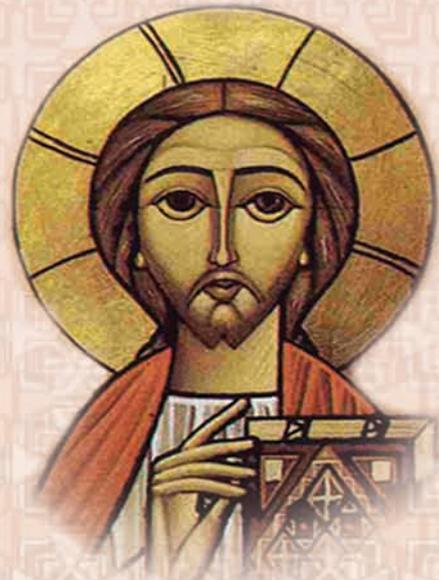


*A Patristic Commentary*



# THE BOOK OF Jeremiah

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# **THE CALL AND MISSION OF JEREMIAH**

## **JEREMIAH 1**

## CHAPTER 1

# THE CALL TO MINISTRY

The book opens by a little introduction that gives information about the prophet's homeland, and the dates of beginning and end of his ministry; things that we have already dealt with in the introduction. The whole first chapter came as an introduction to the book; like a practical agenda for the true minister; with the following items:

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>
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### INTRODUCTION:

Like many other prophetic books, this book presented concisely three things to understand it: certain personal information about the prophet; his divine mission; and the duration of his prophetic work; all of which we have already dealt with.

#### 1- Appreciating the divine call:

The book spoke of the call and mission of the prophet through two things: a dialogue between God and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1: 4-10; 17-19), and two visions (Jeremiah 11 - 16). The dialogue concentrated on the personal call to Jeremiah; and the two visions on his mission.

As God entered into the life of Jeremiah, and talked to him in an open dialogue, He opened his eyes to let him appreciate his identity, his mission in life, and his potentials in the Lord.

The prophet started talking about his relationship with God who sends him by saying: "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you*" (Jeremiah 1: 4, 5).

This amazing expression reveals the secret of deep love between God and man.

The prophet realized that the roots of his relationship with God extends to a time before he was formed in his mother's womb; He has been in God's mind, and the subject of His love; He represented an integral part of God's plan for salvation ! His call to prophetic work did not come out of his own self, nor according to human planning; but to a divine plan.

The prophet Jeremiah realized that his life was not haphazardly, a result of a physical relationship between his father and mother; but was greater than that. His birth was not the true start of his life; and his death would not be the end of it ! He is rather the product of the hand of God Himself!

Speaking of the false prophets, God says on Jeremiah's tongue: "*I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied*" (Jeremiah 23: 21).

To confirm his prophecy, Jeremiah reminded his readers that he is called directly by God, and sent by Him to the people, who have entered with Him into a divine

covenant; the same way with the prophet Amos and other prophets before him (Amos 7: 14 - 15; Isaiah 6: 1 - 13; Ezekiel 1: 4; 3: 15).

That was what the apostle Paul realized, when he was called to faith and to apostolic work, after having been formerly a persecutor of the Church of God (1 Timothy 1: 12, 13) trying to destroy it (Galatians 1: 13); He knew that he was separated from his mother's womb (Galatians 1: 15).

The expression "*formed you*" (Jeremiah 1: 5) is based on God's work as a "*Potter*" (Genesis 2: 7 - 8); while the Hebrew word for it means (created) (Amos 4: 13; Jeremiah 51: 19); Isaiah 45: 18; 49: 5; Psalm 59: 5)<sup>1</sup>.

God called His ministers and his shepherds by several ways: He called Moses by appearing to him as a burning bush, and commanded him to take off his shoes, to be able to listen to the holy message in awe and fear; then supported him by miracles and wonders (Exodus 3). When He called Isaiah and Ezekiel, he gave them visions pertaining to the glory of God and the heavenly creatures (Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1). Isaiah cried out, feeling the burden of his sins and those of the people; and Ezekiel fell on his face before the splendor of the glory of God. The call to Jeremiah came by a totally different way; He simply says: "***The word of the Lord came to me saying: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you ...***" (Jeremiah 1: 4). The encounter between God and Jeremiah was a natural one, as though they were close friends; and as though that message came as a result of an old relationship, whose roots extended to the days before Jeremiah was formed in his mother's womb.

God's choice of Jeremiah and his sanctification while still in his mother's womb, shook the hearts of several of the fathers of the Church; **St. Ambrose** saw in it a living portrait of God's work in us for the sake of sanctifying us; He grants the sanctification as a free gift, with no favor on our part; and goes on to say: [Keep the gifts of God; as whatever no one teaches you, God grants you and inspires to you]<sup>2</sup>. **St. Jerome** believes that God, through His previous knowledge, realizing what Jeremiah would be, chose him for prophetic work (Roman 8: 29): [God knowing the future beforehand sanctified Jeremiah before he was born]<sup>3</sup>. And **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** believes that God, who shaped Jeremiah in the womb, and prepared him for the prophetic work, would not be embarrassed to take for Himself a body in the womb: [If God was not embarrassed to have something to do with forming a man, would He be embarrassed to acquire for Himself a holy body as a curtain for His deity?!]<sup>4</sup>.

**The scholar Origen** believes that what came in the previous phrase, is a gift that was never enjoyed by any other prophet, before or after Jeremiah; even Abraham the father of fathers, who also counted as a prophet, did not enjoy it; He says:

[What did the word of God tell Jeremiah? It told him something very special and different from anything said to other prophets.

Abraham was called a prophet in the verse: "***He is a prophet; he will pray for you***" (Genesis 20: 7); Yet God did not say to him: "*Before I formed you in the womb I know you; Before you were born I sanctified you*" (Jeremiah 1: 4, 5). Abraham was sanctified after a while, when he departed from his land, his family, and his father's

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<sup>1</sup> *The Jerome Biblical Comm.*, 1970, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> *Exposition on the Christian faith.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ep. 24: 2.*

<sup>4</sup> *Lect. 12: 26.*

house; and Isaac, although born by a promise; yet those words were not addressed to him. Jeremiah was granted a special gift; namely, “*Before I formed you in the womb I know you; Before you were born I sanctified you*”<sup>1</sup>.]

The secret of this privilege is that Jeremiah is a symbol of the Lord Christ, on whom this phrase applies in a unique awesome concept; As, since eternity and before His incarnation, the Father knows His only-begotten Son,; and He sanctified Him; namely, He entrusted Him with the salvation of man. Although the Lord Christ was in no need of an outer sanctification; as He is the Holy One; yet He, in obedience, presented Himself to the Father to carry out our salvation; That is why He probably says :”*For their sake I sanctify Myself, that they may also be sanctified by the truth*” (John 17: 19). **The scholar Origen** says: [God sanctifies for Himself certain persons; He does not wait for them to be born to sanctify them (dedicate them to His work); but he does that before they come out of the womb ...This applies to the Savior who was sanctified, not only before coming out of the womb, but also before that (before incarnation); While, as far as Jeremiah is concerned, He was sanctified him before he comes out of the womb]<sup>2</sup>.

Some people may probably say: Why does He says: “*Before I formed you in the womb I know you*”? Doesn’t God know every man before He forms him in the womb ? We answer this by saying, that knowledge here is not a mere mental realization, but it is the knowledge of friendship and of love between God and His believers. The Hebrew word (*yada*) most probably bears a personal pledge; the one between man and his wife (Genesis 4: 1); and the way it is said: “*You only, have I known of all the families of the earth*” (Amos 3: 2); That is why it made God very sad to see that “*There is no knowledge of God in the land*” (Hosea 4: 1); counting the knowledge of God better than burnt offerings (Hosea 6: 6)<sup>3</sup>. And as **the scholar Origen** says: [The sinner is not known to God ...God does not know those who do iniquities; as they are not worthy of His knowledge]<sup>4</sup>.

[God knows the righteous who are worthy of His knowledge; as “*The Lord knows those who are His*” (2 Timothy 2: 19). On the contrary, He does not know those unworthy of Him; saying: “*I never knew you*” (Matthew 7: 23).

We human, according to our measures, see something as worthy to know, while some other things, we do not want even to hear about, nor to know of their existence. The same way with the Lord of all; He wished to know Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but they were unworthy of His knowledge; While Moses and all the other prophets like him, were worthy of God’s knowledge.

Therefore, practice the works of love more often, so that God may start to know you. If God knew Jeremiah before He formed him in his mother’s womb; yet He starts to know some others, as they reach the age of thirty or forty.

God sanctifies some people for Himself; but in Jeremiah’s case, He did not wait for his birth to sanctify him; He was already sanctified before he comes out of the womb]<sup>5</sup>.

God knew (*yada*) Jeremiah, sanctified (*hiqdis*) him, designated or set (*ntn*) him for prophetic ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom. 1: 5.

<sup>2</sup> In Jer. Hom. 1: 11.

<sup>3</sup> J. A. Thompson, p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> In Jer. Hom. 1:8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 1: 10.

Beside knowledge; namely, God's personal care for him, and his bond with him, we see sanctification to mean dedicating someone or something, and separating him or it, so as not to be used for anything else, except to God's account; the way God separated the tribe of Levi to minister to Him, His temple, the Sabbaths, the feasts, the first fruits, the tithes, etc.; Whoever use them for something other than the ministry of God, is counted as blasphemous.

God set him a prophet for nations, and not for just one nation; as he speaks in the name of God, the God of all nations, who desires to gather all people together to enjoy him.

## **2- Making his heart spacious with love:**

God proclaims to Jeremiah the range of his ministry, saying to him:

***"I ordained you a prophet to the nations"*** (Jeremiah 1: 5)

If Jeremiah started his ministry within the boundaries of his village that rejected him, yet his heart was spacious enough to accommodate all Judah, that also persisted on rejecting him; God even confirms that He has ordained him *"a prophet to the nations"*; as though He intended to bring him out of the narrow circle, to make him moan with every man, and for his heart to find no comfort before all find comfort in the Lord.

Was Jeremiah called to minister to Judah, or as a prophet to the nations? Literally, he prophesied about certain other nations, like Babylon (Jeremiah 25: 12 - 14; Jeremiah 50); Egypt (Jeremiah 49), Philistia (Jeremiah 47); Moab (Jeremiah 48); Emmon (Jeremiah 49); Edom (Jeremiah 49); and Damascus -Aram (Jeremiah 49) ... It is as though God intended for Jeremiah to have a role, not only in the life of Judah, but in the history of other nations as well<sup>1</sup>. When man realizes the mission, for the sake of which God created him, he would have a vital role in the life of others some way or another. As to the spiritual aspect, Jeremiah was referring to the Lord Christ, who, while he was the only-begotten Son, He came as a prophet (Jeremiah 18: 15), to draw the hearts of nations to the heavenly life. So are His ministers connected to Him; they bear the same Spirit; yearning in the Spirit of compassionate fatherhood to bring everyone, if possible, to the kingdom of God. And as St. John Chrysostom says: [A priest is charged with the whole world; and has become a father of all people]<sup>2</sup>.

## **3- Humility of the soul:**

Having been called to ministry, he did not reject it right away, but excused himself for his personal weakness, saying:

***"Then said I: 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a (child)'. But the Lord said to me: 'Do not say I am a (child), for you shall go to all to whom I send you; and whatever I command you, you shall speak'"*** (Jeremiah 1: 6, 7)

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** has a spiritual interpretation of the excuse of some, and the acceptance of others of the ministry, saying: [It is good for man to feel apprehension toward God's call for some time, like what the great prophet Moses did (Exodus 4: 10), and Jeremiah after him. But then, we accept the call well prepared, like what Aaron did (Exodus 4: 27), and Isaiah (Isaiah 1: 6). That should occur through a feeling of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Collegerille Bible Comm., p. 458.*

<sup>2</sup> *De Sacerdotis 6: 4.*

responsibility; the reluctance should be out of a feeling of need for strength; and the acceptance would be on account of the capability of Him who called us] <sup>1</sup>.

In a talk by **father Gregory the great**, about shepherding, he presents to us Isaiah as an example of him who, through love, accepts ministry; and Jeremiah as an example of him who, through love, excuse himself of it, saying: [In these two examples, we see two portraits, although apparently different, yet they both come from the same fountain of love. There are two commandments of love: to love God, and to love a fellow man. While Isaiah yearned to benefit his fellowmen through the work of preaching, Jeremiah, on the other hand, because he coveted to attach himself persistently to the love of his Creator through a life of meditation, he excused himself of being sent to preach] <sup>2</sup>.

Anyway, Jeremiah was not reluctant to minister out of a cold heart, nor of fear of responsibility, but for the sake of a yearning to have the chance of retreat with God, even for a short time; beside some feeling of weakness before that great responsibility. This feeling came to confirm his worthiness for the work of God assigned to him; as God works in the humble. **St. Ambrose** says: [God chose Moses and Jeremiah to proclaim the word of God through humility, to be able to realize that work by grace] <sup>3</sup>. And the apostle Paul says: “*God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world, and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him*” (1 Corinthians 27 - 29). Therefore the secret of strength is not in the chosen vessel, but in the One who works in him; That is why the Lord confirms to Jeremiah in more than one occasion, saying: “*I am with you*” (Jeremiah 1: 8, 9).

**The scholar Origen**<sup>4</sup> wonders how can the words of Jeremiah “*I cannot speak for I am a (child)*” , apply to the Savior, being a symbol of Him ? He answers that, in the Old Testament, it was clearly said about the Savior: “*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel ... Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings*” (Isaiah 7: 14, 16); It came that “*He made Himself of no reputation*” (Philippians 2: 7); and in the gospel, that “*Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men*” (Luke 2: 52). As He made Himself of no reputation, through descending to earth, He regained what He has forsaken by His own will; So it is not strange for Him to increase in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and men; and by that the words saying “*Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good*” are realized; beside other texts by Isaiah. **The scholar Origen** says that the Savior, the Word of God who Knows everything; in His humility, chose to incarnate and become a child, to learn, not the great things but the little things; not the language of God, which is His own language, but that of men, to become like us in every respect. The incarnation was real in every sense of the word; He carried our manhood, and walked gradually with us in every thing as one of us, in order to raise us up to His eternal glory.

We come back to the scripture text, where God answers Jeremiah, saying: “*Do not say, ‘I am a child’*” - the word ‘child’ is used for a newly born infant, and until he

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<sup>1</sup> Oration 1: 1.

<sup>2</sup> Pastoral Rule 1: 7.

<sup>3</sup> Duties of Clergy 1: 17.

<sup>4</sup> In Jer. Hom. 1:7.

reaches the age of marriage<sup>1</sup>; So if Jeremiah age-wise is considered young, Yet in God's eyes, he is spiritually mature. And as the scholar Origen says: [We can be little children according to our inner man, even if we are elders according to the body; and we can be little children according to our outer man, yet we are mature according to the inner man. As such was Jeremiah; He had the grace of God, while he was a little child according to the body; That is why God said to him, "*Do not say, 'I am a child'*" . the sign that he is a completely mature man, and not a child, is what came after this, "*For you shall go to all to whom I send you. And wherever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces*" (Jeremiah 1: 7, 8)<sup>2</sup>].

Jeremiah excused himself from ministry, as the prophet Moses did before him (Exodus 3). Some scholar believed that Jeremiah is a new 'Moses' set by God for the people, concerning:

- a- Their initial excuse from ministry on account of their human inadequacy!
- b-They ued to intercede on behalf of the people of God with bitterness and great love.
- c-They were both granted a promise that God will put his words in their mouths (Jeremiah 1: 8; Exodus 3: 12).
- d- Moses intended to save the people from the servitude of Pharaoh; And Jeremiah intended to save the people from the servitude of sin, that led them into the Babylonian captivity.
- e- Moses presented to the people the covenant of God with them; And Jeremiah proclaimed a new covenant with God (Jeremiah 31: 31 - 34).

#### **4- Courage of the minister:**

Humility does mean meekness; but a feeling of human weakness and inadequacy , together with faith in the mighty capabilities of God that support the minister; he works with courage, with no fear. The shepherd, and every true believer, who holds fast to the firm word of God that proclaims the truth and exposes the vain, would be a subject of wrath of those dwelling in the darkness; and sometimes even of those working in the same vineyard. That is why, in the book of 'Ben Sirakh' it came, [If you intend to minister to God, prepare yourself for temptation].

**The scholar Origen** says: [God knows the risks that surround those who are committed to spread His word. When they reproach, they are hated by people; and when they blame they are persecuted. All prophets bear these sufferings; as "*A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house*" (Matthew 13: 57).Knowing these risks that chase those whom He sends, God says:

***"Do not be afraid of their faces ; For I am with you to deliver you'; says the Lord"*** (Jeremiah 1: 8)

Jeremiah was cast into the dungeon (Jeremiah 38: 6); to subsist on a daily ration of one piece of bread and few drops of water. It was said to the Jews: Who of the prophets have not been persecuted by your fathers?! ; And it was also said: "*All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*" (2 Timothy 3: 12). Those persecuted, readily bear their sufferings; hoping to be persecuted for no fault on their part, rather than for some fault they did. If it happens that we are persecuted for the sake

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<sup>1</sup> R. Davidson: *Jermiah, vol 1, Philadelphia, 1983 p. 12.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Jer. Hom. 1:13.*

of truth; we shall be worthy to hear this blessing: *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (Matthew 5: 11-12) <sup>1</sup>

God confirmed to Jeremiah: *“Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you”* (Jeremiah 1: 8). These are words coming from the divine mouth, by which God commits Himself by His will, full of love toward His faithful ministers; namely, to grant them His “divine company” (Exodus 4: 12; Joshua 1: 5, 9; Judges 6: 16; 1 Samuel 3: 19; 16: 13; Matthew 28: 20). The ministry is hard and even impossible by human arm; as it is in essence, a ministry of raising from the dead; not the death of the body, but that of the soul; something done by the Savior Creator through His ministers who lean on Him.

He confirms to him, saying: *“I made you this day, a fortified city and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you”, says the Lord, to deliver you”* (Jeremiah 1: 18, 19). God did not promise to free him of troubles, but promised to support him during temptations and afflictions; not just to keep him from falling; but to make of him a fortified city that embraces many; an iron pillar on which the temple of the Lord is built; and bronze walls, behind which many would hide in Jesus Christ. He grants His ministers His word as a hammer that breaks the rock; and give them His name to destroy the evil surrounding them (Psalm 118: 11).

God does not spare His saints, being exposed to temptations; but grants them the strength to conquer; And as **St. Beamon** says: [A saint does not differ from a sinner in being exposed to temptations; but differ from him in that he could never be conquered even by fierce attacks; while the other would be overcome by the least temptation] <sup>2</sup>.

It is amazing that God does not only comfort His ministers by saying, that He would keep temptations away from them, but also threatens them, in case they forsake the spirit of courage, that they would not only be defeated, but He would terrify them before their enemies; saying: *“Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them”* (Jeremiah 1: 17). As though the secret of their success is their courage in the Lord.

Finally, as Jeremiah excused himself from ministry on account of his weakness, God provoked him to have faith in Him, to live with the spirit of courage; granting him the ability of conquest and victory over all difficulties; but without committing him to ministry by force. Concerning this, **St. John Chrysostom** speaks about those working in God’s vine; saying:

[Behold, It is within their authority to talk or to abstain from talking; They are not committed to work by force ... Jonah fled (Jonah 1: 3); Ezekiel delayed, and Jeremiah excused himself; and yet God did not force them, nor commit them to work, but counseled, guided, and threatened them ... and provoked their minds to appreciate the necessary issues] <sup>3</sup>.

## **5- Hiding in the word of God:**

*“Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: Behold I have put My word in your mouth”* (Jeremiah 1: 9)

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *St. Cassian: Confer. 18: 13.*

<sup>3</sup> *In 1 Cor. Hom 19.*

The minister of God completely hides in the word of God, and hides it in his depths to live by it; He swallows the word, and the word swallows him.

As much as the minister decorates the word, it comes out of his mouth distorted and weak and with no authority; and as much as he is dissolved in it, it comes out in its simplicity, capable of penetrating the depths of the heart, to give peace, spirit, and life! That is why the Church in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, prays to God to grant His ministers, to utter only the word of truth; namely, the ‘word of God’; and for the Pope and for those who work with him, to rightly define the word of truth; and to “grant them unto Your holy Church”.

In the apostolic ordainments it came: [Take care of the words, O Bishop; if you are able to interpret the Scripture, do so. Fulfill your flock, water them with the light of the law; and make them rich with the abundance of your teachings] <sup>1</sup>. And **St. Eronimus** says: [The words of the priest have to conform to the readings of the bible. Do not be just eloquent, nor speak many words with no goal; but go deep in God’s secrets] <sup>2</sup>. He also says: [Keep on reading the holy books; Do not let the Holy Book leave your hand; Learn what you are going to teach others<sup>3</sup>. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [What distinguishes the teacher is his ability to teach the word] <sup>4</sup>.

The secret of strength in the life of Jeremiah is therefore, that God put forth His hand and touched his mouth, and put His words in his mouth. **The scholar Origen** has a beautiful comment on this divine action; saying: [Notice the difference between Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah says: “*Woe to me, I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty*” (Isaiah 6: 5). Following this confession ... God did not put forth His hand to touch him; but one of the Seraphim flew to him, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar; and he touched his mouth with it, and said, “*Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged*” (Isaiah 6: 6, 7). Jeremiah, on the other hand, was sanctified while still in his mother’s womb; God did not send to him tongs or a live coal from the altar; as he had nothing that warrants fire; but put forth his very hand and touched him] <sup>5</sup>.

So Jeremiah enjoyed God’s sanctification while still in his mother’s womb; beside God’s touching his mouth to put the word inside him ... As to the work of the divine word in the life of God’s men, this is: “***See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant***” (Jeremiah 1: 10)

The apostle Paul says: “*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword*” (Hebrew 4: 12); It separates good from evil, discerns between the kingdom of the devil and that of God; roots out the seeds of sin and plants the seeds of goodness; destroys the corruption, and builds the righteousness of Christ in us. God was frank with His prophet Jeremiah from the start; He taught him to hold fast to the word of God that destroys and builds; that roots out and plants! A difficult and firm

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<sup>1</sup> النسقولية، باب 3.

<sup>2</sup> الحب الرعوي: 1965، ص 687.

<sup>3</sup> المرجع السابق، ص 700، 701.

<sup>4</sup> المرجع السابق، ص 689.

<sup>5</sup> In Jer. Hom. 1:14.

message that could arouse peoples and kingdoms against him. He did not send him to expound soft and soothing words; but to destroy, to root out; and at the same time to build and to plant.

**St. Augustine** says: [This is the voice of the truth. This is what the physicians do when they cut to cure, and wound to heal]<sup>1</sup>. **St. John Cassian** says in one of his homilies: [The practical perfection is based on a double aspect: The first is to recognize of the nature of all the iniquities and the way to cure them; and the second is to discover the ordainment of virtues ... We should know how to do our best to achieve a double goal: crushing wickedness and gaining virtue]<sup>2</sup>.

This is the double work of God's work in the inner life of man, and in the life of the Church and the world; Yet it is one integral work; as there is no building without demolition; and no planting without rooting out ! This is also the work of the Holy Spirit in Baptism; in which the old man and his wicked works are destroyed, to let the baptized enjoy the new man, who has the image of his Creator. And as **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says to those newly baptized: [You were dying, and at the same moment you were born; The water of salvation was for you, a tomb and mother at the same time]<sup>3</sup>. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says: [Sin is burial in the water ... while Baptism is a gaining of of the Spirit]<sup>4</sup>. And **St. Jerome** says: [Whoever gains Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, becomes a temple of the Lord; The old structure is destroyed, and a new sanctuary is set for the Holy Trinity]<sup>5</sup>.

**The scholar Origen** believes that this work of destroying and building is done by the Lord Christ Himself; saying:

[Where were the peoples that Jeremiah rooted out?

And where were the kingdoms that he destroyed?

As it is clearly written: "*I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out and pull down*"

What authority did Jeremiah have to destroy and to throw down; on the assumption that these words are addressed to him?

Were there a multitude of men who were built by Jeremiah, to be told: "*To build*"?

Jeremiah proclaims that he has not done any goodness; So how could he be assigned to build and to plant?

Whereas if these words are applied to the Savior, the interpreter wouldn't be any more worried or confused; as Jeremiah is here a symbol of the Savior]<sup>6</sup>.

If the work of the word is to root out and to set peoples and kingdoms ... Then what are these kingdoms, symbolically?

**The scholar Origen** says:

[Who among men, who has taken words from God, and acquired the grace of the divine words, would root out and destroy peoples and kingdoms?

When we say: Who has taken words from God, to root out and destroy peoples and kingdoms; I wish that you do not take the two words 'peoples' and 'kingdoms'

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 51: 11.

<sup>2</sup> Conf. 14: 3.

<sup>3</sup> Cat. Myst. 2: 4.

<sup>4</sup> Oratione 40: 4.

<sup>5</sup> Adv. Luc. F. 6.

<sup>6</sup> In Jer. Hom. 1:6.

literally; but consider that sin reigns in human souls, according to the words of the apostle: *“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body”* (Romans 6: 12); And as there are new kinds of sins; we shall understand that peoples and kingdoms, symbolically mean the horrible sins existing in human souls, that are rooted out and destroyed through the words of God given to Jeremiah and the other prophets] <sup>1</sup>.

There are several kingdoms as well as peoples: There are the kingdoms and the peoples of abomination, that lay the works of evil in the life of every one, as for example greed and theft ... If you look at the sinners one by one, you will understand the peoples or the subjects of the kingdom ... The word of God is sent to the peoples and the kingdoms for rooting out and planting; What are they rooting out? The Savior taught us that *“Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted”* (Matthew 15: 13). In the souls, there are things that are not planted by the heavenly Father, like *“evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnessing, blasphemies”* (Matthew 15: 19). Do you wish to know who planted them? Hear what is said: *“An enemy has done this”* (Matthew 13: 28); has *“sowed tares among the wheat”* (Matthew 13: 25). God cares for His seeds; and so does Satan; So if we leave the field void, Satan would sow seeds that are not planted by the heavenly Father. So you should never leave the field void for Satan, but for the Lord, to joyfully sow His seeds in our souls. Do not assume that Jeremiah has got a painful ministry, as he came to reign on peoples and kingdoms; The good God, by His word uprooted every thing shameful; separated the kingdom of the enemy from the heavenly kingdom; and uprooted the adversary peoples (the sins) from among the people of God] <sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, by the word of God, the minister of God uproots the foreign plants, for the Father to present His own plant in the soul; destroys the kingdom of sin, for the Lord to set His heavenly kingdom; and throws away the foreign and unclean peoples (the abominations), for God to be glorified in His people.

For the word of God to build His kingdom in us, we should let it destroy in us what is foreign to it: and completely root them up, burn them with fire, or throw them away, in order not to disrupt the new building and the new plant. That is why the stones of the leper’s house, were cast into an unclean place outside the city (Leviticus 14: 40) ... It was not sufficient to take the stones down, but they should not be left to occupy a holy space, or to get their uncleanness into others; They should be cast away... So we should not leave in ourselves any trace of sin, but we should burn the foreign plant as though by fire; according to the divine words: *“First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them”* (Matthew 13: 30).

**The scholar Origen** says:

[*“To root out and to pull down”*

There is a building from Satan and a building from God.

The building *“on the sand”* is from Satan, as it is not set upon some solid base; whereas the building set *“on the rock”* is from God; To the believers it is said: *“You are God’s field ; You are God’s building”* (1 Corinthians 3: 9).

Therefore the words of God are directed to peoples and to kingdoms *“To root out and to pull down; to destroy and to throw down”*. If we root out, yet we do not destroy the rooted out thing; it would stay; and if we destroy without throwing away the

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom. 1:7.

<sup>2</sup> In Jer. Hom. 1:14.

foundation stones, what is destroyed would stay. Of the signs of God's goodness and His love, is that after He roots out, He destroys, and after He destroys something He throws it away.

Concerning the things rooted out and destroyed; Read carefully the way they are got rid of: "*Burn the hay with fire; and bind the tares in bundles and cast them in fire*".

Do you wish also to know the destiny of the corrupt building after it is pulled down? The building that is pulled down because of leprosy, is to be turned into dust and cast out in an unclean place outside the city; so that not a single stone is left.

The corrupt things should not stay, but should be destroyed to avoid reusing them to build new buildings set by Satan. The corrupt plants should be rooted out, in order not to let Satan find in them other seeds to sow anew. They should be destroyed to give Satan no chance to sow the tares with the wheat] <sup>1</sup>.

Things do not stop at destroying and rooting out every trace of evil; but this should be followed by positive work; namely, building the new kingdom and presenting the heavenly plantation. The scholar Origen says: [The words of God do not stop at rooting out, destroying, and pulling down ... How can I benefit from rooting out the shameful things, and pulling down every thing evil, if they are not replaced by plants of higher goodness and by building of virtues ? ! That is why the word of God cares, out of necessity, for rooting out, destroying, and throwing away; then after that for building and planting.. He says "*I kill and I make alive*" (Deuteronomy 32: 39). He did not say: I make alive then I kill; as it is impossible for what God makes alive to be uprooted by another ... What doe He Kill? He kills 'Saul' the persecutor, to let him live as 'Paul' the apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1: 1)! ... Therefore God starts by the more grieving, but necessary things: He says, "I kill"; then follows it by "I make alive"; He wounds then He heals (Deuteronomy 32: 39); for "whom God loves, He will chasten"! ... Evil should be completely uprooted, and the building of abomination should be completely destroyed and cast away from our souls, in order that the word of God in us should be built and sown.

There is no other way to understand this phrase: "*I have put My words in your mouth*" Why? "*To root out and pull down; to destroy and throw down*". Yes, they are words that uproots peoples; words that pull down kingdoms; yet, not the material kingdoms of this world. When you understand the meanings of these words in an exalted way: what is meant by the words that uproot and those that pull down, you will be granted strength from God, according to what is written: "God grants great and powerful word to preachers", a power to uproot what they encounter, of disbelief, hypocrisy or abomination; to destroy and pull down the idols within the heart; so that the destroyed idol would be replaced by a temple for the Lord, where the glory of God would be seen and apparent; No more tares would be sown; but there would be the paradise of God in the temple of God, in Christ Jesus] <sup>2</sup>.

For this divine word, by which He pulls down and builds, roots out and plants, God Himself cares; being His word; The prophet says: "***Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Jeremiah, what do you see ?' And I said, 'I see a branch of an almond tree'. Then the Lord said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am (watching to see that My word is fulfilled)'***" (Jeremiah 1: 11, 12)

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom. 1: 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 1: 16.

Jeremiah saw ‘a branch of an almond tree’ (Shaqed), which is the same branch produced by the dry rod of Aaron; that, although it did not carry life in itself, yet it produced the living word of God, to fulfill His believers. **The scholar Origen** believes that the branch of the almond tree, refers to the necessity to know the word of God by its literal, behavioral, and spiritual aspects. The almond fruit has a bitter outer sheath that falls by itself when ripe. This is the literal or the apparent interpretation, which is bitter and deadly, that hindered the literal Jews and also the Gnostics from reaching the true knowledge<sup>1</sup>. It also has a thick inner sheath, that we break before we eat the fruit inside it; It refers to the behavioral or moral interpretation, through which the believer enters into a condition of contrition through a life of monastic-like behavior, of fasts, prostrations, etc.; and finally the inner fruit itself which is sweet and fulfilling, that refers to the hidden spiritual interpretation, a fulfilling nourishment for the believer, not only in the present life, but in the eternal one as well<sup>2</sup>.

It is to be noticed that the “branch of the almond tree”, means in Hebrew, (the watchful); on account that the almond trees flower early during the month of February before other trees. The tree becomes full of white flowers, to proclaim that the winter season is about to come to an end, and the spring is about to begin. In other words, the time of death (for the plant) is over, to be replaced by life anew ! The almond tree witnesses to God’s exalted work, that brings life out of death ! It is as though this tree stays “watchful” over all the other trees; referring to God who is watchful over His word, to see that it works in the life of people; saying: **“I am watching to see My word is fulfilled” (Jeremiah 1: 11)**

God confirms to Jeremiah the fault adopted by many, in his days and in all days, even in our day, who say that *“The Lord will not do well, nor will He do evil”* (Zephaniah 1: 12); meaning, that God is helpless, and does nothing!

From another aspect, it is as though God is providing Jeremiah with comfort and at the same time with a warning: Even if the work seems difficult and bitter, yet it is God Himself who works; so it is unfitting for him to fear or be troubled; At the same time, as God is committed to watch over His word to see it fulfilled; if the prophet does not work by the divine word, God will work through someone else.

If God Himself fulfills His word, and is watchful over it, yet He requests from us as well to be watchful, lest evil would approach us. That is why after seeing the branch of almond tree, he saw the boiling pot, facing away from the north, from where evil is coming.

**“And the word of God came to me the second time, saying, ‘What do you see ?’, And I said, I see a boiling pot, and it is facing away from the north’. Then the Lord said to me, ‘Out of the north calamity shall break forth on all the inhabitants of the land’ “(Jeremiah 1: 11 - 14)**

The **scholar Origen** believes that looking toward the north refers to watching against the evil approaching the human soul to destroy its salvation; saying: {The lampstand should be placed in the south, to face the north; as when the light is on; namely, for the heart to be watchful, it is committed to look toward the north, to watch for whoever comes from the north. And as the prophet says: *“I see a boiling pot, and it is*

<sup>1</sup> كلمة "غنوسي" مأخوذة عن اليونانية، وتغني "صاحب معرفة"، لتعرف على البدع الغنوسية راجع كتابنا: آباء مدرسة الإسكندرية الأولون، 1980.

<sup>2</sup> المرجع السابق، ص 160.

*facing away from the north; as out of the north calamity shall break forth on all the inhabitants of the land” (Jeremiah 1: 14).*

With watchfulness, trembling, and zeal, a believer should always contemplate in the tricks of Satan, and watch for, from where the temptation may come, and when the enemy may attack; The apostle Peter says: “*Your adversary the devil walks like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5: 8) <sup>1</sup>].

## **6- Faithfulness in work:**

If the prophet was set as a steward on behalf of God; saying to him, “*I have this day set you over the nations ...*”; He is committed to work with the Spirit of the One who has set him: to root out and plant; to pull down and build. The wage of this work is affliction and bitterness, from the world toward those who work.

God presented to the prophet Jeremiah another vision; a boiling pot facing away from the north; opening with evil toward the people; and interpreted it as such: “*For behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north’, says the Lord; ‘They shall come and each one will set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around, and against all the cities of Judah. I will utter My judgments against them concerning all their wickedness, because they have forsaken Me, burned incense to other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands’ “ (Jeremiah 1: 15, 16).* By this vision, God clarified to Jeremiah every thing in advance, presented to His steward His divine plan very clearly, to spare him getting confused when he sees the affliction that awaits Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah. That is what the Lord Christ did with His disciples, when He told them all the afflictions that await them, to be ready for them. From another aspect, He clarified that He is going to use every way; and will even use the wicked nations to chasten His people.

As most of the troubles that confronted Israel came from the north (from the Assyrians, the Aramites, and the Babylonians); the north became a symbol of the forces of darkness<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Jerome** sees in this vision, that God delivers His children temporarily to Satan for the sake of chastisement, so that when they taste its bitterness, they would return to their heavenly Father. The same way the apostle Paul did with him who committed evil with his father’s wife; saying: “*As absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present ...In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ...Deliver such one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*” (1 Corinthians 5: 5). **St. Jerome** sees that the pot contains meat (Ezekiel 24: 10, 11); in order that sinners would have compassion instead of cruelty, through the action of fire; would have fleshy hearts instead of stony ones<sup>3</sup>.

It is to be noticed that the first vision was joyful; with the word of God presented as almond, fulfilling and delicious; and the second one was bitter and painful with firm chastisement. It is as though God wishes to present His sweet word to every soul to enjoy and get fulfilled; and in case it is rejected, He will allow for chastisement, that may seem cruel and bitter. In all this, God seeks our love and our eternal glory.

Faithfulness does not stop at just delivering the message, but extends to touching the inner life; The faithfulness of the steward is proclaimed through his inner holiness,

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<sup>1</sup> In Exod. Hom. 9: 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Thompson, p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. Hom 34.

fitting for him as a steward of the Holy One. That is why He says to him: ***“Therefore prepare (girdle) yourself and arise, and speak to them all that I commanded you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them”*** (Jeremiah 1: 17)

He commanded him to girdle himself and arise; as when he girdles himself, he becomes as though he takes part in the feast of Passover (Exodus 12: 11); and crosses over together with the people, from the servitude of sin to enter into the higher Jerusalem. As to saying, “arise”; this confirms that he would not be able to consummate his preaching mission, and to testify to the word, unless he rises together with our Lord Jesus Christ; to make his brothers arise with him.

In our interpretation of the book of Exodus, we saw that to girdle oneself refers to entering into a life of bringing to death the body lusts; for the sake of setting the soul free by the Holy Spirit to the heavenliest.

Therefore a sign of faithfulness in the preaching work, is to be girdled; namely, to enter into death together with Christ, and to enjoy the power of His resurrection. Then the minister can talk with every thing God commanded him; the word comes out living and active; working first in him, then the others would receive it as life. By this as well, he would not get terrified before the faces of people; for when he is dead and rose, would he be any more terrified ? ! By this God makes him a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land (Jeremiah 1: 18); he would be the secret of blessing for many; would support and help them; and would become, by Christ ‘the Rock’, another rock for others; and by that he would hear the divine voice:

***“They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you’, says the Lord, ‘to deliver you’”*** (Jeremiah 1: 19)

**AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH (Chapter 1)**  
**I AM NOT ONE OF THE BILLIONS**

- ❖ I often looked to myself,  
And thought that I am just one of billions of creatures;  
But I discovered that You have created me and known me personally!  
You sanctified me and set me to consummate your message!
- ❖ The world may despise me; and I may despise myself;  
But you will never disregard me ... I am your beloved!
- ❖ You separated me while in my mother's womb;  
You said to me: 'You are mine; and I am yours!  
I chose you to work for me; And I sanctify Myself for you'  
Indeed, How amazing You are, O You the desire of my heart!
- ❖ I am too small to consummate Your divine message;  
I confess to you that I am just a child!  
But by You, I can do every thing, O My strength!
- ❖ Stretch Your hand, and touch my lips;  
I shall not utter a vain word;  
But will carry your fiery words;  
I will flow, with your grace, fountains of living waters!
- ❖ Your word is like a branch of almond tree!  
Break the outer sheath, the deadly letter;  
And grant me the spiritual fruit of almond, a fulfillment to my soul !
- ❖ Your word is fulfilling and joyous; Yet, at the same time, serious and firm !  
Grant me Your love, and nail in me Your fear!  
By Your word, I realize who I am, O the beloved of my soul!  
Teach me, train me, chasten me, but do not be offended by me!
- ❖ Grant me to hide in You; Grant me to take refuge in You  
So as to enjoy the living fruit inside me!  
I wish I acquire You; together with all mankind;  
As You are, for me and for them, All in All!

***THE FIRST SECTION***

**PROPHECIES PRIOR TO THE FALL OF  
JERUSALEM  
'WITH A PROMISE TO BRING THEM BACK  
FROM CAPTIVITY'**

(Jeremiah 2 to 33)

## CHAPTERS 2 to 6

### ADMONITION IN THE HEARING OF JERUSALEM

The five chapters (2 to 6) include two messages that cover the spiritual and moral corruption reached by Jerusalem, together with a threat of painful punishment to befall them on the hands of a distant people that would come from the north, of unknown tongue<sup>1</sup>.

Some scholars believe<sup>2</sup> that Jeremiah speaks about two calamities:

**The first calamity:** has already befallen them while he was speaking; that was caused by their wicked ways; saying to them: “*Your ways and your doings have procured these things for you. This is your wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reaches to your heart*” (Jeremiah 4: 18). Because of them, the earth got back to its condition before the creation of the world; when “*it was without form and void; and the heavens, they had no light*” (Jeremiah 4: 23; Genesis 1: 2).

**The second calamity:** had not occurred yet; and could have been avoided by repentance and return to God; saying: “*Will he remain angry forever? Will he keep it to the end?*” (Jeremiah 3: 5)

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<sup>1</sup> يرى بعض الدارسين أن النبي يتحدث في هذه الأصحاحات عن غزو السكثيين ليهودا، بينما يرى آخرون أنه يتحدث عن الكلدانيين.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Davidson: *Jeremiah, vol 1, Philadelphia 1983, 21-23.*

## CHAPTER 2

# THE SECRET WHY GOD BRINGS CHARGES AGAINST JERUSALEM

God as a Philanthropist intended at the beginning of his admonition, to let Jeremiah speak in the hearing of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 1); as though He does not want to disgrace her, nor to punish her, but would rather reform her through a secret dialogue as far as possible.

By saying, “*Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem*” (Jeremiah 2: 2); He may have intended to let him approach her with the daring of friendship and love; which does not mean to cover up her sin, but to expose to her the cause of her corruption. God is the jealous Bridegroom, who still seeks His bride who deserted Him; gently trying to draw her back to Him; yet He would not have her if she persists on her sins.

Some scholars believe that God in this chapter is bringing charges of marital infidelity against His beloved bride; not to seek her conviction, but to expose her weakness to get her back to Him.

It is said, that the word of God comforts the weary, and troubles the comfortable<sup>1</sup>; It presents comfort to the souls that confess its sins; and troubles those who justify themselves ... Here, the word presents trouble to a people who found comfort in sin and who justified themselves.

In this chapter He speaks of the following:

<b>1- God remembers Jerusalem’s previous virtues</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
<b>2- What she is to Him</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3- He has not forsaken her</b>	<b>4 - 8</b>
<b>4- She has not even followed the example of the Gentiles</b>	<b>9 - 11</b>
<b>5- The secret of her weakness</b>	<b>12 - 28</b>
<b>6- The fruits of her sins</b>	<b>29 – 37</b>

### 1- God remembers Jerusalem’s previous virtues:

*“Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, I remember you; the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown’”* (Jeremiah 2: 2)

The Lord started His admonition with a word of encouragement, proclaiming to Jerusalem that He would never forget the day He betrothed her when she was still in her youth in Egypt; how she accepted Him as her Bridegroom; and followed Him in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. He proclaims that He is indebted to her for that love; although He has been the One to hear her crying out of bondage, cared for her, presented Himself a cloud to protect her during the heat of the day, and a pillar of light to lead her by night; He sent to her the heavenly Manna, to let her in need of no other food, and provided her with a rock of water which followed her wherever she went; He has been for her the Guardian, the Physician, and the Architect ... to fulfill all her needs.

God remembers all the sweet moments, when she listened to the voice of the prophet Moses, and trusted the divine promises; how she was like a bride in her

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<sup>1</sup> John Guest: *The Communicator's Commentary, Jeremiah*, p. 35.

'honeymoon' with her Bridegroom; and did not remember how she was hard-hearted and quick to murmur!

How amazing God is in His love; He never forgets a cup of cool water, that man offers in His name; As for his sins, he wishes to forget. He loves man; yet He confronts him with all his weaknesses, without hurting his feelings, and without disregarding his good points, present or past. He is a God who projects the virtues of man, and concentrates on them, to support him and to let him not despair. This is the spirit that was followed by the apostle Paul, who in his epistles, starts by encouraging, and projecting the virtues of those he is writing to, before mentioning their problems and exposing their weaknesses ... Indeed, a word of encouragement would support a feeble soul !

I say, In the midst of your weaknesses and falls; lovingly, the Lord says to you: "*I remember the kindness of your youth; the love of your betrothal*" ... He never forgets the work of love, even after long years!

## **2- What she is to Him:**

***"Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of His harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them", declares the Lord' (Jeremiah 2: 3)***

If the Lord , in this book, speaks to Israel very frankly, enters with him in a bitter admonition, and proclaims His chastisement firmly; yet all that was not for the sake of revenge or disgrace, but on account of the fact that He is "*holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of His harvest*". What do these mean?

The High priest used to enter into the Most Holy Place once a year, after offering sacrifices for his own sins and those of the people; Then he puts a plate of pure gold on his forehead, with the words "*Holiness to the Lord*" engraved on it (Exodus 28: 36 -38), as a symbol of the Lord Christ, the First fruit and the subject of the Father's pleasure; who enters into it on behalf of all humanity; or in other words, carrying humanity in Himself as His holy body; to become holy in Him and accepted by His Father.

In what the High Priest used to do in the old days, he was representing the Lord Messiah who says: "*For their sake I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth*" (John 17: 19).

If Israel was "*Holiness to the Lord*" ; He was counted like a High Priest compared to other people and nations; Only to them was given the right to enjoy His Holies. That is why He request from them sanctification, not as a law to which they are bound, and not as a commitment under which they are burdened, but as a privilege, to which it is fitting to hold fast.

According to the law, it is also a commitment to present the firstfruits to the Lord, so that all the harvest would be sanctified. So that was, how the Lord used to see His people: as the firstfruits of all peoples; as the portion of the Lord; on account of whom, the whole world is blessed ... That is why He bitterly admonishes them; ... they are His!

Being "*Holiness to the Lord, and firstfruits of His harvest*" , Israel was His possession, the firstfruits of the whole world, holy to Him alone; Whoever devour him is devouring the portion of the Lord, and would be found guilty toward the holies of God; That is why He says "*disaster will overtake them*". Even if God delivers Israel to the Chaldeans for chastisement; In case those treat them fiercely, they are counted as doing wrong to the portion of God Himself!

How amazing it is !; While God allows for our chastisement or affliction; He still see us as His Holiness and the firstfruits of His harvest; Whoever dares to stretch his hand toward us, is doing wrong to the portion of the Lord Himself. That is why the Lord confirms: *“When they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak”* (Matthew 10: 19)

God probably intended to admonish them gently, for sometimes they joined forces with Pharaoh against the Chaldeans, or the other way round; So it is as though he was saying to them: ‘You do not belong to Yourself; you belong to Me; you are My holiness and My firstfruits; So why do you lean on somebody else?!, and deliver yourself as free fruits to pagan nations.

Anyhow, God used to remind His people, every now and then, of what they are to Him; to keep them from doubting His fatherly care, His love and watchfulness; like His saying:

***“Is Israel a servant? Is he a home-born slave (Jeremiah 2: 14)***

He is not a slave; *“He is my Son; My firstborn”* (Exodus 4: 22); for whom God wants true freedom from the captivity of sin. Yet Israel considered the commitments of son hood as a yoke, out of which he wants to be set free; So God admonishes him, saying:

***“Long ago you broke off yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, I will not serve you” (Jeremiah 2: 20)***

Although Israel misunderstood his position as a son to God; yet God remains on His faithfulness toward His son; He wants him to be a mature and blessed son who bears the image of his Father; So He keeps on straightening his path and mending his twists. If he is not his son, he would not bother to chasten him; But for the sake of son hood, he brings him into the pains of chastisement, to make him worthy of his inheritance.

Once more God reminds His people that they are His vine that He Himself planted (Jeremiah 2: 21); and keeps on calling them *“My people”* (Jeremiah 11, 13, 32, 33); and, *“The adorned virgin; and the bride who does not forget her attire”* (Jeremiah 2: 32) ... By all ways, He keeps on revealing to her where she stands to Him, to let her trust in Him, and accept His directions and chastisements.

### **3- He has nor forsaken her:**

In order to expose the weakness of His people, God does not only reveal their past virtues to encourage them; and proclaim their position to Him by every mean: as holiness to the Lord, His first fruits, His son, His people, His bride, etc.; but He also reminds His people of His divine works and care for them along the long history; saying:

***“What injustice have your fathers found in Me; That they have gone far from Me; Have followed (vain) idols, and became (vain) idolaters themselves? Neither did they say, ‘Where is the Lord, Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, through a land of desert and pits, through a land of drought and the shadow of death, through a land that no one crossed, and where no one dwelt ? I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness” (Jeremiah 2: 5 - 7)***

In admonition, He presents a clear and quick account of His care for His people; as He brought them out of the land of bondage and servitude; accompanied them along their way in the wilderness, where there was nothing but the shadow of death; where no one ever crossed ... and brought them to the land of promise, the bountiful country.

If that was His works in the Old Testament; What would we say, we, who enjoy salvation of such magnitude?!

He did not bring us out of a land of bondage, but of the kingdom of the devil; granting us the authority to renounce Satan and all his works, and trample on all his potentials under our feet.

He did not bring us through a barren wilderness; but accompanied us all the days of our sojourn, where the war with sin and iniquity never comes to an end; granted us the strength to escape the snares put for us along the way by our enemy.

He brought us to a land full of thorns; but bore those thorns on His forehead, to keep them from wounding our feet.

He brought us to a way never crossed by man; as he trod for and with us the winepress; saying, *“I have trodden the winepress alone; And from the peoples no one was with Me”* (Isaiah 63: 3); and, *“And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me”* (John 16: 32).

He brought us into a bountiful land to feed on its fruits and goodness. This bountiful land is the Lord Christ Himself who descended to us, and opened up His side for us to enter into Him, and to get fulfilled with His love; to say: *“I sat down in His shade with great delight; And His fruit was sweet to my taste”; “His mouth is most sweet; Yes He is altogether lovely”* (Songs 2: 3; 5: 16). So he set forth with us from the land of the shadow of death, to His body, the life-giver, to live by and with Him forever.

Probably the most serious in this verse is His saying: ***“They followed (vain) idols; and became (vain) idolaters themselves” (Jeremiah 2: 5)***. This admonition bears two meanings:

(1) Whoever follows the truth and unite with it, would enjoy the divine nature, and would bear the truth; While he who follows the vain corruption, and unite with it, would have his life turn to corruption, and would become himself vain. It is as though, whoever unite with God, would be divine; And he who unite with sin, would bear its corrupt nature.

(2) The word ‘vain’ in Hebrew (**habel**) is very close to the word ‘Baal’, the god of fertility for the Canaanites; They worship it hoping to enjoy the abundant fruit; but to find out that their life became barren, and vain. The sin, actually, offers nothing but mirage that leads travelers to their death by thirst!

It is probably because of this, that the Lord Christ offered us His body and blood, as spiritual food to carry in us; in order to bear the new risen life; the fruitful heavenly life, instead of the corruption that came to dwell in us ! Our Christ became a true food; for us to become “truth”, instead of feeding on the vain to become “vain”!

If God in His love, did not forsake His people, but cared for them; yet the priests and ministers, unfortunately were slothful in their caring for the vine of God; They neither tasted God’s love, nor were capable to convey it to His people; They went astray to the worship of Baal, and drew the people’s hearts after them: ***“The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord ?’, And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me” (Jeremiah 2: 8)***

Here, He spoke of three categories at least:

a- **The priests** :The Jewish priests assumed that their main job is just to offer sacrifices; and disregarded their foremost mission, namely, the reconciliation with God, the Savior of Mankind. They practiced the rites of sacrifices with great accuracy; yet

they did not raise their hearts, nor those of the people toward God their Savior. That is why He admonishes them saying: “*The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord?’* “. They should have also delivered the law, a generation after another; and should have revealed the knowledge, will, and plan of God! They could not do that, because they themselves did not know God in their life and works!

b- **The rulers:** namely the governors and kings: Who are considered as the representatives of the Lord, to care for the people, especially the poor and needy, as it came in psalm 72; to consummate His counsel; Yet they selfishly disobeyed Him...

c- **The false prophets:** They did not testify to the Lord; but prophesied on account of Baal.

So the priests disregarded the Lord, whom they should have proclaimed, and with whom they should have interceded; The eyes of those who handle the law were closed shut to knowledge; The rulers resorted to disobedience instead of leading the people to obedience. And the false prophets prophesied to Baal instead of reproaching the people for their diversion! All the spiritual leaderships have gone astray and walked along a path contrary to their missions. Sin entered into the life of man, to deprive him of the balance of all the leaderships of his inner soul.

The priests here refer to the energies of love, that should draw man to God, to seek Him with his whole heart; yet evil corrupted the heart to turn it into wicked lusts; to seek the earthly instead of the heavenly; and the love of the body instead of that of God.

Those who handle the law, refer to the mind, who should be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to recognize the secrets of God; Yet evil corrupts the mind, to transform it from the light of knowledge to the darkness of ignorance, to become like blinds leading the blind; and both will fall into a ditch (Matthew 15: 14).

The rulers refer to the senses that should lead man to the salvation pastures of God, to touch, taste, and smell the new life; Yet when they get diverted, the senses turn into a burden on the soul, drawing it to the earth and to the body!

Whereas the prophets refer to the inner insight, where, it is fitting for the heart, in purity, to behold God and to seek the eternities; Losing its purity, the heart becomes blind; and God turns for him into a shadow or just a product of imagination. So man, rejecting the care of God, surrenders all his inner energies and his centers of power; to seek, not what would be for his benefit, but what would be for his harm !

#### **4- They have not even followed the example of the Gentiles:**

Having rejected Him as her Bridegroom, He brought her over, from the marital home which she defiled, to the court of justice; saying:

“*Therefore I will yet bring charges against you’, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 2: 9)*

The whole chapter is like a memorandum of a plea raised on account of marital treason.

“*Cross over to the coasts of Kittim and look; send to Kedar and observe closely. Has a nation ever changed its gods? Which are not gods at all. But My people have exchanged their glory for worthless idols” (Jeremiah 2: 10, 11)*

Kittim is the island of Crete; and Kedar is in the eastern desert. It is as though God requests from His people to look east and west, to see for themselves how the pagan nations hold fast to their gods; that are not gods at all; while His people disregard their

relationship to the true God; exchange his glory with vain and worthless things; and resort to idol worship. Thus the children of the Kingdom, may get ashamed, when they see others strive in what would not benefit them; although they do not enjoy what they personally enjoy, of the promises, gifts, and exalted divine graces!

He admonishes and rebukes His people; Yet, as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Even in His reproach, for the sake of edifying His people] <sup>1</sup>, He compares Himself to the pagan idols, to reveal the fact that His people do not dignify Him, the way the pagans dignify the idol.

## **5- The secret of her weakness:**

After such a gentle admonition, in which He proclaimed that, although he was not slothful to care for them or for their fathers, yet they exchanged Him for foreign gods; He revealed to them the following aspects of their weakness:

### **(1) She had forsaken the spring of life, and leaned upon herself:**

God asks heaven to testify against His people, who exchanged his glory for vain things; rejected God, the spring of living water, and dug for themselves cisterns, the work of their own hands:

*“Be appalled at this, O heaven, and shudder with horror’, declares the Lord, ‘My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water”* (Jeremiah 2: 12, 13)

It is difficult to imagine that someone would prefer the water of cisterns to that of springs; Yet for the sake of his own body comfort, he chooses to drink the water of cisterns which he dug for himself in his own backyard, instead of walking a long distances to drink of the water of a natural spring. This is typical of man who prefers the wide and easy way over the narrow way of the cross. From another aspect, the prophet clarifies that whoever seeks the water of cisterns which he dug for himself, instead of that of a natural spring, will eventually end up empty-handed; as those cisterns will eventually crack up, and their water will disappear through the rocks.

God admonishes His people, saying: You have rejected me, and rejected my work in your spirits and bodies, to do according to your own wishes and wills; you have turned physical and carnal, instead of spiritual. We know that the apostle Paul classified humans into three categories: spirituals, physical, and carnal.

The spiritual man is he, who receives the Spirit of God in him, the spring of living water; working in both his spirit and body; sanctifying him completely.

The physical man is he, who rejects the living spring, to dig for himself self cisterns, the work of his own will, and walks according to the pride of his heart, even in spiritual things.

The carnal man; rejecting the work of the Spirit in him, he surrenders to his body lusts.

God probably said the word ‘cisterns’ twice; because they dug for themselves, cisterns according to their own will; and dug as well cisterns according to their body lusts; Thus they fell into both pride and lusts.

The Church fathers believe that man drinks from the spring of living water, granted by the Lord Christ to His holy Church. So whoever forsakes her and receives

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<sup>1</sup> In Til. Hom. 3.

(baptism) from another or teachings foreign to her, drinks from cisterns that cannot hold water! **St. Erinaos** says: [Those who do not have the fellowship with Him, do not enjoy nourishment from the mother's breast, nor pure spring water from the body of Christ; but dig for themselves broken cisterns, and drink water polluted with mud; They flee away from the Church's faith, so as not to be judged; and despise the Spirit, so as not to learn] <sup>1</sup>. **St. Cyprian** says: [Although there is no other baptism; as it is but one Baptism; yet they assume they are capable of baptizing others. They forsook the spring of life; and yet they promise to offer the grace of the living water. People for them, do not get cleansed (from sin), but they just get together. Such birth (baptism) does not beget children for God, but for the devil. Their birth is vain, and so are the promises they receive] <sup>2</sup>. And, [Once more, the Holy Book warns, saying: Keep yourself away from the foreign water, and do not drink from a foreign spring (Proverb 9: 19 - the Septuagint version) ... How can someone who is outside the Church, and not capable of uprooting his own sins, be able to baptize another, and to grant him the remission of his sins] <sup>3</sup>.

So, the Lord presented to His Church, Himself as the spring of living water; outside which man does not enjoy except broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the living Spring that flows over the Church, to bring forth from her children living springs; and to turn them into rivers; That is why the Psalmist says: "*The rivers clap their hands*" (Psalm 98: 8); and **St. Jerome** comments, saying: [The rivers draw their water from the Spring of Jesus ... He is the Spring and we are the rivers - if we are worthy to be so called. Jesus is the Spring, and the saints are rivers; Those less holy are canals; and still others are just drains that dry up with temptation] <sup>4</sup>.

**St. Ambrose** believes that, when the Jews rejected the Lord Christ, the living Spring, became like the fleece put by Gideon; that was alone dry, while on all the surrounding ground there was dew (Judges 6: 39); The Jews fell into renouncing faith in Christ; while the Gentiles believed in Him <sup>5</sup>.

From another aspect, **St. Ambrose** believes that God, is both the "*consuming fire*" (Deuteronomy 4: 24), and the Spring of living water: [Our Lord Jesus Christ, like fire, ignites the hearts of those who hear him; and he is also the spring of living water who grants coolness. He "*came to send fire on the earth*" (Luke 12: 49); and to grant living water to the thirsty (John 7: 37, 38) <sup>6</sup>.

❖ The book of Jeremiah testifies to God the Father as 'A Spring': "*They have forsaken Me, the Spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water*" (Jeremiah 2: 13).. And in another location we read that they have forsaken the Son, the Spring of wisdom ; And concerning the Holy Spirit, we read: "*Whoever drinks the water I give him ...It will become in him a spring of water willing up to eternal life*" (John 4: 14).

(**St. Jerome**) <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 3: 24: 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Unuty of the Church*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ep 69: 1 (Oxford 70:1)*.

<sup>4</sup> *On Ps. Hom.* 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit*, 1: 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Duties of the Clergy*, 3: 18.

<sup>7</sup> *In Ps. Hom.*, 92.

- ❖ God truly is the Spring; I wish that he, who longs for this spring, would not let anything in him be the possession of the body; but would let his soul flow with love everywhere.

(St. Amrose) <sup>1</sup>

- ❖ Many are thirsty: Both the righteous and the sinners. The first thirst for the truth; and the others for the pleasures. The righteous thirst for God; And the sinners for the gold.

(Caesarius, Bishop of Arl) <sup>2</sup>

- ❖ To that spring, Rebecca came with her pitcher to fill it with water. The Book says: *“She went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up”* (Genesis 24: 16). So did the Church (or the soul); She went down to the well of wisdom to fill her pitcher, and to raise the teachings of pure wisdom, that the Jews did not wish to raise from the flowing spring. Listen to Him - the Spring Himself saying: *“They have forsaken Me, the Spring of living water”* (Jeremiah 2: 13).

The souls of the prophets thirst for this spring; David says: *“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God”* (Psalm 42: 2); to quench his thirst with the riches of God’s knowledge; and to wash away the blood of foolishness by the waters of the spiritual rivers.

(St, Ambrose) <sup>3</sup>

- ❖ The believer does not take a drop from the knowledge of the devil: astrology, magic, etc. and other knowledge that oppose deity in God; for he has his own wells; He drinks from the wells of Israel, the wells of salvation, and not from the well of Sihon. He would not forsake the spring of life and drink from the broken cisterns (Jeremiah 2: 13); He proclaims that he walks along the royal way; the way of Him who says: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life”* (John 14: 6). It is the royal way about which the prophet says: *“Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king’s Son”* (Psalm 72: 1). It is fitting for us to walk along the way of the King, without turning into any other way; neither into a field, nor to the works and thoughts of the devil.

(The scholar Origen) <sup>4</sup>

In the days of Jeremiah, the people forsook God the Spring of living water, and dug for themselves cisterns that hold no water. The Pharaoh of Egypt pretended to be a friend, and proclaimed his desire to protect them against Assyria; Yet, in truth, he intended to snatch and swallow them himself; like his master the devil, who presents ways that seem as though for salvation, while they are leading to perdition. That is why He says: *“The young lions roared at him and growled; they made his land waste; His cities are burned without inhabitant. Also the people of Noph and Taphanhes, have broken the crown of your head”* (Jeremiah 2: 15, 16)

‘Noph’ and ‘Taphhanhes’ were two Egyptian cities that represented the whole kingdom of Pharaoh; on which Israel leaned to rescue them against Assyria; but they roared at him like young lions, and made his land waste and without inhabitants.

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<sup>1</sup> Ambrose: *Flight from the word*, 9: 52.

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon 103: 2.*

<sup>3</sup> *Isaac or the soul, 1:1.*

<sup>4</sup> *In Num. hom. 12.*

Saying the word ‘cistern’ twice, may also refer to their faltering between leaning upon the king of Babylon against the Pharaoh of Egypt, and the other way round; wishing for human protection; for quenching their thirst from the water of the Nile or of the Euphrates, instead of the living water of God; He says: **“Have you not brought this on yourself, In that you have forsaken the Lord your God, when He led you in the way? And now why take the road to Egypt to drink the waters of Sihor? Or why take the road to Assyria, to drink the waters of the River? (Jeremiah 2: 17, 18)**

By the water of ‘Sihor’ he means that of the Nile; As it came in Isaiah: *“On the great waters came the grain of the Shihor; the harvest of the Nile was the revenue of Tyre, and she became the marketplace of the nations”* (Isaiah 23: 3)

**St. Jerome**<sup>1</sup> believes that the word ‘Sihor’ means the muddy River; The River Nile was probably so called because of the silt it carries in the period of flood.

If Egypt refers to the love of the world, because of its abundant wealth; and Babylon refers to the pride, because of its worldly greatness; the believer may often has his heart deviate from leaning on the work of God, to fulfill the lusts of his body, and to realize his love for the earthlies, or to satisfy the spirit of pride that arises in him; and in all cases he deprives himself of being fulfilled by the truth.

In his Easter sermon of 335 BC, **Pope Athanasius** looks at two categories of his listeners celebrating Easter: A category who, like the old people, wished to get fulfilled by the water of the Nile of Egypt, or by that of the Euphrates of Assyria, instead of by the living water of the divine springs, to end up with greater thirst; And another category who saw in the crucified Christ risen from the dead, all their fulfillment. He says: [You know that sin also has its own bread - that of its death - That is why it invites the pleasure lovers, saying: *“Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant”* (Proverb 9: 17); whoever touches it, does not realize that those who are bound to earthly things will perish with the sin.

Unfortunately, even when man expects fulfillment, he finds the fruit of sin unpleasant; and as said by the divine wisdom: *“Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man; But afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel”* (Proverb 20: 17); And, *“For 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”* (Proverb 5: 3, 4). He would eat with pleasure for a certain time; yet, later, as he gets severed from God, he perishes. That is why the prophet warns the sinners against straying away from God, saying: **“Now why take the road to Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor (the Nile)? Or why take the road to Assyria, to drink the waters of the River? “(Jeremiah 2: 18)<sup>2</sup>”**].

**(2) Binding herself with vain gods made her vain:**

She has not only forsaken God, the Spring of living water, to seek what is for herself; the cisterns, the work of her own hands; or to resort, according to her human mind, to the protection by the king of Babylon or the Pharaoh of Egypt; But the secret of her weakness is that she replaced the living God with the vain pagan gods; Instead of uniting with the living God, to become herself living, she united with vain to become herself vain; saying: **“They followed worthless idols, and became worthless themselves” (Jeremiah 2: 5) ...**

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<sup>1</sup> Ep. 108: 14.

<sup>2</sup> Paschal Letter 7.

And in admonition He says: *“Where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble”* (Jeremiah 2: 28)

That is the secret of her weakness: She rejected God, to receive those who are not gods, as gods for her. God says about her forsaking Him: *“Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you, when you forsake the Lord your God, and have no awe of Me’, says the Lord God of hosts”* (Jeremiah 2: 19).

If we look more closely, we shall see that God in this phrase, reveals for us a fact that often escape our attention; that, it is the wickedness of man that rebukes him, and his backsliding that punishes him ... Indeed God may rebuke, and in His love may firmly and sometimes very harshly punish; Yet we cannot blame God, but ourselves; as the rebuke and punishment that befall us, is a natural fruit of our wickedness and backsliding. But God allows us to reap just a very little of the fruit of the work of our own hands, and of what we did with our full freedom; in order to rid us of evil, and to forsake backsliding, so that the rebuke would stop, and the punishment would no longer be necessary.

Man reaps the fruit of what he sows; And as **St. Theonas** says: [Whoever kindles evil will perish by its fire] <sup>1</sup>. As, *“His own iniquities entrap the wicked man; and he is caught in the cords of his own of his sin”* (Proverb 5: 22); and the Lord says: *“Look, all you who kindle a fire, who girdle yourselves with sparks; Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks you have kindled”* (Isaiah 50: 11). The work of that fire kindled by the wicked, is to deprive them of God; to draw their hearts away from Him, to uproot from them the fear of God; and to fill their life with bitterness; So He says: *“Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you, when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe of Me’, declare the Lord of hosts”* (Jeremiah 2: 19).

The prophet David used the expression *“The Lord of hosts”*, in his dialogue with the mighty ‘Goliath’ (1 Samuel 17: 45), to confirm that it is the Lord who leads the battle, who protects His people. And in the psalm it came: *“The Lord of hosts is with us; The Lord of Jacob is our refuge”* (Psalm 46: 7). The prophet Jeremiah, now, also uses this expression to proclaim that God is the leader of the battle to protect His people; yet, if His people reject Him, God will destroy them.

He revealed her weakness by three analogies he took from animals, humans, and plants:

a- **He described her as a wild animal** that refuse to return to its owner (Jeremiah 2: 20).

b- **A harlot who practices** corruption openly and shamelessly, on every high hill and under every green tree; namely where she worships the Baal; as though her worship is mixed with abominations.

c- **A noble vine, a seed of highest quality**; yet it produced useless grapes (Jeremiah 2: 20; Isaiah 5). In the Holy Book, the people of God are referred to as four kinds of trees: the vine, the olive tree, the fig tree, and a thorny tree. We have already dealt with the vine and the fig tree in our study of the book of Hosea. If the vine and the wine (the juice of grape) refer in the Holy Book to spiritual rejoice; fruitlessness, or the production of sour grapes, on the other hand, means that the Church (or the people) have

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian: conf. 23: 9.

lost the spirit of joy by the Lord; have been stamped with sadness and permanent murmur.

Our Christ came as a Vine, to turn us into branches (John 15) that testify to His heavenly joy, and his exalted divine peace.

His bride refused to unite with Him, and replaced Him by the Baal; as, ***“Long ago you broke your off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, ‘I will not serve you ! When on every hill and under every green tree you lay down, playing the harlot”*** (Jeremiah 2: 20)

She received the Baal as her bridegroom instead of her Man, to turn into a harlot.

Why was it said that Israel lay down as a harlot on every high hill and under every green tree (Jeremiah 2: 20; 3: 6)?

**The scholar Origen** says: [Because they talk with haughtiness, and use adorned eloquence; Anyhow, they do not do according to what they say]<sup>1</sup>.

Intending to confirm her responsibility for what she does; He says to her: ***“I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality; How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?(Jeremiah 2: 21)***

As though He is saying to her: I have created you all truth, with no vanity nor corruption; I have sown you a choice vine of choice seeds; Why have you turned into a lowly alien vine ? ! **The scholar Origen** comments on this by saying that God made for us all that could be enjoyable; yet we created evil and iniquities for ourselves; That is why the prophet seems as though, he is asking those whose souls are filled with bitterness instead of meekness and gentility that were placed in us by God, saying: How then has it turned into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?

[***“Death is not of God’s doing, nor the perdition of the living pleases Him. He has created all for persistence. The world’s newborns are created healthy with no deadl poison; and no dominion for hell is on the earth”***] (Wisdom 1: 13 - 14). **From where then has death come ? “Through the jealousy of the devil death came to the world”** (Wisdom 2: 24).

God made every thing that could be beautiful for us; and we created evil and wickedness for ourselves.

The prophet puts forth an inquiry, before those whose souls were filled with bitterness instead of the sweetness put in them by God, saying: ***“ How was it turned into the degenerate plant of an alien vine “ ?***

He says that God did not create lameness; but, on the contrary He gave all, active and agile limbs; then something happened that made them lame! So it is the case with all body members.

The soul likewise, is created in the image of God; not only of the first man, but of every one; as the words, ***“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness”*** (Genesis 1: 26), extends to all mankind. What is said about Adam extends to all mankind. Adam, originally, has borne the ***“image of God”***, then, through his iniquities, he added to it the ***“image of the man of dust”*** (1 Corinthians 15: 49). That happened with all mankind; the image of God preceded that of man.

***“We have borne”*** as sinners the ***“image of the man of dust”*** ; Let us, through repentance bear the ***“image of the heavenly”***, knowing in spite of every thing else, that creation was made in the heavenly image.

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<sup>1</sup> In Gen. hom 2: 6.

The words of the Holy Book puts forth this inquiry before sinners; God admonishes them saying: *“I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality, How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine ?”*

We have already said that God had planted the soul of man *“a noble vine”*; Yet through diversion, he turned into the contrary of what God intended<sup>1</sup>.

God created it a vine holy to Him; But choosing to reject Him, it turned into *“a degenerate plant of an alien vine”*. That is why He does not call it *“My vine”*, but just *“a vine”*. She has rejected His reference to her as God; and now He is rejecting her reference to Him, until she return to Him, holy in Him. St Augustine says: [He did not say ‘My vine’; for if it is His vine, it has to be good; But being degenerate, it is not His, but an alien vine] <sup>2</sup>.

In the Old Testament, it came that God *‘Planted it with the choicest vine’* (Isaiah 5; 2); namely, of the highest quality; as an elect people who gained a covenant with God, to bear *“the truth”* in him.

As far as the Church of the New Testament is concerned, the *“Truth”* Himself, the incarnate Word of God, came to present Himself a Vine, to bear us in Him as living branches that *“bear much fruit”* (John 15: 5).

❖ When he says *“I am the true Vine”* (John 15: 1), He undoubtedly distinguishes Himself from that, He addressed by the words *“How have you turned into ... an alien vine”*? (Jeremiah 2: 21); as how is it possible for a true vine, expected to produce grapes, to produce thorns instead?!

(St. Augustine) <sup>3</sup>

❖ ‘I longed for the vine to produce wine, but it produced thorns instead. Here you see the crown with which I am adorned!

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem) <sup>4</sup>

It did not stop at corrupting herself through forsaking her God and rejecting her reference to Him and His reference to her; but, even as she tried to correct her ways, she leans upon her human arm, instead of returning to Him as her Savior. It is as though, even in her regret, she increases her dissension from the true God; for, instead of confessing her sins, she tries to justify herself; That is why He says to her: *“‘For though you wash yourself with lye (soda) and use an abundance of soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me’, says the Lord God”* (Jeremiah 2: 22)

As the souls become too stubborn, God threatens punishment without opening a door for hope; not to let them fall into despair, but to keep them from turning that hope into slothfulness. When He sent the prophet Jonah to the people of Nineveh, He started His talk as though they have no chance of salvation; Yet when they repented He forgave them and defended them before His prophet.

❖ When He says to the city: *“For though you wash yourself with lye, and use an abundance of soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me”* (Jeremiah 2: 22); He did not say that, to cast them to despair, but to provoke them to repentance<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom., 2: 1.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 56.

<sup>3</sup> On John, tr 80: 1; in Ps. 80

<sup>4</sup> Cat. Lect. 13: 29.

<sup>5</sup> In Rom. Hom. 14.

(St. John Chrysostom)

She assumed that, by herself, she is capable of cleansing her iniquities by soda and soap; and did not realize that this is the work of the Creator Himself; He alone can cleanse the soul and sanctify the body! And as **the scholar Origen** says:

[Let us again contemplate in that phrase uttered by God. Does this mean that the sinner soul assumes that, by washing herself with the material soda, she can put an end to her iniquity and sin?

No, but we should know that the word of God, the Omnipotent, is capable of curing all; **“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrew 4: 12).**

Hence, there is a talk of lye (soda), and another of soap; by their mere utterance, it is assumed that sins of a certain kind can be cleansed. But, as these two are not capable of curing all kinds of sins; for there are sins that require other treatments; it is said to the soul that presumed that its sins could be cleansed by lye and soap: **“For though you wash ... , says the Lord God”**.

Look at the wounds: There are wounds that can be healed by ointments; and others that can be healed by oil; and others that need to be bandaged ... But there are still other wounds about which it is said :”*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). The same thing with sins: Some of them can lead to dirtying the soul; These need ‘lye’ or soap to cleanse them; Yet others could not be cured that way, as they imply much more than mere dirtiness.

Behold, how God, who knows how to discern between sins; proclaims in Isaiah, saying: **“When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning” (Isaiah 4: 4).**

Filth and blood: the filth to be washed away by “the spirit of judgment”; and the blood by “the spirit of burning”.

So if you commit a sin, even if it is not leading to death (1 John 5: 16); you are dirtied, and the Lord **“will wash away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and will purge the blood of Jerusalem from her midst”**. What we need, when we commit a more serious sin, is not lye or soap, but we will need **“the spirit of burning”**.

I probably know now the reason why the Lord Christ **“baptized with the Holy Spirit, and with fire”** (Luke 3: 16). Not that he baptized the same man with both; but He baptized the righteous man with the Holy Spirit; whereas, the other man, who after believing, and becoming worthy of the Holy Spirit, would sin anew, the Lord cleanses with fire.

Blessed is he who is baptized with the **Holy Spirit**, and in no need to be baptized with fire; and very miserable is he who needs to be baptized with fire. However, the Lord Christ is capable of baptizing in both cases. It is written: **“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots”** (Isaiah 11: 1). The Rod for those to be punished, and the Branch for the righteous. God is also **“a consuming fire”** (Hebrew 12: 29); and **“is light”** (1 John 1: 5); A consuming fire for the sinners, and light for the righteous and the saints<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom. 2.

As she tried to cover up her sins by justifying herself, God exposed her before herself; saying to her: “*See your ways in the valley*” (Jeremiah 2: 23). Here he means “*the valley of the son of Hinnom*” (2 Kings 23: 10; Jeremiah 7: 31, 32; 19: 5, 6), where they used to offer their children as burnt offerings to the idols. That reveals how the worship of idols had so much authority on their hearts and life; They did not practice it for worldly benefits; but ended up burning their own children as human sacrifices, while they danced and rejoiced before the idols.

Once again He rebukes her for forsaking Him and for following the foreign Baal; confirming to her that she sold Him; yet, for no price; for all she has acquired from the Baal was falling down from the high holy mountains to the valley (Jeremiah 2: 23); saying: “*See your way in the valley*” (Jeremiah 2: 23). The Baal pulled you down from the high heavenly life to the earthlies. By saying that, he is probably reminding her of what she does in the valley of Hinnom, where she offers her little children as human sacrifices and victims to the Baal (Jeremiah 7: 31) to lose them forever! With bitterness He says to her: “***See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done. You are a swift she-camel running here and there, a wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving - in her heat, who can restrain her***” (Jeremiah 3: 23, 24). She became like a she-camel that runs incessantly and aimlessly here and there; and like a wild donkey, accustomed to life in the wilderness, that sniff the wind, and all the time chases the males here and there; driven by its sexual desire!

What did she benefit from forsaking her God and going after the Baal, but the loss of her humanity, her children, her reasoning, and all blessings, to live aimlessly as though in the wilderness.

She became in danger, as though walking bare-footed on rough ground, and dry-mouthed with thirst; yet is not ready to wear a sandal, nor to drink some water! “***Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst. But you said, there is no hope. No ! For I have loved aliens, and after them I will go***”(Jeremiah 2: 25)

He begs her to return to Him, to spare her feet from stumbling, and her throat from thirst; but she adamantly refuses; assuming that chasing aliens, even if subjected to danger and thirst, is better for her than enjoying the bosom of her divine Bridegroom and gaining His fulfilling blessings. That is why He starts to threaten her, saying: “***As the thief is ashamed when he is found out, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they and their kings and their princes, and their priests and their prophets***” (Jeremiah 2: 26). A thief keeps thrilled by his thefts, even if he does not put what he stole to use; and keeps boasting that he can steal unnoticed; but once he gets caught, he becomes ashamed when it is too late. So did the house of Israel on the highest levels: their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets; they will one day stand before God like thieves in court, with nobody to intercede for them, or to cover their shame; for they have chosen the tree (the wooden idols) as their father, and the stone (the stone idols) as their mother (Jeremiah 2: 27), and rejected God their true Father! They forsook Him, who can save them on the Day of Judgment, and attached themselves to those who bring them to perdition and perish together with them! He bitterly says: “***For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face***” (Jeremiah 2: 7)

They have rejected My fatherhood, and acquired for themselves fathers and mothers of wood and stone; They forsook Me, the philanthropic Creator, and resorted to the bosoms of irrational defiled creation !

**The scholar Origen** believes that wicked men disappear before the face of the Lord; as it is said: *“They have turned their back to Me, and not their face”* (Jeremiah 2: 27); Whereas the righteous men stand in confidence before Him, to be granted by Him the holy life (John 3: 21); to say with the prophet Elisha: *“As the Lord lives, before whom I stand .....”* (2 Kings 5: 16).

It is fitting for him who carries the divine throne, having entered into the perfection of glory, to have no back, but to be all faces, and all eyes, in order to behold God permanently and without obstruction. That is why when the people sinned to God, He admonished them, saying that: *“They have turned their back to Me, and not their face”* (Jeremiah 2: 27); an expression used often by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7: 24; 18: 17; 32: 33).

### **(3) Faltering between two ways:**

We said that the secret of their weakness is forsaking the spring of living water, to dig for themselves cistern of their own. On another aspect, they forsook their living Father to accept the wooden Ashtoreth - the female goddess of fertility - as their (father); and the male stone god as their (mother); *”Saying to a tree, ‘You are my father’, and to a stone, ‘You gave birth to me’ “* (Jeremiah 2: 27). This is a form of ridicule; as the prophet proclaims to them, that they have lost every natural comprehension and every human logic; making the female a father, and the male a mother who gave birth to them ! They did not only lose the ability to distinguish between the true God and the vain ones, but they became unable to distinguish between the male and the female; between the father and the mother!

And finally, even in the time of affliction, they do not return to God with their whole heart, but they falter between the two ways: They seek God to save them; while their hearts are still attached to the Baal. He says: *“But in the time of their trouble, they will say, ‘Arise and save us’. But where are your gods, that you have made for yourselves ? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble”* (Jeremiah 2: 27, 28)

These are the same words He used to rebuke their fathers in the days of the judges, saying: *“You have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; Let them deliver you in the time of your distress”* (Judges 10: 13, 14). He said that out of love; for when they realized their faults and returned to him, the Scripture says: *“His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel”* (Judges 10: 16) ... He waits for our return, and does not endure our tears.

## **6- The fruits of her sin:**

Having revealed to her some aspects of the secret of her weakness, He spoke of the fruits of her sins; which are:

### **(1) The Lord became to them a wilderness or a land of darkness:**

The Lord says:

*“Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of darkness? Why do my people say, ‘We are free to roam; We shall come to You no more’”* (Jeremiah 2: 31)

It is as though God is admonishing His people, saying: ‘Why do you forsake Me; Have you seen Me a wilderness from which to flee, or a land of darkness that you fear’?!

**The scholar Origen**<sup>1</sup> comments on this phrase, clarifying that God grants two kinds of gifts: general and personal gifts. He grants the sunlight, the air, and all the earthly goods to the entire world. He is no barren wilderness, but the Beneficent who “*makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good; and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*” (Matthew 5: 45).

He is no land of darkness; but “*God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1: 5). As for the general gifts, God appears as the One who Gives His goodness to all, and the One who shines His light on all. But, as far as the personal gifts are concerned, like the gift of enlightenment, of the sonhood, etc., These are given to believers; whereas the non-believers are deprived of them; God becomes to them a barren wilderness and a land of darkness. When Israel rejected the belief in the Lord Christ, God became to them as such; As the apostle Paul says: “*For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other we are the aroma of life to life*” (2 Corinthians 2: 15, 16).

**The scholar Origen** says:

[“*Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of darkness?*” (Jeremiah 2: 31).

In the beginning of this text, the Lord says that He has never been a wilderness to Israel, nor a land of darkness ... So, has he become as such today? Or what?

And when He has not been as such to Israel; has He ever been to the Gentiles?

If God was not, and would never be to anyone a wilderness or a land of darkness, why then, is He saying that to Israel? Let us now recall the good works of God: both the general and the personal.

God would never be a ‘wilderness’ to anyone; He who “*makes His sun rises on the evil and on the good*”; and would never be a land of darkness; He who “*sends His rain on the just and on the unjust*”.

How could He be a land of darkness, He who created the day, and also created the night for rest ? !

How could He be a wilderness; He who gives fertility to the land?!

How could He be a wilderness; He who sustains every one; and grants man the ability, the wisdom, and the good thinking; and who gives him in his body, “the senses, trained to discern between good and evil”?

Therefore, from the general aspect, God could never be a wilderness to anyone; Yet from the personal aspect, I shall go back to the subject of Israel, and say: that God was not to them a wilderness nor a land of darkness, when they were in the land of Egypt. There, He did miracles and signs for their sake. Yet every time they went astray, He became, in their own minds, a wilderness and a land of darkness; although God could never be as such.

Nevertheless, When God was not a wilderness nor a land of darkness to Israel, He was as such to the Gentiles. Then, when God gave Israel His back, and became, in their minds, a wilderness and a land of darkness, the grace increased for the Gentiles, and the Lord Christ became to us, not a wilderness, but fulfillment; He became, not a land of darkness, but a fertile land. “*For more are the children of the desolate*” (Isaiah 54: 1).

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid 3 (modified).*

God admonishes those, to whom He had never been a wilderness nor a land of darkness, saying to them: 'I had never been as such to you; but it is you who said: "***We are free to roam; we will come to you no more***" (Jeremiah 2: 31). Did Israel say that out of despair?'<sup>1</sup>

**The scholar Origen** believes that we should distinguish between the general good works of God and His personal good works. There are good gifts, that God forever grants to all men, like sunshine, rain, and the fertile land; From this point of view, we cannot say that God could ever be a 'wilderness'. But as far as His personal gifts, which He gave to, and then took away from Israel; In this case, He became according to them, a 'wilderness'. Yet, He never was as such; as what He took away from Israel, He gave to the Christians<sup>2</sup>.

That is the most horrible of the fruits of sin; that God, the source of life and light, is counted by the wicked, as a barren wilderness and a land of darkness; He flees from God as though from the source of his perdition! God for him becomes a burden, that he wishes to get rid of; the same way, He is counted by some of the contemporary existentialists; namely as a nightmare from which man should free himself! The phrase "*We are free to roam*" (Jeremiah 2: 31) came in certain versions, as (We became free of God), or (**We became lords ourselves**)!

God is astonished by His people's desire to free them of Him; although He is the secret of their life, their enlightenment, their fulfillment, and their adornment. That is why He admonishes them, saying: "***Can a virgin forget her ornament?***" [**Her chastity that she should always keep, according to Fr. Methodius**]<sup>3</sup>; "***Or a bride her attire?, Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number***" (Jeremiah 2: 32)

He presents to them the virgin and the bride as examples; because He looks at His people as a chaste virgin offered to Him; who should keep her chastity and virginity against the deceit of the enemy and the world; and as a bride sanctified to Him, who finds in God, her Groom, the secret of her splendor and glory, proclaimed in her wedding attire! He says: "***Why do you beautify your way (your attire) to seek love? Therefore you have also taught the wicked women your ways***" (Jeremiah 2: 33)

Instead of accepting me as the secret of your heavenly adornment, you stretch your hand toward external adornment; and instead of accepting My divine love, you seek the love of the wicked; and teach the evil to your daughters!

***"Also on your skirts is found the blood of the lives of the poor innocents. I have not found it by secret search; but plainly on all these things"*** (Jeremiah 2: 34). While adorning yourself by external ornaments, to seek lovers to do evil with you; the crime attaches to the tails of your clothes. And as the clothes symbolize the body, it is as though He is saying, that the crime attaches to all your body, even to its tails; Every member of your body is defiled, and is covered by the blood of the poor innocents whom you oppress. This thing needs no effort to search, as it is proclaimed on the tails of your skirt, is connected to your body; and is obvious in the life of all.

## **(2) Justifying herself:**

The impacts of sin do not stop at fleeing from God, as though from a wilderness and a land of darkness; to connect to evil and iniquity, as external ornament; but while

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Source Christienne.

<sup>3</sup> Banquet of 10 Virgins 4: 6.

covered with the blood of wickedness, she justifies herself, and does not realize her fault: *“Yet you say, ‘Because I am innocent, Surely His anger shall turn from me’; Behold I will plead My case against you, because you say, ‘I have not sinned’* **“(Jeremiah 2: 35)**. That is the worst of what man could reach: to drink iniquity as water, and does not realize it; to commit evil, and does not recognize it as such! By that, man shuts himself in sin; and repentance would never find a place in him.

### **(3) He destroys her evil gains:**

Casting himself on evil, man assumes that he gains something, that he did not gain through walking in righteousness. God’s love allows for destroying what we gained, so as to realize that evil can offer nothing. As the people have sometimes leaned on the king of Babylon; and other times on the Pharaoh of Egypt; God led them to shame in both places; to realize that they should lean on the bosom of the eternal God, who is capable of granting comfort.

*“Why do you gad about so much to change your way ? Also you shall be ashamed of Egypt as you were ashamed of Assyria. Indeed you will go forth from him with your hands on your head; For the Lord has rejected your trusted allies, and you will not prosper by them”* **(Jeremiah 2: 36, 37)**

She changed her trust and replaced Assyria by Egypt for protection; But, like a woman who mourns her man, puts her hand on her head, for all her human plans were destroyed (Putting the hands on the head refers to captivity; as the captives were usually led to the land of captivity, this way).

### **Summary of the plea:**

God’s plea against His people Israel could be summarized as follows:

- 1- They became like the idols they worship; namely, they became as vain (Jerem. 2: 5).
- 2- They became deniers; denying the works of God, their Redeemer and Savior (Jerem. 6, 7).
- 3- They defiled God’s land and heritage (Jerem. 2: 7).
- 4- They surpassed the nation’s evil; having exchanged Him for vain gods (Jerem. 2: 10, 11)
- 5- Even nature testifies against them (Jerem. 2: 12).
- 6- They forsook the living spring, and drank from the cisterns of the Pharaoh of Egypt and the king of Babylon (Jerem. 2: 13 - 19).
- 7- They became like a wild animal (Jerem. 2: 20).
- 8- They became like a rude harlot (Jerem. 2: 20).
- 9- They became a fruitless vine (Jerem. 2: 20).
- 10- The kingdom of Judah justified herself instead of admitting her fault (Jerem. 2: 21).
- 11- They became like a she-camel running here and there without a leader (Jerem. 2: 23).
- 12- They became like a wild she-donkey, whose desire for mating made her lose her balance (Jerem. 2: 24).
- 13- They became like a thief who is caught while stealing (Jerem. 2: 26).
- 14- They became irrational; seeing the female as a father, and the male as a mother (Jerem. 2: 27).

- 15- They became like a bride who forgot her ornaments (Jerem. 2: 32).
- 16- They became an instructor of evil to others (Jerem. 2: 33).
- 17- They shed the blood of the poor innocent (Jerem. 2: 34).
- 18- Finally, They became like a captive, who puts her hands on her head (Jerem. 2: 37).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH  
YOU ARE AMAZING, EVEN IN YOUR PLEA!**

- ❖ How sweet is your admonition!  
You give it in my hearing, because I am Your Jerusalem!  
You whisper it in my ear, so as not to disgrace me!  
You want me dignified before all; even before Your angels and all the heavenlies !
- ❖ You begin Your admonition by sweet words of encouragement.  
To support me, You recall for me, my old works of love;  
You count me as a girl who sought you as her Groom!  
You disregard my faults to lift up my soul!  
Amazing You are in Your compassion and the wisdom of Your fatherhood!
- ❖ I confess to you that I was not ear-circumcised. I could not listen to Your loving whispers  
You admonished me once and again; And in my foolishness, I could not hear Your sweet voice
- ❖ How amazing you are, O my Savior!  
You write the plea against me; to expose me before my betrayer soul, to realize my faults;  
And in all that, You anticipate my return,  
You forgive me, and do not address me with a wounding word!
- ❖ My soul became like a wild ox;  
Like a harlot who openly commit evil;  
Like a vine that produces sour grapes !
- ❖ I confess to You that I forsook You; O the eternal Truth.  
I adhered to the vain lusts, to become myself vain.  
I defiled my body, which is your earth; And abused Your talents to me.  
I disregarded my sonnhod to You; and forgot my ornaments as a bride sanctified to You !
- ❖ Because I justified my faults, it got multiplied! I became aimlessly gadding about;
- ❖ You are amazing in Your plea;  
You are both my Prosecutor and counsel!  
How can I repay Your amazing love? !

## CHAPTER 3

# GOD SEEKS HIS BRIDE

In the last chapter, God revealed the cause of His charges against us; something that He often does; not only in the book of Jeremiah, but in several holy books. When God chastens, He likes to explain the cause of chastisement, to realize His goal. He does not chasten just to show His authority, nor for the sake of revenge, the way man does when he gets the chance; but for the sake of dialogue, to let man return to Him.

In the present chapter, He clearly proclaims His desire for the return of His divorcee bride who defiled herself with many, and corrupted the ground. He makes a divine plan, to open before her the door for repentance, and to receive her, glorified and dignified.

<b>1- The Groom seeks His harlot divorcee</b>	<b>1 - 5</b>
<b>2- A divine plan for her return</b>	<b>6 - 11</b>
<b>3- The way to repentance</b>	<b>12 - 14</b>
<b>4- The blessings of the return to God</b>	<b>15 - 25</b>

### 1- The Groom seeks His harlot divorcee:

God revealed His limitless love toward His people; and toward every believer; saying: *“they say, ‘If a man divorces his wife; and she goes from him and becomes another man’s; May he return to her again? Would not that land be greatly polluted?’ But you have played the harlot with many lovers; Yet return to Me’, says the Lord”* (Jeremiah 3: 1)

**The scholar Origen** says: [This is a new kind of goodness; God receives the soul, even after harlotry, if she returns and repents from her whole heart ,, Here God appears as jealous; He seeks your soul, and wishes that you attach to Him. He is indeed not pleased; He is angry; and revealing some kind of jealousy; to let you know that He longs for your salvation<sup>1</sup>].

It is difficult for man to imagine himself in this situation; having back his divorcee whom he left because of harlotry; who did not transgress out of weakness. with someone who coveted her; but who loves to transgress shamelessly and stubbornly with several lovers; She has “a harlot’s forehead” ...; And yet her man longs for her to repent and to return to him !

God started His talk with His people, by referring to one of the statutes of the law concerning divorce (Deuteronomy 24: 1 - 4), that He presented to them because of their weakness. It was not allowed for man to take back his wife, if she, after being divorced, was married to another.

Here, He reveals the essence of marital life, clarifying that marriage is supposed to be an unbreakable secret union; Yet, if a third party got in between, that union is dissolved for good. No man would remarry his harlot divorcee, lest the ground; namely his body would get defiled! God, on the other hand, is not like any human husband, to expel His betrayer wife; But, in his limitless love, although He sees that the soul has voided her union with Him through her union with His enemies - the Devil and his hosts with their evil works; counting them as her friends Yet He calls her again, saying, “Return to me”.

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<sup>1</sup> In exod. Hom 8: 5.

**Father Methodeus** says: [He speaks of that who presents herself to harlotry with a multitude, who came to corrupt her; those who are related to Satan and his angels, who plot to defile and corrupt the beauty of our rational mind and sound insight; through dialogue, and corrupting every soul that is betrothed to the Lord<sup>1</sup>].

How amazing is God's love for man; Despite His knowledge of man's evil and wickedness, He opens before him the door of hope to return; saying to him: "**Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end? !**" (**Jeremiah 3: 5**)

He keeps on seeking the return of the soul to Him ... not because He likes to see her sad, pained, and regretting the transgressions she committed; but because He seeks her as His holy bride, who to have her place in His Bosom; or as a daughter who finds her father running toward her, falling on her neck, and kissing her (Luke 15: 20).

How amazing is God's love !; He knows us well, and classifies us in our evil as such:

(1) **As a divorcee who married another man (Jeremiah 3: 1)**: According to the Mosaic Law, it is not allowed for man to return to the woman he divorced then married another man; even if the other man divorced her, or died (Deuteronomy 24: 1 – 4).

(2) **As one who played the harlot with many lovers (Jeremiah 3: 1)**: There is a great difference between a girl who is coveted by someone and falls; and a married woman who throws herself in the bosom of this and that, with no fulfillment greedy in evil and in seeking pleasure.

(3) As one who is not sought by the wicked, but runs in all the roads seeking evil; there is no road where she did not commit sin: "**Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: Where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat to them like an Arabian in the wilderness; And you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness**" (**Jeremiah 3: 2**)

(4) **As one to whose evil, even nature testifies, because of whom: "... showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain"**(**Jeremiah 3: 3**)

The early rain during the two months of October and November, helps to sow the seeds; while the late rain during the months of March and April, helps plants to ripen.

When man persists on sinning, defying the commandment of God, nature that is created for his sake will defy him, to testify that, because he got corrupted, and diverted from realizing his mission; why should it support and serve him ? !

(5) **As one who has a harlot's forehead (Jeremiah 3: 3)**: Namely a face of bronze that knows no shame nor shyness. In the old days, a harlot used to put a sign on her forehead, to be recognized by those who seek evil.

**St. John Chrysostom**<sup>2</sup> believes that committing sin with no shame, makes out of man a harlot with a harlot's forehead. And, in another place he says: [The use of this expression applies to all those who shamelessly defy the truth<sup>3</sup>].

(6) "**Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My father, You are the guide of my youth? Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end? Behold You have spoken and done evil things, as you were able**" (**Jeremiah 3: 4, 5**). Some believe that Israel has misused these compassionate fatherly words of admonition, that come from God, to arouse in her a spirit of hope by repentance, despite the corruption she has

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<sup>1</sup> Banquet of Ten Virgins 6: 1.

<sup>2</sup> In Hebr. Hom: 15: 7.

<sup>3</sup> In Joan. Hom 74: 1.

reached; and talked like a daughter, yet acted like a violent rebel. She assumed that God , like any human father, would disregard her faults; but she did not comprehend that, being more compassionate, would not change His ordinances before she change her behavior, present repentance, and seek to return to Him.

(7) She did not stop at harlotry and marital treason, but she has deceitful lips, says what she does not intend to do (Jeremiah 3: 3-5); hated by men, so how would she be by God?! God does not receive the prayers of deceitful lips, but seeks poured out souls (1 Samuel 1: 15) and poured out heart (Psalm 62: 8).

Having presented this portrait, He confirmed to us two things:

- a- The horror of the sin, being marital treason !
- b- Reconciliation is not based on words of apology on our part, but on the rich grace of God that surpasses the Law; to receive us after our betrayal to Him.

It is to be noticed that the word “Return” (shuv) came several times in this book. As repentance, in truth, is not just a confession of sin; nor abstention from it; but it is a return to God and a union with Him.

## **2- A divine plan for her return:**

God reveals to Judah His plan for her salvation, proclaiming that the kingdom of Israel (10 tribes), has previously got corrupted; And after being warned several times, He allowed for her captivation, in order to repent, and to become a practical example for Judah. But instead of benefiting from what happened to the kingdom of Israel (10 tribes), the kingdom of Judah (two tribes: Judah and Benjamin), although left for a full century after the captivity of Israel, to repent; She, likewise, betrayed Him like her sister, She probably leaned on the wrong presumption that God would never allow for the captivity of His city Jerusalem, and the devastation of His temple in it; but would soon open the door of hope, not only before Judah, but before the two kingdoms together, and even before all nations, being the Savior of the whole world.

A cause for chastisement is for the one chastened to become a living example before sinners: *“The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: ‘Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done?’ She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. And I said, after she has done all these things, ‘Return to Me’, But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away , and given her a certificate of divorce; Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not returned to me with her whole heart, but in pretense’, says the Lord. Then the Lord said to me, ‘Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah’”* (Jeremiah 3: 6 – 11)

In this text, the following points are to be noticed:

- a- **The scholar Origen** says: [The prophet here intends to inform us that the people – as it came in the book of kings – has been divide, after King Solomon, into a kingdom of ten tribes under the reign of Jeroboam, and another, of two tribes, under the reign of Rehoboam (1 kings 12), The kingdom of Jeroboam was called ‘Israel’, and that of Rehoboam was called Judah. This schism continued until the days of the prophet .... Israel, under Jeroboam and his successors, was the first to sin; going so far, compared to

the kingdom of Judah, that God allowed for her captivation by the Assyrians, which extended till the days of the prophet, according to the book. Then afterwards the kingdom of Judah also sinned, and was captivated to Babylon. After all those sins committed by Israel, that Judah knew of, and knew how they led to her captivity; she did not benefit of this lesson; but on the contrary, she so increased her sins; that, if compared to Israel, more righteousness would be found in Israel than in Judah.

Judah should have taken a lesson, from the fact that I have divorced Israel, delivered her to the Assyrians, and given her a certificate of divorce. Yet she did not only reject that lesson, but added to her sins more transgressions; to the extent that, the sins of Israel, if compared to those of Judah, would all seem as righteousness<sup>1</sup>].

The backsliding Israel openly rebelled against the Lord, since the two golden calves of Jeroboam were set; with the goal that the people would not yearn to go to worship at the temple of God in Jerusalem; and since Jeroboam ordained priests who are not from the tribe of Levi (1 Kings 12: 28, 31); and made a feast in Bethel. We do not find among their kings, one who sought the Lord, except for once, when affliction became intense and unbearable, because of the oppression of the Aramites (2 Kings 13: 4, 5); It so happened that the Lord saved them; *“Nevertheless they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam who had made Israel sin, but walked in them; and the wooden image also remained in Samaria”*.

Before this open and continuous stubbornness, along the generations, God delivered them to the Assyrian captivity; so they left their land, like a divorced wife leaving her marital home.

As to the sin of the betrayer Judah; although she had, on the contrary, some few good kings, Judah became preoccupied with apparent worship, together with a hidden treason: the hearts were directed to the abominations of the Gentiles.

While Israel was known for open backsliding, and for opposing the worship of God; Judah, on the other hand, was known for deceit. And as the scholar Origen says on the Lord’s tongue: [Judah did not fear Me after all what I did to Israel; and did not return to Me with her whole heart; On the contrary, she returned to me with deceit<sup>2</sup>].

b- **The scholar Origen** believes that what happened in the old days to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah: that the first rebelled, and the second played the harlot; represents a symbol of what the Jews did in the days of the Lord Christ; when they rejected the Savior and rebelled against Him. It also represents a symbol of what is done by some of the men of the New Testament; as certain Christians adhere to the nomination, rather than to the actual spiritual life; It is as though what came here is a reproach to them.

[The call to the Gentiles started by the fall of Israel. After preaching to the congregation of the Jews, the apostles said to them: *“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; But since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles”* (Acts 13: 46).

And the apostle Paul, being also aware of this says: *“Through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles”* (Romans 11: 11).

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom. 4: 1.

<sup>2</sup> In Jer. Hom. 4.

Therefore, the many transgressions of those people, have led to their rejection; as well as to our entry into the ‘hope of salvation’; we who were “*strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope*” (see Ephesians 2: 12).

How did this happen ? How, being born in just any place in the world, and a stranger to the land of promise, I stand today to talk about the promises of God, and to believe in the God of the forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? And even more than that, to receive in me, the Lord Jesus Christ, prophesied by the prophets?

Let us notice here, that the people of Israel are the one of whom it is written: “*I put her away, and gave her a certificate of divorce*”. God divorced Israel, and gave her a certificate of divorce. This happens with a wife who becomes hated by her husband, as is written in the statutes of Moses; and the husband who divorces his wife for bad behavior, has the right to marry another.

In the same way, the people of Israel, having got their certificate of divorce, were completely neglected by God. Where are their prophets? Where are their miracles? Where are God’s appearances to them? Where are the worship, the temple, and the sacrifices? They were expelled from their position.

Therefore, God gave Israel a certificate of divorce; Then we, the (kingdom) of Judah - the Savior having come from the tribe of Judah - Although we returned to the Lord; yet it seems that, in our last days, we shall come to liken Judah in her last days; if not worse than that.

It looks as though, this is actually the end of the world!

This seems obvious in the words of the Lord Christ in the Gospel: “*And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold; But he who endures to the end shall be saved*” (Matthew 24: 12, 13); and also: “*For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders so as to deceive if possible, even the elect*” (Matthew 24: 24). This is our present days, meant by the Savior for His second coming; as, if we search in several churches, we shall not find one single true believer. “*When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18: 8). Truly, if we judge the situation according to the truth, and not according to the numbers; and if we look into the inner depths, instead of looking into the number of people gathering together in the church; we shall realize that we are not true believers any more! In the flourishing time of the martyrs, there were indeed true believers. Returning from accompanying the processions of bodies of martyrs to their tombs, all the congregation fearlessly gathered together in the church; and the new Catechumens were taught the bases of Christianity, while they see around them the bodies of the martyrs. Several believers used then to proclaim their faith even to death without fear; and we know many who saw amazing and exalted things.

There were then few believers; Yet they were true believers; who followed the difficult and narrow path that leads to life. Now, we became more in number; Yet it is not possible to find as many elect; as the Lord Jesus Christ truly says: “*Many are called, but few are elected*”. Among those who take religion as a profession, few are worthy of the blessing of God’s election.

When God says: that He divorced Israel because of her sins, and sent her away; and that Judah did not return to Him despite her knowledge of what happened to Israel; He is also talking about our sins.

When we read about the calamities that have befallen the people of Israel, we should tremble, and say: *“If God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare(us) either”* (Romans 11: 21). If those who used to boast, that they are branches of the true olive tree (Romans 11: 24); who are connected to the roots of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have been mercilessly cut by God, despite His goodness and love of mankind; How could it be for us ?

*“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God”* (Romans 11: 22). He is not just goodness without severity; neither severity without goodness. If He is good but not severe, His goodness would be despised; and if He is severe but without goodness, we would fall into despair concerning our sins. But actually, God is good and severe at the same time. As far as we are concerned as humans, we have to choose: either His goodness, if we return to Him, or His severity, if we remain in our sins.

God speaks to us through His prophet saying: *“Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? (Israel here means the Jewish people) She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree”* (Jeremiah 3: 6). When you see that Pharisee who haughtily went up to the temple; and without beating his breast or thinking of his sin; he said: *“God, I thank you that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector; I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I Possess”* (see Luke 18: 11 – 12); you will understand that he has *“gone up on every high mountain”* with his feelings worthy of reproach, with his love of boasting, and with his haughtiness and pride. He *“came under every tree”*; yet not fruitful trees, but those who produce only wood, that come from barren seeds, and symbolize the arguments of heretics, with the deceiving glitter, not good enough to convince the listeners, that if we go after, we would be going under wood-producing trees.

***“And there played the harlot. And I said after she has done all these things, ‘Return to me’, But she did not return; and her treacherous sister Judah saw it” (Jeremiah 3: 6, 7).***

This admonition is also directed to us; we who transgress and do not keep our promises to God; we who see what happened to those who did the same, although they were of the seeds of Abraham, and have got the promise.

We should abide to this notion: If those have been cut, of the divine blessings and promises, and have been denied the benefit of being of the seeds of Abraham, ; How would it be for us, if we transgress? God would forsake us. The Savior says to the Jews: *“If you are the children of Abraham, you would do the works of Abraham”*; And St. John say to them: *“And do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’, For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones”* (Matthew 3: 9). By ‘these stones’ he means us; with our stony hearts and our hardness toward the truth. Truly, God raised up from the stones, children to Abraham.

If a new servant came to serve a master, he would enquire, who among the previous servants was good in his master’s eyes? And why ?; and who was worthless in his eyes ? and why ? He would then try, in order to continue serving his master, to avoid the behavior that led to the punishment and expulsion of the wicked servants; and to follow the lead of those who were commended and blessed by the master.

We also, who have been servants, not to God but to the idols and devils; We, who have been pagans and returned to God, yesterday or the day before; let us read the Holy Book, and see who in it was justified, and who was condemned; in order to follow the

lead of the first, and to avoid falling into the faults of those who were delivered to captivity, and those cast away from God.

The true repentance is to read the old books (the Old Testament), to know who were the righteous and follow their lead, and who were the sinners and avoid falling in their faults. Let us also read the New Testament and the words of the apostles. And after reading, we should write down all what we read in our hearts, and apply them in our life, so as not to get a certificate of divorce, but to gain the eternal inheritance. When the Gentiles are saved, then Israel (by accepting the faith) can be saved; because “*hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved*” (Romans 11: 25, 26), for all to be one flock for one Shepherd<sup>1</sup>].

c- “*She defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees*” (Jeremiah 3: 9)

When “*God created man in His image, and according to His likeness, He saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good*” (Genesis 1: 26, 31). Man, as a king set over earthly creation, as though with authority in a royal palace, was pure in the eyes of God. But as his heart got corrupted, and thus all his nature got destroyed, even the earth that was created for his sake, was defiled.

For the sake of man, stones and trees were created ... Yet, as he made, out of the stones, images to worship, and out of the trees, temples and altars for the idols, he was counted as though he is committing adultery with the stones and the trees, that were corrupted because of him. God did not create nature for us to unite with, and to worship, but to use it to partake of our praise for God.

Do you love nature; then use it, and do not let it use you. Submit it, and do not let it submit you. If you use nature, it will bless the Lord together with you; And if it uses you, it would be corrupted; and would become defiled together with you in the eyes of God.

d- It is obvious that the book of Jeremiah as a whole, is a call to repentance and to return to God. We see him here repeat this word “*Return*” (Jeremiah 3: 7). And as **St. John Chrysostom** says, God does not grieve for our sins, as much as He grieves for our abstention to forsake them by resorting to Him. He is a Father who waits for His children; and a heavenly Groom who seeks His bride.

[The evil we commit does not offend God, as much as our abstention to change. As he, who transgresses falls into human weakness; while he who persists on falling to the same sin, cancels his humanity to become a devil. See how God condemns, on the tongue of His prophet, the second deed more than the first<sup>2</sup>].

[I wish any man who lives in evil, would never despair!

And any man, who lives in virtue, would never relax!

I wish he who come last, would never trust in himself; lest the adulterers would go ahead of him!

And he who comes first, would never despair; as he is capable of getting ahead of the later!

If we return to the zealous love of God; we shall not recall the previous things.

God is not like man; when we repent, he does not blame us for the past; and will never say: ‘Why were you so late in coming to me?’

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid* 4: 2-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ep. To Theodoer* 1: 15.

I wish we approach Him as is fitting.  
I wish we attach ourselves to Him zealously. I wish we nail our hearts in His fear<sup>1]</sup>

[He came as a Physician and not as a judge<sup>2]</sup>.

e- ***“She did not return to Me with her whole heart” (Jeremiah 3: 10).***

There are many who assume that they can return to the Lord, not by repentance and confession, but by justifying their transgressions. That is why St Jerome comments on the last verse, saying: [I wish we do not lose, through false peace, what we gained by strife (spiritual war)<sup>3]</sup>.

### **3- The way to repentance:**

The Lord often repeats on the tongue of the prophet Jeremiah, the two words:

***“Return ... ..Acknowledge” (Jeremiah 3: 12, 13).***

*“Return to Me’, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 3: 1).*

***“And I said after she had done all these things, ‘Return to me’, But she did not return” (Jeremiah 3: 7)***

***“Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say: ‘Return backsliding Israel’, says the Lord, ‘And I will not cause My anger to fall on you; for I am merciful’, says the Lord; ‘And I will not remain angry forever; your iniquity; that you transgressed against the Lord your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice’, says the Lord. Return, O backsliding children” (Jeremiah 3: 12 – 14).***

***“Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding” (Jeremiah 3: 22).***

The last divine phrases summarize the concept of repentance in the following stages:

a- Repentance is the acceptance of God’s invitation to the soul to return to her beloved. .God, in His love for the soul keeps on calling *“Return to Me”*. In the darkest moments of sin, and in the midst of the hardness of our hearts, God stands anticipating a hidden scream of the heart; a look of the eye toward Him; or an inner moan, in order to carry us on the eternal arms. He yearns to our return, and glory, more than we yearn to our own salvation. But, also in His love, He does not wish to force the soul against her will; He sanctifies her freedom to chose, and respects our humanity.

b- Discovering the Person of God: *“For I am merciful’, says the Lord, ‘And I will not*

*Remain angry forever”*. The world often distorts the image of God, portraying Him as a cruel Judge, who is not compassionate toward our weakness ... who dwells high up in His heavens, not feeling us down on our earth. Yet, He is merciful; helps the tempted, and supports those who seek returning to Him!

God confirms His love; He could be betrayed by His bride; yet He remains the Lord, merciful to her. He may become angry and chastens her; yet this is not His last word; as He says: *“I will not remain angry forever”*.

c- Acknowledging the truth of our weakness: *“Only acknowledge your iniquity”*. The soul has to judge herself, and acknowledge her iniquity, to find her compassionate

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<sup>1</sup> In Matt. Hom 67: 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 3: 5.

<sup>3</sup> Against Pelagians: Prologue.

Savior justifying her. There is no way to salvation for man without acknowledging his sins; for, how can the sick responds to the counsel of his physician, unless he feels his illness ! Our Christ is the Savior of sinners; If we acknowledge our iniquities, we would feel our need for Him!

We are in need of quiet sessions with God, for His Holy Spirit to reveal to our souls, her weaknesses, without letting her lose her hope. **St John Cassian** says: [The more man's mind progresses and proceeds toward clarity and purity in meditation, the more he will discover his uncleanness and impurity! When he beholds himself in the mirror of the true purity!

For, the more the soul rises to a higher level of meditation, and proceeds forward, the more she yearns for something higher than she has already achieved; Then she would realize the lowliness and nothingness of the things she is currently doing; for the keen look reveals many hidden things. Life without blame creates deep grief on the iniquities committed<sup>1</sup>].

d- To realize that every transgression is actually directed against God: ***“You have transgressed against the Lord your God”***(**Jeremiah 3: 13**)

And as the prophet David says: *“Against You, You only, I have sinned”* (Psalm 51: 4); even if the sin is only in thought, and did not harm anyone. Every sin is a breaking of God's commandment, who wants us to take His image, and to become according to His likeness: *“And you have not obeyed My voice’, says the Lord”* (Jeremiah 3: 13).

e- To realize our situation as children; as it is painful for anyone to be insulted by his own son: ***“Return, O backsliding children”*** (**Jeremiah 3: 14**).

f- To have confidence in the Savior, as a Father, capable of healing our wounds, and of rooting up the nature of backsliding from us.

***“Return, O backsliding children and I will heal your backsliding”***(**Jeremiah 3: 22**)

### **Who are these children, called to return to God?**

The scholar **Origen** believes, that believers became children of God; Yet sometimes, after enjoying sonhood, through Baptism, they rebel against God their Father; However, He keeps on calling them to return to Him ... The door of repentance is open before all.

Closing the door of repentance before anyone, is a heresy opposed by the Church; and was dealt with by several fathers, like **St Cyprian**, who wrote two articles on repentance, clarifying that the Church , like her Groom, should absolve without closing the door before anyone<sup>2</sup>. **St. Jerome** used certain phrases of the book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 3: 29; 8: 4) in his letter to Marsela, to clarify how the Church opens its doors for repentance every day; while the followers of ‘Mani’ close them before some, because of transgressions they have committed<sup>3</sup>.

**The scholar Origen** comments on the divine words: *“Return, you backsliding children, And I will heal your backsliding”* (Jeremiah 3: 22); saying:

[At the beginning of our readings today, the Lord says to the children of Israel: ***“You shall call Me, ‘M Father’, and not turn away from Me. Surely,as a wife***

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<sup>1</sup> للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، 1965، ص 308.

<sup>2</sup> راجع: القديس كبريانوس: التوبة، ترجمة القمص تادرس يعقوب ملطي.

<sup>3</sup> Ep. 41: 3.

*treacherously departs from her husband, So have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel', says the Lord" (Jeremiah 3: 19, 20).* After saying these words concerning Israel, the Holy Spirit addresses us, the Gentiles, and says: *"Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding"* (Jeremiah 3: 22). We are the ones meant by those full of backsliding (wounds). Every one of us can say: 'We were also ...; We also were non-believers, foolish, lost, slaves to lusts and various iniquities; living in evil, and hating one another; But, when the goodness of our Savior God, and His love for mankind, appeared, He poured His mercy on us, through the grace of the new birth'.

Let me explain these words more clearly: He did not say "We, who were before foolish ...", but the apostle Paul, the son of Israel, who has been, concerning the Law, blameless, says: "We, who were before (also) foolish"; namely, 'We also, 'the children of Israel', were non-believers, and foolish. It was not only the Gentiles who were foolish, or who were non-believers, or sinners, but we also, who received the Law, were like that, before the coming of the Lord Christ.

After those words, addressed to Israel; it was said to us, the Gentiles: *"Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding"*. Yet some may say: these words were addressed to Israel, and now you are applying them to the Gentiles. To this I clarify, that when God intends to address Israel, with words concerning repentance and returning, He always adds the word 'Israel'; as He does when He says: *"If you will return, O Israel', says the Lord, 'Return to Me. And if you put away your detestable idols out of My sight, and no longer go astray; And if in a truthful, just, and righteous way you swear, 'As surely as the Lord lives', then the nations will be blessed by Him and in Him they will glory"* (Jeremiah 4: 1, 2)

Therefore the first part was addressed to Israel; as *"The hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so Israel will be saved"* (Romans 11: 25, 26).

Look how God calls us to return; So, if we return, let us return completely; as He promises us, if we return to Him in repentance, He would heal our wounds (backsliding) by Christ Jesus. Then we, without delay, will answer like Israel did, and say:

*"Indeed we do come to You, For You are the Lord our God"* (Jeremiah 3: 22)

The Lord says: *"Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding"*. And the children of the Gentiles answer "We shall be servants to you; we who were before servants to the devil and his hosts'.

Now after You called us to repentance, we respond: *"Indeed we do come to You"*; We were waiting for only one thing: 'Your call'.

On the contrary to those whom You called, and they gave excuses, We, once we are called, will unconditionally respond. In the parable of the gospel; we see those invited said: *"I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it, I ask you to have me excused. And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them, I ask you to have me excused. Still another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come"* (Luke 14: 18 – 20).

This is not our way, the children of the Gentiles: to be called, then ask to be excused ! Then, why should we? What ground or wife would preoccupy us ? What indeed will ever preoccupy us ?

Therefore, as God says to us: *"Return, O backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding"*; We shall look at our wounds, and to the promise of healing, and

responds promptly, saying: *“Indeed we do come to You, For You are the Lord our God”*. Yet, let us remember that, by these words, we are setting a covenant with God, not belong to any one else; We shall not belong to the thoughts of anger, nor to those of depression, nor to those of lusts; and we shall never be a possession of the devil or his hosts. On the contrary, ‘We were called, and we responded: *“Indeed we do come to You”*’.

Let us prove by our deeds, that we are the possession of Him alone, and add: *“For You are the Lord our God”*. We do not know any other God. The belly is no god to us, like those about whom is said: *“Their gods are their bellies”*; nor silver or greed.

We should set for ourselves no other god; not like other people; We have a God who is *“One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”* (Ephesians 4: 6). And as our only preoccupation is the love of God, we would say:

*“Indeed we do come to you, For you are the Lord our God”*<sup>1</sup>].

#### **4- Blessings of the return to God:**

Calling us, He reveals the blessings of returning to Him, together with the danger of keeping away from Him. We can summarize these blessings in the following:

##### **a- He will include us in His Church (the new Zion).**

*“For I am married to you, I will take you, one from a city, and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion”* (Jeremiah 3: 14)

Although the call is publicly addressed to all the people, Yet it is also a persona call. Amid His wish to acquire all the people, He also receives one out of a whole city, or two out of a whole family; He does not despise a single soul returning to Him, even if He is rejected by the whole city. At the time when the whole world has been heathens, except for Abraham and Sarah his wife; He called them, to set out of their descendents a holy nation and a pure Church.

God seeks your return to Him, to bring you to Zion, His church which He has redeemed by His blood; to set you a member in His holy body; and to qualify you for the eternal inheritance.

If the whole world becomes corrupted; He still waits for you by your name, to bring you into His glory.

So do not say with Elijah: *“They have forsaken Your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life”* (1 Kings 19: 14); As *“God has reserved for Himself seven thousand, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him”* (1 Kings 19: 18).

Even if you are alone, For your sake. Christ died to save you.

##### **b- He sends workers holy to Him; with spiritual knowledge:**

*“And I will give you shepherds according to My heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding”*(Jeremiah 3: 15)

When the people return to God, He will be zealous for His Church; and give her shepherds according to His heart; who have spiritual knowledge and true understanding, to shepherd the people by the Spirit of God to the heavenly life.

Do not ever judge the ministers; Your repentance moves heaven itself; and God will send holy workers to minister to humanity ! Instead of judging others, let us judge

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom. 5: 12.

ourselves; and count the hardness of the ministers' hearts, as a sign of God's displeasure with us, allowing for our chastisement through them.

Of the most important attributes of a pure minister, who has the Spirit of his Master, is his enjoyment of knowledge and understanding ! To present the pasture of knowledge to the people, and to minister to them without any spirit of haughtiness, in ignorance and foolishness.

The fathers of Alexandria count 'knowledge' as the greatest gift that the Lord Christ gives to His bride, as he raises her by His Holy Spirit to His secret place; where He reveals to her the secrets of the Word, and brings her into the secret of His knowledge.

**c- The increasing fruition:**

***“Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days’, says the Lord ...”(Jeremiah 3: 16)***

There are many who consider returning to God, as a waste of time and energies; prayers, as a vain effort; fasting as deprivation; and praises and collective worship as loss .....; These are disregarding and forgetting in their life, the factor of 'blessing'. Our returning to God means bringing blessing to our time, our words, and our actions, even the temporal ones; to have every thing in our hands blessed and abundant fruition.

Because of Joseph, God blessed the house of Potiphar; and because of Abraham, God blessed a people along the generations, even after his death! By the shadow of the apostle Peter, many were rescued from the evil spirits; and by the handkerchiefs and aprons of the apostle Paul, many were healed

By your return, you will be blessed, will become a blessing to those around you; and will be fruitful even after your departure!

**d- He Himself will return to us:**

***“They will say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of the Lord’, It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore” (Jeremiah 3: 16)***

In other words, encountering with God, will be no more through symbols like the Ark of the Covenant, but will be a true encounter ... God will dwell among His people; and the believer will recognize God's presence in his depths<sup>1</sup>.

The Ark of the Covenant, with what it included: the two tablets of the Law and the pot of manna, referred to the divine presence among His people; especially during the period of wandering in the wilderness, and the beginning of settling in the Promised Land. But now, that the Word of God Himself came, the bread coming down from heaven, there is no more need for confirming the divine presence ... He dwells among His people, and in their hearts.

**e- The return of the Gentiles to Him:**

There is no more need for the ark of the covenant to confirm the divine presence; as Jerusalem – the city of the great King – became an attraction to all nations. People from every nation and tongue will come to behold the exalted Jerusalem our mother; to live in it, and to carry its features, saying with the apostle Paul: *“He made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2: 6).

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<sup>1</sup> جاء في 2 مكابيين 2: 48 أن إرميا النبي خبأ تابوت العهد والمذبح في كهف لدى تدمير المدينة والهيكل.

Seeking the return of His old people to Him, He proclaims to His prophet the return of the Gentiles, and their acceptance of faith in Him.

***“At that time, Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem; They shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil hearts” (Jeremiah 3: 17)***

With your repentance, you will attract many to the Lord, and will bring them over to His heavens. Our weakness and our wickedness are obstacles in the way of the salvation of many; as the name of God is blasphemed because of us; while our return to God, heartily and practically, would attract many to Him.

Here, we notice that God is lifting the eyes beyond the return from captivity, as a divine blessing, to what is greater, namely, to the return of the nations from the captivity of sin and disbelief, to the Church of Christ, the new Promised Land.

**f- Healing from the nature of corruption working in us:**

***“Return, you backsliding children, And I will heal your backsliding” (Jeremiah 3: 22).*** And the repentant Psalmist says: *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast Spirit within me” (Psalm 51: 10).*

He who returns to God, feels daily, the continuous work of the Holy Spirit to renew him, to become according to the likeness of God !

Finally, after talking about the blessings of the return to God, He refers to the danger of backsliding and stubbornness in holding fast to wickedness; or to the betrayal of man or of the congregation to God.

**A- *“A voice was heard on the desolate heights; Weeping and supplications of the children of Israel; for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God” (Jeremiah 3: 21)***

On the same location, where they used to do their abominations; namely, on the desolate heights, the voice of their weeping is heard; as they are taken in humiliation to captivity.

Sin cannot give man a true joy; but sedates him for some time, until he finds out that he has lost his inner peace, his joy, and his life itself. This is the fruit of entering into perverted ways, and of forgetting the Lord our God.

**b- Entering into vanity, and not into the truth:**

***“Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; Truly, in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel”(Jeremiah 3: 23)***

Here, he compares between worshipping the idols on the hills and mountains, thought by the wicked as wealth and riches to the soul, where they find the wide road and the easy life; and the salvation of the Lord our God. Idol worship offers an easy, yet a vain road; while in that narrow road of the Lord, there is the true salvation.

The literal translation of the word ‘hills’ here, is (looselyness); It presents all what is vanity; while the Lord presents to us the truth.

**The scholar Origen<sup>1</sup>** believes that the nations used to worship two kinds of gods: They worshiped persons who became gods; these were referred to as hills; and they worshiped gods that they see as such by nature; these are referred to as mountains.

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<sup>1</sup> See In Jer. Hom 5: 3.

[Those who worship these gods do not realize that they are false gods; but assume that their inspiration is true, and that they offer true healing. They do not realize the difference between the work of Satan, with all his power, signs, and lying wonders (2 Thessalonians 2: 9), and the power and wonders of the ‘Truth’.

What Lord Jesus Christ used to do, were wonders of the ‘Truth’. What Moses used to do, (in the name of God), were also powers of the ‘Truth’ Whereas what the Egyptians used to do, were false signs and wonders; like what the sorcery Simon used to do, to impress the people of Samaria, who said, ‘*This man is the great power of God*’ (Acts 8: 10); although they were all, false signs and wonders].

That is the danger of sin; It makes man lose his ability to distinguish between what is vain and false , and what is true ! it makes him lose the inner spirit of discernment.

### **c- Entrance into shame and reproach:**

***“For shame has devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth – Their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us (like a veil); For we have sinned against the Lord our God, We and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God” (Jeremiah 3: 24, 25)***

The work of sin does not stop at the loss of the inner peace, and the destruction of the spirit of discernment, to make man confused between what is true and what is vain, make him think that life is eternal, and heaven is imaginary; but it brings him into reproach (bosheth), that destroys all his labor since his youth.

The wise Solomon says: “*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach of him who has understanding*” (Proverb 14: 34). When the people entered the land of Canaan and presented a holy worship, the place was called “Gilgal”; meaning (rolling away), as the Lord rolled away the reproach from them (Joshua 5: 6); the reproach of bondage, the symbol of sin.

Saul called his son, ‘Ishbosheth’ (s Samuel 2: 8); meaning, (man of reproach) ... That is the fruit of sin!

The danger of sin lies in its deceit. While pushing man to shame and reproach, some are proud of it, and think it as though it is glory for them. ...; instead of standing in shame and reproach before God, and instead of admitting what they ended up to, before themselves, because of their sins; Namely, by repentance and confession, we strike the shame and reproach of sin, by our feeling of shame and reproach !

**The scholar Origen says:**

***“For shame has devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth ...” (Jeremiah 3: 24)***

There should be ‘shame’, to devour the vain labor and the false works of our fathers; for without ‘shame’, those works would never be consumed (come to an end).

There are sinners who feel no shame of their sins; those have lost all feelings, and are delivered to all abominations.

You actually see how the Gentile peoples, sometimes boast a long list of their abominations and adulteries, as though they are heroic works. They feel no shame for them, and they do not even call them ‘sins’. As long as they are that way, their sins will never be consumed (wiped away).

Feeling shame for what did not cause us shame before, is the beginning of goodness<sup>1</sup>].

**What are these ‘flocks and herds’ that are devoured by shame?**

**The scholar Origen** says:

[The irrational behavior, practiced by our fathers, are called “flocks and herds”

[The irrational behaviors by the fathers are called, “flocks and herds”.

The irrational creatures (the animals), are not always commendable, but blamed, like the “*flocks and herds*” of the fathers who sinned; while others are blessed; of which the Lord Christ says: “*My sheep hear My voice*”.

When the Savior says, “*I am the good Shepherd*”, we should not understand it in a general sense like all others, counting Him as the Shepherd of the believers alone, and not of the sinners. As a sinner, I should receive the Lord Christ in my soul; receive the good Shepherd in me; the good Shepherd, who, by His staff, can control my irrational behavior, not allowing them to show however and whenever they chose; But, under the guidance of the good Shepherd, they would become sound behavior. “*You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*” (Ephesians 2: 19).

Thus, if the Shepherd is inside me, He would guide my senses, and would keep them from submitting to any foreign thought; from submitting to Pharaoh or to Nebuchadnezzar, but only to the good Shepherd<sup>2</sup>].

Therefore, as long as there is, in my inner life and my behavior, lost herds and flocks; By true repentance and straight forward confession, I shall feel reproach; the corrupt animals inside me will be consumed; and the good Shepherd will set in me, holy herds under His personal care.

The children of Israel used to have “flocks and herds”; as they used to lean, sometimes on the Pharaoh of Egypt, and sometimes on the king of Babylon ... Let us seek the true Shepherd of our souls, and take refuge in Him; He is alone capable of caring for us and protecting us against all the deadly temptations of the devil.

**What is meant by the sons and daughters who are devoured by shame ?**

**The scholar Origen**<sup>3</sup> often interprets the ‘sons’, as the fruits of the soul and its thoughts; and the ‘daughters’ as the works of the body and its thoughts ... Thus, by the shame of repentance, the corrupt thoughts of the soul, and the evil works of the body, are consumed; and the Lord Savior, by His Holy Spirit, will set for us holy fruition for both the soul and the body.

**What does He mean by saying “*We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us (as though by a veil)*” (Jeremiah 3: 25)?**

**The scholar Origen** says: [We are used to talk of the veil put over the faces and hearts of those who do not return to the Lord. Because of this veil, the sinners do not understand, when Moses is read (2 Corinthians 3: 15); Hence we call that shame ‘a veil’.

As long as we have works of shame, we surely have the veil; as is said in the psalm: “*The shame of my face has covered me*” (Psalm 44: 15). While those who do not practice shameful works, will not have that veil. That is what the apostle Paul says: “*But*

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom 5: 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 5: 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 5: 7.

*we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3: 18).*

If we wish to remove the veil resulting from shame, let us do glorious works; putting in our minds these words of the Savior: “*So that all will glorify the Son as they glorify the Father*”, and the words of the apostle Paul: “*By breaking the Law, we insult God*”.

We alone, can remove the veil, and not anybody else. When Moses used to approach God, he removed the veil. God did not command Moses to cover his face with a veil; but when Moses saw how the people were unable to look at his glory, he put a veil over his face; And he did not also wait for God to tell him every time he talk to him: ‘Remove the veil’.

Therefore, this was written, that you in your turn, should remove the veil of your shameful works, that you put over your face; whenever you put your eyes on the Lord; Then, you would say no more, “My reproach covers me (as though with a veil)”..

For example, when wrath settle in our souls, it will be like a veil covering our face. And when we say in our prayer: “*Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us*” (Psalm 4: 6), we remove the veil, according to words of the apostle Paul: “*I desire that the men pray everywhere, lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting*” (1 Timothy 2: 8). If we remove wrath, it would be as though we remove the veil; and so it would be for all sins.

As long as the sins are in our minds, the veil would be over our inner faces, in a way that would hide from us the light of God’s glory. God does not hide His glory from us; But we, by putting the veil of sin over our souls, deprive ourselves of beholding His glory<sup>1</sup>].

Therefore, by repentance and confession, we would feel reproach, and would cast away from inside us the irrational animal life; our flocks and herds would be devoured; and our Shepherd would dwell in the heart, to shepherd new spiritual flocks, and to set His kingdom in us.

By the true repentance, the Holy Spirit of God sanctifies our “sons and daughters”; namely, the works of both the soul and the body; so that we would have the holy thoughts and the feelings flaring with His love, and the behavior fitting as children of God.

By true repentance, the Spirit of God would lift up from our hearts the veil of shame and reproach, to be able to behold the glory of God, and to comprehend His exalted heavenly secrets.

This is the way of repentance, with which we cry out saying: “***For we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God***” (Jeremiah 3: 25).

**The scholar Origen** comments on this phrase, saying:

[Can we likewise say as those did: “*We have sinned*”; this is different from saying, “*We have sinned and are still sinning*”. Who is still in his sin, does not say, “*We have sinned*”; that is only said by those who, after they sin, truly repent.

In the Holy Book, there are several examples of people who, although they sin no more, yet they still say, “*We have sinned; We have not kept Your Law*”; as it came in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid* 5:8,9.

book of Daniel; and as said by the prophet David: “*Remember not, O Lord, the sins of my youth, and my ignorance*”.

Let us then confess our sins: not only those of yesterday and the day before, but also those we committed fifteen years ago, even if we have committed no more sins since then. If we go to confess only the sins of yesterday, we would be untrue in our repentance; for “We have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day”.

Wounds need time to get completely healed; So is the pure and complete return to God, it, likewise, need some time<sup>1</sup>].

We end our talk here about repentance and confession by the following sayings of the fathers:

- ❖ The start of the way of repentance, is to condemn our sins<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ Whoever repents after sinning, is worthy of congratulation, and not grief; as he crosses over to the place of the righteous<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ Let the sinner be aware of the danger of his wound; and let him not despair of the greatness of the Physician. Sin with despair is a sure death<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid* 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Resisting the temptation of the Devil, hom, 2: 6.*

<sup>3</sup> *In 1 Cor., hom 11.*

<sup>4</sup> *In Ps. 50 (51).*

**AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH (Chapter 3)**  
**RETURN, O BRIDE, TO THE HOLY**

- ❖ Return ... Return, O bride, to the Holy.  
He opens His bosom to have you back.  
He will not admonish you, O betrayer; but will grant you back the joy of your wedding.
- ❖ Who, among men, would have his betrayer wife back after divorce?  
You have betrayed Him; ... as you set foreign gods inside yourself.  
In your depths, you came to have several partners in harlotry.  
You sat, as though by the road, and was not ashamed of your harlotry  
O my soul, You loved the world more than Him!  
You preoccupied yourself with many things and disregarded Him!  
The amazing beloved became the last of all in your eyes!  
Behold, even the dumb nature testifies against you!
- ❖ Behold, Your Groom is waiting for you, O my soul.  
If he is angry, It is for the sake of your return and salvation!  
He brought you into the heavenly Zion, His eternal secret place!  
He grants you every spiritual fruit; and offers you divine knowledge!  
He makes you a blessing for many! And gives Himself an inheritance to you !  
He heals and renews your nature!  
What more do you seek, you whom pride and backsliding have destroyed ?
- ❖ O my soul, Remember what the sin has done to you.  
It gave you pleasure for a limited time, then let you cry bitterly and incessantly !  
It gave you temporal things; Yet you yourself became vain !  
It gave you shame as a veil over your face, that kept you from beholding the  
glory of your Groom!

## CHAPTER 4

### ORNAMENTS OF THE BRIDE

Most of the phrases of this chapter and the following two, written in the form of Hebrew poetry; most probably were speeches or sayings given by the prophet to motivate the people to repentance, and to save them from the sword that was to fall on their necks.

As God seeks the return of His people to Him, revealing His zeal and great love for them, He requests from them to return, without their corruptions and abominations, and to adorn themselves, like a holy heavenly bride.

<b>1- Repentance is the way to adornment</b>	<b>1 – 2</b>
<b>2- The circumcision of the heart</b>	<b>3 – 9</b>
<b>3- Forsaking the false prophets</b>	<b>10 – 12</b>
<b>4- Realizing God’s plan and accepting His chastisement</b>	<b>13 – 18</b>
<b>5- Receiving the true prophets</b>	<b>19 – 22</b>
<b>6- Fulfillment and enlightenment</b>	<b>23 – 29</b>
<b>7- Forsaking the self righteousness</b>	<b>30 – 31</b>

#### **1- REPENTANCE IS THE WAY TO ADORNMENT:**

**Father Sherimon** says: [He compares Jerusalem (the human soul) to a harlot seeking a man; He compares God, in His love for us, with a husband burning with the fire of his love for his wife, as much as he sees her disregarding and humiliating him<sup>1</sup>.

He tries hard to get her to return to Him; yet, He seeks her return sanctified to Him; saying: *“If you will return, O Israel’, says the Lord, ‘Return to Me; And if you will put away your abominations (from your mouth) out of My sight, Then you shall (no longer go astray)”* (Jeremiah 4: 1)

He is asking His bride to forsake: idol worship and her denial of Him; things that He hates and detests, as they occupy man’s heart, and corrupts his inner life, to lead his soul astray, not recognizing her mission, nor God’s appreciation of her.

Let us forsake every idol we set in our heart, every foreign worship, every leaning on human arm, every desire to seek the pleasure and commendation of men, and every sin by thought, words, or deeds ... all detested by God. By doing that, God would have us a holy bride for Him; and would make us, not only blessed, but a blessing to others, who would bless God who works in us and in them, and would gain His blessing.

**The scholar Origen** says: {What are the things that Israel should do, in order that peoples would be blessed in him ?

To put away abominations (from his mouth).

What does this mean ?

Every evil we say, is an abomination in our mouth. So let us put away the bad and vain words that lead to our judgment; as “by your words you are justified, and by words you are judged”<sup>2</sup>].

He requests from Israel not to swear by the idols, but by Him: *“You shall swear, ‘The Lord lives’, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness”* (Jeremiah 4: 2).

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian: Confer. 13: 8.

<sup>2</sup> In Jer. Hom 5: 11.

The oath in the old days, was a sign of trust in God, by whose name man swears. That is why, when God requested from His people to swear by His name, He meant to keep them from swearing by the idols, and from believing in them.

**The scholar Origen** comments on the divine words: “*And you shall swear, ‘The Lord lives’, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; The nations shall bless themselves in Him, And in Him they shall glory*” (Jeremiah 4: 2) saying: [Let us behold ourselves, we who swear, to see that we do not swear in judgment; that our many oaths have become a matter of custom, and not a matter of truth.

The problem here, is that we are letting ourselves be led by sin, and get used to it. That Is what God detests.

We Know that the Lord said to His disciples in the gospel: “*But I say to you, ‘Do not swear at all’*” (Matthew 5: 34).

Now let us study this verse, and put the two verses together. We should probably start to: “*Swear in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness*”; then, as we later progress and grow in grace, we become prepared to stop swearing altogether, but to have the ‘Yes’ that needs no confirmation by an oath; and the ‘No’, that need no testimony.

Who swears, should first not be a liar, but truthful; As we often, miserably, swear in vain.

If we assume that we are swearing by ‘Truth’, our oath is not keeping with the Law, as it should be by ‘Justice’, beside being by ‘Truth’.

We are making the Lord of this world and His Christ, a witness to something!; What is its importance, to get down on my knees, and swear?...] <sup>1</sup>.

It may be astonishing for some, that the prophet presents to the people a commitment to swear by the name of the Lord, in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, as a sign of repentance. That may seem of no importance, but when we study it deeply, we shall recall that almost all the people and their leaderships worshipped idols, and swore by foreign gods; Therefore swearing by the living God would be a sign of forsaking the pagan worship. Furthermore, because what the mouth utters, is but a reflection of what is in the heart,: the pure and straightforward heart utters nothing but truth, justice, and righteousness; In it, there is no place for lies ! It is as though the oath here, reveals a sound faith and a straightforward behavior.

**In short we say that the repentance as presented in this chapter, is not just a regret and a retreat from abominations, but it is a return and loyalty to God and a union with Him, in order to enjoy the divine truth, justice, and righteousness.**

The divine promise: “*The nations shall bless themselves in Him; And in Him they shall glory*” (Jeremiah 4: 2), is the enjoyment of the riches and perfection of the new life, as a divine gift. This promise was given to our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12: 3, 18; 26: 4); and was realized by the coming of the Lord Christ, in whom the nations of the world are blessed.

## **2- The circumcision of the heart:**

As the kingdom of Israel rebelled against God publicly, and set idol worship instead of that of the living God; God requested that she should put away that detested worship with all its abominations (Jeremiah 4: 1, 2). The kingdom of Judah, on the other hand, behaved differently; She mixed the true worship with idol worship; In appearance

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid* 5: 12.

they used to go for the feasts to Jerusalem, to offer sacrifices to the Lord, to practice the formalities of worship, and to abide to the literality of the law; while their hearts were clinging to the idols. They boasted to be the people of circumcision, while their hearts were uncircumcised. That is why the commandment came to commit them to enter into the depths; to practice the hidden circumcision of the heart, and to care for the inner glory: “*For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, ‘Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury comes forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings’*” (Jeremiah 4: 3, 4)

The call here came to the men of Judah and Jerusalem; and as **the scholar Origen** says:

[Concerning the symbolic significance of Judah and Jerusalem; we also, if God grants us this grace, shall be among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ‘As where your treasure is, there would also be your heart’; If our treasure is in heaven, our heart would also be in the heavenly Jerusalem; of which the apostle says: “*The Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all*” (Galatians 4: 26)]<sup>1</sup>.

It is impossible to hope for a divine spiritual fruition, from those who sow in a barren land full of thorns; That land should be cut with the blade of a plow, to (reproach) the hard soil of the heart. In the parable of the sower, the Lord Christ says: “*Some (seeds) fell among the thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them*” (Matthew 13: 7). And in Hosea it came: “*Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord; till He comes and reigns righteousness on you*” (Hosea 10: 12).

If the soil of our hearts is full of thorns; By the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, it should be plowed to become good; the thorns, namely the (foreskin), should be taken away. This is the circumcision of the heart, connected to the cross; which is not choked by the worries of life and its vain pleasures.

**St. Augustine** says: [Turn over the good soil with the plow; remove from it the stones; take away the thorns ... Beware lest the good seeds, that I sowed in you during my strife, be choked; by the lusts and pleasures of this world. Be the good soil; and let every one of you produce a hundred, a sixty, and a thirty-fold]<sup>2</sup>.

And **St. John Chrysostom** says: [ As the plow turns over the soil in order to provide a secure place for the seeds, so as not to become scattered over the surface; but get hidden in the womb of the earth itself; It is fitting for us as well, to use the plow of afflictions to turn over the depths of the heart.

Another prophet advises us, saying: “*Rend your heart, and not your garments*” (Joel 2: 13).

Let us rend our hearts; so that if there are wicked plants in them, or deceiving thoughts, we would uproot them ; to prepare a pure soil for the seeds of goodness.

If we do not plow the barren ground now; If we do not sow the seeds now; If we do not irrigate it by tears now; while it is time of affliction and fasting; when then shall we reproach ourselves ? !; Will that be in the time of pleasure and looseness ? !

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom 5: 12.

<sup>2</sup> Sermons on N.T. hom. 23: 3.

Impossible! For these are bound to bring us to slothfulness; as affliction would bring us back to strife; and would get back our mind that went astray, dreaming of many things] <sup>1</sup>.

**The scholar Origen** believes that the words here, apply to the teachers and the preachers; as some of them care to present the dogmas of faith, outside the circle of practical salvation; to be as though, sowing good seeds among the thorns; saying: [ *“Break up your fallow ground; and do not sow among thorns”* (Jeremiah 4: 3). These words are directed particularly to the teachers and the preachers; so as not to utter the words of the gospel in the hearing of the listeners, before preparing new fields (plowed) in their souls; lest they would be sowing among thorns.

We also, have sown holy seeds before preparing new fields in the minds of people; we have sown the dogma of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; of the resurrection, the judgment, the eternal rest, the Law, the prophets, and the rest of the teachings of the Holy Book. By that we acted against the commandment that says: *Break up your fallow ground*”; Prepare for yourselves new fields; and *“Do not sow among thorns”*.

Someone may say: I am not a teacher; therefore this commandment is not meant for me !

So, let it be! ! Be a sower (a teacher) for yourself; Do not sow among thorns, Prepare a new field, on of the piece of ground provided for you by the Lord. Care for this ground; Search for the thorns, the worries, the material cares, and the love of riches and lust; Uproot those thorns that are in your soul; Look for that spiritual plow of which the Lord Christ says: *“No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (Luke 9: 62).. Then, having prepared a new field, go and take seeds from the teachers, the Law, the prophets, the gospel writings, and the words of the apostles; and sow them in your soul, by remembering and putting them into effect. You may think that those seeds grow by themselves, through remembering them; But actually it is the Lord who makes them grow: *“I planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase”* (1 Corinthians 3: 6) <sup>2</sup>].

Pope Athanasius sees in the prophetic words: *“Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns”* (Jeremiah 4: 3), a serious invitation to use the free rich grace of God; As *“The way of the slothful man is like a hedge of thorns”* (proverb 15: 19); He, assumes that his ground produces bread without work, to find out that it produces thorns.

We have an apostolic commandment, that the grace given to us should not be in vain; things about which the apostle Paul personally wrote to his disciples, commanding us through them; like his saying: *“Do not neglect the gift that is in you”* (1 Timothy 4: 14).

There is a proverb that has the same meaning: *“He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread; But the way of the slothful man is like a hedge of thorns”* (proverb: 12: 11; 15: 19). That is why the Holy Spirit warns us against falling in such things; saying: *“Break up your fallow ground; and do not sow among thorns”*] <sup>3</sup>.

**“Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts” (Jeremiah 4: 4).**

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<sup>1</sup> On Statues 4: 2.

<sup>2</sup> In Jer. Hom 5: 13.

<sup>3</sup> Paschal Letter, 3.

As man plows by the cross of Jesus the Lord of glory in his heart to uproot the thorns, he would enjoy the hidden spiritual circumcision of the heart. And as the apostle Paul says, rebuking those leaning upon the circumcision of the outer flesh: “*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not from men but from God*” (Romans 2: 28, 29).

**St. Augustine** says: [This conforms to his saying: “*Was anyone called while circumcised; Let him not become uncircumcised*” (1 Corinthians 7: 18). He was a Jew; and was called a circumcised; I wish he does not seek to be uncircumcised; namely not to live as though uncircumcised] <sup>1</sup>.

The **scholar Origen** says: [He had to say: “*Circumcise yourselves to the Lord*”; as the physical circumcision was not confined to the Jews alone, according the Mosaic law; but was practiced by many others; like the Egyptian priests of the idols, who circumcised themselves to the idols, and not to God.

Having understood the literal meaning of circumcision, let us now go to its spiritual meaning, to know that, among those circumcised, are those who are circumcised to the Lord, and others who are circumcised, but not to the Lord.

There are other dogmas beside the true one -- the orthodox dogma; those who depend on philosophy. They are circumcised in their morals and hearts; and practice what we can call the (virtue) those are circumcised but not to the Lord; as their circumcision are according to a false dogma. But when you go to the Church, and follow its true teachings; you will be, not just circumcised, but you will be circumcised to the Lord] <sup>2</sup>.

**The scholar Origen** also says: [In the heart, there is a foreskin that should be taken away. This foreskin is congenital since birth; then is taken away afterwards by circumcision. If the commandment says “the foreskin of your heart”, there has to be, in the heart since birth, something that is called a foreskin, which has to be taken away, in order to become circumcised of the foreskin of our hearts.

If we look carefully at the phrase: ‘No one is pure of defilement, not even if his life on earth is only one day’; we shall realize that we are born with sins and with a foreskin in our heart.

If the heart in us, refers the mind where thoughts are; and from which evil thoughts emerge; He who take away the evil thoughts, would also take away the foreskin of the heart. But he who does not take away the foreskin of his heart (in response to the work of the Holy Spirit in him); let him hear the warning of God: “*Lest My fury comes forth like fire; And burn so that no one can quench it*” (Jeremiah 4: 4)] <sup>3</sup>.

Therefore, let us have the hidden circumcision of the heart to the Lord, set on the work of the Holy Spirit, who takes away the foreskin of the heart, and grants its circumcision; who crucify the old man, and grants us the new one in the water of Baptism.

Baptism is the circumcision of the heart and the Spirit; to be lived by the believer all the days of his life; with the Spirit of God working incessantly in him; to practice the new life, resurrected with Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> *Of the Work of Monks 12.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Jer. Hom 5: 14.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid 5: 14.*

This is the ornament of the bride – the ornament of the inner Spirit --; given to her by the Holy Spirit in the water of Baptism; who keeps on beautifying her all the days of her sojourn so as not to hear the reproach: *“(What are you doing , O devastated one ?) Though you clothe yourself with crimson; Though you adorn yourself with gold, Though you shade your eyes with paint; In vain you will make yourself fair”* (Jeremiah 4: 30)

When we receive the work of the fiery Holy Spirit in us, our circumcised heart will flare with the divine love. But if we get back the foreskin; namely the work of the old man, we shall be burned by the fury of God’s wrath: *“Lest My fury comes out like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings”* (Jeremiah 4: 4).

**The scholar Origen** says: [The fury of God comes out like fire, on those who are not circumcised to Him; those who did not take away the foreskin of their hearts; *“No one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings”*. The fuel of that fire is the evil doings that we practice; for if there are no evil doings, fire will not find what to consume] <sup>1</sup>.

Whoever does not receive the work of the fiery Spirit in him, would fall in the fire of the divine fury; namely, would fall in bitterness brought on him by his evil doings; like what happened when the sins of Judah brought on them the captivity with all its humiliation. This is, so painfully described by the prophet Jeremiah, that he could not bear to see it (Jeremiah 4: 10). The voice of warning was persistent until the moments of captivity; saying:

*“Declare in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say: ‘Blow the trumpet in the land; Cry, Gather together; and say: Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities. Set up the standard toward Zion. Take refuge ! Do not delay! For I will bring disaster from the north, and great destruction. The lion has come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of nations is on his way. He has gone forth from his place to make your land desolate. Your cities will be laid waste, without inhabitants. For this, clothe yourself with sackcloth, lament and wail. For the fierce eanger of the Lord has not turned back from us. And it shall come to pass in that day’, says the Lord, ‘that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder’”* (Jeremiah 4: 5 – 9)

The holy God, who seeks His bride adorned with holiness; As He sees her committing evil that would bring her to captivity, He warns her, and keep warning her until the last moments; wishing for her to avoid that destiny.... He sent those who told her, who blew the trumpet of His words, and cried out in loud voice, to provoke them to forsake the unfortified villages, enter into the fortified cities; and set up the standard of Zion; namely, enter through repentance into a divine stronghold, and set up the standard of the Church, the standard of divine love, to take refuge from danger.

He asks them **“not to delay”** ... As it is fitting for the bride to proceed toward her Groom, to proclaim her love for him practically; the way he proceeded toward her in the first place, giving His life for her sake. He repeats His call for her to repent, so as not to fall under the harsh divine chastisement. **The scholar Origen** says:

[The word of God wakes up the listener, prepares him for the war against the lusts, and the evil hosts; and prepare him also for the heavenly feasts. It is here, like a

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom 5.

trumpet. **“Cry and say, Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities” (Jeremiah 4: 5).**

God does not want us to go into an unfortified city, but into a fortified one. The Church of God was fortified by the truth in Christ Jesus; He, Himself is her Fortress; as what the prophet David says in his psalm: *“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer” (Psalm 18: 2)*

All of you, who were outside Zion, **“Set up the standard toward Zion (namely escape to Zion); Take refuge; Do not delay” (Jeremiah 4: 6).** Take refuge in Zion, *“For I will bring disaster from the north, and great destruction”*. When it comes, whoever does not take refuge into the fortified cities; namely the Churches of God, will stay out, to be caught and killed by the enemy.

Who is this enemy ? Let us look at the rest of the talk: *“The lion has come out of his thicket, and the destroyer of nations is on his way” (Jeremiah 4: 7)*. This is the enemy from whom we should escape. Who is this lion who chases us ? The apostle St. Peter warns us, saying: *“Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1Peter 5: 8- 9)*.

There is a lion that came out of his thicket; Where is that thicket ? He had fallen downward, to the lower reaches of the earth, to its depths.

You as a man, is on a higher level than the devil, as you are anyway better than him; Whereas he fell downwards because of his corruption.

He wishes to enter into your land; to devour every one ...

Now, as the lion came up to threaten you and to destroy your land, clothe yourself with sackcloth, lament and wail, and supplicate to God in prayers; to destroy that lion, and save you from it and its fangs.

This lion tries to catch you through your ears; addressing you with vain words that you love; to divert you from the way of the truth.

He intends to devour your feet; to take them away from the land of the truth.

Clothe yourself with sackcloth; Beat your chest; lament and wail; Cry out the cries of war, when you see the enemy threatening you; Then, you will be spared the fury of God’s anger; and, in confidence and peace, can confront the attacks of the lion; You have entered into the fortified city] <sup>1</sup>.

In the midst of danger, God opens the gate of salvation; proclaiming that His wrath will not remain forever. He gets angry when He sees the enemy coming like a lion to devour us; while we, in our slothfulness, do not come to take refuge in Him, the fortified city; He blows the trumpet, to return him; then He would return to us.

The circumcision of the heart grants the soul beauty in the eyes of her heavenly Groom; that will arouse the devil against her. The soul enters into a spiritual war, armed with the weapons of repentance and humility, beside leaning on the capabilities of her Groom ... And with every battle, she enjoys a new victory, that increases the splendor of her beauty.

### **3- Forsaking the false prophets:**

The gentle heart of Jeremiah was wrenched as he saw **“the sword reaches to the heart” (Jeremiah 4: 10)**. He saw how the people assumed that God deceived them, and deceived His holy city Jerusalem; assumed Him speaking through the mouth of the false

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

prophets who said, “*You shall have peace*” (Jeremiah 4: 10). These are the deceiving sweet words that give false and temporary comfort to the religious and military leaderships together with the people; comfort that could lead them to desolation.

The inner adornment of the bride is set upon her fellowship with God; based on a true repentance and the circumcision of the heart; without listening to the deceiving smooth words that give temporary comfort to the soul, that say,

“*Peace, peace, when there is no peace*” (Jeremiah 6: 14); about which the Lord says: “*The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; They prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart ... Who say, ‘Sword and famine shall not be in this land’ – ‘By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed ! And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, because of the famine and the sword; they will have no one to bury them – them nor their wives, their sons, nor their daughters – for I will pour their wickedness on them*” (Jeremiah 14: 14 – 16); Those “*are prophets of the deceit of their own hearts*” (Jeremiah 23: 26)

The Church should reject these words; and should rather receive the fiery words of God, even if they seem severe and bitter; because they are a divine fire, capable of “*preparing her as a bride adorned for her husband*” (Revelation 21: 2).

The adornment of the bride is not the words of deceit that we feel comfortable with, but the words of God that come down on the heart like a sword, to cut off every trace of the foreskin, and to destroy its evil; so as to be proclaimed a sanctuary for the Lord and a dwelling place for His Holy Spirit. Let us then receive His words, whose wounds will heal our wounds !

Up to this day, the soul is still deceived, not by the outer false prophets, but by those within it: the dangerous deceiving thoughts that make her feel comfortable with sin, and forsake the divine commandment and fellowship. Over such soul, the Lord Christ weeps as He did over Jerusalem, 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. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you and your children within you to the ground, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation*” (Luke 19: 42 – 44).

After presenting His chastisement, God warns against the eternal punishment ... He allowed for their captivity, but if they do not return, they would fall to an eternal judgment; saying:

“*At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem, ‘A dry wind of the desolate heights blows in the wilderness toward the daughter of My people – not to fan or to cleanse – A wind too strong for these will come for Me: Now I will not speak judgment against them’*” (Jeremiah 4: 11, 12)

He speaks with His people as though to His daughter “*The daughter of My people*”, or probably, “*My daughter-people*”, confirming the extent of His caring for the people referred to Him, like a daughter; even though she receives His love and care with rebellion. He allowed for her captivity as a ‘fanning wind’, that separates the wheat from the tares; and as a ‘cleansing’ fire that purifies gold and silver. Yet, when the day of judgment comes, this punishment will become eternal.

#### **4- Realizing God’s plan, and accepting His chastisement:**

Rejecting the deceiving words, to receive instead the living words of God, the soul discovers God's plan concerning her chastisement. And as this book confirms in more than one occasion, that what befall Judah of the chastisement of captivity, is by a divine permission; as well as a natural fruit of her evil; and a revelation of the truth of the nature of the sin, adopted by Judah through her own will.

He compared the coming captivity to a lion coming up from his thicket, to a destroyer of nations on his way to make the land desolate (Jeremiah 4: 7); then to a swift destructive wind: ***“Behold, He shall come up like clouds, and his chariots like a whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are plundered”*** (Jeremiah 4: 13)

This is a painful portrait of a violent attack by the enemy ... He appears as clouds, Who can go up to fight, or to catch them?; as a destructive whirlwind coming from the desert; ... Who can confront it?; and as horses swifter than eagles, ... Who can stand against them ?

Isn't this the portrait of the war of the devil against the soul that delivers herself to evil, who infiltrates into the heart by the spirit of pride, to bring man down to the depths of hell, to become like the deceiving cloud – of pride and love of vain glory --, that carries no water of grace to irrigate the land to produce fruit. It is like a violent whirlwind, that lets the soul lose its spiritual insight, and its ability to recognize the secrets of God; and like swift horses that charge like eagles, snatch a prey then take off with it.

God allows us to be chastened; to let us taste the advance payment of the fruit of sin; in the hope that we forsake it and take refuge in Him. That is why He completes His talk, offering a cure for the soul: ***“O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you ?”*** (Jeremiah 4: 14)

By the divine chastisement, the soul realizes her need for cleansing, that she may be saved; namely to enjoy the fellowship of glory ... to bear on her the beauty and splendor of her Groom.

This cleansing is of the rich grace of God; Yet God does not cleanse her against her will; He says:, “Wash”. So it is up to her: either to deliver herself to the Holy Spirit of God to cleanse her; or to stay in her sins amid her stubbornness and rebellion.

**Father Sherimon** says: [In all this, there is a proclamation of God's grace, together with man's freedom; If he wishes to walk in the way of virtue, he has to ask for God's help] <sup>1</sup>.

And Father Serinus sees in this phrase, a confirmation of man's authority over sin; saying: [When we strive, as humans, against sins, they become under our authority and according to our will; We fight against the wicked lusts of our body; destroy and captivate the hosts of our sins under our authority; and drive out of our chests those fearsome guests; by the power that is ours by the cross of our Lord; So we can enjoy that conquest we spiritually see in the example of the Centurion (Matthew 8: 9) <sup>2</sup>].

**St. John Chrysostom** speaks to us about the inner cleansing; saying: [To pray without washing our hands is something of little importance; but to pray with an unwashed mind is a horrible evil. Hear what was said to the Jews who were preoccupied

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian: Conf. 13: 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 7: 5.

with the outer defilement: ***“How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? ! “***. I wish that we as well, wash ourselves by clean water, and not by turbid water; by giving, and not by greed; Let us deviate from wickedness and do good] <sup>1</sup>.

Let our heart, that is our inner Jerusalem, be cleansed, to be able to behold the Lord, and to receive Him dwelling in it; instead of our vain thoughts that have lodged and settled down in it for such a long time!

Again He reminds us that the chastisement is very imminent;... There is no time for delay !

***“For a voice of those approaching) declares from Dan and proclaims affliction from Mount Ephraim” (Jeremiah 4: 15)***

It is not fitting for her to blame God who chastens, nor the tool of chastisement; but she should blame herself; He says: ***“Because she has been rebellious against me’, says the Lord. ‘Your ways and your doings have procured these things for you. This is your wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reaches to your heart’”(Jeremiah 4: 17, 18)***

By your own will, you have chosen wickedness and rebellion; So bitterness occupied your heart instead of the joyful Kingdom of God !

And He says: [Let us, we as well, cleanse ourselves, not with turbid water, but with clean water; by giving, and not by greed; Let us ***“Depart from evil, and do good”*** (Psalm 37: 27)] <sup>2</sup>.

## **5- Receiving the true prophets:**

If it is fitting for the bride to reject the deceiving smooth words of the false prophets, in order to realize God’s plan for her salvation through chastisement; to cleanse herself, not with water, but with the tears of repentance; the prophet does not stop at just carrying the words of God; But as a member in the bride, he moans and suffers for her pains.

We should not assume that the prophets and teachers just carry God’s words; proclaim His divine will; and pray for the sake of the people; but they are the men of God, full of love ... members in the body; who moan and suffer with every pain! That is why the prophet says: ***“O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart pounds within me; I cannot hold my peace” (Jeremiah 4: 19)***

Here, the prophet reveals his great love for his people; speaking, not just as a firm teacher; but through his inner soul and heart; incessantly moaning, as he imagines before his eyes one horrible image after another, of what would soon befall them. He wishes he would not be the one to carry the bitter news to them; yet he could not hold his peace, beholding the imminent danger. He feels helpless; for although he is not able any more to intercede on their behalf; yet he can not help but to suffer and moan for their sake.

Indeed he honestly presents the word of God; Yet he also proclaims God’s grief for His people; He did not wish for them to go through that bitterness, they brought over themselves, as a natural fruit of their rebellion.

That is the feeling of every honest shepherd; He cries out together with his people, being his soul and heart He moans together with them, share their joy, and their spiritual growth; presents his soul to be torn, as a price for his love of the people of God.

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<sup>1</sup> In oan hom., 13: 3.

<sup>2</sup> In oan hom., 73: 3.

That is the work of sin; to melt the heart of the people, together with that of their shepherd; When the people betrayed God, it was said: “The heart of people melted and became like water”. Sin has destroyed the whole people, has let them lose every courage and strength, and has turned their hearts into water; with nobody to help or to support. Therefore do not marvel, when you hear the prophet Jeremiah, realizing the bitter activity of sin, say: ***“O my soul, my soul ! I am pained in my very heart! My heart pounds within me; I cannot hold my peace, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war”.*** (Jeremiah 4: 19)

And as the Lord carried our sins, He said on the tongue of His prophet David: *“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax, I has melted within me”* (Psalm 22: 14); How horrible is sin !

***“You have heard, O my soul the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried, for the whole land is plundered. Suddenly my tents are plundered, and my curtains in a moment. How long will I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet ? “*** (Jeremiah 4: 19, 20)

The prophet hears by his soul, and not by his ears. By the spirit of prophecy; he sees the events of the coming war as though he is there; He hears and sees unbearable things; He cannot bear to imagine that horrible day.

He believes the voice of the Lord to his inner soul, more than he does in voices he hears by his ear. And here he is describing the devastation that will come on the people, to awake in them the holy fear of God, and to keep them, by repentance, from judgment..

He sees destruction upon destruction; every one of them incessantly calling the other ... He sees sudden successive events coming over the villages (the tents) and the cities (the curtains).

The prophet says *“My soul, O my soul”*. The Jews used the different members of the body to express their soul experiences. They considered the soul (the heart) the center or throne of emotions, as it came in Isaiah 16: 11: *“My heart shall resound like a harp for Moab”*.

In the bitterness of his soul he cries out to the Lord: ‘When will you take away this calamity?’; How long will he bear to see war and hear the sound of the trumpet ? To which God responds: ‘It is up to them; as the cause for all that, is their foolishness, their ignorance of the truth, and their persistence on corruption; There is no cure, but to repent and to return to Me’; He says to the prophet: ***“For My people are foolish; They have not known Me; They are silly children; And they have no understanding; They are wise to do evil, But to do good they have no knowledge”*** (Jeremiah 4: 20)

God used to refrain from referring the people to Him when they are evil; But because of the bitterness of His prophet’s soul, he says *“My people”* ... As though He is saying to him, ‘If your soul is bitter because you foresee what will befall them, Do not forget that they are My people, whom I do not like to harm ... They brought themselves into corruption, because they do not know Me, as God who reigns on the heart, as the Savior who saves them from corruption; and as their loving friend ... Their knowledge of Me is formal, not that of living experience; They are ignorant and not understanding; casting themselves by themselves into bitterness.

I granted them wisdom; yet they used it for doing evil, and not for doing good; They did wrong to Me and to My gifts to them.

From all this we realize that the cries of the true prophets are nothing but an echo of the voice of God who does not stand the corruption, foolishness, and ignorance of His bride; but seeks her a bride, adorned with His wisdom and His living knowledge. That is the adornment sought by the true prophets, and not by the false ones.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** calls the true believer ‘a Gnostic’; namely, (a knowledgeable).

[The Gnostic should be very knowledgeable] <sup>1</sup>; [The Gnostic whom I mean, comprehends what is in-comprehensible to others; believes that there is nothing incomprehensible to the Son of God; and there is nothing that could not be learned. He who suffered for loving us, would not keep from us any knowledge that could benefit us] <sup>2</sup>.

[It seems to me, that the Gnostic is capable of three things:

- 1- Knowing things;
- 2- Putting what the ‘Logos’ (the Word) suggests into effect; and
- 3- The ability to receive the secrets hidden in the truth] <sup>3</sup>.

## **6- Fulfillment and enlightenment:**

The prophet Jeremiah confirms that ignorance is the cause of the desolation that befalls the people; as these chastisements reveal the void or the inner desolation in the people as well as in the soul; and also the inner darkness that corrupts the insight. What the prophet saw was a reflection of what is hidden in the people’s life.

***“I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; And the heavens, they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, And all its cities were broken down, at the presence of the Lord, By His fierce anger” (Jeremiah 4: 23 – 26)***

The portrait presented here by the prophet, reminds us of what came in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, when the earth was without form, and void; and the darkness was on the face of the sea, and there was no life.

The prophet repeats the word “*I beheld*” four times; as though he beheld the world from four directions: (north, south, east and west); What did he see ? He saw almost a return to what was before creation, as it came in the book of Genesis: An earth without form, and void; darkness instead of light; trembling of the solid mountains; fleeing of the birds..; A desolate world where there is no man and no plants ! Sin has corrupted the beautiful and fruitful world, which was created by God for the sake of man. Man destroyed himself, together with the earth creation.

What is the earth, but the multitude of people, who dedicated their energies to the pagan worship and abominations; to become, as though a desolate earth.

And what is heavens, but the religious and civil leaderships, who should have enlightened the way for the commons; but turned into heavens with no light, that brings about a condition of depression and grief.

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<sup>1</sup> Stromata 6: 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 7: 1.

And what are the mountains, but the souls that used to have their popular role of leadership; of whom every one thought as steadfast like mountains; to find them trembling..

He probably meant by the mountains and the hills, those high places on which the pagan altars were built, and on which people offered sacrifices to the idols.; Instead of being protected by them, they trembled and moved back and forth, themselves, in need of protection and support.

The disappearance of every man, is a reference to the disappearance of ration and wisdom; The disappearance of the birds of heaven, is a reference to the loss of security; And the transformation of the garden into a wilderness, is a reference of an utter desolation.

If the persistence of man on evil, and his reluctance to repent and return to God, deprive him of the work of the Holy Spirit of God in him, he would return to the condition of the earth before the Spirit of God hovers over it, to turn it into a beautiful world.

I say, how great is our need to return to the Creator, to work with His Holy Spirit in us:

Instead of the void and desolate earth, we would find a beautiful world; Namely, instead of the body with its corrupt lusts, we would be provided with a holy body in the Lord.

Instead of the heavens with no light, the sun would shine on it; Namely, instead of the soul on which darkness prevails, the Sun of righteousness would shine on it.

Instead of the mountains that tremble, and the hills that move back and forth, we see steadfastness and security.; Namely, our potentials, capabilities, and talents, would be strongly transformed to edification; not to be shaken by the whole world.

Instead of the void, where there are no men and no birds; our hearts become filled with the fellowship of the saints and the heavenly creatures; to sit with our Christ in the heavenlies

Instead of the wilderness, our hearts become like a fruitful garden; Then we would invite our Christ to eat of the fruits of His paradise in us

Instead of the fleeing of the cities before God's face, and before His fierce anger, we would attract many to enjoy the divine presence.

In other words, the beauty of the bride extends to the sanctification of the body, the soul, the energies, and the talents ... to enjoy a spiritual fulfillment, and an exalted spiritual. enlightenment.

God who seeks our fulfillment and enlightenment, while chastening us, provides us with a chance to return to Him; saying: ***“The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not (destroy it completely)” (Jeremiah 4: 27)***

He leaves in it a remnant, which He sanctifies and grows. ... He does not wish to destroy, but to sanctify and build. Yet, after saying “I will not destroy it completely”, lest the people become slothful and abuse the mercies of God, He got back to confirm the harsh chastisement:

*“For this shall the earth mourn; and the heavens above be black, because I have spoken. I have purposed and will not relent, nor I will turn back from it” (Jeremiah 4: 28)*

As long as they do not return to Him, He will not relent nor turn back from His chastisement.

### **7- Forsaking the self righteousness:**

If God seeks the fulfillment of His bride and her enlightenment, yet He confirms her inability to realize that by herself; She is in need of Him, being the source of her beauty, fulfillment, and enlightenment:

*“What are you doing, O devastated one? Why dress yourself in scarlet and put on jewels of gold? Why shade your eyes with paint? You adorn yourself in vain. Your lovers despise you”* (Jeremiah 4: 30)

If she thinks that she is rich, dressed in scarlet; that her safes are full of golden jewelry; and that she is beautiful and shades her eyes with paint ... Yet she will stay despised, not only by God, but even by her lovers. ‘Isabel’, the wicked queen, shaded her eyes with paint, adorned her head, and looked through a window; but Jehu said to the eunuchs: “throw her down”; and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses (2 Kings 9: 30 – 33).

Women in the old days used to shade their eyes with paint, to underscore the wideness of the eyes, as a sign of beauty. So those people did; become like a woman who adorns herself and shows her beauty to her lovers; yet they turn into her killers.

How miserable is the man, who, in his spiritual strife, leans on his self righteousness; He loses every inner beauty, and would become his own killer; he would hear God’s reproach: *“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see”* (Revelation 3: 17, 18).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH**  
(Chapter 4)

**LET YOUR BEAUTY REFLECT ON ME**

- ❖ You created me in Your image and according to Your likeness;  
O You the whole splendor !  
By my foolishness, rebellion, and sins, I corrupted my nature !  
Here I return in repentance to You;  
Let Your Holy Spirit give me back my beauty !  
Let Him reflect beauty on my depths;  
To get back Your image; And to enjoy the splendor of Your inner glory !
- ❖ How easy it is for a human hand to circumcise the flesh;  
but who can circumcise my heart !  
My heart and my depths are in Your hands;  
Circumcise them by the cross of Your love, O My beloved Savior !  
Take away the foreskin of my heart, that distorted every beauty in me !
- ❖ Grant me to use Your cross as a plow to prepare my heart for cultivation !  
To uproot from it all the thorns of the world worries;  
To prepare it to receive Your living Word;  
Then I would carry fruition: thirty-, sixty-, and a hundredfold !  
I would carry, together with the beauty of the inner beauty, the fruit of the eternal Spirit !
- ❖ Your people in the old, listened to the smooth words of the false prophets !  
They assumed that they were in peace;  
And did not realize that captivation was imminent!  
Here I am, with the evil thoughts chasing me !  
That I assumed to be the source of pleasure and peace !  
I did not know that they are killing my depths, and captivating my freedom !  
Grant me, together with the beauty of the soul, its inner freedom,  
O You the true Liberator ! Liberate me from my smooth sinful thoughts;  
And grant me Your holy thoughts !
- ❖ Your hand is stretching to chastise me;  
Let me know Your plan; as no one loves me like You do;  
No one desire the beauty of my depths like You do;  
How amazing You are, O the Holy One, in Your compassion !  
And How amazing, O my Savior, in Your chastisements !
- ❖ If the hearts of Your children burn for the salvation of my soul;  
How much more would be Your love;  
You, who alone, have given Yourself for me !  
Open my eyes to behold Your bosoms flaring for me !
- ❖ O my Lord, Grant me to cry out together with Your prophet:  
My soul ! O my soul ! My heart pounds inside me ! I can't hold my peace !  
Grant me a loving heart that longs for the salvation of every soul !  
That burns with the fall of everyone; And moans together with every soul !

- ❖ Grant me an inner beauty;  
Grant me Your knowledge, O Holy One; so as not to live in ignorance !  
Grant me fulfillment; to be in need of nobody, or of any thing !  
Grant me enlightenment, to carry Your splendor inside me.
- ❖ I confess to You, O my Creator and Savior:  
My body has become a desolate and a void earth;  
Turn it into a garden that offers the fruit of the Spirit !  
My soul has become like a heaven with no light;  
Make it Your heaven that enjoys divine light !  
Where You set up Your joyful kingdom !  
The mountains in me are trembling, and the hills move back and forth !  
Let my depths abide in You, O the true Rock !  
All the birds of heaven have fled away from inside me;  
Grant me the two wings of the Spirit, to fly and settle down in Your bosom !
- ❖ Finally, I did every effort to beautify myself;  
But my hands were destroyed by self righteousness;  
I became a laughing stock before those who reproach me;  
Stretch Your hand, O the perfect in beauty;  
Your grace is capable of pouring Your beauty in me !  
You are my strength, my praise, and my beauty !