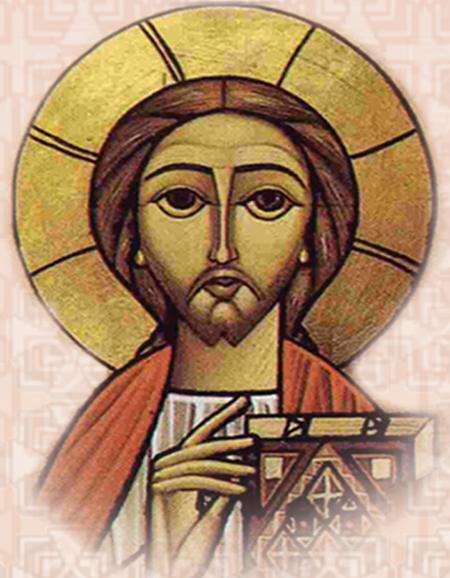


A Patristic Commentary



THE BOOK OF Lamentations

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

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A COMMENTARY ON

THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

By

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(Translated from Arabic by Dr. George Botros)

A PREFACE

FUNERAL SONGS

BITTER MOURNING, OR NEW HEAVENLY MERCIES?!

Standing in awe before this book, man will have his whole being retreat to see God's exalted love for all mankind, and will get in touch with God's holiness, who, in spite of His love for sinners, even while chastening them, He does not endure sin. This book will always remain a source of comfort for the wounded souls, opening the gates of heaven before them. It also bears a prophetic portrait concerning the Lord Christ, the Savior of the world, who has delivered Himself a sacrifice for mankind, yet was not received by His own, who intended to get rid of Him. And It is, as well, the book of every believer whose broken heart burns with love and desire for the salvation of the whole world.

(1) Beyond the desolation of the temple, and the captivation of the people, the prophet Jeremiah saw a painful portrait of a people chosen by

God to enjoy His divine bosom, to set them a living role model for all mankind to imitate, to forsake idol-worship and abominations, to believe in the living God, to get attached to Him, and to enjoy His fatherhood; Then, saw them perverted to sin, preferring the corrupt life to the fellowship with God. For the

sake of chastening them, God allowed for them to be delivered to, and enslaved by a heathen people; so that by letting them taste the bitterness of sin and its perdition-bringing fruit, they would forsake it and return to Him, the way all humanity does all along the generations.

(2) Portraying the bitterness of sin, we could perceive that what dwells upon us of chastisement – however harsh it may seem – comes from a

loving heavenly Father who anticipates our return to Him. “*We love Him because He first loved us*” (1 John 4: 19).

(3) Although the title of this book refers to that it is funeral songs, namely, lamentations fit for death itself, Yet, with all the bitterness they bear,

they present comfort for the wounded souls, open the gates of heaven before us, and bring us back to the divine mercies.

(4) This book, bears, as well, a prophetic portrait concerning the suffering Lord Christ; starting by bitterly revealing what have dwelt upon the

ancient people because of their denial of Christ whom the fathers and the men of God, for so long, have anticipated His coming; And portraying the city of Jerusalem and the promised land as in a calamity, of which there is no way out; Yet in the middle of the book (Chapter 3), the prophet gets in touch with God’s mercies, shining each morning, once man forsakes his denial, and receives faith in the Sun of Righteousness (3: 22- 23), and once the rich grace of God and His endless mercies on humanity are revealed.

(5) Those lamentations reveal a broken loving heart burning with love for his people and desiring to see all restore the lost glory. The author

is a witness of the desolation of Jerusalem on the hands of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in October 587 B.C.

The desolation of Jerusalem, as far as the prophet Jeremiah was concerned, was not merely the loss of a strong and magnificently beautiful capital, being the city of God embracing His unique temple, and representing the presence of God among His people; But the prophet felt that that desolation refers to the departure of God's glory from the city, the temple, and the people; Yet in hope, he anticipated the glorious divine salvation. For him, the shock was beyond his endurance, whether on account of the Babylonian invasion, or the people's denial of the Lord Christ. He cried out in pain, wept, and called his people for prayers, and for their return to God by practical repentance.

It is a book for every believer, whose heart kindles with love for all mankind, who, not enduring to see the perdition of anyone, whatever his race or circumstances; moans, seeking the salvation of all humanity; and cries out together with the prophet, saying: "*O my anguish I, my anguish! I writhe with pain! O the walls of my heart; My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war*" (Jeremiah 4: 19); "*Oh, that my head were water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people*" (Jeremiah 9: 1).

+ It is time for me now, as well, to utter those words. Yes! Indeed, more that it was in the time of the prophet; If I do not grieve on many cities in many nations; but I do grieve on a soul as valuable, and even more valuable, than many such cities and nations!

I do not grieve for the sake of the destruction of a city, or its captivation by the wicked; but for the sake of the destruction of your holy soul ... and of the destruction and the desolation of the temple bearing the Lord Christ in her... For this temple is more holy than temple (of the old covenant); not adorned by gold and silver, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit; And, instead of the ark of the covenant, and the two statutes

of the cherubim, there in the heart, is the Lord Christ, His Father, and the Holy Spirit (the Paraklete).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + For several days I keep weeping on the people who were driven to perdition through the wicked heretic teachings; on the minds of the simple that went astray, and got used on hearing the evil heresy.

(St. Basil)

AN INTRODUCTION TO

THE LAMENTATIONS OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

In Hebrew they are called 'ekah' or 'Eikhah'; meaning (How), the first word of the book as a whole, as well as of the second and the third lamentations. For the Jews, the lamentations are included together with the group of books, called in Hebrew 'the ketubim', and in Greek 'The Hyographa', meaning (the holy writings). In the Septuagint version, it came following the books of Jeremiah and Baruch.

The author of the book:

According to the Jewish tradition, and the Christian tradition, the author of this book is the prophet Jeremiah, who used to work in the royal court, during the invasion of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and the first desolation of the temple. This tradition is set upon what came in 2 Chronicles 35: 25; that it was a lamentation he wrote about king Josiah. Moreover, the 'Targum', and the simple Syrian version (Pechitta), both refer the book to the prophet Jeremiah.

It was claimed that the prophet Jeremiah retreated to a cave outside the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem where he wrote this book. To this cave, the tourists guides to this very day, keep referring to it as the (grotte of Jeremiah).

Indeed, no other author could be more bitterly grieved on that event than the prophet Jeremiah.

The language of the book refers to him as the author of this book; as is also confirmed by certain evidences in and outside it; Although some scholars believe that it was written by several authors.

It was written by the prophet Jeremiah after the siege of Jerusalem, and its utter fall; As according to the Septuagint version: "It so happened after Israel was taken into captivity, and Jerusalem was destroyed, that Jeremiah sat weeping and crying with this lamentation on Jerusalem; saying" (Jeremiah 1: 1);

These words, according to some, were in the Hebrew origin from which the Septuagint version was translated. The same introduction came in Latin translation in the 'Vulgata', with the addition of the words: "And in the bitterness of heart, Jeremiah wept and cried out, saying:". In (Lamentation 3: 48, 49), out of Jeremiah's eyes, fountains of tears, unceasingly flowed. And in Jeremiah 7: 29, it came that the Lord sought from Jeremiah to tell Jerusalem to "*cut off her hair, cast it away, and take up a lamentation on the desolation of Jerusalem*".

Jeremiah as a witness of those events:

Jeremiah, as a witness of those events, wrote his lamentations (Jeremiah 1: 13-15; 2: 6, 9; 4: 1-12); probably with the help of 'Baruch' his personal scribe (Jeremiah 36: 4; 45: 1); during the fall of Jerusalem in the year 586 B.C., or a little time after; in mid July as the city fell, and mid August as the temple was burned down. Witnessing, as well, the destruction of the city wall, the towers, the

houses, the royal palace, and the temple, Jeremiah wrote his memories down while the events were still alive in his mind, before he was carried away against his will to Egypt in the year 583 B.C. (Jeremiah 43: 1-7); His lamentations came conforming with what he previously mentioned in his prophesies in his book.

The circumstances of writing the lamentations:

The prophet wrote it during his grief upon the desolation of Jerusalem and the holy land on the hands of the Chaldeans, and upon the killing and the captivation of many; leaving only the poor, and the people of no skills; and utterly wiping out the seat of the kingdom of Judah.

The lamentations were not written as a historical record, nor as a description of the events themselves, as much as to reveal what were beyond the events, of the dealings of God with His people and believers, who kept on their disobedience and stubbornness; and with those He used as tools to chasten His believers, who have haughtily acted against God Himself

In the first 29 chapters of his book, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied that calamity; Whereas in his lamentation, he concentrated on revealing his grief and his broken heart.

This book, together with the books of Ruth, Esther, the Song of songs, and the Ecclesiastes, came in the Old Testaments, to be called the five scrolls of 'Megilloth', which were read in the synagogues during specific occasions. The book of lamentations was read in the ninth day of July/August to commemorate the desolation of Jerusalem on the hands of Nebuchadnezzar; And that date, itself, was used for the day of the desolation of the temple built by Herod on the hands of the Roman 'Titus' in the year 70 A.D.

Having portrayed to us what dwelt upon Jerusalem and the people of Judah, confirming that that extensive affliction was allowed by God for the sake of chastening His people; Yet the prophet kept on wondering why the divine firmness could reach such a level, and could last as long as 70 years!

But the Holy Book perpetually confirms the fatherhood of God; being a Father while granting an abundance of blessings; and a Father while allowing for temptations, however harsh they may be.

If God allowed for such chastisement against His people, we should not forget the following:

(1) Before entering into the promised land, more than eight centuries before that captivity, and through the prophet Moses, God, giving the people a warning, in some detail, concerning the consequences of disobedience, stubbornness, going after idol-worship, and partaking of the heathen abominations, threatening captivity, He said:

“All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. And they shall be upon you for a sign and a wonder, and on your descendants forever. Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things. Therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of all things; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you. The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle

flies, a nation whose language you will not understand., a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young. They shall eat the increase of your livestock and the produce of your land, until you are destroyed; they shall not leave you grain or new wine or oil, or the increase of your cattle or the offspring of your flocks, until they have destroyed you.. They shall besiege you at all your gates, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land, and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the Lord your God has given you. You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you. The man among you who is sensitive and very refined will be hostile toward his brother, toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the rest of his children whom he leaves behind; so that he will not give any of them the flesh of his children whom he will eat, because he has nothing left in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, who shall not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her delicateness and sensitivity, will refuse to the husband of her bosom, and to her son and her daughter. Her placenta which comes out from between her feet, and her children whom she bears, for she will eat them secretly, for lack of all things in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at your gates. If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD (Deuteronomy 28: 45- 58).

(2) 800 years before the captivation, Joshua the son of Nun prophesied before the distribution of the promised land among the Israeli tribes, about this captivation (Joshua 23: 15-16); in the hope that they beware against the disobedience and plunging in evil.

(3) God for as long as many centuries, sent several prophets to warn the people. As for Jeremiah, for a duration of more than 40 years (645 – 605 B.C.), he kept on warning the people, the king, and the rulers on all levels. But instead of repenting and returning to God, they accused the prophet of national treason; and got attached to the false prophets who talked smoothness, to gain favor in the eyes of the people and the rulers, whether for the sake of material or honor profits, and they persecuted the prophet. And when his prophesies were eventually fulfilled through the coming of Nebuchadnezer and his army, Jeremiah kept on warning the people who were persistent on their disobedience; even while talking to them with extreme sadness.

The divine decision of falling into captivity was not, therefore, made in a hurry, nor without giving the people every chance to be saved from it.

The goal of the book:

(1) These lamentations were written specifically for the Jews, three months after the Babylonian captivation, to be sung with the spirit of sadness by those going into captivity in Babylon; beside those who remained in Israel; in intense reproach because of the desolation of their land, particularly Jerusalem and the temple. Their goal was not merely to cry over what they have reached; as much as to discover two main things in their life: The first is what their persistence on evil, and their oppression against the prophet, have done to them. And the second is their living hope in God,

the Forgiver of sins, and the Grantor of glory.... The wages of sin are very high; but God's mercies will never fail.

- (2) By the spirit of prophecy, Jeremiah proclaimed the future return from captivation; For God desires the success of His children, and their glory, even during the moments of chastisement.

- (3) Jeremiah proclaimed the bitterness of his soul. Despite what dwelt upon the people and the rulers about which he warned them; yet, when reproach came upon them, he did not gloat against them, for their oppression against him, as well as against God Himself, but his soul was embittered within him; on account of that he was a man of love; No one has been so loyal to his people, with such a heart kindled with the fire of true love, like Jeremiah.

- (4) This book motivates us to repent, to return to the Lord, the Grantor of joy, through getting sad because of our sins that caused us to lose our inner peace; and to hear the divine voice, saying: "*There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel*" (Joshua 7: 13). When Achan the son of Carmi sinned and committed trespass in the accursed thing, God's wrath came upon the whole congregation of Israel (Joshua 22: 20). Solomon the sage said: "*It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.... The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth*" (Ecclesiastes 7: 2, 4).

- (5) Jerusalem has been the joy of the whole earth because it was the city of God; the secret of its beauty was the presence of God. But once the glory of God departed from it because of its persistence upon sin, it lost its beauty, strength, and joy; its people were captivated; and those who remained in the land became slaves to the king of Babylon.

Using of this book:

According to Schaff, the Jews used to gather together every Friday afternoon, to mourn the fall and desolation of Jerusalem; at the site of the Wailing wall, where they used to read these lamentations beside other suitable psalms; while kissing the stones of the wall, and wetting them with their tears.

The fifth lamentation or poem is a psalm or prayer, called “the prayer of Jeremiah” is still read by some of the Jews in their synagogues during ‘Temouz – Ab’ of every year, remembering the first desolation of Jerusalem in the year 587 B.C., and the ultimate desolation of the temple in the year 70A.D.

The Coptic church starts the service of the twelfth hour of the Great Friday, commemorating bringing Jesus’ body down from the cross, and His burial, by reading a part of this praise, sung by the bishop if present, or by the priest. As these lamentations reveal the sadness of the crucified Christ over the whole world, as well as over every soul that rejects faith in Him, and chooses for itself what Jerusalem has chosen by its denial of its Savior. At the same time, the Lord proclaims that what has come upon Him, as a unique sacrifice, was on account of that he accepted to bear our iniquities; and of that, by His own free will, He died to take upon Himself God’s wrath away from us, and to grant us holiness together with Him.

Its linguistic structure:

(1) The book is formed of five pieces of Hebrew poems, whose magnificence is not apparent in the translations as it does in its original

language. The first four poems are written in the form of mourning lamentations, the verses of each came arranged according to the

Hebrew alphabet; the same order we find in certain psalms like psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 119, 145.

(2) Each of the three lamentations 1, 2 and 4 is formed of 22 verses arranged according to the order and the number of the Hebrew alphabet 'Acrostics'.

(3) The third lamentation is formed of 66 verses, every three of them start with one letter, according to the order of the Hebrew alphabet.

(4) The fifth lamentation, is formed of 22 verses, yet, although it is a similar poetic piece, it is not bound to the Hebrew alphabetical order.

Its features:

(1) Revealing what lies behind that calamity, no wonder that the author gives a portrait of a desolate city with no inhabitants (4) (although in the same lamentation he says that its inhabitants are there (11); ... a portrait so horrible of people who reached the ferocity to eat their own children (cannibalism) (2: 20; 4: 9-10); who had to purchase water to drink (5: 4); of no more joy of heart, nor music to be heard in Jerusalem; and of that the responsible parties for that situation were the priests and the false prophets (4: 13).

(2) The book presents to us what is like funeral rites for the beautiful city that was counted before as the city of God, and now has reached as though to death. Yet, at the same time, opening the door of hope in the Lord, sets for us the practical way to deal with the bitter troubles and calamities.

(3) The book reveals the personality of the prophet Jeremiah, who has warned the people and the rulers; and now, after the calamity has already dwelt, his tears would not cease. He wrote the most magnificent lamentation known to mankind, coming out of a loving and a loyal heart; And amid his tears that would not dry, he had nothing before him but to end every one of his poems (except for the fourth one), by a prayer, in which he cries out to God.

(4) The essence of his message was that "*Whatever man sows, that he will also reap*" (Galatians 6: 7); For us to perceive that rebelling against God, rejecting the work of His grace, and disobeying His commandment, are nothing but an invitation to the dwelling of bitter calamities, to a loss of a blessed eternity, and of a fellowship of the heavenlies.

(5) God did not respond to Jeremiah's prayer for the people's sake, Seeking their repentance and sanctification, God will chastise them, not for the sake of revenge, as much as for their reform, teaching, and spiritual growth.

(6) A call for serious work, particularly in the time of youth (3: 27); as it was the case of Joseph, Joshua, Samuel, David, Paul, and Timothy

(7) These lamentations present to us a clear picture of how, in the time of afflictions and temptations, we should cry out to God, saying: "*Turn us back to You, O Lord, and we will be restored. Renew our days as in old*", *unless You have utterly rejected us, and are very angry with us*" (5: 21, 22).

(8) These lamentations reveal the perpetual opening of the doors of hope in God's mercies; As there will never be time to say that they are

closed, or that it is too late, even when the darkness are intense. As long as we still have breath in us, God anticipates our return to Him: "*For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion, according to the multitude of His mercies*" (3: 31, 32); and, "*Through the Lord's mercies, we are not consumed ; because His compassion fail not; they are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness*" (3: 22, 23). Yet, these lamentations reveal as well, that repentance has to be serious, and not with a shallow mind.

(9) Although the talk, literally refers to the Babylonian captivity, yet the name 'Babylon' did not appear in the book; A proclamation that the lamentations are not limited to a particular event, but present a bitter portrait of the fruits of the lack of living faith, of the rebellion against the God, and of the slothfulness in keeping the divine commandment.

(10) If God does not hesitate to chasten His own beloved people (Deuteronomy 32: 10), What do you expect He will do to the nations that reject His word?

(11) The lamentations bear divine comforts; counted as a call for prayer, and for resorting to God in the midst of affliction.

(12) The essence of this book is that God is great in His faithfulness (3: 22, 24).

(13) According to some, these lamentations reveal God's plan for the salvation of this people, in their consistent stubbornness. He used the intense chastisement like electric shocks by a clever physician for treatment. In the midst of the bitterness of chastisement, we should always perceive the fatherhood of God (Hebrew 12: 10). As in every lamentation, the prophet reveals a divine grace:

- a- In the first lamentation, together with the intense feeling of grief, and that God has utterly forsaken him, the prophet Jeremiah all of a sudden says: *“The Lord is Righteous; for I rebelled against His commandment”* (1: 18)
- b- In the second lamentation, enjoying a deeper insight of the truth, the prophet says: *“The Lord has done what He proposed. He has fulfilled His word which He commanded in days of old. He has thrown down, and has not pitied. And He has caused your enemy to rejoice over you; He has exalted the horn of your adversaries”* (2: 17). Jeremiah realized how God promised to open up before His people the windows of hope if they obey His commandments; And that the captivation will come to an end after 70 years (Jeremiah 25: 11).
- c- In the third lamentation, while crying with intense pains, the prophet presents to us expressions full of comfort, saying: *“Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed. Because His compassion fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, Therefore I hope in Him. The Lord is good to those who wait for Him”* (3: 22-25).
- d- At the end of the fourth lamentation he proclaims: *“The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion. He will no longer send you into captivity. He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins”* (4: 22).
- e- In the fifth lamentation, the splendor of the divine truth appears, that fills the soul with hope: *“You, O Lord, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation”* (5: 19).

Its theological thought:

Beside the high literal and linguistic level that characterize this book; counted as among the most magnificent pieces of lamentation in the world, particularly in its original language; It is, as well, the source of living theological thoughts:

(1) These lamentations reveal that all what may dwell upon us of calamities are allowed by God, the Omni-merciful. Even if it is difficult for man

to moan amid the severe temptation, Yet, he is committed to seek from God to reveal to him the divine goal that lies behind them, like the repentance and the return to Him.

(2) We are committed, amid the afflictions, to trust in, and to resort to God, the Beneficent.

(3) The past experience of dealing with God in the old, helps the believer to pass through the present affliction, however severe it is, with the spirit of hope.

(4) The goal of repentance is not to seek from God to lift the affliction up from us, as much as it is to encounter Him, and to live together with Him

with the spirit of thanksgiving; which is the true way of reform (Isaiah 35: 1-10; Jeremiah 31: 1; 31: 40; Ezekiel 37: 1-28; Hosea 3: 5; 14: 1-9;

Joel 3: 18-21; Amos 9: 11-15; Micah 7: 14-20; Zecharia 14: 1-11; Malachi 4: 1-6).

(5) God will never forsake us amid our affliction; but desires our salvation.

The ministry of the Lord Christ and the book of lamentations:

According to some, the man who went through humiliation in the third lamentation is the prophet Jeremiah himself, he who counted what dwelt upon his people as though it dwelt upon him personally. While, according to others, he

speaks here in the name of **Zedekiah**, king of Jerusalem; The church, though, believes that the true Sufferer is the Lord Christ, the second Adam, who, through His own free will, and pleasure, He endured humiliation to save the first Adam and his descendants. Hence the priest sings this lamentation at the beginning of the twelfth hour of the great Friday, to commemorate the burial of the Lord Christ.

Anyway, in this book, Jeremiah talks on the tongue of the Savior Lord, according to what the Lord Himself has said to him: “*You shall be as My mouth*” (Jeremiah 15: 19). If Abraham, the father of fathers, by offering his own son a sacrifice, gave a true prophecy of the Father who offered His only begotten Son for the sake of the salvation of the world; So was Jeremiah, who, by his abundant sufferings, he passed through the wine press, as a symbol and a prophecy of the Lord Christ.

Jeremiah’s sufferings, grief, and tears, proclaim the feelings of sorrow of God on His people; And were, as well, a prophecy about the passion endured by the Lord Christ on the cross.

Jeremiah’s tear flowed upon the city that rejected him, and did not receive the voice of the Lord on his tongue. In that he was a symbol of the Lord Christ, the Word of God Himself, who, during His last week ascended the Mount of Olives, and looked down at the city (Matthew 23: 37). His tears flowed in grief over the city that rejected Him as its Savior.

Jeremiah’s tears (3: 48-49), refer to the tears of the Lord Christ over the same city (Matthew 23: 37-39; Luke 19: 41-43). Although it is God who allowed for that affliction to happen for the sake of chastisement, yet He grieves for the desolation that dwelt upon man because of his sins; as “*In all their affliction He was afflicted*” (Isaiah 63: 9). The day will come when He will wipe out every tear (Isaiah 25; 8; Revelation 7: 17; 21: 4), when sin will be no more.

This book embraced the following expressions of Messianic concepts (1: 12; 2: 15; 3: 14, 15, 19, 30):

- 1- The Lord Christ came as a Groom for humanity that was widowed (Lamentation 1: 1)
- 2- With broken heart the disciples looked at the cross (Lamentations 1: 12).
- 3- The multitude scoffed at the crucified Christ (Lamentation 1: 15).
- 4- The realization of what came in Isaiah 50: 6, concerning surrendering His back to those who struck Him; and His cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; And what came in Isaiah 53: 3, about Him as despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, (Jeremiah 3: 14-15; 19: 30).

The book of tears:

Expressing the hidden cry-outs of the heart; what the human language could not express of what lie in the depth of the soul; the inner bitterness and the intense joy; Tears are likewise a way, mostly unintentional, to seek help from those around us of relatives and friends; used by the suckling to express hunger or pain; and a toddler as pressure upon those around him or her to get something out of them.

The prophet Jeremiah is called the “Weeping prophet”; whose tears profusely flowed, not only from his eyes, but from his heart as well, that dissolved with bitterness upon the daughter of his people.

His tears did not bear some kind of selfishness, for he did not cry for the sake of some personal loss, or of personal pain that might have dwelt upon him, but his tears bore an abundance of love toward God, His people, temple, and city.

His tears reveal his personality as a man of God, full of love and compassion like his Lord, as well as his care, sanctification and consecration of the ministry of God.

If the world is full of oppression, and humanity suffers from poverty, wars, and calamities, together with a rebellion against God, and a disregard of the eternal destiny; It is befitting of us to grieve, together with our Lord Jesus, who wept on Jerusalem, and partook of the sorrow of Mary and Martha.

The book of the “weeping Jeremiah”, with its prophecies, came to reveal his grief on what was going to dwell upon Jerusalem and the people of God; And his lamentations came to bear the same bitterness after the prophesied desolation was realized.

The lamentations and Mount Calvary:

In one of the traditions, it came that the prophet Jeremiah wrote those lamentations in the “Grotte of Jeremiah”, close to Jerusalem, below Mount Calvary, where the Lord Christ was crucified; where the prophet poured an abundant flow of tears, and wrote his sad lamentations for the sake of the sins of his people. Yet, looking with the spirit of hope up to Mount Calvary, filled his heart with hope, and turned the lamentations into a song sung by Christ while bearing the sins of His people, on His way to Hades to destroy the fruit of sin, to carry His believers as spoil, and to bring them forth by His resurrection to the paradise of joy.

The main elements in the book:

- (1) The captivated **kingdom of Judah**: The book of lamentations brings Jerusalem before us, widowed by her own will; having lost her heavenly Groom through choosing sin as a vain groom; has lost the celebrations of

feasts; had sorrow as her portion; and her princes came to be in reproach. Hence the prophet cries for her sake, and lament the state she has reached. The Lord Christ wept over Jerusalem: "*As He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying: "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes"*" (Luke 19: 41-42). And before the Lord wept over Jerusalem, the "weeping prophet", for the same reason, wept over her until his eyes failed by tears. According to the Jewish tradition, Jeremiah sat weeping outside the Northern wall of the city on a plateau called Calvary (or Golgotha) where our Lord was to be crucified.

(2) **The Lord Christ:** The Groom and Savior of His people, to whom His people gave their backs and not their faces; oppressed Him, and intended to get rid of Him in any possible way, Hence, denied themselves of the Source of joy. If God does not endure sin, yet He is grieved for the sake of what dwelt upon His own people.

In the midst of afflictions, "*His mercies are new every morning*" (3: 23); Not being God of vengeance against men, but against sin, He mercifully seeks the sanctification of His people to enjoy Him.

(3) **Jeremiah:** The man of God. The bitterness of his heart toward his people and his country, is not merely an emotional partaking, but a true fellowship with those suffering, as a member in a sick body. He did not hold his peace before their oppression, nor admonished them for not listening to his warnings, but stood crying bitterly for their sake; For what dwelt upon them, has dwelt as well upon him; and their sickness was his sickness. As a man of God, he faithfully expresses the feelings of the Lord toward His people, even in the midst of the darkest moments of their chastisement.

(4) **Judah's allies** turned into their enemies; Egypt who had a treaty with Judah against Babylon; Once Judah collapsed it became her enemy.

(5) **Judah's neighbors:** like **Edom** that was like a sister, gloated against her; caught those fleeing from Judah, and delivered them to the Babylonians to captivate (Obadiah 14). For Edom, Judah became a barren land, only fit as pasture for sheep. Egypt, a previous ally of Judah, once Jerusalem was besieged by the Chaldeans, spared herself the danger of confronting Babylon for Judah's sake.

(5) **Babylon:** whom God used as a tool to chasten Judah; assuming that its conquest was by the might of its arm, and reproaching God, the Lord of hosts, God turned against it and destroyed it.

Its divisions:

The first lamentation: Jerusalem the forgotten widow

The second lamentation: In Your anger, O Lord, You intend to lift me up to Your heavens

The third lamentation: A shining hope in the midst of the darkness.

The fourth lamentation: The dwelling of the reproach of sin.

The fifth lamentation: Wait on the Lord the eternal King, and supplicate to Him.

The first lamentation: Jerusalem the forgotten widow:

The author portrays Jerusalem as a widow not ceasing to cry, had no comforter, her splendor was taken away, her temple was defiled and destroyed, came to be in unique mourning; and no sorrow could surpass her sorrow; On account of that it is the Lord who allowed it for her because of her transgressions, she supplicates seeking His mercy. ... The broad lines of this lamentation are:

- The sin may promise man riches; but it deprives him of all the divine goods.
- Rejecting the yoke of submission to the Lord (Jeremiah 27-28); Jerusalem bore the bitter yoke of the enemy (Lamentation 1: 14; Jeremiah 5: 5).
- The friends who provoke man to sin, ridicule him when he suffer its consequences.
- On account of God being Holy, sin has to be condemned.

The second lamentation: In Your anger, O Lord, You intend to lift me up to Your heavens:

The author portrays this widow seeing her children faint because of hunger dwelling upon the city; humiliation dwelling upon the young men; her king and princes scattered among the nations; and her elders sitting speechless on the ground; passersby whistling and scoffing, shaking their heads over the daughter of Jerusalem, the city they used to count as the gladness of the earth -- She has nothing else but to shed her tears before the Lord, supplicating to Him to have compassion upon her children, and to let her enjoy the divine mercies. ... The broad lines of this lamentation are:

- Sin brings forth reproach and desolation. According to the historical records, Babylon was the enemy; But actually, it is God who became the enemy for a certain time, for the sake of her eternal salvation (4-5).
Babylon was no more than the ax of the battle.
- The passersby, not only do not care, but they partake of bringing forth reproach(15)
- The enemy may boast his great conquest, but he does not glorify God.

The third lamentation: A shining hope in the midst of the darkness:

- A turning point in Jeremiah's experience; Instead of concentrating upon how Jerusalem (the soul) reached such desolation, and how the enemy became so violent and oppressive; he concentrates his eyes upon the Lord the Savior, Bearer of our reproach.
- God does not reject us forever; for He is a loving and a compassionate Father
- Do not fear (57), for God's mercies are "*new every morning*". Allow Him to cross over into your depths, to make you start a new life, regardless of your past experience of failure. People are portrayed as though one person, who became a laughing stock for all, and a song for them all day long; whom God let drink the gall, who almost lost hope; Yet, anticipating God's mercies, and seeing them "*new every morning*", he cries out, saying: "*The Lord is my portion, says my soul*" (3: 24).

The fourth lamentation: The dwelling of the reproach of sin:

Looking at the desolation that dwelt upon Jerusalem, the author sees it, not in the buildings, nor in the possibilities, as much as it is in the soul that has been like gold and precious stones, and now turned into mud and mire; In the young men who have turned into broken up earthen vessels; In those who were once living in luxury, and are now wandering homeless in the streets; Who were clothed with scarlet, are now searching for food in the trash baskets; In the rulers who were brighter than snow, and purer than milk, now their skin got stuck to their bones, and dried up like wood; And in the compassionate mothers whose hands stretched to cook their children to eat. ... Because of the sins of the false prophets and the priests, the blood of the innocent was shed, people were taken into captivity; and Edom exulted in gloating.

The fifth lamentation: Wait on the Lord, the eternal King, and supplicate to Him:

In his prayer, the author laments how the people lost their freedom, bowed down under the yoke of bondage in captivity by the Chaldeans, with no one to save them from their hands; How all of them, elders and young, came to be in unceasing mourning; How Mount Zion turned into a barrenness for the foxes; And finally how sin, rebellion, and getting away from God, were behind all that;... Perceiving that no one can bring them back to God except God Himself, the author cries out: "Turn us back to You, O Lord, ... Renew our days as of old" (Lamentation 5: 21)..

A comparison between the book of laments, the book of Jeremiah, and the second book of the kings

Many elements that came in the laments conformed with what came in the book of Jeremiah and the second book of the kings (and also in 2 Chronicles 36: 11-21).

	The laments	The book of Jeremiah	2 kings 25
Jerusalem under siege	2: 20-22; 3: 5-7	39: 1-3; 52: 4-5	1-2
The famine	1: 11, 19; 2: 11-12, 19-20; 4: 4-5. 9-10; 5: 9-10	37: 21; 52: 6	3
The army and the king flee away	1: 3, 6; 2: 2; 4: 19-20	39: 4-7; 52: 8-11	4-7
Burning the palace, the temple, and the city	2: 3-5; 4: 11; 5: 18	39: 8; 52: 13	8-9

Departure to captivity	1: 1-5, 18; 2: 9, 14; 3: 2, 19; 4: 22; 5: 2	28: 3-4, 14; 39: 9-10	11-12
Confiscating the treasures of the temple	1: 10; 2: 6-7	51-52	13-15
Killing the rulers	1: 15; 2: 2-, 20	39: 6	18-21
Humiliating Judah	1: 1; 5: 8-9	40: 9	22-25
No outside help	4: 17; 5: 6	27: 1-11; 37: 5-10	24: 7

OBJECTIONS OF CRITICS AND REBUTTALS TO THEM

Objection 1:

In 2 Chronicles, it came: "*Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah; and to this day all the singing men and the singing women speak of Josiah in their lamentations; ... and indeed they are written in the laments*" (2 Chronicles 35: 25). According to some extreme critics the talk here refers to the canonical book of the lamentations; and the author of the book of Chronicles misunderstood what came in the lamentations (2: 7; 4: 20) as a mourning wrote by Jeremiah for the sake of Josiah.

Rebuttal:

By a particulate reading of that book, one realizes that it is not a funeral song concerning Josiah. The lamentations mentioned by the author of the second book of Chronicles, have nothing to do with that book. The Historian Josephus

might have referred to that by saying: [Jeremiah wrote a funeral song for the funeral of Josiah, still remaining to this day].

It is impossible to believe that the Historian Josephus had no knowledge of the book of lamentation; for if it was the song he referred to, he would have said that. What came in the second book of Chronicles, and what was mentioned by Josephus, confirm that Jeremiah wrote several funeral songs or lamentations (that do not concern king Josiah).

Comparing between what came in the book of lamentations and what came in the book of Jeremiah, 'Driver' confirmed analogy between them.

Objection 2:

Including this book among the books of 'Kethubhim', according to some, is against the Jewish view that it is written by the prophet Jeremiah.

Rebuttal:

It did not perpetually come among the books of 'Kethubhim', but was sometimes included among the five books of 'Megilloth' in the Hebrew books; on account of that it was read in the ninth day of the month of Etip (Ebib), in memorial of the desolation of the temple.

Objection 3:

According to some, certain expressions could not be referred to the prophet Jeremiah, like: "*Her prophets find no vision from the Lord*" (Lamentation 2: 9).

Rebuttal:

This expression more strongly bears what came against the false prophets
(Jeremiah 14: 14; 23: 16)

Objection 4:

According to many, the author refers himself to the people who anticipated salvation on the hands of Pharaoh; which Jeremiah was against.

Rebuttal:

Jeremiah did not bind himself to those who put their trust on Egypt; who were actually the greater majority of people. And if he happen to say: [We did so and so], it is because the majority did; although he did not consent to their behavior

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AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

LAMENTATIONS OR HEAVENLY COMFORTS?!

- + Grant me, O Lord, two of the spirits of the weeping prophet Jeremiah;
By the spirit of prophecy, seeing what will dwell upon his people;
His heart moaned inside him.
His head turned into a fountain of tears
In his love and loyalty to his people, his life turned into unceasing weeping;
He had no fear of the king, nor the greats, and the rulers;
He had no fear of the religious leaders; And he did not care for the
accusations of his village.
He was only preoccupied with the salvation of all.

- + Whenever he passed by the temple, his soul was embittered;

He could not endure to watch the city of God desolated;
Nor to watch the temple of God being defiled by the pagans;
Nor to see the people lying like corpses in the streets;
Seeing all that by the eyes of prophecy, he cried out;
Yet no one listened, nor cared;
But all turned into enemies who prosecuted him;
All sought to get rid of him, however high was the price.

+ When what his prophecies were realized;
All became in bitterness;
But he did not take the watching position;
Nor justified himself, having warned and no one listened;
He felt that what dwelt upon them, as though has dwelt upon him personally.

+ He wrote his lamentations in a grotte close to Jerusalem;
He wrote them to express what he felt in his depths;
He wrote them to call all to repentance.

+ He confirmed to them God's promises concerning the future return from
captivity;
But God anticipates their return to Him to save them;
The prophet called all to work with the spirit of faithfulness and seriousness.;
To have the door of hope open before them;
And he called them to remember God's past dealings with them all along the
past generations.

+ By the spirit of prophecy, Jeremiah proclaims the future coming of the Savior
Messiah;
Helplessly he weeps for their sake;
Whereas Jesus weeps for them and saves them;
His mercies are new every morning;

He perpetually seeks their salvation.

- + If Judah's friends turned into enemies;
They did not stand negatively as mere watchers;
But gloated, and even helped the enemy to bring them into captivity.

- + Jeremiah sees Jerusalem as a lonely and a forgotten widow;
But her heavenly Groom is waiting for her;
He prepares for her a heavenly marital home;
He prepares glories for her;
Whereas unless her opponents repent, their work will come back upon their heads.

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CHAPTER 1

JERUSALEM, THE FORGOTTEN WIDOW

In the book of Jeremiah, as well as in his lamentations, the prophet reveals what he feels, not as an outside watcher of the events, but as a member of those people, what dwell upon them of troubles, dwell upon him personally, regardless of his continuous warnings to them. Hence, no wonder that, in the first half of the first lamentation, we see how the prophet's heart moans, while describing what dwelt upon his city and people; While, in the second half, he proclaims the bitterness that dwelt upon him personally, another face of the same calamity.

It is as though two persons are speaking: one of them the poet who writes as an outside watcher talking about the calamity into which Jerusalem has fallen; likening her to a widow living in bitterness; And the second is as though Jerusalem speaks about what dwelt upon her, as a sad woman, with no one to comfort her. It is one author, and it is one lamentation; yet in a dynamic movement, that invites the reader to stand at first watching the events from outside; then entering into the depth of the problem, to find out that what dwelt upon the city, dwelt upon him personally. The poem presents a description of him who watches from outside, beside what it proclaims on the inside.

The lamentation starts with a talk by the prophet, the author of the poem, who looks at his beloved city with a bitter soul, to see it turning into what is like a widow who faced serious problems (1-11); This is followed by a talk by Jerusalem herself, as a sad woman who moans in her inner depths (12-22).

Having become like a widow, Jerusalem, the great among the nations, used to be called "the city of the Great King" (Psalm 48: 2); lost her independence and freedom, came to be under taxation, mourning, and deserted because no one come anymore, through her gates to ascend to the temple to celebrate the feasts; Through those same gates the armies of Nebudchadnezar entered and

burned the city. The kings of the earth and the whole world could not believe that such hated enemy would enter through the gates of Jerusalem (Lamentations 4: 12).

The lamentation ends by a cry-out, in which the prophet, in the name of his people, confesses that they deserve what dwelt upon them (18); yet the chastisement was too bitter. And the prophet seeks from God to bring upon Babylon, as a symbol of the devil, his hosts, and angels, what it has done to the believers during their chastisement (22).

This lamentation portrays all categories in the following ways:

The **city**, in a widowhood condition, has lost her heavenly Groom, was deserted by her friends and her allies; and was counted like a harlot in reproach.

The **priests**, sigh; instead of lifting their hearts up in heavenly joy.

The **rulers**, are like deer with no pastures, that helplessly run before their chasers, instead of leading the people to conquest.

The **virgins**, who used to be exultant by the Lord, are in bitterness.

The **children**, who used to play cheerfully, go, together with the virgins and young men, into captivity.

The **whole people** sigh seeking the bread; the priests and the elders die of hunger. All that dwelt upon Jerusalem because of her sins and evil. God is righteous in all His dealings.

The **enemies** scoff and laugh at Jerusalem because of her perdition; rejoice and exult to hear about her tribulation.

In short, the key to this lamentation is clear in the following points:

a- It is the Lord who allows for the humiliation for the sake of fatherly chastisement (5)

The prophet portrays the city as a queen with authority, or a princess surrounded by friends; who, all of a sudden became deprived even of her own man; and of her friends who turned into opposing enemies.

When the Roman 'Titus' invaded Jerusalem, to commemorate the incident, he issued a coin with the image of a woman sitting under a palm tree, like a harlot waiting for someone to take her to his tent to fall together in sin; And on it he inscribed the words: "a Jewess in captivity".

In bitterness, the Lord admonishes His people, saying: "How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers; ... Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves" (Isaiah 1: 21, 23). God chose this people to be His holy bride who preaches to the world the true light, to gather all together; so that humanity would be the lighted city of God, and the eternal bride. But, instead of preaching the Savior, she denied Him, and intended to get rid of Him, to come to be like a harlot who rejects her Groom.

On the tongue of the Lord. The prophet Isaiah portrayed what dwelt upon Judah, saying: "I was angry with My people;... And you said, 'I shall be a lady forever'; So that you did not take these things to heart, nor remember the latter end of them. Therefore, hear this now, you who are given to pleasures, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else beside me: I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children'; But these two things shall come to you, in a moment, in one day: the loss of children and widowhood" (Isaiah 47: 6-9).

Attached to God – the King of kings – God will set man a king of authority, bearing inside him the reflection of God's splendor; But being attached to sin, he would be like a maidservant, with no splendor nor authority.

When the glory of God departs from man or congregation, man's heart comes to be like a deserted harlot city, on which desolation, grief, reproach, and bondage, dwell. This is the work of sin in the life of man or the congregation; on account of that it stirs up in them the spirit of pride and haughtiness; *"Saying in her heart, 'I sit as a queen, and not a widow; I shall not know sorrow'. For this reason, and in one day, there will come on her the strikes of death, sorrow, hunger, and burning with fire; 'For strong is the Lord God who judges her'"* (Revelation 18: 7-8).

b- Sorrow with no comfort, and friends dealing treacherously with her:

"She weeps bitterly in the night; Her tears were on her cheeks;
Among all her lovers, she has none to comfort her.

All her friends have dealt treacherously with her" (2)

The kingdom of Judah entered into friendship with the surrounding nations, and loved their idols (Jeremiah 2: 20-25); yet they became her enemies in the time of affliction (2 kings 24: 2; Psalms 137: 7).

After portraying her as a queen, he reveals how she became a widow surrounded by oppressors on all sides; and what dwelt upon her of humiliation. After being free with authority, she became a captive, a maidservant in the house of her mistress; with no place of her own to live in and to practice her freedom.

By "her lovers" he means the surrounding nations with which Jerusalem was allied, to enjoy some sort of security and protection, like Egypt at that time. But her days turned into nights full of darkness with no light; all of a sudden desolation dwell upon her, with none to comfort her; and with no other way to be cured except by repentance.

Not weeping on his sin, and on his loss of sanctification, God allows for man to have his closest friends depart from him, to suffer a feeling of

isolation; in order return to God, and to enter into a fellowship with Him, and with the heavenlies.

+ Perceiving that remorse is a great remedy, Jeremiah resorted to it for Jerusalem's sake in his lamentations; and presented her as
`repentant; saying: "She weeps bitterly in the night her tears are on her cheeks; Among all her lovers, she has none to comfort her; ... The roads to Zion mourn" (1: 2, 4). He even adds: "For these things I weep. My eye, my eye overflow with water, because the comforter who should restore my life is far from me; my children are desolate" (16). Feeling that He who comforts the sorrowful is far from him, Jeremiah adds this bitter phrase; For how could man have comfort if he rejects repentance, the hope for forgiveness?!

But I wish those who repent, know how to present repentance; with what zeal, and with what feelings; How to make it swallow his whole mind, shake his inner depths, and pierce the depths of his heart; as the prophet Jeremiah says: "*See, O Lord, that I am in distress; My soul is troubled; my heart is overturned within me*" (20)... And he says: "*The elders of the daughter of Zion, sit on the ground and keep silence; they throw dust on their heads, and gird themselves with sackcloth. The virgins of Jerusalem bow their heads to the ground. My eyes fail with tears; my heart is troubled; My bile is poured on the ground*" (2: 10, 11).

So did the people of Nineveh, feeling grief and presenting repentance, they fled from the desolation of their city (Jonah 3: 5). How powerful is this medication of repentance, that so seem to alter the intention of God!

Fleeing is, therefore, within your hands; The Lord, intending to be compassionate toward men; wishes for them to seek His help.... If, being

man, you wish that the others seek your forgiveness, Do you assume that God will forgive you, without asking Him to do so?!

The Lord Himself wept on Jerusalem; when she did not intend to weep on herself... He wishes for us to weep in order to flee; As according to the gospel, He said: "*Daughter of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children*" (Luke 23: 28). ... By weeping, David got the divine mercies to take death away from the people who were close to perdition. And when he was offered to choose between three things (as chastisements), he chose the one in which he would be in the hands of the divine mercies.

And Ezekiel was commanded to weep on Jerusalem; And took the scroll of a book on which were written "*lamentations and mourning and woe*" (Ezekiel 2: 10).

Why then do you cease to weep on your sins, if God commanded even His prophets to weep for the sake of the people?!

He who weeps more often in this world, will be saved in the future; because "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of the fools is in the house of mirth" (Ecclesiastes 7: 4); And the Lord Himself said: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh" (Luke 6: 21). ... Let us then weep for some time, to rejoice forever. Let us fear and wait on the Lord, confess our sins, and return from our evil; lest we hear the words: "Woe to me!.... The faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men" (Micah 7: 1, 2).

(St. Ambrose)

c- Falling into captivity:

“Judah has gone into captivity, under affliction and hard servitude. She dwells among the nations; she finds no rest;

All her persecutors overtake her in dire straits” (3)

The people were carried into captivity in two batches in the year 605, and 597 B/C.

The wicked who is captivated by sin, falling under the yoke of servitude, becomes as though driven out of his house, to lose his feeling of security, peace and balance of his mind, and the comfort of his heart.

According to St. Arsanius, man would better have one Master (God) rather than have several masters (the diverse sins). Servitude to God is freedom itself; for God did not create man a slave; and rejoices to grant him the perfection of free will, and the spirit of royalty. Whereas he who is enslaved by the devil or by the sin or lust, will never find inner peace nor comfort, but distress will prevail upon him, and will experience neither love nor conquest.

+ You wound your heart ... And the Lord bandages your wounds ...
Whereas, concerning the non-repentant, the Book says that as a slave of sin, his wounds will not be bandaged, and he will never find comfort.

(St. Jerome)

d- Loss of the true joy:

“The roads to Zion mourn, because no one comes to the set feasts. All her gates are desolate; Her priests sigh;

Her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness” (4)

The city that counted herself the mistress of the world, in the eyes of God; to which the people of God come from all nations during the major feasts, and, being an icon of heaven, or of the life to come; on which joy, praise, and exultation prevail, has become desolate, and no one comes to her, nor practice the celebration of feasts in her temple.

Yes, there are still priests in her, and virgins who used to practice an important role in praise, and the proclamation of joy of the feasts (Judges 21: 19-21; Jeremiah 31: 13; Psalms 68: 25). But now, none of them has any role, except to weep and mourn, particularly in the time of feasts.

As God's wrath and captivation came upon them, they turned into a curse among the nations. The sign of that curse was the desolation of Jerusalem, even during the days of the feasts.

Bringing to memory how the roads to Jerusalem rejoiced in those heading to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts, when the sound of praise and joy were heard; he now see those roads in horrible silence and grief; on account of that no one comes to celebrate any feast.

+ How could the roads to Zion be but mourning, when no one comes to ascend them to Jerusalem to gather together to celebrate a feast?!

(St. Dedymus the blind)

+ Now, beloved brethren, I write all this to you, on account of that the churches are damaged; Blasphemies fill all our public places; Every iniquity and evil prevail upon our cities; No fear of God prevail upon our souls; Many of us have gone astray and followed the perversion of Arius; We cannot go here or there, nor can we avoid tears in any way; For there are no ministers in the house of God, and no congregation to worship Him.

People departed to the wilderness, to set out of it a holy church, where they hold prayers, in an attempt to treat the sorrow of the church by changing its location. The churches are mourning, and their walls are crying out for help; the holy places are still deserted, as though weeping on themselves; "*The roads to Zion mourn, because no one comes to the set feasts*" (4)... Hence I write this, so that hearing all that, you will resort to God with prayer; I am sure that we shall ultimately find favor in the sight of God, and that he will put an end to this situation that took place because of our sins; and will receive the intercessions of the prayers of saints.

(St. Serapion, bishop of Thmuis)

But by the coming of the incarnate Word of God the church of the new covenant drew a multitude of peoples to herself, to enjoy the feast and to rejoice in the Lord; according to the words of the prophet Zechariah: "*Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem*" (Zechariah 8: 22). And as the word 'Jerusalem' means (vision of peace), the sign of blessing will be drawing the multitudes to come to enjoy that spiritual vision of reconciliation on the cross, and of getting peace with God.

+ Today, the Lord, Life and Savior of mankind, is born.

Today, there is reconciliation between God and man; between Divinity and humanity;

Today, the whole creation are shaken; the heavenlies approached toward the earthlies, and the earthlies approached toward the heavenlies.

Today, the darkness is scattered, and the (true) life of man begins;

Today, the way to God opens before man, and toward the human soul;

In the old it was said: "*The road to Zion mourn, because no one comes to the set feasts*" (4), referring by that to the deserted and sick soul; For there

was no other way that leads God to the soul and mind of man; And the soul, as well, could not approach more toward God.

(St. Abba Maccari)

e- She becomes a tail for her enemies:

“Her adversaries have become the (head), her enemies prosper; for the Lord has afflicted her, because of the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy” (5)

The multitude of transgressions is the cause of that divine verdict (Jeremiah 40: 3; Daniel 9: 7, 16).

“Her adversaries have become the (head)”; namely, masters who drive the people like helpless slaves. If he who listens to the voice of the Lord will gain the promise saying: “The Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not beneath” (Deuteronomy 28: 13); On him who does not listen to the voice of the Lord, the curse will dwell, saying: *“The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come lower and lower... he shall be the head and you shall be the tail”* (Deuteronomy 28: 43, 44).

Children going into captivity humiliates man, and turns his life into bitterness, when he feels that what he did has been reflected upon his children. On another aspect, enslaving the children bears a kind of despair concerning the future.

That is how he who bows, by his own free will, before the sin, for the sake of a carnal covetousness, a temporal honor, or a desire for material profits; will have the sin take the leading position upon him, to drive all his energies, talents, and

possibilities, according to its will, to make man helpless, as though having no will of his own.

Submitted to sin and its pleasures, the soul becomes helplessly in bondage to the devil, who frives her as he wishes. Whereas, attached to her Savior, and set free from covetousness, the enemy will come to be underneath her feet, with no authority over her. It is within her hands to be one of authority, or to submit helplessly in humility.

f- Loss of splendor and strength:

“And from the daughter of Zion, all her splendor has departed. Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture, that flee without strength before the pursuer” (6)

Losing her greatness, the princes of Jerusalem become like deer, hungry with no pasture, and without strength before their pursuer.

When the glory of the Lord departed from the temple and from the whole city (Ezekiel 11: 22-24), the daughter of Zion lost all her splendor, and her princes were scattered in weakness and reproach before their pursuers; ... On the soul attached to her Savior, He pours His splendor, and make her hear the joyful voice, saying: *“You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you, says the Lord God”* (Ezekiel 16: 13-14).

The “princes” refer to the mind, heart, and will. He who is sanctified by the Spirit of God will bear a holy will, capable of work, a pure heart to behold God, and emotions that kindle the being of man with the love of God and goodness. Whereas he who falls under the authority of sin, all

those princes inside him will be without strength, will become as though with no will; his senses and emotions would be corrupted; and will moan with the excuse that he is emotional. In other words, his princes within his depths., will either raise him up to heaven, or bring him down as though to the pit.

g- Robbing all her possessions:

“In the days of her affliction and roaming, Jerusalem remembers all her pleasant things that she had in the days
of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, with no one to help her; and adversaries saw her and
mocked at her downfall” (7)

Jerusalem became like the prodigal son who departed from his father’s house with all its blessings, corrupted his inheritance with prodigal living and almost perished of hunger, coveting to eat of the food of swine.

In great misery, Jerusalem remembered the multitude of pleasant things she used to have in the days of old; the temple with all its beauty, the furniture, the holy vessels; and the joy of worship and feasts ... All of which are actually the fruit of the encounter and fellowship with God.

As to the desires of the soul and all her treasures, they are the enjoyment of the fellowship with the Lord Christ “The desire of nations”, the treasure of the soul, the secret of her riches, her heavenly food, her life-giving drink, her heavenly joy, her eternal glory, her righteousness, her life, and her honor. The enemy shall not stop his attempts to rob the soul of that fellowship, to make her lose everything! ... Yet, the wise soul will never seek anything, other than her Groom, her whole desire; for whom she sings, saying: *“His mouth is most sweet. Yes, He is altogether*

lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem” (Songs 5: 16).

h- She became vile:

“Jerusalem has sinned grievously; therefore she has become vile. All who honored her despise her, because

they have seen her nakedness. Yes, she sighs and turn away” (8)

The fruit of sin is reproach and shame. “*They have seen her nakedness*”, and heard her sighs and her bitterness. By falling into sin, Jerusalem lost her holiness in the Lord, and vile dwelt in her; she lost her honor, and came to be in reproach and shame; a naked woman, the way Adam and Eve were. Instead of the joy in the Lord, sighs, grief, and bitterness never departed from her; “*She turned away*”, namely, collapsed day after day in continuous defeat before the enemies; and thus she earned the despise of all who used to honor her.

+ Let us assume that Jerusalem here – as she is the one meant in the literal sense – is the one who sinned grievously toward the Lord Christ, to be worthy to hear His words, saying: “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See, your home is left to you desolate*” (Matthew 23: 37). ... Let us assume that that Jerusalem was the one forsaken by God, and that the angels who did not cease to help her, through whom the law was delivered to the prophet Moses, have forsaken her, for “*She has sinned grievously*”; her people have killed the Lord Christ, and put their hands on Him. When her sins were less grievous, we could intercede for her, and seek for her sake; we could have compassion upon her; But now, having killed the Savior, Who can have compassion

upon Jerusalem?!, “*She sinned grievously, therefore she has become vile*” (8).

Yes, Let us assume that this Jerusalem is the one about whom is said: “*Who could have compassion on her? Who could comfort her?*” We, as well, should not have compassion upon Jerusalem, nor grieve on what dwelt upon her people; for “*Through their fall, salvation has come to the Gentiles (to us)*” (Romans 11: 11).

Now, let us move from the literal to the spiritual interpretation; to apply all what is said about Jerusalem to the human soul, who after having the divine teachings, she has become “Jerusalem”, that was previously called Jebus, before her name was changed later on to “Jerusalem”. As the name Jebus is translated as (trodden under feet), therefore the ‘soul’, trodden under the feet of the enemy hosts, has changed and became “Jerusalem”, namely (the vision of peace); ... before she ultimately fell into sin.

Having trodden the precious blood of the Lord Christ of the new covenant, under feet, and having grievously sinned, you are worthy to hear the words: “*Who will have compassion upon you, O Jerusalem, and who will comfort you?*”; ... having reached the extent of betraying your Christ?!

When any of us grievously sins, he sins against the Lord Christ Himself. “Of how much worse punishment do you suppose will he be thought worthy, who has trampled the Son of God under foot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?!” (Hebrew 10: 29). If you trample the Son of God, and insult the Spirit of grace, Who will have compassion upon you?! Who will comfort you?!; and who will care for your welfare?!

He is the Son of God, who was betrayed by the sinners, who cared to pay attention to our welfare! ... Who else could intercede for the sake of our welfare?!

Let us then perceive that "It is impossible for those who once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the power of the age to come; if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (Hebrew 6: 4-6). If we perceive and understand the meaning of these words, we are committed to do our best, lest it would be said about us, as well: "Who will have compassion upon you, O Jerusalem; Who will comfort you, and who will care for your welfare?!".

(The scholar Origen)

I- She had no comforter:

"Her uncleanness is in her skirts; She did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome. She had no comforter. O Lord, behold my affliction; for the enemy has magnified himself" (9)

"Her uncleanness is in her skirts" is an expression that the uncleanness has reached down to the hem of her skirts (Leviticus 15: 19-35).

Of the worst situations in which man will find no comfort, is that of a great king of authority and name among the nations and peoples, who finds himself bound by chains, barefoot, almost naked, led by a foreign slave, hear words of reproach, and fallen under scourges; surrounded by his state men, rulers, and people; all in bitter humiliation. That is the situation of the captives;

particularly by the Assyrians who used to cut off the noses of the captives, or a member of their bodies, mock them, and deal with them in a way not even worthy of animals (although the Babylonians were a little less vicious).

That is exactly how sin does when it enslaves man; It bends his back to make him crawl on the ground like an animal, which cannot raise its head up toward heaven, nor experience the joy and peace of the heavenly creatures, but is always submerged in the dust and mire of the world. That is how the prophet portrays the captivity of Jerusalem, that bears an image of the captivity of the human soul.

Like the hem of the skirt that pick up dirt from the ground, so will Jerusalem (the human soul), attached to the ground, corrupt herself with the temporal things, and would not be able to enjoy the heavenly things.

“She did not consider her destiny”. She did not put her eternal destiny before her eyes; did not hope for the eternal life; and did not fear the eternal perdition.

“Her collapse was awesome”. Collapsed, and gone down perpetually and continuously, with no one to support, nor to comfort, but with many who gloat in how it ended up. For *“Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays away in vain”* (Psalm 127: 1); and unless the Lord comforts man, who else could comfort him?!

Yes indeed! Only the Savior alone can comfort her. Even if He brings forth sorrow through chastisement, He will eventually have compassion, according to the abundance of His mercies Lamentations 33). By our Lord Jesus Christ, the frail soul and the dry bones will turn into an exceedingly great army (Ezekiel 37: 10). *“Jerusalem be awesome as an army with banners”* (Song 6: 4), whom the devil, with all his hosts and deceptions would not be able to acquire for

himself; And will be like many mighty horses that lead the divine chariot in the procession of victory; hence her Groom says to her: *"I have compared you my love to my filly among Pharaoh's chariots"* (Song 1: 9).

J- She lost her sanctuaries:

"The adversary had spread his hand over all her pleasant things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those whom You commanded, not to enter Your congregation" (10)

If the Ammonites and the Moabites were not allowed to enter into the temple to worship (Deuteronomy 23: 3; Nehemiah 12: 1-2), how much more if they enter into it to rob and to destroy?! ... But the time will come when the Gentiles will be sanctified and become a temple for the Lord (Zechariah 14: 16).

Attached to the Lord, man will enjoy an abundance of divine grace, all his talents, energies, senses, and emotions will be sanctified; God will set His paradise inside him, that the soul will sing, saying: *"Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its pleasant fruits"* (Song 4: 16); To which the Lord will respond, saying: *"I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey. I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones"* (Song 5: 1).

But if man persist upon giving his back, and not his face, to God; Instead of having the paradise of the kingdom of God set inside him, and of calling the heavenlies to rejoice and exult in his work, and the fruit of his Spirit in his soul; Man's heart will turn into a barren and dry wilderness, a dwelling place for the devil, who corrupts all the pleasant and good things; the way it was said about king Saul: *"The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a*

distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him" (1 Samuel 16: 14). That is how the devil forces his way into the inner Jerusalem, and crawls to defile the temple of the soul; and how it happened in the old with the temple of Jerusalem. If God has commanded that no stranger would be allowed into His sanctuary there, yet as the people persisted on idol-worship and on abominations, God, not only allowed the nations to enter into the temple, but even to destroy it and rob its treasures.

Being members in the body of Christ, it is befitting of us to say what the Lord Christ Himself said: "*The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me*" (John 14: 30).

K- A famine and scorn:

"All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their valuables for food to restore life. See, O Lord, and consider, for I am scorned" (11)

In the name of the whole people, the prophet Jeremiah cries out: "See, O Lord, the bitterness we suffer, and consider how we are scorned by the gloating enemy".

Assuming that in the sin he has pleasure and an enjoyment of satisfaction, man will lose his peace, and the devil will captivates all his valuables, even the bread necessary for his life; that hunger will dwell upon him like it has dwelt upon the prodigal son. Sin will destroy our talents, our energies, and all what we were given of divine gifts; which we give up for the sake of temporary pleasure, the way Esau did when he sold his firstborn status for the sake of a meal of lentils.

(2) JERUSALEM CRIES OUT FOR HELP:

a- Begging for the compassion of the passers by:

“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see, if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the Lord has inflicted on me in the day of His fierce anger”(12)

In the midst of the divine chastisement, man, in his weakness, thinking that he is the most miserable of all creation, cries out, saying: “*Behold* and see, if there is any sorrow like my sorrow!”.

As the calamity came to be unbearable, Jerusalem sought, even from those who pass by, to see and to have compassion on her.

In the midst of intense affliction, the church (Jerusalem) recognizes her weaknesses, and seeks the hand and righteousness of God.

Looking around, and finding no comfort from the strong allies and friends; Jerusalem in bitterness, cried out to all who passed by, who were actually, either not capable of helping her, or gloat on her calamity, proclaiming that what have dwelt upon her was not because of the strength of the enemy who captivated and destroyed her, but is allowed by God for her humiliation, on account of that, instead of returning to Him to enjoy the divine mercies , she persisted on evil, not endured by God. In her bitterness she seeks their compassion, although she is sure of their inability to support her; and of that the only way for her salvation is to return to God with repentance.

This saying bears a spiritual concept; as the Savior Messiah, being the Lamb of God, came forward to carry the sins of the world, to become, for the sake of His love of the sinful humanity, “*an iniquity offering*”; according to the words of the prophet Isaiah, saying: “*All we, like sheep, have gone astray; We have turned,*

every one, to his own way. And the Lord had laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53: 6); and according to the apostle Paul: *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us”* (2 Corinthians 5: 21).

A heathen Indian Poet once said: [I wonder how the Christians could sleep at night, knowing that they have such a God who went through all those passion for their own sake!]. And the Lord Christ, in the garden of Gethsemane, while drinking the cup of passion for our sake, said: *“Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done”* (Luke 23: 42).. The first Adam disobeyed the commandment, and the second Adam came to drink the cup of passion in obedience to the Father, with whom He is one in the same essence.

b- Nets and snares:

“From above, He has sent fire into my bones, and it overpowered them. He has spread a net for my feet and
turned me back. He has made me desolate and faint all the day”
(13)

A bitter portrait of what dwelt upon Jerusalem; as though God sent fire from above, which all the water of the world could not quench, to burn her bones, namely, her very being; Spread a net for her feet, from which she could not escape; And pushed her back to fall and never to stand up. By that she came to be desolate, with no one to give her comfort.

If what dwelt upon Jerusalem was because of her sins, our Christ as the Savior of the world consented to carry passions and sufferings by the cross to save us from our sins.

According to the apostle, *“For the joy that was set before Him, Jesus endured the cross despising the shame”* (Hebrew 12: 2). With pleasure, He endured the fire which we kindled by our disobedience, and descended to Hades, as though into the net, which we set for ourselves, to destroy it and set us free from it.

By saying: *“From above He has sent fire into my bones”* (13), He probably means that their wounds became so serious that no pain killers, nor soothing oil would be enough to cure them, but may need to be burned with fire; according to what came in Isaiah: *“From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. They have not been closed or bound up or soothed with ointment; Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire”* (Isaiah 1: 6-7).

+ Some wounds could be cured with pain killers, and some others with soothing ointments, and others need to be bandaged; Yet there are wounds about which it is said: *“They have not been closed or bound up or soothed with ointment. Your country is desolate; your cities are burned with fire”* (Isaiah 1: 6-7). So there are sins that defile the soul, and need the cleansing water, and the soap of the divine Word; And there are sins that would not be so washed.

(The scholar Origen)

“The yoke of my transgressions was bound; They were woven together by His hand, and thrust upon my neck.

He made my strength fail; The Lord delivered me into the hands of those whom I am not able to withstand” (14)

God has previously warned those who persist on their disobedience, saying: *“You shall serve your enemies ,whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger,*

in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of all things; and he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you” (Deuteronomy 28: 48). The chords of this yoke are not made of fibers nor of iron, but of the sins committed by the wicked, of which he would not be able to rid himself, except by repentance, and through the mercies of the Lord.

According to Solomon the Sage: “His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sins” (Proverbs 5: 22).

Whereas the Lord Christ, being our Savior, counted the yoke we set for our selves by our iniquities, as His own yoke, to carry for our sake, to present to us instead the sweet yoke of His love (Matthew 11: 30). The way the farmer puts a yoke over the neck of a bull, to be able to direct it wherever he chooses, So God allows for us to carry a yoke to direct us toward our salvation.

It is befitting of man who assumes that the yoke of bondage is destroying him, not to murmur against God who allowed it for him; nor against the enemy who put it over his neck; and tied it by double chains; but to put the blame over himself, and count what dwelt upon him as the product of his own iniquities.

And it is befitting of the wicked to perceive that the Lord Christ has come to proclaim the freedom, to offer the chains of divine love, and its sweet yoke, which set us free from the yoke of bondage to the letter, to live by His joyful gospel, and not according to the literality of the law.

God has probably so commanded, to let them, through humiliation under the Babylonian yoke, discover the inner yoke under which they have fallen, namely the yoke of sin. For by the humiliation of the body, the harsh circumstances of life, and their deprivation of their country, their holy city, and the temple of the Lord; they would come to perceive what the yoke of sin does to them; and to say together with the prophet Jeremiah: *“He has made me desolate and faint all day. The yoke of my transgressions were bound; they were woven*

together by His hands, and thrust upon my neck. He made my strength fail. The Lord delivered me into the hands of those whom I am not able to withstand” (1:14).

When they came to put the Lord Christ under arrest, they bound Him (Matthew 27: 2), as though they had conquest on Him; probably for fear that He might perform a miracle and flee away from their hands; They bounded His hands behind His back so tightly, that blood came out from His finger tips; they put iron collar around his neck, and dragged Him along. So started the chain of sufferings and insults in every way possible; the way only the slaves are subjected to. They arrested Jesus and bound Him, not because of weakness or helplessness on His part, nor of His inability to flee from their hands, but because He intended it so to be for our salvation through the cross. They could never be able to bind Him, if He did not bind Himself to the horns of the altar by the chords of exalted love, as a lamb offered as a sacrifice for the sake of the whole world. They did not perceive that He was bound in our place, we, who are bound by our iniquities (Proverbs 5: 22), and by the yoke of our disobedience (Lamentations 1: 14). Evil is the bonds of the soul that draw us before the court of God, and that lead us to the kingdom of the devil. Having become sin for our sake, our Christ consented to be bound by chords to set us free from our chains; He came to be so chained, in order for us to enjoy freedom.

+ The Jews bear the yoke of the law by their material works ... Whereas we have taken up the yoke of Christ, who has put over our necks the yoke of His divine love, and not that of the five pairs of bulls (the animal sacrifices); namely the five books of the law; according to the words said by the Lord to the Samaritan woman: “*You had five husbands ...*” (John 5: 18)

(St. Ambrose)

c- Trampled as in a winepress:

“The Lord has trampled underfoot all my mighty men in my midst; He has called an assembly against me to crush my young men. The Lord trampled as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah” (15)

What is this assembly that crushed the young men of Jerusalem, but the armies of the Chaldeans formed of soldiers from diverse nations. Jerusalem did not lack the military might, as there were mighty young men in her midst; Yet sin sent them forth to be trampled under the feet of the pagans as in a winepress. They did not fall in a battle, but in the midst of the city, in her heart, as a sign of God's wrath on them.

With pride and haughtiness, the wicked practice sin, counts themselves capable, and boasts their disobedience; Yet God in His love, allows for them to be trampled under foot by the enemy, as grapes are trampled in a winepress; where they would lose their talents and energies, with the hope that they may eventually return to God and seek Him.... God did not assemble them as He used to do to celebrate a joyful feast, but to encounter the Babylonian army, to be trampled underfoot, and their blood would be poured like the juice of grapes in a winepress.

Jerusalem used to receive assemblies coming from all over the world to celebrate the feasts with great joy. But now it receives an assembly of pagans to trample her young men underfoot, and to defile her temple and sanctuaries.

d- The enemy prevailed:

“For these things I weep. My eye, my eye overflow with water; because the comforter who should restore my life is

far from me. My children are desolate because the enemy prevailed”

(16)

Jerusalem did not cease to weep for the following reasons:

* No one comes to comfort her in the midst of her sufferings, or even to approach her to utter few words of encouragement.

* Her children lost hope in resurrection, even in the future,

* The enemy proclaimed that they prevailed on her.

Who are the children of Jerusalem but the high priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, and other rulers, who, instead of offering help and comfort, they perished, and provoked the people to deny the Savior, the source of every heavenly comfort.

“Zion spreads out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her. The Lord has commanded concerning Jacob, that

those around him become his adversaries. Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them” (17)

After speaking in the name of Jerusalem as a whole, Now the prophet Jeremiah speaks in his own name to reveal the cause of what dwelt upon his people. He calls his people “Jacob”, to exhort them to follow the lead of their father “Jacob” who wrestled with God and men, and prevailed, hoping they will purify themselves of the uncleanness into which they have fallen.

Spreading the hands here does not refer to embracing those who come to her to be filled with joy and comfort, but to seek their comfort..

It was befitting of Zion, having received the prophecies, the divine promises, and the symbols referring to the Savior, to spread her hands to preach Him,; But,

instead of spreading her hands to support the world, she became in need of someone to comfort her; In despair, she seeks help from the world – from Pilate and his men. She was exposed before the nations, and came to be unclean among them.

“The Lord is righteous, for I rebelled against His commandments.
Hear now, all peoples, and behold my sorrow;

My virgins and my young men have gone into captivity” (18)

After exhorting her people to follow the lead of their father Jacob, the striving man of God, Jerusalem loudly confessed before all, that what dwelt upon her is the fruit of her own disobedience to the Lord. She now blames herself and not the Lord (2 Chronicles 12: 5-6; Proverbs 5: 22).

The hope of Jerusalem was set upon her young men to defend the city of God; but having been defiled, and have gone into captivity, she now confesses that she is disobedient and is worthy of chastisement. ... Has she actually did return to the Lord her Savior?

The disobedient Jerusalem started to confess her sins, and to justify God who allowed for her to be chastised for the sake of her salvation; as though she cries out together with the Psalmist, saying: “*Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight – that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge*” (Psalm 51: 4); And together with the prophet Daniel, saying: “*O Lord, righteousness belongs to You; but to us shame of face*” (Daniel 9: 7).

e- Death of the rulers:

“I called for my lovers, but they deceived me. My priests and my elders breathed their last in the city, while they

sought food to restore their life” (19)

The prophet portrays the condition of Judah who was sometimes allied with Egypt, and other times with Assyria, and with others; But such alliances, proved to be like mirage, for once affliction came; none of them moved to support her. As to within, the priests and elders, the religious and the civil rulers, have all forsaken the Lord, and spiritually died; having sought what are for the pleasure of their hearts, and not what is for the glory of God and the edification of their people.

Now Jerusalem confesses that, instead of returning to the Lord with repentance, she resorted to her allies and lovers to support her; to come to discover that they deceived her for so long; and that they only sought what was for their own benefit, not caring for the perdition that dwelt even upon the priests and the elders.

f- Distress inside and outside:

“See, O lord, that I am in distress; My soul is troubled; My heart is overturned within me; for I have been
very rebellious, Outside the sword bereaves, At home it is like death”
(20)

Here, the prophet raises a prayer in the name of Jerusalem as a whole, seeking from the Lord to see the distress that dwelt upon the people because of their rebellion against Him. She confesses that, because she is rebellious, desolation came over from outside as well as inside.

In the name of the people, the prophet proclaims that his soul is troubled because of the rebellion against God, and the disobedience of His commandments; In the inside, there was bitterness, and on the outside there was

perdition and desolation;... In the inside there were plagues and famine; and on the outside there was the sword of the enemy. The prophet's soul was filled with deep bitterness, as he proclaimed in the book of Jeremiah 4:19.

+ I wish those who intend to repent, know how to present it; with what zeal, with what feelings, and how it should swallow all his mind, shake his inner being, pierce the depths of his heart; according to the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "*See, O Lord, that I am in distress; My soul is troubled; My heart is overturned within me*" (20).

(St. Ambrose)

g- Punishing the haughty enemy:

"They have heard that I sigh, with no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my troubles. They are glad that You have done it. Bring on the day that You have announced, that they may become like me" (21)

When the nations around Judah, like Edom, Ammon, and Moab, whose hearts anticipate the day of the desolation of Jerusalem, heard what dwelt upon her, they not only gloated, but they even helped the enemy in every possible way; in order to see Jerusalem lose her greatness and sanctity, to become like them.

But what dwelt upon Jerusalem to chastise her because of her sins, will eventually dwell upon the gloating heathen nations, in the assigned and proper time; as it was said about Babylon and the nations oppressing the divine truth: "*The cities of the nations fell; and great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath*" (Revelation 16: 19).

Those enemies refer to the devil and all the hosts of darkness. Despite what they have of power and authority; yet, anticipating the day of the Lord in bitterness and great horror, they desire that all mankind would become like them, to partake of their eternal perdition.

“Let all their wickedness come before You, and do to them as You have done to me; for all my transgressions,
for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint” (22)

The prophet ends his lamentation by confessing all his transgressions, counting what is done by his people and their rulers, as though he, himself has done, and seeks from God to bring His judgment upon the enemy, namely the devil and his hosts; as well as, on the day of judgment, upon the wicked who insisted on not repenting until their last breath.

+ No one will stand beside them, No one will save them; And the face of Christ (for them) will not be gentle and compassionate.

(St. John Chrysostom)

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**AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK
OF LAMENTATION**

(Chapter 1)

**DO NOT SURRENDER TO
WIDOWHOOD**

+ How amazing! The city of God, the joy of the whole earth;

Has become a lonely forgotten widow!
Her priests became filled with bitterness, instead of with the joy of the feasts;
They unceasingly weep;
Her rulers lost their strength and wisdom;
They wonder around like deer with no pasture nor fountains of water;
The young men and children were led like sheep;
They became humble slaves;
The virgins lost the spirit of amiability;
The bitterness became their food and drink;
The streets of the city became filled with the corpses of the dead, because of hunger and plagues.
The enemies found the chance to mock them, and to deal harshly with them.

+ My soul is widowed by sin, by separating me from You, O the amazing Groom;

It took away from me the enjoyment of the splendor of your beauty;
Bring me back to Yourself, and pour Your splendor on me;
To become an icon of You, O My Creator.

+ Sin has isolated me from all my friends;
I suffer the feeling of isolation and wanting;
Your precious blood brings me back to attach to You, O my unique Friend;
To become for You, and You for me, O my amazing Savior!

+ My sins became a heavy yoke on me;
Who can liberate me from it but You;
You who carried the yoke of the cross for my sake;
For my sake, You became a slave!
When You are the only begotten Son of the Father!

- Grant me to practice my sonhood to Your Father;
To enjoy the liberty of the glory of the children of God.
- + My heart became an unceasing mourning place;
Bring back to me the gladness of salvation;
To become, Yourself, my perpetual feast;
And my soul would unceasingly exult.
- + The enemy has humiliated me, and became my leader;
I lost the freedom of will;
My will lost its sanctity;
I became a tail and not a head;
The enemy drives me according to his whims;
Let the devil fall down from Your heavens in my hearts,
Bring him down to underneath my feet;
I shall fear him no more, because Your kingdom is in me;
And Your Holy Spirit is the Leader of my whole life;
For You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
- + Sin has robbed all my treasures;
It denied me the holiness of my mind, heart, emotions, and energies;
You are my treasure; Let me acquire You, so as not be in need of anyone
else;
You are the Bread that comes down from heaven;
You are the Groom of my soul, and my amazing companion;
You are my riches and all my treasures;
You are my eternal joy and exalted peace;
You are my satisfaction and glory;
You are my life and my resurrection.

+ Sin turned me as though into an “abomination of desolation” (spoken of by Daniel);

Yet, Your Spirit sets out of me a holy temple;
Where You dwell together with Your Father and Your Holy Spirit;

+ Let the devil and all his hosts stir up;
Let him plan all his deceptive ways;
I shall not fear him, as long as You are in me;
Let him set all his snares;
For You lift me up above all the snares of the world;
You raise me up as though to heaven.

+ The enemy comes against me with his whole might;
He intends to trample me by his feet, as though in a winepress;
You are my Savior from all afflictions;
Let me be crucified together with You, to be risen together with You.

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CHAPTER 2

IN YOUR WRATH, O LORD, YOU WISH TO LIFT ME UP TO YOUR HEAVENS

In the first lamentation, the prophet concentrates on the description of Jerusalem, the great queen, who has become a lonely widow with no one to comfort her; On that what dwelt upon her was because of her sins: And on that he (the prophet) moans in her name, and refers every rebellion and disobedience on her part, as though his own, for which he presents repentance, and seeks the divine intervention. But in the present lamentation, he reveals the bitterness of the divine wrath; on account of that what dwell upon the city is not haphazardly, nor because of the might of the enemy, but is a divine chastisement, “*a calamity on the city*” (Amos 3: 6)... The goal of this divine wrath, is not for the sake of revenge, but to raise the repentant up to His heavens.

This chapter starts by a description of the total desolation of Jerusalem, and a confirmation that it came by a command of the Lord Himself, using the army of Nebuchadnezzar as a tool of chastisement.

The divine judgment is presented in the following actions:

- 1- The desolation of all the habitations in Judah (2)
- 2- A total desolation of all the strongholds, walls, gates, boards, (2), about which it was said: “*Walk about Zion, and go all around her; Count her towers; Mark well her bulwarks*” (Psalm 48: 12, 13).
- 3- “*Standing like an enemy, God has bent His bow, with His right hand, like an adversary*” over the whole earth (4).
- 4- The Lord allowed for His temple to fall like leaves in autumn (6).

- 5- *“The Lord spurned His altar”* because of the unfaithfulness of the people; *“He abandoned His sanctuary”*, and allowed it to be trampled by the enemy (7)
- 6- *“The law is no more; and her prophets find no vision from the Lord”* (9, 14). The elders of the daughter of Zion sat on the ground, and kept silent; they threw dust on their heads, and girded themselves with sackcloth; for the desolation was overwhelming.
- 7- The kings and the rulers were captivated (14)
- 8- The Lord gave the enemies of Zion the freedom to open their mouth against her, and to destroy her cities and culture (16)
- 9- The young and old lie on the streets of Jerusalem fallen by the sword (21)

In such a portrait of the horrible judgment, the human comfort would fail; But the prophet exhorts the people to seek the help and support from the Lord.

- 1- The dispute with the Lord 1 -- 9
- 2- Going down to the ground 10 -- 13
- 3- The false and true prophets 14 -- 17
- 4- A call to cry out to the Lord 18 – 22

1- THE DISPUTE WITH THE LORD:

The prophet starts this lamentation by describing what dwelt upon Zion because of the wrath of the Lord on her.

Jerusalem used to cherish the presence of the temple and the Ark of the covenant in her, the enjoyment of the divine presence, and bearing the reflection of the splendor of God, the true Light. Now, with the dwelling of God’s wrath, darkness prevailed on her; and instead of being the kingdom of light, it became the kingdom of darkness (Isaiah 64: 11; 60: 12).

The Lord sent many prophets, to warn Judah; but the majority of the people – almost on all levels – scoffed their warnings. Jeremiah who was one of those prophets took a firm position in talking about the dispute with the Lord for the sake of reforming them. Here, he talks as a witness:

“How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger. He cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel; and did not remember His footstool, in the day of His anger” (1)

God’s wrath was like a thunder cloud He released to descend with its whole might on the daughter of Zion.

The kingdom of Judah assumed that she has a certain privilege, not only over the other nations and peoples of the earth, but even over Israel, on account of that it embraced the city of God, the temple, etc.; and of that it entered into a covenant with God. She did not perceive that those privileges will support and keep her as long as she keeps the covenant; Otherwise, her chastisement would be harsher than the nations that do not enjoy such privileges.

When the Pharaoh of Egypt opposed God, darkness prevailed upon his land; And when the daughter of Zion did the same, darkness also prevailed on her from heaven; As though In her rebellion, she fell down from heaven, where the divine light is, and came down to earth into a horrible and terrifying darkness; ... God will covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud , and did not remember, even His ark of the covenant in her.

He who rebels against God, will hear the divine command: *“Repent ... Or else I will come to you quickly, and remove your lampstand from its place”* (Revelation 2: 5).

The expression “*God’s anger*” was repeated in verses (1, 2, 3, 6); For God, the wholly merciful and loving, intends salvation for all; but whoever persist on rejecting being attached to Him, will cast himself under the activity of sin, to be denied the mercies of the Lord, and to fall under His anger; which is not a mere stir-up, nor some kind of revenge, like that of men; but is rather forsaking him who rejects Him, who casts himself into the fruit of sin, namely into corruption.

- + When we read about the anger and wrath of God, we should not understand the expression according to the human emotion, but according to one befitting of God, who is above any emotion; We should perceive that He is the Judge and the Avenger against all the oppressive things committed in this world.

According to the logic of these expressions, therefore, we should fear Him, being the fearful Avenger against our evil works, and should fear to do anything against His will; on account of that men are used to fear those whom they know as being firm, and fears to do them any offense; as it happens concerning the judges who are known to reach the climax of justice

The avenging anger of such judges is usually feared by those tortured by their conscience; And while in the midst of this fear, the feelings of the judge before whom they are tried are characterized by justice, impartiality, and honoring the law he executes. Yet, however compassionate and gentle he may be, he would be seen as intensely angry and cruel, by those whom he justly and truly condemns.

(St. John Cassian)

“The Lord has swallowed up and has not pitied all the inhabitants of Jacob. He has thrown down in His wrath

the strongholds of the daughter of Judah. He has brought them down to the ground. He has profaned the kingdom and its princes” (2)

Having lifted up His protection, being, “*a wall of fire all around His godly men*” (Zechariah 2: 5), the Lord allowed for them to be swallowed up by the enemy, for their material (stony) strongholds to be destroyed to the ground; and for their kingdom and their sanctuaries to be profaned by the pagans.

In His love He gets angry and He chastens, in order to save and have mercy; He allows for the destruction of the stony strongholds, to let the believers have Him as a stronghold for their souls, in which the devil cannot force himself; and allows the pagans to profane the temple, to make the believers return to Him, and the temple of the Lord in them to be sanctified.

God has previously threatened to destroy the city of Nineveh, to provoke its inhabitants to return to Him, and to avoid the devastation of their life and the inner cities of their souls. God gets angry, that by His anger He would have mercy on man.

- + God called on the prophet Jonah to go to provoke the Gentile nation to repentance.
He sent him to threaten to bring down their prosperity to the ground; that through that threat they forsake their evil;
If God had the intention of striking Nineveh because of the abundance of their iniquities He would not send His prophet to warn them;
If He truly decided to bring harm upon it, He would have sent His wrath all of a sudden on it;
Before raising His hand to strike her in her sleep, he called her and awakened her;

He sent His prophet to the city to bring it back from evil; that through repentance they might have comfort, and avoid desolation;
Once they knew that the wrath would come down from the Mighty God, they resorted to repentance;
In fasting they strove against wrath; they put on sackcloth to go to war; the elder and the child, in terror, took the side of righteousness.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“He has cut off in fierce anger every horn in Israel. He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy.

He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire which devours all around” (3)

The horn refers to strength; as by it some beasts defend themselves. The Holy Book used the word “horn” to refer to power; We hear about “*the horn of our salvation*” (2 Samuel 3: 22; Psalms 18: 2; Luke 1: 69)). Once the beast charges with its horn, its enemy would retreat.

The Lord cuts off the horn of His people, namely, makes them powerless, and instead of making their enemy retreat before them, they, themselves would retreat in weakness and shame.

Having carried our sins to redeem us, the Lord Christ gave Pilate the power to crucify Him; according to His words: “*You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above*” (John 19: 11).

God does not intend to cut the horn off His people; but it is man or the people who do it! How? According to St. Augustine, the horn is at the top of the head, namely, it occupies the leading position over the whole body. Yet, if man submits to his lowly body lusts, he would be as though

has destroyed his own strength, by removing his horn from the leading position.

In other words, being enslaved by the sin and evil desires, take away from him the spirit of power, and he would be hornless.

As to the “flaming fire that devours all around”, it came in Amos: *“Thus says the Lord: ‘For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, lies after which their fathers walked. But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem”* (Amos 2: 4, 5).

The Lord Christ, bearing our sins to destroy them, became like a flaming fire.

“Standing like an enemy, He has bent His bow. With His right hand like an adversary He has slain all who were pleasing to His eyes; on the tent of the daughter of Zion. He has poured out His fury like fire” (4)

The Babylonians defeated Judah; because, the Lord Himself, who was their friend and a stronghold to protect them, has turned into like an enemy; An animosity created by the sin in which Judah fell, on which they rejected to repent, and to return to God their Savior. Sin in the life of the children of God cuts off the fellowship that gives Him pleasure to make them enjoy with Him. That is because His pure eyes do not endure beholding evil. It was not said that God becomes an enemy, but “like an enemy”; for He bears no animosity; but, while chastening His people, He may seem as though an enemy.

Although God never forsakes any of His saints, yet He would not disregard any perversion in behavior. The Lord chastens the one He loves, and scourges those He receives. The lesson we, and the rest of Judah, should learn, despite the bitterness in it, is: *“Call upon Me in the*

day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Psalm 50: 15)..

When the Lord bent His bow; the daughter of Zion lost all what was pleasing to the eyes in her tents, of divine goods, splendor, spiritual beauty, and goodness..

St. John Chrysostom talks to us about the concept of God’s wrath, when an earthquake happened in Constantinople; most probably when the Empress sent him into exile. She got so terrified in her bedroom, counting the earthquake as a sign of God’s wrath because of sending the saint into exile; that she hastened to cancel her decision and command his return.

+ The earthquake has gone away; but fear is still there. ... Do not let your reason go together with it. We have spent three days praying; I wish our zeal does not cool off. What brought the earthquake forth is our slothfulness; Let us therefore renew our zeal to send His Wrath away; I wish we shall not be slothful again, lest we would stir up His wrath anew. On the mouth of His prophet Ezekiel, God proclaims: *“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live”* (Ezekiel 33: 11). ... Have you seen how people died? ... When the earthquake happened I wondered: Where is the robbery? Where is the greed? Where is the tyranny? Where is the arrogance? Where is the power? Where is the persecution? Where is robbing the poor? Where is the haughtiness of the rich? Where is the prevalence of power? Where is the fear? ... In the duration of one minute, everything was torn apart like a spider’s network; everything was destroyed; the city was filled with cries, and everyone hastened to the church to pray.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“The Lord was like an enemy; He has swallowed up Israel; He has swallowed up all her palaces; He has destroyed her strongholds; and has increased mourning and lamentation in the daughter of Judah” (5)

God intends to set out of man a king or a queen, of authority, and to make him live in a palace; Yet, if he turns his palace into a place for sin, man would lose his position, authority, abilities, and the exultation of his heart, to live in mourning and weeping.

+ *“He pours contempt on princes, disarms the mighty”, (Job 12: 21), and lifts the persecuted up. While the Jewish people kept the law, when the Gentile world knew nothing about the commandments of God, the early father were called princes by faith; while others fell in the pit of disbelief. But once Judaism denied the secret of incarnation of our Lord, while the whole world proclaimed their faith in Him, the princes fell into shame, and those who once were down in the pit of disbelief, have got the true faith. Seen by Jeremiah by the eye of prophecy, long before it happened, he said: *“The Lord was like an enemy; He swallowed up Israel; He has swallowed up all her palaces; He has destroyed her strongholds” (5).**

(Pope Gregory the Great)

“He has done violence to His tabernacle, as if it were a garden; He has destroyed His place of assembly; The Lord has caused the appointed feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion. In His burning indignation He has spurned the king and the priest” (6)

The calamity dwelt upon everything and everyone: the temple (6), the feasts (6), the rulers (6), the altar (7), the sanctuaries (7), the city wall (8),

the law (9), the children and the suckling (11).

God has previously set our early parents: Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, to live a royal kind of life, in joy and exultation, offering sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, Here, God for them has been like a Guard in the paradise He created for them. But once they fell into the sin of disobedience, He removed His tabernacle, as though He departed from the paradise, and left it to be prevailed by the corruptive disobedience.

What happened with our early parents also happened in a similar way with Judah that, rebelling against God, He took His glory away from His temple and His city, as He did from the garden of Eden; The synagogue was utterly desolated, together with the schools of prophets, priests, etc.; Even the throne of David, the anointed of the Lord, was destroyed for some time, until the time come for the Son of David to set a temple in the heart of every believer, and a new Jerusalem in the depth of his soul; when Christ Himself would dwell in the heart , as a High Priest, a heavenly Physician, a divine Teacher, a Leader, a stronghold, and heavenly food.

The same thing happened again when the Lord Christ came, and was opposed and denied by the Jews, while the heathen Gentle nations received Him, and enjoyed His salvation work.

What we say about Judah and the Jews, we may also say about everyone who rejects faith, whether by his tongue or by his behavior,

+ Meditating in what St. John said: "*To His own He came*" (John 1: 6) It is not for the need of the Lord Christ, as it is impossible for the divinity to need anything from anyone; but the Lord came to do good to His own.

John goes on to say “*and His own did not receive Him*”. Although Christ came for their own benefit, yet they, not only rejected Him but they brought Him out of His vineyard and killed Him.

- + The Samaritans by their faith in Christ and receiving Him, shall judge the Jews , who, in spite of all His works and miracles He performed among them, resisted Him many times; whereas the Samaritans, even with no miracles performed among them, believed in Him (John 4: 39-42).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + In the midst of the ruins of Jerusalem, a cry-out of hope was heard,: [I am deserted in my afflictions]. By such a cry-out, Israel addressed the nations of the world, saying: [Because of you , I became an enemy of God; He who has chosen me as His beloved for my fathers’ sakes ... Listen to my sighs, and understand the reason of my weeping; The blessing, in the first aspect, is to avoid sin; but in the second, it is to confess the sins we made to the Lord; ... Once the rest of the world have got salvation, I shall in my turn also get it, O Lord, according to Your just judgments].

(The scholar Origen)

“The Lord has spurned His altar; He has abandoned His sanctuary: He has given up the walls of her palaces, into the hands of the enemy. They have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as on the day of a set feast” (7)

Judah assumed that what happened to the kingdom of Israel by falling into the Assyrian captivity, was a natural fruit, for their dissension from

Judah, setting kings not descendants of David, and building for themselves temples other than that built by King Solomon in Jerusalem by a divine command. ... Judah believed that whatever evil they do, the Lord will never deliver them to captivity, for the sake of His temple and Jerusalem - His city; Their main praise was "*The temple of the Lord. The temple of the Lord; The temple of the Lord are these*".(Jeremiah 7:

4). The prophet Jeremiah kept warning them against that wrong assumption, And now, as the dreaded captivation actually happened, he weeps over what dwelt upon the city, the temple, the people, the priests, and the rulers.

"No strangers should ever come into the temple of God" (Nehemiah 13: 1); But, for the sake of the repentance of His people, and their return to Him, God allowed the enemy, not only to enter into it, but to destroy it.

The Lord spurned His altar, for it was defiled by the Jews; He abandoned His sanctuary, for there is no fellowship between the Holy One and the heathen worship with all its abomination. As the Lord cannot endure a worship mixed with abomination (Isaiah 1: 13; Amos5: 21).

He, by Himself has given up the walls of her palaces into the hands of the enemy.

+ Come out, O Jew, from the shadows which you serve; Come, and be wholly covered by the cross of light which you spurn;
Offer no more sacrifices. The church does not seek bulls from you; But to offer yourself as a sacrifice by which you will be forgiven.
No one seeks tithes, nor offerings from you; but yourself;
When you come, do not bring forth a bull for a sacrifice, but come and have yourself cleansed by the cross to wipe out your iniquity;
When your soul is red by iniquity like crimson, the cross will make it white and cleanses her from defilement;

Even if you are defiled more than the dye of scarlet, the death of the Son will purify you, if you believe in Him;
Moses, as well, has purified you secretly by our Lord; and by Him, all the sacrifices he offered were well received;
Now, forsake the sacrifice and approach God by yourself; for He does not seek any of your possessions but seeks you;
Cleanse yourself from your sin of killing the Lord, to let Him forgive your transgressions;
In case you truly love the Father, believe in His Son. And in case you love the peace sacrifices, He is the Sacrifice;
If you seek the purity of the soul, He will purify you; And if you covet your own will, He will scatter His blood over you.
If you love Him, do not annul the law because of Him; For by Him all the sacrifices are consummated without blemish.
He is the Priest, the Sacrifice, and the Forgiver of sins; Blessed is He, by whose secrets, the prophet Moses cured the whole people.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“The Lord has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion. He has stretched out a line; He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying. Therefore He has caused the rampart and wall to lament; they languished together” (8)

The line is used for construction, to ensure that a wall is straight and not inclined; but using it for destruction means that the walls are no more protective, but represent a danger, not on account of that the enemy will destroy them, but because they became so inclined on their own with no interference of the enemy. What was for protection has now come to be for danger.

Using the line here refers to that the procedure of destruction is not haphazard, but is elaborately planned in God's mind; it was so measured so as not to leave any part that could protect the city, even partly. As the wall and the rampart are no more capable of protection, they lamented together.

“Her gates have sunk into the ground; He has destroyed and broken her bars; Her king and her princes are among the nations; The law is no more; And her prophets find no vision from the Lord” (9)

The talk here represents the condition of the Jews after the captivation has taken place; They have lost everything; they see no more miracles to reveal the presence of God among them; There were only few prophets left; They became as though in darkness, and do not know when they will be liberated from captivity. That was their condition as it came in (1 Maccabees 4: 46; 9: 27; 14: 41); which applies as well to the condition of the Jews from the days of the prophet Malachi, until the coming of St. John the Baptist; And from the time of the Roman Titus up to this very day.

In Ezekiel it came: *“Disaster will come upon disaster, and rumor will be upon rumor. Then they will seek a vision from a prophet, but the law will perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders”* (Ezekiel 7: 26).In the lamentation of Jeremiah: *“The law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from the Lord”* (9). ... And the book of the prophet Amos: *“Behold the days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord”* (Amos 8: 11); ... And in the

book of the prophet Micah: *“Therefore you shall have night without vision, and you shall have darkness without divination; The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them”* (Micah 3: 6).

The gates have fallen, not only to the ground, but sunk in it as though in mire; hence the gates have no more need for gates, as the destruction dwelt upon the wall, as well as upon the palaces; no building had bars to keep nor to support them.

Having despised God’s law, they lost it; ... Having rejected the voice of the true prophets, and listened to the smooth words of the false prophets, that provided them with false hope, the Lord took away from all of them the visions; ... And having scoffed the prophet Jeremiah and the like, the time came for them to be denied of all prophets.

- + See how the Jewish nation has become a harlot!
She despised and hated her Father since the days of Sinai; And as His Son incarnated for her salvation, she took hold of Him, crucified Him, and stood dancing, laughing, and ridiculing.
Come, O Moses, look at how the bride whom you brought out of Egypt treats her pure Groom!
Look at the banquet she put before Him; how she brought the myrrh, and mixed it with vinegar; how she drew out the sword; how, instead of the manna, she gave him vinegar; instead of the bitter water you made sweet for her, she put bitter in it for Him!; how the choicest vine produced wild grapes!” (Isaiah 5: 1)

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

- + O Jews, When you come forth to Jerusalem, and find out how she became desolate, and turned into dust and ashes, do not weep like children (1

Corinthians 4); Do not grieve, but seek for yourselves a city in heaven, instead of that for which you search on earth. Lift up your eyes, to see the free Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all (Galatians 4: 26).

Do not be sad on the absence of the temple here, nor despair on your deprivation of a priest; As in heaven you will find the altar and the priests of the goods to come, according to the rank of Melchizedek, in their procession before God (Hebrew 5: 10). The love and mercy of God allowed for the earthly inheritance to be taken away from you, to let you seek the heavenly one.

(The scholar Origen)

2- GOING DOWN TO THE GROUND:

“The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground and keep silence; they throw dust on their heads, and gird themselves with sackcloth. The virgins of Jerusalem bow their heads to the ground” (10)

The virgins of Jerusalem, saw how the elders of Zion, instead of performing their duty as men of justice, have taken off the cloak of justice, put on sackcloth, judge no more; and lost their positions and authority. Putting on sackcloth was a sign of intense sorrow. Here, the prophet portrays Jerusalem in a state of mourning, as he previously stated in his book, saying, *“Judah mourns, and her gates languish; they mourn for the land, and the cry of Jerusalem has gone up”* (Jeremiah 14: 2).

The gates of the city became like phantoms coming out of Hades; the gates of Zion became, not the gates of the joyful kingdom of God, but the gates of hell, where mourning is unceasing, or the gates of death about which the psalmist says: *“You, O Lord, who lift me up from the gates of death, that I may tell of all*

Your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion; I will rejoice in Your salvation" (Psalm 9: 13-14). How awful for the gates of Zion to turn from being the source of the gladness of the Lord, into gates of unceasing mourning, of perdition and desolation.

+ By their rejoice in "The Old of Days", who became a child among them, the children weaved crowns of praise;

The prophet Zechariah bore the spiritual guitar, and hastened to sing prophetic songs before Him; Joyfully he pulled its strings, and by his voice he sang: "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion*".

But the lowly bride (the Jews who rejected Him as their Groom), did not join the joyful procession to which they were invited, but felt sadness and contrition on the coming of the groom.

Her heart was captivated by her beloved -- the golden calf -- with whom she negotiates, and refuses to listen to the prophet who tells her to rejoice.

She did not join the children who joyfully carried the tree branches;

While the prophets kept knocking on her lofty gates to wake her up, she was sleeping with her multitude of lovers;

While the children glorified and blessed the coming heavenly King, the old hag was preoccupied with cleaning her idols (their selfishness and the pride of their hearts).

She felt sad with the coming of the Father's Heir; Knowing for sure that He will expose her; she hated Him, and was not happy to hear the children glorify Him.

Envy muted her mouth; she became mute, and attempted to mute those who glorify;

She became mad at those who glorified Him;

Isaiah cried out, saying: "*Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Jerusalem, the holy city*" (52: 1).

Zechariah cried out, saying: "*Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion*" (2: 10).

And the children cried out, saying: "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*" (Psalm 118: 26);

But she listened, neither to the prophets nor to the children, but was mad at all of them;

O Jews, haters of the light; how could you shut up your ears to the praise raised in heaven and on earth?!

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

"My eyes fail with tears, My heart is troubled; My bile is poured on the ground, because of the destruction of the daughter of My people; because the children and the infants faint in the streets of the city" (11)

The prophet Jeremiah often warned the religious and the civil rulers, as well as the people, who did not listen to him; He kept talking to them with his tears, his heart, and his feelings, yet they scoffed him. Now, as the calamity did dwell on them, he did not gloat, despite the fact that they all discovered that his warnings and prophecies were all true; but, in his intense love for his people, he did not cease to weep, until his eyes failed, his heart was troubled, and his bile was poured on the ground; particularly when he saw how the children and the little infants faint in the streets of the city.

He says: "*My eyes fail with tears, My heart is troubled; My bile is poured on the ground*" (11). There is no cure except by repentance, which seems capable to alter the intention of God!

+ Let the church – your mother – weep on you ... Let the Lord Christ see them weep ... For He will be contented to see a multitude praying for your sake. Seeing the tears of the widow, and of the multitudes who wept for her sake, He was compassionate and raised her son;

... And listening to the prayers of Peter, and to the weeping of the poor, He raised Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9: 10).

+ Come, O Lord to my tomb, and weep for my sake; because my eyes have dried up, and became unable to pour such tears on my own transgressions. ... If you weep, O Lord, on me, as You did on Lazarus, I will be saved; ... Call me, O Lord, out of the tomb of my body, and say: "Come forth", so that my mind would not be confined to the narrow limits of my body, but would come out toward Christ, live in the light, and no more think in the works of the darkness, but of those of the light.

O Lord, call Your servant, whose hands and feet are chained by sins; who is buried in a tomb of dead thoughts and works. Hearing Your call, O Lord, I shall be free to join those attending Your banquet, and smelling the sweet fragrance of Your Person.

Granting someone salvation, You would keep him as well. About me it will be said: [See! Although he was properly raised in his childhood, and did not care to attend the services in the church; yet he was eventually drawn away from the vanity of this world, and joined the ranks of the singers, instead of the mourners; ... he persisted on keeping his priesthood, not by his own strength, but by the grace of Christ, and now he sits among those attending the heavenly banquet.

Keep Your work, O Lord, and guard Your gifts, even to him who fled from them; I know I was not worthy of being a bishop, on account of that I was too preoccupied with this world; but Your grace made me what I am.... Although I am actually the least worthy among the bishops, yet I was given some responsibilities concerning Your holy church, to watch over that fruit. ... Now, having chosen me for priesthood, while I am lost, Do not allow for me to get lost while I am a priest!.

The foremost gift, and the greatest virtue, is to know how to be intensely sorrowful together with those who sin.

(St. Ambrose)

“They say to their mothers, ‘Where is grain and wine?’, as they swoon like the wounded in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out in their mothers’ bosom” (12)

A horrible portrait of a child crying out of hunger and wounds while in his mother’s bosom, who finds no bread to feed him, nor wine to dress his wounds.... What is the grain and wine sought by the wounded while in their mothers’ bosom, but the body and blood of the Savior, capable of healing of wounds to the soul.

Here is the cry-out of every child to have communion of the body and blood of the Lord (the grain and wine), to enjoy the spiritual growth and the new life, according to the words of the Lord: *“He who feeds on Me will live because of Me”* (John 6: 57)

+ While distributing the Sacraments, the priest cries out saying: [The body of God is given for the remission of sins; and the blood of the Son of God to purify of every sin]. Here he repeats the same words said by the Lord when He distributed the Sacraments among His disciples: *“As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat, this is My body’. Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you, for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sin”* (Matthew 26: 26-28). ... We, therefore, as we repent, we approach to have communion of the holy Sacraments of our Savior; We approach as

sinner in need; For, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”* (Matthew 9: 12). ... It is therefore obvious that whoever approaches to have communion in the holy sacraments will have the remission of his sins, whether a priest or a one of the congregation. ... If the Holy Spirit is not dwelling in us on account of that we are sinners; With what authority would the priest invoke the Holy Spirit (in the institution narrative) of the Sacrament of the Eucharist), and would the congregation approach the Sacraments?

(St. (Mar) Filoxinus E-Menabgi)

“How shall I console you? To what shall I liken you. O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I compare with you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin is spread wide as the sea; Who can heal you?” (13)

Saying: *“What shall I compare with you?”* refers to what the comforters sometimes say to the afflicted to appease his soul, that what dwelt upon him is less than what dwelt upon the others. But in the present case the prophet did not find a greater calamity than what has dwelt upon Jerusalem, to comforter her; for it has utterly crushed her, and covered her like a great sea.

3- THE FALSE AND TRUE PROPHETS:

“Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions. They have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions” (14)

Here he reminds her of the false prophets who opposed him and flattered her for their own benefit, saying that what he (Jeremiah) says are mere threats that will

never happen. By saying that they have not uncover her iniquities, but have put a veil on her face, and denied her the chance to present a true repentance (Jeremiah 23: 16-22; 28: 9), and they have even cast her into captivity. ... Hence the Lord warns us against the false prophets (Matthew 7: 15-23).

When the true shepherd offers the Word without looking at the outer appearance, he seeks its fruit, for the sake of which the Word of God has incarnated, namely, (repentance). "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1: 15). By that the mission of the shepherd will be to present our Lord Jesus Christ, as a Redeemer, and a Savior for himself and for his congregation; And the words will come out of his mouth with love, yet with firmness, and with no softness nor looseness; The strong Word of God, capable of entering into the depths of the soul to shake, rebuke, and to crush her; Lest he would hear the words of reproach, saying: "*Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions. They have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions*" (14); And he would hear the prophet rebuke the flattering shepherds, who, instead of rebuking the sinners, they set for them pillows, to seek their words of commendation, and to gain their compassion and love: "*Woe to the women who sew magic charms on their sleeves and make veils for the heads of people of every height to hunt souls*" (Ezekiel 13: 18).

- + To the sinners it was said: "*Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions. They have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives*" (14). ... Notice how the 'teachers' were sometimes called 'prophets' in the Holy Book, on account of that they used to reveal the nature of the present, and proclaim the future. It is as though God accuses them of telling lies, if, for fear of evildoers, they commend them, and declare their innocence instead of condemning their transgressions.

If the shepherds avoid to use the words of rebuke, they will fail to uncover the transgressions of the wicked; on account of that the words of rebuke are

actually the key that would reveal the sin, which its doer is sometimes unaware of. Hence the apostle Paul says: *“Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict”* (Titus 1: 9); And as also said by Malachi: *“For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge; and people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts”* (Malachi 1: 7).. That is why the Lord, on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah warns the shepherds, saying: *“Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet”* (Isaiah 58: 1). For he who enters into priesthood takes the position of a messenger who should cry out aloud, and precede the coming of the just Judge who will follow in an awesome way.

(Father Gregory the Great)

“All who pass by clap their hands at you; they hiss and shake their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem. ‘Is this the city that is called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?’” (15)

After the whole world looked up at Jerusalem as being the perfection of beauty, power, and holiness, not on the architectural aspect, but because of the presence of the temple of the Lord in her, it became a subject of gloat and ridicule by her neighbors.

That reproach which dwelt upon humanity and was demonstrated in the captivity of Judah, was carried by the Lord Christ for our sake, and by it, the One, Mighty and the Glorified by the heavenly hosts, became an object of shame and disgrace.

If the devil envied the first Adam for what he enjoyed, and planned to bring him forth to death, he is still and will always envy every true believer to

draw him away from the enjoyment of the fellowship with Christ, and to bring him to perdition by sin. He will never quit; ... But who is with us is greater than who is against us.

- + What Does he mean by saying: "*Through the devil's envy,, death entered into the world*" (Wisdom 2: 24). When that evil wild beast (the devil) saw that the first man was created to be eternal, he brought into him the feature of envy that is his, and provoked him to disobey the divine commandment, by which he brought on him the penalty of death. ... For envy causes deception, deception causes disobedience, and disobedience causes death. ... Yet by His loving care, God gave eternity back to us, to become in a better privilege than what we had.

The first caused us to be driven out of paradise; and the second led us to exaltation;

The first caused us to fall under the verdict of death; and the second granted us eternity;

The first caused us to be denied the joy of paradise; and the second set for us the kingdom of heaven;

See how Your Lord, not only made you enjoy the great privilege of defeating the enemy (the devil), but He even submitted him to you, by the words, "*He gave you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions*" (Luke 10: 19).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + "*Through the devil's envy death entered the world*" (Wisdom 2: 24). Although the devil presented death to us; yet man is not committed to accept it. It was your consent, O man, that led you to death.

(St. Augustine)

“All your enemies have opened their mouths against you; they hiss and gnash their teeth; they say, ‘We have swallowed her up; Surely this is the day we have waited for; We have found it, we have seen it’” (16)

The enemies exulted, and assumed that what dwelt upon Jerusalem was by their power and authority, and that the day they waited for has finally come; They did not perceive that what happened was through the allowance of God for the sake of temporary chastisement.

- + The devil thinks that his happiness and success lie in having the authority over man, and in occupying his heart, mind, and all his energies, to lead him to his destruction; And, on the contrary, he counts coming out of man as failure on his part.

(Father Theophlactius)

When the Lord Christ consented to offer Himself as atonement for us, the devil exulted, as did those who crucified Him, to see Him as though in weakness. They assumed that they have finally managed to bring Him to perdition, and to get rid of Him forever.

“The Lord has done what He purposed, He has fulfilled His word, which He commanded in days of old; He has thrown down and has not pitied, And He has caused your enemy to rejoice over you; He has exalted the horn of your adversaries” (17)

What happened was not unexpected; as the Lord has warned them in the days of the prophet Moses (Deuteronomy 30: 1-5); by the prophet

Jeremiah, and other prophets; yet they did not heed His warnings (Jeremiah 51: 12). What does the prophet mean by saying: "*The Lord has done what He purposed*"?

- * He fulfilled the warnings He has repeated many times, which were ridiculed by the Jewish rulers and people, who counted them as not more than threatening words that will never be realized.
- * The Lord has done what He purposed, namely, to make them discover their illness, and return to Him, to bandage their wounded souls.
- * What happened to them reveal what man has fallen into through sin, for which the incarnate Word of God, by His consent, came to be crucified to save humanity from the perdition that dwelt upon her.

4- A CALL TO CRY OUT TO THE LORD:

"Their heart cried out to the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night;

Give yourself no relief; Give your eyes no rest" (18)

Here, the prophet addresses his call to the priests and the ministers, to keep on praying and weeping for the sake of every falling soul. If the Lord Christ, is the High Priest, and the perpetual Intercessor for His people before the Father through His blood (Hebrew 7: 25); The priest, being hidden in the Lord Christ, is called (Presbyter), namely (intercessor), whose main task is the perpetual prayers for the sake of his spiritual brethren and children.

In his talk to his fallen friend 'Theodor', St. John Chrysostom says: [It is now a convenient time for me to utter these words; Yes, even more than in the days of the prophet. If I do not grieve for the sake of many cities, yet I grieve for the sake

of a soul which is equal to many nations, if not more valuable. I shall not grieve for the sake of the destruction of a city, nor for its captivation by the wicked, but for the destruction of your holy spirit ... ; for the destruction of the temple that carries the Lord Christ ... For this temple is holier than that of the old covenant; ... It is not adorned by silver and gold, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit; And instead of the ark of the covenant, and the two statues of the cherubim, there are in the heart, the Lord Christ, His Father, and the Holy Spirit (The Paraclete)

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ “*Listen, O Lord to my cry outs*”.. No one has such confidence except the church; for the sinner will not dare to say “*Listen, O Lord to my words*”; ... but, on the contrary, he will hope that God will not hear him.

Meditate in the words “*my cry outs*”, that came several times in the Holy Book. They do not mean the cry outs of the mouth, but of the heart; as when God said to Moses: “*Why do you cry to Me?*” (Exodus 14: 15), when Moses did not utter a single word ... Similarly, came the words of the prophet Jeremiah, “*Give my eyes no rest*” (18). He means to say: Do not allow my eyes to be silent; ... for the eyes, as well, often cry out to God.

+ The good men perpetually grieve for the sake of the sins of others. Samuel in the old, mourned for the sake of Saul (1 Samuel 15: 35), on account of that he was slothful to treat his self pride with the ointment of remorse. And Paul wept for the sake of the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2: 4), who did not care to cleanse the filth of adultery by their tears.

And for the same reason, the prophet Ezekiel ate the book, inside and outside which was written. “Lamentations, mornings, and woes” (Ezekiel 2: 10): lamentations for the righteous, mourning for the lost, and woes for the sake of those about whom is written: “*When the wicked come, contempt comes also; and with dishonor comes reproach*” (Proverbs 18: 4); and about

whom Isaiah said:; *“And in that day the Lord of host called for weeping and for mourning, for baldness and for girding with sackcloth. But instead joy and gladness, slaying oxen and slaying sheep, eating meet and drinking wine; let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”* (Isaiah 22: 12, 13).

- + The Savior also wept on Jerusalem, because her inhabitants did not repent (Luke 12: 41). And the prophet Jeremiah lamented on his un-repenting people, saying, *“Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people”* (Jeremiah 9: 1), and to explain the reason for his sorrow he said: *“Weep not for the dead, nor bemoan him, but weep bitterly for him who goes away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country”* (Jeremiah 22: 10).

We, therefore, should rather weep for the sake of those who, because of their crimes and sins, separated themselves from the church; and should weep, as well, for the sake of those who, once the condemnation or chastisement stop on them, they resume their life in sin.

In this meaning, the prophet calls on the ministers of the church, whom he calls “walls and towers”, saying to each of them: *“O wall, let tears come down like a river”*(18); And the apostle St. Paul says: *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep”* (Romans 12: 15); For your tears will soften the hearts of sinners, and may even make them weep as well.

St. Jerome)

- + You may say: *“If one man sins against another, God will judge him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede (pray) for him?”* (1 Samuel 2: 25)

He did not say 'No one will pray for him', but said, "*Who will pray for him?*"; Meaning, he did not cancel praying, but wonders who would be ready to pray for his sake!. This is like what came in psalm 15, saying: "*Lord, Who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?*" (Psalm 15: 1); in which he does not mean that no one will abide in the tabernacles of the Lord, or dwell in His holy hill, but he wonders who will be worthy of, or chosen for that privilege!

In the same way, we should understand the phrase "*Who will pray for his sake?*"; namely, there should be some spiritually exalted people, to pray for the sake of those who do wrong to the truth of God; who, owing to the enormity of their sin, are in need of an enormity of prayers.

When the people in the old worshipped the golden calf, no one of the congregation prayed for their sake, but Moses himself.Was he wrong to do so? Certainly not; for he became worthy to seek, and he got what he sought' ... With an incredible love, Moses presented himself for the sake of his people, saying: "*If you forgive their sin – but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written*" (Exodus 32: 32).. Here, we see him, not thinking of himself, but of everyone, We see him forgetting all about himself, not in fear that he would probably be counted in contempt, but seeking to save his people from the danger of disobedience.

Therefore, it is truly said: "*Who will pray for him?*", Meaning, There should be someone like Moses, to present himself for the sake of the sinners; or like Jeremiah who, despite the Lord saying to him, "*Do not pray for this people*" (Jeremiah 7: 16), yet, he so did, and he got the forgiveness for their sake. For the intercession of such a prophet, the Lord altered His intent, and said to Jerusalem who, in remorse for her sins, said: "*O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, the soul in anguish and the wearied spirit cry out to You. Hear, O Lord, and have mercy, for we have sinned before You*" (Baruch 3: 1, 2)..

And the Lord commanded them to take off the attire of mourning, and to stop sighing, saying: "*Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem; and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God*" (Baruch 5: 1).

- + Seeing how heavy the burden of the sinners are, our Lord Jesus wept; He did not allow the church to weep alone, but He, Himself, had compassion on His beloved, and said to the dead: "... *Come forth*" (John 11: 43); Meaning, You who were cast in the darkness of the conscience, in the captivity of your sins, and in the prison of your crimes, "*Come forth*", ... Expose your sins to be justified; for "*With the mouth confession is made to salvation*" (Romans 10: 10).

(St. Ambrose)

- + You should know, my beloved, that, As it is perpetually God's wish for us to help all who set their hearts on remembering the church of the firstborn day and night, I, as well, never cease to mention you in my prayers day and night, asking God to make your faithfulness steadfast, to increase your works of virtue and your strength.

That was always my supplication since I gave birth to you by Christ, and you came to be my children. The same way the apostle Paul did for his son Timothy whom he gave birth by Christ, to whom he wrote, saying: "*Without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy*" (2 Timothy 1: 3). I, likewise, mention you, whom my heart love, in my prayers, and wish to see you, for I know your labor, your sighs, your sorrowful hearts, and your perseverance; and that you always do everything by a strong heart and wisdom; for, according to Paul, As God did not give us the spirit of fear, but

the spirit of wisdom, and the strength of love; He seeks from us to do all His works with this wisdom.

Now, my children, I ask the Lord to make my ways easy, to be able to come and see you; for I know that you, in turn wish to see me. And you should know that nothing in the whole world could equal this mutual love between fathers and children, who always wish to see each others. If that is the case of love between the worldly fathers and children, how much more would it be between the spiritual fathers and children, who love one others for the sake of God, and by His fear.

The love of the fathers by God are greater than that of the fathers by the body; And the love of the fathers is greater than that of the children; hence the apostle Paul says: "*If your love for me is little, mine for you is great*". Such is my love for you, O my children, greater than your love for me; Now, having become my children, let us work together, for God to grant us to see each others again; hoping that our getting together will bring you joy.

I fervently wish to see you, so as, according to the apostle Paul, to benefit you by the gift of the Spirit, to strengthen your spirit, and to be comforted, all of us, by my and your faith. And when we shall get together, I shall let you know other things which I cannot put in writing; to make it for your salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be the glory, the honor, and the praise, forever and ever, Amen.

(St. Anthony the Great)

+ Not all tears emerge from like feelings, nor out of one virtue:

a- Weeping that is **caused by the stings of our sins in our hearts**, as is written: "*I am very weary of my groaning; All night I make my*

bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears”(Psalm 6: 60; And, “Let tears run down like a river day and night; Give yourself no relief; Give your eyes no rest” (Lamentations 2: 18). Such a kind of tears come in a certain way.

- b- In another way, will tears that come through the **meditation in good things, and longing for the glory to come**; dense tears would then pour out of joy that could not be hidden, and exultation with no limits. For, thirsting for the Almighty God, our souls would say: *“When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night”* (Psalm 42: 2, 3); proclaiming that, with the daily weeping and crying, saying: *“Woe is me, my soul has dwelt so long”* (Psalm 120: 5).

- c- In a third way, tears pour, not out of feeling the deadly sin; but out of **fear of Hades, and a remembrance of the awesome day of judgment**; like the terror felt by the prophet, saying: *“Do not enter into judgment with your servant; for in Your sight no one living is righteous”* (psalm 143: 2).

- d- Another kind of tears that do not pour because of man’s knowledge of himself; but because of **the cruelty and sins of the others**. As when the prophet Samuel wept for Saul; And when the Lord himself wept for the sake of the city of Jerusalem; And when the prophet Jeremiah wept for her sake in the old days, and said: *“Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people”* (Jeremiah 9: 1)

- e- The tears mentioned in psalm 102, saying: *“For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping”* (Psalm 102: 9),

certainly come out of feeling, different from those mentioned in psalm 6, concerning the repentant man; for they are caused by **the troubles of this life, its afflictions and losses, that dwell upon those living in this world.**

(Father Isaac)

“Arise, cry out in the night; at the beginning of the watches; Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord. Lift your hands toward Him for the life of your young children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street” (19)

Filled with grief, the heart of Jerusalem cried out to God, not to return to Him in repentance, but to seek from Him to take the affliction away. Hence the prophet exhorts them not to cease resorting to God, until they come to attach to Him by true repentance.

How hard it has been for Jeremiah to see the walls of Jerusalem destroyed. If the material wall was destroyed, it was befitting of them to cry out to the true Wall – the Lord Himself – who is capable of surrounding them and protecting them.

The night for the Jews in the old was divided into three equal watches (Judges 7: 19); each formed of 4 hours. The first watch from sunset until 10 o'clock p.m.; the second, called the intermediate watch, from 10 o'clock until 2 o'clock after midnight; and the third watch, the dawn or morning watch from 2 o'clock until 6 o'clock a.m., namely until sun rise. Whereas in the Roman era, the night for the Jews was divided into four watches (Matthew 14: 25; Luke 12: 38). Each watch of three hours. The night starts at 6 o'clock p.m., and ends at 6 o'clock a. m. While people used to go to sleep during the first watch, the prophet seeks from

the daughter of Zion to hasten to pray and to seek the mercies of God, for the sake of her children at the beginning of the first watch.

As for us, ministers, we are committed to have spiritual ;motherhood' or 'fatherhood', deeper than the emotional love. A motherhood that surpasses that of the Canaanite woman; and a fatherhood that exalts above that of the pagan Centurion; on account of that it is the fatherhood or love of Christ in us, for those He has redeemed But I am ashamed to say that those two have surpassed us in faith and love. As for us, who are supposed to shepherd our children spiritually, when sin made them drunk, numbed their senses, cooled down their emotions and love; that they are unable to run after the Lord; They are in great need of prayers for the sake of the salvation of their souls, of liberation of the foolishness of sin, and of the paralysis of iniquity. Although they may be intellectually sound, and not physically paralyzed, yet their souls are dead by sin. Although we are committed to have our hearts moan, and not to give sleep to our eyes, and slumber to our eyelids for their sake, yet we are preoccupied by many things, by administrative, social services, complementary and official visits; ... But, are there tears or weeping for the sake of the fallen? ...

Are there sighs to the Lord: "Lord, help us, for our children are suffering?! ... Are there cry-outs together with David, *"Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep Your law"?*.... Are there sighs together with Jeremiah: *"For the hurt of the daughter of my people, I am hurt; I am mourning, astonishment has taken hold of me; ... Oh, that my head is waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people; ... I will take up a weeping and wailing for the mountains; and for the habitations of the wilderness a lamentation"* (Jeremiah 8: 21; 9: 1, 10); And saying, *"My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my bile is poured on the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the infants faint in the streets of the city"* (Lamentations 2: 11); And, saying, *"Let my eyes flow with tears night and day, and let them not cease; for*

the virgin daughter of my people has been broken with a mighty stroke, with a very severe blow” (Jeremiah 14: 17); And saying with the apostle Paul, “For thirty years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20: 31). And how Jeremiah, during captivity seeks tears from the wall of the daughter of Zion; seeking from us, as well, being a wall for our spiritual children, to weep for the sake of those captivated under the bondage of the devil, saying: “O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night; Give yourself no relief; Give your eyes no rest. Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord. Lift your hands toward Him, for the life of your children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street” (Lamentations 2: 18-19).

The apostle Paul taught us how to deal with the sinners; even with the like of that young man who committed evil with his father’s wife. For, although he sought to separate him from the holy congregation, lest the yeast may corrupt the whole dough (1 Corinthians 5: 6); yet he instructed them to keep on praying, and even wailing for his sake; For the wailing of the congregation and their sorrow, is the work of the living members for the sake of the sick among them to give him a chance to repent; then, once his heart softens, and he repents by his own free will; God will receive him, so should the church with joy.

*“See, O Lord, and consider! To whom have You done this?
Should the women eat their offspring, the
children they have cuddled? Should the priest and the prophet
be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?” (20)*

What a horrible portrait!, for the hand of a mother to stretch to slay her infant because of hunger, that has reached its climax after 18 months of siege (Jeremiah 19: 9). As the Hebrew women used to offer their children sacrifices to the priests of god Molok, to pass them through fire; like the pagan women, hence

God allowed for them to eat their own children because of hunger, to make them perceive how far they have reached of cruelty.

What happened to the priest and the prophet was also a fruit of their works, having opened up the temple for the idols, the temple lost its role in keeping and protecting them.

In his compassion on his people, the prophet Jeremiah cries out to the Lord, reminding Him that those people are His own people

“Young and old lie on the ground in the streets; My virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword. You have slain them in the day of Your anger; You have slaughtered and not pitied” (21)

He seeks from the Lord to see and consider what happened; as the destruction has reached even the children and young men and women; Namely, there will be no hope even in the future.

The children, young, and elders had to go out to the streets to search for whatever food they may find; for they were consumed by hunger; and no one had the strength even to bury the dead.

Perdition was collective, young and old, lie slain on the streets and in the sanctuaries, where they sought food and protection. Even the virgins, who were used to be kept away from battles to be taken later as spoils, were dead. All that happened as though in a set feast.

“You have invited as to a feast day the terror that surround me. In the day of the Lord’s anger, there was

no refugee or survivor. Those whom I have borne and brought up, my enemies have destroyed” (22)

Jerusalem who used to be like a mother taking her children into her bosom in joy and exultation, like a rejoicing heavenly icon, came to be more horrible than the burying sites, full of corpses of every age and every category; with no one able or willing to gather and to bury. She became a place for plagues, with no one caring even to look at her sanctuaries.

AN INSPIRATION FROM LAMENTATION

(Chapter 2)

BRING ME, O LORD, BACK TO YOUR HEAVENS

- + My soul is terrified before Your anger, O Lord;
Yet, in Your anger, You intend to lift me up to Your heavens;
In Your anger, I feel as though darkness surrounds me on all sides.
But, You, being the Sun of Righteousness,
Do not forsake me, Shine on me by Your love;
Pour on me Your splendor, to be fit for a kingdom;
In Your anger, I perceive that my sins have cast me from heaven down to the dust;
But heaven will remain waiting to welcome me back;
Your anger came to be like an enflaming fire;
Not to burn me, and to kill me;
But to burn every corruption that dwelt upon my nature.

- + How amazing, that, getting in touch with Your anger;
I count You as an enemy, aiming Your bow toward me;

My soul wails within me,
For who could stand before Your fiery arrows;
I perceive that Your anger, in its essence, is nothing but love
That there is no real animosity in You;
For You are love itself;
Your arrows will kill my evil;
And will wound my heart with healing wounds;
I am wounded with love;
Your arrows will kill any animosity within me;
And will enflame my heart with love toward You;
I see You not far from me;
You are in me, deeper than my depths;
You are in my depths, high, higher than my heights;
No one is nearer to me than You;
You approach me and make me a member of the household of God.

+ Through Your holy anger, I perceive Your secrets;
You hate all what is corrupt;
To set out of my depths a holy sanctuary for You;
You nail Your cross in my depths;
You carry me in You, O the Atoning Intercessor;
To be justified by You before the throne of Your grace.

+ My sins turned my inner Jerusalem into a tomb;
Behold, the king, the rulers, the leaders, and all the people, even the
children, have perished;
They were captivated and humiliated by the devil;
He destroyed their possibilities and corrupted their homes;
Set my will a king who bears Your holy will;
Support my heart, emotions, and senses, as leaders who work by Your Holy
Spirit;

The enemy has destroyed all my energies;
But You, sanctify my whole depths to set Your kingdom inside me;
I dare to say: "Not as I will, but as You will";
Work, O my Savior, by Your precious blood in me;
Let Your grace fill the storehouses of my heart with Your goods;
Your intention is to set heaven from dust;
And angels from men;
Here I am in Your hands;
I confess that I often misunderstood the truth of Your anger;
Be angry, chastise and let Your work in me;
Set out of me whatever You intend to do with me;
For no one loves me as You do;
I wish I love myself as much as You love me;
And seek for myself what You desire for me;
Glory be to You, O Lover of mankind;
I bow before Your holy anger;
As well as before Your exalted love.

=====

“

CHAPTER 3

(Part 1)

A SHINING HOPE IN THE MIDST OF THE DARKNESS

This long lamentation represents the heart and center of all the lamentations, and a turning point from looking at the sufferings that dwelt upon Jerusalem under chastisement, to the divine Savior, in passion, bearing our iniquities on the cross. It is the song of the Crucified Lover of mankind.

The prophet talks about the reaction in his depths, while meditating in what dwelt upon the city of whole destruction; For us to find out that in his sorrow, the sensitive and gentle spirit of the prophet himself, has so unified with his suffering people; that it would be difficult to distinguish whether the one who talks is the prophet or the whole nation.

Perceiving the greatness of this lamentation, our Coptic church chose it – as we said in the introduction – for the bishop or the priest to sing it at the beginning of the twelfth hour of the great Friday, as a memorial of the burial of the crucified Lord Christ, and of His crossing over to Hades to carry the souls of those who died in hope, and to bring them forth to paradise.

Do not marvel to see that this lamentation starts by parading the sufferings endured by the prophet Jeremiah, being a symbol of the Lord Christ, suffering to the account of humanity. He mentioned about 25 kinds of sufferings that represent what the Lord Christ has endured on my behalf, to bring me forth to the gladness of His resurrection, and to lift me up to His heavens.

THE SUFFERINGS OF THE ONE CRUCIFIED ON OUR BEHALF:

- 1- ***“He has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath” (1).*** *“We esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, but He was wounded for our*

transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we were healed” (Isaiah 53: 4-5). It is a glorified affliction of love! An affliction of the gladness of salvation! He endured affliction to grant me fellowship in the eternal glory.

- 2- **“He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light” (2).** Our Christ – the Light of the World – entered into the darkness of Hades to scatter it, and to shine on us with His light and splendor, to make us enjoy His divine light dwelling in us.
- 3- **“Surely, He has turned His hand against me” (3).** Namely, He appeared as though in the position of animosity; having taken the position of the first Adam and his descendants, who bore animosity against God, gave Him the back instead of the face; and persisted on disobedience and rebellion against Him. He presented Obedience to take away from us the disobedience and animosity, and to bring us forth to reconciliation; *“For when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Romans 5: 10)*
- 4- **“He has aged my flesh and my skin” (4).** So that, by bringing our old man to death, our new man is renewed, in His image (Colossians 3: 10).
- 5- **“And broken my bones” (4).** On the cross, He appeared as though His whole being has collapsed, or that His bones were broken, to grant us the enjoyment of the deposit of the risen body, capable of challenging the sin.
- 6- **“He has besieged me” (5).** Being a representative of humanity, it is as though the Father became His enemy; although He is One with Him in essence.
- 7- **“He surrounded me with bitterness and woe” (5).** He accepted every bitterness to bear our bitterness, and to grant us instead, the sweetness of fellowship with Him.
- 8- **“He has set me in dark places, like the dead of long ago” (6).** Although He is the Grantor of life and eternity, He endured death, was buried in a tomb, and came to be among the dead, in order to destroy the pit, and to liberate the dead from its eternal chains.

- 9- ***“He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out” (7).*** He, who liberates the captives (Isaiah 61: 1), became as though captivated by the tomb, that was tightly shut by a great stone, and sealed.
- 10- ***“He has made my chain heavy” (7).*** The devil assumed that he has bound Him to bring Him forth to the pit, like the rest of mankind, and did not perceive that He came down by His own free will to liberate us from the chains of sin.
- 11- ***“He shut out my prayer” (8).*** On the cross, when He cried out as though for help, He was scoffed by His crucifiers, not perceiving that He is the only begotten Son of the Father, who receives prayers; who was crucified to grant us in Him the daring of sonhood before the Father, and to appear before the throne of His glory.
- 12- ***“He has blocked my ways; He has made my paths crooked” (9).*** The hosts of darkness assumed that He has fallen into a trap from which there is no escape; although He is the Way who grants us Himself, opens the gates of heaven before us, and brings us forth to union with the Father.
- 13- ***“He has been to me like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in ambush” (10).*** The devil, the roaring lion to devour us (1 Peter 5: 8), assumed that the Father will devour Jesus, not perceiving that He is His only begotten Son, coming from the tribe of Judah, by whom we destroy the devil, and enjoy prevalence on him.
- 14- ***“He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces” (11).*** According to the prophet Isaiah: *“We esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted”* (Isaiah 53: 4). He came down to us to grant us the straightforward way, and to become Righteousness for us.
- 15- ***“He has made me desolate” (11).*** Through His cross, He revealed the extent of the desolation we reached, to grant us the non-corruption instead of our corruption.
- 16- ***“He has bent His bow, and set me up as a target for the arrow” (12).*** It so appears as though the Father has set Him as a target for His arrows;

while the Lord Christ presented Himself as the arrow of love which wounds the heart to cure it from denial.

- 17- “He has caused the arrows of His Quiver to pierce my loins” (13).** The “loins” refer to emotion. On the cross, it is as though all His emotions and feelings were destroyed; while He, by the cross, granted us holy emotions toward God and men, instead of those destroyed by the quiver of sin.
- 18- “I have become the ridicule of all my people” (14).** About Him it was written: “*And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, ‘He saved others, Let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen from God;’*” (Luke 23: 35). By His cross, we enjoy the heavenly glories.
- 19- “He has filled me with bitterness. He has made me drink wormwood” (15).** He tasted the bitterness in our place, to offer us His body and blood an eternal exultant life.
- 20- “He has also broken my teeth with gravel” (16).** For us to enjoy the taste of His commandments, which are sweeter than honey.
- 21- “He covered me with ashes” (16).** To let me enjoy the heavenly banquet.
- 22- “You have moved my soul far from peace” (17).** So that He, Himself, would be my true peace.
- 23- “And I said, ‘My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord” (18).** The Lord Christ consented to appear as though with no hope in the sight of His crucifiers, to grant me hope to become a dwelling place for the Holy Trinity, to work in me, and to grant me conquest.
- 24- “Remember my affliction and roaming” (19).** I have come to have heavenly glories, and the gates of heaven opened before me.
- 25- “My soul sinks within me” (20).** To grant me the upright soul, that does not look down to the earthly things, but sets forth toward the high up heavenly things.

THE PERSON OF THE SAVIOR LORD:

If this lamentation has abundantly revealed the wounds of the Lord, and His passions, so as, by weakness, he would reveal what is greater than strength; it revealed the following true features of the Savior Lord; that He is:

- 1- Merciful (22, 32)
- 2- Compassionate
- 3- Faithful (23)
- 4-Good (25)
- 5- Savior
- 6- Righteous and just (30)
- 7- Longsuffering (31)
- 8- Beneficent (22)
- 9- Does not afflict nor grieve men
- 10- Caring for men, He looks down at them from heaven (50)
- 11- He listens to prayers (56)

This lamentation ends up by a prayer, saying: *“Repay them, O Lord, according to the work of their hands; Give them a veiled heart; Your curse is upon them. In Your anger, pursue and destroy them, from under the heavens of the Lord”* (64-66).

- 1- The passions of the Lord Christ 1 - 21
- 2- The hope in God’s mercies 22 – 39
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- 4- The fruits of sin 43 - 54
- 5- A comfort for the believers 55 - 63
- 6- A perdition of the enemy 64 – 66

1- THE PASSIONS OF THE LORD CHRIST:

“I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath” (1)

Concerning the feelings of all toward Him: kings, priests, false prophets, and common people, Although it filled the soul of the prophet Jeremiah with

bitterness; from putting him in prison, to plotting to kill him, to casting him into a dungeon, to resisting his prophecy; Yet he loved them! ... I may say that having the Spirit of the Lord prevail on him, his feeling of fatherhood toward his people, his understanding of his mission, and his perception of the value of his spiritual children, made him partake of their afflictions, and suffer for their sufferings; even though they might not felt them themselves; He felt humiliated when they fell into captivity. He perceived that their bitterness during captivity was his own portion. Although he warned them several times, yet as a father, feeling that their bitterness was as though his own, he refused to get honored in Babylon, and insisted on being humiliated together with his people, crying out to the Lord, saying: *"I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath"* (1)..... Who is "this Man" but the Word of God who incarnated to bear all our sufferings, was humiliated, and endured the rod of wrath of the Father in our place!

In this lamentation, Jeremiah speaks in the name of Him, who carried the humiliation instead of all humanity. Before the incarnation of the Word of God, the first Adam was counted as the firstborn among men; and by his falling they have gone astray, their nature was corrupted, their will collapsed, and their concept of God was distorted, to see Him as an enemy, to come to be under the divine wrath. Then came the second Adam to occupy his place, and to consummate the reconciliation by His precious blood – the only begotten Son in whom the Father is well pleased -- to embrace us to Him to let us enjoy the Father's pleasure in us.

He has truly become Man, accepted the humiliation and suffered; He took what is ours, for us to have what is His.

"The rod of His wrath": refers by some, to that God did not use the sword to utterly destroy all his people, but used the heavy rod of chastisement to train and reform them (Hebrew 12: 7-11).

At the same time it refers to an aspect of the cross, being “a sacrifice of iniquity”. Indeed He was a sacrifice of favor and pleasure to the Father who “*so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (John 3: 16); Yet, this cross which is the “*the rod of His wrath*” was accepted by the Word of God, and was the object of His pleasure, that “*He obeyed even to death on the cross*”. ... Namely, the cross bore another aspect, which is the obedience to the Father.

- + In the sight of the Jews He had “no form or comeliness” (Isaiah 53: 2) but in the eyes of David, “*He was fairer than the sons of men*” (Psalm 45: 2). On the Mount of Transfiguration, “*His face shone like the sun*” (Matthew 17: 2), referring to us the secret of the future.

(St. Gregory the Neizianzen)

- + He who is fairer than men, we seen on the cross of no form or comeliness, His face was bowed down. Yet the lack of beauty of your Savior came as a price of your inner beauty; for “*The royal daughter is all glorious within*” (Psalm 45: 13).

(St. Augustine)

- + He consented to endure insult because He is honorable; For when the honorable is insulted, it is not counted as an insult.
It would be counted as insult for someone in disgrace
If the honorable is insulted and ridiculed when He is not worthy of such a treatment, it would be counted as a conquest.
If they spat in Adam’s face for his disobedience of the divine commandment, it would be counted as an insult and shame;
Having compassion on the weak, the Lord endured the shame in his place, and having not done wrong, He did not feel shame.

He was insulted and ridiculed, yet He did not complain; For when the innocent is insulted it would be glory for him;
He was reviled, stricken, and insulted, while tranquil, gentle, humble, pure, and undisturbed.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

“He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light” (2)

Concerning Jeremiah, he was put in a dark dungeon; Concerning the people, having rejected God, they denied themselves of His light, and became in darkness; But concerning the Lord Christ, the enemy intended to quench His light through burying him in a tomb after His death, not perceiving that the light scatters the darkness.

Saying: *“He has led me and made me walk”*, He proclaims that He came in obedience to the Father, with Whom He is One in the same essence, to let us enjoy the membership in His body, and no longer be counted as the children of disobedience. He intended to save us; But He fulfilled the salvation for the sake of His obedience to the Father; to let us carry the fellowship of the feature of His obedience.

What does he mean by saying: *“in darkness and not in light”*? If the darkness refers to intense affliction, and the light to prosperity; He did not fulfill the salvation while still in His heavens, through issuing a proclamation of amnesty, but did it by entering into the way of passion even to death of the cross

Having declared that He is the light of the world, As we have been in darkness before He came to bear our iniquities, to scatter the darkness

that crawled into our nature, He granted her of His light and splendor, so that we may partake of His eternal glory.

It is as though He says: The Father has led me to the darkness of the tomb; But by My resurrection I grant those sitting in the darkness the enjoyment of the heavenly light.

God is light, and who gets attached to Him will walk in the light (1 John 1: 7); Whereas he who gives Him the back, will walk in the darkness (Amos 3: 3).

+ We stand in awe and look at how the Conqueror stood in the court of justice; At how the Son of the free was smitten on the face;
At how the Sun embraced the pillar (to which the Lord was bound to be scourged);
At how the Fire was scourged by the whips (Matthew 27: 26);
At how the Light was despised by the darkness (John 8: 12; 1: 5);
At how the Flame was stabbed by the spear (John 19: 34)
At how He who provided the sun with rays, was crowned by a crown of thorns (Matthew 27: 29).

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

“Surely He has turned His hand against Me, time and time again throughout the day” (3)

Concerning the prophet Jeremiah, his whole life up till his last breath has been a continuous chain of troubles and afflictions, even from the inhabitants of his own village ‘Anathoth’ who saw him as a persistent pessimist, who destroys the psyche of the leaders, the army, and the people; by words that would never be

realized. He was even accused of being a national traitor who is not worthy of living among his people.

Concerning the Lord Christ, What dwelt upon Him from the time He was conceived, until that of His burial in a tomb, has been a way of passion and of the cross. The Father so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believed in Him should not perish" (*John 3: 16*), "*has turned His hand against Him with afflictions*", to realize the salvation of the world.

By saying: "*time and time again, throughout the day*", he refers to that His life on earth was a continuous chain of passion. And he may also refer to the day of the cross, when passion of every kind came upon Him.

And concerning every believer among us, It may so seem that God became against him, chastises him time and time again, Yet He will not cease to love him: He is not against us, but against our sins.

"He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones" (4)

Concerning the prophet Jeremiah, up to the time he wrote these lamentations, we did not hear that his flesh and skin have aged, nor his bones were broken and scattered. The talk here should not be taken in the literal sense. And the same thing applies to the Lord Christ; whose body has never seen corruption, and not one of His bones was ever broken. But what dwelt upon Him of insults, scourges, and crucifixion, were so unbearable, that His body and skin were as though utterly aged, and His bones had no more strength; as though they were broken and scattered. The passions that dwelt upon Him made Him unable to carry the cross, that they brought forth someone to carry it with Him.

He truly endured unbearable passion; The Lord paid a dear price to grant us the heavenly glory for both our soul and body together.

The prophet likens the people to an elder man with a shrunken skin, and with broken bones that make him unable to move.

According to some fathers, the disciples and the congregation of believers are the bones of the Lord Christ, who scattered in weakness during the moments of His crucifixion; But by His resurrection, they gathered together as one body with no broken bones.

- + *“All my bones are out of joint (scattered)”* (Psalm 22: 14). Although the bones of the Lord Christ were not scattered, and not one of them was broken, Yet, by the realization of the true and perfect resurrection of the Lord Christ, all the members of His body, those who at that time were like dry bones, gather together, every single bone will come to attach and to bind to the other bones, to reach, therefore, to the full measure of the stature of Christ; and the multitude of members will come to be one body.

(The scholar Origen)

- + He was crushed and wounded, to heal every illness and every weakness.

(St. Gregory the Neanzian)

“He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe” (5)

He may mean the siege mounds and the re-enforcements built by the Chaldeans around the walls of Jerusalem to be ready to take the city over when they have the chance during their siege

The devil, through his followers, the hosts of darkness, who did their best, and made all plans to ensure that the Lord Christ would never escape from death, that even after His death and His burial, they sought from Pilate to put guards over the tomb, so that none of His disciple would claim that He resurrected, as He did say beforehand.

Like the city which was put under siege; the prophet Jeremiah – as a symbol of Christ – was besieged by all: the king, the priests, the rulers, the false prophets, and the people, even the inhabitants of his own village, who accused him of national treason.

“He has besieged me”. The Father became an enemy of His only begotten Son, as a representative of the fallen humanity, although He is alone without sin; and although He is One with the Father in essence.

“and surrounded me with bitterness and woe”. They were previously warned by the prophet Moses, on the level of individuals and congregations, against perversion to idol-worship; saying: *“So that there may not be among you, man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood”* (Deuteronomy 29: 18); And the prophet Jeremiah said, *“The Lord our God has given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against Him”* (Jeremiah 8: 14); And we were warned by the apostle Paul, saying: *“Looking diligently, lest anyone falls short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled”* (Hebrew 12: 15); And having carried our sins, the Lord Christ said on the tongue of the Psalmist: *“They gave Me gall for My food, and for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink”* (Psalm 69: 21).

- + If you discover a root of this kind (of bitterness), do not let it grow but hasten to cut it off before it bears fruit, so that it will not defile and corrupt the others.

For good reason he called sin “bitterness”, for there is nothing more bitter than sin.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Among the other things prophesied about Him, it is written: “*They gave Me gall for My food, and for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink*” (Psalm 69: 21); all of which, as we know from the gospel, did happen to Him; While on the cross, “*Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said “I thirst”*” (John 19: 28). “*They filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished’*” (John 19: 30); Namely, All that were prophesied about my passion have been fulfilled.

(St. Augustine)

“He has set me in dark places, like the dead of long ago” (6)

Here he probably refers to that, when he (Jeremiah) warned the rulers against falling into captivity, they said to the king, “*Let this man be put to death, for thus he*

weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in the city, and the hands of all the people by speaking such words to them”;... The king

delivered him into their hands; they took him and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king’s son, which was in the court of the prison, and

they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire (Jeremiah 38: 4-6). That was a prophecy about the burial of the Lord Christ in a tomb.

“He set me in dark places, like the dead of long ago”. How amazing that He, the Resurrection and Life, who arose the dead by His authority, would, for our sake, enter into the darkness of death!. According to (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian, He is the lamb devoured by death as by a wolf. But, as it was impossible for death to keep hold of Him, He exploded its stomach to set free those whom He has previously devoured.

- + The Lord delivered His body to death, to let us be sanctified through the forgiveness of sin, fulfilled by the scattering of His blood.
We are committed to give thanks to the Lord from our depths, for He has told us about the past things, gave us wisdom concerning the present things; and did not leave us with no understanding of the future ones.

(The letter to Barnabas)

- + By death, He arose the dead from death; having borne the curse, saving us from it.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy” (7)

With the Babylonian invasion, Judah came to be in closed prison from which there was no hope of *getting out*. *“He hedged me in”* like a condemned criminal, chained to be kept from escaping. The Chaldeans made the siege so tight around Jerusalem; that no one could escape

from hunger and plagues inside, to the sword outside. Then they led the majority chained captives to Babylon; and left the few for lowly jobs for a high price.

About the harlot kingdom of Israel, it was written: "*Their mother has played the harlot ... ; For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink. Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths'*" (Hosea 2: 5, 6). That could be fitting for a harlot who persist on going after her lover; But, for the Lord Christ, to be (hedged) by the wicked, and to be bound as though to keep him from escaping -- the Holy One who came down to earth by His own free will, and that of His Father, for the sake of the salvation of the world -- that would be an extremely painful and horrible portrait, something that He readily consented to have, for our sake. He consented to be tried and to be crucified, for us to be justified and liberated.

"He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He made my chain heavy". Death by the cross is, undoubtedly, of the most horrible way to die. They counted Him as hedged by the Father, so that He cannot save Himself from death, nor to come out of the pit, but to remain chained in it.

Those who passed by, blasphemed Him wagging their heads, and saying, '*You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself; ... Likewise, the chief priests, also mocking with the scribes and elders, said 'He saved others, Himself He cannot save; If He is the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God, Let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him'*" (Matthew 27: 40-43).

- + Although they saw Him risen from the dead, yet they did not believe that He could come down from the cross, if He has chosen to do. ... What a lack of faith, O Jews! ... I shall let you judge yourselves!... What would be more amazing: a dead man risen from the dead, or a living one to come down from the cross? ... You sought a little thing, to see a greater one happen!. But your lack of faith could not be healed by more wonders and miracles than what you have seen!.

(St. Jerome)

- + Our Lord Savior intended to be known as a Savior, not through saving Himself, but through saving others. For a good physician would not be counted one, by healing himself, but by using his expertise to heal others. So is the Lord, being the Savior, does not need to save Himself. Coming down from the cross would not make Him a Savior, but such a great salvation of humanity is truly fulfilled by His death more than by coming down from the cross.

(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)

“Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayers” (8)

When the people of Jerusalem cried out in captivity, God did not listen to their cry-outs, for it was not out of true repentance, or of a longing to return to God.

When the Lord Christ, representing humanity, and paying the price of her disobedience, cried out: *“My God, My God! Why have You forsaken Me?”*; He seemed as though his prayer was shut out.

- + Christ was not forsaken by the Father, nor by His Godhead, as some assume; Or as though, out of fear of the passions, His Godhead separated from His humanity during His passions ...; But as I already said, He represented us in His Person, we who were forsaken; But now, through the passions of Him who should not have been subjected to passion (according to Godhead), He caused us to be risen and saved.

(St. Gregory the Nezianzen)

- + What did our Lord mean by saying, “*My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?*”, when He Himself is God? ... Why has He used those words, unless we are present in His Person; for the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1: 23). He meant to draw our attention to that that psalm was written about Him.
- + By the death of the Righteous that happened through His own free will, He took away the death of the sinners that should happen as a well deserved verdict.

(St. Augustine)

- + He so chose to walk along all the paths of men, even to enter through the gate of death, to cut Adam loose. He started by His birth, then consummated the way until He encountered death.. ... He humbly walked with the feet of Adam, to where Adam has fallen in the depths of the pit; For his sake He Himself has fallen, to draw him out.

“He has blocked my ways with hewn stones; He has made my paths crooked” (9)

Whoever refuses to walk along God's paths, God will block his ways to keep him from evil behavior, and to make him return to the way of truth.

"Whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in" (Job 3: 23); who lost all hope to mend his ways; saw no door of escape, nor a path to take; Being hedged in by God, he became unable to move, or according to Hosea: *"I will hedge up your ways with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths"* (Hosea 2: 6).

"He has blocked my ways with hewn stones; He has made my paths crooked".

He put obstacles on my ways that could not be overcome; He shut up every route of escape before me..

"He has been to me like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in ambush" (10)

The righteous, when afflicted, praises the Lord and seeks His mercies; whereas the wicked counts Him as a bear lying in wait, or a lion in ambush waiting to devour him.

Having readily consented to carry the reproach of the cross instead of man, He sees what dwelt upon Him as Man, as though a bear or a lion are waiting to devour Him. He truly suffered in His body and soul as Man; But according to His divine plan and ordinance with the Father, it was the subject of His pleasure.

+ I was like a prey to the lion, taking hold of me and leading me to death, roaring: *"Crucify Him, crucify Him"* (John 19: 6).

+ *"Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me"* (Psalm 22: 12). Those were the people, the many bulls, and the rulers the strong bulls.

(St. Augustine)

*“He has turned aside my ways, and torn me in pieces;
He has made me desolate”* (11)

“He has turned aside my ways”, meaning, he seems to scatter all his counsels and plans; to make him divert to dangerous routes full of fierce wild animals.

It is amazing how the Holy and blameless One, in His humility, allowed the wicked to accuse Him of being *“out of His mind”* (Mark 3 21), and of that His ways are crooked and evil; and even counted Him as ‘Beelzebub’ the rulers of the demons (Mark 3: 22). What could be a more disturbing?!

- + He endured all those things, to make us follow His lead, and endure the like ridicules, that disturb more than any rebuke.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“He has bent His bow, and set me up as a
target for the arrow”* (12)

Through His true love, the Lord Christ accepted the cross as an arrow by which He is wounded for the sake of His beloved. At the same time, the Crucified pierces our hearts, to make us enjoy the healing divine wounds of love; and our souls would sing to Him saying: *“Refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick”* (Songs 2: 5). The secret of the soul wounded by love, according to the scholar Origen, is Christ Himself, the living

and active Word of God, sharper than a two-edged sword, that enters into the depths of the soul, and wounds her by the divine love.

- + In case someone is enflamed by true love for the Word of God; ... In case someone receives one of those sweet wounds of the "*chosen arrow*", as it is called by the prophet, ... In case someone is so pierced by the spear of His knowledge, worthy of every love; that he longs for Him day and night; never talks of anything else but of Him, never listen except to Him, never thinks except about Him, and is never inclined to, or hope for, any desire except for Him; When someone has so become, his soul would truly say: "*I am lovesick*"; she would readily receive her wound from Him about whom she would say: "*He made me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden me*" (Isaiah 49: 2)

It is befitting of our souls to be stricken by God with such a healing wound, and with such arrows and spears.

The soul that is enflamed with the longing for the wisdom of God, namely, which can behold the beauty of His wisdom, will say in the same way: 'I am lovesick with wisdom'; ... The soul which meditates in the exaltation of His might, and is amazed by the power of His Word, can say: 'I am lovesick with His might'. She would be the one who said: "*The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*" (Psalm 27: 1); ... The soul enflamed with the love of God's justice, and meditates in the ordinances of His care, will truly say: 'I am lovesick with His justice'; ... The soul, watching the greatness of His goodness and the compassion of His love will, utter in the same way. ... The wound that includes all these things is the wound of love by which the bride proclaims: "*I am lovesick*".

(The scholar Origen)

- + The Holy Book teaches us that “*God is love*” (1 John 4: 8); For He aimed His only begotten Son “*the chosen arrow*” (Isaiah 49: 2) toward the chosen ones; planting in them its triple point full of the spirit of life.

The head of the arrow is faith, that binds the one who aims the arrow with those stricken by it; It is a good wound and a sweet pain; by which “the life” pierces the soul. As through the tears of the “arrow” the soul opens up the door, its entrance.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

- + I wish the unhealthy are so wounded; For through getting wounded they would become healthy

“*He has caused the arrows of His quiver to pierce my loins*” (13)

- + It is befitting of us to understand “*the loins*” as the deep thoughts and the inner desires ... I always see “*the loins*” to refer to the sensual perception and the sound thinking The Holy Book, when it proclaims some secret hidden (sacramental) thing, to say: “*The righteous God tests the hearts and minds*” (Psalm 7: 9).

He refers here to His death on the cross; For the cross touches the depths of love of the Lord Christ for us; having delivered Himself as redemption and salvation; by the wounds of His exalted love for us.

In truth, by the cross, the Holy Spirit of God carries us, as though into the depths of the heart of the Lord Christ; to get in touch with the divine love in a magnificent image. And at the same time, by carrying the Crucified One in our depths, we, ourselves, would enjoy “*the arrows of His quiver*”, to desire to be crucified together with Him, and to work perpetually for the sake of the salvation of everyone.

“*I have become the ridicule of all my people, and their taunting song all the day*” (14)

That is a portrait of those who ridiculed the Lord Christ, the rulers, the people, and even the two robbers who were crucified on His right and left sides; who were reviling Him as well. The prophet here reveals that the Lord Christ died a death of reproach (Matthew 27: 39-44).

- + *“I am a reproach of men, and a despised of the people”* (Psalm 22: 6). My humility made Me the object of ridicule of those people, who said with the spirit of blaspheming: *“You are the disciple of that one”* (John 9: 28); leading the mob to despise Him.
“All those who see Me, laugh Me to scorn: They shoot out the lips; they shake the head” (Psalm 22: 7). Silent with their hearts, they uttered only by their lips.

(St. Augustine)

“He has filled Me with bitterness; He has made me drink Wormwood” (15)

In His exalted divine love, the incarnate Word of God endured every bitterness, to let every embittered soul resort to Him, to find comfort in Him. By love, our Christ became bitter in soul to our account; And by repentance, we return to Him in the bitterness of the soul for the sake of our sins, to enjoy an inexpressible sweetness.

- + Come and see the banquet set by the (Jewish nation) before Him. They brought forth the myrrh, mixed the vinegar, and drew the sword. Instead of the manna, they gave Him vinegar; and instead of the sweet water they gave Him bitter water, which He turned, for their sake, into sweet water!.
- + Look at how Christ endured from the wicked!

How could that ignorant spit in His face?!

How could you, O tongue, do such a horrible thing?!

How could you, O earth, endure scorning the divine Son?!

All that happened for the sake of Adam, he who was worthy of being spat at for his transgression; But instead of the servant, the Lord endured everything.

He delivered His face to receive spitting; For He promised "*not to hide His face from shame and spitting*" (Isaiah 50: 6).

Having compassion on Adam's weakness, the Lord received the reproach in his place.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

- + The Father listen to you while talking within yourself, and hastens to encounter you; While still far away, He sees you, and runs toward you. He sees what is inside your heart, and hastens lest anyone would delay you, He even embraces you; By "encountering you", he proclaims His previous recognition; and by "embracing you", He proclaims His mercy, and expresses His fatherly love. He falls on your neck, to set you up, after falling under the burden of sins, and to bring you back to heaven, to seek Your Creator, after falling down to earth. The Lord Christ falls upon your neck, to save your neck from the yoke of bondage, to put on it instead His easy yoke (Matthew 11: 30). He falls on your neck, saying: "*Come to me, all you who labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11: 28). So, the Lord embraces you when you repent.

(St. Ambrose)

“He has also broken my teeth with gravel, and covered me with ashes” (16)

Here he portrays the unbearable bitterness; as though the Father put gravel in His mouth to crush with His teeth; and ashes over His head, as a sign of intense grief on the dead; to become like someone who has lost every hope in life.

He endured all that in order to present to us every sweetness, having become for us the secret of gladness and exultation.

+ Our Lord! Let me think of Your love with discernment; and with love, let me describe the events of Your trial..

Only by love can the mouth talk about You; For it is love that has drawn You to suffer for our sake (John 3: 16).

Through great love, the Father allowed for His Son to be killed; “For He so loved the world to deliver His only begotten Son for our sake”.

How would He love us to deliver His Son to death to save us!; ... Let us then talk about our Savior with that same kind of love.

For him who acquire it, there is nothing stronger than love.

Who could force the Father to deliver His Son, but the love which is “the greatest of all” (John 15: 13; 1 Corinthians 13: 13)?.

By this sign, man approaches the Lord, who, in turn, approached us with love, and became one of us.

At the time of the killing, mercies came down to the battle; But of all the mercies, only those of the Son have conquered.

The rulers (the disciples) were defeated; But the Shepherd did not flee away from His flock; to let them know who loves them.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

“You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity” (17)

Whoever looks at the cross will see how the plan was elaborately put to make the Crucified lose every hope of being rescued; and to make Him forget every peace He previously had.

The Lord Christ received all that, so that by His cross He would grant peace to our souls and bodies, through our reconciliation with the Father, and our enjoyment of the gift of the Holy Spirit; As He reconciled the people with the peoples; the earth with heaven; and the humans with the heavenly hosts. According to the apostle Paul: *“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful”* (Colossians 3: 15).

- + Whoever seeks peace, seeks Christ; for *“He is our peace”* (Colossians 1: 20); who makes the two one (Ephesians 2: 14); making peace through the blood of His cross whether on earth or in heaven.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + The perfection of peace will be where there is no oppression. The children of God are peace-makers; for the children should liken their Father. They are peace-makers within themselves, having authority on the movements of their spirits, having them submitted to reason; namely, to the mind and the Spirit; and having an utter control over their bodily desires.

So will the kingdom of God appear in them; and so will be man: Everything exalted and honorable in him will have the authority, with no Resistance, over all the other carnal elements.

That exalted element should, in turn, submit to what is more superior; namely to “the Truth” – the Son of God – For man cannot have authority over the lowly things, unless his own self submits to Him who is more superior.

That is the kind of peace that gives the good will; That is the kind of life of the wise man, the peace-maker.

(St. Augustine)

“And I said, ‘My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord’” (18)

Whoever looks at the lord Christ on His cross will think that He came to be without hope; Yet, by His cross He opened before us -- sinners, the door of hope; and He, Himself, even became our hope.

- + Being Himself a Man, He talks bearing my fears; For when we are in the midst of dangers, we may assume that God has forsaken us. Hence, being Man, He got depressed; being Man, He wept; And being Man, He was crucified.

(St. Ambrose)

- + Do not ever fall into despair because of your offences. ... I do not mean to say that you are committed not to suffer from them, but you are committed not to count them un-curable.
It is better to be wounded than to be dead.
There is the healing Truth; He who, on the cross prayed for the sake of His crucifiers; He who forgave His killers.

Christ came for the sake of sinners; Hence He says: *“He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind”* (Luke 4: 18).

And the apostle Paul says: *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”* (1 Timothy 1: 15); And His Lord also testifies: *“I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”* (Mark 2: 17)

(St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)

“Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall” (19)

The mere attempt to portray what has dwelt upon Him, bears the bitter remembrance of wormwood and gall; And will make the soul collapse and bow down (See Psalm 137: 1, 5).

+ He surely has taken the bitterness of our life in the body of His humanity.

“My soul still remembers and sinks within me” (20)

The worst enemy of the human soul is despair; And unfortunately, as some remember God’s chastisements on them, instead of meditating in His love, they let themselves fall into despair of their salvation. Looking at the Crucified, some may assume that He Himself has fallen into despair, and bowed His head as though to the dust or to the grave. This kind of thinking corrupts their look at the cross; in which the apostle Paul sees *“The power of God for salvation”* (1 Corinthians 1: 18).

- + We should not feel ashamed of the cross of our Savior, but should rather boast of it. *“For The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us, being saved, it is the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 1: 18) . For, as I previously said, it was not a mere man who died for our sake, but it was the Son of God, the incarnate God.

Whoever denies the power of the Crucified, let him ask the demons! Whoever does not believe in the words, let him believe what he sees. Many have been crucified in the world; yet the demons were never terrified by any of them; But once they saw the mere sign of the cross of Christ who was crucified for our sake, they were shocked. For all the others were crucified because of their iniquities, while Christ was crucified because of the iniquities of others ... *“He committed no sins, nor was guile found in His mouth”* (Isaiah 53: 9; 1 Peter 2: 22). Peter was not alone who uttered such a testimony, lest we may assume that He said it on account of being His disciple; but Isaiah, who was not present together with Him in the body, has prophesied by the Spirit about His coming in the body.

Why would we quote the prophet alone here, when Pilate, the Roman Governor who condemned Him proclaimed: *“I have found no fault in this*

man” (Luke 23: 14); And when he delivered Him, he washed his hands, saying: “*I am innocent of the blood of this just person*” (Matthew 27: 24). There is also the testimony to the righteous Jesus, who was without sin, by the robber crucified on his right hand, who was the first to enter into paradise; when he rebuked his fellow robber, saying: “*Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? We indeed justly for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing wrong*” (Luke 23: 41).

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

*“This I recall to my mind,
therefore I have hope”* (21)

The previous verses portray what dwelt upon the Lord Christ of passion by His own, particularly between the time He was put under arrest in the garden, until bringing Him down from the cross for burial. ... Now, at the time His soul set forth to liberate the captives from Hades, the light of hope has shined, and the renewable, and the un-perishable mercies of God were revealed.

According to the Coptic rite, the church, while starting the twelfth hour of the Great Friday by reading this prophecy, it moves to take off the signs of grief, and to put on the attires of joy and gladness for the salvation consummated by the Lord Christ on the cross; He who broke down the gates of the pit, and took away the authority of the devil and his hosts, for the believer to live in the glorious liberty of the children of God, as long as he holds the hand of his Savior.

If the first part of this lamentation constitutes a description of the Lord Christ as a Man of passion, in particular while under the civil and the religious trials, the crucifixion, and the burial; Now, as the Lord has yielded up His Spirit, and the light of the cross started to shine, hope dwelt in the life of those who believed in Him.

By His death and crossing over to Hades, as He set the captives free, the cloud scattered, and the divine plan started to be revealed; the tune of the prophet's talk changed; and instead of looking at the events of the cross from outside, his insight opened up to perceive the secret of the cross, as being "*the power of God for salvation*", and the fountain of His exalted mercies that flow every morning abundantly without ceasing.

In the two previous lamentations, the prophet revealed his sufferings flowing from his depths, having been a witness of what dwelt upon his country and his people. Now, as his prophetic look turned toward the One bearing the sufferings of humanity in His body by the cross, the secrets of the divine love was revealed before his eyes, his heart was filled with hope in the Lord, got in touch with His goodness, and perceived that His mercies will never get old, but will keep on flowing every morning, new in its activity in the life of the church and that of those who believe in Him.

2- THE HOPE IN GOD'S MERCIES:

The hope expressed here by the prophet Jeremiah, is not set upon belittling the worth of the sufferings and the miseries that dwelt upon the city and its inhabitants, but is fulfilled through turning the insight away from the apparent events to God, His plan and dealings.

The key of this section is *“His compassions fail not”* (22). If God has set a covenant with His people, it is to offer to them every morning new experiences of His love and mercies. How beautiful are the expressions of hope in the prophet’s experience, saying:

- a- *“Therefore I hope in Him”* (24)
- b- *“The Lord is good to those who wait for Him”* (25)
- c- *“Let him put his mouth in the dust; There may yet be hope”* (29).

*“Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed,
because His compassions fail not”* (22)

The righteous ‘Job’, looked at life since his birth, as a curse and a calamity, as far as he was concerned, and counted death as the greatest blessing that would dwell on him (Job 3: 11); contrary to what the prophet Jeremiah presents, in the midst of his bitter lamentation, of a praise of thanksgiving to God for the *“gift of life”*, saying: *“Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not”* (22).

+ The world is protected by the divine care; for there is no place on earth. not reached by this care..

The divine care is the fulfillment of the promises of the divine Word, who gives form to the material from which this world is formed; whose Artist and Architect is God.

All these things would never have their beauty, if not for the Word, the image of God (the Father), His mind, wisdom, and care.

(St. Anthony the Great)

*“They are new every morning; Great is
Your faithfulness”* (23)

These are the perpetual feelings of the Christian, seeing the faithfulness of God on him new every morning; desiring to pay God's love back with love; At the beginning of every morning, he starts by a new encounter with God; saying in the prayer of the "Prime" hour:[Bring us to a good start]. :

It is amazing how St. Agnatiou of Antioch, on his way to Rome to get martyred, says: [I am starting to be a Christian].

That is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers; He makes us see every moment as a beginning of life with God; as it is the case of the mother who, in her love of her suckling, always looks at his face as though she sees him for the first time.

That is probably why the Jews set "the feast of renewal (or dedication)" that was attended by the Lord Christ in Jerusalem (John 10: 22). According to the Syrian rite, they celebrate the second Sunday of the great lent, as the Sunday of "the renewal of the church", in which the priests and the people re-evaluate their life at the beginning of the lent; to set forth to a new relationship with God.

The prophet Jeremiah's life, turning into bitter lamentations, because of what dwelt upon the priests, the religious leaderships, the king, the statesmen, and all the people, he cries out saying: "*Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people. Oh, that I had in the wilderness, a lodging place for wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them. For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men*" (Jeremiah 9: 1 2).; "*O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace*" (Jeremiah 4: 19). ... Yet, in the midst of this bitterness, looking from afar, by the spirit of prophecy, to the coming of the Lord Christ, who renews man's life, he sings, saying: "*The Lord's compassions fail not; for they are new every morning*" (Lamentations 3: 22, 23).

God casts our sins into the depths of the sea of His forgiving love; not to remember them any more. With every morning we look at Him as a Father who forgives the sins of His children, who pours love in their hearts, and perpetually brings them back to Him. He casts our sins, as though into the Red Sea together with Pharaoh and his soldiers, so as not to remember them again. ... As it is written about the repentant man: *"None of the transgression he has committed shall be remembered against him, because of the righteousness, which he has done, he shall live"* (Ezekiel 18: 22); And the Lord says: *"I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions; and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you"* (Isaiah 44: 22); And, *"He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea"* (Micah 7: 19).

The repentant hearts would say together with the prophet Jeremiah: *"His mercies are new every morning; Great are His faithfulness"* (22). Whereas the adversaries, on the other hand, are committed to anticipate God's chastisements every morning. If God threatens the slothful sinners that the day of judgment is at hand; yet He does not wish for bitterness nor grief to dwell upon men, but He so threatens to provoke them to repent, to open before them the doors of His exalted mercies.

It is befitting of us to enjoy the salvation work of Christ, that will never get old; to perpetually present a new praise with a new heart and a renewable mind. With every conquest we have, we perceive the amazing power of God, working in our weakness, to grant us the holy life, and the conquest over evil; And we opens our hearts to others with love. The perpetual amazing works of God, bring forth to us an inner joy, as though new, and a continuous gladness.

The work of the church is to reveal the divine possibilities, granted to believers in baptism; and to bring her children forth into the hands of the Holy Spirit, who

unceasingly renews their minds; according to the words of the apostle: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* (Romans 12: 2); And; And, *“Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day”* (Romans 4: 16).; *“Since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him”* (Colossians 3: 9, 10).

Putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new man, is a new birth; the setting forth of “the renewal of knowledge”; namely, the unceasing growth, which is a sign of life. That is confirmed by the Holy Book, saying: *“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary; They shall walk and not faint”* (Isaiah 40: 31).

“Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Psalm 103: 5).

This is the perpetual feelings of the Christian; Seeing the faithfulness of God new for him every morning, he desires to pay His love back with love. As though he begins every day with a new encounter with God, saying in his Prime prayer: [Bring us to a good start]..

The renewal here is not on the part of unchangeable God, but on that of man, who, every day, is in his increasing growth, perceives God’s faithfulness more deeply, as though new. Being a living, changeable man, he transforms every day by the renewal of his mind , saying to God: *“Renew a steadfast spirit within me”* (Psalm 51: 10).

According to St. John Chrysostom, In this world we are like a new fetus by baptism; where we are given the possibility of having in us the image of our parents – Christ and the church. This image will be perfectly consummated the day the world casts us off to the moment of judgment. If, while still in the womb of the world, continuously growing, we are counted as living, then emerging out of the darkness of the womb to life, Otherwise we would be like a dead fetus that goes out from darkness to a greater darkness.

Growth is a sign of vitality. A teacher who, every year, keep on presenting the same lessons with no renewal of the content, nor the way of teaching, will be judged as dead in his knowledge. The way a child, as well as an animal or plant, who does not grow, would be counted as ill or dead; Whoever feels satisfied of our Lord Jesus, and counts himself as completely saved, and in need of no more strife, nor of new daily experiences, and a deeper life with the Lord, Such a man will be counted as dead, even if he is a hermit, a priest, a bishop or a patriarch.

The early morning is considered the best time for prayer (Psalm 88: 13): *“O Lord, be gracious to us; We have waited for You. Be their arm every morning”* (Isaiah 33: 2). *“God’s faithfulness are new every morning”* (23), which we anticipate to get in our (morning) prayers; For praying in the early morning is a persistent seeking of God, before resorting to others for help. Whoever offers the firstfruit of his waking thoughts to God, will not deny Him the rest of the hours of the day.

Morning, as well is the time convenient for the temple service (Exodus 29: 38-40; Leviticus 2: 12-13; 2 Kings 3: 20). Actually, the morning and evening sacrifices in the temple were the basis on which the system of the morning and evening prayers of praise and the offering of incense for the Christians are set; which is bound to offering incense.

The morning is also a symbol of the liberation of the people from Egypt (Exodus 14: 20-24), from the Assyrians (Isaiah 37: 36), and from the night, namely, from

the darkness of sin. This concept comes often in the psalms; as the faithfulness of God is mostly anticipated in the morning (Psalm 59: 16; 90: 14); In the morning God sends His help to the holy city, and saves it from falling (Psalm 46: 5; 101: 8).

The morning, here, probably refers to the intervention of the angel of God against Sennacherib – king of Assyria (2 Kings 19: 35); And probably to the resurrection of the Lord Christ.

+ Prayers are recited in the morning in order to dedicate to God all the early movements of the soul and the mind; so that we would have no other preoccupation beside our exultation, joy, and the satisfaction of our hearts in thinking of God; according to what is written: “I remember the Lord and be glad and rejoice in Him” (Psalm 77: 4 – The Septuagint version).; and that the body would not be burdened with any other work before the consummation of the words: “For to You, I pray; My voice, You shall hear in the morning, O Lord” (Psalm 5: 2, 3)

(St.

Basil the Great)

“The Lord is my portion, says my soul;

Therefore I hope in Him” (24)

Could any man say these words, in spite of being stricken with the rod of God’s wrath, if he does not experience the goodness of the Lord, His faithfulness, and His mercies, which will never fail? ... Having experienced all that, he gives Jerusalem the same experience through which he went, hence he says: *“The Lord is good to those who wait for Him; to the soul who seeks Him” (25).*

Our portion in the world will not endure; Whereas the Lord is our eternal portion (Psalm 73: 26).

The faithfulness of God is realized, not in giving temporal goods, and lifting the sufferings up; but rather in what is greater; in presenting Himself a portion to be acquired by whoever seeks Him.

+ O soul, robbed by the evil one from the Lord; You will not enjoy eating his bread; for "*He is a murderer from the beginning*" (John 8: 44)

Return to God, as did Sarah to Abram; For He is your portion; Do not trust in the liar (Genesis 17: 5; Psalm 16: 5).

Sarah was taken to the household of Pharaoh against her will. As for you, your reproach is great on account of that you were enslaved by your own free will.

O soul, remember the great image portrayed on yourself, and the salvation God has done to you through His only begotten Son.

Remember how He mixed you with Him, how He gave you His name, and how you became His own. ... Who is he who drew your attention by force, and captivated you from Him?

The world has disturbed you by its seductions, has taken you, and bound you by its comforts as by tight chains;

It is better for you, O soul, to live with God, and not with the world, filled with death for him who looks at it.

The evil Pharaoh intends to take you from God. ... Beware! Do not corrupt your marriage, full of beauty;

O daughter of Sarah, return like Sarah to the righteous, and do not defile yourself with the wicked who seeks you.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him; to the soul who seeks Him" (25)

In the Hebrew version, the three verses begin with the words *"It is good"*, the verses that exhort us to seek God Himself as our portion; to submit to His wisdom and the fulfillment of His promises in the time He chooses; and for the believer to receive God's chastisements through bearing the yoke in his youth.

+ From the beginning He said to them: "Peace be with you"; and by peace, he taught them wisdom.

In everything, He approached them with peace and love; to let them acquire His sweet fragrance, and follow His lead.

From the time He came until the time He departed to Him who sent Him, Everything ran forth with peace on every path;

He said to His apostles: *"My peace I give you"*; My personal peace I will leave you.

My personal peace which is not from this world, with its deceitful love; My personal peace, which is not deceitful, I leave to you.

He never walked around without covering His path with peace; Everything ran over a garment woven of peace; like a King walking over a scarlet carpet.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

"It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (26)

It is good for the believer, while getting in touch with the salvation of the Lord, to praise, saying: "Your will be done"

"It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth" (27)

Behind every yoke he receives from the hand of the Crucified, God's mercies will shine with a new experience that touches the depths of the soul. Let us bear the yoke; Let us be crucified in our youth together with the One crucified; Let us not rebel like a bull untrained to bear a yoke.

God, for the sake of His fatherhood, allows for His children to suffer afflictions from others, as a heavy yoke on them. But counting it as a chastisement from the Lord for their salvation, they receive it with joy.

Whoever bears the yoke of affliction would perceive the cruelty of the yoke of sin. But through the cross, he perceives the sweetness of the yoke of the cross, the yoke of the giving love, for the Lord Himself says: "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give your rest; Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me ... For My yoke is easy (sweet), and My burden is light*" (Matthew 11: 28-30). He calls on us to cast our yoke underneath His feet; ... not to live without a yoke, but to exchange our heavy yoke with His sweet and light yoke. Instead of the cruel yoke of sin, to bear the fellowship of the yoke of Christ; namely the fellowship of His passion emerging from His giving love.

Talking to us about His sweet yoke and its activity in our life, He says: "*I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love; And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck; I stooped and fed them*" (Hosea 11: 4). Seeing His Christ bearing the yoke in his place, man would desire to have the glory of fellowship with Him in carrying this yoke. He desires to bear it in his youth, fulfilling the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "*It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth*" (26, 27).

+ Listen to the words of the prophet David, saying: "*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes*" (Psalm 119: 71); And: "*It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth*" (Lamentations 3: 27);

And, *“Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord”* (Psalm 94: 12); And, *“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord”* (Proverbs 3: 11); And: *“My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing”* (Sirach 2: 1).; And as said by the Lord Himself to His disciples: *“In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16: 33); And, *“You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy”* (John 16: 20); And, *“Narrow is the gate, and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”* (Matthew 7: 14).....
See how affliction is commended everywhere?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

CHAPTER 3

(Part 2)

“Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him” (28)

Receiving the yoke from God, man dedicates his heart wholly to God; while seemingly as though cast into isolation from others.

Sitting alone does not mean physical retreat, but means not to trust in human arm, to enjoy trusting on the bosom of God, and having fellowship with Him. Silence here means accepting the will of God, and not complaining to others.

- + The Lord Christ exhorts us, not only to avoid wicked men, but to cut them off from our life, saying: *“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you”* (Matthew 5: 29). Here, He does not talk about eyes; for fault would the eye do if the intention is sound; But He refers to the friends and relatives, who are like body members to us, and could do us harm. He commands us to resist the friendship of such people, that our

salvation would be secure. Hence the psalmist also says in another situation: *"I have not sat with idolatrous mortals, nor I go with hypocrites"* (Psalm 26: 4). Jeremiah, as well advises us to sit alone, and to bear the yoke in our youth.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + In the world, it is easy for the enemy to attack us by his weapons, hidden and manifest, using some of his followers to help in stirring up war against the believer, like some women of lowly moral values; spreading their nets on a wide extent.

When Ezekiel saw the four creatures each with four faces, giving glory to the Lord, it was not in a city or a village, but out in a plain, according to God's command: *"Arise, go out into the plain, and there, I shall talk with you"* (Ezekiel 3: 22).

Knowing that solitude finds favor in the sight of the Lord, Jeremiah said: *"It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent"* (27, 28). And knowing that too much talk would not find favor in His sight, he did not cease to repeat: *"Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them"* (Jeremiah 9: 2)... Again, when the prophet Elijah took food from angels, it was not among a crowd of people, nor in a city or a village, but in the wilderness.

I wrote all these things that happened to the saints, to exhort you to imitate those who loved solitude, through which they could communicate with God.

Strive then to become well founded upon quietness to be able to encounter God; namely to have great spiritual meditation in Him.

- + An elder was asked: [Why did St. Anthony say to his disciple St. Paul: Go, dwell in quietness, to receive the temptations of the devil? To which the elder answered: 'For the perfection comes to the monk through the spiritual behavior, which originates from the tendencies and the purity of

the heart; that come from the tendencies of the mind; and the way of thinking is based upon the unceasing prayer, and the struggle against the devil. But the unceasing prayer, and the struggle against the devil, whether in the thoughts or in visions, will have no chance to exist, without the quietness and solitude].

(The paradise of the fathers)

- + The monk who always try to get along with his fellow monks in anything they say or do, is a hypocrite, with the face of a demon.

(St. Filoxinus El-Monbagi)

- + God said to Abram: “*Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you*” (Genesis 12: 1). And Abram obeyed and went.

I assure you that you have received the same divine command received by Abram; and you therefore partake of his blessing: “*It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent*” (Lamentations 3: 27, 28). That is the meaning of your exit from the world. You did not care for the riches, nor for the beauty of women, which may lead you to perversion. It is as though you had no body; and by the fear of God you have trampled by your feet upon the evil tendencies. You have separated yourselves from the thoughts of the world, Yes, you even fled from its vanities.

- + Once a brother said to St. Maccari: [O father! My mind tells me to go and visit the sick; which is a great divine commandment]. To which the saint answered: [The unchangeable word of prophecy says: “*It is good for man to bear the yoke in his youth; Let him sit alone and keep silent*”

(Lamentations 3: 27, 28). As to the saying of the truthful mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ: "*I was sick and you visited Me*" (Matthew 25: 36), He said it to the common people. But to you, O monk, I say: [Staying in your cell is far better for you than visiting the sick; For the time will come when they will ridicule those who stay in their cells, as, according to St. Anthony: 'they will say about anyone who is not like them 'Your are out of your mind'; And I say to you my son: Unless Moses has left the people behind, and entered into the cloud alone, he would not have received the two tablets of the law, written by the finger of God, for the sake of glory] (Exodus 24: 12-18).

(The garden of monks)

- + Beloved friend! The steady and perpetual habit of the godly men, is to feel awe before the whole creation in silence; and in joy, to cry out praising and giving thanks to God, the Beneficent to all. That is what is written in the Holy Book, particularly in the words saying: "*Let him set alone and keep silent*"; In quietness he should care for his own affairs (Lamentations 3: 28); Namely, he should do everything with discernment, alertness, care, and according to the commandment of God.

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + Actually, the goal of the life of fellowship, is for the monk to crucify all his desires, to seek perfection, and not to think about the morrow. But, as far as the solitary hermit is concerned, is definitely obvious that such perfection will be by emptying his mind of every earthly thoughts, and bind it to Christ, as far as the human weakness allows; whom the prophet Jeremiah describes, saying: "*It is good for man to bear the yoke in his youth; Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him*"

(27, 28); And as also said by the prophet David: *“I lie awake, and am like a sparrow alone on the housetop”* (Psalm 102: 7).

(Father John)

- + Out of the fellowship monastic system came some other kind of those who seek perfection, namely (the solitary hermits), for whom trampling with their feet upon the hidden tricks of the devil, while living among their fellow monks, is not conquest enough; but they longed to enter into an open war and battle against the enemy.

They did not fear to go deep into the wilderness, following the lead of John the Baptist who spent there his whole life, of Elijah, and Elisha, about whom the prophet says: *“They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth”* (Hebrew 11: 37, 38).

About them the Lord spoke to ‘Job’ in a symbolic way, saying: *“Who set the wild donkey free? Who loosed the bonds of the onager, whose home I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwelling? He scorns the tumult of the city; he does not heed the shouts of the driver. The range of the mountain is his pasture, and he searches after every green thing”* (Job 39: 5-8); The prophet Jeremiah, says: *“It is good for man to bear the yoke in his youth; Let him sit alone, and keep silent, because God has laid it on him”* (Lamentations 3: 27, 28); In the book of Psalms, the prophet David says: *“Let them whom the Lord has redeemed from the hand of the enemy; They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; They found no city to dwell in; Hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted in them. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses”* (Psalm 107: 4-6); and from his heart, the words come out,

saying: *“I am like an owl of the desert; I lie awake, and am like a sparrow alone on the housetop”* (Psalm 102: 6-7).

(Father Beamon)

“Let him put his mouth in the dust; There may yet be hope” (29)

While sitting alone in silence, man, discovering his self-weakness, and the futility of leaning upon human arm, will stop complaining to men; be humble before God, put his hope and completely submit to God, and will receive His will with joy.

+ Being dust, Do not dare to boast before the Might; ... Being mire, why should you think of what does not concern you?

In despite, God rebuke man, saying to him: *“You are dust, and to dust you will return”*.

Meditating in that commandment, he would perceive that there is a Lord more exalted than him;

Hate pride, for it is a serious trap, full of death, by which the enemy, himself, has fallen since the beginning;

By it, as well, Adam and Eve were driven out of the glory with which God has clothed them in the garden of Eden;

Nothing is more hateful to God than pride and boasting.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach” (30)

If the yoke refers to servitude, striking the cheek is a reproach, only done to a slave.

It was befitting of the Kingdom of Judah not to grumble; for the strike that dwelt upon them by the Babylonians was only allowed by God to chastise them for their persistence on disobedience. The Lord Christ, the One without sin, *“was afflicted, yet he opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearer is silent”* (Isaiah 53: 7). How much more befitting of us, we sinners, not to grumble when we fall under chastisement. In a frank and a clear tone, the prophet Isaiah talked about the events of the cross, saying on the mouth of the Savior: *“I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting”* (Isaiah 50: 6).

+ [You have manifested to me the economy of Your tender mercy
You have borne the oppression of the wicked.
You have given Your back to the scourge.
Your cheeks You have left open to those who smite.
For my sake, O my Master, You have not hidden Your face from the
shame of spitting]

- + Once in their foolishness, they intended to stone our Lord; But having not done it, they kept the stones for Steven.
In Steven, what is lacking in the passion of the Savior was consummated. The cup of the passion of our Lord, the Jews consummated in His servant. Although no prophecy came about stoning the Savior; The bitterness, the vinegar, the spear, the cross, the scourging, the distribution of His clothes, the piercing of His hands, the spitting on the face, and the smiting on the cheeks, all of which were written in the prophecies were consummated..

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“For the Lord will not cast off

forever” (31)

The Lord will not cast off forever; His chastisements are temporary for the sake of the enjoyment of the eternal glories. In the midst of the chastisements, the Lord will not take His mercies away from His people, but intends to renew the covenant with them. God chastens, not to judge, but to open up the way of amnesty and forgiveness before the sinners through their return to Him. *“God wounds and bandages; strikes and binds up”* (Hosea 6: 1); Being a great Physician, together with the chastisement He pours His mercies over us, if we keep on seeking it.

+ Arise to prayer, O you who is worthy and true; and all what you seek from God, you will get.

In case you seek His mercies, why would you hasten to quit, when you are not yet given?

keep disturbing the physician, keep seeking from him; Wet his threshold with your tears;

Keep seeking; If He will not give you out of love, He will do for his persistence.

Be persistent at the door of the Physician; Do not be slothful; For if you so become, He will not bandage your wounds; Why, then, have you come to Him in the first place?!

The persistent knows how to get His mercies. O repentant, be persistent; for then, you will get from the Grantor of goods, as much as you seek.

+ Do not get tired of seeking; Do not think that you will go back empty-handed;

Do not say: I sought much, yet I have not got; and I may not ever get.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion, according to the multitude of His mercies” (32)

- + The humility, wisdom, and teachings of the Son of God, have all shined; His mercies, compassion and intention have been demonstrated; for every one to live, wherever he is; How he healed without exposing those whom He healed; How He bandaged their wounds with longsuffering and humility; When the young man asked Him, saying: *“Good Teacher, what good things shall I do that I may have eternal life?”* (Matthew 19: 16); Although the Lord surely knew that he was not ready to receive His teaching; Yet, He did not rebuke him before everyone present; for He is not used to expose those who approach Him; He did not say to him: Go away, because you will not be able; you are not true, you are a liar. But He listened to him with compassion, bandaged his wounds, and he would be healed if he listened to Him.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men” (33)

Being a heavenly Father, He has no pleasure in punishments; if He chastens, it will be as though He has come out of His place, namely out of the mercy full of compassion; as it is written: *“Behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity”* (Isaiah 26: 21). It is our iniquity and disobedience that make Him come out of His place to punish. Yet even then, He seeks to bring us back to the throne of His mercy.

If God chastens and allows for us to go through affliction, He so does while sitting on the throne of mercy; In all our affliction He is afflicted; for He is our compassionate Father; who seeks our edification and our salvation, and not our humiliation, even during the moments of chastisement.

- + The rod does not imply the absence of love; For love is hidden behind its strokes, although not perceived by him who is stricken.

(The scholar Origen)

- + The Lord condemns us for the sake of chastisement; so as not to be condemned later, together with the world; As, according to the prophet: *“The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death”* (Psalm 118: 18).

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

- + God rebukes to reform; And He reforms to keep us (for Himself).

(St. Cyprian)

- + You have stricken me, not as a Judge, but as a Father to reform me,

(Father Hesichius of Jerusalem)

“To crush under His feet all the prisoners of the earth” (34)

In verses 34-36, the prophet intends to turn the sight of those who suffer of their experience in dealing with men, to dealing with God. Man sometimes finds pleasure in humiliating his opponents; and if given the authority, he will not commit himself to justice, but will cross the line in chastisement. Whereas God in Heaven, seeing everything, is wholly Just and righteous; and even in His chastisement, He works for the benefit of His oppressors.

Here, the prophet presents the grievance of the people fallen under chastisement; as though he says: Will god have pleasure to see the pagan Babylon trample His people under her feet? Will He accept such a humiliation for His own people?

“To turn aside the justice due a man, before the face of the Most High” (35)

God will never disregard the right of man, even while under chastisement. ... Yes, He used Babylon and the like as tools to chasten His people; But at the same time, He will not endure the tyranny or the violence of the tools He uses. For the sake of the salvation and edification of His people, He allowed for them to be captivated by Babylon; But, when Babylon humiliate them and refuse to set them free from bondage, that He does not endure. He punishes Babylon herself for her iniquity, oppression, and violence.

“When one’s case is subverted – does not the Lord see it?” (36)

It was befitting of Babylon to keep within her limits, even if God allows it to captivate His people; And it was befitting for those captivated,

as well, to perceive that nothing is hidden from the sight of God, even if Babylon has gone beyond her limits.

“Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it?!” (37)

The prophet intends to confirm that all things are in the hands of God, who wishes to renew the covenant, and to offer new mercies.As long as man is still living, why does he complain from what dwell upon him of sufferings? When all what he needs is repentance!

“Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and wellbeing proceed?” (38)

Babylon, by her military might, and the alleged greatness of her pagan gods, assumed that she has overcome the people of God and captivated them; They even set victory processions parading their idols before the eyes of the captivated Jews to humiliate and to mock the Lord their God; not perceiving that they would never be able to captivate them without the allowance of God Himself.

By “woes” or (evil) here he means the calamity that dwelt upon the people, which they saw as such; when, in the sight of God they are chastisements which He allowed for their edification. According to the prophet Amos: *“If there is a calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?”* (Amos 3: 6). Many father often discerned between two kinds of “evil”: the one which is so by nature, contrary to virtue or goodness, and that which implies the endurance of affliction or tribulation, considered by man as “owe”. That is what St. John Chrysostom has confirmed in more than one situation.

- + By such words, he does not mean that God Could be the cause of “evil”; For the word “evil” may used in two ways, and in two meanings: It sometimes means the “evil” by nature, contrary to virtue, and to the will of God; And some other times it implies what is evil according to our feeling; namely, the sorrows and calamities, which may seem as evil because they are painful; when they actually are good, for they imply a warning for the sake of transformation and salvation; which, according to the Holy Book come from God.

(Father John of Damascus)

When the divine Judge intends to speak to men, He does so in their language, and according to their human feelings. Like the Physician who may cut off or burn a certain infected area of the body for the sake of the safety of his patient; which is sometimes looked upon by those who cannot endure pain as evil.

(Father Theodor)

“Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?” (39)

It is befitting of us not to grumble against God on account of His chastisements on us; but we should confess our sins and present a repentance.

Filling his heart with hope, Jeremiah found in the cross the divine medication, and set forth to admonish the whole people, saying: *“Why should a living man complain , a man for the punishment of his sins?”*. Yes, if he judges God, Who will be justified before Him? But the way to salvation is open before all, on the personal, as well as on the collective level. Jeremiah posed the question in the singular tense, saying “man”,

then gave the answer or the remedy in the following verse, in the plural tense, saying: "*Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord*" (40).

- + Shall we persist on doing evil all the way? ... God, being a Lover of mankind, He seek our salvation... I wish we would not surrender to despair; For falling is not as serious as staying fallen; Nor the wound is as serious as rejecting the treatment after being wounded ... I say this, not to make you slothful, but to keep you from despair.

3- A CALL TO REPENTANCE:

This section includes two divisions: The first is a prayer put by the prophet Jeremiah on the mouth of the people (40-47); And in the second the prophet adds his tears to those of the people (48-51)

“Let us search out, and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord” (40)

Instead of grumbling, we are committed to sit with ourselves, search out and examine our ways, and lift our hearts to God, seeking from Him to mend our depths. Here, the prophet Jeremiah presents to us an evangelic concept of repentance. If by searching our ways we discover our sins, let us concentrate our eyes on God, the Forgiver of sins: *“Let us return to the Lord”*.

+ O sinner! Have compassion on your soul, full of beauty; For, by your free will, you have submitted her to evil desires.

It was not robbers nor the thieves who took away her beauty; She complains against you, for defiling her by the iniquity of your hands.

It is the temporal comfort, and the evil desires that brought the soul down from her spirituality.

For the sake of nothing, something great in you has fallen from its exaltation; for you, O sinner, have relaxed by the iniquity you have committed.

Beware of what you have lost, and look for it, lest you bring to perdition the good soul, purchased for such a high price.

It is an exalted creation, glorified and full of beauty; No other creation is more exalted than she is.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*“Let us lift our hearts and hands to God
in heaven” (41)*

The prophet wishes to provide the people with a proper prayer of repentance; not only by lifting up the hands, but by lifting up the whole inner being (the hearts) to God dwelling in heaven.

+ Without the hidden beauty of God, you will not see yourself, or be worthy of God, nor it would be easy for you to discover your own shortcomings.

That is the main beauty of your mind, to recognize your shortcomings!

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

*We have transgressed and rebelled; You have
not pardoned” (42)*

In the people’s name the prophet sits with himself, and confesses that all what dwelt on him or on them, was because of their transgressions; and that the remedy will not be realized, except through God Himself, who has the right to forgive. ... Having not forgiven, it would not be because of lack of might nor of mercy on His part; but of not presenting a repentance as is befitting.

+ Having been preoccupied to defend your sins, you were defeated ... Your defense was not adequate; ... For who are you to defend yourself? ... It was befitting of you to accuse yourself instead! ... Do not say: I have done nothing!; Or: What wrong have I done? Or: “Everyone else is doing it!. If you commit a sin, and said that you have done nothing, you, yourself, will be nothing; and will not get anything from God.

God is ready to grant forgiveness; But you are closing the door on yourself!

God is ready to give; So do not lock the door, Open up the bosom of confession, saying with the prophet David: *“Make me to hear joy and gladness”* (Psalm 51: 8).

(St. Augustine)

4- THE FRUITS OF SIN:

“You have covered Yourself with anger, and pursued us; You have slain and not pitied” (43)

If God has covered Himself with anger, and used a firm chastisement, it is because of the disobedience and rebellion of Israel.

- + Supplication could cancel or alter the words of threat. And when they hear that God promises goodness, they should not despise His love, nor count Him slothful or not jealous; and allow themselves, accordingly, to commit evil. By his words, Jeremiah teaches us (Jeremiah 18: 7-9) that God loves when He threatens; and strikes when He is jealous; But that does not mean that His promises are not valid!

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Seougi)

“You have covered Yourself with a cloud, that prayer should not pass through” (44)

The Old Testament often refers to God being hidden from human eyes as though behind clouds or darkness (Exodus 20: 21; 40: 34-35; Leviticus 16: 2; 1 Kings 8: 10, 12). But that was never used to keep prayer from passing through.

- + How could I be certain that I shall get my request from God?... By not seeking what is contrary to what God is ready to give; By not asking what is not befitting of the great King; Nor by seeking what is temporal, but the spiritual blessings. If you approach God with no anger, and by pure and holy hands, used to giving. You will certainly get your request.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“You have made us an offscouring and refuse in the midst of the peoples” (45)

This is a painful portrait of the people’s sufferings caused by their sins, and of being defamed by their enemies (1 Corinthians 4: 13). It is, as well, a portrait of the passion of the lord Christ, having been defamed by the Jews

God looks down from heaven, with grief, on the daughters of Jerusalem; like what the Lord Christ did while He was carrying the cross, when He turned to the women who were mourning and lamenting Him and said to them: *“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children’* (Luke 23: 27, 28).

- + Whoever lives in evil pleasure is dead while living; he lives for the sake of his stomach, and not for the rest of his (holy) senses; He does not see what he should see, hear what he should hear, utter what he should utter, nor consummate the works of the living ... he is dead!
- + How about it, If man is rich or one of the elites; Once he is captivated by sin, he would become more corrupt than any corruption. If he is a king, and was captivated by the barbarians, he would be the most miserable of

all. So it is with sin, it is a barbarian, that captivates the soul. Sin plays the role of a tyrant who destroys all who get in contact with it.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“All our enemies have opened their mouths against us” (46)

Confessing their unworthiness of having their prayers listened to by God, Judah, having lost their relationship with God, and their friendship with the other nations, became the ridicule of their enemies, without the possibility of defending themselves,

“Fear and a snare have come upon us, desolation and destruction” (47)

“My eyes overflow with rivers of water, for the destruction of the daughter of my people” (48)

In this whole lamentation, the prophet did not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem except in the verses 48-51.

- + Let us remember those tears; Let us weep when we see our children in evil.

- + Such tears are not painful; ... Yes indeed! The tears that flow because of such kind of sorrow, are sweeter than the tears that flow because of any worldly pleasure. Listen to the words of the prophet, saying: *“The Lord has heard all my weeping; The Lord has heard my supplication”* (Psalm 6: 8-9).

(St. John Chrysostom)

“My eyes flow and do not cease, without interruption” (49)

The prophet persist on weeping for the sake of his people, until God listen to him, until He looks down from heaven to see how he suffers bitterness caused by what dwelt upon his people.

- + Dealing with a sinner, we should weep and sigh with grief. And when we counsel someone and he does not head our council, but goes forth to perdition, we should weep. For those are the tears of the heavenly wisdom. But when someone is in poverty, suffering from a bodily disease, or even dead, we should not weep for his sake, for all that are unworthy of shedding tears.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Till the Lord from heaven looks down and sees” (50)

Our Lord Jesus longs to set out of our souls a new heaven, or a new Jerusalem.

He promised us, saying: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”*.(Matthew 3: 2). By repentance He will set His kingdom in us; will look down upon us, while dwelling in our depths.

- + I do not deny that the first Jerusalem became desolate because of the evil of her inhabitants; But I wonder: Is it not befitting of you to weep for the sake of your spiritual Jerusalem?!

If someone sins after receiving the truth, he would be worthy of weeping; for he was once of Jerusalem, and now is no more.

Let us weep upon our Jerusalem; for, because of her sin, she is surrounded and besieged by the enemy (the evil spirits), not one stone shall be left here upon another; particularly if such a man has previously practiced chastity and purity for a long time; then the lusts of the body, stirred up in him, caused him to lose his purity and chastity, to fall into adultery; For then, according to the prophet Ezekiel: "*All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered*" (Ezekiel 18: 24).

(The scholar Origen)

"My eyes bring suffering to my soul, because of all the daughters of my city" (51)

The author of the biography of St. Ephraim the Syrian (referred to St. Gregory of Nyssa), telling us how he cared for shedding tears for the sake of the enjoyment of the eternal salvation, says:

[Whenever I remember the flow of his ears, I, myself start to weep; for it was very difficult to pass with dry eyes through the flood of his tears.

There was no day or night, or a part thereof, or any moment, however short, during which his watching eyes appeared not swimming in tears. As he said, he sometimes wept for the sake of the affliction of all and their foolishness; and other times he wept for a specific transgression. You will find him weeping and wailing, not only when he talks about the remorse, the ethics, and the control of life, but even while reciting the prayers of praise].

+ Tears are the flood that sweeps the sins away, and purifies the world.

(St. Gregory the Nezianden)

*“My enemies without cause hunted me
down like a bird” (52)*

As it was not possible to portray his condition by a single analogy, he used three of them: The first as a bird, hunted, not by a regular man, but by an enemy without a cause, who finds pleasure in tormenting him; The second, casting him in a pit which they shut, not by one rock as usual, but by several rocks, to make him lose every hope in coming out of it till he die; And the third analogy is water flowing over his head to ensure his utter drowning.

*“They silenced my life in the pit, and
threw stones at me” (53)*

He would have been spared of that horrible destiny, if he retracted his prophecies, and forsook the word and mission of God ...; but when he refused, they threw him in a pit to die of hunger with no need to shed his blood; Not perceiving that they were killing themselves, through being deprived of the bread of angels – the Word of God. He preferred to die physically of hunger for the bread of the world, to dying of hunger for the bread of angels

- + Jeremiah was forsaken alone to praise God in a pit full of mire; when his soul was more precious than the whole people.
Do you wish to know what a single man could do? Joshua the son of nun, alone, against the whole inhabited world, commanded the sun and the moon to stand still, and so they did. ... A man gave a command, and heaven responded and listened to him; for he listened to the Lord.

Jeremiah said, *“I sat alone ... for you filled me with indignation”* (Jeremiah 15: 17). How would he be alone in a city? ... For there were none to share his goal.

“He rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed” (Matthew 27: 60)..

Proclaiming ahead about the burial of the Lord Christ, Isaiah said: *“For the transgression of my people He was stricken; And they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death”* (Isaiah 53: 8-9); And he also said, *“Look at the Rock from which you were hewn”* (Isaiah 51: 1). As to the door of the tomb, Jeremiah said: *“They silenced my life in the pit, and threw stones at me”* (53).

- + Let us meditate in how *“the chosen and precious rock”* (1 Peter 2: 4) of offence to the Jews, and of salvation to the believers, lie behind the rocks. ... When the tree of life was planted in the earth, the earth that was cursed, enjoyed the blessing and the resurrection from the dead.

- + He (the Lord Christ) chose to walk along all the ways of men, until He entered through the door of death, in order to loosen Adam. ... He started by His birth, and consummated the way until he encountered death. Humbly, He walked along the way of Adam; toward where Adam fell into the depths of the pit, There he entered, fell for his sake, drew him along and came out.

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*“The waters flowed over my head. I
said, ‘I am cut off’” (54)*

He portrays death by the waters that flowed over his head.

According to the Jews, the kingdom of the devil is set in the depths of water, where the great dragon is; In the lifeless barren wilderness; And in the air where there is always disturbance. In the Old Testament, it was often referred to the waters as a source of trouble.

5- A COMFORT FOR THE BELIEVERS:

“I called on Your name, O Lord, from the lowest pit” (55)

“The princes of the court took Jeremiah and cast him into a dungeon” (Jeremiah 38: 4-6). In the lowest pit, his life turning into a prayer, he cried out, saying:

“I called on Your name, O Lord, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice; Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help. You drew near on the day I called on You, and said, ‘Do not fear’. O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul; You have redeemed my life. O Lord, You have seen how I am wronged; Judge my case” (55-59)

As all the doors were closed shut before his face, he found those of God open; He found God’s ears incline to listen to him while in the pit, to hear the inner cry outs of his heart. By saying to him *“Do not fear”*, the Lord confirmed to him his past promises since the day he was called; and by partaking of his sufferings, he counted the adversities against Jeremiah as against Himself; By that the Lord became the Judge and the advocate who pleaded Jeremiah’s case against his persecutors.

If the book of Jeremiah revealed the role played by ‘Ebed Melech the Ethiopian’ (Chapter 38), in the salvation of Jeremiah, his lamentations revealed that it was

God who carried out the actual role, who listened to the cry-outs and the sighs of the oppressed, and moved Ebed Me;ech by compassion to save Jeremiah from the pit.

As to the Lord Christ, the prophet portrays the Lord descending to Hades – the lowest pit – to carry the captives from there to paradise.

*“You have heard my voice; Do not hide Your ears
from my sighing, from my cry for help” (56)*

The Father accepted the sacrifice of the cross, and responded to the atoning intercession of Christ for the sake of the sinners.

Having been cast into the sea, Jonah entered into the whale, not to see death by his eyes, but to see, through the shadow, the Lord Christ Himself – as He was cast into tribulation together with us, and for our sake; So that when He cried out, while being blameless, the Father responded to Him, and lifted us up, together with Him above tribulation. He came down to our lowliness, He who is blameless, so that in Him, we would come to be the subject of pleasure for the Father; to listen to us in our tribulation, and to lift us to Him, As according to St. Jerome: [For our sake, the Lord humbly descended to us, so as to ascend to Him in security and confidence].

In his tribulation, Jonah called the Lord, and promptly enjoyed His response. He found himself ascending, not out of the belly of the whale, but out of Hades, in the crucified Christ Jesus! ... Here he talks in the past and not in the future tense, saying: *“You have heard my voice”*; a sign of the true enjoyment through the symbol, and of the surety that carries no doubt.

Carrying those same feeling, and perceiving those same concepts, when he was cast into the dungeon, Jeremiah said: *“I called on Your name, O Lord, from the*

lowest pit; You have heard my voice; Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help” (55-56).

*You drew near on the day I called on You, and said,
‘Do not fear” (57)*

God sent Ebed Melech the Ethiopian to save Jeremiah from the dungeon (Jeremiah 38: 7-13), And the Father responded to the supplication of the greatest High Priest – our Lord Jesus, to open up before us His fatherly bosoms.

+ Why should you fear, O Christians?

Christ Himself says: “*Do not fear*”.... Why should you be disturbed by such things? ... Why should you fear?

He has already told you that those things will definitely happen ... “*Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid. They willingly received Him into the boat;* (John 6: 20).

Having recognized Him, they rejoiced and were liberated of their fear. “*and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going*” (John 6: 21); An instant move from the water to the shore; from disturbance to peace; from the way to the goal.

(St. Augustine)

“O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul; You have redeemed my life” 58)

What was that case but the one caused by the devil, which the Lord Christ pleaded against him, who seeks our eternal perdition, presenting to us the conquest on him..

- + In the passion and the resurrection of the Lord, we enjoy the crossing over from this mortal to the everlasting life; Namely from death to life.

(St. Augustine)

- + It was such a tribulation and an intense grief that dwelt upon the demons and their hosts, on the day our Lord was crucified; For by His death and descending down to Hades, He did to them what He previously did to Pharaoh and his soldiers; He set Adam and his descendants free from their prison, the way He did to the children of Israel from the land of Egypt.

(St. Ambrose)

*“O Lord, You have seen how I am wronged;
Judge my case” (59)*

Seeing how the demons have deceived us, the Lord Christ, Himself, became our advocate.

- + *“Away with you, Satan”* (Matthew 4: 10)
It is a gift given by the Lord Christ to those who believe in Him ... Having the authority to utter these same words by Christ in them, they could say:: *“Let the devil be ashamed through us” ...* For what the Lord say is for our sake, so that the demons would flee through the Lord who has rebuked them by such words.

“You have seen all their vengeance; all their schemes against me” (60)

- + Jesus came strong to the battle, to bring to perdition all our enemies, to save us from their snares, to liberate us from those who hate us.

“You have heard their reproach, O Lord; all their schemes against me” (61).

All along the eras, the devil did not cease to reproach God, on the tongues of his proud, ignorant, and idol-worshipping followers; who reproach the believers.

“Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me” (Psalm 69: 9)

“Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily” (Psalm 74: 22)

“A fool is ungracious and abusive, and the gift of a grudging giver makes the eyes dim” (Sirach 18: 18)

“Mockery and abuse issues from the proud, but vengeance lies in wait for them like a lion” (Sirach 27: 28)

“Listen to me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is My law; Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their reviles” (Isaiah 51: 7)

“You have heard their reproach, O Lord; all their schemes against me”

(Lamentations 3: 61).

“I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the reviles of the people of Ammon, with which they have reproached my people” (Zephaniah 2: 8)

“There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed” (1 Maccabees 4: 58)

*“For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written: ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on Me’” *Romans 15: 3)*

‘While you were made a spectacle, both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated” (Hebrew 10: 33)

- + How can we follow the role of Christ? ... By practicing everything for the sake of the public interest, and not merely for our own. According to St. Paul: *“For even Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written: ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on Me’”* (Romans 15: 3). I wish no one seeks what is only for his own sake. What is for the good of the neighbor is for our own good; for we are all one body, members for one another.

- + The Savior says: *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me”* (John 6: 38). When the Jews opposed Him and condemned Him to death as a sinner; the psalmist, putting himself in the position of Christ, says: *“The reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me”* (Psalm 69: 9).

(Father Ambrose)

“The lips of my enemies, and their whispering against me all the day” (62)

St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi portrays for us how the devil does not endure the salvation of man; If he sees a sinner start to walk along the way of repentance, he commands his hosts to intensify their efforts to destroy him by evil thoughts, vain glory, and by every way possible. The saint wrote to two harlots, by the names of Lantia and Maria, who repented and lived in seclusion, warning them against the wars of the devil, and his

opposition against them with violence, saying:

- + Now, because of his animosity against you, the devil's command to his hosts are as follows:

[Do not make war against the pure and the perfect, nor against any of my strong enemies; But against these two (harlots) who were of my own, then despised and scoffed me, and became among the ranks of the saints. Bring forth over them the cut off hope; Fill them with laziness; Plant in them envy toward one another, to submit to weakness, and to burn by the lust for food; Wake up in them the thoughts of their early life; Disturb them by the adulterous thoughts; Hinder their prayers, lest if they are strong, they will consummate their pledges; Let them stand on the edge of the cliff of pride; and bind them up by the love of glory; Let them think that they have already become good; Send the sick to them to pray for their sake; Let the later say to them: 'We are healed by your prayers'.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

"Look at their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their taunting song" (63)

The devil intends to mock us, by making us his taunting song; But, by Christ Jesus, the conqueror of the hosts of darkness, we can sing together with the psalmist, saying: *"Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snares of the fowlers; The snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth"* (Psalm 124: 7, 8).

+ While we are still in the midst of the battle, fighting and being wounded, we ask ourselves: 'Who is going to prevail?'
It is, brethren, he who trust in God's support while fighting, and not in his own strength. ... The devil is experienced in war; But if God is on our side, we shall conquer him. ... The devil fights by himself; If we do the same, he will overcome us.... Being an experienced warrior, it is befitting of us to call the Mighty One to confront him.
Let Him who is unconquerable dwell in you, to conquer him who is used to conquer.; For he conquers those whose hearts are empty of God.

+ God, aware of your good will, anticipates your strife, supports your weakness, and will crown your conquest.

(St. Augustine)

+ If the hosts and the rulers of the world of darkness, and the evil spirits, are tempting us, we are not supposed to enter into a debate with them, nor to reconcile with them; but, on the contrary, we should fight them. ... Once we prevail upon them, and gain the authority to "*trample upon the serpents and the scorpions*" (Luke 10: 19); then it would be time for peace. ... Crushing the devil under the feet of the saints has to come first. When it is time for the war, it is befitting of man to trample upon the strength of the enemy; And when we conquer them, we could live in steadfast peace, and our mind would be liberated from disturbance.

(St. Dedyms the blind)

6- THE PERDITION OF THE ENEMY:

This prayer was responded to, by the fall of Babylon (Isaiah 46: 47; Jeremiah 50-51; Daniel 5); And will be fulfilled in a greater way by the end of

time and the fall of the kingdom of the devil – the great Babylon, the mother of harlots (Revelation 19, 20)

“Repay them, O Lord, according to the work of their hands” (64)

In his comment on the saying of the Lord Christ that He came to the world, not to bring peace on earth, but a sword (Matthew 10: 34), St.

Jerome says that the Lord refers to what happened to the devil (Lucifer), who was cast down by the cross, and brought down to the lowest depths of the pit (Isaiah 14: 15); he who used to shine in the morning (Isaiah 14: 13); and once resided in the paradise of joy.

+ Follow the lead of the heavenly Groom; Stand fast before the unseen enemies; Make war against the principalities and the rulers (Ephesians 6: 12). First, draw them away, to have no portion in you; Then you can drive them out from those who may resort to you seeking the protection of your counsel; as their leader and defender. ... Deny all those debates against faith in Christ. ... By the godly word, fight against the bad and evil counsel; as according to the apostle: *“Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God”* (2 Corinthians 10: 5). ... And above all, put your trust in the arm of the great King; before whom all His enemies fear and are terrified.

(St. Basil the Great)

“Give them a veiled heart; Your curse be upon them. In Your anger, pursue and destroy them, from under the heavens of the Lord” (65, 66)

The devil intends to liken God in everything. As God intends to make out of men, ambassadors for Himself, and stewards of heaven, who bear the fellowship of the divine nature; So the devil, whose goal is to destroy the kingdom of God on earth, intends, to make those who follow him ambassadors and stewards for himself, bearing his features of violence, oppression, and corruption.

- + The fears of him who strives would become for him a cause of salvation; And on the contrary, it will be a cause of reproach and scoff for his enemies; He stands fast against all their attacks, makes them void, and rejects all their seductions ... The enemy -- Lucifer who has fallen down from heaven (Isaiah 14: 12) moves in a horrible way between heaven and earth – on account of that the saints on earth did not let him have comfort on it; nor fulfill his desire to enjoy our destruction. ... Having been defeated many times by the righteous 'Job', he did not quit the battle, but kept it on to exhaust the righteous man.

(St. Hesichius of Jerusalem)

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

(Chapter 3)

Let me sing underneath Your cross

- + Is there a place where my soul will find comfort,
except to collect all my energies,
To sing underneath Your cross?
Allow me, O my beloved, to talk about Your life-giving passions;
And to sing the secrets of Your joyful cross!
On the cross You were raised in my place;

In humiliation, You bowed before the divine wrath, enduring it on my behalf;
On the outside wounds, contrite, and humiliation;
And in the depths, love, resurrection, salvation, and gladness for every believer;
I wonder, was Your cross a humiliation for you, or a proclamation of the secrets of Your glory?

- + How can I call You, O my good savior?
You are the Sun of Righteousness;
You did not fear to enter into the darkness
To search for me, a very precious pearl in Your sight; to exult in me;
You scattered my darkness, and poured Your splendor on me;
And introduced me -- the lost pearl -- to Your Father , the Lover of mankind;
You nailed the animosity;
And You set me a son of Your Father;
I shall never give the back to the Father;
But, by You, I shall enter into His bosoms.

- + You entered into death through the bitter-most of its gates;
On the cross, Your body was all covered with wounds;
From the head down to the feet;
What should have dwelt on me, You received by Your own free will, and
Your love;
You nailed my old man, to let me enjoy the new man;
Your Holy Spirit makes me beautiful every morning;
To become Your living icon;
Instead of the frail body, You granted me in it the resurrected life.

- + You received the tribulation in its most horrible form;

You drank the bitterness instead of me;
You turned the bitterness of my life into the sweetness of fellowship with
You.

- + Entering into the pit by Your own authority;
Its foundations were shaken, its gates were destroyed;
You did not refrain from lying among the dead;
To carry them as a spoil.
And to set them free from the bondage of the devil and death;
And to bring them forth to Your joyful paradise.

- + The devil and his hosts could not help dancing for joy;
All of them were ready to carry the chains;
By which to bring You forth into the pit;
They assumed that You will be carried chained into an everlasting prison;
They hedged You in, lest You may escape;
You, instead, loosened my chains, and set me free from their captivation;
To make me enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God.

- + For the sake of my salvation you became truly Man;
You cried out on the cross as though the Father has forsaken You;
The devil, his hosts, and all the hosts of darkness scoffed You, saying:
Let Him cry out! No one can rescue Him from our hands;
The straw scoffed Your fire; and assumed that it could burn it;
They set the snare of death;
They assumed that they hid it from You, to catch You;
They did not perceive that "*You have the power to lay Your life down, and
the power to take again*" (John 10: 18)
They, themselves fell into the snare they have set for You;
And You set forth, O the true Way, to open the gates of heaven before
Your beloved.

+ The deadly lion used to roam around, and no soul could escape from him;
All mankind came to be its prey;
It counted that You, as well, will not escape his fangs;
But, by Your death broke down his fangs;
And turned death for us to an enjoyable journey to heaven in Your
company;

The lion (the devil) became a prey;
And the divine Lamb a lion, a Grantor of resurrection.

+ The devil counted that You have lost the way;
That You had no more place among the living;
Yet You have borne us in You, a unique Way;
That would bring us forth into the divine bosoms;
By his multitude of accusations against You, the enemy assumed that he
could get rid of You;

Yet, instead of the accusations, You became our righteousness,
sanctification, and our eternal life.

+ The enemy assumed that Your heavenly Father has destroyed You;
And that death has torn You apart, to become desolate;
Mockingly, he sang, saying:
[Behold! the divine arrow will kill Him as a deceiver];
But the deceiver did not perceive that it was he who deceived himself
The Father's arrow is no one but You!
Whom He aims toward the hosts of darkness, to scatter them by Your
light;

He aims You toward men, to wound their hearts by the wounds of exalted
love;

You turned my heart from the curse to the eternal blessing;
In it You planted Your cross, instead of the thorns and thistles;

In it, instead of the dust, You set your heavens.
Which the heavenly creatures desire to look at.

+ Tell me, how could the devil assume that You have been destroyed by the cross;

When, by Your cross, You turned my depths into a second heaven!

Together with Your Father, You came to dwell in it;

Welcome, O Crucified!

My heart became Your paradise;

Which You planted by Your right hand, and watered by Your precious blood;

To carry the fruit of Your Holy Spirit.

+ Let me stand together with the righteous 'Job', who saw Your cross through the shadows;

And saw him who intended to make You the laughing stock of everyone;

He himself turned into a toy;

To be scoffed by every believing child;

Let me sing together with 'Job', saying:

"Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you leash him for your maidens? (Job 41: 5);

He even refrained to play with him as with a bird;

He tied him with a thread and delivered him to the kids to play with;

By the cross, the devil became not worthy to be scoffed by a believer;

He fell out from his heart, as he fell down from heaven;

And came to be underneath his feet.

+ You tasted bitterness, O You Sweet in Your words and promises;

By You, I came to taste sweetness in any suffering together with You;

And the bitterness itself has gone forth to the hosts of darkness;

In the civil and the religious trials. The enemy intended for you to grind the pebbles;

Let him do anything he likes, for You turn the pebbles into eternal salvation;

That I would sing, saying: "*His mouth is most sweet, Yes, He is altogether lovely*" (Songs 5: 16);

+ The enemy assumed that in You, the divine verdict against the first Adam, will be fulfilled;

Saying: "*You are dust, and to dust you will return*" (Genesis 3: 19);

At Your tomb he set a tight watch;

To make sure that You will turn to dust like all mankind;

But instead of that verdict, a new one was issued for those who believe in You:

Saying: "*You are heaven, and to heaven you will return*";

By Your life-giving cross, You set Your resurrection a deposit for every true believer;

You opened wide the gates of Hope;

All the hosts of heaven exulted to receive You, O Lord of glory;

The heavenly hosts came to have a new praise;

They cry out to You to hasten Your ultimate coming;

To welcome Your bride whom You gathered from the time of Adam to the end of time;

In a flaring zeal, they anticipate the day of Your eternal wedding.

+ Now, I sing the song of Your crucifix, saying:

Your soul bowed down to bear the cross in our place;

You granted me uprightness instead of bowing;

My eyes will no more look down to earth like the rest of animals;

But will concentrate on the things high up in heaven;

Glory be to You, O who granted me the sweet praise of the crucifix.

CHAPTER 4

A RETURN TO THE REPROACH OF SIN

AND AN ENJOYMENT OF THE LORD CHRIST, OUR LIFE

Why for is the return to talk about the reproach of sin?

Having bringing us forth, in the previous lamentation, into the bosoms of the Crucified, and making us in touch with the amazing Forgiver of sins, Was it necessary for the prophet Jeremiah to return to talk about the reproach of sin?

We expected after the third lamentation, that the prophet will no more talk about sin; but through the divine wisdom, came the lamentation within our hands, to talk about the intense change that could shake our whole being because of our slothfulness with the sin. It is befitting of us, as believers, to sing together with the Psalmist, saying: "*My sin is ever before me*" (Psalm 51: 3); Yet with the spirit of the joyous hope in the Savior, who opens the gates of heaven before us.

We can say that in the first and second lamentations, the prophet talked about the bitterness of sin generally to the believers and the non-believers. But here, the prophet warns us – believers -- lest, because of our hope in the Lord our Savior, we may go back to be slothful with sin. Then the fifth lamentation comes to proclaim our continuous need for the Savior, who perpetually longs to bring us forth to a new beginning! The gate of hope will stay open before all mankind until the last breath in the life of man. In other words, the arms of the Lord will remain outstretched to everyone, to welcome him, to embrace him, and to lift him up into the bosom of the Father.

Seeing what dwelt upon his city of utter desolation, in spite of his continuous warnings to them, he could not believe his eyes, and came to suffer great bitterness in his depths. He represents what has dwelt upon the human nature

after her disobedience of her Creator, and represents what would dwell upon the believer if he disregards the divine grace, and the grace of sonhood through baptism. As according to the apostle: *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”* (Galatians 5: 1); *“For you brethren have been called to liberty; Only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another”* (Galatians 5: 13).

That desolation which covered all people, refers to the danger of being slothful with sin, on the soul, the body, all senses, emotions, and talents. A desolation that could be described as follows:

- 1- *“The precious sons of Zion, valuable as fine gold, how they are regarded as clay pots, the work of the hands of the potter?!”* (2). Meaning that the believer would lose the heavenly thought, and the angelic life, to live in the dust and mire, enslaved by temporal things.
- 2- *“The tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth for thirst”* (4) ; meaning that man would lose his simplicity even while still a suckling. Before having the chance to get in touch with the world; he would be denied of the water of the true spiritual knowledge.
- 3- *“The young children ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them”* (4). As the congregation come to be unable to offer the Word of life, and to lift the hearts up to heaven, although the Holy Book is within their reach.
- 4- *“Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets”* (5)
- 5- *“Her Nazirites who were brighter than snow and whiter than milk; ... now their appearance is blacker than soot”*.(7, 8). Instead of cherishing their sonhood to God, and waking under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, by the spirit of power as kings, they enslaved themselves to the evil one and his covetousness.
- 6- *“The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children; they became food for them”* (10). Sin would corrupt the width of the heart

which embraces even the enemies, to live with a narrow heart, prevailed by selfishness, hate, etc.

- 7- The streets of Jerusalem, the city of God, were covered with blood because of the sins of her false prophets (14). Man would lose the work of the Holy Spirit in him, to lose his insight; and instead of being a temple of the Lord, dwelt by the Holy Trinity, he would become a playground of the devil, and a dwelling place for everything defiled.
- 8- Nebuchadnezzar captivated king Zedekiah who attempted to escape, to be caught by the army who purchased him like eagles, killed his children before his eyes, plucked off his eyes, put him in chains of bronze, and took him into captivity (18-20). Man would lose his position as a king who enjoys the King of kings, and come to be a captive of the devil. He would lose his spiritual children, for many would stumble. He loses as well his spiritual insight, to count salvation as a fiction of human invention; and eternity as a fantasy by which man calms down his feelings, from what he encounters of troubles.

We can divide this lamentation into three divisions:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 1- A drastic change | 1 -- 12 |
| 2- The secret behind the calamity on Jerusalem | 13 -- 20 |
| 3- The punishment of Edom | 21 -- 22 |

1- A DRASTIC CHANGE:

When the calamity dwelt upon Jerusalem, there before the mind of the prophet Jeremiah, came an unbelievable bitter portrait of how the city of Jerusalem has been before the captivation, and how it has become through it.

“How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the head

of every street” (1)

In the eyes of the prophet, the young men of Jerusalem have been like pieces of gold that would never rust, nor lose its beauty with time.

Many of the fathers of the church saw in the gold, particularly that which was used in the temple of Solomon, its furniture and vessels, a reference to the heavenly spiritual nature of the temple.

As the city has been utterly desolate, the soul of the prophet was embittered to see how the gold rusted and corrupted, contrary to its nature! ... How the city lost her goal, position, and even her being as the city of God! ... How, instead of being the icon of heaven in the midst of the evil world, she became desolate and a laughing stock before the nations! ... How the stones of the sanctuary, that no stranger was allowed to touch, nor an impure priest or a Levite to approach, has become scattered in the streets, treaded upon by the pagans, who threw on them their unclean trash!

God intended for man to be a living stone in the heavenly temple of the Lord (1 Peter 2: 5); But through disobedience, he lost his role, and he even corrupted the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3: 17).

That is the condition of the man of God whom the devil fears, and cannot even look at, because of the splendor poured on him by the grace of God, and of the heavenly thought which leads him. When he becomes slothful and disregards his role and mission as the ambassador of Christ, he becomes the laughing stick of the demons and the wicked.

“At the head of every street”; probably refers here to the leaders and shepherds in particular; being the heads of the herd; which should always look ahead and high above, so that the feet would walk ahead in a straight course. But with the distortion of the straight stature of the body, the head bows toward the ground,

and the feet become confused in their walk, and unable to go in a straight forward heavenly way.

How could the conscience of a shepherd, being a head, enjoy the honor of priesthood, when he becomes preoccupied with the earthly things, about which he is supposed to rebuke the others?. That is indeed what the Lord has warned against in His anger, on the tongue of the prophet, saying: "*It shall be, like people, like priest*" (Hosea 4: 9); when the priests, responsible for the spiritual ministry behave the same like the people; when their works are like those who seek everything carnal!. Meditating in all that, the prophet shows how much his heart is disturbed for the desolation of the temple, saying: "*How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold!*" (1).

What does he mean by "*the gold*", but the heavenly life of the priest, and the exaltation of his holiness?

What does he mean by "*the fine gold*", but the spiritual reverence which we awe toward them?

What does he mean by "*the stones of the sanctuary*", but the ones with holy ranks?

And what does he mean by the expression "*at the head of every street*", but the excessive luxury of life? about which the divine truth, Himself, says: "*Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction*" (Matthew 7: 13).

- + The stones refer to the minds of the strong, when St. Peter said: "*As living stones are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood*" (1 Peter 2: 5); which is promised by the Lord to the church, saying on the tongue of the prophet: "*Behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles with rubies; your gates of crystals, and all your walls of precious stones. All your children shall be taught by the Lord*" (Isaiah 54: 11-13); ... Setting its stones in the

right order; and arranging the holy souls according to their diverse worthiness. "*Laying its foundation with sapphires*", as these stones themselves bear the color of heaven; namely, the strength of the church in the souls is set in the souls that seek the heavenly things.

But as that gold has become dim through the darkness of the lack of faith, the prophet Jeremiah lamented its blackness, saying: "*How changed the fine gold?*"(1); the gold became dim; ... the past splendor of faith became dim.

(Pope Gregory the Great)

- + He who is chosen to be ordained a priest should be tested if he is blameless in the things of this world.

(The laws of the apostles – section 3)

- + A priest has to have an exalted mind, an extraordinary sense of perception, and a limitless number of eyes on all sides; For he is to live, not just for himself, but for the sake of a multitude.
- + Meditate in what kind of man is the chosen as a priest:

He has to be reverend, yet free of pride

He has to be awesome, yet compassionate

He has to be fit for leadership, yet sociable

He has to be impartial, yet amiable

He has to be humble, yet not lowly

He has to be strong, yet noble

He has to be all that, to be able to confront all difficulties.

(St. John Chrysostom).

“The precious sons of Zion, valuable as fine gold; how they are regarded as clay pots; the work of the hands of a potter!” (2)

What makes the heart of the prophet sad, is not the honor of the city of God, and the building of the temple that has lost its holiness, but what is more serious, namely, the inhabitants of the city, particularly the leaders, and those who work in the temple: the priests, Levites, elders, etc. who were in the sight of God like pure valuable gold, whom He cherished as His own children, who were honorable, even in the sight of the heavenly creatures; those who have become like clay pots, that nobody cares to clean of the dust that come on them, for when dust became an integral part of their being; they lost every value in heaven and on earth.

The gold of the temple was robbed, scraped off the walls of the buildings, whose stones were cast as trash on the streets.

Gold refers to heaven. God created man from dust, but He granted him a soul that could be likened to that of the angels. But unfortunately the fine gold vessel turned through the corrupt life into a clay pot, broken and valueless.

- + By virtues we come to be equal to the angels, and the kingdom will be presented to us; to be counted as united with Christ. Knowing that without the virtue, we would become lower than the irrational animals, it is befitting of us to train ourselves to be human, ... No, but rather to be angels, in order to enjoy the blessings, promised through the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- + If we will, and by the help of God working in us, we can, with our souls, compete with the heavenly spirits, and even surpass them.
- + Teach those on the outside, that you, in the church, are in the company of the hosts of the heavenly Seraphim, are counted with the heavenly creatures, and among the ranks of the angels, when you talk to the Lord, and be in the company of the Lord Christ. If you so set your souls, there will be no need to say what we would, to those who do not attend, who, seeing what we have got, and perceiving their loss, they would hasten to come to enjoy what we do.

However foolish they may be, being exhorted by the beauty of your glittering souls, their hearts would be enflamed by our good appearance. For if the beauty of the body seduces the onlooker, how much more would the beauty and harmony of the soul draw him to have the same zeal? ... We, therefore should adorn our inner man;... For if the wrestler wrestles according to how he is trained; We, in our dealing with the world, do not use what we hear here.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Even the jackals present their breasts to nurse their young; But the daughter of my people has become cruel, like ostriches in the wilderness” (3)

How horrible is this portrait of how the daughter of Zion has become! ... When even the jackals, whom no one expect to bear any kind of care to her young, once they enjoy motherhood, through the natural instinct, like all the other animals, would present their breasts to nurse their young; while the daughter of Zion would not do the same, but has become like the ostrich in the wilderness that disregard its young (Job 39: 13-18).

According to the Mosaic statute, the ostrich is an animal full of uncleanness (Leviticus 11: 16; Deuteronomy 14: 15); its voice is like wailing (Micah 1: 8), no heavenly joy would enter into it; With a dry nature, does not care for her laid eggs (Lamentations 4: 3); buries its head in the sand when she sees a hunter approaching it; which was once interpreted as to become invisible to the hunter; but it was recently found that it so does on account of that it is too coward to see itself a victim of the hunter.

So the sin does by corrupting even the natural instinct; when the jackals nurse its young, while the daughters of Zion unfortunately did not care for their young ones. They even offered their children as sacrifices and burnt offerings to the god Molok; and because of their sins, their children suffered much from the Babylonian captivity.

“The tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth for thirst. The young children ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them” (4)

During the last stages of the siege on Jerusalem, there happened a bitter famine, of which the children suffered the most (Lamentations 2: 19). Here, the cruelty of the people was clearly shown, as they dealt with their hungry children with so much dryness not even found among the jackals and the ostriches. The scene of the hungry children crying to their mothers, who did not care for their cries because of the tribulation they were going through, shook the being of the prophet, and filled him with bitterness.

The daughter of Zion, having lost the spiritual motherhood; no more suckles the infants with the milk of the pure teaching; and their tongue clang to the roof of their mouth for thirst; And even if there is the spiritual bread to feed the young children, their mother will not move to break it, and to present it to them.

According to Pope Gregory (the Great), this is a prophecy about Judaism. It was befitting of the Jews, when the Lord Christ came, to testify to Him, preach Him, and present Him to the world as the bread of life; But because of the envy of the Jewish leaderships, 'Judaism' turned into a hidden fire, deadly to the souls....
"As for the earth, from it comes bread, but underneath it is turned up as by fire" (see Job 28: 5). All what preoccupied Judaism, was to go on presenting the bread of the law before the people. But, being the sons of perdition, they even could no more interpret that law itself, which made the prophet Jeremiah wails in his lamentations, saying: *"The young children ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them"* (4). But, *"underneath, this earth is turned up as by fire"*, killing itself by the live coal of envy, as she watches the signs performed by our Savior; that some of their men said: *"What shall we do? For this man works many signs"* (John 11: 47); Or, *"You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him"* (John 12: 19).

According to the prophet Amos: *"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord"* (Amos 8: 11)

What are those days in which a famine came because the daughter of Zion refused to break the bread to give to her children, but when the Lord Christ, the living Bread, came, and rejected by the high priests and the rulers, who denied the people of recognizing His divine Person.

- + The Jewish people who could be counted as rich, on account of that they had the adoption, the divine worship, the promises, and the fathers, have become poor because of their sin against the Lord. *"But those who seek the Lord, shall not lack any good thing"* (Psalm 34: 10). They came to be in need for getting replenished in a certain way; They suffered hunger; and because they delivered *"the Bread of Life"* to death, hunger for the bread dwelt upon them.

(St. Basil the Great)

+ The Word of God is food for the soul, her jewelry, and her surety. And in not listening to it, there will be a famine and deprivation.

(The scholar Origen)

“Those who ate delicacies, are desolate in the streets. Those who were brought up in scarlet, embrace ash heaps” (5)

Their children were brought up in scarlet; Namely, practiced the life of kings; But because of captivation, they came to be as though on trash heaps..

A great difference between how the daughter of Zion was living as a royal family in the spiritual palace; enjoying the delicious Word of God, giver of the satisfaction and life, and how it ended up in famine, through her rejection of the Lord Christ, the Bread of life who came down from heaven; How it became spiritually frail, and had perdition in the streets; as though spiritually homeless. And instead of wearing precious attire of scarlet, that bring joy to the angels, seeing her putting on the clothes of true holiness, she was cast on a heap of ashes to embrace denial.

+ Meditate in the words said by John: *“He came to His own”* (John 1: 11), not because of any need on His part, for it is impossible for the divine Being to be in need; But He came for the sake of doing good to His own.

Making the blame on the Jews more stingy, John added: *“And His own did not receive Him”* (John 1: 11). Although the Lord Christ came for their benefit, they rejected Him; and they even brought Him out of His vineyard and killed Him.

- + Although the Jews had more knowledge than the Samaritans, recognized the prophets, and ate together with them; Yet because those Samaritans believed in the Lord Christ according to the testimony of one woman, without seeing him perform a single sign, and hastened to come out to seek from Him to stay with them; While the Jews, for whose sake He originally came, who saw His signs by their own eyes, did not only let Him stay with them, but they even drove Him out, and did their best to keep Him away from their land,

- + It is as though the Lord Christ says here to the Jews: You did not follow Me, not because I am not a Shepherd, but because you are not My sheep. He so said to exhort them to become His sheep, and to plant that desire in them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + We Christian say that the Jews, despite their prior enjoyment of God's care, and His love for them more than any other people; Yet the divine ordinance and grace have become our own, when Jesus transferred the authority that used to work among the Jews to the believers of the Gentiles.

(The scholar Origen)

“The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, though no hand was laid on it”

(6)

Sodom for the Hebrew, has been the serious example of evil, and its destruction in a moment revealed how God hates sin, and does not endure it. Yet what dwelt upon Sodom is considered by the prophet as more bearable than what dwelt upon Jerusalem and Judah through the captivity.

Presenting a serious comparison between the daughter of Zion, who has got the law, entered into a covenant with God, who sent to her the prophets, and provided her with the divine promises; And the pagan Sodom, who got no law, nor priests, or a holy temple, like what the people of Judah had (See 1 Peter 4: 17), which was well known for her sexual immorality; that was burnt down with brimstone and fire from heaven; According to the prophet Jeremiah, the punishment that dwelt upon Judah has been more bitter than what dwelt upon Sodom, on account of that the later was overthrown in a moment, whereas the people of Israel have gone through an extended torment and reproach because of the captivity.

- + They became no longer the people of God, nor a holy nation; They surpassed the sins of Sodom; as according to the prophet Ezekiel: *“Your sister Sodom nor her daughter have done as you and your daughters have done”* (Ezekiel 16: 48; Lamentations 4: 6); For the people of Sodom have opposed angels; whereas the people of Judah opposed the Lord, the King of kings, and dared to kill the Lord of angels; not perceiving that Christ whom they killed is still living among us even today.

(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)

“Her Nazirites were brighter than snow, and whiter than milk. They were more ruddy in body than rubies, like sapphires in appearance” (7)

The word 'Nazirite' came in Genesis 49: 26; and in Deuteronomy 33: 16, to mean him whose personality and even his appearance qualify him to be dedicated for a specific task, for which no other is befitting; like those dedicated to the ministry of the Lord; Or the princes and the nobles; whose privilege, honor, and role in the society are recognized. But now the Nazirites of Judah ended up to a horrible condition, having become fitting only to be buried as dead, not capable of doing any task.

The prophet weeps on how the daughter of Zion has been; when her Nazirites who dedicated their life to the Lord, were pure and blameless as snow, white as milk, and red as rubies. The whiteness refers to the purity, the redness to the work of the blood of Christ (Romans 7: 14); whereas their blue color refers to having an almost heavenly feature, according to the words of the apostle Paul: *"He made us sit together in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2: 6)..

*"Now their appearance is blacker than soot; they go unrecognized in the streets; their skin clings to their bones;
It has become as dry as wood" (8)*

The colors of exalted spiritual significances, have been taken away from them; They came to bear the color of darkness; Their almost heavenly light and splendor transformed into pitch darkness; And their life full of vitality into death.

+ What a horrible cruelty! What a strange ferocity. ... Having no fear of God; nor respect for others, or any sense of reproach from your friends, All things in you were destroyed, and you have deprived yourself of every goodness at the same time.

Again, I feel sad for your sake, O miserable one! You who, showing zeal for the kingdom, has fallen from the kingdom!

You who had the reverence for the sake of teaching, had no fear of God before your eyes.

You who preached holiness, is now defiled; You who were in glory while being poor, ended up stealing money.

You who, under whose leadership, you referred to the punishment of God, has, yourself fallen under chastisement.

How can I wail on you? How can I be sad for your sake? The morning star who shines early, has fallen, and knocked down to the earth; That makes the ears of everyone who hears it ring.

How could it happen that the Nazirite (7 – 8), who shone more splendidly than gold, becomes blacker than soot? How could the son of Zion, an example of beauty, become as a corrupt vessel?

(St. Basil the Great)

“Those slain by the sword are better off than those who die of hunger. For these pine away stricken for lack of the fruits of the field” (9)

Seeing how the gloating nations have entered into the fields, trample on them with their feet, to become like a barren and fruitless wilderness; and seeing the bodies of the children of Israel, particularly the young and the children, scattered like pieces of clay and dust on the streets, the prophet said: *“Those slain by the sword are better off than those who die of hunger” (9)*. In the midst of that reproach and bitterness, all wished for death and found none; and, And according to the prophet Jonah: *“It is better for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4: 8)*.

“The hands of the compassionate women have cooked their own children. They became food for them, in the destruction of the daughter of my people” (10)

It so seems that that siege has been the most horrible known in history; as through the terrible hunger, they had to practice what was utterly against human nature (2 Kings 6: 25-29), Having rejected the Word of God, they went through a deadly famine; and their depths were transformed into a vicious portrait, to practice what the beasts never do by the natural instinct.

In God's threats to His people in case they worship idols and disobey the divine commandment, it came that they will *"cut off their supply of bread, ten women shall bake bread in one oven, and they shall bring back to you the bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied"* (Leviticus 26: 26). *"Cutting off their supply of bread"*, God cut off from them the bread of life – the divine Word – so that their souls will live in hunger.

The first sign of famine will be that, instead of every woman having her own oven, ten women will bake the bread in one oven, as they do not have enough bread, nor enough fuel to use more than one oven. The second sign of famine will be that they will use the bread by weight because of its rarity and the absence of blessing; And the famine reaches its climax when the hands of women stretch to eat the flesh of their children, the way it happened in the days of Jehoram, the son of Ahab king of Israel (2 Kings 6: 24-30); in the days of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (1)0, and when the Roman commander Titus put Jerusalem under siege.

Those who mercilessly offered their children a sacrifice to the god Molok, have ended up tasting the bitterness of hunger, and cooking their children.

"The Lord has fulfilled His fury; He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, and it has devoured its foundation" (11)

Every now and then the prophet intends to confirm that what dwelt upon Jerusalem was allowed by God. Fire usually burn what lie above the ground, but we never heard that it could devour the foundations of the city. It is therefore, not a regular fire, but the fierce fire of God's wrath to chasten the rebellious Zion, that stretched down to devour the foundations of the city.

The prophet Jeremiah often likened the divine judgment to a fire that no one can quench (Jeremiah 4: 4; 17: 4, 27; 21: 12; 43: 12; 49: 27). About such a fire it was said:

“How long, Lord? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire?” (Psalm 89: 46)

“Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings” (Jeremiah 4: 4).

“O house of David! Thus says the Lord: ‘Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him who is plundered, out of the hand of the oppressor, lest My fury goes out like fire, and burn that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings” (Jeremiah 21: 12)

“Yes I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst” (Ezekiel 22: 21)

“I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; And I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads’, says the Lord God” (Ezekiel 22: 31)

+ The wrath of God will kindle like fire on those who did not circumcise themselves to Him; who did not take away the foreskin of their hearts. The fuel of such a fire is the evil works which they do; For if there were no evil works, fire will find nothing to consume!

(The scholar Origen)

“The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem” (12)

The kings of the earth could not believe what dwelt upon Jerusalem, as all of them thought that no one could enter into her by force, nor touch her people; on account of that she was built upon high mountains; and because the Lord God was her heavenly king, dwelling in her.... Sennacherib himself, and the nations around Judah, perceived in their depths, through their past experiences, that Jerusalem, being the city of God, no one could force himself into her, as long as the hand of God embraces her. That is why its collapse and the entrance of the enemy through her gates, were a sudden shock even to those who used to reproach her.

2- THE SECRET BEHIND THE CALAMITY ON JERUSALEM:

“Because of the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests who shed in her midst the blood of the just” (13)

The verses 4 – 13 came looking at how the priests and the false prophets have caused the shedding of innocent blood; which was a prophecy about what will be done in the future by the high priests and other Jewish leaders during the events of the crucifixion of the Righteous Lord Christ.

That immunity of Jerusalem in the minds of the pagans, was broken, because of her false prophets and priests. Calling them ‘blood-shedders’ or ‘killers’ bears a wide meaning. It not only implies shedding the blood physically and literally, but implies, as well, the shameful oppression, the provocation of the others to shed blood without directly taking part themselves, and the slothfulness and partiality with the actual blood-shedders and killers.

Unfortunately, the priests whose foremost task was to pray for the sake of humanity, to enjoy reconciliation with God, became an offense and a hurdle even before the pagans. That was what St. John Chrysostom warned against, Namely, that the sins and iniquities committed by a believer, are more serious than those committed by a non-believer; and that committed by the priest, the bishop, or a monk, is far more serious.

“They wandered blind in the streets; They have defiled themselves with blood, so that no one would touch their garments” (14)

The religious leadership stirred up the people against Christ; *“the blind leading the blind”* (Luke 6: 39), that it was written: *“Al the people said: ‘His blood be on us and on our children”* (Matthew 27: 25).

Here, to show the seriousness of the behavior of those prophets and priests; the prophet Jeremiah says that instead of longing to see every leper healed and purified, they, themselves, came to be in the eyes of the Lord and in the eyes of people defiled by a serious kind of leprosy, namely, oppression and murder!

+ The ruler washed his hands, and accused all of them of iniquity and shedding innocent blood;

While washing his hands, the oppressors cried out: *“His blood be on us and on our children”*

The ignorant fathers ate the sour grapes to set their teeth and those of their children on edge;

Now, looking at the ruler washing his hands; You should approach and swim in the holy waters and be set free;

Behold, your Lord waits for you in the water of baptism, to free you of your sin by His forgiveness;

+ The wretched people committed iniquity, covered themselves with blood, and kept it as well to cover the generations to follow;

It was not enough for them to commit iniquity, but were keen on leaving it to the generations to follow;

The ignorant fathers ate the sour grapes, had their teeth were set on edge and kept them as well to set the teeth of their descendants on edge.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“They cried out to them, ‘Go away, unclean! Go away! Go away, do not touch us’. When they fled and wandered, those among the nations said, ‘They shall no longer dwell here’”

(15)

The blind leaders defiled themselves, all along the generations, by the innocent blood, from the blood of the righteous Abel to that of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah; together with the blood of the children who were offered as sacrifices to the idols, until the time came for them to shed the blood of the Lord Christ Himself.

Those were the cry outs of the people when they saw the destruction that dwelt upon the false prophets who have for so long deceived them with their smooth words. Those who were supposed to be a holy leaven to sanctify the world, the world came to refrain to touch their garments. They, together with the priests and the elders have all lost their honor.

According to some, those were the cry outs of the pagans, who, while practicing their own abominations, counted what dwelt upon Jerusalem as defilements that even they could not endure, and they do not wish for anyone of her people or of her priests to touch them lest they would be defiled.

*“The face of the Lord scattered them; He no longer regards them .
The people do not respect the priests, nor show
favor to the elders” (16)*

According to some the expression “*The face of the Lord*” refers to the divine wrath, as it came in psalm 34: 16; saying, “*The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off all the remembrance of them from the earth*”; not discerning between a priest and one of the people; nor between an elder and a young man. That was reflected on how the pagans started to deal with them with despite, not regarding a leader, nor feeling compassion toward an elder.

Whoever does wrong to the truth of God, his behavior will return on him; “*For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you*” (Luke 6: 38); even from the pagans and the atheists, and from the hosts of darkness themselves.

“Still our eyes failed us, watching vainly for our help; In our watching we watched for a nation that could not save us” (17)

Their souls bowing down, they could not look up toward Him who dwell in heaven, but sought help from those down on earth. Although the Egyptians pretended to be their allies, yet they could not, and were not even wishing to support them. It is written: “*The king of Egypt did not come out of his land anymore, for the king of Babylon had taken all what belonged to the king of Egypt from the brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates*” (2 Kings 24: 7); “*For the Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose; Therefore I have called her “Rehab-Hem-Shebeth”* (Isaiah 30: 7).

The leaders of Judah used to consider their alliance with Egypt as a source of hope for the salvation from the Babylonians (Jeremiah 37: 3-10); which was an object of controversy between Jeremiah and the king, his counselors, statesmen,

the religious leaders, and the people; all of whom counted his attack against the alliance with Egypt, as directed against the Chaldeans, and not for sake of repentance. And when Jeremiah warned king Zedekiah against such a policy, he put him in prison (Jeremiah 37: 5-21).

Judah was infected with a kind of spiritual insight blindness, and of foolishness of thought. ... They kept on watching in vain from the watching towers, in anticipation of some help to save them from the siege of Babylon.

The towers of watching, namely, the holy books (the Old Testament) were within their hands; It was befitting of them to recognize the Lord Christ through the prophecies and the symbols; Yet, when He did come, they hated Him. Deceiving themselves by seeking the Messiah according to their human material concept; the devil sent them the false Messiah

“They tracked our steps so that we could not walk in our streets. Our end was near; our days were over, for our end had come” (28)

By erecting high siege mounds and plateaus, the Chaldeans could track those walking in the streets inside the city and aim their arrows and spears to anyone who intended to escape. All those in Jerusalem felt that even walking in the streets was dangerous, both because of the dead corpses that fill them, and of the spears aimed at them by the Chaldeans; They felt that snares were set for them on all sides, that their end was near, and their days were over.

“Our pursuer were swifter than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains, and lay in wait for us in the wilderness” (19)

The talk here concerns the danger that dwelt on everyone, specially on king Zedekiah who assumed that he could flee away (Jeremiah 52: 6-9). But the

Chaldeans chased him in an unexpected way, like the eagles of the heavens that can catch its prey from high up.

- + In the Holy Book the word “eagle” sometimes, referring to flying swiftly above the lowly things, and seeking the high things, it refers to the keen concepts of the saints, or to the incarnate Lord. Yet It refers as well to envious spirits, corruptive to the souls;; that Jeremiah testifies to the spirits lying in wait, saying, “*Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens*” (19). It also symbolizes some earthly power; as according to the prophet Ezekiel: “*A great eagle with large wings and long pinions, full of feathers of various colors, came to Lebanon, and took from the cedars the highest branch. He cropped off the topmost young twig*” (Ezekiel 17: 3-4) ... By that eagle he actually refers to Nebuchadnezer, king of Babylon.

The word “eagle” also refers to the sharp understanding of the saints; Hence the same prophet (Ezekiel), describing the four Evangelists whom he saw, under the appearance of living creatures, he proclaimed to have seen them with the faces of man, lion, bull, and eagle. By the eagle-faced fourth living creature, he surely referred to St. John, who, in his flying high, he forsook the earth; and through his sharp understanding, he pierced inner secrets by seeing the Word ...

Let us meditate in where the eagle builds its nest up on the tops of the highest trees. The apostle Paul says: “*Our citizenship is in heaven*” (Philippians 3: 20); And, “*He raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 2: 6) ... As he who ascend a mountain would look down and see things down there, little and tiny; So it is with him who progresses to higher levels, strives to care for the high things; he, with the same effort, finding out that the glory of the present life is as good as nothing; he would soar above the earth.

(Pope Gregory (the Great))

+ I am not saying this on my own, but it was said by the Lord of all humanity, when He said to the prophet who interceded for them: *“Therefore, do not pray for these people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you. Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger”* (Jeremiah 7: 16-18).

“The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead”; Namely, no one will be innocent of sin. Striving hard for the sake of their sins, they will justly hear the voice of the Lord, saying: *“Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me. Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children”* (Hosea 4: 6).

The punishment always being according to the weight of the sin; the guilty should endure a punishment equal to their sins. There is no suffering greater and more severe for those who have fallen into sin, than to be denied the holy priesthood, and to lose the right to enjoy God’s reference to them; through which they used to have an honorable life, and the feeling of the lack of nothing, but had every gladness.

That is what happened to Israel, when they despised God’s love for mankind; opposed the law of God; arrogantly held fast to their slothfulness, perverted to unnatural desires, and were not ready to do anything beside their duties, according to the requirement of the law-Giver. Their own desires were their law..

The saints have truly grieved for those people because of their views and their heart imaginations, saying: *“Hear this word which I take up against you, this lamentation, O house of Israel; The virgin of Israel has fallen, she will rise no more”* (Amos 5: 1-2); And, *“Consider and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for skillful wailing women, that they may come. Let them make haste and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run with tears”* (Jeremiah 9: 17-18); because the herd of the Lord has been crushed.

The prophet Jeremiah saw them as though their punishment was at hand, saying: *“Our days were over, for our end had come; Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens”* (Lamentations 4: 18-19).

Such horror prevailed upon everything, upon the whole world defeated by the devil; As according to the prophet: *“Sheol has enlarged itself, and opened its mouth beyond measure”* (Isaiah 5: 14). Concerning the Greeks, because of their great foolishness, they fell into the snare of believing in a multitude of gods; and *“changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things”* (Romans 1: 23; Numbers 4: 15-19; Psalm 106: 20; Jeremiah 2: 11). Hastening in their journey to exceed the speed of the wind, they were actually hastening toward the inner pit of death.

(St. Cyril the Great)

“The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was caught in their pits; of whom we said, ‘Under his shadow, we shall live among the nations’” (20)

King Zedekiah assumed that being a descendant of David according to the flesh, will save him from the hands of the Chaldeans. And the hope of the people has been, even if it so happened that the city collapses, they will become, although servants to Nebuchadnezzar, yet will remain under the leadership of Zedekiah, who would pay him the due taxes, but remain practicing the law of his country. But now, having his eyes put out, he is no more fit to lead the land, and their hope to live under his shadow was utterly lost.

"The breath of our nostril", a Canaanite expression, used in describing kings.
"Caught in their pits", Also a Canaanite expression referring to accepting him as a king to protect them. It probably means that king Zedekiah, under whose shadow and government they hoped to live among the nations, has fallen captive, and all their hope was lost.

This verse also bears a prophecy about the Lord Christ, whom the Jews hoped to reign as a king to save them from the Roman occupation, and to restore to the literal Israel its glory; That was *"the breath of their nostrils"*, a longing they breathed every day and night; And when he rejected the earthly kingdom, they crucified Him, and *"He was caught in their pit"*. ... Concerning us; Our Christ has come, He who is our life; under the shadow of His cross we live among the nations, until the time comes when we encounter Him on a cloud of all nations and peoples.

+ The saying: *"I will return again to my place till they acknowledge their offense; Then they will seek My face; In their affliction, they will diligently seek Me"* (Hosea 5: 15), perfectly applies to the secret of Christ, and the salvation through Him, referring to being transformed toward God. For the face of God whom they will seek surely refers to the Son Himself, *"being the brightness of His glory (of the Father), and the express image of His Person"* (Hebrew 1: 3). The face of The Father is the Son, known through Him; for *"Who has seen the Son has seen the Father"* (John 14: 9). The

Psalmist calls Him when He cries out to the God of all, saying: *“Make Your face shine upon Your servant”* (Psalm 119: 135). For he is indeed one of those who were transformed according to the Son through the Holy Spirit: *“Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us”* (Psalm 4: 6); Or as said by the prophet Jeremiah: *“The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord (Christ)”* (Lamentation 4: 20).

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + The church, carrying so much grace, exhorts her children and her friends to come and partake of the sacraments, saying, *“Eat, O friends! Drink, Yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones”* (Songs 5: 1). What we eat and drink are made clear by the Holy Spirit in another situation, on the tongue of the prophet saying: *“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him* (Psalm 34: 8)*“.. In this sacrament Christ is found, for it is His body; it is therefore not a carnal food but spiritual; hence the apostle says about this kind of food: “Our fathers all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink”* (1 Corinthians 10: 3). The body of God, being a spiritual body, the body of Christ is the body of the divine Spirit; For the Spirit is Christ, as we read: *“The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord (Christ)”* (Lamentations 4: 20). And in the epistle of Peter we read: *“Christ died for us”*; And finally, as is said by the prophet :*“This bread strengthen man’s heart; and this wine makes his heart glad”* (Psalm 104: 15).

- + To know more about the nature of the good, Life is good for it perpetually and steadfastly gives all, their existence and being; and the source of life for all is Christ, about whom the prophet says: *“Under His shadow we shall live”* (Lamentations 4: 20). Now, *“Our life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory”* (Colossians 3: 4). Therefore, it is befitting of us not to fear death,

which is rest to the body and freedom to the soul ...” *We should not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul*” (Matthew 10: 28). For we do not fear him who takes our garment away, or robs our possessions, but cannot rob us of our souls. We are, therefore, souls; and our members are our garments. We should protect our garment from being torn or grow old (Hebrew 1: 11); but it is befitting of him who wears it to protect his soul first and guard it.

- + Why is it so strange to call the Father and the Son “Spirits”? ... Do we not read how the Lord in the gospel, says “*God is Spirit*” (John 4: 24)? ... And how the prophet Jeremiah also calls Christ “A Spirit”, saying: “*The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord*” (Lamentation 4: 20)? ...

Therefore, the Father and the Son are both Spirits; For whoever is not a created body is a Spirit. Yet, calling the Father a Spirit, and the Son a Spirit, does not imply that the Holy Spirit is dissolved in them, but He is distinguished from the Father and the Son.

(St. Ambrose)

- + By His first coming He fulfilled the law, “*having a shadow of the good things to come*” (Hebrew 10: 1). Through His glorious second coming, as well, the shadow of this coming will be fulfilled, and will reach perfection; And as said about Him by the prophet: “*The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord*” (Lamentations 4: 20), about whom we said: “*Under His shadow we live among the nations*”.

- + Our portion whose shadow protects us against the heat of temptations, is Christ and the Holy Spirit.

(The scholar Origen)

THE PUNISHMENT OF EDOM:

“Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom; You who dwell in the land of Uz! The cup shall also pass over to you, and you shall become drunk, and make yourself naked” (21)

After the loss of the vain hope, whether in the alliance with Egypt, or the fleeing away of the king, the descendant of David, Judah came to be in a sorrowful situation.

This is a prophecy about the exultation of Edom on the fall and the desolation of Jerusalem. But her rejoice is short-termed, as she will drink from the cup of God’s wrath on her. Jerusalem and Judah have come to be a laughing stock of Edom which represents all the nations surrounding Judah, who gloat on their fall; Edom, was always looked upon as a bitter enemy of Jerusalem, exulted on her misery and desolation.

As “Edom”, meaning (of blood), or (earthly), refers to the devil – the blood-shedder, who gives those whom he enslaves, the spirit of violence, of the preoccupation with the earthly things, and of the despite of the heavenlies; The daughter of Edom, here, refers to the kingdom of the devil, who opposes the spiritual daughter of Zion.

The time came for the kingdom of the devil to gloat and exult in the collapse of Jerusalem on the hands of Babylon. Yet, by drinking from the cup of God’s wrath”, *“She will become drunk, and make herself naked”*; namely, she will get confused in all her counsels against the people of God, and all her evil plots will be exposed.

Through the alliance of the Jewish leadership and people, with the devil, to crucify and murder of the Lord Christ, their plot turned into a collapse of the devil, and the loss of his dominion upon the believers.

“The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion. He will no longer send you into captivity”

“He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, He will uncover your sins” (22)

With the fulfillment of the goal of chastisement, Judah returned to the Lord; and the kingdom of Edom, and the gloating surrounding nations, were exposed and became naked.

The time came for the daughter of Zion, who came under the divine chastisement through the Babylonian captivity, to be liberated, and for Babylon to be punished for her violence, vain pride, and haughtiness even against God Himself.

As by the cross, the devil thought that he could get rid of the Lord Christ, the Savior of the world; By the cross itself the devil was judged, his kingdom collapsed, and its destiny came to be the everlasting perdition.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

(Chapter 4)

UNDER YOUR SHADOW, I WISHED TO LIVE

- + Allow me, O my Savior, to enjoy two of the prophet Jeremiah's Spirits;
To have in me fountains of bitter tears;
When I see Your holy city, Jerusalem,

Desolate, defiled, and lost her splendor.

+ Allow me to walk along with Your amazing prophet;
To meditate in my inner Jerusalem;
Not only to cry over it, but to desire to sit under the shadow of Your cross
And to breathe the new life, by and in, You;
My sin made me lose the heavenly senses;
And corrupted my longing toward the angelic life;
Made me count the fellowship with You an impossible thing;
Made my soul bow toward the dust;
To play in the mire of this world

+ I cry out to You like a suckling whose tongue clang to the roof of his
mouth;
My depths dried up for thirst;
The water of the whole world could nor quench my thirst;
For I have forsaken You, the Fountain of living water.

+ With my foolishness, I have often forsaken You, O the bread that comes
from heaven;
The deadly hunger killed me;
I acquire You, and have communion in Your body. The life-Giver;
Let Your Holy spirit work in me;
To find a unique bread in Your gospel;
You are my perpetual satisfaction;
Why should I seek food from someone else?!

+ My soul is embittered when I see the princes and nobles cast on the
streets of Jerusalem;
instead of enjoying their magnificent banquets, they beg for bread;
You have set me a king, O King of kings;

- And offered me the fellowship in the heavenly banquet;
Why then, should I disregard it;
And go down to beg what is for the world?!
- + Let my soul forsake wandering in the streets of this world;
Let me set forth by Your Holy Spirit, to make me sit in the heavenlies;
To enjoy the flood of Your grace, and the riches of Your exalted goods;
Behold, my sins deny me the enjoyment of Your splendor;
Let me encounter You, O the true Light;
To shine in me, O Sun of Righteousness.
- + Behold, the enemy does not cease to seduce me;
He set traps before me;
And hides snares on my way;
Lift me up, so that my feet would not stumble in the snares of this world;
Set me forth from glory to glory;
So as not to fall into the bondage of the devil;
Let me enjoy Your sweet yoke and Your light burden;
To be liberated from the yoke of sin and the bondage of the devil.
- + How could the enemy have peace of mind, when he sees me enjoy
sonhood to Your Father?
He aims his arrows toward me to make me fall in his narrow-mindedness;
To deny me the width of Your love;
To make me lose the love and compassion;
And to plant in me the seeds of hate and envy;
Let me sit underneath the shadow of Your cross;
To open my heart to all mankind, even to my oppressors.
- + The streets of Jerusalem are covered with blood because of her sins;
She lost her holiness, and came to be defiled in the strangers' eyes;

Who will set in my depths a holy temple for You?
Except Your fiery Holy Spirit?!
Who will set in me a holy sanctuary?
By which both the heavenly and earthly creatures be amazed?

+ King Zedekiah intended to flee away;
When the Chaldean army chased him like eagles;
They picked him up by their nails, and killed his sons before his eyes;
They put out his eyes, and put him in bronze chains;
To make him spend the rest of his life in prison;
Who will save me from those deadly eagles?
Except Your cross, the power of God for salvation?!

+ Hiding in You, O my divine Refuge;
All hosts of darkness will not be able to crawl to me;
No power can bring my talents to perdition;
Nor make me lose my insight; Your gift to me;
In Your shadow, I shall live, not only among the holy nations;
But also among the heavenly hosts;
In Your shadow, I shall enjoy the eternal heavenly glories;
I shall enjoy the glory of the children of the living God;
Glory be to You, O the Crucified Lover of mankind.

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CHAPTER 5

WAIT ON THE ETERNAL KING AND SUPPLICATE TO HIM

In the first lamentation, the author started describing what dwelt upon Judah and Jerusalem of desolation, as a natural fruit of their persistence on disobedience and sin. The second lamentation revealed God's anger against sin. In the third lamentation the door of hope was opened; and showed that God is good and faithful, and His faithfulness is new every morning, presenting healing to the wounded. The fourth lamentation came to reveal the possibility of falling even after the return to God; and compares between the situation when God made a covenant with His people, and how it came to be with the people's persistence on breaking the covenant. Now, the fifth lamentation ends the book by a prayer, in which the prophet proclaims that history will record what happened as a serious lesson to the peoples all over the world and in all eras, to return to God by repentance, through the support of God Himself.

This last lamentation is a poetic prayer, supplicating before Him to return and have compassion on His people, fallen under chastisement. Here, the prophet calls on us, together with the apostle James, saying: "*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray*" (James 5: 13); Let him pour his troubles before God, who alone, can heal his wounds of chastisements. It is an individual and a collective prayer at the same time; for the return to God is realized on both levels.

On our side, by praying, we proclaim our need for God, the Grantor of life, freedom, joy, spiritual authority, and eternal inheritance. And on God's side, He longs to bring us forth to a new beginning.

This lamentation is formed of 22 verses; yet it does not follow the alphabetical order, and is shorter than the previous lamentations, on account of that its verses are short duets

It starts by the description of the past glories of Jerusalem, then goes on to describe its present misery. And could be subdivided into:

- 1- Zion supplicates because of her sorrows, and how she became; and because of those who despise her (1- 18)
- 2- The supplication to God is based upon His absolute and unchangeable dominion, together with His goodness and faithfulness (19-22).

This prayer includes four main elements:

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1- Remember, O Lord, what has come upon us” | 1 - 15 |
| 2- Receive, O Lord, our confession | 16 - 18 |
| 3- Be glorified, O Lord, in us | 19 - 20 |
| 4- Renew, O Lord, our life | 21 – 22 |

1- REMEMBER, O LORD, WHAT HAS COME UPON US:

This prayer, or this cry-out comes from the heart of those who remained in Jerusalem after the destruction of the city and the temple, and the captivation of the elites, the great, the leaders, and the artisans.

Portraying the desolation that dwelt upon them, the prophet does not grumble against God, as much as he seeks His mercies. This lamentation carries a confession before Him, together with seeking the divine help; not for the sake of the material and mental losses that dwelt upon them, but for the sake of returning to Him; For the greatest danger for them is to be rejected by God;.... For how long? God is merciful!

- a- **Reproach came upon them** (1). That was the most horrible desolation, for in it, there was an insult to the people who always cherished their honor, being the people of God, His worship, and His Holiness. Now, they became in reproach before the pagan nations.
- b- **Loss of inheritance and houses** (2). After the divine promise to Abraham and the other fathers have been fulfilled, and they enjoyed the promised land, Now, it

- became desolate and taken over by foreigners. And what is more painful is that, their private homes were taken by force by the enemy, leaving them homeless.
- c- **Orphanage and widowhood** (3). After having God as their Father, and a Groom for the whole nation, He forsook them, to a condition of orphanage and widowhood.
 - d- **They pay for the water they drink, and the wood they themselves have gathered, and lost the right to use** (4).
 - e- **Suffering persecution** (5).
 - f- **Working to the account of foreigners for the sake of a piece of bread** (6).
 - g- **Bearing the fruit of their fathers' iniquities** (7).
 - h- **Falling into servitude under masters who, themselves, were originally servants** (8).
 - i- **Getting their bread at the risk of being killed by the sword** (9)
 - j- **A serious famine dwelt upon the land** (10).
 - k- **Ravishing women and maidens** (11).
 - l- **Insulting the princes, and showing no respect to the elders** (12).
 - m- **Humiliating the young men and boys** (13).
 - n- **The elders losing their role, and the young the labor of their hands** (14)
 - o- **Joy turned into mourning** (15).

a- Reproach came upon them:

"Remember, O Lord, what has come upon us. Look and behold our reproach" (1)

The soul of the prophet was utterly crushed together with the people remaining in the land. He could no more raise his head up on account of the great reproach that came upon them.

Although God who allows for the chastisement is everywhere, knows what come upon the believer, and perceives what go on in the depths of his heart; Yet He seeks from him to ask him to look and behold his reproach, not to humiliate him, but to confirm what God has granted him of the freedom of will. It is as though God asks his believer: "*Do you want to be made well?*" (John 5: 6). With His fatherhood, the Lord wishes to enter into an

open debate with us; He anticipates us to ask Him, to work in, by, and with us. Such work is the subject of His pleasure.

That was how the men of God always were; Feeling their great weakness, and their need for the divine intervention, did not cease to seek from the Lord, with the spirit of contrition together with hope, to remember their bitter condition and circumstances; as well as His past promises and conventions.

“Remember, O Lord, the reproach of Your servants – how I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples” (Psalm 89: 50).

“Lord, Remember David and all his afflictions” (Psalm 132: 1).

“Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, ‘Raze it, raze it’, to its very foundation” (Ps. 137: 7).

“My God, Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets who would make me afraid” (Nehemiah 6: 14).

“Remember, O Lord, Your covenant; Put words in my mouth; make steadfast, the counsel of my heart;; and Your house in Your sanctuary” (Judith 9: 18).

“Look and behold our reproach” In the time of affliction, we wish to see all our allies, relatives, and acquaintances, look at us to help us. Yet, unfortunately, often feeling that they do not care for us, the prophet says: *“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me”* (Psalm 27: 10). And even if someone looks at us with a compassionate eye, his possibilities may not make him able to help us, Or he may not perceive the truth of our needs; Hence the prophet seeks from the Lord, Himself, to remember them, and to look and behold their reproach.

When Peter denied the Lord Christ, *“The Lord turned and looked at him; and peter remembered the word of the Lord; Then Peter went out and wept bitterly”* (Luke 22: 61-62). The looks of the Lord Christ pierced Peter’s heart, and exhorted him to repent; something that no creature’s looks nor words could do.

b- Loss of inheritance and houses:

“Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, and our houses to foreigners” (2)

God who granted His believers the land of Canaan as inheritance (Joshua 24: 28; Deuteronomy 4: 21), allows for delivering them to the heathen Babylon, to chasten them.

When the believer does what is not befitting of him as a son of God, who bears inside him the kingdom of God, God allows for him to be chastened even by the devil himself, to make him return to God by repentance. That is what the apostle Paul meant when he sought putting away the one who intended to marry his father’s wife (1 Corinthians 5: 13). But once the sinner repented in intense grief, he hastens to seek from them to forgive and comfort him, lest such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow (2 Corinthians 2: 7)

c- Orphanage and widowhood:

“We have become orphans and waifs; Our mothers are like widows” (3)

When man refuses to let the Lord reign in his heart, his soul comes to be in orphanage and widowhood; as though she has lost her heavenly Father and Groom. It is befitting of the believer to keep himself attached to God, being his Father; and to the Savior, being the Groom of his soul,

- + It is befitting of the good Christian to praise his Father, and to do all goodness for the sake of His glory, according to the words of the blessed apostle: *“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Corinthians 10: 31).

(Maximus, bishop of Turin)

- + He who practices the righteousness, is born of God. Our mother is the church, whose Groom is our Lord Jesus Christ; and our statutes are the apostolic laws.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

- + That wife (the old Israel) was a denier of her man; Whereas the church, who, having got rid of the evils she received from our fathers, she persisted on embracing her Groom.

(St. John Chrysostom)

d- They pay for the water they drink, and the wood they themselves have gathered, and lost the right to use:

“We pay for the water we drink, and our wood comes at a price” (4)

Most of those remaining after the captivation, the poorest people of the land (2 kings 24: 14; 25: 12), worked in the fields, and were committed to pay very high taxes. The soul that refuse to attach to her heavenly Father, and the union with her Savior, her eternal Groom, sets forth into the barren wilderness of this world, not resorting to the Rock of ages, the Lord of glory Jesus Christ, who flows with the living free water, and dig for herself cistern, that cost her much, yet do not produce enough water to quench her thirst. The expense of such cisterns may be the whole time on earth, and even the loss of the eternal life.

When comfort goes away from man, he becomes thirsty for the water of the Holy Spirit, capable of satisfying the soul with the inner heavenly joy.

- + We perceive that we have set forth on a journey in a barren land ... What does this mean? ... We are in a wilderness. Why are we in a wilderness? ... Because in this world, man thirsts while on some way where there is no water. But, let us thirst to have water, For *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled”* (Matthew 5: 6).

Our thirst will be quenched from a rock in the barren land; and the Rock is Christ (1 Corinthians 10: 4). It was struck with the rod twice to flow with water; for there are two wooden boards in the cross.

(St. Augustine)

e- Suffering persecution:

“With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven; we are weary, we are given no rest” (5)

He talks here about those who were left behind in Judah under a heavy taxation, and likens them to slaves.

By the expression “*on our necks*”, he refers to the humiliation that dwells upon man in bondage. He who bows before the devil will feel the weight of his yoke, will labor with no rest; except by receiving instead, the light and sweet yoke of Christ.

- + According to Solomon the Sage, “*The end of sin is as bitter as wormwood, sharp as two-edged sword*” (Proverb 5: 4). Whereas the nature of righteousness, on the contrary, may at the beginning, taste bitter, while at the end it produces the fruits of virtue, sweeter than honey.

(The scholar Origen)

- + Let those set free from sin fear to get bound again by it; And let those bound by it pray to be liberated from it. “*His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his own sin*” (Proverbs 5: 22) ; And no one is loosed of his bonds outside the church.

(St. Augustine)

f- Working to the account of foreigners for the sake of a piece of bread:

“We have given our hand to the Egyptians, and the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread” (6)

Here, the prophet goes with his memory back to the past when their fathers fell into spiritual adultery, whether through forsaking the worship of the living God, and falling into idol-worship; or through considering the worship of the living God like that of the gods of the Egyptians and the Assyrians, and that through making alliances with Egypt and Assyria (Hosea 5: 13; 7: 11; 12: 1). Now the children are reaping the fruits of what their fathers have done; on account of that they walked on the same path of their fathers.

The yoke of sin brings on us hunger for bread; Whereas the sweet yoke of Christ liberates us from the captivity of the devil, and lifts us up to the paradisiacal life, full of joy and exultation; namely of the bread of angels.

g- Bearing the fruits of their fathers' iniquities:

“Our fathers sinned, and are no more, but we bear their iniquities” (7)

Having our hearts opened by the Holy Spirit of God, and enjoyed a kind of enlightenment, we confess together with many of the men of God and the prophets, saying: *“We have sinned and committed iniquity, we and the whole household of our fathers”* (Nehemiah 1; Daniel 9).

+ Nothing is heavier and exhausting like sin and rebellion.

(St. John Chrysostom)

h- Falling into servitude under masters who, themselves, were originally servants:

“Servants rule over us; There is none to deliver us from their hands” (8)

Instead of their kings, princes, and great leaders, they are now ruled by Babylonians, most of whom were from lowly ranks. No judgment nor law can deliver them from their oppression and violence, for they were looked upon as no more than captivated slaves.

He who rejects God's possession of his heart, will be ruled by servants, like the Babylonians, the Assyrians, and Pharaoh, etc. whose rule could be the worse; Yet the rule of the wicked devil, who provokes evil, rebellion, and disobedience of God, would be the most bitter of all.

If sin provides us first with pleasure, which makes us feel that without it, life would be tasteless; Yet, by falling into its snares, and being enslaved by it, pleasure would be transformed into bitterness; as revealed to us by St. John Chrysostom by giving the falling into evil desire as an example.

- + The harlot knows nothing about true love, but knows a lot about how to hunt for men. Her kiss is poison, and her mouth is deadly. Even if this does not appear at first, you are committed to avoid her, for she hides her real evil plans, and keeps them from being apparent at the beginning.

(St. John Chrysostom)

i- Getting their bread at the risk of being killed by the sword:

"We get our bread at the risk of our lives, because of the sword in the wilderness" (9)

Because of the intense hunger during the siege, some had to get out of their houses to seek their bread, and came to lose their life by the sword of the Chaldeans (the sword of the wilderness", ... What a horrible portrait for man who, because of some carnal pleasure, he delivers his own soul into the hand of the devil, to go into eternal perdition.

J- A serious famine came upon the land:

“Our skin is hot as an oven because of the fever of famine” (10)

k- Ravishing women and maidens:

“They ravished the women in Zion; the maidens in the cities of Judah” (11)

L- Insulting the princes and showing no respect to the elders:

“Princes were hung up by their hands, and elders were not respected” (12)

This refers to the many ways by which the elites were treated to make them reveal the secret places where they hid their treasures; And may probably also refer to hanging the corpses of the dead by their hands, as a kind of humiliation, even after their death.

M- Humiliating the young men and boys:

“Young men ground at the millstones; boys staggered under loads of wood” (13)

The use of young men to grind at millstones was a kind of humiliation at that time, probably that they were used instead of bulls in the large millstones, as it did happen with Samson to ridicule him (Judges 16: 21).. According to Ewald, that referred, as well to the treatment of the imprisoned king and his entourage..

N- The elders losing their role, and the young men the labor of their hands:

“The elders have ceased gathering at the gate, and the young men from their music” (14)

O- Joy turned into mourning:

“The joy of our hearts has ceased; our dance has turned into mourning:

They lost the joy and exultation, as well as their glory and splendor; for the glory of God has forsaken them.

- + The sinner will never find pleasure in the fruit of his sin; as said by the wisdom of God: *“Bread gained by deceit is sweet to man; but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel”* (Proverbs 20: 17); And, *“The lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword”* (Proverbs 5: 3, 4). He may eat and exult for some time, but he will eventually come to hate his own soul, once she is taken away from God.

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + As long as we are still in this world, our life is seen as though a way, at the end of which we are committed to have rest as a fruit of our labor, instead of having labor as the fruit of our rest (or slothfulness). We would rather work for a short time along the way, in order to reach after that the eternal joy, with the help of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

2- RECEIVE, O LORD, OUR CONFESSION:

“The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us for we have sinned” (16)

Although the prophet says that our sin goes back to past eras, saying, “*Our fathers sinned*” (7); Yet, he confesses that what happened is nothing but a fruit of what they all did as an extension of the work of their fathers, saying, “*Woe to us for we have sinned*”.

“Because of this, our heart is faint; Because of these things our eyes grow dim” (17)

“Because of Mount Zion which is desolate, with foxes walking about on it” (18)

A serious sign of God’s anger, was that the temple has become a refuge for the wild beasts. The priests remaining in Jerusalem refused to enter into the temple, to offer any sacrifice, because after its desolation it became so horribly defiled by the pagans, and dwelt by foxes and the animals of the wilderness. Their feeling of sin and defilement kept them from entering into the temple. Up to this very day, the conservative Orthodox Jews refuse to enter into the site of the temple, and stop at the wailing wall outside it.

Instead of the temple built on Mount Zion, as a reference to the divine presence among His people, the foxes that symbolize the demons are now walking and running in it.

3- BE GLORIFIED, O LORD IN US:

“You, O Lord, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation” (19)

If the foxes here refer the Babylonians, they may reign for a certain time; but what gives us comfort is that the Lord reigns in us forever (19). That is the climax of true comfort (Psalm 45: 6; 93: 2; 102: 12; 103: 19; Daniel 4: 3; 34, 35).

“Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long a time?” (20)

By saying: “*You forsake us for so long a time*”, we remember the horror felt by man when he hears the words said by the Lord to Moses and Aaron, when the people, not trusting in the promise of God, committed them to send spies into the promised land; for

which God punished them, for the 40 days spying, to remain 40 years in the maze of the wilderness; after which they were denied entering into the promised land, and fell dead in the wilderness. He punished them for every day of the forty days by one full year, after which they were denied the enjoyment of the divine promise (Numbers 14: 24).

- + If the sinner, to be punished for every day he sins, by one full year; I am afraid, concerning us, who never spend a single day without disobedience, generations and generations will not be enough to fulfill our punishment].

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

:

A long life will not fulfill the punishment for our sins, On the contrary, it will increase our worthiness of punishment. There is no salvation through the length of life, but only by the Savior alone who atones for our sins, being the One who bears the sins of the whole world.

St Augustine has an interpretation of this verse, saying: "*The carcasses of you who have murmured against shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above*" (Numbers 14: 29). He believes that the number 20 is the product of multiplying 5X4. The 5 refers to the 5 books of the law of Moses; and the 4 refers to the four gospels of the New Testament, It is as though man cannot, by himself, be saved, but will perish, whether he is one of the men of the Old Covenant, or the New one, unless the Savior Himself intervenes; for He is the One who redeems Israel of all their iniquities (Psalm 25: 22).

The prophet ends his lamentations, not by seeking the removal of affliction, but to be granted the repentance as a divine gift; to return to God in a true reconciliation, never again be angry with us.. We are in need of the help of God Himself in our repentance (Psalm 80: 3, 7, 19; Jeremiah 24: 7; 31: 18; John 6: 44, 65). The prophet feels that the forgiveness is a divine gift which we enjoy through His grace and mercy, and not through our own worthiness.

- + God would not threaten the non-repentant, if He does not intend to forgive the repentant. It would be doubtful if has not, in another situation, proclaimed the

flood of His mercies, saying: “He who falls will rise”; and confirmed that “*He desires mercy and not sacrifice*” (Matthew 9: 13; 12: 7). Heaven and earth rejoice in the repentance of men.

Look into yourself, O sinner, and let your heart be good.

Wherever repentance is, it will be a cause for joy.

(The scholar Tertullian)

+ As death is the just worthiness of the (dust) of the early man; Man is saved , not through his own worthiness, but for the sake of God’s mercies.

There is no unjustness in God, whether in His forgiveness or in His firmness to put punishment. For His free mercy is realized at the time when there should be a just punishment.

(St. Augustine)

4- RENEW, O LORD, OUR LIFE:

“Turn us back to you, O Lord, and we will be restored; Renew our days as of old” (21)

The words “*Turn us back*”, meaning (bring us back) is repeated three times; We read: “*Turn us back to you, O Lord, and we will be restored*” (21). With all the desolation and humiliation that the temple, those who worked in it, and the people of all categories, have reached, yet the door of repentance is still open, but not without the help of God Himself (Jeremiah 18: 31, 33-34; Ezekiel 36: 26-27).

The prophet proclaims his great longing for the New Covenant by saying: “*Renew our days*”. The faith of the church did not change all along the generations; yet it was presented in the first century in a way that suited that era. And once the heresies appeared, the church was committed to proclaim her unchangeable faith in a way that keeps her children safe against the heresies, and confronts the heretics. In every era, therefore, the church presents the treasures of her faith according to the needs of her people.

That is why, when the departed Abba Joannes, Metropolitan of the province of Gharbieh, Egypt, gave a speech about “The church renewal”, at the General Committee of the churches of the near East; Even though, not content with the expression itself, yet he proclaimed that by the renewal is meant the return to the early church before the dissension; not in the form, but in the Spirit, thought, and life, to receive her gospel the way it understood, lived, and interpreted in the east and west, before the dissension; To practice her worship by her godly submissive spirit; To walk according to her monastic eschatological Spirit, And to enjoy her features as a church open to the world, preaching through the true love. By that we can, together with the prophet Jeremiah say: “*Renew our days as of old*” (21); and with the bride of the Song, say: “*At our gates are pleasant fruits, all manner new and old, which I have laid up for you, my beloved*” (Song 7: 13); And can understand the evangelic words saying: “*Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old*” (Matthew 13: 52); and, “*No one having drunk old wine immediately desires new, for he says the old is better*” (Luke 5: 39).

+ By the coming of our Savior, a new world opened before us, for in Him, all things for us became new.

(St. Cyril the Great)

+ The renewal we go through in this life; moving from an earthly life according to the body, to a heavenly spiritual one, happens in us by the work of the Holy Spirit.

(St Basil the Great)

+ The renewal is actually the work of the Holy Trinity.... Even if we refer to each Person of the Trinity, a specific work that happens to us or to the creation, we have to believe that everything is from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

(St. Cyril of Alexandria)

- + He would not call her beautiful unless he sees her image renewed day after day.

(The scholar Origen)

- + He who altered the nature of the five loaves of bread to a multitude of loaves (Matthew 14); Who made the irrational donkey talk (Numbers 22); Who turned the harlot to chastity (John 8); Who made the burning nature of fire cool on those in the furnace (Daniel 3); And who, for the sake of Daniel appeased the nature of the vicious lions (Daniel 6); He who could do all that, can also change the soul which became barren and wild by sin, and turn her into His goodness, compassion, and peace, through the Spirit of the good holy promise.

(St. Maccari the Great)

Reading this book, the Jews used to repeat verse 21 many times, to end by it the whole book, so that everyone would be filled with the spirit of hope.

“Unless You have utterly rejected us, and are very angry with us” (22).

In admonition, Jeremiah cries out to God in the people's name, seeking from Him not to make the period of His anger much longer; for all were anticipating God's mercies and forgiveness.

- + Although the non-repentant sinners raise supplications, yet they are not recognized by God, who disregards them because of their sins.

(Pope Gregory (the Great))

The book of the lamentations presents to us an actual image of the condition of him who surrendered to sin; that the heaven of his soul got covered by dense dark clouds; Yet the Sun of Righteousness will remain working; will pierce by His rays the dark clouds, to provide the rainbow of the Grantor of the divine promises. *“To console those who mourn*

in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified” (Isaiah 61: 3).

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE LAMENTATIONS

(Chapter 5)

MAKE US REPENT

- + To whom shall we cry out and complain, because of the heavy burden of sin?
Who will turn us back to You, but the richness of Your grace?
You are the Way;
You came down to us, and carried us on Your shoulders;
To bring us back to Yourself.

- + Look and behold our reproach;
For our sins have taken the garment of light away from us;
Instead of Your image in us,
We are covered by nakedness, disgrace, and reproach
Cover us with Your grace,
Clothe us with Your righteousness
The enemy has forced himself into our house;
Has taken over our inheritance;
Has corrupted our depths.
By giving You the back,
We became orphans with no merciful father;
Our souls are widowed;
For they lost the heavenly Groom
Turn us back to You to practice our sonhood to Your Father;
And that our souls would exult in You, O heavenly Groom
Flowing on us with the water of Your Holy Spirit, amid the dryness of this world;

We shall not seek from the world its water which gives no satisfaction to our souls.

Nor purchase its wood;

But will be attached to the wood of the cross, the divine power of salvation;

Turn us back to You;

That the enemy would not dare to oppose us;

That we fear no labor;

For You are our comfort and our rest.

+ How could we beg from the world its mortal food?!

When You are the free bread coming down from heaven?!

Our fathers sinned to You;

And we consummated their walk;

Turn us back to You, to enjoy Your compassion and righteousness.

+ Sins have humiliated us;

To become slaves to a multitude of cruel masters;

Grant us the perfection of freedom;

Nobody can save us from their yoke but Your sweet yoke;

Servitude to You is the perfection of freedom;

O sweet, even in Your chastisements.

+ The fire of lust and sins burned even our skins;

While Your fire is a joyful heavenly light;

That kindles my heart with true love;

That turns me into an almost fiery minister;

+ The devil will never cease to oppress all;

He will not have mercy on a woman or maiden;

And will have no compassion on an elder whatever his age is;

And will never quit until he turns life into anxiety and bitterness;

Instead of the joy of the heavenly Spirit;

He brings forth the spirit of intense mourning.

+ You are the Fountain of every joy;
While he is the source of every bitterness;
Who will save us from him but You?!
You are the heavenly King of kings;
Who sits on Your heavenly throne;
To set out of every believer a king of authority;
Whose soul would never shake, however violent are the winds of temptations;
Have compassion on us, And do not treat us according to our sins;
Will you be angry with us forever?
You, who are longsuffering, merciful, and compassionate?!

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