is working in us, to carry us through the divine spiritual commandment, presenting us, 'all goods,' namely, the riches of the Spirit, peace of mind, fulfillment of soul, in order to receive the work of the Spirit in us; setting forth with us from glory to glory.

The figure 10 probably refers also to our life on earth, as the figure 1000 refers to that in heaven. As the Holy Spirit sets forth with us to the land of promise - the Higher Jerusalem - he is presenting us here, in our earthly life, with eternal goods, as much as we can receive and enjoy, as a pledge for the enjoyment of the perfect eternal goods. We enjoy a portion of the dowry, and not the whole dowry. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [The Lord Christ, having made with us a (matrimonial) contract, sets for me a dowry, not of money but of blood. This dowry is the pledge for the goods: that "*Eyes have not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man*" (1 Corinthians 2:9). He sets the following things as my dowry: Eternity, the praise of angels, salvation from death, freedom from sin, inheritance of the great kingdom, righteousness, sanctification, salvation from present evils, discovery of future blessings. How great is my

¹ J. Mackenzie: *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 602.

dowry! He came and took me, and set my dowry, saying: I am giving you My riches. Have you lost the Paradise? I shall give it back to you. But I shall not give you the whole dowry here. Why? So as to give it to you when you get to the royal position. Have you come to Me? No, it was I Who came to you, not to leave you where you are, but to take you back with Me. So, do not ask me for the dowry, while you are here in this life, but be filled with hope and faith!^{1]}

The Holy Spirit comes to us, as though on 10 camels, to offer to the Church of the richness of God, and to draw her continuously toward heaven, to enjoy the perfection of glory. How strange, that the man came to a well of water, in the evening, to seek a bride for Isaac. That well is nothing but the waters of baptism, where the Lord Christ encounters His Church, as His bride. And as **Fr. Caesarius of Arles** says: [If the Church had not come to the water of baptism, it would never have been united with Christ².] And he also said: [Brethren, look at the servant of Isaac; he encountered Rebecca by the well; and Rebecca, in turn, had also encountered Isaac by the well (Gen. 24:62). Christ would never encounter the Church; nor the Church would encounter Christ, except by the secret of baptism³.]

Origen sees in the well, a reference to the Scripture, where the soul encounters its Groom, saying: [Rebecca used to go every day to the well to draw water; and there she encountered Abraham's servant, and got to marry Isaac... Learn to come every day to the well of the Scripture to draw continuously the water of the Holy Spirit⁴.] And he also says: [Do you wish to get engaged to Christ? He sends to you His servant - namely His inspired word, without which you can never gain Him, nor get married to Him⁵.]

Getting back to Abraham's servant, we find him like his master, trusting that God would ordain everything; So, as he came to the well, he prayed, surrendering himself into God's hands; Then after everything was settled, he again, prayed and thanked God for the success of his mission (Gen. 24:48). This man, as I said, refers to the Holy Spirit, that descended upon the Church at the fulfillment of time, to sanctify it as a holy bride for the Lord Christ. Some look at that man as a symbol of the apostles, who came to preach among the Gentiles, to offer them as a bride to the Lord, by the Holy Spirit working in them.

3- AN ENCOUNTER WITH REBECCA

The chief servant in Abraham's house, once finished his talk of faith with God, the response was fast; as Rebecca, the granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came to the well to draw water. Besides her physical beauty, she was tender in her speech and great in her generosity; when the stranger asked for a little water from her pitcher to drink, she quickly let her

¹ الكنيسة تحبك، ١٩٨٦، ص ٦١ - ٦٦.

² Ser. 85.3.

³ Ser. 85.4.

⁴ In Gen. hom 10:2.

⁵ In Gen. hom 10:2.

pitcher down, to give him a drink, and to offer to give water to his camels as well, even before he asks for that. She noticed how exhausted he was, so she was eager to serve him, to practice her love of hospitality. Through that loving spirit, Rebecca set forth from being a girl who lives in a pagan country, to become a wife for Isaac, and a mother to Jacob, father of all tribes. By love and meekness, Rebecca had been lifted up to enjoy what never got on her mind nor came to her dreams.

“And the man wondering at her, remained silent so as to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not. The man took a golden nose ring weighing half a sheckel, and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten sheckels of gold” (Gen. 24:21-22).

Some believe that the word “Rebecca” is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning ‘to perplex¹,’ while **St. Clement of Alexandria** believes that it means ‘the glory of God².’ She was the daughter of ‘Bethuel,’ meaning ‘man of God,’ son of ‘Milcah,’ meaning ‘queen’ or ‘counsel.’ In other words, Rebecca, representing the Church and bride of Christ the Lord, carries in her the glory of God, and enjoys an exalted beauty that perplex those who see her. The source of her beauty was that her father was the man of God, and her mother was the holy counsel. Her beauty was truly manifested, when she accepted the gifts of her groom: the golden nose-ring and the two golden bracelets on her wrists.

If gold refers to the spiritual mark or the heavenly nature, the Church, receiving the work of God through his ministers, her senses become heavenly, and so also her hands, to sense nothing but divine things, and to do nothing but what are related to the kingdom of God.

Fr. Caesarius says: [The golden nose-ring refers to the divine words, and the golden bracelets, to the good deeds, as works are referred to hands. Let us, brethren, see how Christ presented these gifts to the Church!³]

Origen says: [Rebecca’s beauty was only manifested when Abraham’s servant came to adorn her. Her hands are not to be adorned except by what Isaac sends her. She wishes to enjoy the golden words and deeds. Yet, she could not enjoy them, nor be worthy of them, unless she comes to draw water from the well. You, who are reluctant to come to the well, or to enjoy the golden words of the prophets, how could you carry the adornments of the teachings and the beauty of life?!⁴]

When the man asked her whether there is room in her father’s house for them to lodge, she answered: *“We have both straw and food enough, and room to lodge, Then the man bowed down his head and worshipped the Lord” (Gen. 24:25-26).*

There is nothing to glorify the Lord in our life, like having hearts wide enough for people,

¹ Strong’s Dictionary of the Hebrew.

² Strom 4:26.

³ Ser. 85:3.

⁴ In Gen. hom 10:4.

to find food for them and for their camels, and room to lodge and get rest. Let us say to the whole world: *“We have both straw and feed enough and room to lodge.”* We do not seek anything from the world. We want instead to give fulfillment and rest to all. What Rebecca, as a representative of the Church of the New Testament, was, likewise, it was practiced by the apostle Paul as one of its members, saying: *“O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open”* (2 Corinthians 6:11).

4- IN REBECCA’S HOUSE

As Laban saw his sister Rebecca, adorned with the nose-ring and the two bracelets, and heard what happened to her, he hastened to the man to say: *“Come in, O blessed of the Lord! Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels”* (Gen. 24:31).

As the man came to the house, and he unloaded the camels, and provided straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him, and food was set before him to eat, he said: *“I will not eat until I have told about my errand.”*

He began to talk about how the Lord has greatly blessed his master Abraham. How Sarah, his master’s wife bore a son to him in his old age. How his master commanded him concerning the marriage of his son Isaac. And how God worked with him when he came to the well and encountered Rebecca. Then, he ended his talk by saying: *“Now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master tell me. And if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left”* (Gen. 24:49).

Here, we are amazed before the work of God. It was not only Rebecca, but also her brother Laban who were characterized by tenderness and generosity! He calls Abraham’s servant *“Blessed of the Lord,”* and insists on not leaving him outside, offering him a place in his heart before his house! It is as though God set that amazing spiritual atmosphere, amid a pagan community, filled with defilement and denials; as though God set it for the sake of Abraham, the Patriarch, to put his heart at ease, as far as his son Isaac is concerned; or as though God was preparing Rebecca as a spiritual wife for Isaac, worthy of motherhood to the whole people of God! Amid the pitch darkness of that city, and of the whole region, God was preparing a girl to such an exalted role!

We should not also disregard the role played by the chief servant of Abraham’s house. When he saw how God gave him success by the well, and now, as he was entering the house, he feared that the niceties of hospitality might distract his attention from his mission; that is why he insisted on not eating until he had told, about God’s deeds, and had the family’s word concerning his errand; or else to tell him, that he may turn to the right hand or to the left. He, having been a symbol of the Holy Spirit, who works in the world to bring on the Church and bride of Christ, always acts according to a well-defined divine goal, or, having been a symbol of the apostles and disciples, preaching the Holy Spirit, to gain souls to fellowship in the body of Christ, His holy

bride, do not preoccupy themselves with the human niceties of hospitality, but seek to realize God's goal in them. That is why the Lord Christ commended them, saying, "*Do not go from house to house*" (Luke 10:7), and, "*Greet no one along the road*" (Luke 10:4).

5- SUCCESS OF THE MISSION OF THE CHIEF SERVANT OF ABRAHAM'S HOUSE

With every successful step, the man "*worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth*" (Gen. 24:52), offering a thanksgiving sacrifice to God, who arranges everything with His own hands.

All of them felt that all these things come from the Lord. The servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebecca (Gen. 24:53). He also gave precious things to her brother and her mother. However, as the procession was about to move, they said: "*We will call the young woman and ask her personally; then they called Rebecca and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' And she said, 'I will go'*" (Gen. 24:57-58).

They believed in freedom of choice. Under no circumstances, a young girl or a young man should be compelled to marry a particular person! If God respects man, and sanctifies his free will, we, on our part, should believe in the freedom of our children, brothers, and sisters, should not compel them to do a thing, but counsel and support them.

In complete freedom she said, "*I will go.*" She submitted to the divine command, and departed from her family and her household, to hear them blessing her, saying: "*Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands, of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them*" (Gen. 24:60).

They asked God for their sister, growth and fruition, her descendants to become thousands and tens of thousands; and asked for them the strength, not to be destroyed by an enemy, but to "*possess the gates of those who hate them.*"

Rebecca then set forth with her much beloved nurse "Deborah" (see Gen. 35:8), her name meaning a 'bee,' who raised her to become like an active bee, to collect the nectar of the holy teachings out of every book, to be transformed by God in her depths into honey that fulfills her life and give her sweetness.

6- REBECCA, WIFE OF ISAAC

Rebecca set forth to go to her Groom Isaac, after having left her kindred and household; as though she is the Church of the New Testament, that forsook what she had inherited from the pagan world, to receive the Lord Christ as her Groom. And as the servant encountered her by the well, Isaac came out to encounter her by the well of "Beer Lahai Roi," as though by the water of baptism.

Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening (Gen. 24:63). Some scholars believe that it was the custom of some Jews to come out in the evening to pray to God in open air, to

meditate in God's work with them on that day, which is the custom still followed by many monks in Egypt.

Isaac represented the Lord Christ, who forsook His glories, and set forth to the field through incarnation, to receive the modest Rebecca who, when seeing Him, she dismounted from her camel to meet Him, after taking a veil of meekness and shyness, and covering her face... Thus, Isaac brought Rebecca into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took her to become his wife, and loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death (Gen. 24:67).

Fr. Caesarius comments on that behavior, saying: [Isaac brought Rebecca into his mother Sarah's tent; and the Lord Christ took the Church and set her in the place of the Synagogue. Through denial, the Synagogue separated itself from God and died, while through faith, the Church attached herself to the Lord Christ and received life. And as the apostle says that through pride, the branches of the olive tree were broken off (Romans 11:17), to be grafted into the modest wild olive tree. That is why it is said: "*He took Rebecca and became his wife, and he loved her, and was comforted after his mother's death.*" The Lord Christ took the Church, and loved her deeply, and was comforted by that love after the death of His mother, namely, the Synagogue. The denial of the Synagogue saddened Christ, and the faith of the Church gave Him joy¹.]

¹ Ser. 85:5.

CHAPTER 25

ABRAHAM'S CROSSING OVER

In this chapter, the divine inspiration tells us about the crossing over of Abraham from this world after marrying 'Keturah,' and giving birth to many children. Yet, if he gave gifts to each of his other sons, he gave all the inheritance to Isaac; he delivered to him his hope in salvation, and his enjoyment of the divine covenant. For Isaac, in his turn, to deliver the same inheritance to his son Jacob.

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| 1- Abraham's marriage to Keturah | 1-6. |
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| 4- Birth of Esau and Jacob | 19-26. |
| 5- Jacob purchases the birthright | 27-34. |

1- ABRAHAM'S MARRIAGE TO KETURAH

Abraham married Keturah after the death of his wife Sarah, and gave birth to children who became heads of nations. Yet, they did not get what Isaac did. The Scripture says: "*Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east*" (Gen. 25:6).

He did not leave his sons of the concubine without gifts, but, while still living, he sent them away from his son Isaac, who enjoyed all what his father had. He gave him his living faith, surrendered to him the promises, and provided him with the spirit of hope in the divine salvation, etc. That is the Church's tradition that we enjoy as a living inheritance we live.

Abraham died, yet he did not lose what he got in the Lord, as he delivered it in the heart of his son Isaac, to carry his same thought, and to harbor the same practical faith in the Lord. By that, even though Abraham died by flesh, yet he rejoiced for what his son had received.

I wish we do not become like the children of the concubines, seeking from our father material gifts. But let us be like Isaac, the son of the promise, to enjoy what is in our father's heart, and live our days on earth as children of God, carrying the spiritual riches, that nobody can take from us.

Going back to Keturah, whom Abraham married in his old age, the word 'Keturah' according to **Origen**¹, means 'fragrance,' or nice smell; and Abraham symbolizes the believer, whose body is extinguished, as though practicing the putting of his members to death (Colossians 3:5). Namely, the carnal lusts are put to death, for the body to set forth sanctified in the Lord, and carry the fragrance of Christ, to say: "*For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death*

¹ In Gen. hom 11.

to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

Some believe that Abraham’s marriage to Keturah, (means ‘fragrance’) after Sarah’s death, was a prophecy about the Church of the New Testament, that carries the fragrance of the Lord Christ, after the Jews (Sarah) lost their life through their denial of faith in the Lord Christ, the Savior of the world.

2- ABRAHAM BREATHES HIS LAST

“This is the sum of the years of Abraham’s life which he lived; one hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:7-8).

Although Abraham died, yet he is alive in God; and as **Origen** says: [Concerning Abraham’s death, we may add what came in the Gospel of the words of the Lord: *“But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,’ He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living”* (Mark 12:26-27). *“For all live in Him”* (Luke 20:37). We yearn for such a death: *“Having died to sins, might live for righteousness”* (1 Peter 2:24). So, we should comprehend Abraham’s death, that his bosoms get wide enough to embrace all saints, coming from the four corners of the world, who *“are carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom”* (Luke 16:22)¹.] In other words, we can say that death has not abolished Abraham, our father, but on the contrary, it made his bosoms wider to embrace the souls of saints along the ages.

Abraham breathed his last, and was gathered to his people, to receive in the Lord the spirits of his children in faith, and enter with them into Paradise in Jesus Christ our Lord, after having enjoyed a good old age, an old man full of years. And as **St. Jerome** says: [His life was all days with no nights².]

Abraham was gathered to his people, as his soul set forth to live with his fathers and ancestors; as his body was buried beside that of his wife Sarah in the cave of Machpelah, that he purchased from the sons of Heth.

“It came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi” (Gen. 25:11). This is the blessing that Isaac got, that he dwelt at ‘Beer Lahai Roi’-(the well of vision); and as **Origen** says: [Isaac was worthy to remain in a state of vision, and to dwell there. We also, if we become illuminated by the mercy of God, we can comprehend some of the visions, and enjoy the radiation of our Lord in our minds. Then, we can say that we spent a day at the well of vision. If I can acquire something from the divine Scripture,

¹ In Gen. hom 11:3.

² On Ps. hom 21.

according to the Spirit, and not to the letter, I can then say, that I spent few days at the well of vision. I cannot comprehend the whole divine Scripture, yet, at least, I persist on listening to its words, and, *"in His law, I meditate day and night"* (Psalm 1:2). I never stop studying it, and contemplating in its meanings, praying to God, to grant me the blessing to be able to comprehend it; as He is the Grantor of prudence to man. By that, I can say, that I also, dwell at the well of vision. On the contrary, he, who does not listen to the words of God in His Church, and comes to Church only on feasts, does not dwell at the well of vision, and does not drink from its water. Therefore, hasten and strive to gain the blessing of our Lord, to be worthy of dwelling at the well of vision; to have your eyes opened to behold that well, and to get from it, *"a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life"* (John 4:14). Let me show you who never separates himself from the well of vision: the apostle Paul, who says, *"We all... behold... the glory of our Lord"* (2 Corinthians 3:18). You also, if you continually get into the depth of the vision, seek what is for your benefit, and persistently meditate in it. You will definitely get the Lord's blessing, and will dwell at the well of vision. Jesus will encounter you on the road, to make you say: *"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?!"* (Luke 24:32). God cares for those who meditate in His Law day and night¹.]

3- THE GENEALOGY OF ISHMAEL

Ishmael begot twelve sons who became princes of tribes and peoples, according to God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 17:20). God did not forget Ishmael and his children, although he did not enjoy what Isaac got: from whose seed the Lord Christ incarnated. He mentions the genealogy of Ishmael, as the Lord comes to embrace all nations and peoples and makes them one in Him.

4- THE BIRTH OF ESAU AND JACOB

The Holy Bible tells us that Isaac got married to Rebecca when he was 40 years old. She was the daughter of Bethuel the Aramite. As she was barren, Isaac pleaded with the Lord for her, and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebecca conceived after 20 years of marriage. The twins struggled together within her, and she said: *"If all is well, why am I this way"* (Gen. 25:22). They jostled each other so intensely, to cause the mother much pain and worry for their life and hers. She meant to say: If that is the way between the twins, what is the need for such pregnancy, that deprived her life of all taste?!

The struggle between Esau and Jacob, that began while still in the womb, and seemed as though unable to accommodate both of them, continued and became more intense as they grew up, and increased between their descendants: Israel and Edom. Some Fathers see in that struggle, a portrait of the continuous struggle between evil and good within the womb of the Church. **Fr.**

¹ In Gen. 11:3.

Caesarius says: [Good souls wish to overcome evil, but the wicked are always keen on destroying the righteous. Members in the Church, who belong to Esau, are those who tend to possess the earthly, love and lust for the earth, and put all hope in it. Likewise, members who wish to minister to the Lord, targeting worldly dignity, or to enjoy material benefit, all belong to Esau, namely to earthly happiness¹.]

As Rebecca suffered the intense pain, “*she went to inquire of the Lord*” (Gen. 25:22), namely, she dedicated more time to praying, probably in her secret place, asking the Lord to give her peace, and to reveal the matter to her. **Origen** believes that the word “*went*,” does not imply an actual material movement, saying: [Where did Rebecca go to inquire of the Lord? Is not He present everywhere? Doesn’t he, Himself, say: “*Do I not fill the heaven and the earth?*” (Jeremiah 23:24) I do not think she went anywhere, but rather crossed over from a kind of life to another, from a kind of work to another; from what is good to what is better; from what is important to what is more so, and from sanctification to higher sanctification².] In other words, if we want God to listen to us, let us go to inquire of the Lord, by setting forth to better life and behaving according to His pleasure.

The Lord said to her: “*Two nations are in your womb, two people shall be separated from your body. One people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger*” (Gen. 25:23).

By that, the Lord revealed to her the mystery of that struggle, as she carried inside her two peoples, one would originate from the younger child – Jacob - yet would become more superior spiritually, and a master to his brother. The secret behind that superiority, was receiving the promise of God, and enjoying the divine blessing; Out of him prophets will come, and of his descendants the Word of God will incarnate.

The older was carnally the firstborn, yet because of the corruption of his heart, he would lose his firstborn status and his blessing. The younger, because of his strife and spiritual longing, would, through faith, enjoy the spiritual birthright, and the blessing.

Some Church Fathers see in that divine phrase a reference to the Church of the New Testament, that, if compared to the Jews, as far as knowledge of God is concerned, is considered the younger, as it came to know Him at the end of times, yet it turned out to become spiritually stronger, confiscated the birthright of the Spirit, and took away the prophecies, the covenants, the divine promises, and the heavenly laws to her children’s account. And as **Fr. Caesarius** says: [The older and more ancient people are the Jews, who now serve the younger people, namely the Christians; having carried for them the divine law in the world to teach the nations³.] **St.**

¹ Ser. 86:2.

² In Gen. hom 12:2.

³ Ser. 86:3.

Augustine says: [You are ‘Jacob,’ the younger people, who is served by the older people¹.] [This is now realized, brethren, as the Jews are serving us as carriers of our briefcase. We study, while they carry our Scriptures for us².]

Origen presents to us the same line of thought, beside another symbolic interpretation that touches our inner life; seeing every soul as though a “Rebecca,” carrying deep inside her two peoples: A people of virtues struggling another of evils, saying: [*“As from out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies”* (Matthew 15:19); as well as *“idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies”* (Galatians 5:20). There you are! You see how huge are the wicked people in us. Yet we are qualified to utter together with the saints: *“So we have been in your sight, O Lord. We have been with child, we have been in pain. We have, as it were, brought forth wind. We have not accomplished any deliverance on earth”* (Isaiah 26:17-18). There is also another people in us, a spiritual generation, *“As the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness”* (Galatians 5:22); It is a small people, compared to the other one. The wicked are always far more numerous than the righteous; virtue is more than evil. Yet, if we become analogue to Rebecca, and we have Isaac, namely the Word of God, (our Groom), a people would be stronger than another, and the older would serve the younger; the flesh would serve the Spirit; and evil would retreat before virtue³.]

We go back to Rebecca: *“ When her days were fulfilled, for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them”* (Gen. 25:25-26).

The first was called Esau, meaning ‘hairy or rough,’ as his body was covered with hair; while the second was called Jacob, as his hand was taking hold of his brother’s heel; He remained, all his life chasing him, to take away from him the birthright and the blessing.

These two children were symbols for the carnal and the spiritual man: the first was hairy, a reference to bond with the flesh; also called Edom, a word derived from the Arabic word for ‘blood,’ as he was red in color. He lived as a violent hunter, fond of shedding blood, a character inherited by his descendants ‘the Edomites.’ Jacob, on the other hand was a symbol of the spiritual man, who chase others for the sake of acquiring eternities. He was, as described by **St. Jerome**, [a wrestler and a striver for spirituals⁴.]

Esau, man of the wilderness, a skillful hunter, while Jacob, was a mild man, dwelling in

¹ On Ps. 81.

² On Ps. 41.

³ In Gen. hom 12:3.

⁴ On Ps. hom 7.

tents (Gen. 25:27). Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebecca found in Jacob, a meek man with whom she was more comfortable.

5- JACOB PURCHASES THE BIRTHRIGHT

Esau appeared a carnal man, as he sell his birthright to his brother Jacob, for a plate of red stew; therefore his name was called Edom. His lack of caring was demonstrated in his saying: “*Look, I am about to die, so what profit shall this birthright be to me?*” (Gen. 25: 32); on which the Holy Bible commented by saying: “*Esau despised his birthright*” (Gen. 25:34). Jacob, although he made use of his brother’s weariness, to bargain with him for birthright, yet, as a spiritual man, he did not sell the plate of stew for a material price, but to acquire the birthright. If Esau represented someone who did not care for spiritual graces and eternal glories, for the sake of food and bodily lusts, Jacob, on the other hand, represented someone who loved the spirituals.

A son with birthright, used to represent the head of the family, who inherits from his father the right to ‘Priesthood,’ being the one to offer sacrifices on behalf of the family. That is why, from Jacob’s seed, came the tribe of ‘Levi’ who were assigned the priestly role.

St. Augustine comments on the fall of Esau, that what he did was not particularly for the sake of a plate of stew, but because of his non-caring nature, saying: [It is to teach us that the fault does not lie in the creation of God, but rather in the stubborn rebellion and shameful lust; The first man did not earn death because of pig meat, but for a fruit (Gen. 3:6); and it was not because of a meal of birds, but for a plate of stew, that Esau sell his birthright¹.]

If we enjoy birthright through our union with God in His Firstborn Son, I wish we do not take that easily, for the sake of food or carnal lusts; but we should rather sell everything to acquire the Firstborn in our life.

¹ In Ioan. tr 73:1.

CHAPTERS 21-27

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ISAAC

If God had been apparent in Abraham's life as the father of believers, and in Sarah's life as their mother, their son Isaac inherited that legacy, as he carried in his heart the faith of his parents, as a living tradition, that he lived all his days, then delivered it to his son Jacob (Israel).

In our studies of the previous chapters, we realized the dealings of God with Isaac, who was the fruit of a divine promise:

- 1- Isaac, the son of promise, as the source of his parents' joy (Gen. 21).**
- 2- Isaac, the son of obedience, a burnt offering to God
(Gen. 22).**
- 3- God chooses Rebecca a sanctified wife and comfort for Isaac (Gen. 23).**
- 4- Rebecca gives birth to Esau and Jacob (Two nations)
(Gen. 25).**
- 5- Isaac sojourns as a stranger in Gerar, and re-digs wells of water (Gen. 26).**
- 6- Jacob supplants the blessing of his father Isaac (Gen. 27).**

CHAPTER 26

ISAAC SOJOURN AS A STRANGER IN GERAR

As there was a famine in the land, Isaac did not go down to Egypt as his father Abraham did, but sojourned in Gerar, according to God's command. And as his father did, Isaac claimed that Rebecca was his sister, and thus was rebuked by Abimelech, king of Gerar. As Isaac became very prosperous, the Philistines stopped up his wells, so he went to the valley of Gerar, and from there to Beersheba, where God appeared to him and blessed him, and renewed His covenant with his father Abraham; as well as giving him favor in the sight of the king and the commander of his army.

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| 1- God's promise to Isaac during the famine | 1-6. |
| 2- Isaac claims that Rebecca was his sister | 7-11. |
| 3- The Philistines envy Isaac | 12-25. |
| 4- Isaac makes a covenant with Abimelech | 26-33. |
| 5- Esau takes Hittite wives | 34-35. |

1- GOD'S PROMISE TO ISAAC DURING THE FAMINE

Isaac had the same experience that his father Abraham went through: "*There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham*" (Gen. 26:1).

There was a famine, yet it was "*in the land,*" and not in him, affecting his 'land,' namely his 'body,' without getting to his depths. And we previously said, the believer submits with his body 'his land' under the temptation, without touching his inner life; while when the unbeliever falls in his wholeness underneath affliction, he loses his inner peace, as well as his hope, and be utterly destroyed.

When famine occurred in the days of Abraham, he went down to Egypt, without God's counsel, to face a probable loss of his wife, if it was not for God's intervention. Isaac, on the other hand, seems to have sought God's counsel, who appeared to him and said: "*Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all this lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven. I will give to your descendants all these lands, and in your seeds all the nations of the earth shall be blessed*" (Gen. 26:2-4).

If Abraham did wrong by going down to Egypt during the famine, God commanded Isaac not to do the same, but to remain in the land of Canaan during a similar famine, as a sign of his acceptance of God's promises to his father. He just moved from 'Beer Lahai Roi' to Gerar, 6 miles south-east of Gaza, where 'Kherbet-Um-Gerar' is located nowadays. Its name is derived

from 'Garah,' meaning 'a ceramic pot'¹.

Obedying the voice of the Lord to remain in Gerar, and not to go down to Egypt, Isaac enjoyed the appearance of God, and the renewal of the divine covenant. If, in time of affliction, we listen to the voice of God, we shall, likewise, enjoy His appearance in us, and the renewal of His covenant with us!

2- ISAAC CLAIM THAT REBECCA WAS HIS SISTER

Isaac harbored the same weakness as his father. Because of his fear lest the men of the place should kill him for Rebecca, because she was beautiful to behold, he claimed that she was his sister. But this time, Abimalech, who was most probably another one than Abimalech of Abraham's days-as we said, (Abimalech) was a title of the kings of Gerar, and not a name-looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac showing endearment to Rebecca his wife. So he called Isaac and nobly rebuked him, then charged all his people, saying, '*He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death*' (Gen. 26:11). The Scripture in being keen on revealing the weaknesses of such righteous people, like Abraham and Isaac, means to warn us against every weakness or sin, and to persuade us not to judge anyone. Obviously every believer, whatever his spiritual status be, has his weaknesses. On the other side, it shows the good points, even in pagans, like Abimelech, who feared lest one of his people would fall into sin with Isaac's wife, and would have brought guilt on the whole people (Gen. 26:10). That would teach us not to despise anyone, even if he is a pagan.

3- THE PHILISTINES ENVY ISAAC

"Then Isaac sowed in that land (Barley, according to the Septuagint Version), and reaped in the same year a hundredfold, and the Lord blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him" (Gen. 26:12-14).

If Isaac, in his weakness, did wrong, yet God sent to him a pagan king to rebuke him. But that did not keep God from blessing him, or realizing His covenants with him. Sowing Barley - according to the Septuagint Version - he reaped a hundredfold, beside possessions of flocks, herds, and a great number of servants, that caused the inhabitants of that region to envy and fear him.

Origen comments on his sowing of 'Barley,' that this refers to the Law, or the easy commandments, that are presented to the spiritually poor, while 'wheat,' on the other hand, refers to the Gospel presented to the spiritually mature, saying: [Why did Isaac sow 'barley'? and why did the Lord bless him as he did? Why did he prosper greatly? 'Barley' is usually the food of

¹ راجع تفسير تك ١٠ : ١٩ ، ٢٠ : ١ .

animals and servants laboring on the fields. Isaac prepared ‘wheat’ for the spiritually perfect, and ‘Barley’ for the beginners; as it is written, “*O Lord, You preserve man and beast*” (Psalm 36:7)... Our Lord, the Perfect Isaac, presents perfection ‘wheat’ to the apostles and disciples, while presenting simple and easy teachings ‘Barley’ to the multitude.. Do you want a proof that He presents ‘Barley’ as food for the beginners? It came in the Gospel, that he fed the multitude twice; in the first time He presented to them the beginners, “*Barley loaves*” (John 6:9); then as they made progress, he fed them “*Wheat loaves*” (Matthew 15:34)¹.] May we receive, as spiritually mature, ‘wheat’ loaves, or else, let us, as beginners, receive ‘barley’ loaves, from the hands of the true Isaac!

Sowing ‘barley,’ Isaac reaped in that year a hundredfold, prospered, and continued prospering, until he became very prosperous. And as **Origen** says: [If ‘barley’ refers to the Law, the true Isaac has been small through the Law; then grew greater and greater through the prophecies. Through the Law, our knowledge of Christ has been as though through a mirror; but the prophets revealed Him, to be far greater. Now, as we remove the straw from the ‘barley,’ namely, remove its literality, the “*spiritual Law*” is revealed (Romans 7:14); to reveal the greatness of the true Isaac. In other word, through the ‘barley,’ Isaac grew greater and appeared richer, by our acquiring the Law, after removing its straw, namely, its literality, and entering into its spirit and depths².

Origen³ has another comment on the barley loaves that revealed the greatness and riches of Isaac; If the undivided loaves have not fulfilled anybody, yet, when he divided them and ordered them to be distributed among the multitude, thousands of them were fulfilled, and fragments remained. So, as we present the words of the Scripture to the whole world, after removing the letter from them, to let them enjoy their depths, all will be fulfilled, and much will remain to be gathered up, “*so that nothing is lost*” (John 6:12).

Before that greatness and riches, that came from sowing the barley, the enemy grew envious, and stopped up all the wells dug in the days of Abraham, and filled them with dirt. “*Abimelech said unto Isaac go away from us; for you are much mightier than we*” (Gen. 26:16).

Origen comments on how Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines have stopped them up after the death of Abraham (Gen. 26:18), saying: [While the Philistine despised the water and loved the land, we see Isaac, on the other hand, loving the water, digging again the old wells, and new ones as well. Let us contemplate in Isaac, who had “*given Himself for us*” (Ephesians 5:2). He (hidden in the Person of Christ) came to the valley of Gerar, meaning the ‘wall’ (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus Christ came to break down the wall of division, namely the sin that divides us from God; that separates us from

¹ In Gen. hom 12:5.

² In Gen. hom 12:5.

³ In Gen. hom 12:5.

spiritual virtues; to “*make both one*” (Ephesians 2:4); carrying the lost sheep on His shoulders over the mountains, to join them to the ninety-nine that were not lost (Luke 15:6; Matthew 28:12). This Isaac, our Savior, as He comes to the valley of Gerar, He wishes first to dig again the wells of water, that were dug in the time of His father; namely, to reveal the wells of the Law and the prophets, that were stopped up by the Philistines... Who are they, who fill the wells with dirt? They are actually those who present the Law with an earthly, carnal way of thinking, getting away from the mysterious spiritual riches. They did not drink, and hindered others from drinking. Hear what Isaac, our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ says in the Gospel: “*Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in, yourselves, and those who were entering in, you hindered*” (Luke 11:52)¹.]

The Lord Christ dug, by His ministers the ancient wells, as he revealed the secrets of the law and the proclamations of the prophets, giving us deep spiritual concepts, that were corrupted by lovers of the killing letter. The Master did not stop at that, but dug for us, by His apostles and disciples, new wells, despite the opposition of the evil one, who tries to stop up every spiritual well. **Origen** says: [Isaac and his servants dug new wells. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, Jude, and the apostle Paul, dug the new wells of the New Testament, despite the opposition of those “*who set their mind on earthly things*” (Philippians 3: 19)².]

The Scripture tells us of the digging of three wells. The first one was called by Isaac’s servants “Esek,” because the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with them over it. The second well, they called “Sitneh,” for the same reason. And the third one they dug, they called “Rehoboth,” namely ‘roomy and spacious,’ because they did not quarrel over it. It is in the region known today as ‘valley of Raheba,’ located 19 miles south-west of Beersheba. **Origen** sees in that third well a reference to faith in the secret of the Holy Trinity, in which the kingdom of heaven was proclaimed to embrace the whole world, saying: [After that, Isaac dug a third well he called “Rehoboth,” saying, ‘*The Lord has made room for us and we shall be fruitful in the land*’ (Gen. 26:22). Indeed, Isaac’s name became great in the whole world, as he filled us with the knowledge of the Holy Trinity. Previously, God was only known in Judah, and in Israel (Psalm 76:1). But now “*Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their word to the end of the world*” (Psalm 19:4). The servants of Isaac covered all the world, and dug the wells, revealing the material of life to all; as is commanded by the Lord: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:19); as “*The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness*” (Psalm 24:1)³.]

4. ISAAC MAKES A COVENANT WITH ABIMELECH

¹ In Gen. hom 13:2.

² In Gen. hom 13:2.

³ In Gen. hom 13:3.

Abimelech had previously requested a covenant with Abraham, saying to him, “*God is with you in all that you do*” (Gen. 21:22); and now Abimelech - not necessarily the same king - makes a covenant with his son Isaac. He came to him accompanied by two of his officers: his friend ‘Ahuzzath,’ meaning ‘reign,’ and ‘Phicol,’ commander of his army, saying: “*We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you. So we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you. That you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good, and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord’*” (Gen. 26:28-29).

If the prosperity of Isaac had caused fear and envy among the inhabitants of the region, yet, as they saw in it the work of God, they became witnesses of the truth, so they called Isaac “*the blessed of the Lord,*” and requested a covenant with him. How marvelous, for the believer to have a testimonial from those outside, to realize that he is the man of the Lord, and to feel that the Lord’s dignity is surrounding him.

If the success of the believer would cause envy at first, yet it would eventually turn to grace in the eyes of all!

Isaac overcoming their fear with love; He made them a feast, and they ate and drank.

Origen sees in Abimelech, who sometimes hates Isaac (Gen. 26:27), and another time seeks reconciliation with him, a symbol of the philosophy of this world; at some stage it contradicts faith, and at another stage responds to it: [If philosophy is not contradicting God’s Law all the way, it could not always be in accordance with it¹.] **Origen** gives examples for that, saying that certain philosophers agree with the Law, and even with the Gospel, in proclaiming the presence of the One God, who created and ordained everything by His divine word; but they contradict us in faith, in their belief in the eternity of the world, counting matter as sharing God in His eternity.

Abimelech and his two companions Ahuzzath his friend and Phicol, the commander of the army, the three of them - according to **Origen**, refer to the three branches of philosophy: the ‘Logic,’ namely the philosophy that is set upon the mind alone (Abimelech), the philosophy that is set upon the power of nature (Ahuzzath), and the ethical and behaviorist philosophy (Phicol). These three branches, despite their drawbacks, yet, if sanctified, they would submit to faith, quoting: “*We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you... Let there now be an oath between us... and let us make a covenant with you.*”

Origen also sees in these three strangers, who came to make a covenant and reconciliation with Isaac, a symbol of the three wise men who came from the East to the newborn Jesus, saying: “*We have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him*” (Matthew 2:2).

The feast that Isaac made for them, and the reconciliation he offered them, refer to the

¹ In Gen. hom 14:3.

faith, wide enough to absorb every philosophy and every thought on Christ's account; It likewise refers to Christ receiving the wise men, as a symbol of the Church of the Gentiles. His hospitality to the three men, probably refers to that of the Lord to all nations and peoples, descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, namely to all humanity.

5- ESAU TAKES HITTITE WIVES

Esau took two Hittite wives, who were grief in mind, for Isaac and Rebecca (Gen. 26:34-35). He had been unwise in uniting with two pagan women, who corrupted his relationship with his parents, and deprived him and his descendants of peace.

CHAPTER 27

ISAAC BLESSES JACOB

Isaac confiscated the birthright from his brother Esau, for the price of a meal of stew; and now, his mother plotted for him to confiscate as well, his father Isaac's blessing instead of Esau.

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|--|--------|
| 1- Isaac calls Esau | 1-4. |
| 2- Rebecca supports Jacob | 5-25. |
| 3- Jacob gets his father's blessing | 26-29. |
| 4- Esau deprived of his father's blessing | 30-40. |
| 5- Esau holds a grudge against his brother | 41-46. |

1- ISAAC CALLS ESAU

"Now it came to pass when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, then he called Esau his older son and said to him, 'My son,' and he answered him, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Behold now, I am old, I do not know the day of my death. Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die'" (Gen. 27:1-4).

Isaac had previously found out that he *"The older shall serve the younger"* (Gen. 25:23), he heard how, for a meal of stew, Esau had disgracefully sold his birthrights, being frivolous concerning them; and he foresaw how Esau would take two pagan wives, to be a grief of mind to his parents. Yet he called him to eat from his game, to bless him before he dies; and to let him inherit the blessing he got from his father Abraham. Was Isaac motivated by his human fatherly emotions, or he unknowingly undertook a prophetic task?!

If we blame Rebecca for interfering in a human way, to let her beloved son Jacob get the blessing instead of his brother Esau, even if in that, was to be a realization of the divine decree that the older shall serve the younger, yet we can not help noticing the weakness of Isaac, in his wish to bless Esau, despite his knowledge of that divine proclamation. **St. Jerome** presents to us a concise symbolic interpretation, quoted from the writings of **St. Hippolytus**, revealing in it the symbolic prophetic work, that this chapter carried, proclaiming the Messianic era, which we may summarize as follows: Isaac, in his call to his son Esau, to bless him as his eyes grew dim with old age, refers to the heavenly Father, who called, at the fulfillment of time, the Jewish people, being the firstborn, yearning to grant them the biblical blessing, and let them enjoy the eternal salvation, to reign together with the Lord Christ, and to keep the new Sabbath. As to Rebecca, she refers to the Holy Spirit who, knowing that the older shall serve the younger, she cared for the congregation of the Gentiles (the younger son) to get the biblical blessing instead of the Jews, who rejected faith in the Messiah, the Savior. If the 'kid of the goats' refers to the salvation of

sinners, the two choice ‘kids,’ offered by Jacob as food for his father, refer to some of the Jews joining with the Gentiles. Rebecca let her son Jacob put on the clothes of his older brother, as reference to men of the New Testament who acquired, by the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures and drew from the Jews the Law, the covenants, and the prophecies that were their clothes which they took off by their denial of Jesus Christ. As to the skins of kids of the goats that Rebecca put on Jacob’s hands and on the smooth parts of his neck, they refer to the sin that the Lord Christ carried on our behalf, although not his sins, as He is Holy One. The food that he presented is the unique sacrifice that brings pleasure to the Father’s heart, through which the Church was granted His blessing, while Esau (the Jews) got the curse because of his denial. Jacob’s escape to Haran out of his brother’s face was a symbol of the setting forth of faith to strangers, namely the Gentiles, having been opposed by the Jews.

Through this concept of the Fathers, we can comprehend the true mystery of the call to Esau to get the blessing, to be violated by Jacob, through a plot by his mother Rebecca.

2-REBECCA SUPPORTS JACOB

Rebecca heard what her husband Isaac said to Esau, and now in her love for her son Jacob, she told him all what happened. It is strange that neither she nor Jacob ever felt any remorse for what they did; and even Isaac never rebuked them for their behavior, after discovering their deceit, but confirmed his blessing for Jacob. He probably realized that they were right, although they used an unethical way.

St. Augustine¹ believes that the Scripture intended to clarify that Jacob’s behavior was not out of shrewdness or deceit, but it was in faith and innocence of heart; as it was previously proclaimed that “*Esau was a skilled hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents*” (Gen. 25:27). According to the Greek text, the word “*mild*” came as ‘faultless or simple;’ that is why he was worthy of the blessing.

It was expected from Rebecca, as a prudent mother and a loving wife, to be loyal to Isaac, opening her heart to remind him of the divine voice concerning the blessing of the younger son. Yet God used, even her weakness, for the good, even though she tasted the bitter results of her impulsive conduct.

Rebecca mastered her role perfectly: she prepared for Isaac his favorable meal, she enticed Jacob to wear his brother’s clothes, bearing his smell, and to put the skins of kids of the goats on Jacob’s hands and on the smooth part of his neck. This is how, through taste, smell, and touch, Isaac was convinced that it was his elder son and blessed him. Concerning the clothes, some scholars believe that Esau, being the firstborn, had a priestly garment to put on in the days of his father’s old age, to offer the sacrifices on behalf of the family. As for the skin put on

¹ *City of God 16:37.*

Jacob's arms neck, according to **St. Augustine**, it referred to him, carrying the sins of others¹.

There is no doubt, that Jacob here, represents the Lord Christ, the Head of the Church, who offered his life as a sacrifice of love, a heavenly food, that brings pleasure to the heart of God the Father. He puts on our clothes and garments, carried our sins, to receive, in our name, and for our benefit, the eternal glory, and the pleasure of His heavenly Father.

Isaac said: "*The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau*" (Gen. 26:22), and he blessed him! It is a living portrait of the Lord Christ: His voice is that of the Son, the Only-begotten. Yet, His hands are ours, as he carried our nature in Him! Although being the righteous Jacob, yet He, as Esau, carried our weaknesses and our sins!

3- JACOB GETS HIS FATHER'S BLESSING

"Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come near now and kiss me, my son,' and he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him and said, 'Surely the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord had blessed. Therefore, may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let people serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you; and blessed be those who bless you'" (Gen. 26:26-29).

Isaac ate and drank wine and asked his son to approach and kiss him the kiss of love and respect, to get the fatherly blessing, through the abundance of fulfillment in Isaac's life, and the good reputation he carried all his days.

He smelled his clothes, as Esau's valuable clothes were in the midst of delicate fragrance that stimulated in him the smell of the fields with their delightful flowers and fruits. So he began his blessing by saying: "*The smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord had blessed,*" praying God to give him of the dew of heaven, that transforms the barren land into a Paradise, of the fatness of the earth, namely its fertility, and plenty of grain and wine, a sign of fulfillment and joy. He prayed for him as well, to let nations be subjected to him, and his brethren to bow down before him. Here, **St. Irenaeus** says that we should interpret this blessing literally, but accept the symbols spiritually, that are realized through the blessings of the New Testament. He explains this blessing as such:

[If somebody does not understand these things, as referring to the designated kingdom (the Messianic), he will fall into contradiction as did the Jews, who were utterly confused: It was not just, that the nations have not served Jacob during his life; but he, himself, after receiving the blessing, left his home, and served his uncle Laban the Syrian, for the duration of 20 years (Gen. 31:41). Not only he did not become a master to his brother, but he bent and bowed before Esau, his brother, upon his return, from Mesopotamia, to his father's house, presenting him with many

¹ *City of God 16:37.*

gifts (Gen. 33:3). Add to all this the manner in which he inherited plenty of grain and wine here, he who immigrated to Egypt because of the famine that befell the land where he dwelt; and submitted himself to Pharaoh who ruled Egypt at that time?¹] Therefore, we should not take that blessing on a literal basis; as it was spiritually realized by the coming of Christ the Lord, when Jacob - namely, the Church enjoyed the spiritual kingdom. According to **St. Augustine**, [The blessing of Jacob is the proclamation of Christ to all nations, which is realized now... Isaac is the Law and the prophecy. Even through the mouth of the Jews, the blessing of Christ was proclaimed through the prophecy, through someone who did not know or comprehend it. The world is like a field full of the sweet fragrance of Christ; His blessing is like the dew of heaven, namely the rain of divine words; The fertility of the earth is the gathering together of nations. His blessing is the abundance of grain and wine, namely, the multitudes that partake of the bread and wine, through the sacrament of His body and blood. Nations minister to Him, and princes bow down before Him. He is the Master of His brethren, for He reigns over the Jews. The children of the Father worship Him - those who are the sons of Abraham according to faith, as He is, according to the flesh, a descendant of Abraham. Cursed be everyone who curses Him, and blessed be those who bless Him².]

In our Lord Jesus Christ, each one of us becomes Jacob, who hears the blessing from his father's mouth as such: "*Surely, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord had blessed. May God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine... Be master over your brethren.*" Indeed in Jesus Christ, our heart becomes like a field, like a Paradise, that smells of fragrance that brings pleasure to the heart of the Groom, to say: "*I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey. I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply*" O beloved ones!" (Song 5:1). **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says in his interpretation of the Book of the Song of Songs: [He comes to His garden... and gathers its spices, mixed with the fruits of its virtues; He then talks about His enjoyment of the feast, saying to His spouse: "*I have come to My garden, My sister, My spouse*"³."]

What is the dew of heaven, but the sanctification of the soul, that becomes like a heaven carrying the grace of God, as dew used by the Holy Spirit to irrigate plenty of land; the fertility of the earth refers to the fertility of the body, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, to have all its energies, feelings, and capabilities, working in harmony with the dew of heaven. The abundance of grain reveals the fulfillment of the soul, by its Groom, the bread coming down from heaven, and that of wine, refers to the abundance of the inner spiritual joy. Finally, enjoyment of authority, refers to the status of the spiritual man, as a king of authority, and a master who, if he says to this thought

¹ *Adv. hear. 33:3.*

² *City of God 16:37.*

³ *Ser. 10.*

to come, it would come; and if he says to that though to go, it would go. He would have authority by the Lord over his thoughts, as well as over his senses and his depths!

4- ESAU DEPRIVED OF HIS FATHER'S BLESSING

Some people may probably wonder: Where had Esau gone wrong, to be deprived of the blessing usurped by his brother, through a plot from their mother, Rebecca? Did he not cry with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, when he heard his father telling him how his brother stole the blessing when he asked his father to bless him as well? That can be answered by saying, that Esau has been negligent with what he already had - the birthright – so, as result, he lost the blessing. This, and his whole conduct, deprived him from getting the blessing.

Esau's exceedingly great and bitter cry, means that he, according to the apostle, "*sought the blessing diligently with tears*" (Heb. 12:17), but he did not seek it with a spiritual concept. He sought it for worldly blessings, proved by his request to get a blessing as well, saying to his father: "*Have you not reserved a blessing for me?*" (Gen. 27:36). It is one blessing only, through which he would enjoy Christ the Lord coming from his seed. So how could this blessing belong to two brothers?!

5- ESAU HOLDS A GRUDGE AGAINST HIS BROTHER

Despite his grudge against his brother, we cannot deny Esau's noble reaction. He refused to kill his brother for the sake of his father's old age. He expected a quick death for his father, without anticipating that he was to live for a long time afterwards.

Perhaps Rebecca feared to inform Isaac about Esau's grudge against Jacob, so, she asked him to instruct Jacob to depart to Haran to marry from there, instead of taking a wife of the daughters of Heth, as his brother Esau did. Thus, she found a way for Jacob to get his father's blessing before fleeing from his brother's face.

Finally, as a result of her plot, and after deceiving her man, Rebecca was deprived from her beloved son Jacob. However, **St. Ambrose** sees in Rebecca's last action a kind of wisdom, her natural motherly instincts prevailed, in order to spare Esau from anger, and avoid missing him together with his brother Jacob, he said: [The good counsels prevail over the natural feelings¹.]

¹ *Duties of the Clergy 1:24.*

CHAPTERS 25-50

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH JACOB

God's presence had been manifested in the life of Abraham and Sarah. And their son Isaac received God's blessings to them, and enjoyed their hope in salvation. The Lord Himself came to Isaac, to confirm His promises to his father Abraham... Now Jacob receives, in his turn, the blessings of his parents Isaac and Rebecca, namely God's blessing to them, to live, carrying on their faith, and enjoying their hope, striving all the days of his sojourn on earth for the sake of the Lord.

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| 1- Jacob the wrestler in his mother's womb | (Gen. 25). |
| 2- Jacob supplants his father's blessing | (Gen. 27). |
| 3- Jacob and the open heaven | (Gen. 28). |
| 4- Jacob labors for his uncle Laban | (Gen. 29-30). |
| 5- God blesses Jacob's uncle | (Gen. 31). |
| 6- Jacob wrestles with the Angel | (Gen. 32). |
| 7- Jacob overcomes Esau with love | (Gen. 33). |
| 8- Shechem violates Dinah, Jacob's daughter | (Gen. 34). |
| 9- Jacob returns to Bethel | (Gen. 35). |
| 10- Jacob and his beloved son Joseph | (Gen. 37-50). |

CHAPTER 28

JACOB AND THE OPEN HEAVEN

Having blessed his son Jacob, Isaac - by Rebecca's request - instructed Jacob to go to his uncle Laban, to take one of his daughters as wife, to support him in his way of faith, and to refrain from marrying from the daughters of Heth, as his brother Esau did. On his way, he dreamt that heaven was open, and saw a ladder set up on earth, and its top reached to heaven, and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it, and the Lord stood above it. Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, and poured oil on top of it, to set it as a pillar in God's house.

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| 1- Isaac's commandment to his son Jacob | 1-5. |
| 2- Esau marries the daughter of Ishmael | 6-9. |
| 3- The heavenly ladder | 10-15. |
| 4- Jacob and the house of God | 16-22. |

1- ISAAC'S COMMANDMENT TO HIS SON JACOB

If Rebecca asked Jacob to flee from the face of his brother Esau until his anger vanished, she, together with her husband Isaac were convinced that Jacob was the heir of the blessing, in whom the promise would be realized. That is why, in her talk with him, she was sure of his eventual return to the land of Canaan (Gen. 27:44-45) to inherit the land of promise.

Isaac also made that clear in his saying to Jacob: "*May God Almighty give you the blessing of Abraham; to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham* (Gen. 28:4).

Indeed, Isaac could have sent one of his servants to bring a wife for Jacob, as Abraham did for him, but because of Esau's anger towards his brother, Isaac and Rebecca preferred to send Jacob off to his uncle Laban, to stay with him "*a few days.*" These few days extended about 40 years, during which Rebecca died and did not see her son Jacob.

Isaac blessed his son Jacob before leaving to his uncle Laban who is described in the Holy Bible as "*the brother of Rebecca, the mother of Jacob and Esau*" (Gen. 28:5). Here, Rebecca was called "*the mother of Jacob,*" counting him as a firstborn, who would enjoy the blessings of Abraham.

2- ESAU MARRIES THE DAUGHTER OF ISHMAEL

When Esau saw how his brother got the birthright and the blessing, that was confirmed by sending him to 'Padan Aram' to marry one of his uncle's daughters, and felt that his own marriage to two of the pagan daughters of Heth, had deprived him of much. He intended, for the sake of pacifying his parents, to marry a third wife, 'Mahalath,' daughter of Ishmael, son of Abraham, and sister of 'Nebajoth.'

3- THE HEAVENLY LADDER

And now, having fled before the face of his brother Esau, deprived of the compassion and care of his parents, on his way, when the sun has set, he found himself alone and prone to many dangers. Amid that affliction, Jacob lay down to sleep, putting his head on one of the stones of that place. Then he dreamed of a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven, something he could never had seen, as he was dwelling in his tent, spoiled and cared for by his mother, with soft pillows under his head! Amid affliction and deprivation, there comes God to respond to any need, and to give in much more abundance than we ask for. And as **St. Jerome** says: [The stone under Jacob's head is Christ, as he, who never had a stone under his head, have one now, at the time he fled before his oppressor. When he was in his father's house, comfortable according to the flesh, he did not enjoy such a stone under his head. He forsook his home, and became poor and lonely, with nothing in his possession except a cane, to find in the same evening a stone to put under his head; and to find comfort through a vision he saw¹.]

If the stone is the Lord Christ, we would never enjoy heavenly visions and exalted divine knowledge, as long as we live spoiled, leaning on others.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles² believes that Jacob refers to Christ. And his father Isaac, who commanded him to forsake the girls of the region, refers to God the Father Who lets His Son forsake the Jewish Synagogue, to head far away to acquire the Church of the Gentiles as His bride. That was realized when the two apostles, Paul and Barnabas, said to the Jews: "*It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles*" (Acts 13:46).

Fr. Caesarius also sees in that stone, a symbol of the Lord Christ, on whom the Church is established, anointed for the work of salvation. While the Lord Christ appeared on the top of the ladder, in the height of heaven, being the heavenly, there He is under Jacob's head as the Cornerstone, on which the Church is set through His incarnation. **St. Augustine** speaks of that stone saying: [In that stone, we comprehend Christ... put at his head, being the Head of the Church (1 Corinthians 11:3); then that stone was anointed, as Christ was so called, as He is the "Anointed³."]

The ladder seen by Jacob is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which, by faith we are lifted up to enjoy heaven itself; and through their denial, the Jews descend down to Hades. And as **St. Jerome** says: [I believe that the cross of the Savior is the ladder seen by Jacob. On that ladder, the angels were seen ascending and descending. On that ladder, namely on the cross, the Jews were descending, and the Gentiles were ascending⁴.] And he also says: [He saw angels

¹ On Ps. hom 46.

² Ser. 83:2.

³ On Ps. 45.

⁴ On Ps. hom 21.

ascending, as he saw Paul ascending; and angels descending, as he saw Judas the traitor falling down. He saw saints ascending from earth to heaven, as he saw also angels descending, namely the devil and all his hosts, falling down from heaven¹.]

As we behold the ladder, we should not find it difficult to ascend through it, as the Lord is there on its top, to support us and to lift us up. And as **St. Jerome** says: [Do not look at the steps, but lift your eyes up to where the Lord is².]

St. Jerome encourages us to ascend without stopping, saying: [If one of us is standing on the first step, let him not despair to reach the second one. And who stands on the second, let him not lose hope of reaching the third. How happy have been the martyrs, many of whom were worthy of ascending to the ultimate steps, to the top itself. We, who are living in the world, cannot ascend all the steps, from the bottom to the top, at one time. Yet, I wish we do not stop at the first step, but it is appropriate for us to strive ascending higher steps³.] And he says as well: [The lesson we learn from that ladder, is that it is not fit for the sinner to despair of salvation, nor for the righteous to relax in peace concerning his virtue⁴.]

Fr. Caesarius interprets the timing of that vision on the way, by saying: [Why did that vision happen on the way, before Jacob acquires his wife? Because our Lord, the true Jacob, first bowed on the ladder, namely the cross, before shaping the Church for Himself. He did that as He presented her with His blood, as a dowry for His kingdom⁵.]

4- JACOB AND THE HOUSE OF GOD

In our study of the Church as the house of God, we spoke of “*Bethel*”⁶, having been the first house of God, set by man, after he enjoyed the opened heaven, and saw the ladder, set up on earth, and its top reaching to heaven, and saw the angels of God ascending and descending on it; and heard God, who was standing on its top saying to him, “*I am with you.*” Jacob awoke from his sleep and said: “*Surely the Lord is in this place!... How awesome is this place!... This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!... Then he took that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it, and he called the name of that place ‘Bethel,’ namely, (the house of God)*” (Gen. 28 16-19).

God intended to present to the sacred congregation, through their father Jacob, two facts of faith, which are: His presence with them, and the opening of heaven to those on earth. As to His presence with His people, we find God’s confirmation “*I am with you,*” at a time when Jacob found no one to support him. As to the opening of heaven to those on earth, the reconciliation has

¹ *On Ps. hom 41.*

² *On Ps. hom 41.*

³ *On Ps. hom 41.*

⁴ *Ep. 132:5.*

⁵ *Ser. 87:3.*

⁶ *Church, House of God, P 20-22.*

been realized through the true ladder, and the Church became the house of God, and the dwelling place of His angels. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [God sends angels to mankind, to lead them to the heavenly. Here, heaven is set on earth; in order that heaven is committed to accept the earthly¹.]

We have previously dealt with the Church ‘*Bethel*,’ and its relationship with the sacred congregation and heaven².

¹ *Sunday Sermons of the Great Frs. Vol. 1, p. 113.*

² الكنيسة بيت الله، ١٩٨٢، الباب الثاني.

CHAPTER 29

JACOB'S MARRIAGE TO LEAH AND RACHEL

Having enjoyed God's peace through the ladder, Jacob hastened to 'Padan Aram;' and there, he met Rachel by the well of water. And after laboring for his uncle Laban, he married his two daughters Leah and Rachel.

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|---|---------------|
| 1- An encounter with Rachel | 1-14. |
| 2- Jacob serves his uncle Laban | 15-20. |
| 3- His marriage to Leah and Rachel | 21-30. |
| 4- The sons of Leah | 31-55. |

1- AN ENCOUNTER WITH RACHEL

"So Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east" (Gen. 29:1). The vision he saw motivated him to hasten, with peace of heart, on his way to where his uncle dwelt in 'Padan Aram,' east of Canaan. It is as though our eyes are opened to the heavenly, and our internal ears enjoying God's promises, that He is with us. We hasten on our way, not to marry Lea or Rachel, but to unite with God in our Lord Jesus Christ. *"And he looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks. A large stone was on the well's mouth"* (Gen. 29:2).

The three flocks of sheep, lying by the well, were waiting for someone to roll the large stone that covered the well's mouth, for all to be watered. Jacob is the type of the Lord Christ, Who came to the world to acquire the true Rachel - the Church of the New Testament - as His bride. He came to the field, namely to the world, where there was a well, that was the closed up baptismal font, that was in need of Jacob to roll the large stone from its mouth, and to reveal its mystery through His coming into it. The three flocks lying by the well, anticipating its water, and waiting for someone to roll the stone for them, are three groups, lying on the hope of salvation, these are: Fathers preceding the Mosaic law, like Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, together with those who followed their faith; then men of the Mosaic Law, who anticipated the Savior Messiah through the symbols and commandments, to be followed by the prophets, whose eyes were opened to behold the true Jacob coming in the spirit of prophecy. In other words, these three flocks, that lied by the well, waiting for the Messiah, were: The natural Law, the Mosaic Law with its symbols, and the prophecies. All sat by the well, inviting humanity to enjoy the water of baptism, to gain sonship to God, and to enter into the heavenly kingdom. They are, however, unable to present them. They are pointing their finger toward the kingdom, anticipating the coming of the Savior, the hope of all nations, the heavenly Groom! *"Now while he was speaking with them (the shepherds), Rachel came with her father's sheep... When Jacob saw*

Rachel,... he rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept; then he told Rachel that he was her father's relative, and that he was Rebecca's son. So she ran and told her father... Laban ran to meet him,... and told him, 'Surely you are my bone and flesh.' And he stayed with him for a month" (Gen. 29:9-14).

Jacob's talk to the shepherds when the stone was on the mouth of the well, refers to that of the Word of God to the men of the Old Testament, in various ways, through events, symbols, and prophecies, until the time was ripe, for the Church of the New Testament, to come. Christ came forward and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well, presenting the Church with His Holy divine sacraments. Rolling of the stone also reminds us of what happened the day of His resurrection, when He was risen, while the stone was still on the mouth of the grave; But He sent His angel to roll the stone, in order to let us drink from the water of His resurrection, through being buried with Him, and also risen with Him; As said by the apostle: *"Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead"* (Colossians 2:12).

Jacob kissed Rachel, lifted up his voice and wept. What kiss was that, but that of practical love, Jesus manifested when He cried out on the cross, as He delivered Himself for the Church's sake. That kiss that Rachel yearns for, saying: *"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth - for your love is better than wine"* (Songs 1:2). As to telling her that he is a relative of her father, that refers to His revelation of His relationship to us through the cross, as when we were reconciled, we became the sons of His heavenly Father! We entered with the Lord Christ into a relationship through the grace of His cross!

Jacob stayed with Laban for a month; as it was the custom at that time to give hospitality for a maximum of one month, after which the guest is to be treated as one of the family, sharing with them their regular daily life, including work, although he earns a wage for it.

In short, Jacob encounter with Rachel, was on a level different from that with the shepherds who were sitting by the well, in the following various aspects:

- ❖ He encountered with her, after lifting up the shadows and symbols, to enter with her into the perfection of truth.
- ❖ He encountered with her by the water, to enter with her into a relationship through the sacrament of Baptism; and to enjoy sonship to God.
- ❖ He kissed her, lifted up his voice and wept; the kiss of the cross, namely, that of practical love, in which He delivered Himself for her sake.
- ❖ As He proclaimed Himself to her, she accepted Him, and entered with Him into her father's house.
- ❖ He stayed for a month in her father's house, a sign of our fellowship with Him all days of our life, until He enters with us into His heavens.

2- JACOB SERVES HIS UNCLE

“Then Laban said to Jacob, ‘Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me what should your wages be’... He said, ‘I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.’ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed but a few days to him, because of the love he had for her” (Gen. 29:15-20)

Jacob could have passed the first month as a guest, doing only very simple work; but as a man of strife, he gave all his energy, that Laban considered him indispensable. When asked about his wages, he asked to marry his younger daughter Rachel. Jacob represented the Lord Christ who descended to the world as a guest, although He is its Creator; and persisted on working in the world for the sake of the younger daughter Rachel, namely, the Church of the New Testament, to acquire her as a bride for Himself.

If ‘Leah’ means ‘faulty’ or ‘blemished,’ probably because of her weak or delicate eyes, and ‘Rachel’ means a ‘she-goat;’ the true Jacob, the Lamb of God, seeks Rachel, the she-goat, sanctified by the blood of the Lamb; while ‘Leah’ has lost her beauty, because of her weak inner eyes or of her spiritual insight.

It was said of the years that Jacob served for Rachel that *“they seemed but a few days to him, because of the love he had for her”* (Gen. 29:20). And as **St. Jerome** says: [With love nothing is difficult; Labor is easy to who longs for it¹.]

If, for the sake of his marriage to Rachel, Jacob worked for seven years, that seemed as though few days, then worked for extra seven years; how much, it is fit for us to offer, for the sake of our enjoyment of the kingdom of heaven, and our union with our Lord Christ?

3- JACOB’S MARRIAGE TO LEAH AND RACHEL

Having completed his seven years service, Jacob demanded that Rachel be given him as his wife, as his days are fulfilled, according to his uncle’s promise. Laban made a feast, and in the evening he brought his daughter Leah to Jacob, and gave her ‘Zilpah’ as her maid. In the morning, when he discovered his uncle’s deceit, Laban apologized saying: *“It must not be done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years”* (Gen. 29:26-27).

If Jacob had deceived his father Isaac in his old age, getting his blessing instead of Esau, even though that was with good intention and for a spiritual goal, then, he was to be treated by the same measure he treated his father. So he was deceived by his uncle concerning Rachel, then deceived by his sons concerning Joseph; and passed most of his life with a bitter soul.

Deceit was not a difficult task, as the bride, all along her wedding feast, used to be covered with a thick red veil, and in the darkness of the evening, it was not easy to recognize her

¹ Ep. 22:40.

Anyhow, what occurred concerning Jacob's marriage carried a prophetic symbolic significance. And as said by **Fr. Caesarius of Arles**: [These two women to which Jacob was married, refer to the two peoples: Leah refer to the Jews, and Rachel to the Gentiles, with Christ, as a Cornerstone, connecting the two peoples, as two walls from different directions. In Him they found eternal peace, according to the words of the apostle: "*For He Himself is our peace, who had made both one*" (Ephesians 2:14)¹.] It is to be noted that Christ the Lord came from the tribe of Judah, born by Leah (Gen. 29:35), as the Lord Christ came incarnated from among the Jewish nation.

The Law, forbidding marriage to two sisters, was not yet delivered (Leviticus 18:18), and Jacob was not seeking polygamy, having come from his father's house to marry only one wife. And in his service to Laban, he expected to be given just one wife. As to clinging to maids, this was not out of carnal lust, but for need of children, as the world at that time was sparsely populated, in relation to its size.

4- THE CHILDREN OF LEAH

It was not without reason, that God, seeing that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb, to bear to Jacob Reuben, Simeon, Levi, then Judah, before she stopped bearing. God gave Leah the privilege to be loved by her husband for the sake of her children. From another aspect, Leah, represented the Jews, who were fertile, as far as knowledge of God was concerned. From them came the patriarchs, the prophets, the priesthood, etc. As to Rachel, she represented the Gentiles, who were before, barren, with no spiritual fruit, because of paganism.

From Leah came Reuben, the firstborn. The Jews were, in the eyes of the Lord, the firstborn, until the Gentiles took away from them the spiritual birthright. Also from her, came Levi, (the Priests), and also Judah, as the Lord Christ came from the Jews. Then she stopped bearing children, as the Jews rejected Christ the Lord, who came of the tribe of Judah, there was a ceasing of spiritual bearing. It seems that Jacob temporarily deserted her, before she resumed bearing, in probable reference to the expected return of the Jews from their denial of Christ the Lord, and their anticipated acceptance of Christian faith in the end of time.

¹ Ser. 88:2.

CHAPTER 30

A STRUGGLE IN JACOB'S LIFE

If Jacob struggled with his twin brother Esau while still in their mother's womb (Gen. 25:22), all his life has been a continuous series of struggles. He struggled with Esau, and supplanted him of his birthright and blessing. And now, in that land far from home, he lives in a family atmosphere, filled with struggle in between his two wives, Leah and Rachel, besides, struggling with their father concerning his wages.

1- A struggle between Leah and Rachel 1-24.

2- Jacob demands his wages 25-43.

1- A STRUGGLE BETWEEN LEAH AND RACHEL

Leah, having been with weak eyes, older than Rachel, and of less beauty, God granted her children to bring her the love of her husband Jacob (Gen. 29:31). This made Rachel jealous of her sister, who said to Jacob: "*Give me children, or else I die*" (Gen. 30:1). Jacob's soul was very bitter, as he longed to satisfy Rachel whom he loved; and now, she is asking for something he cannot provide. So, angrily he said to her: "*Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?*" (Gen. 30:2) And when she gave Jacob her maid Bilhah to have children by her, he got himself into more continuous struggles, between Leah and Rachel. Each of them wanted to have more children than her sister. The causes of that struggle were:

(1) The two wives probably heard from Jacob, much about God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and about what their descendants would enjoy, of the inheritance of the land of promise, and of the blessing of the coming of the Messiah of their descendants; **The struggle was based on the longing of each of them, for the divine promises to be fulfilled by her children.**

(2) As far as Leah is concerned, **Lea felt that she was unloved, believed that Jacob, her man, was her right alone, and that Rachel supplanted her of his heart;** She assumed that bearing him many children would probably open up his heart. That was apparent when Rachel asked Leah to give her of the (mandrakes), brought from the field by her son Reuben (Gen. 30:14); Lea answered her: "*Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?*" (Gen. 30:15) This shows that Leah felt that Rachel had supplanted her of her husband; beside the probability that Jacob temporarily deserted her, which is why she accepted to give away her son's mandrakes to Rachel, for the price of spending one night with Jacob (Gen. 30:15). As to this mandrakes that Reuben found in the field, and brought to his mother, (Gen. 30:14); it is a plant called 'apple of the genie' or 'apple of love;' also called 'Jerboa;' apple-like in shape, and believed by the common people at that time, to bring about a husband's love to his wife.

(3) **Rachel, on her part, has been jealous of her sister, who bore four sons to Jacob, while she was barren.** God allowed for the barrenness of Rachel, to open Jacob’s heart to Leah; and to be a symbol of the Church of the New Testament, coming from the Gentiles, who were previously with no spiritual fruit; then was granted children; the Holy Bible says: *“Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. And she conceived and bore a son, and said, ‘God has taken away my reproach.’ So she called his name Joseph, and said, ‘The Lord shall add to me another son’”* (Gen. 30:22-24).

She became a symbol of the Church of the New Testament, that gave birth to ‘Joseph,’ meaning ‘growth’ or ‘addition;’ as it continuously seeks a life of growth, and longs for persistent fruition.

Amid that bitter struggle between Leah and Rachel, Jacob’s soul had been surely bitter, trying to satisfy both of them. By that, he realized the bitterness previously felt by his brother Esau, amid their struggle for the birthright and blessing. Here, **we cannot disregard the faults committed by Rachel during her struggle,** until she bore Joseph; these were:

a- Rachel fell into despair, **instead of placing her hope on God; and demanded from her man what is solely the right of God,** saying to him: *“Give me children, or else I die”* (Gen. 30:1), as though she is telling him: Give me children, or else I would be counted as dead.. Of what use is your love for me, when I am childless, without a heir?

b- **Rachel went so far to compel her husband to get her children by her maid,** opening to herself a new range of struggle with her sister Leah, as well as with her own maid.

c- She restored faulty common beliefs, **assuming that eating these mandrakes would let her keep her husband’s love,** probably because she feared that he would desert her if she grew old without bearing children!

Finally, it seems that she eventually placed her hope on God, as the human ways she resorted to, outside faith, have all come to no avail. Then, God opened up her womb, and granted her a son she called “Joseph,” meaning ‘growth’ or ‘addition,’ in belief of God, who continuously gives.

In the following table we find the names of Jacob’s sons, and the meanings of their names:

| Mother | Son | Meaning | Reason of giving him this name |
|--------|-----|---------|--------------------------------|
|--------|-----|---------|--------------------------------|

| | | | |
|--------|----------|----------------------------|---|
| Leah | Reuben | Son of vision. | The Lord looked on my affliction (29:32) |
| Leah | Simeon | Listener. | The Lord heard that I am unloved (29:33) |
| Leah | Levi | Attached to me. | My husband will become attached to me (29:34) |
| Leah | Judah | confess | |
| Belhah | Dan | To judge | I will praise the Lord (29:35) |
| Belhah | Naphtali | Spacious | God has judged Rachel's case (30:6) |
| Zilpah | Gad | Consistent | The Lord let Lea prevail (30:8) |
| Zilpah | Asher | Happy | Lea wrestled with her sister (30:11) |
| Leah | Issachar | Reward | Lea became happy (30:13) |
| Leah | Zebulun | Dwelling | God has given me my hire (30:18) |
| Rachel | Joseph | To add | Now my husband will dwell with me(30:20) |
| Rachel | Benjamin | the right hand of the Lord | The Lord shall add to me another son (30:24) His mother called him Ben-Oni (son of my pain) and his father called him Benjamin(30:18) |

The descendants of Jacob began with 'Reuben,' the firstborn according to the flesh, in whom it was proclaimed that God saw our affliction, so He granted us fruit; and would keep granting us until we enjoy 'Benjamin;' namely, through pain, we should reach up to God's right hand, in fellowship of eternal glory.

The following are comments of some Fathers on that issue:

(1) The succession here came according to age seniority; starting with the firstborn according to the flesh, and ended with Benjamin, the youngest. But in the Book of Revelation, it came in the following order: The sons of Leah, followed by those of Rachel; then the sons of the two maids, without reference to their seniority. It is as though God intended to confirm that the divine glories are not given according to seniority of age, but according to spiritual growth, and to actual union with God¹.

(2) Some Fathers noticed that the twelve sons had only one sister 'Dinah,' by Leah (Gen. 30:21); or, at least, there is no reference in the Scripture to any other. If male sons refer to the fruit of the spirit, the daughter refers to that of the flesh. Because of Dinah, the only daughter, Jacob and his sons got into a conflict with the people of Shechem (Gen. 34); as though the flesh, if not controlled and sanctified, would corrupt the peace of the spirit, and would let it lose its increasing fruit.

¹ سفر العدد، ١٩٨١، ص 15-١٦.

2- JACOB DEMANDS HIS WAGES

As soon as Rachel gave birth to her son Joseph, a kind of family stability began to appear in between the two sisters; Lea felt secure because of her many sons, and Rachel began to feel less jealous. Then, Jacob started to think of going back to the land of Canaan, saying to his uncle Laban: “*Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country. Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done to you*” (Gen. 30:25-26). These words came to carry, firm but tender admonishment at the same time. He spent 14 years serving for marrying his two wives; then 6 years of service, for nothing more than his mere sustenance and that of his wives and children. And now, as he is coming out, with his two wives, sons, and a daughter, he possesses no flocks of sheep.

Laban realizing how God blessed his household because of Jacob, said to him: “*Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake... Name me your wages, and I will give you*” (Gen. 30:27-28).

Here, Jacob asked Laban to give him every speckled sheep (the white spots on their skin are about equal to the black), every spotted sheep (black, with some white spots), and every black one; beside all the speckled and spotted among the goats...These kinds of sheep and goats were rare in the East. So he chose the few and left for his uncle the many.

After executing that agreement, Laban gave his flocks into the hands of his sons; and put three days journey (about 40 miles) between his flocks and those of Jacob (Gen. 30:36). This reveals the extent of wealth that Laban reached, to have to isolate the two flocks by such a distance. He, who did not possess more than a small flock, that his daughter Rachel used to shepherd, in the day Jacob came to their land.

In order for Jacob to get rich, he had to put three days journey between himself and his uncle. As we said before, the three days refer to the fellowship of resurrection of our Lord Christ, raised from the dead after three days¹; For God to grant him the blessing, he should practice the life of resurrection, namely the new life in Jesus Christ, of which Laban is deprived.

Jacob took for himself rods of green poplar and of the almond and chestnut trees, peeled white strips in them, and exposed the white which was in the rods; the rods he had peeled, he set before the flocks in the gutters, in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, so that they should conceive when they came to drink. And it came to pass, whenever the stronger livestock conceived, that Jacob placed the rods before the eyes of the livestock in the gutters. But when the flocks were feeble, he did not put them in; So the feebler were Laban’s and the stronger Jacob’s.

Although he used such shrewdness, yet his true richness had been the blessing of the Lord.

¹ Cf. our Commentary on Gen. 22:4.

Let us get away from the love of the world, attach ourselves to the Lord, risen from the dead, to be like Jacob, who set forth, a three days journey, to be aid of him: *“Thus the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks, female and male servants, and camels and donkeys”* (Gen. 30: 43)

By the new life for us in Jesus Christ, we will have spiritual prosperity and abundance, through the sanctification of our senses, emotions, capacities, and all our energies, for the sake of His kingdom.

CHAPTER 31

RETURN TO CANAAN

If Jacob refers to Christ the Lord, He embraces the Church of the New Testament (Rachel), with her children, and the Church of the Old Testament (Lea), with her children, and carries all of them to the heavenly Canaan. But the pagan Laban, representing the devil, does not accept this celestial procession, so he sets forth with his hosts to hinder it, but completely fails.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- Escape of Jacob | 1–21. |
| 2- Laban pursues the procession | 22–25. |
| 3- Laban (the devil) seeks what is his in us | 26–42. |
| 4- Making a covenant | 43–54. |
| 5- Departure of the two parties | 55. |

1- ESCAPE OF JACOB

Laban's sons felt that Jacob has taken away all that was their father's, and acquired all his wealth (Gen. 31:1), something that changed the countenance of Laban toward Jacob. At that time *"The Lord said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you'"* (Gen. 31:3).

Jacob's heart was surely attached to the land of Canaan, being the land promised by God to Abraham and his descendants. He wanted to get married to Rachel, then return to inherit. But 7 years have passed, followed by 7 years more, and now, he is there for twenty years; he had to set forth from Haran; He had already gotten the beloved wife, children, numerous sheep and cattle, besides servants and maids. So How can he depart? The Lord spoke to him in the language of facts, allowing for the change of attitude of Laban and his sons against him, in order to let him feel his position as a stranger, and wish to depart. The Lord also spoke to him in a vision in a dream, and ordered him to depart (Gen. 31:12-13). Jacob realized that what he faces in his life, are not a matter of coincidence, but through divine ordainment, so as to fulfill God's will in him. If the behavior of Laban and his sons was through jealousy and evil spirit, yet Jacob felt that all occurred at the right time. We learn from this that everything in our lives are for the good, if we surrender our life in His hands; something that was felt by the apostle Paul who says: *"All things work together for good to those who love God"* (Romans 8:28).

So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Lea to the field, to his flock, so that seeing the extent of his wealth, they would listen to his counsel, and set forth with him together with their children. He revealed to them how the countenance of their father became unfavorable toward him. He reminded them of how he, with all might had served their father; yet he has deceived him and changed his wages many times, and of how the Lord has taken away the livestock of their father, and given them to him. And finally, how the Lord commanded him to return to the land of his

fathers, to which he is committed to obey. It seems from his talk to them, that they were aware of the dream he had, on his escape from the face of his brother, and how he anointed the pillar, and made a vow (Gen. 31:13) It is as though, by his previous talks with his wives, he had prepared their hearts and minds for what was to come, to respond to his talk, saying: “*Whatever God has said to you, do it*” (Gen. 31:16).

We can say that the submission of Rachel and Lea to Jacob, and their position against their father, have been a result of their realization of the continuous dealings of God with their man, their understanding of his anticipation of God’s blessing and his yearning to return, in order to enjoy His promise, and to fulfill his vow in Bethel. So the last talk came to respond to an inner thought that filled their minds. In other words, Jacob has succeeded in gaining his family on God’s account, and in preparing their lives to submit with joy to Him.

Rachel and Lea felt that their father treated them as strangers; that instead of giving them of what was his, he sold them for the services of their honest husband all those years. So they encouraged Jacob to depart “*Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels, and he carried away all his livestock and all his possessions which he had gained in Padan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan... So he fled with all he had. He arose and crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead*” (Gen. 31:17-21).

If Jacob is the type of Christ the Lord, Who came to our land, as though to Haran, and took us away from the ancient father (to those who once gave him the chance to be so), namely from the devil - Laban, the Pagan -, He acquired us as His bride, either if we were from the Gentiles as Rachel, or from the Jews as Lea. Consequently, to carry us together with our children, namely, the fruits of the Spirit, and our sheep, namely, the fruits of the sanctified flesh. Besides all that He acquired in us, through sanctifying our senses, thoughts, capacities, and energies; to set forth with us from our land, from Padan Aram to cross, not the River of Euphrates as Jacob did, but the water of the Holy Baptism. Thus, heading, not toward Isaac, but toward the bosom of God the Father, to be with Him in His heavens eternally! This is our new Jacob, who came to us, and would never rest, until He sets forth with us to where His heavenly glories are. He would carry us, yet, not against our will, but according to it, as Rachel and Lea did with Jacob.

Let us likewise share the feelings of these two wives. Let us say as they once said that their ancient father, representing the devil, has treated them as strangers, and sold them, having confiscated their lives, freedom, and glories. And now, there the devil is deceiving us to captivate us in his kingdom. Let us escape, together with Jacob, away from his authority; and set forth by the Holy Spirit, crossing the water of Baptism, to enter to our new Father, the Holy heavenly Father, to enjoy His inheritance, instead of that of our perishable ancient father!

2- LABAN PURSUES THE PROCESSION

If Jacob sets forth escaping from the face of Laban (rescuing his family from his authority), yet he was leading the procession of the Church, militant and victorious in Him and

with Him. And as said by the apostle Paul: “*Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ; and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place*” (2 Corinthians 2: 14). That procession, as **Fr. Caesarius of Arles**¹ says, would infuriate the devil who cannot bear to see Christ the Lord carrying humanity, but he would pursue it. Thus, if we accept the Lord Christ as a spiritual Leader, who carries us triumphantly, setting forth with us to His Father’s bosom, the evil one would never stand still, but would watch our lives, hoping to find in our inner life anything to hold against us, and to claim us as his, or as his children!

While Laban has gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole the household idols that were her father’s (Gen. 31:19) that he kept in or near his tent. Laban did not sense that Jacob had fled until the third day. (Gen. 31: 22)

Laban - as a representative of the evil one - was shearing his sheep. If the devil is trying his best to acquire every soul as a spoil for himself; he intends to shear its wool on the account of his kingdom. He is abusing his followers! Rachel refers to the Church of the Gentiles, who could steal away his idols from him, to destroy the idols of her father, which she had worshipped for such a long time before the coming of the Lord Christ. As to his unawareness of Jacob’s flight, before the third day. This refers to the inability of the evil one to recognize, truly, the secret of the saving work of Christ the Lord, except by the resurrection of the Lord from the dead (on the third day). The devil did not realize the triumph of Christ the Lord and His conquest on the cross, until he knew that He is the Resurrection, the Grantor of life!

Realizing, on the third day that Jacob fled, Laban: “*took his brothers with him and pursued him for seven days’ journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead. But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, ‘Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad’*” (Gen. 31:23-24).

When the devil recognized our procession of triumph, having known Christ the Lord, as the Grantor of resurrection, instead of retreating, he took his brothers with him, and pursued us for seven days, as though the enemy uses every available means, and everyone, to fight against the procession of triumph. And he would persist on pursuing the individual for seven days, namely, he would fight against us along the whole week with no rest. He would fight against us as long as we are still in the world, as long as we are still in the body, he would never rest, in hope of gaining us for his kingdom, and diverting us from the way of our salvation.

The war or the rivalry was not between Jacob and Laban. For it was not a personal rivalry, but it was between the kingdom of God, and that of the devil. For this reason, God Himself intervened in the proper time, and warned Laban against harming His man Jacob.

3- LABAN (THE DEVIL) SEEKS WHAT IS HIS IN US

Laban rebuked Jacob for “*carrying away his daughters like captives of war,*” and not

¹ Ser. 88:4.

letting him kiss them or their children, accusing him of stupidity or foolishness, as he *“might have sent them away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp”* (Gen. 31:26, 27). It is obvious that Laban would not have allowed Jacob and his family to depart; he might probably hinder him, as Jacob himself said.

In any case, Laban’s only question, after proclaiming that he is incapable of causing Jacob any harm was because of God’s warning to him in a dream, saying: *“Why did you steal my gods?”* (Gen. 31:30). To that, Jacob answered: *“With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours, and take it with you”* (Gen. 31:32).

Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen her father’s gods, and now, she had taken the household idols, put them in the camel’s saddle, and sat on them, pretending that she could not rise before her father, because of her menstruation. As we said before, Rachel represents the Church coming out from the Gentiles, who used to worship the idols, which later on she crushed under her feet!

Jacob asked Laban to search his belongings and his family’s. And whomever he finds his gods with, should be put to death. And as **Fr. Caesarius of Arles** says: [Let God’s mercies come unto us, and grants us that the enemy would never find in us anything related to him. Thus, he would be unable to hinder us or to turn us away from eternal life¹.]

Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, saying to him: *“What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me?... These twenty years I have been with you, your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. That which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it; you required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from my eyes... ; and you have changed my wages ten times”* (Gen. 31:38-41).

By that, Jacob proclaimed his honesty all along twenty years in Laban’s service, presenting a living portrait, not just of the shepherd of sheep, but of every man given the responsibility of caring for souls. How should he bear the drought of the day and the frost of the night; so as not to let any soul of his flock be torn by beasts, or any heart to be stolen?

I say that these words of Jacob shall remain rebuking every minister in God’s vineyard. If sheep are so precious in Jacob’s eyes, how much so would be every human soul in ours?

Laban changed the wages of Jacob ten times, namely several times. Yet Jacob’s honesty did not change. Thus, it is fit for us, not to care for wages, whatever they might be: material or dignity! Let us stay honest for the sake of salvation of all souls. How beautiful are the words of **St. John Chrysostom**: [I am a father, filled with compassion... Hear what the apostle Paul says: *“My little children for whom I labor in birth”* (Galatians 4:19). As every mother screams at the

¹ Ser. 88:4.

time of her delivery, so also I do¹.]

4- MAKING A COVENANT

Laban wisely asked for a covenant to be made between him and Jacob, his son-in-law, so that none of them would harm the other. Jacob took a stone and set it as a pillar; and they made a heap of stones, and they ate on the heap for the sake of reconciliation. That heap of stones that would be a witness of the covenant they made was called “Jegar Sahadutha,” in Syrian, by Laban, but Jacob called it “Galeed,” in Hebrew. Both names meaning ‘heap of testimony;’ and also called in Hebrew “Mizpah,” meaning ‘watch tower,’ as though God would be watching over them.

If Jacob and Laban have set a pillar and a heap of stones, as a covenant of reconciliation, and ate there, as a sign of peace, in fact, they shared one bread as well as one blood. That pillar refers to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, lifted up on the Mount of Calvary, offering His body and blood as a sacrifice of love for our sake. The Lord Christ reconciled us with His Father, in His body delivered for us, and offered as exalted food of love, capable of lifting us up to a union with God the Father, through abiding in Him! The cross would eternally remain, with the Lord’s holy body and blood, a testimonial of truth to that reconciliation, and a sign of the new covenant that we got, and we call it the “New Testament” (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). That covenant we accept and to it we commit ourselves, and as said by the apostle Paul: *“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy, who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?”* (Hebrew 10:29)².

5- DEPARTURE OF THE TWO PARTIES

“Early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place” (Gen. 31:55)

At the end of that situation, Laban returned to his place, and Jacob went on his way. Laban had put his heart in Haran, while Jacob put his in the land of promise! And God gave each of them his heart’s request. Whoever puts his heart in dust, will hear the divine voice, saying: *“For dust you are, and to dust you shall return”* (Gen. 3:19). While whoever puts his heart in heaven, will hear the divine voice, saying: *“For a heaven you are, and to heaven you shall return.”* He gives us according to what the heart lusts for, and to wherever it sets forth. If it falls down to things of the world, our life transforms into worldly corruption; and if it sets forth toward heaven, it transforms to heavenly!

¹ In Hebr., hom 23:9.

² للمؤلف: المسيح في سر الإفخارستيا ١٩٧٣، ص ٦٦ - ٨٤.

CHAPTER 31

PREPARING FOR THE ENCOUNTER WITH ESAU

If Jacob got much confused, and feared his encounter with Esau, yet God prepared his heart for that encounter by His appearance and warning to his uncle Laban, to confirm to him that He is his Keeper and the Disposer of his life. And on his way, God appeared, and allowed Jacob to wrestle with Him, to be granted a new name, to be carried by the Church of the Old Testament along the ages.

| | |
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| 1- Jacob with the angels of God | 1-2. |
| 2- Jacob sends messengers to his brother | 3-8. |
| 3- Jacob resorts to God, the God of his father | 9-12. |
| 4- Jacob sends a present to his brother | 13-23. |
| 5- Jacob wrestles with God | 24-32. |

1- JACOB WITH THE ANGELS OF GOD

“So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, ‘This is God’s camp,’ and he called the name of that place, ‘Mahanaim’” (Gen. 32:1-2).

While Laban returned with his brothers to the land in which he had put his heart, Jacob, in turn, set forth with his household and all his possessions toward Canaan, as though to the heavenly Canaan, the promised land. This is why the angels of God met him. Jacob represents the Church sojourning on the earth, setting forth with all its hearts, members, and all its possessions, toward the bosom of the Father, by the Holy Spirit, through its union with, and abiding in its Head, Jesus Christ. It walks hidden in its Christ, and supported by His hosts (the angels of God). That was what Jacob saw, as he said, *“This is God’s camp...”*. We are walking in a divine procession, accompanied by the angels, who desire our salvation.

It seems that the number of angels that Jacob saw, was so huge, that he called them, *“God’s camp”* and called the place *“Mahanaim,”* meaning ‘two camps’: Jacob and his household representing an apparent army, while the angels of God supporting them are representing a divine, unseen army. **Origen** believes that the Church that embraces those fearing God, when it convenes, it also includes the angels of God, who surround them. There would be both a seen Church, another unseen one of angels. All convene together in Jesus Christ the ‘Cornerstone,’ who unifies the earthly with the heavenly, for the Church to become a *“Mahanaim,”* namely two camps united together.

2- JACOB SENDS MESSENGERS TO HIS BROTHER

God taught Jacob two lessons, the first through His appearance to Laban, approaching

with the intention to harm Jacob, but stopped by God. The second was through the appearance of His angels to him. Yet Jacob, in his human weakness, feared the wrath of his brother Esau, so he sent messengers to test his feelings toward him. Esau has been in the land of 'Seir,' the country of 'Edom,' which were two names of Esau: He was called 'Seir,' namely 'hairy,' as well as 'Edom,' namely 'red or bloody' (Gen. 25:25). That region, might have been called 'Seir,' because of its numerous trees that gave it the impression of hair covering the body; and extended from the Gulf of Aquaba to the Dead Sea, it belonged to the 'Horites' (Gen. 14:6), then taken over by Esau.

Jacob sent messengers with a message of hope to have favor in his sight, without seeking the counsel of God, or asking for his support... even though, in his message, he used the spirit of love and humility, calling his brother 'lord.'

Esau listened to the message. He was very rich, and came to meet his brother with 400 men with him, something that made Jacob afraid and distressed (Gen. 32:7). He divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels into two companies, so that in case Esau attacked one of them, the other company would escape, and thought of sending a present of love, to find favor in the sight of his brother.

Jacob is not to be blamed for his plan especially that he acted with wisdom and humility. However, he is to be blamed for not seeking God's counsel!

3- JACOB RESORTS TO GOD, GOD OF HIS FATHERS

Greatly distressed and afraid of his brother Esau, Jacob resorted to God by prayers that came strong and effective, having the following criteria:

(1) He speaks with God through a personal relationship, calling Him: "*God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac*" (Gen. 32:9). He does not speak with God, as a God, isolated from humanity, nor as a lover of mankind in general, but as His Father, and Father of his family. How wonderful for man to feel that he is on the level of a personal relationship with God. This was obvious in the life of **St. Augustine**, who once said, that he feels that there is nobody else in the world, but God and himself; God granting him all love, and he responds by presenting God with his whole heart.

(2) He reminds God of His promises: "*The Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and your kindred, and I will deal well with you'*" (Gen. 32:9). God is pleased, when His children insist on the realization of His divine promises, and hold on to them in the spirit of loving sonship.

(3) In his prayer, he feels weak before God's exalted and rich love; as though he shies from asking for more, saying: "*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and all the truth which you have shown your servant*" (Gen. 32:10). All what he is asking for now, is nothing but an extension of enjoyment of the practical riches of God's love, which he had already tasted! He is not asking, as though he has some right, nor asking Him to give him back, for some good he

did. But he is asking Him to give him, as he used to, along all his years, as He was, and still is, rich and generous in His giving.

(4) Jacob says, “*I crossed the Jordan with my staff; and now I have become two companies*” (Gen. 32:10).

He left his father’s house empty-handed, with no possessions other than the staff in his hand. And now, he is returning in two great companies. He is, as though, like a believer, setting forth from the world, carrying in his heart, his staff, namely his cross, as the source of his strength. Through this divine staff he acquired, he becomes, in God’s eyes, as two companies, as he is sanctified in his spirit, as well as in his body, the spirit presenting all its energies, and the body all its senses, sanctified in the Lord!

Fr. Caesarius sees in Jacob, as he departs with a staff to return in two companies, a type of Christ the Lord, saying: [Jacob utilized his staff to acquire his wife; while the Lord Christ carried his cross to save the Church¹.]

Finally, having related God to himself and to his family; and after reminding Him of His divine promises, declaring his right in those promises, not because of righteousness, but because of the abundant and exceeding riches of God’s love, and after considering faith in the power of the cross (his staff), he finally asked Him to deliver him!

May we present our problems, troubles and needs, but only after offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God, and after enjoying an amiable talk with Him, and bringing to light His amazing deeds with us!

4- JACOB SENDS A PRESENT TO HIS BROTHER

Wisely, Jacob sent to his brother a present of love, to extinguish the flame of wrath that kindled 20 years ago, seeking his love through 580 heads of sheep, camels, cows, and colts etc. He sent his present in successively, in order to appease the heart of his brother.

With the present, he offered humility, commanding the servants who delivered his presents to say to his brother, if he asks them, ‘Whose are these in front of you?’ “*They are your servant Jacob’s. It is a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also is behind us. For he said, ‘I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me’*” (Gen. 32:18-20)

May we make peace with all people to gain everyone as a friend through the matters of this finite world, and with the spirit of humility, that lifts us up in the eyes of God, of His angels, and also of people!

Finally, Jacob took his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the stream of Jabbock, namely the river of Jabbock, one of the tributaries of the Jordan River, 23 miles north of the Dead Sea, now called ‘El-Zarka.’

¹ Ser. 87:2.

5- JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

“Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of day” (Gen. 32: 24).

Having crossed, together with his family, the stream of Jabbock, Jacob was left alone to meditate; as though he was getting ready for his encounter with his brother Esau, through an encounter with God. A man appeared to him, who some scholars believe to be an angel in the form of man. He was not the Word of God, but represented the divine presence. Jacob says: *“For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved”* (Gen. 32:30).

And, it was said to him: *“For you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed”* (Gen. 32:28). *“When He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint, as He wrestled with him”* (Gen. 32:25).

Namely, the angel saw that Jacob, in his struggle, did not surrender but resisted all night; a situation, in which, as the angel appears, as though defeated by man, He lightly touched the socket of Jacob’s hip. Jacob insisted, not to let the angel go *“until He blesses him”* (Gen. 32:26); realizing that he was dealing with a heavenly Being.

St. Augustine comments on this episode, saying: [Why did Jacob wrestle with Him and caught Him? Because *“the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force”* (Matthew 11:12), Why did he wrestle? In order to take Him by labor; as whatever we get after strife, we hold to it more strongly¹.] And he also says: [The man defeated the angel; yet the conqueror persists on holding the angel until He blesses him. What a great mystery! The defeated blesses the conqueror! He was defeated, because He chose that, to appear weak in His flesh form, although in His greatness, He was strong; *“For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God”* (2 Corinthians 13:4)².] What happened with Jacob, before his encounter with Esau, to overcome him with love, refers to what the Lord Christ did, coming as weak, carrying our nature, to occupy the last row, to be counted as a trespasser, and to bear the disgrace of the cross; but, risen from the dead, He blesses our nature, and renews it in Him!

St. Ambrose believes that what happened with Jacob concerning the socket of his hip getting out of joint, refers to the fellowship of his passion with the Lord Christ, who will incarnate through his seed, saying: [In his passion he acknowledges the heir of his body, and by Him he would pre-identify the passion of his heir, through what happened to the socket of his hip³.]

The struggle ended with the angel asking Jacob about his name, not that He does not know it, but in order to change it to a new name fit for him as a **struggler**, saying to him: *“Your*

¹ On Ps. 148.

² On Ps. 80.

³ On Belief of Resur 2:100.

name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have struggled with God, and with men, and have prevailed” (Gen. 32:28).

And as said by **St. Clement of Alexandria**: [The new name was presented to him for the new people¹], as though this gift was not granted to Jacob personally, but to the whole people of God, as a sign of their spiritual strife.

Jacob called the name of the place ‘Paniel,’ namely, ‘God’s face,’ considering himself fortunate to have seen God face to face, and his life is preserved with sunrise, Jacob set forth to join his family, encouraged by these visions and that struggle.

¹ *Paedagogus 1:7.*

CHAPTER 33

JACOB'S ENCOUNTER WITH ESAU

If Jacob had prepared himself for his encounter with his brother Esau, through prayers, offering gifts, and dividing his family into two companies, God, on His part, prepare Esau's heart, by kindling it with brotherly emotions and longing to meet his brother.

1- The encounter of the two brothers **1-16.**

2- Jacob in Succoth and Shechem **17-20.**

1- THE ENCOUNTER OF THE TWO BROTHERS

“Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Lea, Rachel, and the two maidservants. And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Lea and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last. Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother” (Gen. 33:1-3).

This plan revealed Jacob's feelings: He put his beloved Rachel with her son at the end of the procession, in order to give her more chance to escape, in case of any attack by his brother and his men. As for him, he crossed over before all, as though he is offering himself a ransom for all, even for the two maidservants. It is fit for a Christian to harbor such a spirit, to be as his Master the Lord Christ, who preceded the flock as a good Shepherd, who delivers Himself for his flock.

Jacob precedes the procession, not out of a spirit of haughtiness or arrogance, but of a spirit of humility, bowing himself to the ground seven times, as a sign of submission. As to Christ the Lord, the heavenly Groom and Head of the Church, He preceded the procession of conquest by His humility, *“making Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant... and being found in the appearance of man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2:7-8); He, God's Only-Begotten Son, learned obedience through His passion (Hebrew 5:8). Being One with His Father, He fasted, prayed, and worshipped in submission to Him, in our name, and on our account, so our worshipping is accepted in Him.

If Jacob supplanted the birthright and the blessing, and enjoyed God's promises to his grandfather Abraham, and his father Isaac, yet the Holy Bible did not disregard the good heart and feelings of his brother Esau, evident from the following behavior:

(1) Once Esau saw his brother, *“He ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept”* (Gen. 33:4) as though he had forgotten the past, with all its envy and grudge!

(2) He revealed his love through his brotherly inquiry about that great number of people

who came with Jacob, to which the latter confessed that this is the grace of God that grants everything.

(3) It seems that Esau did not feel comfortable with taking the present offered to him by his brother Jacob, but wished instead to give him hospitality, together with his family, and all his servants. Jacob, in his turn, responded to these feelings with a spirit of humility and wisdom, as though apologizing for the past, and asking him to show his pleasure through receiving his present, saying to him: *“If I now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me”* (Gen. 33:10) And he urged him, and he took it.

(4) When Jacob apologized for the slow pace of his journey due to the weakness of his young children and the exhaustion of his livestock, he suggested that Esau goes ahead of him, Esau left behind some of his men to help and guide his brother.

2- JACOB IN SUCCOTH AND SHECHEM

Jacob journeyed to ‘Succoth,’ meaning ‘booths;’ many places carried this name, as for instance Succoth, where the Jews set booths for their livestock, after their exodus from the land of Egypt, not far from Rameses (Exodus 12:37); and Succoth to the west of the Jordan; But the present Succoth was located east of the Jordan, about one mile, south of the river of Jabok.

After Succoth, he set forth toward Shechem in the land of Canaan (see Gen. 12:6). In some versions, it is said: “Jacob came to Salem, city of Shechem,” namely to Salem, on the border of the land of Shechem, son of Hamor. There, he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for one hundred pieces of money.

The first task Jacob did as he returned to Canaan, was to erect an altar for the Lord, and called it ‘El Elohe Israel’ (Gen 33:20) .namely, ‘God of Israel;’ as he came to settle down in the bosom of God, through the sacred sacrifice.

Let us have in our heart, an altar for the Lord, for our depths to be a spiritual Canaan, where God transfigures through the sacrifice of the cross.

CHAPTER 34

DINAH AND THE PEOPLE OF SHECHEM

Jacob returned to the land of Canaan, and with him were eleven sons, besides Dinah, a daughter of his wife Lea. As Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land, she was violated by Shechem the son of Hamor, for which the sons of Jacob were grieved and became angry; so they killed the people of Shechem with the edge of the sword, plundered the city, and took all their wives and children captives. That action very much troubled Jacob.

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| 1- Shechem violates Dinah | 1-2. |
| 2- Hamor asks for Dinah as a wife for his son | 3-12. |
| 3- The deceitful response Jacob's sons | 13-31. |

1- SHECHEM VIOLATES DINAH

“Now Dinah the daughter of Lea, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land; and when Shechem the son of Hamor, the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her” (Gen. 34:1-2).

In our talk about Jacob's sons (Gen. 30), we saw that the eleven (later twelve), refer to the fruits of the Spirit, while Dinah, as a daughter, refers to the fruit of the flesh, that stays sanctified and responding to the fruit of the spirit, as long as the flesh is controlled in good order. But, to let Dinah go out to see the daughters of the land, she would surely lose her sanctity, corrupt the peace of her father and brothers, and cause the death of many. That is why the spiritual apostle Paul says: *“I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”* (1 Corinthians 9: 27).

Sarah was in the tent behind Abraham, as Abraham encountered God and His two angels (Gen. 18:9-10), representing the body under control in the Lord, that seeks the yearnings of the Holy Spirit. That is why the two of them enjoyed the divine promise to have Isaac; while Dinah going out to see the daughters of the land, represents the spoiled body that destroys the soul, and deprives it of its peace. Dinah, by going out to see the girls of the world, to follow their ways in life, lost her virginity and freedom, and was violated by the world.

2- HAMOR ASKS FOR DINAH, AS A WIFE FOR HIS SON

Hamor came to Jacob, asking for Dinah to be a wife for his son Shechem, after the latter violated her, for which Jacob was shocked, but he kept quiet (Gen. 34:5), waiting for the return of her brothers from the field to tell them about the incident. Considering what was done *“a disgraceful thing in Israel, by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done,”* they thought of revenge, not against Shechem alone, nor against his father together with him, but

against all the inhabitants of the city; Simeon and Levi took over themselves the execution of that inhuman task.

Hamor assumed that he was making up for Jacob's honor, by asking for Dinah to be a wife for his son, offering a proposition, he considered generous, to enter with Jacob's household into marriage relationships, to become one family; and to dwell and trade and acquire possessions in their land. Moreover, Hamor asked Jacob and his sons to set the dowry as high as they like, and he would be ready to give it willingly and gladly, according to what they say, for the sake of his son's love to Dinah!

If Shechem means 'shoulder,' and Hamor is a word derived from 'homar, or donkey,' what Shechem and his father did, refers to the work of the devil, who persuades creatures to be defiant towards God, and to behave according to carnal thought, like an animal, a donkey. The devil here violates the human soul, to get it corrupted like Dinah, by stubborn spirit and lustful thoughts. Then, pretending to solve the problem, he approaches with exaggerated tenderness and generosity, and reveals his wish for making a close marriage relationship, presenting his land, trade, and possessions as a dowry, in an attempt to draw the soul away from its true Jacob! These are the devil's tricks in every generation, attempting to draw the soul away from faith, through appearances of tenderness, generous giving, and making closer relationship. This is why the apostle Paul warns us, saying, "*What communion has light with darkness?*" (2 Corinthians 6:14)

3- THE DECEITFUL RESPONSE JACOB'S SONS

If Hamor did wrong by counting marriage like a trade bargain, being able, by his land and wealth, to acquire Dinah, Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi in particular, did wrong by their hypocrisy, and by taking advantage under the name of religion to take revenge in an inhuman way. Simeon and Levi demanded, as a condition of their consent, that Hamor, his son, and every male of the people of Shechem become circumcised in order to permit this marriage and they all become one family. As their demand was met, Simeon and Levi took their swords and killed all the males of the city, on the third day, and took Dinah out from Shechem's house and left. Their brothers took advantage of the situation: they killed many, plundered the city, and took the children and the women captives.

It was a savage crime that surely troubled Jacob's soul, for fear that the inhabitants of the land would come together and avenge the people of Shechem, since he and his household were foreigners and few in number.

If Jacob rebuked his two sons for their craftiness, he was actually drinking from the same cup that he had mixed; having previously used malice, himself, in supplanting his father's blessing; to have all his life a continuous series of bitterness, because of the deceit of others, even if these others were his own sons. Laban, his uncle deceived him ten times; and he remains until his last days reaping the result of what he had sown.

CHAPTER 35

JACOB DEPARTS TO BETHEL

Jacob, no doubt, lived all his years in Padan Aram, dreaming of the day when he would return to Bethel, where he saw the heavenly ladder, felt the awe of God's house, and made a vow to God. Now, God realizes the wish of his heart, inviting to go up to Bethel.

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|---|---------------|
| 1- Jacob departs to Bethel | 1-15. |
| 2- Birth of Benjamin and death of Rachel | 16-20. |
| 3- The sin of Reuben | 21-26. |
| 4- Death of Isaac | 27-29. |

1- JACOB DEPARTS TO BETHEL

"Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother'" (Gen. 35:1).

While Jacob was troubled in Shechem because of what his sons did, and of his fear of the neighboring nations and people, God, Himself, calls on him to go up to Bethel, to dwell and to make an altar there to God. Jacob came to 'Luz,' which is in the land of Canaan that became called Bethel; of which we previously dealt (Gen. 28:16-22). It is to be noticed:

(1) Jacob commanded his household and all who were with him, to put away the foreign gods, like the household idols which Rachel stole that were her father's, the idols that were in the servants' possession before they entered into the divine covenant, and those that Jacob's sons might have taken from Shechem. It is impossible to proclaim the sanctity of the house of God (Bethel), as long as the congregation is not sanctified! The sanctity of God's house harmonizes with that of the congregation. The two, building and congregation become a living icon of the unblemished heaven.

(2) Jacob commanded his household to change their garments. If putting the foreign gods away refers to sanctifying the soul, purifying the garments refers to the purity of the body.

(3) They gave to Jacob, all the earrings which were in their ears, together with the foreign idols, to bury them under the terebinth tree that was by Shechem. Those earrings were most probably used, beside being ornaments, for certain fictitious religious practices, as seeking goodness and putting away envy, etc.¹ Burying the earrings and the idols under the terebinth tree refers to burying all the works and thoughts of the devil under the cross. If the house of God, in its essence, is the dwelling of God amid His people, to encounter with Him, we have to bury all what are the devil's, by the power of the cross.

¹ نجيب جرجس: سفر التكوين، ص ٣٣٤.

(4) We saw that ‘Bethel,’ or the ‘House of God,’ had been called before, the city of ‘Luz,’ The Luz or almond, referring to the word of God¹; there being a close relationship between the Church, as God’s house, and the word of God. If the house of God refers to our entrance into the bosom of God, to be in Him and to enjoy His life, the goal of the word of God is our abidance in God, and our enjoyment of the union with him, in His Only-Begotten Son.

(5) As Jacob journeyed to Bethel, the neighboring peoples did not dare to pursue him, as “*The terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them*” (Gen. 35:5). The nations feeling the awe of God in the life of Jacob, dwelling in God’s house, could not pursue him.

(6) As the procession of Jacob set forth toward Bethel, “*Deborah, Rebecca’s nurse, died, and was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called ‘Allon Bachuth’*” (Gen. 35: 8). That, did not happen by coincidence, and the Bible did not mention it without significance; God intended for Deborah, Rebecca’s nurse to be buried in Bethel under the terebinth, called later ‘Allon Bachuth,’ meaning ‘the terebinth of weeping.’ If Bethel embraced the congregation of believers in the Lord, who dwells in their midst, among those believers who fell asleep, who have previously strived like a bee (Deborah), suckled many, and raised in the Lord, as what Deborah did with Rebecca. In other words, in God’s house, all those who strive, who are still on earth completing the days of their life, together with their brothers who preceded them, are all one Church, one house of the Lord.

Jacob buried his mother Rebecca’s nurse, whom she receives as a present from her family. The day she was engaged (Gen. 24:59). Nurses had a great status and respect that was close to the mother’s. Some believe that Deborah died at the age of one hundred and eighty years, brought by Jacob from his father Isaac’s household in Hebron. It seems that Jacob visited his father there more than once, and obtained his permission to take Deborah, to have her blessings as the nurse of his mother, who, probably died before returning from his sojourn with his uncle Laban.

It seems that everyone mourned her death, that the place of her burial was called “Allon Bachuth,” below Bethel, namely at a low land in or close to Bethel.

(7) Having put away the foreign gods, buried them together with the earrings, under the terebinth tree, as though under the cross, and set forth to Bethel, in pure garments, namely pure body; the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and did not pursue the sons of Jacob. The death and burial of Deborah, there, became a reference to a union of the holy congregation, on the level of both the living and the dead. And now, Jacob enjoys a divine appearance, and a confirmation of the renewal of his name, and the divine promises; the Holy Bible says: “*And God appeared to Jacob again... and said to him, ‘Your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name’ So he called his name Israel. Also God said to him, ‘I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall*

¹ Cf. our commentary on Gen 28:16-22.

proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land”(Gen. 35:9-12).

In Bethel, namely, the holy Church, we encounter with God the Almighty “Elshdai,’ not only as the Almighty One, but also who grants us in Him the capability, to live strong and capable, singing together with the apostle Paul, saying: “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:13). We encounter with God the Almighty, the Grantor of spiritual strength, to make everything in us new, and to carry a new name, not to be called Jacob anymore, but Israel, to be fruitful and multiply, according to his promise, so that our capabilities, energies, and all our feelings, would set forth by the Holy Spirit to carry the multiplying fruits of the Spirit and become, in God’s eyes, a nation, even a company of nations, as our life becomes transformed into spiritual energies without limit. And from our bodies, kings would proceed; to possess the mind, as a king of authority over every thought, and the soul, as a queen who controls with authority, all things pertaining to the body, with no exception... Finally, God grants to us and to our descendants the land He gave to our father Abraham and our father Isaac, namely, grants us the holy body (the land), as an inheritance that pleases our heart, and not as opponent to the work of the Spirit of God.

(8) Finally, Jacob dedicated the first house of God after the fall, as is said: “*Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He (God) talked with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it*” (Gen. 35:14)

Jacob presented a pillar of stone, a drink offering, and oil, that were received by God from the hands of Jacob, to make of that place a dwelling for him and His angels, He Who, heaven and earth are not wide enough for him. He lovingly accepts that place, as a sign of His dwelling in the midst of His people, attached to His children, and entering with His love into their lives.

That pillar also refers to the Lord Christ, the Cornerstone, who, amid His redeeming passion, proclaimed the drink offering, namely, that of joy for His resurrection; and received the oil of anointment, being the Messiah, Savior of the world; in whom alone, we enter to dwell in His Father’s bosom, as an eternal house that embraces the whole Church in divine love.

2- BIRTH OF BENJAMIN AND DEATH OF RACHEL

Jacob and all his procession departed from Bethel toward Ephrath; and about one mile north of Ephrath, Rachel travailed in childbirth, and she had such hard labor. And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name ‘Ben-Oni,’ meaning ‘son of my grief,’ because of the severe pain and grief she was suffering; but his father called him Benjamin, meaning ‘son of the right hand.’ Rachel was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is Bethlehem); and Jacob set a pillar on her grave, that is there to this day.

Rachel’s heart was, without doubt, aflame with hope, to have a brother to Joseph from his father and mother, and lived all the days of her pregnancy rejoicing for that gift. Why did God

allow for her death as she delivered him?

(1) God wished to confirm to man, that birth and death, in human life, go hand in hand; and that our joys intermingle with grieves, as long as we are still in our bodies.

(2) Rachel came to represent the Church of the Gentiles, and Jacob was a type of Christ the Lord. The Church kept on laboring hard with her children, that once the elects are consummated, the whole church would depart, to have eternal rest. What gives grief to the Church, to call him 'Ben-Oni,' gives joy to God, to call him Benjamin. She labors and grieves for some time, to have our grief turn to joy, when we all set forth together with God, on the clouds, and be on his right hand.

3- THE SIN OF REUBEN

After the death of Rachel, Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder, meaning 'the tower of herds,' located in the valley of shepherds, about one mile east of Bethlehem. And it happened that Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, dared to lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine, who was given to him by Rachel to give her children; Because of that defilement, Reuben lost the blessing of birthright, something that was mentioned bitterly by Jacob on his deathbed (Gen. 49:14).

What Reuben, the firstborn, dared to do, refers to what Satan did, he who was previously the 'morning star,' to whom God gave exalted possibilities and gifts, but, in the pride of his heart, deceived man to draw his heart away, the dwelling of God, for the devil to occupy, as a 'bed defiler'!

After mentioning the sin of Reuben, the Holy Bible presented us with a list of Jacob's twelve sons, of whom we have dealt before (Gen. 30).

4- DEATH OF ISAAC

Isaac breathed his last and died at the age of 180 years, and he joined his people, old and fulfilled with days (Gen. 35:29).

Isaac presented numerous fruits during his time. Age is not to be counted in years, but in how far pious life has been.

CHAPTER 36

THE DESCENDANTS OF ESAU

After Isaac's death, his sons, Jacob and Esau, buried him. The Holy Bible presented us with lists of Esau's descendants and the chiefs who proceeded from him, and the descendants of Seir, and the kings of Edom... These lists came concise, so that the believer can comprehend the future events that are to follow along the ages, on his own, as far as origin of every people or nation. It came to pass that those nations entered into faith, as the ancient Israel denied his Christ.

| | |
|--|---------------|
| 1- Wives of Esau | 1-3. |
| 2- Descendants of Esau in Canaan | 4-5. |
| 3-Departure of Esau to Seir | 6-8. |
| 4- Descendants of Esau in Seir | 9-14. |
| 5- Chiefs, the sons of Esau | 15-19. |
| 6- Sons of Seir | 20-28. |
| 7- Chiefs of Seir | 29-30. |
| 8- Kings of Edom | 31-39. |
| 9- Another list of the chiefs, sons of Esau | 40-43. |

1- WIVES OF ESAU

The names of Esau's wives were previously mentioned in (Gen. 26:24, 35; 28:9). The reason for the differences between the list mentioned here, and the one mentioned before, is that some of them carried more than one name, something that was common among men and women, as for example, calling Esau by the name of Edom, and Sarai, by the name of Sarah.

(1) Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite, was most probably Judith, the daughter of Anah the Hivite, who was himself Beerli the Hivite; that is because his father was a Hivite, and his mother was a Hittite; especially that the tribes of the Hivites and the Hittites have been descended from Canaan (Gen. 10:15, 17), and were intermarried.

(2) Adah was herself Basmath the daughter of Elon the Hittite (Gen. 26:34).

(3) Basmath daughter of Ishmael, sister of Nebajoth, was called Mahalath(Gen. 28:9).

2- DESCENDANTS OF ESAU IN CANAAN

We were presented with a list of the sons, born by Esau's wives, while he was still with his father Isaac in Canaan, who were:

(1) Eliphaz (My God is power), son of Adah.

(2) Reuel (Care of God), son of Basmath.

(3) Sons of Aholibamah: Jeush (Jehovah hastens); Jaalam (Jehovah knows); Korah

(Squash plant).

3- DEPARTURE OF ESAU TO SEIR

As Jacob and Esau became too prosperous, and their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land of Canaan could not support them because of their livestock, Jacob dwelt in the land of Canaan, to inherit with his descendants what the Lord had promised; Esau, on the other hand, departed to the land of Seir, that extended from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba, embracing a chain of mountains beside agricultural land.

Some believe that the name Seir refers to Esau himself, having been hairy; while others see it referring to a land of dense trees, that simulates a hairy body; others still believe that it refers to Seir, one of the chiefs of the Hevites (Gen. 36:20), with whose family Esau got related in marriage, having married Aholibamah, the daughter of Zibeon; Esau went and took possession in that land.

4- DESCENDANTS OF ESAU IN SEIR

The Holy Bible presented us with a list of Esau's sons and grandchildren, born to him in Seir, after departing from the land of Canaan, even though this list includes some of them, who were born in Canaan.

5- CHIEFS OF THE SONS OF ESAU

Chiefs, here, mean heads of tribes; the Hebrew word came meaning 'heads of thousands.'

6- SONS OF SEIR

Here, the seven sons of Seir the Hevite, and their grandchildren, are included.

7- CHIEFS OF SEIR

The seven sons of Seir were called chiefs, having been chiefs of tribes.

8- KINGS OF EDOM

Those kings were like the judges in Israel; their titles were not inherited, and their authority was similar to a chief of tribe.

We have previously, in the introduction to this book, commented on the phrase, "*Before any king reigned over the children of Israel*" (Gen. 36:31), by saying that it does not mean that it was written at the time of the kings of Israel, but it was written by the prophet Moses, who knew that kings will reign on Israel in eras to come, according to God's promise to the fathers, like His saying to Jacob: "*Kings shall come from your body*" (Gen. 35:11).

9- ANOTHER LIST OF THE CHIEFS OF ESAU

Some believe that certain of these chiefs took their authority by force, and not by inheritance.

CHAPTERS 37-50

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH JOSEPH

In our encounter with our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we saw how their lives were marked by abundant dealings with God, so that, out of their bodies, came the Church of the Old Testament, as a yeast that had to leaven the whole dough. And now, as we encounter with Joseph, we have before us a portrait of our Lord Jesus, having come as His symbol in several respects:

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1- Joseph, the son and the slave | Gen. 37. |
| 2- Joseph and the wife of Potiphar | Gen. 39. |
| 3- Joseph, the prisoner | Gen. 40. |
| 4- Joseph, the glorified | Gen. 41. |
| 5- Joseph's encounter with his brothers | Gen. 42. |
| 6- The second encounter with Joseph | Gen. 43. |
| 7- Calling Joseph's brothers back | Gen. 44. |
| 8- Joseph reveals his identity | Gen. 45. |
| 9- Jacob blesses Joseph and his sons | Gen. 48. |

CHAPTER 37

JOSEPH, THE SON AND THE SLAVE

If the Holy Bible introduced the life of Abraham, the Patriarch, as the one who got the promise: *“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed”* (Gen. 22:18); and as from whose seed, came the Lord Christ, the Savior of the world, and the desire of nations; and the same applies to Isaac and to Jacob; some could probably expect the Holy Bible to introduce the life of Judas, from whose seed, the Lord will come. Yet, we find him dealing with Joseph in some kind of detail, as his life carried a living symbolic portrait of the person of the Messiah, His features, redeeming work, and glories; that he was worthy of enjoying a double portion, becoming two tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph’s life is considered the connecting link between the era of the fathers and the existence of the Jews as people and nation, having opened the way before his father and brothers, to live in the land of Egypt.

In the present chapter, we find Joseph, type of Christ the Lord, being the beloved Son, and the Slave who loves his brothers, and delivers his life a ransom for them.

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- Joseph in his father’s house | 1-3. |
| 2- Joseph, the dreamer | 4-11. |
| 3- A mission of love | 12-17. |
| 4- Joseph, the victimized | 18-30. |
| 5- Dipping Joseph’s tunic in blood | 31-35. |
| 6- Joseph, the slave | 36. |

1- JOSEPH IN HIS FATHER’S HOUSE

“Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. This is the genealogy of Jacob; Joseph, being seventeen years old was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age” (Gen. 37:1-3).

Jacob dwelt in the land of Canaan as a stranger, like his father Isaac, until the time comes, and his grandchildren would receive it, as a land of promise, where they dwell, not as strangers in tents, but as citizens who build cities and houses. As though Jacob represents the soul, that wrestles spiritually on account of the kingdom, dwelling by faith in the heavenly Canaan, until it inherits it later on, to dwell there eternally.

The divine inspiration, did not find, as far as the genealogy of Jacob is concerned, greater than to talk about Joseph, as a 17 years lad, who, although was helping the sons of the two concubines: Bilhah and Zilpah, yet he was great in the eyes of God, and beloved by his father! The true greatness does not relate to the kind of work one does, nor to his position, but to his

inner life and his spiritual behavior. Joseph could captivate his father's heart more than all his brothers, to count him as the son of his old age, although there has been somebody who was younger than him.

We said that Joseph was a type of Christ the Lord, having been the one beloved to his father; and as said by **Fr. Caesarius of Arles**: [Jacob loved his son, as the Father loves His Only-Begotten Son, saying: "*This is My beloved Son*" (Matthew 3: 17)¹.]

If Joseph becomes a slave and a prisoner in the land of Egypt, because of his brothers, to get into the king's court to have the chance to fulfill the needs of his brothers; the Bible proclaimed that he was his father's beloved son. I say that he is a living portrait of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, although He, the Only-begotten Son, came to our Egypt as a slave, and entered for our sake under judgment, in order to lift us up to His heavenly palace. What I say of the Lord Christ, I say of every true believer, as it is fit for him, first to enter into a true sonship to God, to be the subject of His love, through abiding in Jesus Christ. By this sonship, we accept, through love, to become slaves, and enter under judgment for the sake of our brothers, in order to lift them up, together with us, by Jesus Christ, to taste the fellowship of His glory, and to be fulfilled by the heavenly bread. That was expressed by the apostle Paul, saying, "*For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more*" (1 Corinthians 9:19). In the water of Baptism, he enjoyed freedom in Jesus Christ; that freedom full of love, has motivated him to become a servant to all, that he might win the more, in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jacob having loved Joseph more than all his brothers, Jacob "*He made him a tunic of many colors*" (Gen. 37:3). What is that colored tunic, but the Church, of many nations, received by the Lord Christ, from His Father's hands, as a price for His love of humanity, and His entering into servitude for her sake?! This was confirmed by **St. Augustine** and **Origen**; the colored tunic is the Church, attached to the Lord Christ, as His tunic. In His transfiguration, "*His clothes became as white as the light*" (Matthew 17:2), as a reference to the Church, acquired by the Lord for Himself, and where He dwelt, being the Sun of Righteousness who illuminate it. That tunic was referred to by the apostle Paul, saying of himself, "*Then last of all, he was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time*" (1 Corinthians 15:7). That border of garment was touched by the bleeding woman (namely, the nations defiled by pagan worship), to get healed of her ailment. As to being colored, the apostle says: "*Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord*" (1 Corinthians 12:4-5).

It is the one tunic, of many colors; if one of them is removed, it would lose its beauty, as well as its durability. Thus, the Church proclaims its need for everyone of its members, whatever his color, position, work, or capacities, would be.

In a comparison to Christ the Lord, **Fr. Asterius of Amasea** (in Asia Minor c. 400) says:

¹ Ser. 98:1.

[Joseph's father made him a colored tunic; and it is said of Christ: "*My soul shall be joyful in my God. For He has clothed me with the garment of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness; as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments*" (Isaiah 61:10)¹.]

2- JOSEPH, THE DREAMER

Joseph's brothers could not stand their father's love for Joseph; they envied and hated him, so that "*they could not speak peaceably to him*" (Gen. 37:4). This bitter attitude that surrounded Joseph in his father's house could not change his heart toward his brothers, hurt his feelings, nor let him lose his peace. That is why heaven opened up before him to confirm through two consecutive dreams, that carried the same meaning, that was his entrance into glory, and submission of all to him; as though he is representing the Lord Christ, who opens His heart to humanity, that harbored animosity toward Him for no cause, delivering His life as a ransom even for His crucifiers!

Joseph dreamt that sheaves in the field, stood all around and bowed down to his sheaf; and also dreamt that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bow down to him. His brothers got the message that he was destined to reign over them, and that they are to submit to him. Instead of heading to the voice of heaven, and opening their hearts to him, "*they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words*" (Gen. 37:8), and "*envied him*" (Gen. 37:11); as though they are like the wicked vinedressers, who, "*when they saw the son,, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir, Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance*" (Matthew 21:38). The heaven proclaimed his glory, for the wicked to grow more so. Yet the good Lord turned evil into goodness, and transformed their wicked deeds into a way to consummate His divine plan.

"*His brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind*" (Gen. 37:11). Jacob comprehended that he is to submit to his son in his glory. Probably, the matter then, represented to him, an incomprehensible secret; so he kept it in mind, meditating quietly in God's works and promises. So, men of God keep in mind and heart God's proclamations, and contemplate on His dealings, like what was said of the Virgin St. Mary, "*But His mother kept all these things in her heart*" (Luke 2:51).

3- A MISSION OF LOVE

Joseph's brothers went to feed their father's flocks in Shechem; that most probably included flocks that they confiscated after killing their owners, in their revenge for what happened to their sister Dinah (Gen. 34). That is why Jacob sent Joseph to see if it is well with his brothers and well with the flocks; fearing that some tribes could have attacked them in revenge for the people of Shechem.

Joseph set forth in obedience to his father's love for his sons, despite their wicked ways

¹ On Ps. hom 19.

(Gen. 37:2), and despite their hatred and envy for his beloved and loving person; yet, it was not the obedience of fear like a slave, or of a servant anticipating his wages, but it was the obedience of a son, who loves his father and his envious brothers. He set forth from the Valley of Hebron to Shechem; and not finding them there, he sought them, and went after them to Dothan.

Joseph's mission represents that of the Only-begotten Son; and as said by **Fr. Caesarius of Arles**: [Jacob sent his son to proclaim his worry for their safety; and God the Father sent His Only-begotten Son, to visit mankind, who were weak with sin, a lost flock. As Joseph sought his brothers, he wandered in the wilderness; and the Lord Christ, as He sought mankind, He wandered in the world... Joseph sought his brothers in Shechem, that means 'shoulder;' as the sinners gave their backs to the Righteous, and put their shoulders backwards¹.]

4- JOSEPH, THE VICTIMIZED

"Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. Then they said to one another, Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, Let us kill him and cast him in some pit, and we shall say, 'some wild beast has devoured him,' We shall see what will become of his dreams" (Gen. 37:18-20).

Reuben delivered him out of their hands, so they did not kill him, but stripped him of his colored tunic and cast him into a pit that was empty of water. As they sat down to eat a meal, they saw a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. So Judas counseled his brothers to sell Joseph as a slave to the Ishmaelites; they listened to his counsel, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. When Reuben returned, and did not find Joseph in the pit, he tore his clothes, and did not know what to do.

They could not bear to see him, even afar off. Although he came to them with a mission of love, they grew more envious, because of God's work with him, and His proclamations to him. And as said by **Abbot Piamon**: [Joseph, their brother, was incapable of decreasing sharpness of envy of his brothers, who sought his death, although he did them no harm. It is obvious that envy is one of the worst of sins, and most difficult to cure; it flares up by the same medications that can combat other sins... What can you do to somebody who increases in transgression, the more your mercy and humility get. He gets envious, not out of greed for some bribe he could have, or some favor he could gain, but because of the success and happiness of others².]

What Joseph's brothers did here, carried a symbol of what the Jews did to Christ the Lord, in several respects:

a- **Fr. Asterius of Amasea** says: [Joseph's brothers accumulated a heap of bitter rebuke

¹ *Ser. 89.1.*

² *Cassian: 18:16.*

for their brother; as the Jews did to the Lord, saying, “*We are not born of fornication*” (John 8:41)... Joseph was sent to his brothers, as a physician to visit them; yet, in their eyes, he was like a conspiring enemy... Christ was sent to the world as a compassionate Shepherd, only to be looked upon as a crucified robber¹.] **Fr. Caesarius** says: [As Joseph’s brothers harbored envy, giving to the brotherly love, their backs and not their faces; the Jews preferred envy over love, toward Him who offered them salvation. Of people like these, the Psalms say: “*Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see; and make their loins shake continually*” (Psalm 69:23)².]

b- The matter did not stop at inner envy, but was translated into rebellion, conspiracy, and treason. **Fr. Caesarius** says: {Joseph found his brothers in Dothan, meaning ‘rebellion,’ as those who wished to kill their brother, were truly in a great rebellion. When they saw Joseph, they discussed his death; like what the Jews did to the true Joseph, Christ the Lord, as they all had one decision: to crucify Him... Joseph’s brothers stripped him of his colored tunic; and the Jews stripped Jesus of his clothes before crucifying Him. Joseph, stripped of his tunic, was cast into a pit; and Christ, whose body was mutilated, descended into Hades... Joseph was pulled up and lifted out of the pit, and sold to the Ishmaelites (namely to the Gentiles); and Christ, coming back from Hades, was bought by the Gentiles for the price of faith³.] So Joseph was a symbol of the Lord Christ: conspired against, cast into a pit, stripped of his tunic, and sold to the Gentiles.

c- As Judah counseled his brothers to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites, Judah, likewise, sold the Lord Christ; the former was sold for twenty pieces of silver (according to the Septuagint version, for twenty pieces of gold); while his Master was sold for thirty pieces of silver. **Fr. Caesarius** comments on that, saying: [The servant was sold for a price higher than that given for his Master. But, human calculations, have surely deceived man in the Lord’s case; He who could never be evaluated⁴.]

d- Having cast their brother into the empty pit, “*they sat down to eat a meal*” (Gen. 37:25); In the same way, having plotted to crucify Christ the Lord, the Jews sat to eat the old Passover, as food to fulfill their bodies, and not their souls.

e- The camels of the Ishmaelites who bought Joseph, were bearing spices, a kind of gum, extracted from trees of *Astraaglus*, used in medicine and for sticking things; ‘balm,’ a kind of fragrant oil, extracted by cutting the stem of a balm tree, and used in medicine and embalming; and ‘Myrrh,’ a kind of gum, extracted from a tree by the name of ‘*Cistus Creticus*,’ used in medicine. These goodies, carried by the camels of the Ishmaelites, refer to the talents and capabilities of the Gentiles that they presented as they believed in the true Joseph, to get sanctified and used on account of His kingdom.

¹ *On Ps. hom 19.*

² *Ser. 89:1.*

³ *Ser. 89:1.*

⁴ *Ser. 93:4.*

5- DIPPING HIS TUNIC IN BLOOD

Joseph's brothers tried to deceive their father, by dipping Joseph's tunic in the blood of a goat, and brought it to their father, to know whether it was his son's tunic or not; claiming that a wild beast has devoured him. Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned on his son many days.

Jacob deceived his father Isaac, and supplanted his blessing. Yet, for the purity of his heart, and his strife, he earned the blessing, as the Lord Christ came from his seed. However, he was disciplined for deceiving his father, through his sons, who let him live many days mourning with no comfort, until he encountered his long lost son in the land of Egypt.

Jacob could not look at his son's colored tunic, covered with blood; although the tunic, referring to the Church, would never have its beauty and value, unless it is dipped in the blood of the Sacrifice, our Lord Jesus Christ, who delivered Himself to death by His own will, to have His pure blood poured on His believers, granting them the power of His resurrection.

Assuming that his son died, he bitterly said: "*I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning*" (Gen. 37:35). **St. Jerome** says: [He said he will go down into the grave (Hades), as Paradise was not yet opened for the thief¹.] Everyone used to fear death, as it was a crossing over to Hades, waiting for the coming of the Lord Christ, to carry His own to His Paradise, preceded by the robber, who believed in the crucified Lord.

6- JOSEPH, THE SLAVE

"The Medianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard" (Gen. 37:36).

The beloved son was sold as a slave in Egypt. He harbored a free heart and noble soul that no outer servitude could invade his inner depths. By his inner freedom he lifted up the status of slaves, and dignified the free humanity, whatever its social status might be. **St. Jerome** says: [We read about Joseph, who, whether he was in need, or was rich, presented a proof of his integrity; who confirmed the freedom of soul, as a slave, as well as a master².]

Joseph, the son, became a slave, he was a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son, who became a servant for our sake (Philippians 2:7). **Fr. Caesarius** says: [Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Christ came down to the world!... Joseph saved Egypt from famine, and Christ freed the world from the famine to the word of God! If Joseph was not sold by his brothers, Egypt would not have been saved, and indeed, if the Jews have not crucified Christ, the world would have perished.]

He was sold to Potiphar, whose name means 'referred to Ra the god of the sun;' He was

¹ *On Ps. hom 34.*

² *Ep. 79.2.*

the captain of the guard for Pharaoh, who had the authority to condemn criminals, and to supervise the prisons (Gen. 37:36; 39:1, 20).

CHAPTER 38

JUDAH AND TAMAR

As the Lord Christ was to come from the seed of Judah, the Holy Bible had to present the succession of the descendants of Judah, in order to be able to follow the genealogy of the Lord.

Indeed - with his love for money - Judas counseled his brothers to sell Joseph. But God transformed his bad counsel to realize his divine purposes. And now, Judas set forth to marry a Canaanite. But the exalted grace of God transformed, even this action to proclaim the salvation ordainment of God.

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1- Sons of Judah | 1-5. |
| 2- Er and Tamar | 6-11. |
| 3- Judah and Tamar | 12-26. |
| 4- Birth of Perez and Zerah | 27-30. |

1- SONS OF JUDAH

“It came to pass at that time that Judas departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. And Judas saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and went in to her, so she conceived and bore him a son, and he called him Er” (Gen. 38:1-3)

Judas separated himself from his brothers and joined Hirah the Adullamite, who was probably his friend; and there he married a daughter of a Canaanite whose name was Shua, meaning ‘rich;’ as though he represents the Jewish nation that denied the true Joseph, and set forth, through its love for the world riches, to marry the pagan girl, namely the unbelief

The daughter of Shua conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan; and conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib, meaning ‘a liar’ when she bore him; as the nation carries false fruits through its attachment to denial.

Adullam, to which Hirah father of Shua, was one of the great cities of Canaan, meaning ‘a resort or refuge;’ very close to the famous cave of David in the valley of Elah, that extends from Hebron to Palestine, two or three miles south of Shokoh, and about fifteen miles north-west of Hebron. Chezib, also called Achzib in the book of Micah (Micah 1:14-15), was located close to Ein-Chezbah north of Adullam.

2- ER AND TAMAR

“Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar” (Gen. 38:6).

If Judah did wrong by his marriage to a Canaanite woman, the fruit of that fault was reflected on his sons; the Bible tells us that his firstborn son died before having children, to serve as a lesson for Judah and his other sons; but that lesson proved to have no effect on their lives. When Judas ordered his son Onan to marry Tamar, to raise an heir to his deceased brother, Er

behaved inhumanely, emitting on the ground, lest Tamar would conceive; probably because he wanted his father's inheritance to be confined to him and his younger brother Shelah, and not to be shared by the deceased brother Er. Thus because of greed for a larger share, he refused to raise an heir to his deceased brother, so God killed him as well (Gen. 38:10).

It was fit for Judas to reconsider his accounts, and to realize that he failed in raising his children; he has lost Er and Onan, and now, he has only Shelah... Instead of guiding Shelah to walk according to the spirit of his fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he said to Tamar his daughter-in-law to remain a widow in her father's house, under the pretense of the young age of his third son; saying in his heart, "*lest he also dies as his brothers did*" (Gen. 38:11). How much we need in dealing with our lives, to go deeper, and seek the real cause of corruption, to root it out, instead of acting in a superficial outer way. If Judah had rooted sin out of his family, there would not have been any need for the fears that filled his heart and mind, nor need to send Tamar back to her father's house.

3- JUDAH AND TAMAR

Shelah was grown, and Judas did not fulfill his promise to give Tamar to him as his wife. And as Judas was on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep, Tamar took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a veil, and sat in an open place at the entrance of Timnah on the way to Timnah. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, and came to her after giving her his signet and cord and his staff, as pledge, until he sends her a young goat from the flock. When he did send it to get back his pledge, his messenger did not find her there, and gave it back to Judas. It came to pass, about three months after, when Judah was told that Tamar was with a child, he said, "*Bring her out, and let her be burned*" (Gen. 38:24). As to Tamar, she revealed the signet, cord, and staff to Judah, when he acknowledged them, he said: "*She has been more righteous than I; because I did not give her to Shelah my son*" (Gen. 38:26).

In this story we notice the following:

(1) 'Timnah,' in Hebrew means 'designated portion'¹. There are more than one place with that name, but the one here, is seven miles from Adullam, where Judas and Hirah used to live; close to Bethlehem, and called nowadays Tibnah.

Judah set forth to Timnah, namely to his own portion, having been comforted after his wife, the daughter of Shua, died. He did not care about the portions of others. He did not care about the widow Tamar, his daughter-in-law. He was right in saying: "*She has been more righteous than I.*"

(2) Tamar, as any other Hebrew woman, wishing to have the Savior Messiah come from her seed, ventured to risk her own life; took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a veil, and was not ashamed to appear as a harlot, not out of lust of body, but for the sake of having

¹ *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 948.

children; she attached herself to her father-in-law, who was an old man. Her purity was apparent, in that after revealing the fact, she did not seek to be married to the brother of her deceased husband, but lived with her father-in-law, who was said, “*he never knew her again*” (Gen. 38:26).

Because of her faith, she desired to have children, while Judah, in his old age, committed adultery. That is why he said: “*She has been more righteous than I*” (Gen. 38:26). Tamar became a living example that keeps us from judgment, even if the evidence of sin seems obvious. **St. Ambrose** often comments on that phrase “*She has been more righteous than I*” in his talk about repentance, asking everyone - even the Bishop - to refrain from judging anybody, but to have compassion on sinners; saying:

[O God, Let the falls of everyone be before me, so that I bear them with him. Let me not arrogantly rebuke him, but grief and cry; as in my crying for others I cry for myself, saying, “*She has been more righteous than I.*” Let us assume that a certain girl has fallen, moved and deceived by certain circumstances. Well, we, who are much older than she is, could also fall; as in us, as well, the law of our flesh is warring against that of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin, that we do what we do not want to do (Romans 7:23); her young age might be an excuse for her, but what is my excuse? She will have to learn, but I will have to know that “*She has been more righteous than I.*”

We could accuse others for greed; Yet, let us contemplate whether we have never been as greedy; and that greed, namely the love for wealth, is the origin of all evils, that works in our bodies as a vicious serpent; That is why we should say, “*She has been more righteous than I.*”

As a Bishop gets unfairly aggressive against a certain member of the congregation, The Bishop should contemplate and say to himself, that the one whom he came against, could be more righteous than he is. When we all do that, we would be keeping ourselves from what the Lord Christ warned us against, as He said: “*Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye... Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother’s eye*” (Matt. 7:3-5).

Let us, therefore, not be ashamed of admitting that our fault is worse than this of the one, whom we are accusing; That was what Judah has done, as he rebuked Tamar; remembering his own sin, he said: “*She has been more righteous than I.*” He condemned himself, before others would condemn him¹.]

(3) By that work of faith, Tamar became qualified to become a grandmother to Christ the Lord; to have her blood run in His veins; that Matthew, the Evangelist included her name in the genealogy of the Lord Christ (Matthew 1:23); while not including the names of Sarah, Rebecca,

¹ ترفقوا بالخطاة!!... للقديس أمبروسوس ١٩٦٨، ص ٦٠، ٦١.

or any other of the blessed mothers.

Tamar has been a symbol of the Gentile nations, who became a holy Church of the Lord; that has been before fruitless like Tamar, like a desolate widow, with nobody to support or to help. Her first near kinsman 'Shelah' did not marry her; so she attached herself to the second near kinsman, namely Judah. In the same way, the Gentile nations did not attach themselves to their first kinsman, namely to the Mosaic Law, nor committed themselves to circumcision or Judaism, but attached themselves to the second near kinsman, namely to the true Judah, our Lord Jesus Christ, who came from the tribe of Judas.

Actually, the actions of Tamar carried many symbols that are analogue to those enjoyed by the Church of the Gentiles of which are:

a- Tamar took off her widow's garments, to attach herself to Judas. Likewise, the nations of the Gentiles took off the garments of the old man, to put on those of new man, that would fit her union with the eternal Groom; Christ Himself has even become her new Garment.

b- Tamar covered her face with a veil. Likewise, the nations of the Gentiles, having received faith, are living here in a mystery, until the time comes, when they encounter the Groom, face to face, to behold Him in the perfection of His glory, and the greatness of His splendor; they would then be able to recognize His exalted secrets.

c- Tamar sat at the entrance of Enaim (Gen. 38:14 NIV), meaning that of the 'two springs;' as though she is the Church of the Gentiles, that did not enjoy the spring of the Old Testament alone, but that of the New Testament as well.

d- Tamar enjoyed Judah's signet, cord, and staff; namely the signet of sonship to God, the heavenly crown, and the life-giving cross.

e- The signs of pregnancy appeared after three months; as though it is the Church of the Gentiles, that carried spiritual fruits, through her belief in the Holy Trinity (three months), and her enjoyment of life resurrected in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was risen in the third day.

(4) Some scholars believe that a regular harlot did not cover her face with a veil; but who used to do that, was a woman who vowed herself to harlotry, for the sake of gods, especially 'Ashteroth,' goddess of the moon, to collect from every man the skin of one goat, to offer to the temple of the goddess. That is why the word 'harlot,' in the Hebrew text, came as 'Kadsha,' namely a 'saint' or a 'Nazirite' to the goddesses.

By so doing, Tamar occupied the position of a Gentile girl, a worshipper of idols, to represent the nations of the Gentiles, that, after being connected to defilements, attached themselves to faith in the New Judas, in order to enjoy the holy pure life, and to have a portion in the Lord.

4- BIRTH OF PEREZ AND ZERAH

And so it was, when Tamar was giving birth, that Perez put out his hand, and the midwife bound a scarlet thread on his hand; yet he drew back his hand, that his brother Zerah came out

first, before Perez did. Some fathers see in Zerah a representative of the Jewish people, who was supposed to be the firstborn; put out his hand to receive the Law, that centralized around the sacrifice (the scarlet blood); Yet, through unbelief, Zarah, representative of the Gentiles, came out first; those who came to have the birthright of the spirit, instead of Zerah, (the Jews)¹.

¹ للمؤلف: الإنجيل بحسب متى ١٩٨٣، ص ٤٣.

CHAPTER 39

JOSEPH AND THE WIFE OF POTIPHAR

If Judah, the free son, had enslaved himself to the lust of his body, and married the Canaanite, the daughter of Shua; Joseph, the slave, on the other hand, proclaimed his true freedom, when his master's wife could not take over his heart, or defile his body, despite the bitter circumstances in which that young man lived.

Indeed, if the name 'Joseph' means 'growth' or 'addition,' he practiced, in his life, consistent growth: in his love for his brothers, despite their hatred for him; and now, in his enjoyment of purity in the midst of servitude.

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|---|---------------|
| 1- Joseph in the house of Potiphar | 1-6. |
| 2- Joseph and his master's wife | 7-10. |
| 3- Joseph and his garment | 1-18. |
| 4- Joseph in prison | 19-23. |

1- JOSEPH IN THE HOUSE OF POTIPHAR

We did not hear about Joseph, while in his father's house, that the house was blessed because of him, nor was said, "*The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man*" (Gen. 39:2). That was not because Joseph was not a blessing in his father's house, or that he was not successful, but, as he was enjoying his father's bosom, and his colored tunic, he was not in need of a word of encouragement. But, when he was sold as a slave in a strange land, and became deprived of any family emotion, the divine inspiration proclaimed that the Lord Himself was with him, granting him success, and giving him favor in his master's eyes; as it is said: "*The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field. So He (Potiphar) left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. And Joseph was handsome in form and appearance*" (Gen. 39:5-6).

Joseph, in Jacob's house, was like a bottle of expensive fragrant oil, kept closed, for nobody to enjoy its smell; but once it was broken by the afflictions of servitude, and deprivation of family love, its fragrance filled Potiphar's house and field. So, seeing in Joseph the work of God, he loved him dearly, and put everything in his hand. Everybody saw him handsome in form and appearance, as affliction revealed the inner beauty of his face, as well as the peace of his heart and mind.

The same thing happened with his father Jacob; who could not enjoy the heavenly ladder, nor the mysteries and glories of the cross, while still in his father's tent, and in the bosom of his mother Rebecca; But he did, once he became a fugitive with no human help, placing his head on Christ (the Cornerstone).

If we could say, that we could never have recognized the true Joseph, as being, “*Fairer than the sons of men*” (Psalm 44), until he was lifted up on the cross, and crossed the winepress alone, for our sake; That is why the Church praises him by saying: “*Your name is ointment poured forth. Therefore the virgins love you*” (Song 1:3).

2- JOSEPH AND HIS MASTER’S WIFE

The Church stands, all along the ages, before the pure Joseph, who refused to defile his body, with respect and honor. The heart that was filled with true love, even for his brothers who hated him, has no place for carnal lust, nor a need for the emotion of a strange woman. Joseph succeeded in the temptation set for him by the enemy through his master’s wife, not because of human dignity, nor of an earlier upbringing, but because of the love that filled his heart. That was confirmed by **St. John Chrysostom**, as he compared between Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, proclaiming that Joseph had practically loved her; In his talk to her, he did not hurt her feelings with a single harsh word... he did not hint that she was intending to commit adultery; but humbly said: “*Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and has committed all that he has in my hand. There is no greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife*” (Gen. 39:9).

He is reminding her that she is his mistress, and his master’s wife, proclaiming that he could not pay for their generosity toward him, by treason! He proclaims that he is the servant who serves, and not betray. He made it clear, that his relationship with them, is in the Lord, saying: “*How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?*” (Gen. 39:9)

He loved her in the Lord, and submitted to her in the Lord. The sign of his true love was that he did not say anything disgraceful about her, when he was unfairly put in prison; nor avenged her, when he was glorified by Pharaoh! On the contrary, Potiphar’s wife loved him only carnally, or, in other words, she loved the lusts of her body, as proved by her putting him in prison, and exposing him to death.

Fr. Caesarius says: [I believe that she neither loved him, nor loved herself. If she loved him, how could she wish to destroy him?! And if she loved herself, how could she wish to disgrace herself?! She was not in love, but was burning with the poison of lust. She was not shinning with the flame of the truth¹.]

In his talk with her, who loved him ferociously, he kept on calling her man, “*My master.*” He did not use her evil emotions to control her, nor to let her feel that he is equal to her, but adorned himself with the spirit of humility; and as **St. Ambrose** says: [Although Joseph was from the family of the great Patriarchs, he was not ashamed of the lowly servitude, but he adorned it by his readiness for service, and glorified it by his virtues².]

¹ *Ser.98:1.*

² *Duties of the Clergy 2:17.*

3- JOSEPH AND HIS GARMENT

As they were home alone, she caught him by his garment, so “*He left the garment in her hand and fled and ran outside*” (Gen. 39:2). He was aware of the probable consequences of his escape: nakedness, disgrace, and false accusation, and probably also death. Yet, he accepted all that, as a price for his relationship with God and his purity. By that, the young Joseph became a living role model for purity; and as said by **Fr. Caesarius**: [In the Church there are three role models for purity, the example of whom we should follow: Joseph, Sosanna, and St. Mary; Men should follow the example of Joseph, women should follow that of Sosanna, and virgins should follow that of St. Mary¹.]

If it was said about Joseph, that he was “*handsome in form and appearance*” (Gen. 39:6), leaving his garment in the hands of his mistress, revealed his purity, the beauty of his soul, and the sweetness of his heart; and as said by **Fr. Caesarius**: [Joseph was more handsome inside than outside, in his heart that the woman could not penetrate to enjoy its beauty, than his outer body².] **St. John Chrysostom**³ says that Joseph became naked, to become more splendid than others; as though he returned to how Adam has not been ashamed of his nakedness in Paradise, because of his purity.

Joseph became a living role model of courage and fleeing from evil. Of the sayings of Fathers in this concern:

❖ If you are still pure, be more so by avoiding looking at indecent things, and hearing improper talk...Do not seek vain excuses, but have only one solution... leave the Egyptian harlot, and escape even naked⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Joseph fled leaving his garment, to avoid hearing what could contradict his purity, as he, who enjoys listening, is encouraging the other who talks⁵.

St. Ambrose

❖ If you can follow Joseph’s example, and leave your garment in the hand of your Egyptian mistress; in your nakedness you are following your Lord and Savior, who says in the Bible, that whoever do not forsake all what he has and bear his cross and follow Me, will not be my disciple⁶.

❖ When you are on the housetop, do not think about your garment that is down (Matthew 24: 17, 18); To flee from your Egyptian mistress, forsake the garment that belongs to this world...

¹ Ser. 93:3.

² Ser. 90:2.

³ In Matt. Hom 18:2.

⁴ In Matt. Hom 37:8.

⁵ Duties of the Clergy 1:18.

⁶ Ep. 145.

Even Elijah, in his quick move to heaven, could not take his mantle with him, but left the garments of the world there in the world (2 Kings 2:11,13)¹.

St. Jerome

Fr. Asterius, Bishop of Amasea, believes that what Joseph did, strongly bore what was realized in our Lord Jesus Christ, saying: [An Egyptian woman caught Joseph by his garment, so he left his garment in her hand and fled away... Christ The Lord forsook death that took hold of Him, leaving his linen clothes in the tomb. The Egyptian woman got Joseph's garment in her hand, but could not get Joseph himself... The linen wraps were in the tomb that could not keep the Lord in it².]

4- JOSEPH IN PRISON

Potiphar's wife could not have Joseph's heart, so he took hold of his garment, and cried out accusing him of evil, to arouse the anger of her husband: *"He took him and put him into the prison, a place where the King's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison"* (Gen. 39: 20, 21)

Joseph succeeded in his father's house, as a son who loved those who hated him; so God got him into servitude, to proclaim his success as a foreign slave; and having succeeded in his servitude, and adorned it with virtues. God got him in prison, to be glorified in him in the midst of criminals. God gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison, who committed everything to Joseph's hand, and: *"The Lord was with him, and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper"* (Gen. 39:23).

How beautiful are the words of **St. John Chrysostom**: [Joseph, in his shackles, was more glorified than any victorious crowned leader; while Potiphar's wife, even in her royal dwellings, was more miserable than any prisoner³.]

The divine inspiration confirmed that *"The Lord was with Joseph."* By this the prison turned into heaven; as wherever the Lord is, that place turns to heaven! Jonah encountered the Lord, buried in the tomb, when he was inside the whale, amid the raging waves of the sea; and the Word of God appeared among the three young men amid the flames of fire, while the Pharisee was deprived of the encounter with God in the temple, as he stood haughtily counting his virtues! I am not underestimating by this, the holiness of the temple, but I wish we encounter with God wherever we are! God wants us to become a sanctuary for the Lord, and a temple for His Holy Spirit, to carry Him inside us wherever we go. Thus, the prison was transformed in Joseph's life, into a new encounter with the Lord, on a level, probably deeper than what he has

¹ Ep. 118:4.

² On Ps. 5. hom 19.

³ In Matt. Hom 84:4.

been, in his father's house. Or in that of his master.

Anyhow, the wicked woman cast Joseph into prison to destroy him; and there he found success and grace; the prison was transformed into a way to glory; and as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [So are God's ordainment, that things that seem to harm us, are, themselves, that benefit us. That is what occurred in Joseph's case; his mistress intended to destroy him, yet while doing that, she placed him into security. The house where that monster (woman) has been kept, was for Joseph, a sort of pit, while the prison was for him a mercy. When he was in her house, surrounded by endearment and love (her flirtation), he was in terror that she would entrap him; but once he was accused and cast in prison, he got rid of that monster and of its corruption and perishing plots. So, it was better for him, to be put into a miserable place (prison), amid humans, than to be in a place dwelt by a crazy woman... Actually, he was not cast into prison, but he set forth from one. She turned his master into an enemy, but made of God a friend of his! She let him enter into a closer relationship with God, the true Friend¹.]

¹ *In Acts hom 49.*

CHAPTER 40

JOSEPH IN PRISON

Joseph entered prison, not for anything wrong he did, but as a price for the lust of Potiphar's wife. Similarly, the Lord descended to us and passed the winepress, not because of any evil, he might have done, but in redemption of humanity that was defiled. In prison, Joseph encountered with the two eunuchs (officers) of Pharaoh, as though he is the Lord Christ, crucified between two robbers.

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| 1- The two eunuchs in prison | 1-4. |
| 2- The dreams of the two officers | 5-19. |
| 3- Realization of the two dreams | 20-23. |

1- THE TWO EUNUCHS (OFFICERS) IN PRISON

Having got angry with his two eunuchs: the chief butler and the chief baker of the king of Egypt, he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, where they found Joseph to serve them honestly and compassionately. Joseph, according to **St. John Chrysostom**, lived in prison, as though in his own house, caring for other prisoners, as his own family. He was characterized by meekness, tenderness, and obedience; He was not ashamed of his servitude, nor of his prison, but was compassionate to all, serving all, even the fiercest of prisoners. So Joseph was prosperous wherever he went¹.

2- THE DREAMS OF THE TWO EUNUCHS

The two eunuchs dreamt a dream in one night and in one place, and were both sad. But Joseph said to them, "*Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please*" (Gen. 40:8). What does that mean?

(1) The two officers, probably refer to the two robbers, who were crucified with the Lord Christ² - the true Joseph - and were blaspheming Him; But the one on the right proclaimed his repentance, and took hold of Paradise, to remain with God, while the one on the left stayed on his evil and blasphemy, to lose both his present and eternal lives. The two officers refer to the fallen mankind; yet some of them crossed over wrath, to Paradise, while others, in their denial, eternally lost their lives.

Who was he, who gained God's mercies, but the chief butler, who offered the cup of grapes juice to Pharaoh; as though he is like the congregation of believers who receive the blood of the Lord Christ in the cup of their life, and cross in faith with Him, the winepress, so the Father would be pleased by the sacrifice of His Son, capable of salvation. As to the chief baker,

¹ *In Tit. hom 4.*

² *Asterius of Amasea: On Ps. 5 hom 19.*

he carried all kinds of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on his head. It seems that that food snatched by birds, refer to the works of the Law, on which the Jews leaned, through their literal worship, or their works of self-righteousness, works that are not connected to faith, to get snatched by the devil, and would not be the object of pleasure to God.

(2) The two officers of Pharaoh refer to the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). The chief butler was like a virgin, and offered in his cup the juice of vine; as though representing the wise virgins, who carried their lamps full of the oil of faith, living and working by love¹.

(3) The chief butler saw in his dream a vine with three branches; it was as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes (Gen. 40:10); and the chief baker saw himself carrying on his head three baskets. Joseph interpreted the figure “3” as three days, at the end of which the first will enjoy restoration to his place, and the other will face death.

In our study of the Books of Exodus and Joshua, we saw that figure “3” refers to the resurrection from the dead, together with the Lord Christ who was risen on the third day². As though the dream of the chief butler refers to the resurrection of the Lord Christ and our resurrection with Him. And what was realized in case of the chief baker, refers to the death of the Lord Christ and our being buried together with Him. He started by the resurrection, in order that we would not be terrified of death and burial, as the apostle Paul did when he said: *“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowships of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”* (Philippians 3:10).

The chief butler probably refers to the congregation of true believers, who received the signs of resurrection in them as a fragrance of life; while the chief baker refers to those in whom the work of Christ became a fragrance of death, because of their denial; and as the apostle says: *“Now thanks be to God who always lead us in triumph in Christ, and 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. To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to others the aroma of life to life”* (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

Despite what Joseph achieved of that Exalted status, that made him a type of Christ the Lord in His death and resurrection, and a type of Him in His crucifixion between two robbers, yet, in human weakness he leaned upon human arm, as he asked the chief butler to make mention of him to Pharaoh; and though he talked decently, he did not hurt the feelings of Potiphar or his wife, saying: *“For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon”* (Gen. 40:15).

God, in his love for Joseph chastened him on his behavior; and as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [Joseph, eager to be released from prison, was left there for sometime... so as to

¹ St. Augustine: Ser. On N.T. Lessons 43:1-5.

² Cf. our Commentary on Exod. 2:2; 5:5; Jos. 1:31.

learn not to put his hope or trust in humans, but in God alone¹.]

3- REALIZATION OF THE TWO DREAMS

The two dreams were realized on the third day, according to Joseph's interpretation, on the birthday of Pharaoh, who made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler, and restored him to his butlership again, while the chief baker was hanged, as Joseph interpreted. It is a day of new birth, in which the new man (the chief butler), who crosses over the vine press, lives, while the arrogant old man (the chief baker) dies, he who placed the bread in the uppermost basket.

¹ *In Tit. hom 6.*

CHAPTER 41

JOSEPH THE GLORIFIED

Joseph graduated of the school of true love. His heart was filled with love for his brothers who hated him; he succeeded in Potiphar's house, serving in love, and lastly in prison among the prisoners. And in due time, God lifted him up to the royal palace; as though he is Christ the Lord, who descended for us to the prison of Hades, to raise us with Him up to His heavenly palace, granting us the heavenly bread.

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|---|---------------|
| 1- The two dreams of Pharaoh | 1-8. |
| 2- Summoning Joseph | 9-16. |
| 3- The interpretation of the two dreams | 17-32. |
| 4- Joseph's counsel | 33-36. |
| 5- Joseph and the signet ring of Pharaoh | 37-46. |
| 6- Joseph and laying up the grain | 47-49. |
| 7- The two sons of Joseph | 50-52. |
| 8- Joseph satisfies Egypt | 53-57. |

1- THE TWO DREAMS OF PHARAOH

Joseph asked the chief butler to make mention of him to Pharaoh, without defaming the reputation of Potiphar's wife. But, because of his leaning upon human arm, God left him two years in prison. In due time, designated by God, God, Himself, talked to Pharaoh's heart through two dreams that troubled his spirit.

Pharaoh, standing by the river, saw seven cows, fine looking and fat, and they fed in the meadow; then seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt. The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows, and remained as they were: ugly and gaunt (Gen. 41:1-4). As Pharaoh slept, he dreamt a second time, and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good; to be devoured by seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, that sprang up after them.

Joseph interpreted the two dreams, to indicate that God has confirmed to Pharaoh what was about to happen; that seven years of great plenty will come throughout the land of Egypt, to be followed by seven years of severe famine that will deplete the land.

If the Nile River refers to the water of baptism, through which the Lord set forth with His Holy Church, symbolized by the fine looking and fat cows; the devil would set forth like a marine beast, together with his evil followers, ugly and gaunt, aiming to devour the Church by the end of ages. The Lord Christ says: "*Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved*" (Matthew 24:22). "*So as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand*" (Matthew 24:25). Christ the Lord presented us with a bitter description of the

coming of the Antichrist at the end of time, whose interpretation by many Fathers, we have previously dealt¹.

As to the heads of grain, the Church represents those thin heads, on one stalk, blighted by the east wind, of which **St. Hippolytus of Rome**² says that the Antichrist will blow from the east as scorching wind that burns the holy plantation. So the Antichrist attacks, together with his followers, the Church of Christ, to corrupt it at the end of time.

It seems that it will be bitter days, when the Antichrist will appear, of whom the apostle Paul says: "*when the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

And as **Origen** deals with the Antichrist, in his homilies on the Book of Jeremiah, he thanks God that will not be present in those days, wondering, if there would be one believer in every Church?! By that, **Origen** reflects the view of the Church of the second century, concerning the Antichrist.

2- SUMMONING JOSEPH

It came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, Pharaoh sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. When he told them his dreams, there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh. Then the chief butler remembered what occurred with him and the chief baker, as they were in prison, and how the Hebrew lad interpreted both their dreams; and how, just as he interpreted, so it happened. The chief butler told Pharaoh, who sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily; and he shaved and changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh. When Pharaoh told him about his dreams, Joseph said: "*It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace*" (Gen. 41:16).

If letting hair grow, and putting on the prison clothing, refer to divine incarnation, as Christ the Lord adopted our nature, yet without corruption, and put on our body, what Joseph did, as he shaved and changed his clothing before entering to Pharaoh, refer to the Lord Christ, who lifts us up to His glory, to the bosom of His Father, after casting off our disgrace, and changing our first nature to one that fits our enjoyment of His life. In Jesus Christ, we take off our old man, to put on the new man, who is in the image of his Creator.

3- THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TWO DREAMS

Pharaoh told Joseph about his two dreams, and how the magicians could not interpret them to him. Here, Pharaoh represents the world that God used to address through dreams and symbols, especially during the Mosaic era, up till the time when Christ the Lord - the True

¹ للمؤلف: الإنجيل بحسب متى ١٩٨٣، ص ٤٩١ - ٥٢٣.

² راجع مقالة عن: "عن المسيح وضد المسيح".

Joseph - came to reveal the symbols, to speak to us mouth to mouth, to grant us the good counsel, through getting the leadership of our lives, and to establish stores of spiritual grain in our depths.

How much we need to set forth from the magicians and wise men to the True Joseph, not to lean anymore upon our human understanding; but by faith encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, to reveal to us the divine mysteries, to lead our life in the time of fulfillment, as well as in the time of famine, and to get our spiritual ordinance, in order to get us out of the affliction of this world, to the perfection of His eternal glory!

4- JOSEPH'S COUNSEL

Joseph did not stop at interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, but gave him a good counsel, according to the divine wisdom, saying: *"Let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt... Let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine"* (Gen. 41:33-36).

Joseph's counsel was concentrated in the following points:

(1) A need for a discerning and wise man to be set by Pharaoh over the land of Egypt. Pharaoh's response to that request was: *"Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God? And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word"* (Gen. 41:38-40).

As God gives us insight, so as not to live any more under the shadow of the Law, but to have the two dreams revealed, so as to discern the truth instead of the shadow, the symbolized instead of the symbol, we discover that truth, that we are in need of Him, Who receives our land, and ordains our inner life, by divine wisdom, so as to say to our Joseph: If You made us know Truth, and enlightened us to the way to heaven, Can we find anyone as discerning and as wise as you?! Who could be over my inner house, and could fulfill my senses, my emotions, and all my energies, but You? In other words, as Christ the Lord gets us to enter His heavenly secrets, our need for Him, would increase, and our depths would flare with yearning toward Him, to say with the bride: *"When I found the one I love, I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me"* (Song 3:4).

If Pharaoh's heart got attracted to Joseph, saying: *"Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?"* How much more should we be attracted to Him, whose the Spirit of God is His Spirit?!, the One with the Holy Spirit in Godhead?!

The apostle Paul says: *"For Christ is the end of the Law"* (Romans 10:4). As the Lord Christ reveals to us the secrets and depths of the Law, we discover that its goal is to push us

toward Christ as a Savior, and a Groom to human soul. That is probably why the Psalmist cries out: “*With Your light, O God, we behold the light.*” As though he is saying: By Your Christ, who is Your light, we discover the mysteries of Your Law, to enter with us to Christ Himself, being “the divine Light.” Christ is the Way, as well as the end!

(2) Joseph asks Pharaoh to appoint officers over the land, under the leadership of that wise man. Who are these officers, but the sanctification of senses, to have all our senses controlled and sanctified in the Lord, to work, not according to the whims of the body, but according to the counsel of Christ the Lord, the Overseer of our whole life.

It is noteworthy that Christ the Lord did not appoint any supervisor over our senses, but the Holy Spirit, who, alone, can sanctify and formulate our senses, according to His divine will. **St. Anthony** said: [The Holy Spirit instructs man on how to keep the whole body - from the head to the feet - in harmony; to keep the eyes to be pure; to keep the ears to hear in peace, and not to find pleasure in talking about others and defaming others; to keep the tongue just to pray, giving weight to every word, so that no defiled or carnal thing would intermingle with our talk; to keep the hands, to be lifted for prayers, and to work for mercy and generosity; to keep the stomach, to have appropriate limits for food and drink, according to what is right for sustaining the body, and not letting lust and greed deviate it from its right course; and keep the feet, to walk according to the will of God, to do the good works. By that, the whole body would get under the authority of the Holy Spirit; to change gradually, until it, to a certain extent, shares the features of the spiritual body, that it gains at the just resurrection¹.]

(3) Joseph counseled Pharaoh to gather one fifth of all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain, as reserve for the land for the seven years of famine that shall be in the land of Egypt. That was a wise counsel, which should be adopted by every believer spiritually. In times of his spiritual comfort, and when his heart flares with love for God, he should take the opportunity to gather, on account of the kingdom of God, in the innermost stores of his heart, so that, being honest and committed at those times, God, Himself, would support him at times of draught, and at times of temptations.

As much as our honesty is, in times of spiritual flare, and we making use of every opportunity for continuous growth, we shall find abundance of free help from God, in times of negligence... Because He is honest, and “*not unjust to forget your work and labor of love*” (Hebrew 6:10). If, under the Law, we are committed to give tithes, in the era of grace, we should give in abundance. The one fifth, here, does not imply a certain sum, but a surrendering our five senses to Him.

(4) As we set on earth, storehouses, “*land would not perish during the famine*” (Gen. 41:36), namely, if our body carried in it, stores of spiritual grain, sin would be incapable of

¹ للمؤلف: الفيلوكاليا ١٩٦٦، ج ١، ص ٥٨، ٥٩.

corrupting it through famine, but would not perish during periods of affliction.

5- JOSEPH AND THE SIGNET RING OF PHARAOH

Pharaoh felt that Joseph is a man in whom is the Spirit of God (Gen. 41:38), a man discerning and wise, so he said to him: *“See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand, and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck. And had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out, ‘Bow the knee’”* (Gen. 41:41-43).

How amazing! The one considered by his brothers as worthy of death, is honored by the pagan king, and set by him over all the land of Egypt. His brothers took off his colored tunic, and the stranger presented him with a garment of white linen. His brothers sold him as a slave, and the pagan gives him his signet ring, put a gold chain around his neck, and had him ride on his second chariot. His brothers humiliated him, and the stranger cried out, ‘Bow the knee to him.’

Who is that Joseph, but Christ the Lord, rejected by His nation, as a King to reign over their hearts, to ordain their lives, and transfigure in their depths?! Who is that Joseph, but every true believer who abides in Christ the Lord, to become rejected by his brothers, and for his righteousness testified for by the strangers?!

Pharaoh, on the other hand, represented the pagan peoples who received the Lord Christ - the slave rejected by His brothers - to reign spiritually over them, and to take over leadership of their lives; We can say, as well, that he also represents the Father. Just as Joseph came out of prison, to encounter with Pharaoh, and be given his signet ring from his hand, the white linen garment, the gold chain, and the chariot, the Lord Christ, who, for our sake became a slave; descended to Hades as to a prison; and on our account, set forth to receive, in our name from the Father, the signet ring of sonship, so we became in Him children of God, enjoyed His righteousness as a white linen garment with no blemish or defilement; got the fellowship of His glories, proclaimed in the gold chain; enjoyed the heavenly chariot; set forth toward heaven, from glory to glory, and from power to power; and became in Him dignified kings.

Joseph was called by the name of ‘Zaphnath-Paaneah,’ that means in Hieroglyph ‘food of life,’ a title truly fit for Christ the Lord, who did not set earthly storehouses to gather the grain of the good years, but offered Himself as Heavenly Bread, whoever eats of It would not hunger, forever. Some believe that name to mean in Hebrew ‘Savior of the world’ or ‘Proclaimer of secrets.’

Pharaoh gave him a wife, Asenath, the daughter of ‘Poti-Pherah Priest of On, symbolizing in this, the union of Christ the Lord to His bride, coming from the Gentiles, where her father worshipped, and was a priest of the idols; The name Asenath is that of the goddess of wisdom. That of her father, Poti-Pherah, means ‘the one related to Ra, God of the sun;’ and ‘On’ was ‘Heliopolis, city of the sun. It is claimed that Asenath, has been a beautiful and decent girl,

who loving Joseph dearly, she forsook the idol worship, and clang to the Living God. Anyhow, I wish that we be counted as Asenath to become wise enough to forsake the worship of the sun of this world, and attach ourselves to the sun of righteousness, as an eternal Groom.

6- JOSEPH AND LAYING UP THE GRAINS

Joseph gathered up in every city, all the food of the seven plentiful years, *“He gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was without number”* (Gen. 41:48-49)

When we deliver our life in the hand of the Lord Christ, our life would be flooded, and fulfilled beyond human counting. Void would never infiltrate into our mind, heart, or feelings! God would stretch His hands to give in abundance, bringing forth in us living and persistent fountains.

7- JOSEPH’S TWO SONS

During the years of abundance, Asenath, Joseph’s wife, bore him two sons, Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, for ‘God has made him forget all his toil and all his father’s house.’ And the name of the second Ephraim, for ‘God has caused him to be fruitful in the land of his affliction’ (Gen. 41:51-52).

The soul that gets attached to Christ the Lord will bear, like Asenath, two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim. The first representing the passive side, namely, forgetting all toils of life, together with the house of his old father. The second represents the positive side, as Ephraim means ‘increasing fruit.’ It is not enough to forget the past, but it is fit to produce fruit in the Lord.

If Asenath represents the virtuous life, as it is the union with the true Joseph, this virtuous life, as expressed by **St. John Chrysostom**¹, does not stop at forsaking evil or forgetting it, but should, likewise, do good. virtue, in the Lord Christ, has two integrated aspects: forgetting evil, and acting with goodness. Namely, guarding oneself from sin, with readiness to the real righteousness.

8- JOSEPH SATISFIES EGYPT

We end our talk here, by contemplating in the amazing plan of God. He allowed Joseph to be cast in prison, in order to deliver the Egyptians from famine, and to give life to his family. He is a type of Christ the Lord, Who became as slave, and accepted the verdict of the cross, in order to offer Himself as Heavenly Bread, to fulfill the Gentiles, and, in the end of days, to receive His own, accept faith after such a long denial.

¹ للمؤلف: القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم ، ١٩٨٠ ، ص ٣٧٤ ، ٣٧٥ .

CHAPTER 42

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS IN EGYPT

Having deprived themselves from Joseph by selling him, all Canaan lost the blessing, and came under famine, while Egypt got blessed by him, to become the source of satisfaction to the hungry. And now, feeling the hunger, those brothers had to go to Egypt to buy themselves grain, as though representing the congregation of Jews who betrayed the Lord Christ, and sold Him for a little silver, and at the end of days, feeling the real hunger, would leave Canaan, and depart to Egypt, namely, to the Church of the Gentiles, to seek what it had lost: Faith in Christ the Lord. But, it will not encounter with Him, as long as it is committed to Zionism, attached to worldly ambitions.

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- Jacob sends his sons to Egypt | 1-4. |
| 2- Presenting themselves before Joseph | 5-28. |
| 3- Return to Canaan | 20-38. |

1- JACOB SENDS HIS SONS TO EGYPT

“When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, ‘Why do you look at one another?’ and he said, ‘Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die’”(Gen. 42: 1, 2).

Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, probably from traders who do business there, or from the surrounding people who had to go there to buy grain; so he instructed his sons to go down to that place. In the present text, we note the following:

(1) The word ‘Jacob’ was repeated more than once. ‘Israel’ was not mentioned, despite the fact that he was promised to be called ‘Israel,’ and not ‘Jacob’ anymore. ‘Jacob’ here, does not represent the people of God, but the ‘Jews,’ who lost faith in Christ the Lord, namely, the true Joseph. They are not counted as the spiritual Israel, or the people of God, because of their denial.

(2) Now, Jacob resort, through his sons, to Egypt, to live and not to die; as the Jews have lost the Source of their life - the True Joseph -, while the Gentiles - Egypt - received the true Source of life.

(3) Jacob said to them, *“Go down to that place”* as the Jews were characterized by pride that led them to denial. That is why that invitation is directed to every arrogant soul, to forsake its pride, and *“go down there,”* namely, to the Church of Christ the Lord, marked by the Spirit of her humble Groom.

(4) Jacob said to them: *“Why do you look at one another?!”* It was fit for them to look up to the Source of satisfaction, to where Joseph is, instead of looking at each other. It is as though Jacob’s words represent an invitation to the soul to wake up and come out of its shell to open to

Christ the Lord. The closed heart lives hungry, while the one open to God and men would be satisfied with God, the source of every satisfaction.

(5) Only 10 of Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt (Gen. 42:3), without Benjamin, as Jacob feared that some calamity might befall him, like what happened to Joseph. That first setting forth of the ten, refers to setting forth toward Christ the Lord, through our spiritual comprehension of the Law (10 commandments of the Law). But we shall never encounter with Joseph, on the level of love, except with Benjamin 'son of the right,' namely, with our attachment to the Bible, that grants us the right to enjoy the right of God.

2- PRESENTING THEMSELVES BEFORE JOSEPH

When Canaan was enjoying prosperity, Jacob and his sons did not think about an encounter with Joseph. Most probably the sons of Jacob forgot all about Joseph, assuming that they would never see him again. But God with His love allowed famine in Canaan, in order to give them the chance to encounter with Joseph. God does not wish for our humiliation, nor seek our hunger; but as we lose our inner Joseph, our depths become dry and hungry; so God allows for famine on land, so that, when we discover our inner hunger, we seek our Joseph, to satisfy the inside as well as the outside.

The Holy Bible says: "*Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth*" (Gen. 42:6).

Joseph took on himself the task of selling grain from outlets on the eastern frontiers of Egypt; probably to make sure that strangers, coming from abroad, would not abuse the fortune of Egypt; or because of his flaring yearning for his father and brothers, whom he expected eventually to come buy grain. When they actually came, he recognized them, but acted as a stranger and spoke roughly to them. His behavior in that encounter carried the following significance:

(1) Representing the Lord Christ, Joseph recognized his brothers who did not recognize Him. The Lord Christ, who knows us by name, came. Yet as he carried our nature, and took the appearance of man, His brothers, the Jews, did not recognize Him, and as the apostle says, "If they would have recognized the Lord of glory, they would have not crucified Him."

(2) He spoke to them roughly, and even accused them of being spies; not to avenge them, as his soul was aflame for his brothers. And when he heard them speak bitterly, remembering what they did to him, without knowing that he was Joseph, "*He turned himself away from them and wept*" (Gen. 42:24). By acting rough, he meant to hide his identity from them, so they would not be terrified. And besides, he wanted to hear from them about his father and brother Benjamin, in an indirect manner, planning to bring them all to live with him in Egypt. He managed to accomplish all that.

God, in His love, sometimes seem rough, not to deprive us of His compassion, but to

realize His plans in us, and to enter with us into His mysteries, and to let us enjoy His grace, in an exalted way, that is beyond our comprehension.

(3) Joseph remembered the dreams in which he had dreamt about them (Gen. 42:9). We may occasionally, as time goes by, assume that God had forgotten His promises; but actually, he will grant us their realization in due time, and in an exalted way, that we do not expect.

(4) He put them all together in prison three days, as though he intended to chasten them, compassionately, hoping that they might remember their sin toward his innocent blood. And then Joseph kindly said to them, the third day: *“Do this and live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you go and carry grain for the famine of your houses. And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die”* (Gen. 42:18-20).

He wanted to put their hearts at ease, as he feared God, but wished to verify their words by letting them bring their younger brother to him, toward whom his heart was aflame; and as a sign of his compassion he allowed them to take grain for their house, saying: *“You shall not die,”* and besides, he restored every man’s money to his sack, giving them the grain free.

Joseph who was previously imprisoned is now imprisoning his brothers three days. As they are released, they will find Joseph presenting them grain for their houses, requesting them, in order to prove their honesty, to bring their younger brother to him. It is the talk of the Lord Christ, who was buried in the tomb as though in prison, granting us to be buried with Him three days, to enjoy the power of His resurrection; then to receive Him as a heavenly bread to satisfy us and all our families, namely, to fulfill the soul, together with the body, and the mind... all what we have. As to his request for the younger brother, it is an invitation to work. The heart of the Lord Christ would not be at peace toward the Church, unless it brings Him the younger brother, namely seeks every soul and brings it to His account. The Lord Christ will keep requesting from the Church to work on bringing Benjamin to Him, namely, to bring Him all, being a Son on the right hand of God. With this Spirit, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [God gets much pleasure by that; for, even if man did everything possible, to submit his body to asceticism, if he fasts his whole life, if he gives away all his possessions to the poor, all that would not be equal to his zeal for soul’s salvation¹.]

(5) Joseph’s words to them, *“Do this, and you shall live and not die”* (Gen. 42:18, 20), is the invitation by the Lord Christ, risen from the dead, wanting us to be buried together with Him, in order to enjoy the new risen life, and not to die. And as the apostle Paul said, *“Therefore we are buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His*

¹ الحب الأخرى ١٩٦٤، ص ٧٣.

resurrection” (Romans 6:4-5).

(6) Why did Joseph bound Simeon before their eyes (Gen. 42:24)? Surely, he did not do that out of spite or revenge, and most probably he loosed his shackles and treated him well, after his brothers left. But he intended to motivate them to hasten to bring him Benjamin, if they are keen on releasing their brother Simeon. From another aspect, the word ‘Simeon’ means ‘hearkening,’ referring to hearkening to the voice of God, and obeying him. That is why, binding Simeon, reveals the loss by the Jews of the spirit of hearkening to God and obeying Him.

Yet some believe that Simeon had been very harsh toward Joseph, having been the one who suggested killing him (Gen. 37:19-20). So he deserved chastisement to make him feel his sin, and present repentance for his actions.

Reuben ‘son of vision,’ on the other hand, rebuked his brothers, saying: “*Did I not speak to you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the boy,’ and you would not listen? Therefore, behold, his blood is now required of us*” (Gen. 42:22).

He represents the ‘son of vision,’ namely, the insight that opens to realize the transgression done by man, in order to repent for it. And as said by **St. John Chrysostom**: [When you behold a certain thing happening to you, remember your sin, that brought it upon you¹.]

3- RETURN TO CANAAN

Joseph’s brothers returned to their father in the land of Canaan, without Simeon, to tell him all that befell them, and how “*the lord of the country*” said to them, “*By this I will know that you are honest men; leave one of your brothers here with me, take food for the famine of your households, and be gone. And bring your youngest brother to me. So that I shall know that you are not spies, but that you are honest men. And I will deliver your brother to you, and you may trade in the land*” (Gen. 42:33-34)

Jacob’s response to that was: “*You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin away. All these things are against me. Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, ‘Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands; and I will bring him back to you*” (Gen. 42:36).

Jacob’s sons returned without Simeon, to have their depths revealed. It appeared that they, in their hearts, did not hearken to God, the apparent thing that represented bitterness to all, revealed the inner situation that they long disregarded.

In calling Joseph, “*the lord of the country*” without recognizing him, they unknowingly testified that in him, the dreams they could not stand to hear were realized. That lord was not aggressive, but was asking them to prove their honesty, by bringing Benjamin to him.

Jacob refused to deliver Benjamin to them, lest any calamity should befall him along the

¹ In Acts hom 12.

way like his brother Joseph, then “*you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave*” (Gen. 42:38). This is the true fatherly emotions, as the fall of any of our sons, even so he is young, would bring down our gray hair to the abyss; these emotions expressed by the apostle Paul by saying: “*Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?*” (2 Corinthians 11:20). **St. John Chrysostom** often dealt with this fatherly compassion toward every soul in the Jesus Christ¹.

Jacob says “you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave (the abyss);” as then, the door of Paradise was not yet opened... death was to him a bringing down!

¹ القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم ، ص ١٦٩ الخ.

CHAPTER 43

THE NEXT ENCOUNTER WITH JOSEPH

In the first encounter, Joseph pretended to be rough with them, and accused them of being spies. In the second encounter they were terrified and could not recognize him. Then came the third encounter, and Joseph could not restrain himself, and wept aloud proclaiming himself to them (Gen. 45:1-3). It was as though they were encountering the true Joseph, in the third time, through His resurrection on the third day, to recognize Him as the Source of their life, and as their true brother; while the two first encounters carried to them much sufferings.

1- The need for food

1-13.

2- An encounter in Joseph's home

14-34.

1- THE NEED FOR FOOD

Now the famine was so severe in the land that Jacob had to persuade his sons to return to Egypt to buy more food. Then Judah asked him to allow them to take Benjamin along, as the lord of the country had previously solemnly proclaimed that they shall not see his face unless their brother was with them. As Jacob was reluctant to do so, he admonished them for telling the man whether they had still another younger brother, to which they responded, that the man pointedly asked about them and their kindred, and they had to tell him everything. Finally, he said to Israel his father, "*Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you, and also our little ones. I myself will be surely for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you, and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever*" (Gen. 43:8-9).

Judah and Benjamin, each were a type of Christ the Lord, from a certain aspect. Judah represented Christ the Lord, by being a guardian for his younger brother, committed to bring him back, as the Word of God came incarnated, as our firstborn brother, from the tribe of Judah, Guarantor before the Father, to redeem us with His blood. Indeed we became the least, not in relation to Christ the Lord, the Creator and Head of all creation, but in relation to the heavenly rational creation, having been greatly brought down by sin. However, in the eyes of God the Father, we are as much beloved as Benjamin, to present His own Son for the sake of our salvation. Benjamin, on the other hand, presents another symbol of the Lord Christ, who became the least, having occupied the last row, to embrace all creation in love. He became the least like Benjamin, who, if he does not set forth to Canaan to the land of Egypt, his brothers would be deprived of food. As though he is the Word of God, the beloved Son, the Only-Begotten, and who sits on the right hand of the Almighty, descending to Egypt, as one of us, to find in Him the satisfaction of Spirit.

Joseph says: "*You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you*" (Gen. 43:4). As

though he is the voice of God, the Father warning us that we shall not see His Face, or enjoy His heavenly bread or the fellowship of His glories, unless we appear before Him in and with the Lord Jesus Christ. Without Him, we shall never encounter the Father, nor shall have a place in His divine bosom. And as said by the apostle Paul, “*Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*” (Ephesians 1:4).

Finding no other way for salvation, Jacob sent Benjamin to the land of Egypt, and instructed his sons to take with them some of the best fruits of the land in their vessels and carry down a present for the man: a little balm and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds, and to take back the money that was returned in the mouth of their sacs, beside other money to pay for what they will purchase.

As if, in order for the sons of Israel to encounter Joseph, it is fit for them to present three things:

(1) **To take Benjamin with them**, without whom they would not see Joseph’s face - symbolizing, as we said, Christ the Lord. In Him and with Him we can encounter the Father in His heavenly glories.

(2) **To take with them presents**, some of the best fruits of the land, is a representation of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, offered to us by the Father through His Holy Spirit, to carry as a present of love to Him. For He is “*working in us to do for His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13). From his work, we are presenting Him with what is for His good pleasure. And as the prophet David says: “*Of your own we have given you*” (1 Chronicles 29:13). Indeed, the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness (Galatians 5:22) are (balm, spices, and myrrh) to heal the Spirit; (honey), that carries the sweetness of heart and mind; as well as (pistachio nuts and almond) as food that satisfies the body. We present what we enjoyed, as a source of healing for the soul, and satisfaction and sweetness, as a present of love to the Father in His Son, to bring Him pleasure.

(3) **Returning the silver that they found in the mouths of their sacs**, refer to understanding the symbols and the prophecies of the Old Testament. As to the new silver, it is the enjoyment of the understanding of the New Testament, and recognizing the gospel of Christ. If “*the words of the Lord are... like silver tried in a furnace of earth*” (Psalm 12:6), it is fit for us to encounter with God through presenting that silver by making it real in our life and obvious in our behavior, promulgating our spiritual comprehension of the Law and of the Gospel, practically every day.

2- AN ENCOUNTER IN JOSEPH’S HOME

“*When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, ‘take these men to my home, and slaughter an animal and make ready; for these men will dine with me at noon*” (Gen. 43:16).

But, as his brothers were brought into Joseph's house, they were afraid that, because of the money that was returned in their sacs, he wanted to arrest them and take revenge. But the steward in charge of the house, put their hearts at ease, saying to them, "*Peace be with you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money*" (Gen. 43:23).

It seems that Joseph instructed his man to say these words, to put the heart of his brothers at ease, especially that the man brought Simeon out to them, gave them water and they washed their feet, and gave their donkeys feed. When Joseph came home, he asked them about the well-being of their father, and saw his younger brother Benjamin, "*Now his heart yearned for his younger brother, so Joseph made haste and sought somewhere to weep, and went to his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and he restrained himself, and said, 'Serve the bread.' So they set him a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked in astonishment at one another. Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin's serving was 5 times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him*" (Gen. 43:30-34).

That was the second encounter between Joseph and his brothers, it was clearly different from the first one (Gen. 42): the first presented to us a shadow of our encounter with the Lord Christ during the passions of his crucifixion, while here, we encounter with Him in His tomb. And in the third one, we enjoy encountering with Him through His resurrection, even though we cannot separate between the crucifixion, the burial, and the resurrection, all representing one integral work of redemption, that cannot be divided.

In that encounter, we distinguish shadows of the work of redemption of the Lord Christ, from the following different aspects:

(1) **In the first encounter Joseph appears rough**, and accuses them of being spies, though the Holy Bible proclaims that he could not bear the bitterness of the situation, so "*he turned himself away from them and wept*" (Gen. 42:24). It is our encounter with the Lord Christ at the moments of crucifixion, as the divine justice was fulfilling the debt in the body of Christ, although our eyes were incapable of comprehending the hidden love of God, exalted beyond our minds. Here, however, we do not find roughness but compassion and food. As the Lord Christ was buried in His tomb, humanity, departed on hope, could encounter with Him, recognize Him, and receive the Savior as a spiritual food, that grants eternity.

The first encounter took place outside Joseph's house; as the Lord Christ has been crucified outside the camp, where we are asked by the apostle to "*go forth to Him, bearing His reproach*" (Hebrew 13:13). This encounter, on the other hand, took place inside Joseph's house, as the departed in hope, encounter with the buried Lord Christ, in Paradise, to which He bore

them as a loot of love, to His house. And as the Lord said to the robber on His right-hand side: *“Today, you will be with Me in Paradise.”*

(2) **Joseph went into his chamber, and wept there**, then washed his face and came out, and he restrained himself and said, *“Serve the bread.”* What is that “chamber” where the true Joseph wept, then washed His face, and came out, but His Holy tomb, where He encountered with death; washed our death, not with His tears, but with His pure blood, then resurrected to give us His risen body, as eternal life?!

(3) **Joseph set a special table for him**, he seated his Hebrew brothers at another, and the Egyptian guests at a third one. The gathering of all of them together, refers to the unity of the Church in the Head, where men of the Old Testament gather with those of the New Testament, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Joseph represented the head, with a special table, being the firstborn. The Hebrews represented men of the Old Testament, who received in Joseph’s house special food, through the Law and prophecies. And the Egyptians represented men of the New Testament, namely, the Church of the Gentiles that enjoyed the table of the Bible.

(4) As the Hebrews sat before Joseph, they looked at one another in astonishment, seeing that the order of their sitting was conforming to their seniority of age, wondering if the man recognized them?! The Hebrews did not recognize Joseph, but **he recognized them fully**, and set for each of them his proper place, as though he is the Lord Christ, who knows us before we knew Him, *“knows us by name”* (John 10:3), and ordains our salvation beforehand, and designates for each of us a special mansion in His Father’s house (John 14:2). He knows us, and knows the stature of each in Spirit; and as the apostle says: *“For one star differs from another star in glory”* (1 Corinthians 15:41).

(5) **He took servings to them from before him**, but Benjamin’s serving was 5 times as much as any of theirs. What servings of glory he got, he grants us from before him, as we become ‘fellows with Him in glory.’ The 5 times much of servings that Benjamin got, refers to God’s gift to us, by sanctifying our 5 senses, to become satisfied and glorified by Jesus Christ.

(6) **That fulfilling and joyful encounter rejoiced Joseph’s heart** and made it yearn for his brothers, especially for Benjamin, caused them to look in astonishment at one another, as to an exalted thing beyond their comprehension, in order to encounter with their brother Simeon, to sit and eat with the “Lord of the country,” and to get servings from before him, they had to be so prepared: To enter into Joseph’s house, to wash their feet with water, to get feed for their donkeys; then to sit at the table.

What is entering Joseph’s house, but being included in the fellowship of the Church, to get into God’s house through the water of Baptism? What is washing of feet with water, but presentation of repentance to wash out our transgressions, and the dust that clanged to our souls during our travel. As to feeding our donkeys, it refers to sanctification of the flesh, that was animal - like by its lusts, to satisfy it, not with lusts of this world, but through the sanctified life

in the house of the Lord, and lastly, to sit at the table, it refers to enjoyment of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. These are all the media of our salvation, that we enjoy in the Church of Christ by the Holy Spirit through the cross.

(7) We end our talk about that encounter, with the comment by **St. John Chrysostom** on **the weeping of Joseph**, as he saw his brothers: [Let us be like that man; be sad and weep for those who harm us; Let us not get angry with them, as they actually, are worthy of tears, because of the punishment that awaits them, and the judgment into which they cast themselves¹.]

¹ *In 1 Thess. hom 4.*

CHAPTER 44

JOSEPH'S SILVER CUP

It was not possible for Joseph, having seen the face of his younger brother Benjamin, who entered his house, and sat at his table, to let him go again. So, prudently, he ordered to put his silver cup in the mouth of Benjamin's sack. By that, he could retain him, and at the same time be sure of his brothers' honesty towards him: will they forsake their younger brother and go without him, or abide to him.

1- Putting the cup in Benjamin's sack 1-13.

2- Judah redeems his younger brother 14-34.

1- PUTTING THE CUP IN BENJAMIN'S SACK

Joseph commanded the steward of his house to put each man's money in the top of his sack, and to put his cup, the silver cup, in the top of the sack of Benjamin, together with his money. That cup was used for drinking. Some nations had certain superstitions, by throwing a coin or a ring in it then see the pattern and direction of the bubbles that appear, by this they thought that they could predict the future. This custom is still found in Egypt, but in another form: turning the cup of coffee upside down after drinking, to see the different patterns made by the coffee grounds.

Some others used that cup to bring about sleep, through deep and long meditation in the bubbles that appear in it, that give them some relaxation.

As soon as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, and when they had gone out of the city, and were not yet far off, Joseph's steward followed and overtook them, and rebuked them for their alleged stealing of his master's silver cup, repaying evil for good! Their response was: "*Why does my lord say these word?! Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing. Look, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money that we found in the mouth of our sacks. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house?! With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves*" (Gen. 44:7-9)

So he searched, and began with the oldest, and left off with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city.

Thus, Joseph's plan worked: Benjamin returned to him, though unfairly accused of stealing and he discovered the change of heart of his brothers, having torn their clothes and returned in bitterness, for the sake of their youngest brother Benjamin. Because of that, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. For their repentance, and their unselfish love for their youngest brother, all of them were found worthy of the third encounter with Joseph; as though with the

Lord Christ, risen from the dead, to proclaim His resurrection to and in them.

What is that cup, found in the sack of Benjamin, that made all of them return to Joseph, but the cup that the Lord Christ drank for our sake, saying: “*O, My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will*” (Matthew 26:39).

The Lord drank that cup, as He received the passions on behalf of all humanity; and by drinking it. He got us back to the city, after we departed from it together with our donkeys. We return to the Holy City, the Upper Jerusalem, carrying the heavenly grains, through the body, that does not go back to the Paradise of Eden, where Adam and Eve have been, but to eternal life. We return, not with a natural (animal) body, but with one that carries a new nature, fit for eternity, as expressed by the apostle Paul: “*It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body... And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man*” (1 Corinthians 15:44-49).

The man said, “*With whomever of your servants, it is found, let him die; and we also will be my lord’s servants*” (Gen. 44: 9). That is the voice of humanity that cried out, “*It was expedient that one man should die for the people*” (John 18:14). The Lord Christ bore the cup for our sake, and died according to the flesh; and indeed we all became slaves to our Lord; as though the previous words were realized literally in the Person of the Lord Christ and those who believe in Him.

The men tore their clothes, having cast away the old man and set forth, together with Benjamin the bearer of the cup, to the city, to encounter with Joseph, the glorified.

2- JUDAS REDEEMS HIS YOUNGER BROTHER

If Benjamin became a symbol of Christ the Lord, who occupied the rearmost row, as though the least of all, in order to bear on our behalf the cup of wrath of the Lord, to pay our debt, and to enter with us into the city of God, where we encounter the glorified Lord of the land, he, from another aspect, represents the humanity that bears the sin, for whose sake, the One, of the tribe of Judah, came out to intercede and to offer His life for its salvation. That was what Judah did, as he, with the spirit of humility, approached Joseph to deliver himself a ransom for his younger brother, saying, “*For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.’ Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father*” (Gen. 44:32-34).

Judah recited to Joseph the talk between them and their father, and told him how the soul of their father is attached to the lad, especially that his brother has been torn to pieces. And now, he could not bear to see the evil that would befall the old man. That attachment of Jacob’s soul to Benjamin, which motivated Judah to offer himself a surety for the sake of his brother, is a faint portrait of the love that binds the Father to mankind; to make the Only-Begotten Son, in His love

to His Father, and to humanity, to offer Himself a redeemer and Savior.

CHAPTER 45

JOSEPH REVEALS HIMSELF

We said that the first encounter referred to our enjoyment of fellowship in the passions and crucifixion of the Lord Christ; the second encounter referred to burial with the Lord, while the third encounter referred to our being raised with the Lord Christ, who revealed Himself as the Grantor of life and the Conqueror of death.

- 1- Joseph reveals himself to his brothers 1-15.
- 2- Inviting his father and brothers to come to live in Egypt 16-24.
- 3- Israel hears about Joseph 25-28.

1- JOSEPH REVEALS HIMSELF TO HIS BROTHERS

“Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all who stood by him, and he cried out, ‘Make everyone go out from me.’ So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph, does my father still live?’ ‘But his brothers could not answer, for they were terrified in his presence” (Gen. 45:1-3).

Judah recited the conversation between him and his father Israel, by which he demonstrated how the absence of Joseph had a deep effect on his father’s soul, and could not be easily taken away, and was the reason why the old man got greatly attached to Benjamin, his youngest son. And how that motivated Judah to offer himself a surety for Benjamin, lest he sees the evil that would come upon his father, if he does not bring the lad back to him. Before those emotional words, together with his flaring yearning in his heart toward his father, Joseph could not restrain himself, and cried out, ‘Make everyone goes out from me.’ And then, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, while weeping aloud till the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it!

In the first and second encounters, Joseph managed to control his emotions; although his heart was yearning for his brothers, that he wept in his private chamber. But now, he could not restrain himself any more, and he could not help revealing his identity to them, after driving strangers outside!

The first encounter took place in the presence of many, so was the second. But, in the third encounter, Joseph did not reveal himself except after driving all strangers outside. So was the case with the first encounter with Christ the Lord by the cross before a multitude, and on his burial, before the Roman guards. But on His resurrection, He did not reveal Himself except to His own, who yearn to the resurrected life. In other words, crucifixion and burial were realized in public, to proclaim His salvation to all mankind. But as far as the mystery of resurrection is concerned, it was not to be enjoyed except by those who wish to recognize its mysteries, and to

enjoy His risen life, as the resurrection of the Lord Christ, is the mystery of Christ's transfiguration, the Conqueror of death, and His revealing Himself to His Church, that enjoys life with Him and abiding in Him.

The Holy Bible says: "*The Egyptians and house of Pharaoh heard it,*" they heard Joseph weeping and crying out. But they could not understand what was going on inside. Was he weeping out of joy, of astonishment, or grief?! They were like those guards by the tomb, who saw a splendid light, and felt an earthquake, but were unable to comprehend the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord Christ, having been from outside! I say that they were like the companions of Saul of Tarsus, who saw a splendid light and heard a voice from heaven, but could not enjoy seeing or comprehending the voice of the Risen from the dead; the encounter has been for Saul alone.

"*Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph,'*" as though he is symbolizing the Lord Christ, who proclaimed from heaven, "*I am Jesus, whom you are prosecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads*" (Acts 9:5). And as Joseph's brothers were terrified from that encounter, Saul was likewise terrified and confused!

I wish that we hear the voice of Joseph, whom we sold out by our sins, saying: I am Joseph your brother, who loved you, and offered you all compassion, yet you sold me out for vain silver! I am Joseph, whom you subjected to humiliation! "*But now, do not therefore be grieved nor angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life*" (Gen. 45:5).

We sold him for vain silver; but He was crucified to grant us eternal life. I say: Let us not fear the encounter with our Lord Jesus, the risen from the dead, as He is very tender, even in His admonition to us!

As he proclaimed himself to them, he asked them: "*Does my father still live?!*" (Gen. 45:3). He already knew that his father still lived, but he was wondering how he could sustain the severe blow! Could he be hoping for eventually seeing him?! He is as though revealing to us, that what occupies the mind of the new Joseph, as He encounters us through resurrection, is to present His atonement sacrifice to the Father, who "lives," and yearns to grant life to everyone.

"*His brothers could not answer him, for they were terrified in his presence*" (Gen. 45:3). What was the cause for their terror? They saw Joseph as though he died and rose again! They did not expect to see him again, especially with such great glory. They probably remembered Joseph's dreams that they despised and mocked; and are now realized so magnificently! Or they probably assumed that they fell in the lion's den, the one whom they mercilessly cast to death, is risen again with great authority!

They might have fallen back, because of that horrible situation. But in amazing tenderness, and in order to root out their fear, Joseph said to them: "*Please come near me*" (Gen. 45:4). Through sin, we distance ourselves from our Joseph, yet, as we hear His voice, and receive

the work of His resurrection in us, we “*come near Him;*” and as the apostle Paul said: “*But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off, have been made near by the blood of Christ*” (Ephesians 2:13).

And in order to motivate them to approach Him, not only with their bodies, but also with their hearts, he said to them: “*Do not therefore be grieved, nor angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life*” (Gen. 45:5-8). He exposed their transgression, by saying: “*I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt*” (Gen. 45:4). However, he hastened to offer them the way out, that God made use of that evil, for his and their good. Two years have already passed in that famine, and there are still five more years to go. And now, God has sent him to preserve their life all along those years, so as not to die. With the same concept, Christ the Lord proclaims to His own, that, although they sold Him, and delivered Him to death, two years of famine have already passed for the world, and there remain five more years of famine, till the end of days. The Word of God sustained the world in the Old Testament, and now, He is sustaining it in the New Testament, until the life of famine passes, and we enter into eternal fulfillment.

How beautiful it is, to meditate in God’s plan and ordinance, as He transforms everything to the good, even if our brothers intended to get rid of us by selling us into Egypt! “*God has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt*” (Gen. 45:8).

It was the old custom for Pharaoh, to call his first minister, his father, as he leaves everything in his hands, like a son delivers his life in his father’s hands. And, as Pharaoh represented the world of the Gentiles at that time, Christ the Lord became a father to the Gentiles, a master on their life, and a ruler over their bodies (the whole earth), as well as over their spirits. Such is how the true Joseph cares for the foreign Gentiles, by gathering them to Himself, as members of His body. “*Hasten and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph: God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me; do not tarry, You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children’s children, your flocks, and your herds, and all that you have. There, I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine*” (Gen. 45:9-13).

Joseph was not thinking of the past, in a sick human way, but with a spiritual insight, that is actually a divine gift. Instead of rebuking his brothers for the evil they have done to him, and for the affliction they cause him to pass through along the past years, he could see the mighty hand of God, and His supreme plan for his salvation from death, and that of his father, his brothers, and their children. He did not waste time in talks, but concentrated on serious work, saying: “*Hasten and go up to my father.*” It was not the time to talk, but to act, and be saved from death that threatened the world for five more years to come!

As to the land of Goshen, chosen by Joseph, for his father and brothers, and all their children, it is located north-east of the Nile Delta, where the province of 'Sharkieh' is today. It is also called 'Rameses' (Gen. 47:11), and a very fertile land for pasture, where the children of Israel sojourned, herding Pharaoh's and their flocks, up till their time of affliction!

He counted his glory as his father's and his brothers,' saying to them, "*You shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt*" (Gen. 45:13). Contrary to what many people do, as they get rich and dignified, to disregard their own folks, and treat them with haughtiness. Joseph felt that what he achieved was not his own doing, but was God's, for the sake of his father and his brothers, to live and be glorified. By that he became an image of the Lord Christ, who forsook His glory for our sake, then got glorified again, by the glory that was His, before the world was (John 17:5), so as to lift us up with Him in His glory, as heirs to the inheritance.

2- INVITING HIS FATHER AND BROTHERS TO COME TO LIVE IN EGYPT

When Pharaoh and his servants heard the news, they were very pleased (Gen. 45:6); as they all loved him. Pharaoh has been very generous, when he demanded from Joseph: "*Say to your brothers, 'Do this, load your beasts and depart. Bring your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land. Now you are commanded - do this: Take carts out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and your wives; bring your father and come. Also do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours*" (Gen. 45:17-20).

The best of the land of Egypt, and the fat of the land, that Pharaoh wished to give to Joseph's brothers, for the love of their brother, beloved to him, refer to the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and to riches of heaven, that became ours from God, through the New Joseph, beloved to the Father. He commanded them to take carts from the land of Egypt for their little ones and their wives, to come to enjoy the goods of the land of Egypt, that are to be theirs. What are the carts that will carry us, but the redeeming works of God, and the media of salvation, together with supplications and prostration, that flare the heart to set forth by the Holy Spirit, not to enjoy the riches of the land of Egypt, but those of heaven itself.

An instance of these divine carts, is the sacrament of Baptism; of which **St. Gregory the Theologian** says: [Enlightenment is Baptism; enlightenment is a boat that sails toward God, sailing with Christ, Head of religion, and consummation of mind. Enlightenment is the key to the Kingdom of heavens; restoration of life; freedom from servitude; and loosening of bonds¹.] As to the second cart that sets with us to glory; It is the sacrament of the Eucharist. It is described in the **Syrian Liturgy of Adam and Marie**: [This sacrifice by your ministers... Let it be for the

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الإلهي، ص ٨٥٥، ٨٥٦.

forgiveness of our transgressions and our sins; a great light of resurrection from the dead; and a new life in the kingdom of heavens.] Thus you could say that the works of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, are like divine carts, capable of lifting us up to the Father's bosom, though abiding us in our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we go back to Pharaoh, we find him saying: "*Now you are commanded*" (Gen. 45:19). Pharaoh assumes that any of his commands, for the benefit of Joseph and his family, as though it is from Joseph himself; the same way as any of Joseph's commands, for the benefit of Egypt, as though it is from Pharaoh. I may say, that what God the Father commands to grant us, is in Christ; and what Christ grants us, is through God the Father.

How sweet are "*Do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours*" (Gen. 45:20). Surely, it was not easy for the elder Israel, his children, grandchildren, and slaves, to leave back their land, despite what they experienced because of the famine, unless they look forward to the promise, that "*the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.*" Likewise, it would not be easy for us to forsake what we have in the land of our sojourn, unless God opens our sight to behold the eternal glory set for us, if our hearts depart to there. The apostle Paul, as his spiritual eyes were opened to behold that glory, says: "*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ*" (Philippians 3:7-8). The apostle Paul found in the Lord Christ, the Pearl of high value, for which he sold everything with joy and happiness. In Him, he discovered abundance of riches, so he forsook everything, setting forth with his heart and all his feelings; he found in Him all true satisfaction.

Getting back to Joseph, we find him, in amazing love, in order to assure them that he forgave all the past; he gave them carts, and to each man changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave 300 pieces of silver and five changes of garment; and he sent to his father 10 donkeys loaded with grain, bread and food, as provisions for the journey from Canaan to Egypt. As he sent them away, he said to them, "*See that you do not become troubled along the way*" (Gen. 45:24); fearing that they would start to blame one another for what they already did to him. It is not any more a time for rebuke, but for hastening to come back together with their father, wives, children, and all their possessions.

What are these garments, given by Joseph to his brothers, but the union with the Lord Christ; to be with and in Him; to hide in Him, and have Him as a Garment to cover us eternally; and by Him, we should have the right to enter into the bosom of God, His Father.

As to the silver that was given by Joseph to his younger brother Benjamin; it is the word of the Gospel, delivered by the Lord Christ to His Church or to humanity, as a younger brother. And as we said before, in our interpretation of the Book of Judges¹, that the figure 300 in Greek,

¹ Cf. our Commentary on Judges, chapter 7.

is represented by the letter "T" namely the cross; It is as though the 300 pieces of silver taken by Benjamin, is receiving the fellowship of the cross and passion, together with the Lord Christ, through preaching of the joyful word of the Gospel. As to the five changes of garments, given to Benjamin, They are the sanctification of our five senses, to carry the features of the Lord Christ, and to be sanctified on His account, by His Holy Spirit.

All what the True Joseph granted us, is but "*food for the journey*" (Gen. 45:23); But what is beyond that food, is an enjoyment of things that "*Eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man; the things that God has prepared for those who love Him*" (1 Corinthians 2:9). What we get here, is a pledge and provision for the journey, until we reach the glory, in order to enjoy the divine gift.

3- ISRAEL HEARS ABOUT JOSEPH

"Then they went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to Jacob their father. And they told him, saying: 'Joseph is still alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt.' And Jacob's heart stood still, because he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived. Then Israel said, 'It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die'" (Gen. 45:25-28).

The men went up out of Egypt, and came to their father, who, hearing about his son, his heart stood still; the situation having been beyond the control of the old man. And as he slowly regained his composure, and confirmed the truth of what they said, through seeing the carts, his spirit revived anew, and counted it as the greatest divine gift, to see his son Joseph before he dies. The carts did not preoccupy him, nor the glory, that his son has reached, but said, "*I will go and see him,*" as though proclaiming with the Psalmist, "*Whom I have in heaven but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides you*" (Psalm 73:25).

Origen has a long comment on this text, we shall quote some of it, with some comment of our own:

(1) He comments on the phrase, "*They went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan*" (Gen. 45:25), saying that the Holy Bible has never mentioned a going down to holy places, but going up to them; and vice versa¹. If Egypt was blessed by the presence of Joseph in it, to turn into a source of satisfaction; Yet, in the Old Testament, it has been a symbol of love of the world; That is why it is said: "*they went up out of Egypt;*" went up out of the world, toward the heavenly Canaan. We can say that the land of Egypt has been far more blessed by the coming to it of the Lord Christ Himself, together with His mother and St. Joseph.

(2) **Origen** believes that the word "*revived*" in the phrase "*The spirit of Jacob their father revived,*" came in Latin as was enlightened; as though Jacob, away from Joseph, has been like a

¹ In Gen. hom 15:1.

quenched lamp, that was lighted by life, as it is said, “*The life was the light of men*” (John 1:4)¹.

We can say, that our souls, are like Jacob, when they are far from the true Joseph, the spirit in them are quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19); and when we recognize Him as being alive, namely, risen from the dead, our souls get enlightened inside us, with the joy of His resurrection working in us.

If Jacob longed to end his life with seeing Joseph alive; he is representing humanity that longed to enjoy the Lord Christ, risen from the dead, so as to die with hope.

(3) **Origen** says that Israel was astonished to hear that Joseph was “*governor of all Egypt;*” namely a conqueror over every sin of lust, adultery and defilement².

Let us unite with our true Joseph, and carry in Him all victory, to become truly, not governors of one, two, or three cities, but over our whole body (our symbolic Egypt). By Him we control the mind, and live sanctified in senses, and emotions, and walk respectfully.

¹ In *Gen. hom 15:2*.

² In *Gen. hom 15:3*.

CHAPTER 46

JACOB GOES DOWN TO EGYPT

It seems that Jacob harbored some doubt, as far as his going down to Egypt is concerned, despite the severe conditions surrounding him, and his longing to see his son Joseph. That is why God spoke to him in the vision of the night, and put his heart at ease.

- 1- God commands Jacob to go down to Egypt 1-7.
- 2- Those who departed with him 8-27.
- 3- Israel's encounter with Joseph 28-34.

1- GOD COMMANDS JACOB TO GO DOWN TO EGYPT

Jacob yearned to go down to Egypt to see his son Joseph. Yet, as he was a little fearful, *“He took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. Then God spoke to Israel in the vision of the night, and said, ‘Jacob, Jacob,’ and he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, I am God, the God of your father, do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes”* (Gen. 46:1-4).

That was the last time that God appeared to Jacob, and not to anyone in Egypt, until he appeared to the prophet Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3), for the sake of bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt. God appeared to Israel before he goes down to Egypt, and appeared to Moses for the sake of bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt; as though God cared both for his going down and his coming up. What does going down to Egypt means?

Origen believes that going down to Egypt here, refers to the believer's going down, as though to a spiritual battle, through which he grows, conquers, and returns victorious in the Lord, to enjoy the heavenly Jerusalem, saying: [It is fit for us to contemplate quietly in what the Lord said to Jacob in the vision, how he strengthened and encouraged, as though he was going to war, saying to him. *“Do not fear to go down to Egypt,”* as though he was going to *“go against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age”* (Ephesians 6:12). He is telling him, not to fear them, and not to be troubled; Why? *“I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again.”* We should not fear going down to Egypt, nor confronting the struggle against this world, or the battles against the devil, the enemy against whom the Lord came down to do battle. Listen to what the apostle Paul says: *“I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”* (1 Corinthians 15:10). In Jerusalem, when he had been confronted by amazing struggle, because of the word and the preaching of God, God appeared to him, and addressed him with words similar to what he did to Israel, saying: *“Be of good cheer, Paul: for as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome”* (Acts

23:11)¹.]

Origen continues his comment on the going down of Jacob to Egypt, accompanied by the Lord, and strengthened by His promise that He will bring him up from there, by saying: [I believe that the text carries a mystery, that is much deeper than the apparent letter, as the following phrase strikes me as significant: *“I will make you a great nation there; I will go down with you to Egypt; And I will also surely bring you up again.”*]

Who was he, who became a great nation in Egypt, and who was he, who was brought up again? We may assume that it meant Jacob. But that was actually not true, as Jacob did not leave Egypt alive. He died there, and it is not rational to say that God brought Jacob up, when He did with his remains as *“God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”* (Matthew 22:32). He means here, people, living, and in good health. Is not this a portrait of the descending of God to this world, and His growth in the great nation, namely the Church, that embraces the Gentiles? Then His ascension to the Father, after the death of everything, especially the first man, who came down to Egypt amid battles, as he was driven out of Paradise to confront the sufferings and pains of this world... God did not forsake those who are in this battle, but He is always with them. As to saying: *“And I will also surely bring you up again;”* I assume that He means, that at the end of days, as the Only-Begotten Son of God descended into the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4:9), for the sake of salvation of the world, He brings the first man up. Let us understand, that the talk here, concerns what was said to the thief on the right hand: *“Today, you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43). This proclamation does not concern him alone, but concerns all the saints, for whose sake the Son of God descended. By that, in Jacob, would be realized the saying: *I will also bring you up again.”* Therefore, I wish everyone of us descends (allegorically) to Egypt, amid the battles, in the same way, walking along the same route, to be worthy that God would not forsake him, but make of him a great nation. That great nation is the collection of virtues and righteousness, in which, the Book says, the saints grow and increase. By that the saying would be realized: *“And I will also bring you up again; as, at the end, would be the perfection of everything, and the consummation of virtues. That is why the prophet David says: “Do not take me away in the midst of my days” (Psalm 102:24). “I will also bring you up again, is as though saying to him: “You have fought the good fight; you have finished the race; you have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for you the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give, on that day, to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8)².]*

In short we say that, if the first Adam descended to the world, as though to Egypt, amid a battle against the devil, yet God descended to be with him, to bruise the head of the serpent under His feet, to grant him conquest and victory; and to ascend with him raising him from the abyss to

¹ In Gen. hom 15:5.

² In Gen. hom 15:5, 6.

His heavenly Paradise. By descending to us through incarnation, he made of us a great nation, transforming our inner manger into His kingdom that embraces God, together with His angels and saints! That is the nation that brings joy to heaven, according to the words of God: “*I say to you, there is joy in the presence of angels of God over one sinner who repents*” (Luke 15:10). The angels rejoice, seeing that God, Himself, descended into his heart, as though into the manger, to bring him up to His kingdom.

As to God’s promise to Jacob: “*And Joseph will put his hand on your eyes*” (Gen. 46:4), this refers to the old custom in those days, for the nearest kin to close the eyes of the deceased. **Origen** comments on that phrase saying: [The true Joseph, our Lord and Savior, puts His (human) hands on the eyes of the blind, to restore for him his lost sight; and He puts (spiritual) hands on the eyes of the Law, that blinded the spiritual minds of the Scribes and the Pharisees, to grant them the insight; to open to them the books, and to grant them a spiritual vision, and a spiritual understanding of the Law... I pray God, to put His hands on our eyes, so that we do not look forward to the seen things, but to the future things; to lift up the veil from over our hearts, to contemplate in the Lord with the Spirit¹.]

After getting those promises in Beersheba, after offering sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac (Gen. 46:1), the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him; taking their livestock and their goods which they acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to Egypt.

Jacob, would not have received these promises, except in Beersheba, namely in the waters of Baptism, in which the Holy Spirit grants us the new birth to become members in the body of Christ, to be prepared, by this, for God to go down with us to Egypt, and to bring us back again from it. As to the sacrifices that he offered, these would reveal the source of every divine gift, which is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Finally, the children of Israel set forth, carrying their father, their little ones, and their wives, together with their livestock and their possessions. If we set forth by our Lord Jesus Christ, to the spiritual strife, we set forth with the soul, as well as with the body, all capabilities and energies to have them all working in the kingdom of God, in the strange land.

2-THOSE WHO DEPARTED WITH HIM

The book mentioned to us lists of 66 of Israel’s children and grandchildren, more than once, to confirm how they enormously grew and increased. In the book of Acts, St. Stephen mentioned that their number reached 75 souls (Acts 7:14); probably because he added to them the five grandchildren of Ephraim and Manasseh.

3-ISRAEL’S ENCOUNTER WITH JOSEPH

¹ In Gen. hom 15:7.

Jacob sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out before him the way to Goshen, and to provide for their sojourn. If Jacob represents the Church, it cannot walk without Judas, namely, without the Lord Christ, who comes out of the tribe of Judas. He leads us on our way to the strange land. He is Himself, the Way.

When Joseph encountered with his father, he fell on his neck and wept, staying on his neck for a good while, unable to let him go. And finally Jacob said to Joseph: *“Now, let me die, since I have seen your face, because you are still alive”* (Gen. 46:30).

Jacob, as a representative of the Church, when it encountered with its Joseph, risen from the dead, it was crushed with love before him and longed to set forth with Him.

Joseph told his father and brothers that he will go up to inform Pharaoh of their arrival; and advised them to tell Pharaoh that they are shepherds, to let them live in the land of Goshen (Gen. 45:10). The reason behind his choice of that location was:

(1) To be at the north-east of Egypt; the nearest location to the land of Canaan, as though, he wanted them, even in their sojourn along more than 300 years, to have their hearts set and prepared for the departure to Canaan.

(2) To spare them the despise of the Egyptians, who considered the occupation of sheep shepherding an abomination. Living far away in Goshen would spare them of getting in contact with the Egyptians.

(3) By living in Goshen, they would not be, as much as possible, affected by the pagan worship, and the evil customs.

CHAPTER 47

JACOB'S ENCOUNTER WITH PHARAOH

Having informed from Pharaoh of the arrival of his family, Jacob was presented to Pharaoh, and went out fro before him to live in the land of Goshen till the day he died.

1- Five of Joseph's brothers are presented to Pharaoh 1-6.

2- Jacob's encounter with Pharaoh 7-10.

3- Jacob's children in Rameses 11-12.

4- The Egyptians become Pharaoh's servants 13-26.

5- Jacob's will to Joseph 27-31.

1- FIVE OF JOSEPH'S BROTHERS ARE PRESENTED TO PHARAOH

Joseph was not ashamed of the occupation of his father and brothers, as sheep shepherds, considered an abomination to the Egyptians. He proudly set forth in his chariot to meet them. He hastened to inform Pharaoh of their arrival, and chose five of his brothers to present to him, after instructing them to be frank concerning their occupation. As though he is the Lord Jesus Christ, presenting His Church, as five wise virgins, or presenting the believing humanity in glory, through sanctification of the five senses.

The men said to Pharaoh: "*We have come to sojourn in the land*" (Gen. 47:4); Thus, feeling of sojourning is never to be separated from the believer, until he encounter with the Groom of his soul, face to face.

Before Joseph's honesty, and his love for his brothers, Pharaoh said to him: "*The land of Egypt is before you, have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know any competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock*" (Gen. 47:6).

Thus, a heart opened by love, will get love in return, even if met, in the beginning with many afflictions. Pharaoh presented to Joseph all the land of Egypt; and requested from him to appoint, of his brothers chief herdsmen over his livestock, if he finds among them, those who are competent for the task.

2- JACOB'S ENCOUNTER WITH PHARAOH

Joseph presented his father before Pharaoh, who, despite his old age, frailty, and probably poor eyesight, yet Pharaoh was impressed by his obvious dignity, and asked for his blessing; "*Jacob blessed Pharaoh*" (Gen. 47:5); that, most probably implied that Pharaoh bowed before the old man, to put his hand on his head to bless him. "*Pharaoh asked Jacob: 'How old are you?;' and Jacob said to Pharaoh: 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage are 130 years, few and evil..., and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage'*" (Gen. 47:8-9).

Jacob felt that feeling of pilgrimage all the days of his life; especially that his life was of continuous troubles: In his adolescence, although his mother loved him and favored him over his brother, yet it seems that he suffered much from the fierce nature of the later. In his youth, he had to escape to a foreign land, where he vigorously served his uncle “*in the day, the draught consumed him, and the frost by night; and the sleep departed from his eyes*” (Gen. 31:40), who deceived him and changed his wages ten times. When he fled from the face of his uncle, he was devastated by fear from his brother Esau, and on his way, he wrestled with an angel the whole night (Gen. 32). In Shechem, his sons Simeon and Levi caused him much trouble, and made him obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land because of their sister Dinah. In Ephrath his beloved wife Rachel travailed in childbirth and died (Gen. 35), then his father died. After that, his firstborn son Reuben laid with his father’s concubine, something that was very painful for Jacob (Gen. 21). This was followed by the episode of Joseph that rocked his whole being.

It may look as though he has been a failure. Yet becoming Israel, he presented the Church of the Old Testament. And from his seed, Christ the Lord came incarnated. He remains Jacob the father of every believer! He blessed Pharaoh, then blessed him again (Gen. 47:10), as though the sufferings caused his blessing to increase.

3- THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN RAMESES

Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Rameses, namely, the land of ‘the son of the sun,’ a part of the land of Goshen, where ‘San-el-Hagar’ is nowadays. There, the Hebrews built for Pharaoh the city of Raamses (Exodus 1:11); which was probably, so named, before building that city.

From a spiritual aspect, he situated his father and brothers, and giving them possession in the land of Egypt. In this, Joseph is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ Who granted Jacob, in other words His Church that includes His lesser brothers, to reign spiritually over the land of Egypt. Namely, He gave them the right of authority over the body (the land of Egypt), to have the body submitted to the soul in Christ Jesus our Lord, and not rebelling against it. Joseph provided his father, his brothers and all his father’s household, with bread according to the number in their families (Gen. 47:12), as though man can be of more authority over his body, the more he carries spiritual fruits (namely children).

From another aspect, what Joseph did with his father Jacob, who represents the sojourning Church, and with his brothers, giving them possession in the land of Egypt, according to Pharaoh’s command, refers to what the true Joseph, our Lord Christ, did with His Church (Jacob), making it extend to the Gentiles, as though get possession in the land of Egypt; something that was not realized by force, but according to Pharaoh’s command, that is, according to the free will of the Gentiles themselves, who received in faith, to submit to the Church, as their queen and mother.

4- THE EGYPTIANS BECOME PHARAOH'S SERVANTS

The famine was so severe that the Egyptians came with their silver to purchase grain from Pharaoh; and when the money failed they gave their livestock, followed by their bodies and their lands, saying: *“Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants of Pharaoh”* (Gen. 47:20).

Having done that, and all of them became servants of Pharaoh. He moved them from one end of the borders of Egypt to the other end. Everyone, in servitude, got seed to sow land that was not his own, to give, all his life, one-fifth of the harvest to Pharaoh. What is painful was that they came to seek servitude by their own free will, saying: *“Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants”* (Gen. 47:25).

Here, **Origen** contemplates in the difference between the Egyptians in these days, and the Hebrews: The Egyptians, by their free will, came to seek servitude, while it was said of the Hebrews, *“The Egyptians made the children serve with rigor”* (Exodus 1:13); and again it was said: *“All their services in which they made them serve, was in rigor”* (Exodus 1:14). There is great difference between someone running to the real Pharaoh (the devil), to ask him to have him as a slave, for a little grain, a temporary lust, or dignity, and another who is enslaved by the enemy by force. **Origen** says: [Take notice of what is said, that Hebrews fell into servitude with rigor, having known to carry in themselves, natural freedom, which cannot be easily taken away from them, except through force. Pharaoh, on the other hand, submitted the Egyptians to servitude, without any claim of use of force. The Egyptians (symbolizing lovers of the world), were easily swept down to corruption, and quickly fell into wickedness¹.]

If the Egyptians symbolized to the non-believers (having been worshippers of idols) and were symbols of lovers of the world, the Hebrews represented the believers. The former coveted the life of humiliation and servitude to the devil, for the sake of world lusts, while, for the latter, the enemy uses all his energies, and exerts every effort to captivate them to his side. Anyhow, when the former happened to fall into servitude, they used to live it all their life, while the Hebrew, if it happens to be sold as a slave, according to the Law, he should be set free on the seventh year of his servitude. The wicked falls by his own free will, to be said of him, that he is like *“a dog returning to his own vomit, and a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire”* (2 Peter 2:22); while the man of God, even if he falls, will stand again. He would not find comfort, except in the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Going back to the Egyptians, at that time, we find that they first presented their silver to Pharaoh, then their livestock, and their bodies and lands, namely their whole life. If silver refers to the word of God (Psalm 12:6), the beginning of our setting forth toward servitude, is surrendering our weapon - the word of God - to the enemy; who would draw from our heart its

¹ In Gen. hom 16:1.

attachment to the word, to deprive us of the warmth of the spirit, and take away from us the sweetness of the experience of the cross, and the fellowship with our Savior. As man surrenders his gospel to live without it, the enemy would demand the livestock, namely the bodily lusts, to turn him with his body under the servitude of the enemy, who agitates the bodily lusts, to act as hooks to catch the body with all its energies, to put all its movements, its feelings, and all its energies, namely to put all the land under the authority of Pharaoh - the devil. When man loses the sanctification of his livestock, body, and land, all to become Pharaoh's, there will be no way for the soul, but to bow, with its full will before Pharaoh, to beg him to acquire it on his account; to work as an instrument of wickedness, rejoicing in the fall of others and their doom.

Some people may wonder, why Joseph, the righteous man, acted that role, to deliver the Egyptians as slaves to Pharaoh? **Origen** says: [We can answer that by the fact that the Holy Bible itself, gives a justification to the ordination of that saintly man, by saying that the Egyptians have sold themselves and their possessions (Gen. 47:20). Thus, we can not blame Joseph for executing what these people brought on themselves. You may also discover that the apostle Paul as well, did something like that, when he delivered someone, who was sexually immoral, to Satan, "*for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 5:5). That man qualified himself for unworthiness of the fellowship with saints. We cannot say that St. Paul acted in haste, when he cast such a man out of the Church, and delivered him to Satan; the whole blame actually falls on that individual himself, who deserved through his behavior to lose his place in the Church, to be in the company of Satan¹.]

If the Egyptians have voluntarily given up their silver, and sold their livestock, lands, bodies, and all their livelihood, and accepted servitude to Pharaoh, the pagan priests were more wicked, as they did not have to sell anything, but received grain from Pharaoh, as his friends; and as **Origen** says: [As God says to those, advanced in faith and holiness: "*No longer do I call you servants, but I have called you friends*" (John 15:15), so also Pharaoh says to those who seem to have reached a high degree of wickedness in the priesthood of perdition. Do you wish to know the difference between the priests of God, and those of Pharaoh? Pharaoh give his priests land, while God denies them a portion in the land, but says to them, "*I am your portion*"².]

5- JACOB'S WILL TO JOSEPH

If the Egyptians have sold themselves as slaves to Pharaoh, and if the pagan priests became his friends, Israel, on the other hand, lived in Egypt, but his heart has been with the Lord. Israel lived in the land of Goshen, meaning symbolically the attachment of the heart to God. **Origen** says: [Goshen means 'nearness' or 'kinship.' So Israel lived in Egypt, but not far from God, but near Him, and attached to Him. The Lord Himself says: "*I will go down with you to*

¹ In Gen. hom 16:2.

² In Gen. hom 16:2.

Egypt” (Gen. 46:4). Thus, even if we look as though we are going down to Egypt, namely be in the flesh, if we dwell with those submitting to Pharaoh in servitude, yet we are near to God, as long as we abide to His commandments - as that is what nearness to God means - to contemplate in what is God’s, and seek what is His (Philippians 2:21); so that God would be always with us, through our Lord Jesus Christ¹.]

“When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, ‘Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me, Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers. You shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place’...” When Joseph swore to him, Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed” (Gen. 47:29-31).

We previously explained why someone put his hand under the thigh of him, to whom he vows². In this case, Israel is resorting to the testimonial of the Lord Christ who is to come from his seeds.

Israel intended through that vow, to proclaim his care for the resurrection of his body; and the commitment of his children to God’s promises, concerning their enjoyment of the inheritance of the land of Canaan, where their ancestors were buried³.

As to bowing himself on the head of the bed (Gen. 47:13), it came in the Septuagint version that Israel bowed on the head of Joseph’s staff. The apostle Paul adopted this view (Hebrew 11:21). Some scholars interpret that phrase that Israel, as an old man, having seen God’s gifts to him and to his son Joseph, held the head of the staff of his son, to lean on it, while still on his bed. Another interpretation was, that Israel, hearing the voice of his beloved son, promising him to head his final request, he bowed before the staff of his son, that represents his authority and high status - a custom known in Egypt and in most of nations of the East; as when Esther touched the top of the golden scepter in the hand of King Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes). Anyhow, we said that, Israel representing the Church, sojourning in the world, as did Israel in Egypt. As she finds the True Joseph, namely our Lord Jesus Christ, he promises her to carry, even her body to the heavenly Canaan, after granting it a new spiritual nature. Then the Church bows before the Royal Scepter of her true Groom, as a sign of thanksgiving for His continuous benefits. Several Fathers saw in that phrase a clear prophecy about the cross, or the Crucified One, worthy of bowing before Him.

¹ *In Gen. hom 16:7.*

² *Cf. our Commentary on Gen. 24:2.*

³ *Cf. our Commentary on Gen. 50:1-6.*

CHAPTER 48

JACOB BLESSES JOSEPH'S SONS

As the time drew near, for which Israel bore the troubles all his life, and for which he waited for so long, Joseph hastened to bring his sons to be blessed by his father; Then Israel strengthened himself, and blessed the younger with his right hand, and the older with his left.

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| 1- The sickness of Jacob | 1-2. |
| 2- Jacob blesses Joseph | 3-7. |
| 3- Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh | 8-20. |
| 4- Joseph gets one portion above his brothers | 21-22. |

1- THE SICKNESS OF JACOB

“Joseph was told, ‘Indeed your father is sick;’ and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And Jacob was told, ‘Look, your son Joseph is coming to you;’ and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed” (Gen. 48:1-2).

Feeling that his father was about to die, Joseph hastened with his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim to get the blessing of his father, and to enjoy his hope for the Savior. He wished for his older son to get the blessing by Jacob’s right hand.

Israel, hearing that his beloved son Joseph came to him, strengthened himself and sat up on his bed to receive him, and to extend to him his final request and his blessing.

2- JACOB BLESSES JOSEPH

In his blessing of Joseph, Jacob proclaimed the following:

(1) At the beginning of his talk, Jacob proclaimed how God appeared to him, once in “Luz” (Bethel), in the land of Canaan, blessing him, as he was fleeing from the face of his brother Esau, and another time, as he was returning from “Padan,” from where his uncle Laban was (Gen. 28). It was as though he intended to confirm to Joseph, that the blessing he gives him, is actually the blessing of God Himself, working in him, especially at the time of affliction of his soul.

If Jacob, as we previously said, symbolizes the Church, then the blessings that the Church presents, is not her own, but from what she enjoys from God, Grantor of blessing, who pours his blessings on her at the time of her passions. That blessing is realized in “Luz,” in the land of Canaan; namely, is realized in the Word of God, through the setting forth of our thoughts to the heavenly Canaan.

(2) Jacob requested from Joseph, to refer his two sons: Ephraim and Manasseh to Jacob. By that, Joseph would get a portion more than any of his brothers, becoming two tribes, when each of his brothers became only one tribe. He probably intended to set Joseph as a (firstborn), in place of Reuben, who lost his birthrights through defiling his father’s bed (Gen. 35:22).

Jacob counted Ephraim and Manasseh as his own sons, while the offspring whom he begets after them shall be his, and shall not be tribes, but refers to those of Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:6); and shall not have a separate inheritance.

(3) While blessing Joseph in his two sons, Jacob does not forget his beloved Rachel, Joseph's mother; He tells him about her death and burial on the way to Ephrath - Bethlehem (Gen. 48:7). Up till his last breath, he does not forget his beloved wife, and he probably intended to draw the heart of his beloved son to Canaan; lest his Egyptian wife, his many descendants, or his riches, would make him forget the promised land.

3- JACOB BLESSES EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH

As Jacob acknowledged God's blessings on him, as he blessed his children and grandchildren, Joseph, like his father, acknowledged that his sons were given to him by God (Gen. 48:8).

Jacob asked Joseph to introduce his sons; and as he embraced and kissed them, they, together with their father bowed before Jacob. Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head who was the younger, whom Joseph brought to stand toward Israel's left hand; and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, the firstborn, whom Joseph brought to stand toward Israel's right hand. He began to give to them the blessing of God, God of his fathers Abraham and Isaac. In that blessing he prayed for:

(1) God's blessing was to come on Joseph through his two sons. The blessing was counted to Joseph, although Israel's hands were stretched on Ephraim and Manasseh. As though every divine blessing will extend in the life of Ephraim (the increasing fruition), and Manasseh (forgetting the toils of the world). God's blessing appears in life of continuous growth and increasing fruition, as well as in forsaking the love of the world, namely, in the positive as well as in the negative aspects.

(2) To get the blessing of the angel who has redeemed him from all evil, in time of affliction, as God proclaims more, his care amid afflictions. He does not lift up afflictions from his children, but supports and delivers them.

(3) To let his name and those of his fathers Abraham and Isaac, be named upon them. That was realized, as each of them became a tribe, referred to Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.

(4) To let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth (Gen. 48:16).

While Joseph greatly rejoiced, because of his father's blessing, that he got in the persons of his sons, yet, he was displeased, and took hold of his father's right hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head, and his left hand, to remove it from Manasseh's head to that of Ephraim. He assumed that, by that, he was putting in order what his father overlooked. But Jacob refused and confirmed to Joseph that God revealed to him the mystery of the greatness of the younger son, saying: *"I know, my son, I know. He also shall be a people, and he also shall be*

great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations”(Gen. 48:19).

What does that mean?

a- Jacob knew that the younger Ephraim is going to become greater than Manasseh. His descendants shall become a multitude of nations. That was realized in the first census done in the time of Moses. Of the tribe of Ephraim, the number of names, from 20 years old and above, all who were able to go to war, were 40500, while those, of the tribe of Manasseh, were 22200 (Numbers 1:32, 25). Also, the tribe of Manasseh lived divided, one half east of the Jordan, and the other half west of it; resulting in its weakness. Added to this, the mixing of the half dwelling east of the Jordan, with the pagan peoples, exposed them to idol worship, more than others (2 Chronicles 15:9; 30:1). As to Ephraim, it was strong, that the northern kingdom (Israel), was named after Ephraim. Out of that tribe, came Joshua (Hoshea), son of Nun (Numbers 13:8); and they had an active role in the time of the Judges, in the days of the prophetess Deborah, Gideon, and Jephthah; and the prophet Samuel came from them (Judges 5; 8; 12; 1 Samuel 1) Shiloh, one of their cities, has been a holy place for the tabernacle for a long time, etc.

b- The way Jacob stretched out his hands, was like placing a cross over their heads, as though the mystery of the true blessing is the sacrifice of the cross.

c- Preferring the younger than the older, as we noticed in many occasions, refers to the coming of the Second Adam who occupies the birthright, that the first Adam lost. God does not care for the body birthright, but seeks the work of the Spirit. So He looked with favor on the sacrifice of Abel, the younger brother, and rejected that of Cain, the older brother (Gen. 4). Likewise, Jacob enjoyed the birthright, and his father’s blessing Isaac in the Lord, of which the older one Esau was deprived; as did Isaac, who enjoyed the blessing and inheritance, instead of Ishmael, the older son. In our study of the Gospel of St. Matthew the Evangelist, we saw how the Lord Christ came from descendants, most of whom do not enjoy physical birthrights¹.

St. Augustine² says that Jacob did that, giving a hidden blessing to the younger, by which the first became the last, and the last became the first, as a prophecy about what would happen on the coming of the Lord Christ. Abel was preferred over his older brother Cain: Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau; David over his older brothers; and the Christians over the Jews who preceded them. He also says: [As the two sons of Isaac - Esau and Jacob were used as symbols of the Jew and Christian peoples... The same thing happened concerning Joseph’s two sons; the older one became a symbol of the Jews, and the younger of the Christians³.]

Manasseh had been blessed, being a representative of the Church of the Old Testament;

¹ الإنجيل بحسب متى، ١٩٨٣.

² On Ps. 78.

³ City of God 16:42.

He became of significance in the eyes of God, having lived by faith, receiving the Law, the prophecies and the divine promises, at a time when the world was cast in the bosom of idolatry and its defilements. Then came the true Ephraim, namely the church of the New Testament that became greater, and embraced a multitude of peoples and nations.

Jacob ended his blessing to them by saying: *“By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh’”* (Gen. 48:20).

As though God blesses humanity through the two Churches of the New and the Old Testaments, that are actually, one Church, assembled together in Jesus Christ, crucified under the arms of Jacob, as the sign of the cross.

4- JOSEPH TAKES ONE PORTION ABOVE HIS BROTHERS

Finally, Israel proclaims to his son Joseph, that he dies, but his heart is attached to God’s promise to him and to his fathers before him, that their descendants will inherit the land of promise (Gen. 48:21). Israel then granted his son Joseph one portion above his brothers (Gen. 48:22), making him the firstborn, and counting his sons as two tribes; and gave him also a plot of land that he took from the hand of the Amorites with his sword and bow (Gen. 48:22; and John 4:5, 6); and Joseph also got the privilege of having his bones buried in the plot of ground, bought by his father (Joshua 24:32).

CHAPTER 49

JACOB BLESSES HIS SONS

By the end of Jacob's life on earth, the era of the great Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), came to an end. Then Israel set forth, not as individuals, but as a people, as yeast, that should raise the whole dough by faith, and prepare the world for the coming of the Savior Messiah. That is why that era, was sealed by giving the blessing to every tribe, that carries in itself a prophecy on the coming of the Savior.

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| 1- Jacob calls his sons | 1-2. |
| 2- Reuben | 3-4. |
| 3-Simeon and Levi | 5-7. |
| 4- Judah | 8-12. |
| 5- Zebulun | 13. |
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| 7- Dan | 16-18. |
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| 9- Asher | 20. |
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| 11- Joseph | 22-26. |
| 12- Benjamin | 27. |
| 13- The final command | 28-33. |

1- JACOB CALLS HIS SONS

“Jacob called his sons and said, ‘Gather together that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days’ (Gen. 49:1).

After a life full of strife, along which Jacob took over for himself the blessing and birthright; and became worthy, despite his numerous weaknesses, of getting the promise, that the Savior Messiah would come from his seed, in Whom all nations would be blessed. He remained 17 years in Egypt, quietly and in peace. And now, as he was about to pass from this earth, he saw his sons as tribes, from which the people of God would emerge, to enjoy the land of promise, and the Savior Messiah would come. His mouth was opened to utter what he sees through the spirit of prophecy, or through the shadows, as though he is Moses who ascended to Mount Nebo, to look from afar at the land of promise, and rejoice for the sake of the people, who would enjoy the realization of the promise, of which he was deprived.

In the twelve tribes, he saw the Church that would enjoy the salvation of Christ, and grow in Spirit. He saw in **Reuben**, the firstborn, and his natural fruit from Leah, a man who leans on the birthright of the flesh, namely the works of the Law, to lose the birthright of the Spirit; That

is why he counted him as the one who defiled his father's bed, by defiling the Church, the bride of Christ, through his self-righteousness.

And in **Simeon** and **Levi**, from whom the *scribes* and *priests* came, who opposed the Lord Christ, the Word of God. Referring to the sin of evil plotting, and of counsels of transgressions, that corrupts the ministry and the work of God.

As for **Judah**, he saw him representing the crucified Lamb, and at the same time, the lion, conqueror by the cross. He saw the Lord Christ coming from the tribe of Judah, to grant the power of His resurrection to His believers; as though, it is not enough for us to forsake self-righteousness (Reuben), and reject the counsel of transgression (Simeon and Levi). But we should attach ourselves to the true Judah, in order to enjoy the power of His resurrection working in us. By that, he then set forth to **Zebulun**, who refers to setting forth toward the sea, namely heading to the Gentiles to preach them. He, who carries in him, the risen Judah, could never stand to see the Gentiles in their lack of faith; but would seek the salvation of every soul.

He compares **Issachar** to a donkey, carrying the burdens of others. If we are accused of idiocy, because of our bearing the passion with joy, and our serving others; let us not escape, but keep on working incessantly, guided by His words: "*Come to Me, all who labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28).

The more the kingdom of God extends among the nations, the more will be the opposition of the devil, until the Antichrist appears, out of the tribe of **Dan**, as a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, to bite until killing.

Then he spoke of **Gad**, as being tramped upon by a troop, but triumphs at last as a reference to the believer who is often attacked, yet to conquer at the end. That is why, he is followed by **Asher** with his fat bread, and royal dainties; the spiritual wars, even if they expose our weaknesses, yet, they give strength to the soul, and make it more fruitful.

After Asher, he spoke of **Naphtali**, of quick action. He gives sweet words to all. As to **Joseph**, he carries the seeds of two tribes: **Manasseh** and **Ephraim**; his name meaning, 'growth,' through forgetting the worries of the world 'Manasseh,' and enjoying the increasing fruition 'Ephraim.'

Finally he speaks of **Benjamin**, meaning 'son of the right hand;' who enjoys the fellowship of the eternal glory.

In short, we can say, that Jacob with the spirit of prophecy in his sons, is a living portrait of the Church, striving in Jesus Christ:

- 1- **Reuben**: Getting away from self-righteousness.
- 2- **Simeon and Levi**: Getting away from evil plotting.
- 3- **Judah**: Getting attached to Christ.
- 4- **Zebulun**: Setting forth to preaching.
- 5- **Issachar**: Bearing the burdens of others.

- 6- **Dan**: Opposing the devil.
- 7- **Gad**: Spiritual strife.
- 8- **Asher**: Fruits of the strife.
- 9- **Nephtali**: Sweetness of talk.
- 10- **Joseph**: Continuous growth.(**Manasseh** [forgetting the worries of the world] and **Ephraim** [enjoying the increasing fruition])
- 11- **Benjamin**: Enjoyment of the right hand of God.

2- REUBEN

As the blessing is through the shadow of the Law, Jacob began by his firstborn according to the flesh Reuben, who represents the nature, having come from Leah. Reuben means ‘son of vision.’ But unfortunately, he did not keep the purity of his eyes, to behold the heavenly things, but leaned on his own ‘self,’ and lost his insight, to leave his spiritual birthright to Judah, who would enjoy the coming of the Lord Christ, the true Firstborn, from his seed; He, whose fragrance gives pleasure to the Father.

Jacob blesses his firstborn, according to the flesh; but admonishes him at the same time: *“Reuben, you are my firstborn; my might, and the beginning of my strength; the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father’s bed. Then you defiled it - He went up to my couch” your father’s bed*” (Gen. 49:3-4).

Jacob was proud of his firstborn, and calls him his might and the beginning of his strength He received the best dignity and power, yet, he does not forget that he went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine (Gen. 35:22). Because of that, he lost his birthright, to be given to Joseph’s sons (1 Chronicles 5:1). As to the spiritual birthright, it went to Judah. Reuben was defeated before his bodily lust, so became like water, boiling up then cooling down again, losing his virtue.

Reuben represented the Jewish people, counted as firstborn in the knowledge of God, but, because of his denial, he lost his birthright; lost his spiritual strength, his dignity and virtue, and counted as defiled, through their attempt to corrupt the Church of God. About this, **St. Hippolytus of Rome** says: [A great role was supposed, for the power of God, to be proclaimed, on account of His firstborn people, on their exodus from the land of Egypt. For their sake, that land had been chastised in several ways that people was meant by His saying: *“My strength and my firstborn, the first people, the circumcised.”*] But unfortunately, they lost this privilege because of their denial of faith of the Savior, and were counted as defilers of the Church. What happened with the Jews, will happen at the time of backsliding, when many will deny faith; **St. Hippolytus of Rome** says: [In the last days, people will violate the Father’s bed, namely, the Church His bride, to corrupt it, something that is happening nowadays through blasphemy.]

3- SIMEON AND LEVI

“Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their habitation. Let not my soul enter their council; let not my honor be united to their assembly. For in their anger, they slew a man, and in their self-will, they hamstrung an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel!” (Gen. 49:5-7).

What did Jacob see in his two sons that made him reject their council and their assembly? **St. Hippolytus** says: [**From Simeon came the scribes, and from Levi the priests;** through their will, the scribes and priests consummated the evil, by crucifying Christ.] Indeed they were brothers, yet in their union, they did not dignify God, but crucified the Savior, who came as Man, and hamstrung Him, He who offered Himself a sacrifice (as an ox) for their redemption.

This is the spiritual concept, in which we reject every wicked council, in order to live in the Church, the kingdom of God. According to the literal concept, Simeon and Levi were brothers, namely, similar in character; each of them took his sword, and came to the city of Shechem, where they killed every male, avenging their sister Dinah, who was defiled by Shechem, son of Hamor, the Hivite (Gen. 34); disregarding justice in their revenge. Together they planned evil, and brought trouble on their father.

4- JUDAS

Indeed, Judah did not get two portions like Joseph, his brother, who took the birthright from Reuben, to become two tribes: Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Jacob counted as his sons, like Reuben and Simeon, referred to him (Gen. 48:5). But Judah, got the portion of a lion in the blessing, when Jacob saw the Lord Christ, the King and Priest, coming from his seeds, saying: *“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s children shall bow down before you”* (Gen. 49:8).

Who is this Judah, whom his brothers shall praise, but the Lord Christ, Himself, Who comes from the tribe of Judah; Who, with the cross, has put his hand on the neck of the devil, his enemy, and destroyed him, to set humanity free from his authority, in order to let them worship Him in Spirit and truth. Judah became the royal tribe; starting by David, the king and prophet; and culminating by the coming of the King of kings, the Lord of glory Himself. *“Judah is a lion’s whelp. From the prey, my son, you have gone up; He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse Him?!”* (Gen. 49:9).

Seeing the Lord Christ, in the seed of Judah, Jacob called Him the lion that came out of the war of the cross, victorious over his spiritual enemies. He bowed down, and lied down on the cross. But, even in His sleep on the cross, He has been a lion. No enemy could approach Him. Concerning this, **St. Augustine** says: [He prophesied the death of Christ by saying *“lied down,”* stressing that his death has been by his own will, and not compulsory; symbolizing Him by a lion. He, Himself, proclaimed that authority, in the Bible, saying, *“No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down by Myself; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again”* (John

10:18). So the lion roared, and consummated what he said. Then He added to that His power in resurrection, saying, "*Who shall arouse Him?*," namely, He will raise Himself up, no one will arouse Him. He said about His body, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*" (John 2:10). He also talked about the kind of His death, namely being lifted up on the cross, saying, "*From the prey, you have gone up*¹."

Then he goes on saying: "*The scepter shall not depart from Judas, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people*" (Gen. 49:10). It is a privilege that Jacob gives to his son, whose descendant will carry the royal scepter, and from among his children (*between His feet*), will be the Lawgiver, until the Messiah, the Grantor of peace (*Shiloh*) comes, to include the nations in His spiritual kingdom. **St. Augustine** says: [The Jews, were so called, after "Judah" one of the twelve sons of Jacob... from whose seed, royalty came... From that tribe kings came; and from it our Lord Jesus Christ came².]

"Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine. He washed his garment in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11)

In our study of the gospel of Matthew, chapter 21, we saw that the donkey's colt refers to the Jewish people, and the donkey to the Gentiles, who lost their minds, because of their pagan defilements. He is proclaiming by the spirit of prophecy that both, the Jews and the Gentiles, have united together to the vine. And the choice vine has become one holy Church. As **St. Hippolytus** comments on this phrase: [He calls both circumcised and uncircumcised peoples to one faith³.] This, and the garment of Christ, refers to the Church, attached to Him, as what we saw in our talk on the colored tunic (Gen. 37:3); that garment, that was washed by the Lord in His pure blood]; and as **St. Cyprian** says: [What is the blood of wine, but the wine of the blood of the Lord?!⁴] And **St. Clement of Alexandria** says: [The vine produces wine, and the Word offers blood; both give health: the wine for the body, and the blood for the spirit⁵.] And **St. Augustine** says: [What is this garment, that He washes in wine, namely in His blood, from sin, but the Church?!⁶] "*His eyes are darker than wine, and His teeth whiter than milk*" (Gen. 49:12).

St. Hippolytus comments on this phrase, saying: [His eyes glow, as though by the word of truth, watching what is believed; and his teeth are whiter than milk, expressing the strength of His illuminating words. That is why he described them as white, and compared them to milk, that nourishes the body and soul.] **St. Augustine** says: [His eyes are red because of the wine; these are His spiritual people, who drink His cup; and His teeth are whiter than milk; which is the

¹ *City of God 16:41.*

² *On Ps. 76.*

³ *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist. 12:13.*

⁴ *Ep. 62:6.*

⁵ *Paedagogus 1:5.*

⁶ *City of God 16:41.*

words taken by the babes, who, as the apostle says, are not still qualified for solid food (1 Corinthians 3:2; 1 Peter 2:2)¹.]

St. Hippolytus also says, that the eyes refer to the prophets, and the milk to the commandments of Christ, saying: [What are the eyes of Christ, but the prophets who prophesied by the Spirit, and proclaimed in advance, the passions that He would suffer; and rejoiced, as they clearly saw Him, through the spiritual insight, getting revived by His word and grace?... And the milk refers to the commandments, coming from the mouth of Holy Christ, pure as milk².]

5- ZEBULUN

“Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea. He shall become a haven for ships; and his border shall adjoin Sidon” (Gen., 49:13).

The tribe of Zebulun dwelt west of the River Jordan, west of the Sea of Galilee; and worked as traders, who most probably have taken over locations close to the Mediterranean Sea. **St. Hippolytus** believes, that his saying, *“Zebulun shall dwell by the Haven of the sea,”* carries a symbol of the union of Israel to the Gentiles; as the sea symbolized the Gentiles, while the river symbolized the Jews³; so the two together unite to form one flock. **St. Hippolytus** says: [The Haven for ships, designates a secure Haven, referring by this to the Lord Christ, the Anchor of hope. Here is a reference to the call to the Gentiles; when the grace of Christ covers the whole earth as well as the sea. By saying: *“He shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall adjoin Sidon,”* he presents a prophetic proclamation, concerning the Church of the Gentiles, which appeared in the Gospel: *“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people who sat in the darkness saw a great light”* (Matthew 4:15-16). Therefore, by saying Zebulun, fixing his dwelling by the border of the sea, he prophecies the union of Israel with the Gentiles, both to become one flock, under the One Great Shepherd, the good by His nature, the Lord Christ. That is why, in his blessing, Moses says: *“Rejoice, O Zebulun”* (Deuteronomy 33:18).

6- ISSACHAR

“Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between two burdens; he saw that rest was good, and that the land was pleasant; he bowed his shoulder to bear a burden, and became a band of slaves” (Gen. 49:14-15). He likened Issachar to a strong donkey; as that tribe used to work as farmers, characterized by patience. As the land was fertile, he was satisfied with agriculture, and did not care, except rarely for politics, and was accordingly exposed to paying taxes.

¹ *City of God* 16:41.

² *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*. 12, 13.

³ Cf. *our Commentary on Habakkuk* 3:8..

St. Hippolytus believes that his saying that the land was pleasant, refers to the body of Christ, rich with His gifts, presented to us to inherit, as though the land of promise, that floods with milk and honey, nourishing the babes and grown-ups.

In the introduction to this chapter, we said that Issachar was like a donkey, that carries the burdens of others, bowing down his shoulders of love, for the tired, and enslaving himself to set others free.

When Saul of Tarsus, tasted the good taste of the land, and got aware of the divine gifts, given to him through his fellowship in the body of Christ, he bowed down his shoulder and said: *“For though I am free from all men, I have myself a servant to all, that I might win the more”* (1 Corinthians 9:19). That was the tax he paid, delivering himself as a slave, although he was a free man, in order to set the slaves free, and to win them as children of God. He bowed down his shoulders, saying: *“Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?!”* (2 Corinthians 11:29). *“I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. But be that as it may”* (2 Corinthians 12:15-16).

7- DAN

“Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path that bites the horse’s heels, so that its rider shall fall backward. I have waited for your salvation, O Lord” (Gen. 49:16-18).

As this prophecy carries bitterness, he started it with an admonishment, proclaiming that Dan is *“one of the tribes of Israel;”* counted as a tribe, although he was the first among Jacob’s sons born to a concubine (Gen. 30:1-6). His descendants were known as having been shrewd cunning; described by Moses as *“A lion’s whelp; He shall leap from Bashan”* (Deuteronomy 33:22).

St. Irenaeus says that the antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan; a view accepted by several Fathers, and supported by **St. Hippolytus**, by quoting the prophet Jeremiah, *“The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan. The whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones. For they have come and devoured the land and all that is in it, the city and those who dwell in it. ‘For behold, I will send serpents among you, vipers which cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you’”* (Jeremiah 8:16-17); believing all that to conform with the time of (backsliding), when the antichrist would come out of the tribe of Dan, with his hosts, to make war against the Church all over the world, and to bite the believers with the poison of his blasphemies. He also supports his view by the words of the prophet Moses: *“A lions whelp; He shall leap from Bashan”* (Deuteronomy 33:22). As the Lord Christ came out of the tribe of Judah as a lion, the antichrist, in order to deceive mankind, would come out of the tribe of Dan, as a whelp of a lion.

❖ As the Lord Christ came out of the tribe of Judah, the antichrist will come out of the tribe of

Dan... What does he mean here by the Serpent, but the deceiving antichrist; the serpent that was mentioned in the Book of Genesis (3:1), that deceived Adam and Eve?!

- ❖ That would surely be realized in the tribe of Dan; from which would come a tyrant, a king, a fearsome judge - a son of Satan¹.

St. Hippolytus of Rome

8- GAD

“Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him; But he shall triumph at last” (Gen. 49:19). The tribe of Gad chose the region, east of the Jordan as its portion, after vowing to the prophet Moses to cross, with the rest of his brothers, over the Jordan, and fight together with them, until all the enemies are driven out of the promised land (Numbers 32). Their choice of the east of Jordan, made their land a battle field between Aram and Israel (2 Kings 10: 33), and they were exposed to attacks by the Amonites and the Amorites, but the children of God, were always capable of chasing and defeating them. Some Gadites joined David at the stronghold in the wilderness; and were described as, *“mighty men of valor, men trained for battle, who could handle shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as gazelles on the mountains,... the least (of them) was over a hundred, and the greatest was over a thousand”* (1 Chronicles 12: 8, 14).

Gad, therefore, represented the soul, that faces several spiritual wars, yet would never cease to strive in the Lord; hastening as a gazelle toward the higher Jerusalem; fearlessly making war against sins and transgressions.

9- ASHER

“Bread from Asher shall be rich; and he shall yield royal dainties” (Gen. 49: 20). Jacob prophesied the prosperity of Asher; and the prophet Moses said that he will *“dip his foot in oil”* (Deuteronomy 33:24). The two prophesies were realized, as the tribe of Asher enjoyed fertile lands, rich in olive trees from which oil was extracted. The produce of their land was so abundant, that their bread was described as rich; and they used to export to the other tribes. Their dwelling close to the sea, also enabled them to import foreign items, then sell them to the other tribes; so it was said that they *“yield royal dainties.”* That tribe referred to abundance of grace in the life of spiritual strugglers.

10- NAPHTALI

“Naphtali is a doe set free, that bears beautiful fawns” (Gen. 49:21). That tribe, in its love for freedom, simulated a female gazelle running free in an open wilderness, and in a valley with no obstacles; roaming swiftly wherever it chooses. Yet that freedom was not an excuse for wickedness and corruption, but this tribe had been committed to good relationships with the rest

¹ *Treat on Christ and Antichrist 14, 15.*

of tribes, offering “*full blessings of the Lord.*” And in the Book of Judges, Deborah, the prophetess sang, saying: “*Zebulun is a people who jeopardized their life to the point of death; Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield*” (Judges 5:18); probably in reference to their strife in wars. The prophet Moses blessed them before his death, saying: “*O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full of blessing of the Lord; Possess the west and the south*” (Deuteronomy 33: 23). Thus Naphtali came to represent the soul, which, because of its tender relationship with its brothers, it enjoys the blessing of the Lord.

11- JOSEPH

Joseph, the “man of dreams,” the firstborn of Rachel, was praised more than all his brothers; having been honest in his relationship with God, and loving all, as a son, a brother, a slave, a prisoner, or a leader in a palace. That is why his father called him, “*a fruitful bough,*” repeating it twice, as a reference that its fruit is that of love; and because the figure 2, as said by **St. Augustine**, refers to love, making two into one. Joseph was a bough that produced a heavenly fruit, exalted high, not hindered by the wall of events nor surrounding circumstances, saying: “*Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well. His branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong, by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob*” (Gen. 49: 22-24)

Joseph represents the human soul, honest to God, that does not cease to offer spiritual love, despite numerous oppressions and fierce spiritual wars. That soul keeps on being a fruitful bough, connected to the origin, according to the words of the Lord: “*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). It is the bough that is attached to the well of the water of the Holy Spirit, that grants it life and fruits; to grow to become like “*branches run over the wall*” of time, set forth toward heaven. Through abiding in Christ, and enjoying the work of the Holy Spirit, the soul faces Satan and his hosts “the archers,” such a bitter war, which would justify him and reveal, the more, his conquest.

St. Hippolytus believes that the talk here applies more to the Lord Christ, whose brothers envied Him, and whom the archers, namely the leaders of people, grieved Him by their bitter counsel. But their bows were broken, and their arms collapsed, proclaiming His victory on the cross against the wicked hosts. The Lord Christ was often described as a bough especially in the book of Zechariah (3:8).

Joseph, although separated by his brothers, who sold him as a slave, to live far away in humiliation, was seen by Jacob as “*a (Nazarite) among his brothers,*” namely dedicated to God on their behalf; to enjoy exalted heavenly and worldly blessings; saying: “*By the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob, (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel); By the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you; With blessings of heaven above,*

blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors; up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him, who was separate from his brothers (the Nazarite among his brothers) ” (Gen. 49:24-26).

Jacob asks for his son Joseph every blessing possible, praying on his behalf to God, beloved by him; the Shepherd and the Stone of Israel, who will help him; asks from the Almighty, to bless him with the blessings of heaven above, and blessings of the deep that lies beneath; riches of the land and abundance of descendants (blessings of the breasts and womb); to be granted more blessings than those given to Isaac by Abraham, and to Jacob by Isaac (The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors); asking for him a blessing that would be up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.

So Jacob loved his son Joseph more than himself, praying for him to be granted much more than he got of his father’s blessing; a blessing that will cover his soul (blessing of heaven), and his body (blessing of the deep that lies beneath) and all his energies and abilities (blessings of the breasts and womb), to become eternally blessed, and a Nazarite among his brothers to intercede on their behalf.

12- BENJAMIN

“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. In the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil” (Gen. 49:27).

The prophecy refers here to the courage of the tribe of Benjamin and its might in war. It was said of them: *“Everyone of them could sling a stone at a hair’s breath and not miss” (Judges 20: 16).*

St. Hippolytus of Rome says that the prophecy here refers to King Saul who was from the tribe of Benjamin, who was threatening to devour King David like a wolf; and refers as well to Saul of Tarsus, who set forth in the morning of his life, to devour the Church as a spoil, but, after he believed, he submitted and delivered himself to her as food (The Septuagint version).

St. Jerome presented us with the same thought, saying: [Paul, the persecutor of the Church, the wolf coming out of the tribe of Benjamin to devour a prey, bows his head before Ananias, one of Christ’s flock, to have his eyes healed, before the medicine of Baptism (Acts 9:17-18) ¹.] He also says: [In the morning, Paul, the prosecutor of the Church, was a wolf that devours; but in the evening he became food to be offered (according to the Septuagint version) submitted to the lamb, Ananias².]

13- THE FINAL COMMAND

Jacob previously made his son Joseph vow to bury him with his father, his mother, and

¹ Ep. 69:6.

² Ep. 60:8.

his grandparents, in Canaan, in the cave of Machpelah, which Abraham bought from Ephron the Hitite; Now, he is repeating his command to his twelve sons. He lived all his life, like his fathers before him, a stranger, waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise in his descendants. Finally, he died on hope, "*He breathed his last, and was gathered to his people*" (Gen. 49:33).

CHAPTER 50

BURIAL OF JACOB

Jacob died as a stranger in the land of Egypt, after commanding his sons to bury him in Canaan, in the burial place of his fathers. As though, realizing that the seed of God's people, had been planted in Egypt to grow and flourish, he demands from these people to keep their hearts attached to Canaan, the promised land, in order to enjoy the promises of God.

- 1- Embalming Jacob** **1-6**
- 2- Burying Jacob in Canaan** **7-13**
- 3- Joseph reassures and comforts his brothers** **14-21**
- 4- Joseph takes an oath from the children of Israel to carry his bones from Egypt** **22-26**

1- EMBALMING JACOB

Jacob lived all his life, like his fathers, unsettled in tents; and died as a stranger in the land of Egypt. He commanded his sons to bury him in Canaan in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca etc. were buried. Some people may ask: why did such man of faith, father of all tribes, care about that issue, to make it his last command to his sons?! Does he care for the body after death?!

(1) The Fathers confirm that people of the Old Testament, used to care to have their bodies buried in particular locations, as a tradition, through which their children would apprehend the resurrection of the body. Those fathers lived their life as strangers, depriving the body of comfort and luxury, in anticipation of carrying it glorified in the great day of the Lord.

(2) Jacob wanted to confirm to his children, through burying him in Canaan, that, although he lived his last days in Egypt, where Joseph delivered the family from famine, yet his heart is in Canaan, that God promised to give to Abraham's descendants. It is as though Jacob is demanding from his children to live in Egypt, honestly working and striving, yet, they have to keep their hearts attached to God's promises to them.

(3) He demanded to be buried with his fathers, to proclaim that his life walked in harmony with the faith of his fathers, delivered along the ages, in particular his faith in the resurrection from the dead.

Anyhow, when Jacob died, Joseph was so moved that, "*He fell on his father's face, and wept over him, and kissed him*" (Gen. 50:1)

As though he was aware of the realization of God's promise to his father: "*Do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hands on your eyes*" (Gen. 46:4); namely, he will put his hands on his father's eyes on his death to close them, as it is the custom to this very day.

Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his fathers, to carry him to Canaan and spoke to the household of Pharaoh to speak in the ears of Pharaoh, to let him go up and bury his father in Canaan; as it was not possible for Joseph to approach Pharaoh with his attire of grief, and with his long beard, left to grow, in honor of the deceased.

2- BURIAL OF JACOB IN CANAAN

The great procession moved from Goshen, setting forth to the land of Canaan, to bury Israel. Joseph said: *“I go up and bury my father”* (Gen. 50:6), as it was, in his eyes, a procession of ‘ascending and not of descending,’ carrying a symbol of ascension of the Church toward the higher Jerusalem, the true Canaan, to be eternally with her Groom.

The procedure of burial was in three steps:

(1) Setting forth from Egypt; described by the Book as *“a very great gathering”* (Gen. 50:9). It had at its head, Joseph, or the true leader of our spiritual procession against the forces of darkness, according to the words of the apostle: *“Now thanks be to God who always lead us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place”* (2 Corinthians 2:14). The procession also included all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt; as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s house. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It has been the procession of the Catholic Church that embraces all men of faith, from the Gentiles, as well as from the Jews, both the servants and elite elders. It was a very great procession, as though in a continuous war, *“not against flesh and blood, but... against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:12), a spiritual war against sin and wicked spirits. Many Fathers spoke of this spiritual war, and of our enjoyment of fighting it, through the water of baptism, to set forth toward heaven, in a conquest and victory by the Holy Spirit. **St. Cyprian** says: [I wanted to fight gallantly, putting in consideration the ‘Sacrament’ that is mine, bearing the weapons of dedication and faith¹.] And **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Just as the seal is put on soldiers, so also the Holy Spirit is put on the believers².] And **St. Cyril** says: [Now, your name will be engraved, and you will be called to join the (spiritual) camp³.]

In the symbolic Egypt, as the believer sets forth, as a very great army to make battle against uncountable sins, he lives among tears and crying, as done by the Egyptians, who mourned for seventy days (Gen. 50:3). Our exit from the love of the world needs persistent spiritual strife, until our depths are freed, from worldly bonds, by Jesus Christ the Leader of the procession.

(2) The procession came to the ‘threshing floor of Atad’ which is beyond the Jordan;

¹ De Lapsis 13.

² PG 61:48.

³ PG 33:333 A.

representing the Church that longed to exit the love of the world, to enjoy the heavenly life, through its crossing of the Holy baptism. There, the procession mourned with a great and very solemn lamentation for seven days; of which it was said: *“When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, ‘This is a grievous mourning of the Egyptians;’ Therefore its name was called (Abel Mizraim), which is beyond the Jordan”* (Gen. 50:11-12).

The baptism melds with mourning for seven days; as our new birth in the Holy Font, melds with the continuous repentance, all the days of our sojourn. And as said by **St. Gregory of Nyssa**: [Whoever receives the bath of renewal, is like a little soldier, given a place among the wrestlers, although he did not still prove his worthiness of that honor¹.]

(3) As they reached the land of Canaan, we do not hear any more of tears and crying; as though entrance into the heavenly Canaan, would take any suffering away from the Church. And as said in the Book of Revelation: *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and there shall be no more pain; for the former things have passed away”* (Revelation 21:4).

Jacob entered into the same cave where his father Abraham was buried, as though the sojourning Church, had found comfort, and settled down in the bosom of Abraham.

3- JOSEPH REASSURES AND COMFORTS HIS BROTHERS

“When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him” (Gen. 50:15).

They came to beg him, in the name of his father, and according to his command, to forgive their evil deed. Joseph could not help himself before their humiliation, and wept when they spoke to him. Here Joseph’s dignity grew in the eyes of his brother who, *“fell down before his face, and they said, ‘Behold, we are your servants”* (Gen. 50:18).

Joseph grew greater, not by occupying the second place in Egypt after Pharaoh, but by the love that filled his heart; enjoying, not the righteousness of the Law, through keeping its commandments, but realization of the evangelic commandment through the covenant of the Law. He did not repay evil with evil; and did not even stop at forgiveness of those who did him wrong, but he could not bear to see their humiliation, and wept. He did not see their evil, but he saw God’s hand that turned their evil into good for all; proclaiming his great care for them, and that he will provide for them and their little ones. By that, he consummated the commandments of the Gospel, that so many of the New Testament consider as heavy burden.

Joseph’s words, *“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive;”* these words became a living program, in which the spirituals find a revelation of God’s mysteries and dealings with them.

¹ PG 46:429 C.

The coming back of Joseph's brothers to him with repentance, refers to the coming back of the Jews, at the end of days, to faith, through receiving the Lord Christ whom they denied; after the consummation of the Church of the Gentiles; when they ask for forgiveness for what they did; forsaking their arrogance and Zionistic thoughts; to live, not any more as a fanatic nation, but as believers, accepting Him, whom they have persecuted before.

4- JOSEPH TAKES AN OATH FROM THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, TO CARRY HIS BONES OUT OF EGYPT

If Joseph, in his love for his brothers had comforted and reassured them, by saying: "*Do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones*" (Gen. 50:21); He, in his last request, revealed that God alone will be their provider; as for him, he is going to die; saying: "*I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob*" (Gen. 50:24).

Which have been realized on the hands of Moses and Joshua. He lived with the faith of his fathers, believing that his people will surely set forth to the land of Canaan. That is why he took an oath from the children of Israel, saying: "*God will surely visit you; and you shall carry up my bones from here*" (Gen. 50:25) in a reference to his wish to partake of his people's exodus from the land of servitude, even through his bones.

Finally, the Book of Genesis came to an end, by the death of Joseph, his embalming, and being put in a coffin in Egypt. As we said before, this Book started by the creation, namely the setting forth of life out of nothingness through the work of God; and ended by man being embalmed and buried in Egypt, where huge pyramids, arts, and civilization, could not save him from death, because of his inner corruption.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF GENESIS

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