

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETS

First of all, it is important to specify what we mean by prophets and prophetism since these words are used with a wide range of meanings. For many Christians, prophets are somewhat like seers who, already before Christ, announced his coming to save the world. When they begin to read the prophetic writings, they no longer know what to think: the idea they had of the prophets prevents them from discovering the meaning of the texts, or they simply give up.

Prophets in Israel

Human beings have always attempted to avert the fate of a future which escapes them. Diviners, necromancers and astrologers predicted to the great of this world what their future would be. Meanwhile, fortune tellers served the same function with the masses, like today's mediums and horoscope writers. In the Old Testament, we have testimonies of this need for predictions: disguised as a simple peasant, Saul goes to the village of Endor to consult a witch (1 S 28). A century and a half later, four hundred "prophets" predict victory to the kings of Israel and of Judah, both at the court of Samaria (1 K 22).

The "sons of the prophets" in the days of Samuel and David have a few things in common with those professional prophets. In his fatherly pedagogy, God respects the necessary stages to lead people to greater maturity: at times God accepts to speak to us through primitive and ambiguous means. However, the Prophets of Israel quickly break free from these groups of hotheads, often simple and sincere people who encourage people's faith by their charismatic manifestations, but often enough, swindlers who earn their daily bread by their predictions (Am 7:12). When the first meeting between Saul and Samuel is narrated, the authors use the opportunity to tell us that before the term "seer" was used whereas now the term used is "prophet" (1 S 9:9). In Hebrew the word "prophet" refers both to the one who is "called" and to the one who "proclaims." The Greek Bible kept the second meaning: a "prophet" is the one who "speaks in the name of" God.

While in Oriental courts, "seers" formed a particular body along with other royal officials, in Israel prophets are people of faith, called by God, and who speak on behalf of God with total independence.

A people of prophets

The response of prophets to their call is first of all an act of faith in God's untiring faithfulness. They communicate their faith to bring about conversions of the heart and a response from all the people to God's call. This is why several passages of the Bible seem to ask why the prophets' spirit was not passed on to the entire people of God. In the book of Numbers we already have Moses' answer when the Spirit is communicated to those who could not come to receive it from him (Num 11:24). The prophet Joel announced that at the end of time, the spirit of prophesy would be given to everyone (Jl 3:1).

So, in the Bible there is a *time of prophets* that corresponds approximately to the period of the kings from the rule of David until the second century after the return from the Exile. Then the Spirit seems to leave and "heaven closes up," but people continue to wait for the days of the Messiah, when communication with God will be reestablished.

Real men

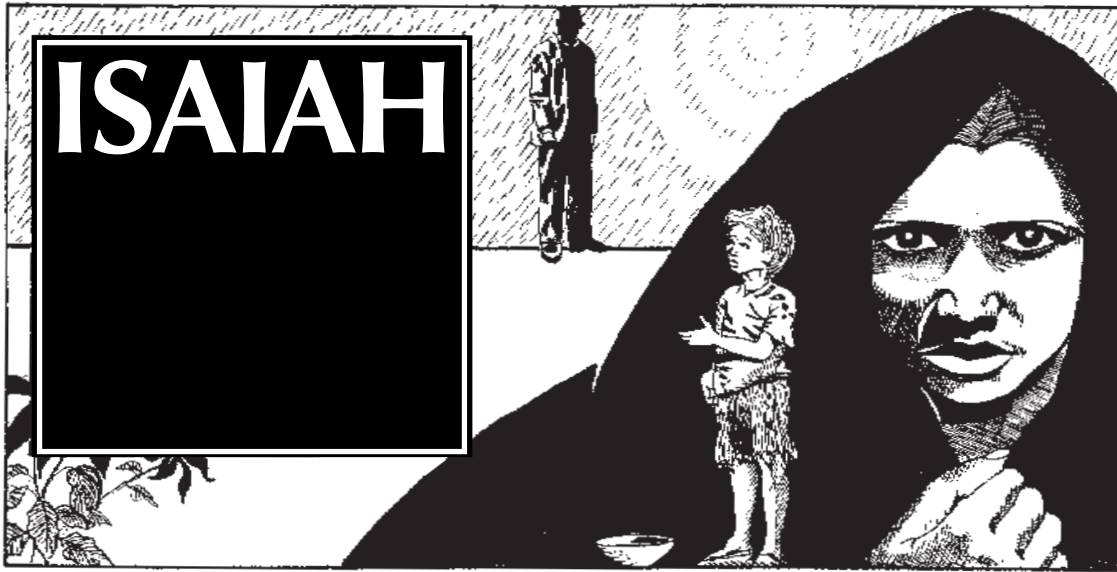
Prophetism is neither connected with some type of disposition nor with social status. Isaiah was a distinguished man, one of those that the New Testament would call *the elders* and who were the sons of leaders of tribes or groups from the nomadic period. After the exile, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah were priests at the Jerusalem temple. Amos was probably a scribe in charge of the royal livestock. Hosea and Jonah, Amittai's son, famous because of the tale in which he is the hero, came from the northern kingdom where they exercised their ministry. On the contrary, Zephaniah probably came from the north to Jerusalem with the refugees who fled the Assyrian invasion of the kingdom of Samaria. Micah came from a rural setting, but he belonged to an educated family probably close to the "wise men" of Judah.

The prophets are not stereotyped puppets in God's hand. Instead they are men seized by the Spirit, men seasoned by an exceptional spiritual experience and called to speak to their people in the name of Yahweh. In the course of their preaching they keep the richness and the limitations of their time, their milieu and their personal history making each one of them a unique being.

A prophetic vision of history

Prophets accompany Israel throughout its history because Israel has *one road* to travel. According to Israel's faith, history is not caught up in the vicious cycle of a perpetual starting over again as pagans viewed it. The People of God knew that human came from God and returned to God. Of course, people's history is not linear: it is sprinkled with weaknesses, failures and trials but also with strengths, joys and lights. Yet, one thing is certain for people of faith, the road always lies ahead, open to God's love and mercy, a road straightened out by the power of his salvation and, in the end, flowing into everlasting communion with God. This is the light in which we must read and reread all the texts from the prophets through whom "the Holy Spirit has spoken." Reproaches and threats, words of hope and restoration, everything expressing the love of the Father who prepares, corrects and molds his people, to allow them to welcome the fullness of light and salvation in his Son (cf. Heb 1:1-2).

We should not be surprised therefore that a good part of Israel's history was written in the prophets' circles. They were not only concerned with giving a chronicle of past events, but with interpreting them in order to rediscover God's way of doing things and the successes and failures of his Covenant.



Israel's period of glory and prosperity was very short indeed. The kingdom of David, the kingdom of God among the people of Israel, had become a very small nation, no different from the rest of the small nations that were trying to survive in the midst of powerful neighbors. The Israelites believed in their mission as long as good fortune was on their side. When it became obvious that they could no longer maintain their privileged situation, the Israelites lost the sense of their own destiny and began to live like the rest.

Israel knew that Yahweh, their God, is the "God of gods" because of their books and because the old people told their children; the Israelites go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and follow the religious customs of their elders. But, as Isaiah will reproach them, all of this is nothing more than human laws, a religion that is learned and does not spring from the heart. The processions are well attended, the clergy is powerful, but behind this facade life is absent and a godless king is able to destroy everything (2 K 21).

Actually, faith is without power unless it relies on an "experience" of God. If we have not had that experience, if the faithful as a whole have not had it, if they are taught only the religious experience of their forebears, all will die little by little. Isaiah is the man who at this time lived this experience and encountered the living God. This young man, of noble birth "had seen Yahweh" (chapter 6) and never ceased to speak in the name of God present in Israel, but whom Israel did not know.

What do we find in the following poems?

- Echoes of days of anguish. Judah, quite small, is squeezed in between two great nations, Ashur (Assyria) and Egypt, and the politicians wonder which of the two they must allow to swallow them up. Isaiah responds: "Seek first the kingdom of God and see to it that you practice justice among yourselves. God will make you stronger than the powerful."

- A persevering struggle to arouse faith in those deprived of vision. The externals of religion abound, but there is very little sense of responsibility, not much love for God, and little concern about doing his will. Isaiah will repeat: "Believe in him, he is among you, and if you do not become strong by relying on him, he will crush you."

- God's promises to David's descendants. Whether the rulers are good like Hezekiah or estranged like Ahaz, they are mediocre men not to be trusted with such great

promises. Yet, in the darkest hours, Isaiah will declare that the Lord has chosen Jerusalem and David, his king. From David's line, Christ, the king of Peace, will be born.

Some Facts About Isaiah's Time

Beginning in the year 740, the northern nation of Ashur rises up and begins its conquests. All the peoples of the Middle East are afraid and try to resist, with the encouragement of Egypt, another great power. In this conflict the northern nation of Israel disappears; Samaria, its capital, is captured and its residents deported in 720.

In 736, northern Israel and their neighbors from Aram try to force the kingdom of Judah to join them against Ashur. Then Ahaz, the king of Jerusalem, calls for the help of the Assyrian armies, in spite of Isaiah's warnings. The Assyrians destroy both Israel and Aram, and plunder the land of Judah.

In the years 701-691 Sennacherib, king of Assyria, comes to subdue Judah. King Hezekiah, encouraged by Isaiah, resists the enemy, and the famous liberation of Jerusalem takes place.

The Book of Isaiah

The Book of Isaiah and his disciples is the most important of the prophetic books. Jesus and his apostles will often quote it. Isaiah's words are found in chapters 1-39 of the book bearing his name. The second and the third parts of the book, namely, chapters 40-66, bring together the words of other prophets who wrote a century and a half later.

For the second part of the book of Isaiah and the poems of the Servant of Yahweh (chapters 40-55), see Introduction on page 569.

For the third part of the book of Isaiah (chapters 56-66), see Introduction on page 593.

Against an unthinking people

1 • ¹This is what Isaiah son of Amoz foretold concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

^{Dt 30:19} ^{31:28} ^{32:5,} ¹⁸ ²Listen, O heavens!
Give heed, O earth! for the Lord speaks:

“I raised children, I brought them up, but they have risen against me.

³The ox knows its master and the ass its owner’s manger, but Israel does not know me, my people do not understand.

⁴A sinful nation, a people weighed down with iniquity, a wicked race, perverted children! They have turned away from Yahweh and despised the Holy One of Israel.

^{Jer 5:3} ^{Hos 6:1} ⁵Shall I strike you again and again?
People always rebelling,
your whole head is diseased
and your heart also afflicted.

^{Lk 10:34} ⁶From the soles of your feet to the top of your head – all is wounds and bruises,

sores uncleaned and unbound, not eased with soothing ointment.

⁷Your country lies desolate, your cities razed by fire. Aliens have devoured the harvest before your very eyes, and you were left in ruins.

⁸The Daughter of Zion is left like a shanty in a vineyard, like a hut in a melon field, like a hamleted town.

⁹Had not Yahweh of hosts left us a small remnant, we would resemble Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah.

¹⁰Hear the warning of Yahweh, rulers of Sodom.

Listen to the word of God, people of Gomorrah.”

• ¹¹“What do I care,” says Yahweh “for your endless sacrifices? I am fed up with your burnt offerings, and the fat of your bulls. The blood of fatlings, and lambs and he-goats I abhor.

Gen 18:20
Dt 29:22

• **1.1** Verse 1 introduces the prophecies of the first twelve chapters. We find messages proclaimed on different occasions, over a long period of time but they are not arranged according to the time they were spoken.

I raised children... but they have risen against me. We often think that God demands what is due him, but it is not so: the Lord is a Father, a neglected Father. His love is wounded, not because of any particular sin, but because his children are irresponsible: *my people do not understand.*

Perverted children. People must hear the prophets’ harsh words. The power of their interests, their passions and propaganda are such that they are accustomed to accept everything, except the truth and their vocation as sons and daughters of God.

Shall I strike you again and again? Scarcity, bad laws, defeat are not in themselves punishment from God; we cause them ourselves. If those who are suffering are God’s children, God is committed to them, yet he does not spare them because only suffering can teach them. So, in another sense, it is true that God is the one striking them.

Here we have several expressions which are repeated in the following pages:

The Daughter of Zion means the city of Zion,

or Jerusalem. Zion was the area of Jerusalem where David had established his residence.

The Holy One of Israel. In chapter 6, God will reveal himself as the *Holy One*, that is to say, God whose mystery is inaccessible and whose brilliance causes the death of any creature blemished by sin. Isaiah will be the prophet of the Holy God.

Yahweh Sabaoth or the Lord of Hosts: it is an ancient title for Yahweh. It means both the God who leads Israel’s armies to victory and the God who rules the heavenly hosts, the angels, the stars and the forces of the universe.

• **11.** *What do I care for your endless sacrifices?* It is characteristic of the prophets to condemn external worship that does not express a true surrender to God. The sacrifices and the festivals in question here were required by the law of God; yet God says that he detests them, because when done without proper dispositions, they are a lie (see Ps 40:7 and 50:16, also, Mt 5:23).

Give the fatherless their rights. The Mosaic commandments condemned theft (Ex 20:14). The prophets denounce a social system which crushes the lowly.

Some people are fond of great ceremonies, others of their own devotions and prayers and

12 When you come before me and
trample on my courts,
who asked you to visit me?
13 I am fed up with your oblations.
I grow sick with your incense.
Your New Moons, Sabbaths and meet-
ings,
evil with holy assemblies,
I can no longer bear.
14 I hate your New Moons and ap-
pointed feasts
they burden me.
15 When you stretch out your hands
I will close my eyes;
the more you pray,
the more I refuse to listen,
for your hands are bloody.
16 Wash and make yourselves clean.
Remove from my sight
the evil of your deeds.
Put an end to your wickedness
17 and learn to do good.
Seek justice and keep in line the
abusers;
give the fatherless their rights
and defend the widow.”
18 “Come,” says the Lord,
“let us reason together.

Jer
7:22Hos
6:6Am
5:22Ps
50:8Mt
9:13Jer
15:6Jer
15:6Jer
15:6Jer
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Though your sins be like scarlet,
they will be white as snow;
though they be as crimson red,
they will be white as wool.
19 If you will obey me,
you will eat the goods of the earth;
20 but if you resist and rebel,
the sword will eat you instead.”
Truly the Lord has spoken.

Jer
2:7Dt
32:42

You became a harlot

• 21 Zion, the faithful city,
has become a harlot!
She who abounded in justice,
in whom righteousness lodged,
has become a hideout of murderers!
22 Your silver has turned to dross,
your best wine thinned with water.
23 Your rulers are tyrants,
partners of thieves.
They love a bribe
and look around for gifts.
No one protects the orphan,
or listens to the claim of the widow.
24 This is why the Lord speaks,
Yahweh Sabaoth,
the Mighty One of Israel:
“I will subdue my foes

Ezk
16
Hos
1:25:23
Ex
23:8
Hos
9:15

still others, of doing generous and philanthropic works. When doing this, we may be covering up the injustice we do every day.

- 21. Jerusalem is the city chosen by God. As the groom chooses his bride, so did Yahweh choose his people. Now, they are a *harlot*, because with their crimes, their trampling on the poor, they are unfaithful to Yahweh. Those who forget God and run after their own interests, without caring for their brothers and sisters, are adulterers.

It is a question of *justice*. Justice is one of the words most often used by the prophets. In the Bible, the “just one” is the one who lives according to the truth, that is, who remains faithful to the Covenant with God. What the prophets ask with such insistence is that justice be a profound *righteousness* and not just an external observance of the laws. Finally with Jesus, we come to the “justice” of the Holy Spirit, meaning the holiness of God deep in the human heart.

The deliverance of Zion will be like a judgment. Israel, plundered and ruined, prays for salvation. God says: “My salvation means punishing what you are doing.”

Here we have something very new. Up to this time people always prayed for the salvation of Israel, and if they were faithful God promised

them prosperity in the land of Palestine. Here Isaiah opens up other perspectives. God comes to judge his people and *it is the just who will be saved*. A new world is beginning, and Isaiah understands that this future will be beyond the present world where violence prevails. A new age is foreseen.

We must also note that the opposition of Israel to the “nations”, that is to the rest of humanity, has disappeared: different peoples come to Jerusalem to find there a light that God has simply put into the hands of his people.

Without saying it, Isaiah questions Jewish nationalism and in the poems that follow (7:10; 9:1; 11:1) he will show the figure of a Savior who in a certain way will be son of David, but certainly not the heir of corrupt kings and judges who reign and govern in the name of Yahweh.

Jesus and the Apostles will in their turn, speak of a judgment. God prepares something new and he cannot but condemn and destroy a world that has grown old in evil to which we become too easily accustomed. Certain liberations in history bring to mind the coming of a Kingdom (as in Exodus, Isaiah 37, in the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem...). More often moments of anguish prepare for it, less through the good they bring than because they destroy ancient structures in which sin was embedded (Lk 21, 28 and Rev).

and exact payment from my enemies.

^{Ezk 22:18} ²⁵ I will turn my hand against you,
I will smelt away your dross and re-
move your impurities.

^{56:5} ^{60:14} ^{Jer 23:6} ²⁶ I will restore your judges,
I will give back your counselors,
as it was in the beginning.
Then you will be called
the City of Righteousness,
the Faithful City.”

²⁷ The deliverance of Zion will be like a
judgment
there will be a remnant: the just ones.

²⁸ But rebels and sinners
alike will be destroyed,
and those who desert the Lord
will likewise perish.

^{17:10} ^{57:5} ^{Hos 4:13} • ²⁹ Yes, you will be ashamed of your sa-
cred oaks which have
given you delight;
you will blush for your gardens
which you have chosen.

^{Ps 1:3} ³⁰ You will be like an oak,
the leaves of which wither,
and like a garden
which runs out of water.

³¹ The strongman will be as tinder
and all his work a spark:
both will burn together
and no one will quench the fire.

• 29. This passage deals with the pagan cults which were practiced in groves and woods where they used to sleep with the prostitutes consecrated to the Baals.

• 2.1 This is apparently an unreal vision and yet it is being fulfilled and will be fulfilled.

The small hill overlooking the city of David and on which Solomon's temple is built, has become in this vision the center of the universe. All the nations are going there. Why are they going there? Because they know they need the *word of God*. After having exhausted the resources of science, economy and politics, they realize they need a *Teaching*, that is to say, a Revelation from God. The word "Torah," which in later days will mean the "Law," originally means, the Instruction given by God as we translate it here.

The law of God teaches us the meaning of human life and the mission of humankind. The answer to such questions is finally found in the person of Christ, Son of God become human, the model for his brothers and sisters. Recall how Jesus also went up a mountain to be transfigured before his apostles. It is there that they were given *the Law and the Teaching*: "Listen to him."

Let us go to the house of the God of Jacob. The Kingdom of God will be formed around the

God promises lasting peace

2 • ¹ The vision of Isaiah, son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² In the last days, the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be set over the highest mountains and shall tower over the hills.

³ All the nations shall stream to it, saying, "Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths. For the Teaching comes from Zion, and from Jerusalem the word of Yahweh.

⁴ He will rule over the nations and settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not raise sword against nation; they will train for war no more.

⁵ O nation of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

Hide in the dust

• ⁶ You have forsaken your people, the land of Jacob, for it was full of diviners.

people of Jacob-Israel and their kings, the descendants of David. Throughout the ages God preserves a Center in the world, the visible focus of the invisible kingdom: first, Israel, then remnant of Israel which is in the Church. Today, the Church reveals itself as a sign upon a mountain, open to the contemplation of both believing and unbelieving people.

It is true that the Church has many unattractive aspects: her institutions, her hierarchy; her paralyzing traditions are no more exempt from error and scandals than were those of the Jewish community. Perhaps we fail to discern the profound riches which the Church develops in sincere believers. In the world, they are those who keep the fire that Christ lit burning, and who create a network of more human relationships and more authentic life around them.

In the final analysis, this is what prepares for the coming of the "new creature." Isaiah alone has done more for human progress than all the kings of Assyria with their armies, their victories and their laws. This leaven of authentic civilization is what, one day, will be placed "on the high mountains", or "on a lampstand" to enlighten the world. (See Mt 5:14.)

• 6. This text is not addressed to Jerusalem (capital of Judah), but to the northern

They turned into soothsayers like the Philistines, and clasped hands with pagans.

^{Dt 17:16} ^{2K 14:25} ^{Ps 20:8} ^{Jer 25:6} ⁷ Their land is full of silver and gold, there is no end to their treasures.

⁸ Their land is full of horses, there is no end to their chariots.

⁸ Their land is full of idols, and they bow down before the work of their hands, before the things their fingers have made.

⁹ Man will be humbled and the mortal fallen, forgive them not!

^{Hos 10:8} ^{Lk 23:30} ¹⁰ Get behind the rocks, hide in the dust, for fear of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty!

¹¹ The haughty looks of man will be humbled; the pride of mortal will be brought low. Yahweh alone will be exalted on that day.

^{Lk 1:51} ¹² Yahweh will stand up on that day against all the proud and arrogant, against all that is high or great,

¹³ against all the cedars of Lebanon and all the oaks of Bashan,

¹⁴ against all the lofty mountains, and all the soaring hills,

¹⁵ against every high tower and fortified walls,

¹⁶ against all the ships of Tarshish and their luxurious load.

¹⁷ The arrogance of man will be hum-

bled; the pride of mortal will be brought low. Yahweh alone will be exalted on that day, ¹⁸ and all the idols will pass away.

¹⁹ People will flee

into the hollows of the rocks, into the caverns of the earth, from the terror of Yahweh, from the splendor of his majesty, when he arises to terrify the earth.

²⁰ On that day,

they will throw to the moles and to the bats their idols of silver and gold, which they made for themselves to worship.

²¹ They will flee

into the caverns of the rocks, into the crevices of the crags, from the terror of the Lord, from the splendor of his Majesty, when he arises to terrify the earth.

²² Rely not on man,

who has but a breath in his nostrils. What is he worth?

3 ¹ See how the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth, takes away provisions and supplies from Judah and Jerusalem –

² the hero and the soldier, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder,

³ the captain and the man of rank, the counselor, the wise man, the craftsman, and the enchanter.

⁴ I will make striplings their princes

Num 10:35
Ps 82:8

Gen 2:7
Job 7:16
34:14

kingdom (Samaria is the capital) which bears the name of their ancestor Jacob-Israel.

At the time, the northern kingdom had enjoyed years of prosperity. It followed that idols multiplied. In those days, those who became rich did not know what to do with their gold other than to make statues and ornaments which they dedicated to some god from whom they expected security and protection. Isaiah foresaw the disaster which was approaching for those unconcerned people.

Isaiah considers war as disasters and the terror of the defeated as an encounter of materialistic-minded people with their God who comes to judge them.

Their land is full of idols. An idol in our life

is like a cancer in the body; it is something overly important which consumes our real life. This is what science, progress, conveniences, a house, a car or money do, when they are no longer a means of fulfilling God's plans but instead we devote to them all our energy and hope.

Note the refrain in 9, 11 and 17: *the pride of mortal will be brought low*. Pride of the great, of the wise, pride of the mediocre and of the falsely humble. The pride of the religious person who believes he knows God because he knows how to speak about him. Pride of the mortal creature coming to the end of his days without having encountered the living God. More than folly, pride is an insult to the Holy God and it demands amendment: the more divine love is, the more demanding and jealous it is.

Mic
7:6

and raw lads their rulers.
⁵People will oppress each other – every neighbor his neighbor; the young will bully the old and the base will insult the honorable.
⁶When that day comes, a man will take hold of his brother in the house of his father and say, “You have clothes, so be our leader and rule over this heap of ruins.”
⁷But he will cry out in protest: “I cannot undertake to remedy all this, when in my own house there is neither food nor clothing; do not make me leader of the people.”
⁸See how Jerusalem crumbles and Judah falls, for in word and deed they have defied the Lord, and insulted his glorious presence.

Alas for the wicked!

• ⁹The look on their faces denounces them: they do not hide their sin; instead, they parade it, like Sodom: Woe to them! They bring about their own downfall!

¹⁰Say, “Fortunate are the righteous, they will eat of the fruit of their deeds.”

¹¹But woe to the wicked: the evil that their hands have done shall be done to them!

¹²O my people, plundered by your rulers, enslaved by your creditors! O my people, your leaders deceive you and lead you astray.

Jer
2:5

¹³Yahweh takes his place in court and stands to try his people. ¹⁴Yahweh calls to judgment the elders and the princes:

“You have devoured my vineyard. The spoil of the poor is in your houses.
¹⁵What right have you to crush the

people and to grind down the poor?” declares Yahweh Sabaoth.

How haughty are these women!

• ¹⁶Yahweh says, “Haughty are the women of Zion, walking with their heads held high, with mincing steps, flirting with their eyes, ornaments tinkling on their ankles.”

Ezk
16:50

¹⁷But Yahweh will cover with scabs the heads of Zion’s women and make their scalps bald.

Jer
13:26

¹⁸On that day the Lord will take away the ankle ornaments, the headbands and the crescents, ¹⁹the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves, ²⁰the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume bottles and the amulets, ²¹the signet rings and nose rings, ²²the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags, ²³the garments, the turbans, and the veils.

²⁴Instead of fragrance, there will be stench; instead of girdle, rope; instead of well-set hair, baldness; instead of jeweled gown, sackcloth; and instead of beauty, shame.

²⁵Your men will fall by the sword; your heroes, in battle.

47:1
Lm
2:10

²⁶The city gates will lament and mourn as Zion, ravaged, sits on the ground.

4 ¹On that day, seven women will fight over one man.

Gen
30:23
Lk
1:25

“We will eat our own food,” they will say, “we will wear our own clothing, only let us be called by your name and take away our disgrace.”

A remnant saved on Mount Zion

• ²On that day the *Shoot of Yahweh*

Jer
23:5-6

• **3.9** The prophets do not speak of poverty because it would hide historic reality. In Isaiah’s view, the poor are poor because others are oppressors. The sin is in the laws and in those who have forgotten God to the point of taking power into their own hands. Isaiah denounces the sin of the leaders in order to save the entire people from God’s judgment.

• **16.** Isaiah castigates the wealthy women of Jerusalem, all equipped to seduce like the idols whose jewels have been paid for with the blood of the poor. We have the same maledictions in

Amos 4:1. Maledictions that the poor of today could legitimately call down on our materialist countries: we think of the astronomic sums dispensed for dogs, drugs and pornography, not to mention the remedies for those who have over-eaten.

The remainder of the discourse is in 4:1: the imminent disaster will account for the many widows; cost what it may, they will search for a husband who will give them legal protection at least.

• **4.2** In the turbulent history of nations, God

33:15 will be beautiful and glorious; and the
 Zec 3:8 *Fruit* of the earth will be honor and
 6:12 splendor for the survivors of Israel.

Ezk 9:8 ³Those who are left in Zion and re-
 Mal 3:16 main in Jerusalem will be called holy
 13:8 all who are recorded among the living
 in Jerusalem,

⁴when Yahweh washes away the filth
 of the women of Zion and purges
 Jerusalem of the bloodstains in its
 midst with the blast of searing judg-
 ment, the blast of fire.

25:4 ⁵Then will Yahweh create over the
 49:10 whole site of Mount Zion and over its
 Ex 14:21 assemblies a cloud of smoke by day
 and a glow of fire by night.

For the Glory of the Lord will be a
 canopy and a pavilion for all, ⁶a shade
 from the scorching heat by day, a ref-
 uge from the storm and rain.

The song of the vineyard

3:14 **5** • ¹Let me sing for my beloved
 27:2 the love song of my beloved
 Jer 2:21 about his vineyard.
 Hos 10:1
 Ps 80:9

allows a small and insignificant people to take
 shape. From among them a chosen group called
 “Remnant” appears and takes root. As a pyra-
 mid is gradually reduced to a point, so is this
 remnant reduced, until it becomes only one
 man, the Savior. Here, he is called the *fruit of
 the earth*. He is also called *Shoot*, because he
 will be the sprout for the new humanity.

Notice here, as in 1:27, that the Kingdom of
 God begins with a “judgment.” This means that
 human beings alone cannot build the lasting city.
 Isaiah denounces at the same time the sin of
 individuals and the sin of the nation. No nation
 can present itself as the kingdom of God on
 earth. The Jewish people directed by the law of
 Moses, and the kingdom of David consecrated
 by God, only represented the first phase of
 sacred history. They would have to give up their
 ambitions and their human limitations (a king-
 dom of God in Palestine!) to receive from God a
 new covenant: see Jer 31:31. It is Christ who
 judges the world (Jn 12:31) and who pardons its
 sins (Jn 20:22).

Also, as in 2:2, the Kingdom of God is a place
 where God becomes present to his people: see
 the *Cloud* and the *pillar of fire* in Exodus
 13:21.

Above Mount Zion which symbolizes the
 Church, God will be a *shade from the scorching
 heat by day*.

- He will provide rest for the weary: “Come to
 me and I will refresh you” (Mt 11:28).
- The new trends in the world can harm the

My beloved had a vineyard
 on a fertile hillside.

²He dug it up, cleared the stones,
 and planted the choicest vines.

He built there a watchtower
 and hewed out a winepress as well.

Then he looked
 for a crop of good grapes,
 but it yielded only wild grapes.

³Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and
 people of Judah,
 judge between me and my vineyard.

⁴What more was there to do
 that I have not done for my vineyard?
 Good grapes was the yield I expected,
 why did it yield only sour grapes?

⁵Now I will let you know
 what I am going to do
 with my vineyard:

I will remove its hedge
 and it will be burned;
 I will break down its wall
 and it will be trampled on.

⁶I will make it a wasteland,
 I will neither prune nor hoe it,

Mt 21:18,
 33
 Jn 15

Dt 32:23

32:13

unwary and the isolated but not those who live in
 the church community.

It seems however, that only a small remnant is
 assembled there on Mt. Zion. Let us not say that
 only a small number of the elect (in which we
 number of course), will be saved for eternity. It
 is better to say that the Church in this world will
 always seem to be a small remnant; likewise in
 what is called the Church or people of God, only
 a small number will live the promises of God (Lk
 12:32).

- **5.1** Song of the “love” of God who at the
 end, threatens to destroy those who despise him.
 Isaiah knows this well because he encountered
 God whose love is tender and terrible.

The prophets readily exchange the language
 of religion for the language of passionate love.
 Friend, Lover, Husband: The Lord does not
 resemble God as depicted by the Jews.

The vineyard is the people whom Yahweh
 nurtured over the centuries of their history and
 among whom so many prophets worked, water-
 ing it with their sweat, if not with their blood.
 Perhaps we should not look for a specific mean-
 ing in every detail of the parable: the tower, the
 wine press. In a somewhat similar text, in Micah
 6:1-5, God reminds us of all he has done for his
 people.

After seeing how considerate the Lord has
 been, Isaiah denounces the injustice and oppres-
 sion which rule daily life in Jerusalem. In that, he
 sees proof that the law, the miracles and the

and briars and thorns will grow there.
I command the clouds, as well,
not to send rain on it.

⁷The vineyard of Yahweh Sabaoth
is the people of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his pleasant vine.
He looked for justice,
but found bloodshed;
He looked for righteousness
but heard cries of distress.

Woe to you rich!

^{Lev 25:23} • ⁸Woe to you who join house to
^{Dt 1:8} house,
^{15:1} who add field to field!
^{Jer 24:10} So no room will remain,
^{Mic 2:2} with you alone in the land?
⁹Yahweh Sabaoth has sworn in my
hearing:
“Many houses will remain in ruins,
beautiful mansions without occupants.
¹⁰Ten acres of vineyard
will yield only a barrel of wine;
ten bushels of seed,
only a bushel of grain.”
^{56:12} ¹¹Woe to those who rise early in the
^{Am 4:1} morning
to run after strong drink,
^{28:7} and tarry late in the evening
till they are inflamed with wine.
¹²They have lyres and harps,
timbrels and flutes,
and wine at their banquets;
but they have no thought for the deeds
of the Lord,
nor do they see his plans.

blessings of the Lord have been in vain. Their history shows that the kingdom of David is already a failure and Judah will be destroyed.

The same image of the vineyard appears in Isaiah 27:2 and in Jeremiah 2:21. Jesus will recall it in John 15.

• 8. God does not tolerate that some occupy all the land when many are without a plot to live (see Lev 25:8). There is no justification either for a society leaving all the capital in the hands of owners so that most of the workers cannot benefit from the riches of their own country. Isaiah’s words also condemn those who take over all the real power in a society, preventing

¹³Thus my people will go into exile
for want of understanding,
their dignitaries dying of hunger,
their masses parched with thirst.

¹⁴Therefore the grave has enlarged its
throat
and opened its mouth to the full;
it swallows the upper crust of Zion,
their throngs and their revelry.

¹⁵Man shall be humbled
and the mortal fallen,
and the eyes of the haughty cast down.

¹⁶But Yahweh Sabaoth will be exalted
when he comes in judgment;
the sentences of the holy God
will reveal his holiness.
(¹⁷Then will the lambs graze as at pasture,
fatlings and kids will browse among the
ruins.)

¹⁸Woe to those who haul their wrongs with
cords of deceit,
to those who pull a cart of sins,
¹⁹to those who say, “Let God hurry,
let him speed up his work
so that we may see it.
Let the plans of the Holy One of Israel
draw near and come true,
which we are eager to learn about!”

²⁰Woe to those who call evil good, and
good evil,
who change darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who give bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter.

²¹Woe to those who are wise in their own
eyes
and take themselves for sages.

²²Woe to those who are champions in
mixing drinks
and valiant at drinking bouts,
²³but acquit the guilty for a bribe
and deprive the innocent of his right.

²⁴Therefore, as the tongues of fire lick up
stubble,

others from exercising their human responsibilities.

The six woes point to the same people: to the rich and the noble who are unwilling to shoulder their responsibilities towards their people and who squander money. Their own judgment has become corrupt.

When false values are imposed on a society it culminates in evil. This is the social scandal which Jesus addressed in Matthew 18:7.

Isaiah predicts the exile without hesitation. It would have been wiser to understand the will of God and the way in which he rules over events. The people unfortunately make use of their intelligence only to advance their own interests

1:26
Num
20:13

Jer
17:15
2P
3:4

Mic
3:2

Rom
1:21-
22

as dry grass sinks down in the flames,
 so their roots will rot,
 and their flowers be blown away like dust,
 for they have rejected the law of Yahweh
 Sabaoth
 and scorned the word of the Holy One of
 Israel.

²⁵ Therefore the Lord,
 his wrath burning against his people,
 raises his hand against them
 and strikes them down.
 The mountains quake:
 the corpses litter the streets.
 Yet for all this his anger does not subside,
 his hand is still raised, poised to strike.

²⁶ He gives a signal to nations afar,
 he whistles to them from the ends of the
 earth;
 speedily and swiftly they come.

²⁷ None of them is weary, none stumbles
 none slumbers or sleeps;
 not a waist belt is loosened,
 not a sandal-thong broken.

²⁸ Their arrows are sharp,
 all their bows are strong:
 their horses' hoofs seem like flint,
 their chariot wheels like the whirlwind.

²⁹ They roar like young lions;
 they growl as they seize their prey,
 no one to rescue it as they carry it off.

³⁰ On that day they will roar over these
 people

like the roaring of the sea.
 Just look at the land –
 darkness and distress,
 the light flickering out in shadows,
 darkened finally by the clouds.

or to excel in the empty games of the rich. They
 allow their own people to sink into poverty.

• **6.1** On that day, in the year 740, Isaiah is
 in the Temple, or rather, he sees himself in the
 Temple, in spirit. In the innermost room, where
 the Ark is kept, there is only the divine presence:
 Yahweh seated as king, the train of his cloak
 filling the anteroom, as if to express the overflow
 of holiness and the power of God over the holy
 place and the city of Jerusalem.

During this brief moment, Isaiah encounters
 God in an intimate, authentic way, and this
 encounter will mark him for his entire life. This
 cannot be expressed, nor can he try to describe
 Yahweh who communicated with him in a spiri-
 tual way. The vision he has, the images he sees
 and the words that he hears are like flashes
 emerging from this mysterious and unspeakable
 encounter.

Isaiah speaks of the *holy* God, that is to say,
 totally other, infinitely different from any crea-
 ture. At the very moment of becoming present,
 he is out of our reach. *Holy God* is a way of
 saying that God is mystery. Isaiah continues to

The call of Isaiah

6 ¹ In the year that King Uzziah died
 I saw the Lord seated on a throne,
 high and exalted; the train of his robe
 filled the Temple. ² Above him were ser-
 aphs, each with six wings: two to cover
 the face, two to cover the feet, and two
 to fly with.

³ They were calling to one another:
 “Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sabaoth.
 All the earth is filled with his Glory!”

⁴ At the sound of their voices the
 foundations of the threshold shook and
 the Temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ I
 said, “Poor me! I am doomed! For I am
 a man of unclean lips living among a
 people of unclean lips, and yet I have
 seen the King, Yahweh Sabaoth.”

⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me;
 in his hands was a live coal which he
 had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ He
 touched my mouth with it and said,
 “See, this has touched your lips;
 your guilt is taken away and your sin is
 forgiven.”

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord,
 “Whom shall I send? And who will go
 for us?” I answered, “Here I am. Send
 me!” ⁹ He said, “Go and tell this people:

hold on to the presence of God and at the same
 time he is invaded by a fear which is not fright-
 ening. In the presence of the Holy One we
 experience ourselves as sinners, not because of
 a particular sin, but because of our very nature;
 we feel incapable of placing ourselves in the
 hands of God who surrounds us with his pres-
 ence.

Poor me! I am doomed! because God has
 said: “No one can see me and live” (Ex 33:20).
 God makes the first move and the Seraph
 purifies Isaiah through divine fire. Isaiah is for-
 given in the very instant he responds by an act of
 faith and completely accepts his mission. From
 then on, Isaiah will know and will say that it is
 necessary to choose: either believe in the Lord or
 else be destroyed by contact with the Holy One.

Seraphim, that is, *the burning ones*. The
 Israelites always believed in good and evil spirits.
 From their time in the desert, they attribute to
 some of these spirits the form of burning ser-
 pents; read Num 21:4-9; 2 K 18:4 on the
 subject. These texts help us to understand why
 Yahweh appears surrounded by fantastic Sera-
 phim with human faces. Being superior to hu-

1K
22:19
14:29
Num
21:6
Dt
8:15
Ezk
1:11
Ps
29:9
Ex
3:6
Jdg
6:22
Zep
3:9
Ex
29:36
1K
22:20
Mt
13:14

Acts 28:26 ‘Much as you hear, you will not understand; much as you see, you do not perceive.’

29:9
35:5
42:18
Ex
10:1
Ezk
2:5
Jn
9:39
12:43
10 Let their hearts be hardened, make their ears deaf and their eyes blind; what a misfortune for them, should they hear and see! Yet if they understood and came back to me I would heal them.”

11 Then I said, “For how long, O Lord?” And he answered,

“Until towns have been laid waste and left without inhabitant; until the houses are deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, 12 until Yahweh has sent away the people and the fields are left deserted.

4:3 13 Even though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned. Yet there a stump will remain like that of a fallen oak; this stump is a holy seed.”

First warning to Ahaz

2K 16:5-9 **7** • 1 When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of

Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, laid siege to Jerusalem but they were unable to capture it.

2 When the news reached the house of David, “Aram’s troops are encamped in Ephraim,” the heart of the king and the hearts of the people trembled as the trees of the forest tremble before the wind.

3 Yahweh then said to Isaiah: “Go with your son *A-remnant-will-return*, and meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washer’s Field.

4 Say to him,

Stay calm and fear not; do not lose courage before these two stumps of smoldering firebrands – the fierce anger of Rezin the Aramean and the blazing fury of the son of Remaliah. You know that 5 Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah’s son have plotted against Judah, saying: 6 Let us invade and scare it, let us seize it and put the son of Tabeel king over it. 7 But the Lord Yahweh says:

It shall not be so,
it shall not come to pass.

8a For Damascus is only the head of Aram and Rezin the lord of Damascus.

9a Samaria is only the head of Ephraim and Remaliah’s son is only the lord of Samaria.

8b Within fifty-six years,

mans, these beings can live close to God, but they must shield themselves from the splendor of his glory.

The Glory of God is the radiance coming from God, who is present in the Jerusalem Temple, as in the center of the world, radiating his power from one end of the earth to the other.

Isaiah receives his mission:

- He will be God’s spokesperson.
- Instead of believing, the people will harden their hearts.

- This will be the cause of Judah’s ruin. All that will remain will be the root from which something new will spring forth.

Much as you hear... Here God speaks ironically. In vain will they listen to the message of the prophet. In vain will they see the events of which they are witnesses and through which God speaks to them. Many times Isaiah will denounce this double voluntary blindness (1:12; 28:9-12). The tense of the Hebrew verb could be translated in the present or the future: it is already true and yet will be worse.

Make their ears deaf. The text here uses a form that is difficult to translate and means: you are going to make them, or you will be the occasion of their hardening... The end of the phrase shows clearly that God speaks in an ironical way. What a misfortune for them should they be converted! It is only in this way that God will heal all the wounds of his people (1:5, 26-28).

It is evident that if this irony is not seen – it will be found in numerous texts of the prophets – or

if the special mood of the Hebrew verb is not noted, a person could be scandalized in thinking that God sends the prophet for the sole purpose of not being listened to and consequently for the people to be lost.

These verses apply not only to Isaiah’s mission but to Jesus himself (Mt 13:14) and after him, to the apostles (Acts 28:26 and Jn 12:40). They will use these words to express the result of their own mission. Challenged by the word of God, many people and social groups close themselves and reject the message which might have saved them. The word of God is for our rising or our downfall, depending on how we welcome it (Lk 2:34).

- **7.1** The passage 7:1-9 summarizes the situation which developed in 736 when the people of Aram and Israel (the northern kingdom with its capital, Samaria) invaded the kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem (the southern kingdom). Several names may make this text difficult to understand: Rezin, king of Aram and Pekah, Remaliah’s son, king of Israel (also called *Ephraim: 7:9*), are the enemies.

King Ahaz thinks of everything except the help of God who committed himself to David’s heirs as long as they would trust him and seek justice.

Isaiah opposes the king: if the Assyrians intervene, there will be as much destruction in Judah as in Israel and Aram, even if Ahaz is the ally of the Assyrians. The king must rely on the Covenant and Yahweh’s protection.

36:2
2K
18:17

8:12

Ephraim will be shattered
and will no longer be a people.
^{9b}But if you do not stand firm in faith,
you, too, will not stand at all.”

The Virgin is with child

Mic 5:2
Jdg 6:36
Mt 16:1
• ¹⁰Once again Yahweh addressed Ahaz, ¹¹“Ask for a sign from Yahweh your God, let it come either from the deepest depths or from the heights of heaven.”

Ex 17:2
¹²But Ahaz answered, “I will not ask, I will not put Yahweh to the test.”

¹³Then Isaiah said, “Now listen, descendants of David. Have you not been satisfied trying the patience of people, that you also try the patience of my God? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign:

Gen 16:11
Jdg 13:3
Mt 1:23
Lk 1:31
The Virgin is with child and bears a son and calls his name *Immanuel*. ¹⁵He will live on curds and honey by the time

7:22
8:4
he learns to refuse evil and choose good. ¹⁶For before the child knows how to reject evil and cherish virtue, the land of the two kings that you abhor will be deserted. ¹⁷Yahweh will bring a time much worse than any since Ephraim broke away from Judah. 1K 12

¹⁸On that day Yahweh will whistle for flies from the farthest streams of Egypt and for bees from the land of Assyria.

¹⁹They will come and settle in the steep ravines, in the clefts of the rocks, on all the bushes, and on every pasture.

²⁰On that day, with a razor hired from beyond the river (with the king of Assyria), Yahweh will shave the head and the hair of the legs and the beard as well.

²¹On that day a man will raise a heifer and a couple of sheep,

• 10. The prophecy about the Virgin giving birth is one of the most important in the Bible even though it leaves some questions unanswered.

To support his warnings already expressed in 7:4-9, Isaiah offers a miraculous sign to the king: *Ask the Lord...* (v. 11). Ahaz piously refuses to hide his determination not to turn back (v. 12). Then, the prophet explodes in anger: these descendants of David whom God has always protected are useless: a descendant of David of another kind will be able to bring salvation to God's people. Yahweh is preparing to send him. His mother (called here *the Virgin*: see what follows) gives him the name he will deserve (v. 14). Before this future king may bring peace, he will be raised humbly (v. 15). Before that Ahaz's and his followers' absurd politics would certainly bring total ruin to the country.

Now a few points need to be clarified.

1. *Immanuel* means *God-with-us*. This child not only gives us God's blessings, or miraculous and divine liberation, but through him, God becomes present among humankind and the promises heard so many times come true: *I will be their God and they will be my people* (Hos 2:25; Ezk 37:27; Rev 21:3).

2. Why does the Gospel use the word “Virgin” (Mt 1:23) where Isaiah speaks in 7:14 of *the young* (mother)?

The term used by Isaiah signifies in the biblical texts, at times a young girl, at times a young woman: it is a question of a young person. It was used like that without anything added to denote the young queen. On the other hand the prophets used to say the *Virgin of Israel* or the *Virgin Daughter of Zion* to refer to the people and to the holy city (Is 37:22). And so to them, the verse, *the Virgin will give birth*, could also

mean: the believing community will give birth to the Messiah.

3. Since God is giving a sign to all the people, the question of time must be exact: otherwise how could it be a sign? The *young* (mother) was perhaps Ahaz's wife whose motherhood would have anticipated salvation. However Ahaz's son and successor Ezekiah whom the Bible considers as a good king was already born at that time. Moreover how is it possible that Isaiah spoke about him in such an extraordinary manner (see 9:1-6).

It is also possible that this young mother was the one referred to by the prophet Micah when he spoke with enigmatic words of “the one who is to give birth” (5:2). These words seem to allude to the believers' community from which the Messiah will be born.

The prophecy of Isaiah was actually understood as an announcement of the Messiah, which is why they kept it for future times. In that case, how can we understand Isaiah's announcement of such birth as a close event that would be a sign for his listeners?

We cannot answer these questions because we do not know the exact words of Isaiah. Remember that his prophecy came to us as it was written by his disciples. However, by comparing these lines with those in Micah 5:2, we can at least approximate the message. Isaiah speaks as did the prophets: they see and gather together in one vision events which are perhaps far removed in time but follow the same line and set a direction in history.

Isaiah is giving a sign to King Ahaz, to his heirs, *David's descendants* (7:13), and to all who live in a world devastated by sin, and this sign points to Christ. Just as in the lost earthly Paradise we have the image of a woman, or of the son of a

22 and from the abundance of milk those who survive in the land will feed on curds and honey.

32:13 23 On that day every place planted with a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels will be covered with briars and thorns.
24 Men will go there armed with bows and arrows, for the whole country will be covered with briars and thorns.
25 No one will dare come to all the hills which used to be cultivated with hoe, for fear of briars and thorns. There, cattle will be let loose and sheep left to graze.

The waters of Shiloah gently flowing

Jer 32:11 **8** • 1 The Lord said to me, "Take a large cylindrical seal and write on it in ordinary characters: *Quick to plunder-Booty is Close*. 2 Do this before Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah my reliable witness."

10:5 3 I went to my wife; she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then Yahweh said to me, "Call him *Quick to plunder-Booty is Close*, for this is Yahweh's word:

7:14 4 Before the child knows how to say "father" or "mother", the wealth of Damascus and the booty of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria."

30:15 5 Again Yahweh spoke to me: 6 "Because this people refuses the gently flowing waters of Shiloah, and cowers in fear before Rezin

and the son of Remaliah, 7 therefore the Lord will bring against them the waters of the River, deep and mighty – the king of Assyria with all his pomp.

Jer 46:7-8
Dn 11:10
It will rise over all its channels and overflow all its banks; 8 it will sweep on to Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching up to the neck.
10:28 It will spread its wings over the whole breadth of your land, O Immanuel!
9 Know it, O you nations. Hear, O you distant lands; gird yourselves for war and be dismayed!
10 Devise a plan and it will be thwarted, make a resolve and it will not stand, for God-is-with-us.
Rom 8:31

Yahweh, a hidden God

• 11 Thus Yahweh spoke to me when his hand grasped me and he warned me not to walk in the way of these people:

Jer 20:7
12 "Do not speak of conspiracy whenever these people dread conspiracy; do not fear what they fear nor be in dread. 13 Only Yahweh Sabaoth must you hold in veneration, only him must you fear, only him must you dread.
7:2, 13
1P
3:14

14 He will be a sanctuary and at the same time a stumbling-stone, the rock that brings down, for both houses of

woman who will crush the serpent's head, here we have another image, that of the virgin with her son, *God-with-us*. Immanuel suffers for his brothers' and sisters' sins, and that is why he can reconcile us with God.

Many believing Jews suspected that the Messiah's origin would be extraordinary; before Jesus, the Greek translation of the Bible had already substituted the word "virgin" for the original term *young girl*.

So the evangelists would easily have recognized the fulfillment of that prophecy in the virginal birth of Jesus.

• 8.1 Prophets teach through their words and through their actions. Here, the strange name that Isaiah gives his son serves as a warning for everyone. Such a name, along with Immanuel form a pair in this chapter, and complement each other in pointing both to the invasion caused by Ahaz and to the liberation which will come later.

The *waters of Shiloah* (8:6) are the only source of water supply for Jerusalem, located on a plateau. They symbolize the secret protection of the Lord, present in the midst of his people and in whom all should place their faith. Whereas the king of Assyria whom Ahaz called

for help, would be like the river whose raging waters will flood everything. He will destroy Judah's enemies, but will also leave Judah in ruins. In this, we also have the prophecy about the destiny of modern nations that believe they will solve their internal problems by jumping on the bandwagon of more powerful nations.

• 11. *When his hand grasped me*. Isaiah is referring to one of those decisive encounters when God made him his prophet and he was under the wing of God's Spirit.

Do not speak of conspiracy! God acts in his prophets and frees them from fear. They are no longer paralyzed by the fears of the society in which they live. They are able to see and to show new ways.

We are signs in Israel. Isaiah has concluded his interventions and they have not listened to him. All he can do now is to wait in silence for the events to occur. His two sons, to whom he gave symbolic names: *Quick to plunder-Booty-is-Close* (8:3) and *A remnant-will-return* (7:3) remind everyone of his predictions. The first of these names refers to the near future; the second, to the end of the crisis. (See 10:20.)

Only Yahweh Sabaoth is holy: *only him must you fear*. For Jerusalem, it is a privilege to

Lk 2:34
Rom 9:32-33

^{1P} Israel. He will be like trap and snare for
^{2:8} the people of Jerusalem. ¹⁵ Many of
^{Rev} them will stumble, many will fall and be
^{21:22} broken, be trapped and captured.”
^{Mt} ^{21:44}

^{29:11} ¹⁶ Yahweh added: “Bind this testi-
^{Dn} mony and seal it in the midst of my
^{12:4} disciples.”

^{Ps} ^{22:25} ¹⁷ So I will wait for Yahweh who hides
his face from the people of Jacob. I will
hope in him. ¹⁸ Here am I and the chil-
^{Ps} dren he has given me. We are signs and
^{132:} portents in Israel from Yahweh Sa-
¹² baath, who dwells on Mount Zion.

^{1S} • ¹⁹ Should people tell you to consult me-
^{287:7} diums and spiritists who whisper and mutter,
^{2K} you must say to them: “A people, of course,
^{21:6}

To us a child is born

^{8:23}
^{60:1}
^{Mic}
^{7:8}
^{Lk}
^{1:78-}
⁷⁹

9

• ¹ The people who walk in darkness
have seen a great light.
A light has dawned
on those who live in the land of the shadow of death.

^{Ps}
¹²⁶

² You have enlarged the nation;
you have increased their joy.
They rejoice before you,
as people rejoice at harvest time
as they rejoice in dividing the spoil.

have God in its midst. Rather than being fright-
ened by human dangers, the Jews should look to
God and obey him. In their midst, God is like the
stone which hardly emerges from the ground but
causes a fall for those who do not see it. Jesus will
appear as a stumbling stone (Mt 21:44).

God hides his face from the people of Jacob.
Humanly speaking, the people of Jerusalem
have good reasons for not following Yahweh’s
command given through Isaiah, and God does
not work a miracle to persuade them at that time.
God “hides” because faith relies on his word and
does not demand miracles.

• 19. Israel, who did not listen to the word of
the living God, is left with one recourse: to
consult the dead through the fortune-tellers and
the mediums: Isaiah makes fun of them (8:19-
20).

• **9.1** This poem may have been composed
in 732 when the king of Assyria destroyed Israel,
kindred and enemies at the same time. Accord-
ing to their custom, the Assyrians took many of
the people to the other end of their empire. They
resided in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali
(see previous paragraph) which, centuries later,
would become Galilee. Dispersed among the
pagans, they were coming out of sacred history
to enter *into darkness*.

must consult its gods! On behalf of the living,
will you consult the dead?”

²⁰ This is what is said through the law and ^{8:16}
revelations: this word will not fade away.

²¹ Distressed and famished,
they will roam the land.
In their hunger they will fume
and curse their God and their king.
They will look upward,

²² and then look towards the earth,
but they will only find distress and dark-
ness,

and frightening gloom.

²³ Yet, where there was but anguish, dark-
ness will disappear.

^{2K}
^{15:29}
^{Mt}
^{4:15}

He has just afflicted the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali; but in the future he
will confer glory on the way of the sea, on the
land beyond the Jordan – the pagans’ Gali-
lee.

The liberation promised to them is presented
as a crushing victory of the Lord, inaugurating a
reign of peace, related to Emmanuel.

The people who walk in darkness... The
Gospel (Mt 4:16) sees in that people the crowds
whom Jesus addresses:

– a people dominated by every kind of oppres-
sors;

– a people seeking light and without hope.

A child is born: in growing up he will lose
nothing of his child-like qualities, but will do away
with the pride of nations.

Without doubt this child is the one named
Emmanuel in 7:15. Here again, his name signi-
fies what God will do through him. Through him
God will be revealed as “Wonderful Counselor”
which means he whose “counsel,” whose plans
are marvelously wise. God “Father” as he was for
David, “Mighty God” as he was for Jacob. The
“Prince of Peace,” he is still God but he will be
so in giving the victory to his king, his “messiah,”
as he did for David.

As was already the case for Emmanuel, God-
with-us, these appellations which seem at first
said for God could be equally applied to the
future king who will be “his” king, which is
usually expressed with the word Messiah. In any
case it prophetically announces what in fact
would happen: God himself will come in the
person of Jesus.

³For the yoke of their burden,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressors,
you have broken it as on the day of Midian.

10:27
14:25
Jdg
7:15-
25

⁴Every warrior's boot that tramped in war,
every cloak rolled in blood,
will be thrown out for burning,
will serve as fuel for the fire.

⁵For a child is born to us,
a son is given us;
the royal ornament is laid upon his shoulder,
and his name is proclaimed:
"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

7:14
Dt
10:17
Mic
5:1-3
Zec
9:9
Ps
2:6
72:17
110:2
Lk
10:11
Jn
3:16
Rev
19:12

11:9
32:18
33:20

⁶To the increase of his powerful rule
in peace, there will be no end.
Vast will be his dominion,
he will reign on David's throne
and over all his kingdom,
to establish and uphold it
with justice and righteousness
from this time onward and forever.

The zealous love of Yahweh Sabaoth will do this.

Threats against Israel

⁷The Lord has sent a word against Jacob: the sentence fell upon Israel.

⁸The people of Samaria and Ephraim saw it, but they said in pride and arrogance of heart: ⁹"The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones; the sycamores have been cut down, but in their place we will plant cedars."

¹⁰Therefore, Yahweh raises foes against them and stirs up their adversaries: ¹¹from the east, Arameans, from the west, Philistines – with open mouth they devour Israel.

Yet for all this his anger does not subside, his hand is poised to strike.

¹²For the people have not come back to him who has smitten them; they have not sought Yahweh Sabaoth.

¹³Therefore, Yahweh has cut off from Israel both head and tail, palm branch and reed

in a single day. ¹⁴The elders and prominent men are the head, the tail is the prophet of lies. ¹⁵The guides of these people mislead them, the leaders have lost their way. ¹⁶The Lord, therefore, does not spare their young men nor have compassion on their orphans and widows. For everyone has become evil and ungodly; every mouth speaks folly.

Yet for all this his anger does not subside, his hand is poised to strike.

¹⁷Their wickedness has become like a fire which consumes both thorn and brier; it rages, sets thickets ablaze, and all of them vanish like smoke.

¹⁸By the wrath of Yahweh Sabaoth the land is set aflame, and the people are burned like fuel for fire because no one spared another.

¹⁹Snatching left and right, they still go hungry and they remain unfilled: each one devours his neighbor's flesh.

WE DO NOT ABANDON HOPE

In the Bible, many promises appear as if they would happen immediately.

Abraham is promised a son and Isaac is born; but the true heir is Christ. Abraham is promised a land for his children who will, in fact, occupy Canaan; but the true land is the kingdom of God.

David is promised an heir and a lasting kingdom, but Christ is the definitive king, not Solomon.

• 7. The poem beginning here and ending in 10:4 was written years before the one we just read. It is addressed to the people of Israel who although weakened by their defeats, remain unconcerned and indifferent to God.

²⁰Manasseh devours Ephraim, Ephraim devours Manasseh; and against Judah together they march.

Yet for all this his anger does not subside, his hand is poised to strike.

Legal injustice

Pro
22:22

10

Ex
22:22
Dt
24:17
Job
31:14

Zep
1:18

¹Woe to those who enact unjust laws
and issue oppressive decrees!
²Woe to those who rob the poor of their rights
and deprive the helpless of justice!
They prey on widows and plunder the orphans.
³What will you do on the day of punishment?
Where will you flee for help
when disaster suddenly comes?
Where will you save your wealth?
⁴You can do nothing but cringe
among the captives and exiles
or fall down among the slain.
Yet for all this Yahweh’s anger does not subside,
his hand is poised to strike.

Assyria: instrument of God

10:27
14:24-
27
30:27

Jer
51:20

Mic
4:12

37:12

⁵Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury!
⁶Against a godless nation I send him,
against a people who provoke my wrath I dispatch him,
to plunder and pillage,
to tread them down like mud in the streets.
⁷But the mind of his king is far from this,
his heart harbors other thoughts;
what he wants is to destroy,
to make an end of all nations.
⁸For he says:
“Are not my commanders like kings?
⁹Was it not the same for Calno as for Carchemish,
for Hamath as for Arpad,
and for Samaria as for Damascus?
¹⁰Just as my hands have seized idolatrous kingdoms,
whose graven images excelled those of Samaria and Jerusalem,
¹¹just as I have dealt with Samaria and her idols,
shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols?”
¹²When Yahweh has finished all his work on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
he will punish the king of Assyria for his willful pride and arrogant insolence.
¹³For the king says:
“By my own strength I have done this and by my own wisdom,
for I am clever. I have moved the frontiers of peoples,
I have plundered treasures,

I have brought inhabitants down to the dust,
I have toppled kings from their thrones.
¹⁴As one reaches into a nest,
so my hands have reached into nations’ wealth.
As one gathers deserted eggs,
so have I gathered the riches of the earth.
No one flapped a wing
or opened its mouth to chirp a protest.”
¹⁵Does the axe claim more credit than the man who wields it?
Does the saw magnify itself more than the one who uses it?
This would be like a rod wielding the man who lifts it up;
will those not made of wood, be controlled by the cudgel?
¹⁶Therefore the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth,
is ready to send a wasting sickness upon the king’s sturdy warriors.
Beneath his plenty, a flame will burn like a consuming fire.
¹⁷The Light of Israel will be a fire and his Holy One a flame –
to burn and devour his thorns and briers all in a single day.
¹⁸The splendor of his forest and fruitful land
comes undone and raves,
body and soul disappears and passes away.

31:9

What the prophet condemns on God’s behalf is their social injustice.
10:2, “the widows, the orphans:” which means those who have no protection.
The Bible often calls our attention to them; it

also mentions “the foreigner,” meaning the immigrant.
• **10.5** This poem addresses the Assyrians when they were still a threat, perhaps in the

¹⁹The remnant of the trees in his forest will be so few, so easy to count, that a child could make a list of them.

A remnant will return

^{1:9} • ²⁰On that day, the remnant of Israel and
^{4:2} the survivors of the people of Jacob will no
^{6:13} longer rely upon the tyrant who struck them
down, but instead will truly rely upon the Holy
One of Israel. ²¹*A remnant will return* – a
remnant of Jacob – to the mighty God.

^{Rom} ^{9:27} ²²Yes, Israel! Though your people be as
the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them
will return; their end has been ordered, justice
shall be fully done. ²³The Lord will make a full
end, as decreed by Him, all over the land.

^{37:6} ²⁴Thus says the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth,
^{Ex} ^{5:14} “O my people, who dwell in Zion, do not be
afraid of the Assyrians who strike you with the
rod and lift up their staff against you as did the
Egyptians. ²⁵In a little while my anger against
you will be over and will be directed to their
destruction.

²⁶Yahweh Sabaoth will lash at them with a
scourge, as he did with the Midianites at the
rock of Oreb, as he did in Egypt when he
raised his rod over the sea.

The Prince of Peace

11

• ¹From the stump of Jesse a shoot will come forth;
from his roots a branch will grow and bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him –
a Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a Spirit of counsel and power,
a Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.

³Not by appearances will he judge,
nor by what is said must he decide,

campaign of 701 (see the commentary on chapter 31).

• 20. In 8:3 we already mentioned Isaiah's son whom he called “Quick to plunder-Booty is Close.” Here, his other son's name, mentioned in 7:3, *A-remnant-will-return*, is explained. Several times in the Bible we find Remnant which refers to the Remnant of Israel, namely, the small group who will remain after God punishes Israel for their infidelity (see Am 5:15).

From the time God spoke to Elijah of the “seven thousand Israelites” (1 K 19:18), the prophets are constantly repeating that the sins of Israel will not cancel God's plans. A remnant will remain when Israel is destroyed, and they *will return*. This has a double meaning:

- they will return from the countries where they were deported;
- they will return to their God interiorly: they will be converted to the Lord in their hearts.

²⁷On that day, their burden will be lifted off your shoulders, their yoke lifted off your neck. The yoke will be destroyed.

²⁸They have gone up from Rimmon and have come to Aiath; they have passed through Migron and stored supplies at Michmash.

²⁹They have crossed over the pass and now camp at Geba for the night. Ramah is in terror; Gibeah of Saul has fled.

³⁰Lift up your voice, O daughter of Gallim, let it be heard at Laishah and answered at Anathoth.

³¹Madmenah is in flight; the people of Gebim flee for their lives.

³²This day the invaders will halt at Nob; they will shake their fists at the mount of the Daughter of Zion, at the hill of Jerusalem.

³³Suddenly, the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth lops off the boughs with terrifying violence.

The tall trees are hewn down,
the lofty ones are brought low.

³⁴With an axe he cuts down the thickets; and Lebanon, the majestic, falls.

1S
2:12

4:2
1S
16
Jer
23:5
Rom
15:12
2S
23:2
Pro
8:12-
14
Jn
1:32
Col
2:3

• **11.1** Those who have read the New Testament know that the Jews of Jesus' time were expecting a Messiah. This, however, was not always the case. From Abraham to David, the Israelites were looking for the land promised by God and they conquered it. After David, they thought that a better king could not be found and, during the two and a half centuries that followed, they hoped only that their present and future kings would resemble David. The very promise that God made to David about his descendants (2 S 7:14) was not understood as the announcement of a future Messiah.

Isaiah is the first to announce the Messiah, namely, a king like David but better. Here he is presented as a shoot coming from the stump, once the tree has been felled. Thus, he suggests that the present kings, who are sinners and without much faith, will disappear. More than a descendant of David, Emmanuel will be a new David (he is called *son of Jesse* like David).

Rev
2:16

⁴but with justice he will judge the poor
and with righteousness decide for the meek.

Eph
6:14
2Thes
2:8

Like a rod, his word will strike the oppressor,
and the breath of his lips slay the wicked.

⁵Justice will be the girdle of his waist,
truth the girdle of his loins.

Gen
2:19
9:2
Lev
26:6
Hos
2:20

⁶The wolf will dwell with the lamb,
the leopard will rest beside the kid,
the calf and the lion cub will feed together
and a little child will lead them.

⁷Befriending each other, the cow and the bear
will see their young ones lie down together.

Like cattle, the lion will eat hay.

Gen
3:15

⁸By the cobra's den the infant will play.
The child will put his hand into the viper's lair.

Hb
2:14

⁹No one will harm or destroy over my holy mountain,
for as water fills the sea
the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

Rom
15:12

• ¹⁰On that day the "Root of Jesse" will be raised as a signal for the nations. The people will come in search of him, thus making his dwelling place glorious.

40:3
Ex
3:20

¹¹On that day Yahweh will again raise his hand to reclaim the remnant of his people from Assyria; from Egypt, Pathros and Ethiopia; from Elam, Shinar, Hamath and from the coastlands of the sea.

¹²He will set up a signal that can be seen from all the countries and assemble the exiles

of Israel; he will gather the scattered people of Judah from all the corners of the earth.

¹³Then Ephraim will cast off its jealousy and Judah will be rid of its enemies. Ephraim will not envy Judah nor Judah be hostile to Ephraim. ¹⁴But the two will sweep down together upon the shoulder of Philistia to the west and plunder the nations to the east. They will lay their hands upon Edom and Moab and make the Ammonites their subjects.

Zep
2:5

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him as it did on the prophets and more so. The prophets were inspired by a mysterious power called "Spirit of God," but not at all times. In him, the Spirit would dwell always:

- a spirit of wisdom and intelligence, as Solomon had;
- a spirit of prudence and strength, like David's;
- a spirit of knowledge and respect for the Lord, as Moses and the Patriarchs had.

To do justice for the meek was and continues to be the first function of sovereigns. The Messiah-King would be God's deputy, attentive to the poor, and he must receive the Spirit, or Breath of God for this endeavor. We must not see material liberation as opposed to spiritual liberation as if believers were to let others build a more just world. God's work that saves persons, can never be separated from educating people: it demands *the repression of the oppressors and ruling in the fear of the Lord.*

It would be wrong to think that, with Christ, this longing for justice was finished. The love and forgiveness that Jesus proclaims bring about the salvation of humankind through truth, justice and shared food. Should we forget these require-

ments, "spiritual" and naive love would be nothing but an illusion.

The renewal of God's people will be manifested in nature: *the lion will eat hay*. To put this in modern terms: thanks to technology and a greater cooperation between people, nature's hostile forces will be placed at the service of humankind.

Beginning with Isaiah, the prophets will see the Messiah, or the future king anointed by God, as a man of the Spirit. See the second part of Isaiah 42:1 and the commentary of this text Jesus gave in Nazareth (Lk 4:18). When the Spirit of God is conferred on believers through the sacrament of confirmation, the church recalls the Spirit of wisdom, intelligence, strength, etc.

• 10. This poem in 11:10-16 was written at the time of the exile. It was placed here to develop the prophecy concerning the "stump of Jesse."

In verses 10 and 12 note the theme of the "signal for the nations," found also in Luke 2:32, though in a different form.

Then we have a song of thanksgiving. About *the fountains of salvation*, see Isaiah 55:1 and the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4:1.

^{Ex 14:21} ¹⁵Yahweh will dry up the tongue of the Egyptian sea; he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates in scorching fury, and break it into seven streams that people can cross

dry-shod. ¹⁶Then there will be a highway for the remnant of his people coming back from Assyria, as there was when Israel came out of Egypt. ^{40:3}

Song of the saved

12

¹On that day you will say:
 “I give praise to you, O Lord.
 Although you have been angry with me
 your anger has been appeased
 and you have consoled me.
²He is the God of my salvation;
 in him I trust and am not afraid,
 Yahweh is my strength: him I will praise,
 the one who saved me.”
³You will draw water with joy
 from the very fountain of salvation.
⁴Then you will say: “Praise to the Lord,
 break into songs of joy for him,
 proclaim his marvellous deeds among the nations
 and exalt his Name.
⁵Sing to the Lord: wonders he has done
 let these be known all over the earth.
⁶Sing for joy, O people of Zion,
 for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

Ex
15:2

55:1
Jer
2:13
17:13
Ezk
47:1
Zec
14:8
Jn
4:14

Ps
105:1

Against Babylon

13

¹An oracle concerning Babylon, seen by Isaiah, son of Amoz:
²On a bare hilltop raise a banner;
 cry aloud to them,
 wave a hand for them
 to enter the Gates of the Nobles.
³I have ordered my sacred knights,
 I have summoned my mighty warriors –
 all those who rejoice in my triumph –
 I have commanded them to carry out my
 wrath.
⁴Listen, a rumbling on the mountains
 as of a great multitude!
 Listen, a tumultuous uproar
 as of kingdoms massing together!
 Yes, Yahweh Sabaoth is mustering his
 army.
⁵From faraway lands,
 from the ends of the heavens

they come – Yahweh
 and the instruments of his wrath –
 to destroy the whole earth.

⁶Wail, for the day of Yahweh is near;
 it will come as destruction from the Al-
 mighty.

⁷All arms will go limp,
 every human heart will fail him.

⁸Everyone will be gripped with terror.
 Pain and sorrow taking hold of them,
 men will be in anguish
 like women in travail.
 They will look aghast at each other,
 their faces aflame as with fever.

Ezk
7:17

⁹See how the day of Yahweh comes:
 it is a cruel day
 coming with wrath and fierce anger.
 It will make the earth desolate;
 it will destroy sinners within it.

Zep
1:14
Job
38:13

¹⁰The stars and constellations at night

• **13.1** Chapters 13 to 33 are a series of oracles against the neighboring people. The Bible calls them *the nations*, and since the Word of God was not addressed to these people, they were pagans. And so, whenever we read “the nations” in the Bible, we can translate it as “the pagans” or “the foreigners.”

It must be admitted that these chapters gather

together poems that are vastly different regarding date and spirit. Some of them are from Isaiah and are not really “against” neighboring nations: they are warnings to the peoples of Judah and Jerusalem to rely on the protection of Yahweh instead of letting themselves get involved in coalitions against Assyria.

For example, 14:28-32. An embassy of Philis-

will send forth no light, the moon
will not shine; in the morning the sun
will be dark as it rises.

¹¹ I punish the world for the evil it does,
and the wicked for their sins.
I make the arrogance of the proud cease.
I end the haughtiness of the ruthless.

¹² I will make mortals scarcer than gold
and humans more rare than the gold of
Ophir.

¹³ This is why the heavens tremble
and the earth shakes its foundation,
at the wrath of Yahweh Sabaoth
on the day of his burning anger.

^{Jer}
^{51:9} ¹⁴ Like a hunted gazelle,
or like a flock without a shepherd
everyone returns to his own people,
each one flees to his native land.

¹⁵ Whoever is captured will be butchered,
whoever is caught will be slaughtered.

^{Ps}
^{137:9} ¹⁶ Their babies will be dashed to pieces
before their eyes,
their houses will be looted,
their wives raped.

¹⁷ Against them I will stir up the Medes,
who don't crave for money
and are not interested in gold.

¹⁸ Their bows and arrows will strike down
young men
without mercy or compassion.

They do not spare infants and children.
¹⁹ Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms,
pride and glory of the Chaldeans,
will be like Sodom and Gomorrah
when overthrown by God.

²⁰ She will never be inhabited,
nor dwell in from age to age.

There no Arab will pitch his tent,
no shepherd will tend his flock.

²¹ There wild beasts of the desert will lie,
howling creatures will fill the houses,
owls and ostriches will dwell there
and wild goats will leap about.

²² There mad dogs will cry out in her
strongholds,
and jackals in her palaces.

Her time is close at hand;
her days are now numbered.

14 ¹ The Lord will take pity on Jacob, he
will choose Israel again and settle them
in their own land. Then foreigners will join
them and be counted with the people of
Jacob.

56:3
Ezk
37:14
Zec
2:15

² Nations will take them and bring them to
their own place. But as soon as they are back
home, the people of Israel will subdue them
and make them servants and maids. Thus the
people of Israel will make captives of their
captors and rule over their oppressors.

66:20
Zec
2:13

How you have fallen, shining star!

• ³ On the day Yahweh gives you rest
from your suffering and turmoil, from
your fear and your cruel bondage, ⁴ you
will take up this taunt against the king
of Babylon:

How has the oppression ceased?
How has the strongman ended?

⁵ Yahweh has broken the staff of the
wicked,

9:3
Ezk
26:17
Lm
1:1

the scepter of the tyrant

⁶ who struck down the people
with blow after blow,

who ruled the nations in anger,
with unrelenting persecution.

⁷ The whole earth is at rest and at
peace,
breaking forth into song.

⁸ Even the cypresses exult
and the cedars of Lebanon say:

“Now that you have fallen,
no loggers come to cut us down.”

⁹ The netherworld is all astir
to meet you when you come.

It stirs up the dead to greet you –

tines came to Jerusalem after a number of set-
backs at the hands of the Assyrians. Isaiah's
message is: Assyria will recover, Judah will be
saved if it remains neutral, trusting in
Yahweh.

Again in chapter 16, Moab must have been
ravaged by the Assyrian troops and came to ask
help from Judah remembering how in the past
Moab had been protected by the kings of Jerusa-
lem and paid them a tribute of wool and sheep.
Isaiah's reply: *Let them weep.*

The poem 13:1-22 has been inserted much
later in the book of Isaiah, certainly well after the
end of Babylon which it recounts. It is equally
true for 14:1-2 and 22-23. We note in 13:2 the
“saints,” meaning celestial personages also

termed “sons of God,” or “angels.” During the
last centuries before Christ, it was thought that
through their intermediary God directed history
(Dn 4:14).

• **14.3** See 14:2: it is still far from the Gospel
and the missionary spirit!

The poem in 14:3-21 was spoken by Isaiah on
the occasion of the death of an Assyrian king:
here these words are applied much later to the
ruin of Babylon which had become the symbol of
the fall of God's enemies.

It is worth noting how those empires of
Assyria, Babylon and Egypt which dominated
the world and made the Jews tremble disap-
peared without leaving a trace.

all who were leaders of the world.
It raises from their thrones –
all who were kings of the nations.

¹⁰ They all speak and say to you:
“You have also been thrown to the
ground and have become like us!

¹¹ All your pomp has been brought
down to the Kingdom of death,
along with the sound of your harps;
maggots are the bed beneath you
and worms are your blanket.”

¹² How you are fallen from heaven,

O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cast down to the ground,
you who mowed down the nations!

^{Ps} ^{48:3} ¹³ You said in your heart,
“I will ascend to heaven,
I will raise my throne
higher than the stars of God;

^{Gen} ^{3:5} ^{Ezk} ^{28:2} ^{Dn} ^{11:36} ^{2Thes} ^{2:4} ¹⁴ I will climb up above the clouds;
I will be like the Most High!”

^{Ezk} ^{32:33} ¹⁵ But down to the netherworld you go,
to the deep recesses of the Pit.

¹⁶ All who see you stare at you
and ponder over your fate:
“Is this the man who shook the earth,
who made kingdoms quake,
¹⁷ who made the world a waste,
who overthrew its cities
and would not give its captives
release?”

¹⁸ All kings of nations lie in state,
each in his own tomb.

¹⁹ You are nevertheless cast out of the
tomb,
like a rejected untimely birth,
like a trampled corpse buried
under the slaughtered,
under those cut down by the sword,
thrown into the common grave.

²⁰ You were not given a monument
for you have brought your land to ruin,
and caused your people to be slain.
May the descendants of evildoers never
be mentioned again!

²¹ Go up, slaughter the sons for the sins ^{Gen} ^{11:8}
of their fathers,
lest they rise and possess the land
and cover the earth with their cities.

²² “I will rise up against them,” says Yah-
weh Sabaoth. “I will cut off from Babylon her
name, her remnant, offspring and posterity,”
says Yahweh.

²³ “I will turn her into a swampland, a
habitation of reptiles and crocodiles; I will
sweep her with the broom of destruction,”
says Yahweh Sabaoth.

²⁴ Yahweh Sabaoth has sworn: ^{10:5}
“As I have planned, so will it be!
As I have decided, so will I do;
²⁵ I will destroy the Assyrian in my land,
trample him down on my mountains;
take his yoke off my people’s neck,
and remove his burden from their shoul-
ders.

²⁶ This is the sentence he pronounced for
the whole earth; with his hand stretched out
over all nations. ²⁷ Yahweh has made a deci- ^{Dn} ^{4:32}
sion, and who will annul it? His hand is
stretched out, and who can turn it back?

Warning to the Philistines

²⁸ In the year King Ahaz died this oracle
was proclaimed:

²⁹ “Rejoice not, all you Philistines, that the ^{Am} ^{5:19}
rod which smote you is broken; for from the
root of the snake will come forth a viper, and
its offspring will be a flying dragon.

³⁰ On that day my poor will have their fill
with the fruits of my fields and the helpless will
rest secure. But through famine I will kill your
children and slay even your remnant.”

³¹ Wail, O gate! Cry, O city!
tremble in fear, all you Philistines!
For smoke comes from the north –
a great army sweeps down on you.

³² What answer will then be given to the
messengers of that nation? “Yahweh has laid
the foundation of Zion, and there his afflicted
people will take refuge.”

Lament for Moab

15 ¹ An oracle concerning Moab: ^{Jer} ⁴⁸
Laid waste in a night,

Ar of Moab is silent!
Laid waste in a night,
Kir of Moab is ruined!

² The people of Diman have gone ^{Am} ^{8:10}
to the high places to weep.
Over Nebo and Medeba Moab wails.

Every head is shaved,
every beard is shorn.

³ In the streets they wear sackcloth,
on the rooftops and in the squares;
everyone wails,
every heart melts in tears. ^{Jon} ^{3:6}

⁴Heshbon and Elealeh cry out;
their howling is heard as far as Jahaz;
the armed men of Moab cry aloud
and their hearts are faint.

⁵My heart cries out for Moab;
her fugitives flee as far as Zoar,
as far as Eglath-shelishiyah.

At the ascent of Luhith
they go up weeping;
on the way to Horonaim
their cries are heart-rending.

⁶The watered fields of Nimrim
have become a wasteland;
the turf is dried up,
the grass is withered,
the verdure is gone.

⁷Now they carry away their possessions,
the wealth they have stored up,
to the Brook of the Willows.

⁸Their cry rings round the border of Moab,
resounds as far as Eglaim,
reaches as far as Beer Elim.

⁹The waters of Dimon flow with blood,
but worse is yet in store,
for I will bring lions upon Dimon,
upon those who escape from Moab,
and upon those who survive in the land.

2K
17:25
Am
1:2

16 ¹Like bewildered birds
cast out of their nests,
the daughters of Moab
stay at the fords of Arnon.

²From Sela, across the wilderness,
they send lambs to the mount of Zion:
are they not the rulers of the land?

³They say: "Take counsel,
render decision with justice.
Even at high noon
let your shade be like the night
to hide the fugitives.
Do not betray the refugees.

⁴Let the outcasts from Moab
sojourn among you;
be a refuge to them
against the destroyer."

(When the oppressor is no more
and the destruction is over
and those who trample the land
underfoot have gone,

⁵a throne will be established
steadfast in love.

One from the House of David,
for the sake of truth will sit on it;
he will administer justice swiftly
and judge the people righteously.)

2S
7:15

⁶We have heard of the pride of Moab,
of her arrogance and insolence,
of her empty pretensions.

⁷Let her wail then,
and let everyone wail for her.
Mourn for the raisin-cakes of Kirhareseth.

⁸The fields of Heshbon languish,
the vines of Sibmah wither.
The tyrants of the nations
have trampled down the choicest vines,
those that once reached Jazer,
spreading towards the desert,
stretching out as far as the sea.

⁹Therefore I weep as Jazer weeps
for the vines of Sibmah.
I drench you, O Heshbon,
O Elealeh, with my tears!

For over your fruit and your vintage
have been heard loud battle cheers.

¹⁰But they are gone: joy and gladness
have now vanished from your orchards.
In the vineyards

no more singing is heard,
no more shout of joy is raised.
In the winepresses
no foot treads out wine,
no voice shouts in exultation,
no heart sings a vintage song.

¹¹Like a lyre, therefore,
my soul moans for Moab;
my heart pines for Kir-areseth.

¹²When Moab appears on the high places,
she will only grow weary;
when she goes to pray at the sanctuary,
it will be to no avail.

¹³This is the word which Yahweh spoke
against Moab in the past. But ¹⁴now Yahweh
says, "Within three years, like the years of a
servant bound by contract, the glorious
power of Moab will have ceased to command
respect, her survivors will be very few and
feeble."

Against Damascus

17 ¹An oracle concerning Damascus:
"Damascus will cease to be a city
and will become a heap of ruins.

²Her towns will be abandoned
and left as pasture for flocks;
there they will lie down afraid of no one.
Damascus will no longer be a kingdom,
³so Ephraim will be left undefended.

From now on the remnant of Aram will
have no more power than the children of
Israel."

• **17.1** Despite its title this poem should not have been placed among the prophecies against the nations. It is a warning to the Kingdom of Israel to the north. Verses 10-11 surely allude to the cult of the god Adonis whose death and return to life were symbols of the return of

vegetation. It would seem that for his feasts people cultivated earliest and fast-growing plants which appeared and soon withered: in this way people celebrated their mourning for Adonis. The prophet sees there an image of what idols produce in the life of Israel.

This is Yahweh Sabaoth speaking.

⁴On that day
the glory of Jacob will fade;
the fat of his flesh will waste away.

⁵It will be as when a reaper
gathers the standing grain
and lops off the stalks,
or as when they gather the gleanings
in the Valley of Rephaim.

⁶Yet some gleanings remain,
as when an olive tree is beaten –
two or three olives are left on the topmost
bough,
four or five on the fruitful branches,
says Yahweh, the God of Israel.

⁷On that day people will look to their
Creator, their eyes turned to the Holy One of
Israel.

⁸They will no longer look to the altars, to
the work of their hand,
the sacred pole or the incense stand
which their fingers have made.

⁹On that day your cities will be like the
cities of the Hivites and the Amorites which
they abandoned to the Israelites. All will be
desolation.

¹⁰For you have forgotten the God of your
salvation,
you have failed to remember the Rock of
your refuge.

You may plant the finest plants,
you may plant out imported shoots,

¹¹you may make them grow
on the day you plant them,
you may make them blossom
on the day you sow,
yet they dwindle and the harvest is gone:
then you may cry!

The upsurge of nations

¹²Oh, the rage of many peoples –
they rage like the raging sea!
Oh, the thunder of many nations –
they thunder like the thundering of mighty
waves!

¹³But God rebukes them,
and they flee far away,
swept away like chaff
on the hills before the wind,
whirled away like eddying dust
before the thunderstorm.

¹⁴At eventide they sow terror;
before morning they are no more.
Such is the portion of our despoilers,
such is the lot of our plunderers.

Against Ethiopia

18 • ¹Woe to the land of whirring wings
beyond the rivers of Cush,

²which sends ambassadors by sea
in papyrus boats over the waters!

Go, swift messengers,
to a people tall and bronzed,
to a nation feared far and wide,
a nation conquering and strong,
whose land the rivers divide.

³All you inhabitants of the world,
all you who dwell on earth,
when a banner on the mountain is raised,
look!

When a horn on the hill is sounded, listen!

⁴For thus Yahweh spoke to me:

“From where I dwell, I gaze untroubled,
like heat shimmering in the sunshine,
like a dewy mist in the heat of harvest.”

⁵For before the vintage,
when the flowers fall,
and the blooms become ripened grapes,
I will cut shoots and prune
and hew away spreading branches.

⁶They will be left to the birds of prey
and to the beasts of the earth.

The birds will feed on them all summer,
and the beasts all winter.

⁷At that time the tall, bronzed people from
a country traversed by rivers – a conquering
and strong nation feared far and wide – will
bring offerings to Yahweh Sabaoth, to Mount
Zion. For this is the place where the name of
Yahweh dwells.

Against Egypt

19 ¹An oracle concerning Egypt:
Yahweh rides on a swift cloud and
comes to Egypt.

The idols of Egypt tremble before him;
the heart of Egypt melts within it.

²I will stir Egyptians against each other:
brother will fight against brother,
friend against friend,
city against city,
kingdom against kingdom.

³The Egyptians will lose heart for I will
confound their plans;

they will consult idols and sorcerers,
ghosts and necromancers.

⁴I will deliver the Egyptians
into the hands of a cruel master,
and a tyrant will be their ruler.
It is Yahweh Sabaoth who speaks.

⁵The waters of the river will dry up;

• **18.1** See commentary on 13:1. However,
in 18:7 and 19:16-24, note two additions
placed there much later. The first mentions a cult
which was celebrated in a Jewish temple built in
Heliopolis (which means: City of the Sun).

The second is one of the most extraordinary
paragraphs of the Old Testament, for it affirms
that the day will come in which foreign nations
will share all the privileges of Israel.

the river bed will be parched.

⁶The canals will become foul dry,
the tributaries of Egypt's Nile will dwindle
and cease to flow.

The reeds and rushes will wither.

⁷The plants on the banks
and at the mouth of the river,
and all the crops along the Nile will dry up,
blow away and be no more.

⁸The fishermen will mourn,
all who cast hook in the Nile will groan,
and those who throw nets upon the waters
will lament.

⁹The flax worker will despair,
the carders, too, and white cloth weavers;

¹⁰the spinners will be crushed;
the hired laborers despondent.

¹¹The princes of Zoan are utter fools,
and brutish is the counsel
of the wisest of Pharaoh's counselors.

How can you say to Pharaoh,
"I am one of the wise men,
a disciple of ancient kings?"

¹²Where are your wise men?

Let them come forward now,
let them explain to you
what Yahweh will do against Egypt.

¹³The princes of Zoan have become
fools;

the princes of Memphis have been
deceived;

Egypt is led astray by the chiefs of her
tribes.

¹⁴Yahweh has poured into them a spirit
which makes Egypt err in all her ventures,
as a vomiting drunkard errs.

¹⁵And Egypt will never succeed
in anything it attempts
by head or by tail, by palm or by reed.

Egypt will be converted

¹⁶On that day the Egyptians will be like a
woman trembling in fear whenever they see
the hand of Yahweh Sabaoth raised against
them. ¹⁷Judah will be a terror to Egypt.
Whenever they think of Judah, the Egyptians
will be terrified because of the terrible fate
Yahweh Sabaoth has in store for them.

¹⁸On that day there will be five cities in the
land of Egypt speaking the language of
Canaan, in which people will call upon
Yahweh Sabaoth. One of them is called the
City of the Sun.

¹⁹On that day there will be an altar to
Yahweh in the center of the land of Egypt and

a sacred pillar to Yahweh at its border. ²⁰It will
be a sign and a remembrance of Yahweh
Sabaoth in the land of Egypt, so that they
may call to him when they are oppressed,
and he will send a savior to defend and deliver
them. ²¹Yahweh will reveal himself to the
Egyptians. They will acknowledge him on
that day and worship him with sacrifice and
burnt offerings. They will make vows to
Yahweh and perform them. ²²Yahweh will
strike Egypt and then cure it. When they turn
to him, he will heal them and heed their
supplications.

²³On that day there will be a highway from
Egypt to Assyria. Assyrians will come to
Egypt, and Egyptians to Assyria. Egyptians
and Assyrians will worship together.

²⁴On that day, Israel will be a third party
with Egypt and Assyria – a blessing on earth.
²⁵And Yahweh will bless them saying,
"Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my
creation, and Israel my heritage."

Hos
6:1

Gen
12:2
Zec
8:13

The Sign of the Naked Prophet

20 ¹In the year that the general
sent by Sargon, king of Assyria,
made an assault upon Ashdod, capturing
it, ²Yahweh gave a warning through
Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saying, "Hang
the sackcloth from your hips, take off
your sandals and go." He did so, and
walked naked and barefoot.

³Then Yahweh said: Just as my ser-
vant Isaiah has walked naked and bare-
foot for three years as a sign and por-
tent for Egypt and Ethiopia, ⁴so will the
king of Assyria lead away captives
from Egypt and exiles from Ethiopia,
both the young and the old, naked and
barefoot, their buttocks uncovered, to
the disgrace of Egypt. ⁵Those who
pinned their hope upon Ethiopia and
made a boast of Egypt will be fright-
ened and put to shame.

⁶On that day the inhabitants of this
coastland will say, "Look at what hap-
pened to those we trusted and fled to
for help and deliverance from the king
of Assyria! What are we going to do
now to save ourselves?"

2K
18:17

• **20.1** We can easily imagine the impact of
this symbolic gesture. Egypt was among the
powerful of that time. Compared with Assyria,
an example of military power, Egypt was the
richer country, with a more refined civilization.

The Jews were counting on Egypt and were
asking for help: *chariots and horses*.

"Alas for those who trust in humans" (Jer
17:5).

Fall of Babylon

21 ¹ *An oracle concerning the Desert by the Sea:*

A fearful vision is shown to me:
As whirlwinds sweep over the Negeb,
coming in waves from the desert,
from the fearful land,
²the traitor betrays,
the plunderer plunders.
“Go up, O Elam!
Lay siege, O Media!”
“I have silenced all the groanings.”

³ Therefore I am in anguish;
my body is wracked with pain
as a woman in travail.
I am so bewildered that I cannot hear,
I am so dismayed that I cannot see.

⁴ My mind reels,
my heart falters in fear;
the twilight I longed for
has become a horror.

⁵ They set the tables,
they spread the rugs,
they eat and drink.
Arise, O princes,
oil the shield!

⁶ For this is what Yahweh said to me,
“Go, post a watchman
and make him report what he sees.

⁷ If he sees riders:
horsemen in pairs,
men mounted on camels,
men mounted on donkeys;
let him observe diligently,
let him listen attentively.”

⁸ Then the watchman shouted,
“On a watchtower, O Lord, I stand
through all the watches of the day,
and at my post I stay
through all the watches of the night.

⁹ And look, here come riders,
horsemen in pairs.”
And he spoke up again:
“Fallen is Babylon, fallen,
and all the graven images of her gods
lie shattered on the ground!”

¹⁰ O my people, threshed and winnowed,
I announce to you what I have heard
from Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of Israel.

Against Edom and Arabia

¹¹ *An oracle concerning Dumah:*
Someone calls to me out of Seir,
“Watchman, what of the night?
Watchman, what of the night?”

¹² The watchman answers,
“Morning comes, but soon
it will be night again.
Come back and ask,
if you want to ask again.”

¹³ *An oracle concerning Arabia:*
In the forest of Arabia lodge
the Dedanites’ traveling companies.

¹⁴ Those who dwell in the land of Tema
went to meet the fugitives:
bring bread for the hungry
and water for the thirsty.

¹⁵ These people have fled from the sword,
from the whetted swords,
from the bent bows,
from the fury of battle.

¹⁶ For thus Yahweh says to me, “In a year’s
time, as a worker bound by contract would
reckon it, all the glory of Kedar will come to
an end. ¹⁷ Few of Kedar’s archers and war-
riors will remain.” Yahweh God of Israel has
spoken.

22 ¹ *An oracle concerning the Valley of Vision.*

What ails you now,
that you have all gone up to the housetops,
² you with your hustle and bustle
a tumultuous city, a wanton town?

Your slain men
have not been killed by the sword,
nor have they died in battle.

³ Together your leaders have fled;
they were captured under the threat of the
bow.

Your valiant were caught together,
they had fled far away.

⁴ That is why I say,
“Look away from me.
I will weep bitterly.

Do not try to comfort me
over the ruin of the daughter of my people.”

⁵ There comes from the Lord Yahweh
Sabaoth a day of trampling and rout.
In the Valley of Vision they undermine the
walls

and the cries for help ascend to the moun-
tains.

⁶ Elam bears the quiver
with charioteers and horsemen;
Kir uncovers the shield.

⁷ Chariots are all over your choicest val-
leys;
horsemen are stationed at the gates.

⁸ Judah is stripped of her defenses.

Jer
51:8
Rev
18:2

41:15

Jer
8:19
9:17

1K
7:2-5

• **22.1** *Against the Valley of Vision*, namely, the cursed valley “Gehenna,” bordering Jerusalem on the south. All the people went up to express their delight. Hezekiah’s military victory or costly surrender to the Assyrians? Isaiah

knows that today’s meager success means tomorrow’s defeat and humiliation. If they had listened to him instead of relying on their strength and their diplomacy, the Lord would have saved them.

Let us eat and drink!

• On that day you turned your eyes to the arsenal at the Palace of the Forest. ⁹You saw the many breaches in the defenses of the city of David. You gathered together the waters of the lower pool.

^{5:12}
^{7:3}
^{30:1} ¹⁰You counted the houses of Jerusalem and tore down some of them to strengthen the wall. ¹¹You built a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old Pool.

But you gave no thought to its Maker. You had no regard for him who had planned it long ago. ¹²On that day the Lord Yahweh Sabaoth called you to weep and mourn, to shave your head and put on sackcloth.

^{Ecl}
^{3:12}
^{1Cor}
^{15:32} ¹³But look, instead of that, there is wanton revelry: oxen are butchered and sheep are slaughtered. You eat meat and get drunk, saying, “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.”

¹⁴A word from Yahweh Sabaoth has reached my ears: “This sin will not be forgiven until they die.”

Against a minister

¹⁵Thus says the Lord Yahweh Sabaoth: Go and talk to this man Shebna, who is the palace steward. Ask him:

¹⁶Who are you and what right have you to carve a resting place on the heights, to cut out a burial place for yourself here in the rock?

¹⁷Look here, O you strongman,

Yahweh will seize you; he will take you captive and take firm hold of you.

¹⁸He will roll you up, toss you like a ball, then violently hurl you down into a large open land. There you will perish with the chariots of your glory, O you, the shame of your master’s house!

¹⁹You will be deposed, strongman. I will hurl you down from where you are.

²⁰On that day I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah.

²¹I will clothe him with your robe, I will strengthen him with your girdle, I will give him your authority, and he will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the people of Judah.

²²Upon his shoulder I will place the key of the House of David: what he opens, no one shall shut; what he shuts, no one shall open.

²³I will fasten him like a peg in a sure spot, and he will be a seat of honor in the house of his father.

²⁴(Upon him will hang all the load of his father’s house – offspring and descendants, all the little vessels from bowls to jars. ²⁵On that day, says Yahweh Sabaoth, the peg fastened in a sure spot will give way; it will be cut down and the load hanging on it will fall. Thus Yahweh has spoken.)

Against Tyre

23 • ¹ *An oracle concerning Tyre:*
Wail, O ships of Tarshish,
for Tyre is destroyed!
When you return from Kittim
you will hear the news and wonder.
²Keep silent, merchants of Sidon,

Am
7:17

Rev
3:7

Ezk
26-
28

• 8. The Jews were dragged into a new coalition against Assyria (705-701). Hezekiah reinforces Jerusalem’s defenses before Sennacherib’s arrival.

Isaiah looks at the restlessness of those who refused to hear the call of Yahweh: he asked them to stay out of fruitless struggles and to dedicate themselves to bringing about justice.

Neither Assyria nor Egypt is the savior that Israel needs. Assyria and Egypt, fighting against each other for predominance, are not preparing a civilization for the future. In the days of Isaiah, no one knew that Assyria and Egypt were about to disappear, or to lose their influence. People could not guess that the following centuries would be dominated by new cultures based on moral values (Buddhism) or on a new sense of the creative human personality (Greek culture). Israel would also create one of these cultures

through the sense of responsibility, the concern for justice, and the obedience to God’s word: this was Isaiah’s preaching.

Isaiah seemingly forgets what is needed for the security of his country, too small to survive without help. In fact, he indicates the most pressing political needs when he speaks of establishing national life on a just and moral bases. This is the only way to prepare for an unknown future, knowing that God is *the one who has planned history long ago*.

The people were having a good time in order to forget their tragedy. “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*” Paul recalls these words in 1 Corinthians 15:32.

• **23.1** The poem against Tyre is perhaps Isaiah’s. Tyre, the great commercial center of

all you inhabitants of the coast.
Your messengers passed over the sea,
³across the wide oceans;
the grain of Shihor,
the harvest of the Nile,
was your income
and you were the fair of the nations.

⁴Be ashamed, O Sidon, refuge on the sea!
The queen of the sea wonders:
“Have I not had labor pains
and brought forth children?
Have I not nourished young men
and brought up daughters?”

⁵Those in Egypt will be in anguish
when they learn the fate of Tyre.

⁶You who dwell on the coastlands,
wail as you pass over to Tarshish.

⁷Is this the ancient city, your pride,
whose feet had carried her afar
to found colonies in distant lands?

⁸Who has planned this against Tyre,
the imperial city whose merchants
are princes,

whose traders are among the great ones of
the world?

⁹It is Yahweh Sabaoth who has planned it,
to bring down her proud majesty,
to humble the great ones of the world.

¹⁰Till your land like the valley of the Nile
O Daughter of Tarshish,
you have no more shipbuilding yard.

¹¹Yahweh has stretched out his hand
over the sea to make kingdoms tremble.
He has ordered the destruction
of the fortresses of Phoenicia.

¹²He has said, “Rejoice no longer,
ravished virgin daughter of Sidon.
Arise, pass over to Cyprus;
even there you will find no rest.”

¹³Look at the land of the Chaldeans,
a people now of no account.
The Assyrians have destined the land
to be a place for wild beasts.
They have erected siege towers
and demolished her bastions,
razed her palaces, completely
reducing her to ruins.

¹⁴Wail, O ships of Tarshish,
for your haven is destroyed.

¹⁵On that day, Tyre will be forgotten for

seventy years, about the span of a king’s life.
Then at the end of seventy years, it will
happen to Tyre as in a harlot’s song:

¹⁶Take a harp, go about the city, forgotten
harlot, sing your sweetest song, play your
best melody, that they may remember you.

¹⁷At the end of seventy years, Yahweh will
visit Tyre. She will return to her hire and once
again play whore with all the kingdoms of the
world on the face of the earth. ¹⁸But her
wages and activities as harlot will be dedi-
cated to Yahweh, instead of being stored or
hoarded. Her profits will go to those who live
in the presence of Yahweh, that they may
have abundant food and beautiful clothes.

The sentence

24 • ¹See how Yahweh breaks
the land and makes it crack,
how he turns it upside down
and scatters its inhabitants,
²priest and people alike,
servant and master, maid and mistress;
buyer and seller, lender and borrower.

As it will be with the creditor,
so will it be with the debtor.

³Cracked is the earth,
worn out is the world,
for Yahweh has spoken.

⁴The earth mourns and withers,
the world pines and fades,
both heaven and earth languish.

⁵The land lies polluted,
defiled by its inhabitants
who have transgressed the laws,
violated the ordinances,
and broken the covenant.

⁶Therefore a curse consumes the land
and its people burn for their guilt.
Few of its inhabitants are left.

(⁷The new wine mourns,
the vine pines away,
all the revelers groan.

⁸The merry timbrels are stilled,
the noise of the revelers is over,
the harps and lyres are silenced.

⁹No more will they drink wine with a song;
strong drink tastes bitter to the drinker.

¹⁰The city of confusion is broken down,
every door is closed; you cannot enter.

Palestine was for them what the great centers of international commerce are for us. The prophet speaks of “prostitution:” one could find there the embryo for which we can reproach the society of consumption. Verses 15-18 were most probably written centuries later when Tyre was for a time in the orbit of the Jewish nation.

• **24.1** When Isaiah was announcing the coming of Emmanuel and a new “victory of Midian,” he was expecting this to happen soon.

He could foresee that events were heading for a crisis in which God would give victory to his people.

However, after the exile, when the Jews had returned to Palestine and nothing was happening, many despaired because history was following its usual course. They lost trust in human power to bring about something really new and placed all their hopes in a divine intervention that would shake the world order.

This expectation is characteristic of the books

¹¹In the streets they cry for wine:
all joy is gone,
all cheer has left the land.
¹²The city is left in distress,
its ruined market is deserted.)
¹³Some remain where nations have been
as olives after the beating of the trees,
as grapes after the vintage.
¹⁴They lift up their voices and shout for joy,
from the vast lands they acclaim Yahweh.
¹⁵People give him glory from the western
islands:
"Islands, sing to Yahweh, the God of Is-
rael!"
Ps ¹⁶From the remotest part of the earth
7:10 we hear songs of praise:
"Glory to the Righteous One."
Yet I said: "Woe is me! Woe is me! there is
but treachery and traitors!"
¹⁷Not at all!
Terror, pit and snare
await you, inhabitants of the earth.
Am ¹⁸He who flees at the cry of terror
5:19 falls into the pit,
and he who climbs out of the pit
gets caught in the snare.
For the floodgates of heaven are opened
and the earth shakes to its foundation.
Gen ¹⁹The earth is broken into fragments,
7:11 the earth is in convulsion.
²⁰The earth reels like a drunkard,
it sways like a hut in the storm,
weighed down by its transgression,
and it falls, never to rise again.
²¹On that day Yahweh will punish
the host of the heavens above,
and the kings of the earth below.
²²They will be gathered together
as prisoners are gathered in the pit;
they will be shut up in a dungeon
and after a time, punished.
²³Then the moon will be confounded
and the sun ashamed,
when Yahweh Sabaoth reigns
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and lets his Glory be shown to his elders.

Thanksgiving

Ps **25** • ¹Yahweh, you are my God; I ex-
118: 28 alt you and praise your name, for

you have done wonderful things, faith-
ful and true, planned long ago.

²You have made the city a heap, the
massively defended city a ruin. The
bastion of foreign domination is a city
no more, nor will it ever be rebuilt.

³Therefore a strong people glorifies
you; the head of a great nation holds
you in awe.

⁴For you have been a refuge to the
poor, a haven to the needy in time of
distress, a harbor in the storm, a shade
from the heat.

For the blast from the ruthless is like
an icy storm, ⁵like heat in a dry place.
You silence the noise of foreigners; you
subdue the singing of the despot and
the proud.

⁶On this mountain Yahweh Sabaoth
will prepare for all peoples a feast of
rich food and choice wines, meat full of
marrow, fine wine strained.

⁷On this mountain he will destroy
the pall cast over all peoples, this very
shroud spread over all nations, ⁸and
death will be no more. The Lord
Yahweh will wipe away the tears from
all cheeks and eyes; he will take away
the humiliation of his people all over
the world:

for Yahweh has spoken.

⁹On that day you will say: This is our
God. We have waited for him to save us,
let us be glad and rejoice in his salva-
tion. ¹⁰For on this mountain the hand of
Yahweh rests.

Moab instead will be trodden down, as
straw trodden down on a dunghill. ¹¹He will
stretch forth his hands there, as a swimmer
spreads out his hands to swim. But Yahweh
will strike down their pride together with their

termed "apocalyptic," it is expressed in a part of
the poems of chapters 24-27: they were inter-
serted in the book of Isaiah a long time after him.

Verses 7-12 should be put in parentheses, as
they are of the same spirit as 16:7-12, and break
the thread of the poem. This apocalyptic chap-
ter announces a cosmic intervention of Yahweh.
The earth is ravaged but there are survivors in all
the pagan peoples. These recognize the true
God and sing his glory.

In 24:21-23: all nature is judged, the heavenly

powers, cosmic spirits charged with the good
order of the universe as well as the earthly kings
charged with doing justice here below.

• **25.1** Chapters 25 and 26:1-6: a thanks-
giving to Yahweh who has done away with the
presence of the oppressor. His citadel, installed,
it would seem, in Jerusalem itself had been
completely destroyed. Stanza 25:6-9 recalls that
this victory is only one stage: the great hope is
"the banquet of the elect" after the judgment

Pro
9:2

2S
15:30

1Cor
15:54
Rev
21:4

Ps
93:1
97:1
1P
1:8

falsehood. ¹² He will raze the high-walled fortress; he will level it to the ground, as dust.

Song of victory

26 ¹ On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

We have a strong city,
he himself has set up
walls and fortifications to protect us.

² Open the gates!

Let the righteous nation enter,
she who is firm in faithfulness.

³ You keep in perfect peace
the one of steadfast mind,
the one who trusts in you.

⁴ Trust in Yahweh forever,
for Yahweh is an everlasting Rock.

⁵ He brought down those who dwell
on high,

he laid low the lofty city,
he razed it to the ground,
leveled it to the dust,

⁶ Now it is trampled
the poor and the lowly tread upon it.

Psalm of hope

• ⁷ Let the righteous walk in righteousness. You make smooth the path of the just, ⁸ and we only seek the way of your laws, O Yahweh.

Your name and your memory are the desire of our hearts. ⁹ My soul yearns for you in the night; for you my spirit keeps vigil.

When your judgments come to earth, the world's inhabitants learn to be upright. ¹⁰ But when favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn to be just. He does evil in a land of righteousness and fails to see Yahweh's majesty.

when God will destroy death. John will use these images in Rev 7:17 and 21:4.

• **26.7** 26:7-21: "psalm of hope" to which we draw attention.

This psalm of hope was written long after Isaiah. It exemplifies Jewish piety in the centuries after their return home, following the exile.

The people returned from exile, full of hope. The masters to whom they were subjected were perhaps foreigners, possibly their own kings

¹¹ Yahweh, your hand is lifted up, but they fail to see that. Let them see your zeal for your people, that they may be put to shame. Let your enemies be burned in the fire of your anger.

¹² Yahweh, please give us peace; for all that we accomplish is your work.

¹³ O Yahweh, our God, other lords besides you have ruled us, but it is your name alone that we honor.

¹⁴ They are now dead, never to rise again, for you have passed sentence on them. You have wiped out all remembrance of them.

¹⁵ You have enlarged the nation, O Yahweh; you have given glory to your name; you have widened the borders of the country. ¹⁶ For they sought you in distress, they cried out to you in the time of their punishment.

¹⁷ As a woman in travail moans and writhes in pain, so are we now in your presence.

¹⁸ We conceived, we had labor pains, but we gave birth to the wind. We have not brought salvation to the land; the inhabitants of a new world have not been born.

¹⁹ Your dead will live! Their corpses will rise! Awake and sing, you who lie in the dust!

Let your dew fall, O Lord, like a dew of light, and the earth will throw out her dead.

²⁰ Come, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a moment until his wrath is over.

²¹ For look, Yahweh is coming out of his dwelling; he will punish the inhabit-

Phil
2:13

13:8
Mt
24:8

Gen
4:10
Job
16:18

before the exile (13-14). Now all has changed, now the community wants no other sovereign than God and counts only on the Law (8 and 16). They hoped for their liberation (v. 17). They believed that upon return, they would build a better world, but this apparently did not happen (v. 18), since the pagans remained in the Holy Land and continued to make the life of believers difficult (vv. 10-12). So the people pray to God for the time of their restoration. God, being just, will not only grant them the liberation of the

ants of the earth for their sins. The earth will reveal the blood shed upon her and will not conceal her slain any longer.

The vineyard of Yahweh

51:9
Ezk
32:2
Job
26:13
Ps
74:14
Rev
12

27 ¹On that day, with his fierce, strong, and powerful sword, Yahweh will punish Leviathan, the twisting serpent always fleeing; he will slay the dragon of the sea.

5:1-7
26:1

²On that day, he will say, "Praise my fruitful vineyard! ³I, Yahweh, am its keeper; I water it every moment. So that no one will harm it, day and night I guard it."

⁴– "I have no wall, who will cleanse me from thorns?"

– "I myself will march against them, I will burn them altogether. ⁵Or if they come to me for refuge, let them make peace with me, yes, let them make peace with me."

11:1
Hos
14:4

⁶In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will blossom and bear many a shoot and fill the face of the earth with fruit.

⁷Has Yahweh beaten them as he beat those who beat them?

Has he slain them as he slew those who slew them?

⁸With expulsion and exile the city has been punished; with a blast as fierce as a storm from the east,

she has been pursued and carried off.

Dt
7:5

⁹By this, therefore, the guilt of Jacob will be expiated and he will atone for his sins when he pulverizes all the altar stones like chalkstones crushed to pieces. No more Asherah poles or incense altars!

25:2

¹⁰For the fortified city is abandoned: it lies deserted now, a forsaken habitation left like a wilderness.

There the calves graze, there they lie down, and there

they strip bare its branches.

¹¹Its dry boughs are broken; women come and make fire with them. This is a people without understanding; therefore their Maker will not spare them; he will not show compassion on them.

¹²On that day, between the Euphrates and the Wadi of Egypt,

Yahweh will thresh out the grain. One by one you will be gleaned, O people of Israel.

¹³On that day a great trumpet will blow, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will return to worship the Lord on the mountain in Jerusalem.

The irresponsible rulers

28 ¹Woe to the drunkards of Ephraim proudly adorned, 5:22

to that fading flower of luxurious beauty on the head of a rich valley – all are dizzy with wine.

²Look, the Lord is sending a powerful and strong one. Like a downpour of hail, like a destructive tempest, like flooding water in torrential rain,

he will cast it down to the ground –

³that proud ornament of the drunkards of Ephraim.

He will trample it underfoot –

⁴that fading flower of glorious beauty on the head of a rich valley. Nh
3:12

It will be like an early fruit which ripened before summer: as soon as someone sees it he picks it, and while it is yet in his hand he eats it.

⁵On that day, Yahweh Sabaoth will be a glorious ornament, a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people. 4:2

⁶He will be a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who turn back the enemies at the gate.

living, but will raise up the innocent victims who trusted in him, so that they may also know God's peace (vv. 19-21).

• **27.2** 27:2-5: a "song of the vine" in contrast with the threatening song, 5:1-7.

• **28.1** Chapters 28-35. In these chapters we find a mixture of many poems from different sources.

28:1-6. Oracles against Samaria: pronounced immediately before its destruction (721); see commentary on 2:6-19.

Scoffers beware

• ⁷But they also have erred through wine,
reeling and stumbling from strong drink.
Priests and prophets stagger,
befuddled with wine,
reeling when seeing visions,
stumbling when rendering decisions.

⁸All the tables are full of vomit;
there is not a spot without filth.

⁹“Who does he think he is teaching?
Who does he think listens to him?

Babies just weaned from their mother’s
milk?

Babies just taken from their mother’s
breast?

¹⁰Who cares to hear his
‘Keep quiet, keep quiet!
Wait a little, wait a little!’

33:19
1Cor
1:21
14:21

¹¹Yes, surely with stammering lips
and in a strange tongue,
he will talk to this nation,

¹²he who once said to them,
“This is rest, give rest to the weary”;
and, “This is repose.”

But they would not listen.

¹³That is why Yahweh now says:

Keep quiet, keep quiet!

Wait a little, wait a little!

So that when they have to go forward,
they will instead fall backward;
they will be injured and snared
and taken captive.

• ¹⁴Therefore, listen to the word of Yahweh,
you scoffers who rule these people of
Jerusalem.

¹⁵Because you make a boast,
“We have made a covenant with death,
we have made a pact with the nether-
world.

When the flood passes by
it cannot harm us,
for we have made lies our refuge
and falsehood our hiding place.”

8:19

The cornerstone

¹⁶Therefore the Lord Yahweh says
this:

See, I lay in Zion a granite stone,
a precious stone,
a sure foundation;
he who relies on it shall not be put to
shame.

¹⁷I will make justice the measure
and righteousness the plumb line.

Violent hail will sweep away your
refuge of lies and raging waters will
overflow your hiding place.

¹⁸Your covenant with death will not stand,
your pact with the netherworld will be
annulled.

When the overwhelming flood passes,
you will be crushed by it.

¹⁹Morning after morning,
by day and by night,

the scourge will seize and crush you.

If you understood this message,
you would be terrified.

²⁰“The bed will be too short to stretch out

Ps
118:
22
Rom
9:33
1Cor
3:11
1P
2:6

• 7. In 28:7-22, a very important poem. To understand it, let us not forget that Isaiah addresses people steeped in a religious culture. They do nothing without consulting priests and prophets. It is known that these prophets are members of confraternities of some kind charged with the guidance of those who seek counsel from Yahweh: but all that is more self-interest and not a matter of seeking the will of God. In verse 11 the prophet is the one who knows how to read God’s messages and reads for those who do not; but what God has to say is sealed and is not accessible to this kind of prophets.

The priests and false prophets make fun of Isaiah, saying his words make no sense other than warnings to little children. Isaiah tells them: since you refuse to understand Yahweh’s warnings, he will speak to you in a stronger way through events where you will not know what to do and you will have in your homeland strangers whose language you will not understand (the same message in 29:14).

• 14. 28:14-15 and 18-19: the king’s counselors enter into political alliances, playing Egypt

against Assyria; Isaiah demands that they seek salvation elsewhere than in these games that can only lead to disaster. It is in the midst of these reproaches that we have the word *cornerstone*.

28:16-22: *See, I lay in Zion a granite stone*. The Lord builds the foundation of the new Jerusalem. Regarding the cornerstone we read: *He who relies on it shall not be put to shame*. God assists at the events where the elite and the politicians bustle about. He begins to create in his own way a new history, and already places in the midst of his people that which or he whom no one will be able to ignore, he on whom a believing person may lean. In Hebrew the same word denotes “believe” and “lean on.”

The new people of God will be a people of believers and no power will dominate them. Must we understand *relies on it* to mean a new stage of history where God already counts little on the kings of Jerusalem, or *relies on him* to mean the savior? Isaiah lets us understand that it is a matter of new history where justice will be the criterion, replacing customs and human prejudice, and of course money, corruption and the authoritarian caprice of kings.

Already before Christ, the Jews held that this

on, the blanket too narrow to wrap around you.”

²¹Yahweh will arise as on Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon,

to work his work – his singular work;
to do his deed – his strange deed.

²²Put an end to your mocking, or your bonds will be tightened, for I have heard the destruction decreed against the whole earth by the Lord Yahweh Sabaoth.

Parable of the farmer

• ²³Listen to my words, pay attention and understand what I say.

²⁴Does the plowman do nothing but plow, loosen the earth, pulverize the clods with a harrow?

²⁵After leveling the soil, does he not begin to sow caraway and scatter cumin, wheat and barley and put spelt as the border? ²⁶For his God instructs him on what to do, he gives him guidance and discretion, too.

^{2S}
^{7:14}
^{Jer}
^{10:24}

²⁷For caraway is not threshed nor cumin crushed, but caraway is beaten with a stick and cumin with a rod.

²⁸Is the wheat milled on the threshing floor? Is it threshed without end? They put in movement chariot and horses but do not grind it.

^{Rom}
^{11:33}

²⁹All comes from Yahweh Sabaoth whose advice is excellent, whose wisdom is wonderful.

Hurricane in Jerusalem

^{2S}
^{5:6}

29 • ¹Woe to Ariel – Ariel, the city against which David encamped!

After a year or two, after the feasts have made their full round,

²I will lay siege on Ariel and there will be grief and mourning. To me she will be like an Ariel.

³I will send warriors against you; they will encircle you with outposts and raise siegeworks against you.

⁴Thrown down, you will speak from the ground:

from the dust your words will come muffled, your voice will rise as a ghost’s, your speech will be a whisper in the dust. But in a flash,

⁵the horde of your enemies will be like dust, the horde of tyrants, flying chaff.

⁶For suddenly, Yahweh Sabaoth will come with thunder, earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and thunderstorm and flames of consuming fire.

^{30:27}
^{66:15}

⁷The hordes of all nations that fight against Ariel, that attack and besiege her fortress, will vanish like a dream, like a vision in the night.

³⁶⁻
³⁷

⁸As when a hungry man dreams he is eating and awakens with an empty stomach, or when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking

and awakens with a parched throat, so will the horde of nations be that make war against Zion.

⁹Be irresolute, be stupefied, lose your sight and remain blind! Be drunk but not from wine, stagger but not from beer.

¹⁰For Yahweh has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep; he has shut your eyes – the prophets; he has covered your heads – the seers.

^{Mic}
^{3:6}
^{Rom}
^{11:8}

¹¹The revelation of all this has become for you like the words of a sealed scroll. When someone gives it to another who knows how to read and says, “Read this,” the other one answers, “I cannot; it is sealed.” ¹²When the scroll is given to one who doesn’t know how to read,” he answers, “I do not know.”

^{Rev}
^{5:1-3}

This people honors me with words

• ¹³Yahweh has said; “These people approach me in words; they honor me with lip-service, while their hearts stay afar. The worship they offer me is use-

^{1:11}
^{Ps}
^{78:36}
^{Mt}
^{15:8}
^{Mk}
^{7:6}

“stone” designated the Messiah (see Psalm 118:22). In any case Isaiah refuses to speak of a “king consecrated by God” (which is what Messiah means), for already it was obvious that Kings only deceive. The salvation promised by God would go far beyond what was expected then from a savior.

Jesus will apply this word to himself (see Mt 21:42 and Eph 2:21). Paul also recalls this new foundation in 2 Tim 2:19. The Christ is there in the midst of his people, and he is there in his Church, even when we believe we are building it ourselves.

• 23. Several oracles pronounced during the crisis of 701.

It is difficult for us to understand this parable of the farmer unless we remember that all ancient peoples considered that God, or the gods, taught them the secrets of agriculture. Isaiah says: see how Yahweh has taught the secrets of the earth, to plant at the right time so that the harvest will follow in due time. Know then that Yahweh’s word is the sure means of sowing in history and guiding politics in such a way that there may be fruit to harvest at a given time.

• **29.1** 29:1-12; 30:27-33 and 33:7-16: against Assyria and its king, Sennacherib. “Ariel” or “Lion of God” denotes Jerusalem.

• 13. 29:13. If we cease to be seekers of

less, these are no more than traditions and human rules.

¹⁰Cor 1:19 ¹⁴Because of this I will surprise them once more; the wisdom of the wise will be useless and the understanding of their prudent men will be at a loss.

¹⁵Woe to those who hide deep from Yahweh their plans, who work in the dark and say, "Who will know, and who will see us?"

45:9 Jer 18:6 Rom 9:21 ¹⁶You turn things upside down, as though the potter were the clay, and of him it could say, "He did not make me; he knows nothing."

¹⁷In a very short time, Lebanon will become a fruitful field and the fruitful field will be as a forest.

¹⁸On that day the deaf will hear the words of the book, and out of the dark and obscurity the eyes of the blind will see.

¹⁹The meek will find joy and the poor among men will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

28:14 ²⁰For the tyrant will be no more and the scoffers gone forever, and all who plan to do evil will be cut down –

²¹those who by a word make a you guilty, those who for a bribe can lay a snare and send home the just empty-handed.

45:17 ²²Therefore Yahweh, Abraham's redeemer,

speaks concerning the people of Jacob: No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will his face grow pale.

²³When he sees the work of my hands, his children again in his midst, they will sanctify my name, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and stand in awe of the God of Israel.

²⁴Those who err in spirit will understand; those who murmur will learn.

Do not rely on the great powers

5:21 28:15 29:15 **30** • ¹"Woe to the rebellious children," says the Lord; "they make plans which are not mine, they form alliances I did not inspire, and thus add sin upon sin.

²They go down to Egypt without my advice to take refuge in Pharaoh's protection and seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt.

³Therefore Pharaoh's protection will be

your shame and Egypt's shadow your confusion.

⁴When your officials reach Zoan and your ambassadors come to Hanes, ⁵they will all be put to shame by a people who can do nothing for them, who can give neither help nor benefit but only disgrace and reproach."

⁶An oracle concerning the beasts of the Negeb:

Through a distressed and troubled land of lions and lionesses, of vipers and darting snakes, the envoys carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, their treasures upon the humps of camels, to a people that is of no use to them.

⁷Egypt! An illusory and useless help. Because of that I call it: *Scarecrow, the Do-Nothing*.

Just tell us pleasant things

⁸Now go, write it down as a record for them, inscribe it on a scroll, so it will be an everlasting accusation against them.

⁹These are a rebellious people, their children deceitful. They do not listen to Yahweh's advice.

¹⁰To the seers they say, "See not," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy the truth. Just tell us pleasant things; see illusions and prophesy deceits. ¹¹Stray from the path, turn from the way! Take away from us the Holy One of Israel!"

¹²Therefore the Holy One of Israel says, "Because you despised this message and resorted instead to lies and abusive taxes, choosing to stay with it, ¹³therefore this guilt of yours will be like a breach on a high wall, cracked and bulging, ready to fall; the crash will come suddenly and instantly.

¹⁴It will be like the breaking of a potter's vessel, smashed so ruthlessly that among its fragments not one shard remains big enough to scoop cinder out of the hearth or ladle water out of the cistern."

¹⁵For thus said the Lord Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel: "Conversion and calmness would have been your salvation, quietness and trust your strength."

¹⁶But instead you said, "No, we will flee on horses!" Very well then, flee! And you added, "We will ride on swift steeds." Your pursuer will be swifter.

¹⁷At the threat of one, a thousand will flee, at the threat of five all will flee, till what is left

God, if we have not orientated our life to allow God to enter, our religion quickly becomes a collection of beliefs and practices similar to what all social groups have, which became like elements of a school program. Jesus will recall it in Mk 7:6.

• **30.1** Poem condemning the alliance with Egypt. The rulers thought that paying services to a rich country would be protection against danger; because of that they imposed forced taxes (12) in spite of words of God which condemned this policy (9). Compare with Isaiah 8:11-15.

Jer 11:21
Am 2:12
2Tim 4:3

Ezk 13:14

Dt 32:20

of you will be like a staff on a mountaintop,
like a banner on a hill.

The coming prosperity

Hos 14 Ps 1:1 2:1 33:12 • ¹⁸ Yet Yahweh waits to give you grace; he rises to show you compassion. For Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him.

65:24 ¹⁹ O people of Zion, who dwell in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. When you cry, he will listen; when he hears, he will answer.

Jl 2:23 ²⁰ When the Lord has given you the bread of anguish and the water of distress, he, your teacher will hide no longer. ²¹ Your own eyes will see him, and your ear will listen to his words behind you: "This is the way, walk in it."

2:20 ²² You will see the uncleanness of your idols and images overlaid with silver and gold. You will throw them out like a menstrual cloth. "Away with you then!" you will say to them.

Lev 26:3 ²³ He will then give rain for the seed you sow and make the harvest abundant from the crops you grow. On that day your cattle will graze in wide pastures. ²⁴ Your beasts of burden will eat silage tossed to them with pitchfork and shovel.

35:7 ²⁵ For on the day of the great slaughter, when fortresses fall, streams of water will flow on every mountain and lofty hill.

Hos 6:1 ²⁶ The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven times greater, like the light of seven days, when Yahweh binds up the wounds of his people and heals the bruises inflicted by his blows.

Assyria will be sacrificed

²⁷ Look, from afar the Name of Yahweh is coming, burning in anger, with a heavy hand. 10:5-19

Filled with fury are his lips, like a consuming fire is his tongue.

²⁸ Like a rushing torrent is his breath, rising up to the neck, shaking the nations as in a sieve of destruction, putting the bit of his bridle between the jaws of the peoples causing them to err and stray. 8:8 37:29

²⁹ You will sing, as on the night of a holy solemnity; your hearts will rejoice as when people go up with flutes, with timbrels and lyres. to the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty One of Israel.

³⁰ Yahweh will make his majestic voice heard

and show his arm descending in devastating fury and consuming fire, with sweeping wind and crashing thunder.

³¹ At the voice of Yahweh, Assyria will be battered; at the blows of his rod, it will be shattered.

³² At every beat of the punishing rod the plagues will fall on him. For Yahweh will fight him with outstretched hand. 10:24

³³ The pyre has long been ready, prepared for the king. Broad and deep is its fire pit, piled up with dry grass and wood. The breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, will set it ablaze.

Look to the Holy One of Israel

31 ¹ Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who pin their hopes on cavalry, putting their trust in chariots because they are many, relying on horsemen because they are strong. 18:2 29:15 30:1

Why did they not look to the Holy

• 18. God loves us and teaches us. This poem speaks of all the marvels to be discovered when meeting God through tears.

You will see the uncleanness of your idols. People have become aware that they were serving false gods. Idolatry does not only mean keeping carved gods, but more trusting people, serving institutions and envying the things that these images represent (see commentary on Ez 23).

• **31.1** This text continues the poem of 30:1 and presents the three protagonists of political power. There are two "great powers" and between them, the small Jewish nation trying to survive. The kings call on Egypt against Assyria and then, on Assyria against Egypt.

Isaiah's teaching is firm: before getting involved in dangerous political games, the king must be just and the people likewise faithful to the commandments. Then, all may rely on God,

5:12 One of Israel or consult Yahweh? ²And yet he is very wise, and from him disaster will come.

He does not go back on his word; he will rise against the evildoers, and cut off the help the wicked waited for.

Ps 146:3 ³The Egyptians are men, not God; their horses are flesh, not spirit. When Yahweh stretches forth his hand, the helper and the one he helped will fall and perish together.

Hos 5:14 Am 1:2 ⁴For thus the Lord has spoken: Just as a lion or a lion cub growls over its prey and is neither frightened nor disturbed by the shouts of the shepherd, so will Yahweh Sabaoth descend to fight on Mount Zion.

Dt 32:12 ⁵Like birds that hover, so will Yah-

weh Sabaoth shield Jerusalem: he will protect and deliver, rescue and save. Ps 36:7

⁶Return, O children of Israel, to him you have so wickedly betrayed. ⁷On that day each one of you will throw away the idols of silver and gold that his sinful hands have made. 2:20

⁸Assyria will fall by a sword not wielded by a man. They will be devoured by a sword not held by a mortal. They will flee before the sword, their young men will be captured and put to forced labor. ⁹They will desert their post and the officers, in terror, will abandon the standard." 3:16 Am 4:1

It is Yahweh who speaks, whose fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

A king will reign with justice

32

• ¹A king will reign with justice and princes reign in righteousness.

²Each will be like a shield from the wind and a shelter from the rain, like streams of water in a dry, parched land, like the shade of a rock in a weary land.

³The eyes that see will not be shut; the ears that hear will not be stopped.

⁴The mind of the rash will not judge hastily; the tongue that stammers will speak clearly.

⁵No more will the fool be taken as noble, nor the scoundrel considered honorable.

Pro 15:2 Sir 10:13 ⁶For the fool speaks folly and his mind thinks sinfully: he practices wickedness and takes pride in godlessness; he lets the hungry go without food, and the thirsty without drink.

10:2 Mic 2:1 ⁷The ways of the scoundrel are also evil, scheming wickedly against the poor, destroying the needy with lies even when their plea is just.

⁸But those who are noble plan noble things, and so are their deeds.

Tremble, you idle women

3:16 Am 4:1-6 ⁹Rise up, women who are at ease; hear my voice, carefree daughters; give heed to my words.

¹⁰In a little over a year, you who feel complacent will be shaken, for harvest will not come and the vintage will fail.

¹¹Tremble, you women who are at ease; be troubled, you carefree ones. Strip yourselves bare, with only a sackcloth to cover your loins. 20:2 Mic 1:8

¹²Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine, ¹³for the soil of my people overgrown with briars and thorns, for all the houses of joy, for the city of the wanton. Lk 23:48

¹⁴For the palace will be abandoned, and the noisy city deserted; the fort and the tower will become dens forever, the delight of wild asses, a pasture for flocks. 7:25

their Rock. This word of God continues to be meaningful today:

- for the dominated people of the third world.
- for the Church when it feels threatened.

• **32.1** Another poem about the hopes placed in the future Prince of Peace (see Is 11). The just king will give his spirit to the rulers and to the people in charge. Then, the people will be attentive to the Word of God.

My people will live in peace

¹⁵When at last the spirit is poured on us from on high, then will the desert become a garden, and this garden will be free as a fallow land.

¹⁶Justice will dwell in the wilderness; and in the fertile land, righteousness.

^{9:6 Ps 72:2 Jas 3:18} ¹⁷Justice will bring about peace; justice will produce calm and security forever.

^{28:12 Jer 23:6} ¹⁸My people will live in comfort and bliss in a land of secure dwellings and undisturbed resting places. ¹⁹While the forest will be beaten down and the fortress laid waste.

²⁰How blessed you will be, sowing by every stream, letting your work animals roam contented and free.

Psalm of hope

^{26 Jer 30:16 Hb 2:8} **33** ¹Woe to you, O ravager who never have been ravaged, you O treacherous one who have not been betrayed!

When your ravaging is over, you yourself will be ravaged; when your treacherous deals are ended, you yourself will be betrayed.

^{25:9 Ps 33:22} ²O Yahweh, have mercy on us who put all our hope in you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation when trouble comes.

^{Num 10:35 Ps 68:2} ³Peoples flee when you thunder and threaten, nations scatter when you rise majestically.

⁴Your spoil, O nations, will be gathered like grasshoppers or locusts leaping and pouncing at grain in the fields.

⁵Great is Yahweh who dwells in the height who fills Zion with justice and right, ⁶at any time he makes you secure.

Wisdom and knowledge are the helpful riches, the fear of Yahweh will be your treasure.

The intervention of Yahweh

⁷The people of Ariel lament in the street, their envoys of peace bitterly weep. ^{29:1}

⁸The highways lie waste with no traveler in sight.

For the covenants were broken, the promises trampled down; no one has been respected.

⁹The earth mourns and languishes, Lebanon withers away with shame, Sharon has become a wilderness, and Bashan and Carmel are stripped bare.

¹⁰Yahweh says: now I will rise up, now I will be exalted, now I will lift myself up. ^{Ps 12:6}

¹¹You conceived chaff, you will deliver stubble, my breath like fire will devour you. ^{Ps 7:15 10:12}

¹²The nations will be burned to lime, like thorns cut down and burned in the fire.

¹³You who are afar, hear what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge my might.

¹⁴The sinners of Zion shake, trembling in fear are the hypocrites. ^{30:27 Dt 4:24} "Who among us will dwell with flames? Who can subsist in the midst of fire?"

¹⁵He who walks uprightly and speaks righteously, spurns profit from oppression, shakes his fists at graft and corruption, stops his ears against suggestions of bloodshed

and averts his eyes from evil plans.

¹⁶This is the one who will dwell on the heights, his stronghold a fortress of rocks; bread is given to him, his water will not fail. ^{Ps 15:5}

After the oppression

• ¹⁷Your eyes will behold a king in his splendor and a land that stretches afar.

¹⁸Yet your mind may still dwell on its old fears: Where is the oppressor who counted and weighed the taxes and enrolled our sons? ^{Ps 37:1}

¹⁹But you will see no more of those ^{28:11}

• **33.17** This poem, inserted in the book of Isaiah later, emphasizes the hope for a peaceful time when oppression will only be a memory.

Zion, Jerusalem, is the tent which will never be moved. It enjoys Yahweh's secret protection, already mentioned in 8:1 in the image of the waters of Shiloah. A silent presence, yet more powerful than the presence of the great nations. These nations are on the shores of large rivers (Babylon, Egypt and also Tyre, on the seacoast) and are proud of their large boats. In Zion, the city

without power or riches, but under the Law of God, believers feel secure in the face of events.

Look to Zion, the city of our festivals; see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode. This is the way the believer looks at the Church where Christ is found. Staying on the fringe, without commitment, one can easily criticize. If a person really comes in and shares his or her life in depth, he or she discovers that only the Church can communicate strength, peace and God's presence to everyone.

fierce people with obscure speech you cannot comprehend, with stammering tongue you cannot understand.

^{Ps 46:122} ²⁰Look to Zion, the city of our festivals; see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode, a tabernacle never to be destroyed. Not one of its stakes will ever be removed nor any of its ropes severed.

²¹But there is Yahweh mighty for our sake, in place of broad rivers and streams. Here you see no galley with oars; no stately sailing ship. ²²But Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our king; he will save us.

The oppressor pillaged

²³Your rigging hangs loose: it cannot hold the mast firm, it cannot keep the sail spread out.

Such have been the prey and spoil that even the lame pounced on it. ²⁴On that day no one apologized, "I am sickly." The people who dwell there have been forgiven their sins.

The end of Edom

34 • ¹Come, O nations, hear and take heed, O peoples! Listen, O earth and all that is in you; listen, O world and all that comes from you. ²The wrath of Yahweh is upon all nations. His fury is upon all their armies. He has doomed them, he has given them over for slaughter. ³Their slain will be thrown away, stench coming from the carcasses, mountains will flow with blood. ⁴The heavens will dissolve and the skies roll up like a scroll, all their hosts shall fall, as the leaf falls from its vine, as the fruit falls from its tree. ⁵My sword waited in the heavens; and look, it descends upon Edom, to judge the people I have doomed. ⁶The sword of Yahweh is bathed in blood and covered with fat –

^{24:23}
^{Mt}
^{24:29}
^{Rev}
^{6:12}

^{63:1}
^{2S}
^{1:22}
^{Jer}
^{46:10}

The return of the exiles

35 ¹Let the wilderness and the arid land rejoice, the desert be glad and blossom.

²Covered with flowers, it sings and shouts with joy,

^{Gen}
^{19:24}

the blood of goats and lambs, the fat of the saddle of rams. For Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom. ⁷Wild oxen will fall and young steers with the bulls. Their land will be drenched with blood; their soil enriched with fat. ⁸For Yahweh has a day of vengeance, Zion's defender has a year of recompense.

⁹The streams of Edom will become pitch, her soil will be turned into brimstone, her land will be burning pitch.

¹⁰Never will its fire be quenched, night or day, forever will its smoke go up. From generation to generation the land will lie desolate

and none will ever pass through it. ¹¹It will be the haunt of pelican and wild hog, the dwelling place of the owl and the hawk.

^{Zep}
^{2:14}

God has decided to make it empty, he has destined it to be desolate.

¹²There will be no more kings to be proclaimed, no princes to be acclaimed, for the nobility will vanish in a kingdom doomed to perish.

¹³Thorns will grow over the castles, nettles and brambles over the citadels; the place will be a haunt of reptiles, an abode of owls and ostriches.

¹⁴Wild beasts will meet there, wild goats will call to one another; there will the night creatures alight to find for themselves a resting place.

¹⁵There will the great owl make her nest to lay and hatch and also find rest. There will the vultures gather, each with its mate.

¹⁶Seek and read from the book of Yahweh: not one of them will be missing, for his mouth has given the order and his spirit has brought them together.

¹⁷He has cast the lot for them. His hand has divided it among them. They will possess the land forever, and from generation to generation they shall dwell there.

^{40:5}

• **34.1** – 34:1. Yahweh's judgment upon Edom. See the introduction to chapter 24. – 35:1. Announcement of the re-

turn of the exiles and of the Messiah's coming. See commentary on Isaiah 40-41.

41:18
60:13

adorned with the splendor of Lebanon,
the magnificence of Carmel and Sharon.
They, my people, see the glory of Yahweh,
the majesty of our God.

40:10

³ Give vigor to weary hands
and strength to enfeebled knees.
⁴ Say to those who are afraid:
“Have courage, do not fear.
See, your God comes, demanding justice.
He is the God who rewards,
the God who comes to save you.”

29:18

⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unsealed.
⁶ Then will the lame leap as a hart
and the tongue of the dumb sing and shout.
For water will break out in the wilderness
and streams gush forth from the desert.
⁷ The thirsty ground will become a pool,
the arid land springs of water.
In the haunts where once reptiles lay,
grass will grow with reeds and rushes.
⁸ There will be a highway
which will be called The Way of Holiness;
no one unclean will pass over it
nor any wicked fool stray there.
⁹ No lion will be found there
nor any beast of prey.
Only the redeemed will walk there.
¹⁰ For the ransomed of Yahweh will return:
with everlasting joy upon their heads,
they will come to Zion singing,
gladness and joy marching with them,
while sorrow and sighing flee away.

Sennacherib's invasion

36 ¹In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. ²From Lakish the king of Assyria sent

his field commander with a large army to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. They halted at the channel of the Upper Pool on the highway of the Fuller's Field. ³So Eliakim son of Hilkiah, the palace administrator, went out to him together

• **36.1** The next two chapters repeat chapters 18 and 19 of 2 Kings, that relate the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib's army. The first story was taken up in the commentary on 2 Kings 18:17.

Now, we look at the second event. Isaiah encourages resistance even though there is no human hope of salvation. He promises an intervention from God which occurs in the form of an

epidemic – *the angel of Yahweh* wiping out the Assyrian army.

In 22:8 we remarked on Isaiah's opposition to any compromise with the great powers – a seemingly negative attitude for a small insecure nation. Here he relies solely on the power of faith – as Elijah had done before – and saves his nation.

with Shebna the secretary and Joah son of Asaph the recorder.

10:8 ⁴The field commander said to them, “Give Hezekiah this message of the great king of Assyria: How can you be so confident? ⁵Do you think words can replace strategy and military strength? On whom are you relying to rebel against me?”

⁶You rely on Egypt, a broken staff which pierces the palm of him who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, for all who rely on him. ⁷Yes, you may say to me: ‘We rely on Yahweh our God.’ But isn’t he the one whose altars and high places Hezekiah removed when he commanded Judah and Jerusalem: You shall worship before this altar?

⁸Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king. I will give you two thousand horses if you are able to supply riders. ⁹How could you ever repulse one of the least of my master’s generals? And you rely on Egypt for chariots and horsemen! ¹⁰Do you think that I have come to attack and destroy this land without consulting Yahweh? He himself said to me: Go up to this land and conquer it!”

¹¹Then Eliakim and Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, “Speak to your servants in Aramaic, we understand it. Do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of these people on the walls.”

¹²But the field commander said, “Do you think that my master sent me to speak these words only to your master and you? Isn’t it also to the men on the walls who with you will have to eat their own dung and drink their urine?”

¹³Then the field commander stood and cried out with a loud voice in Hebrew, “Hear the words of the great king of Assyria: ¹⁴Do not let Hezekiah deceive you! No, he will not be able to help you! ¹⁵Do not listen to him when he tells you to trust in Yahweh, saying, ‘Yahweh will save us; this city will not be given over to the king of Assyria.’ ¹⁶Do not listen to Hezekiah but to what the king of Assyria says, ‘Make your peace with me ¹⁷and surrender. So I will let each of you eat of your vine and of your fig tree and drink the water of your cistern until I come again. Then I will take you to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, of bread and vineyards.’

¹⁸Hezekiah is misleading you when he says that Yahweh will save you. Have the gods of the nations rescued their lands from the hands of the king of Assyria? ¹⁹Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Shepharvaim? And have the gods delivered Samaria from my hand? ²⁰Who

among all the gods of these nations has been able to save his country from me? Do you think that Yahweh could deliver Jerusalem from my hand?”

²¹The people were like deaf and remained silent, for the king had commanded them not to answer him.

²²Then Eliakim with Shebna and Joah came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him what the field commander had said.

King Hezekiah consults Isaiah

¹When King Hezekiah heard this he **37** tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and went to the house of Yahweh. ²He sent Eliakim, Shebna and the elders among the priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz.

³And they said to Isaiah, “This is what Hezekiah says: Today is a day of distress, rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to birth and there is no strength to deliver. ⁴May your God hear the words of the field commander, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent. May Yahweh your God rebuke him for the words he said, insulting the living God. Therefore offer a prayer for the few of us that are left.”

⁵When King Hezekiah’s officials came to Isaiah, ⁶he said to them: “Tell your master this word of Yahweh: Do not fear because of what you heard when the servants of the king of Assyria insulted me. Listen! ⁷I will let him be disturbed by certain news, so he will return to his country and there I will have him slain by the sword.”

⁸The field commander returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. ⁹This was because King Sennacherib had heard that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was going out to fight him.

Again Sennacherib sent messengers to Hezekiah with these words, ¹⁰“Say to Hezekiah king of Judah that his God in whom he trusts might deceive him in saying that Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria. ¹¹Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands they have destroyed! And will you be spared? ¹²Have the gods saved the nations that my fathers destroyed? Gozan and Haran, Rezeph and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the kings of the cities of Sepharvaim, of Hena and of Ivvah?”

¹⁴Hezekiah took the letter from the messengers and when he had read it he went to the house of Yahweh where he unrolled the letter ¹⁵and prayed saying, ¹⁶“O Yahweh, God of hosts and God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim! You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth, give ear

Yahweh and hear! ¹⁷Open your eyes and see!
 Listen to all the words of Sennacherib who
 37:17 Dn has sent men to insult the living God!

9:18 ¹⁸It is true, Yahweh, that the kings of
 Assyria have laid waste all the countries of
 the earth. ¹⁹They have thrown their gods into
 the fire and destroyed them, for they were not
 true gods but made of wood and stone by
 human hands. ²⁰Now, O Yahweh our God,
 save us from his hand and let all the king-
 doms of the earth know that you alone,
 Yahweh, are God."

• ²¹Then Isaiah, son of Amoz, sent
 38:5 word to Hezekiah: "You have called
 upon Yahweh and he has heard your
 prayer regarding Sennacherib, king of
 Assyria. This is what Yahweh has spo-
 ken against him:

²²The Virgin Daughter of Zion
 despises and scorns you;
 the Daughter of Jerusalem
 shakes her head behind you.

²³Whom have you insulted and blas-
 phemed?

Against whom have you raised your
 voice

and lifted up your brow?

Against the Holy One of Israel!

²⁴Through your servants
 you have insulted Yahweh.

For you have said:

With my numerous chariots,
 I have climbed the heights of the moun-
 tains,

the topmost recesses of Lebanon.

I have felled its tallest cedars and its
 choicest fir trees.

I have reached the remotest heights of
 its border,

the best of its forests.

²⁵I have dug wells and drunk waters;
 I dried up with the sole of my foot all the
 streams of Egypt.

²⁶But have you not heard how I decreed
 it long ago?

I have just brought to pass what I
 planned from days of old:

to lay waste fortified cities,
 to turn them into heaps of ruins.

²⁷Shorn of power, their inhabitants
 have been dismayed and confounded;
 they have been as the grass
 and green plants in the field,
 as the grass on the housetops,
 as corn scorched before it blooms.

²⁸I know whenever you rise or sit,
 whenever you come or go.

²⁹Because of your rage against me
 and of your arrogance that has
 reached my ears,

I will put my hook in your nose
 and my bridle in your mouth,
 and I will turn you back
 on the way by which you came.

³⁰This will be a sign for you, O Heze-
 kiah: This year you will eat the gleaning
 of the fields and next year the self-sown
 grain, but in the third year sow and
 reap, plant vines and eat the fruit.

³¹A remnant of the people of Judah
 shall take root below and produce fruit
 above. ³²For a remnant will come from
 Jerusalem and survivors from Mount
 Zion. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will
 accomplish this. That is why Yahweh
 has spoken concerning the king of As-
 syria. ³³He shall not enter this city nor
 shoot his arrows. ³⁴He shall not raise a
 shield to oppose it nor build a siege
 ramp against it. He shall leave by the
 way he came and he shall not enter the
 city, word of Yahweh.

³⁵I will protect this city and so save it
 for my own sake and for the sake of
 David, my servant." ^{30:19}
^{1K}
^{11:32}

³⁶That night the angel of Yahweh
 went and struck one hundred and
 eighty-five thousand men in the Assy-

• **37.21** It is important to underscore the following in Isaiah's prophecy:
 – God cannot stand the pride of the powerful who, by despising the poor who trust in God, despise God himself.

– The promise of liberation includes the promise of national restoration. After their trial, the survivors will be like a new plant.
 If we look carefully at world history we see how God protects defenseless people and the human

ian camp. When the people rose early next morning there lay all the corpses.

³⁷ So Sennacherib, king of Assyria departed, returned home and lived in Nineveh. ³⁸ While he was worshiping in the temple of his god, Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer slew him with the sword and then escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhad-don, his son, succeeded him as king.

Illness and cure of Hezekiah

38 ¹ In those days Hezekiah fell mortally ill and the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, went to him with a message from Yahweh, “Put your house in order for you shall die; you shall not live.”

² Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Yahweh, ³ “Ah Yahweh! Remember how I have walked before you in truth and wholeheartedly, and done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴ Then the word of Yahweh came to Isaiah, ⁵ “Go and tell Hezekiah what Yahweh, the God of his father David, says: I have heard your prayer and I have seen your tears. See! I am adding fifteen years to your life ⁶ and I will save you and this city from the power of the king of Assyria. I will defend it for my sake and for the sake of David my servant.

²² Hezekiah asked, “What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?” ⁷ Isaiah answered, “This shall be for you a sign from Yahweh, that he will do what he has promised. ⁸ See! I shall make the shadow descending on the stairway of Ahaz go back ten steps.” So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had covered on the stairway.

groups who remain faithful to their mission. More than anyone, the Church experiences this protection when it is reduced to a persecuted minority.

• **38.1** This incident must have taken place before the 701 siege. Here we see King Hezekiah sick and worried about his health.

Isaiah offers to cure him on God’s behalf and adds the promise to protect and defend the Holy

²¹ Isaiah then said, “Bring a fig cake to rub on the ulcer and let Hezekiah be cured!”

Canticle of Hezekiah

⁹ *Canticle of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery:*

¹⁰ Once I said: In the noontime of my life I go; Job 17:11

I am sent to the land of the dead, for the rest of my years.

¹¹ I said: Never again shall I see Yahweh in the land of the living; never again shall I see the inhabitants of the earth.

¹² Like a shepherd’s tent, my dwelling has been pulled down and thrown away; like a weaver, you rolled up my life and cut it from the loom: from day to night you made me waste away. Job 7:6

¹³ I have cried for help until morning. Like a lion, he has broken all my bones. Ps 90:5

¹⁴ I have uttered shrill cries like a swallow or a crane, I have moaned like a dove. Ps 88

My eyes all the while are growing weary as I look up to the heavens: Come and help me, O Lord! For I am troubled.

¹⁵ But how can I speak and what shall I say to him, if he himself is doing this to me? I will have to walk all my years bearing this anguish of my soul.

¹⁶ O Lord, give me back my health and give me back my life! Hos 6:2

¹⁷ My anguish has turned to peace; you have retrieved my life from the pit of corruption; you have cast all my sins behind you. Mic 7:19

¹⁸ For the dead cannot give you thanks, death cannot give you praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your kindness. Ecl 9:10
Ps 88:10
115:17

¹⁹ The living, the living alone can give you thanks and praise, as I do; fathers will tell their sons of your fidelity. Dt 4:9

City. Yahweh’s perspective is much broader than that of the pious Hezekiah. If God cures him it is with a view to his own plan of salvation for all.

Hezekiah’s canticle is a psalm of thanksgiving like those we find in the book of Psalms. It expresses the profound feelings of the believers of the Old Testament for whom dying meant losing everything and who tried to convince God that he would gain nothing in letting his faithful disappear forever.

²⁰O Yahweh, come and save me!
We will sing, accompanied by harps,
in the Temple of Yahweh
all the days of our life.

Babylonian Embassy

^{2S}
^{8:9} **39** • ¹At that time Merodach-Baladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah after hearing that he was recovering from an illness. ²Hezekiah was pleased and showed the envoys all that was in his treasure house, the silver, gold, spices and fine oil, his entire armory and all that was in his treasury. In fact there was nothing in his palace or in his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.

³Isaiah the prophet came to Hezekiah and asked him, “What did these men say and from where did they come?” Hezekiah answered, “They

came to me from a distant country – from Babylon.”

⁴And Isaiah said, “What have they seen in your palace?” Hezekiah replied, “They have seen everything in my palace; there is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them.”

⁵Isaiah then said, “Hear this word of Yahweh, the God of hosts: ⁶Behold the days are coming when all that is in your palace, and which your fathers have treasured to this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left. ⁷And some of your descendants, born of you, will be taken and will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

⁸Hezekiah then said to Isaiah, “The word of Yahweh which you have spoken to me is good!” For he thought: there will be peace and truth in my lifetime.

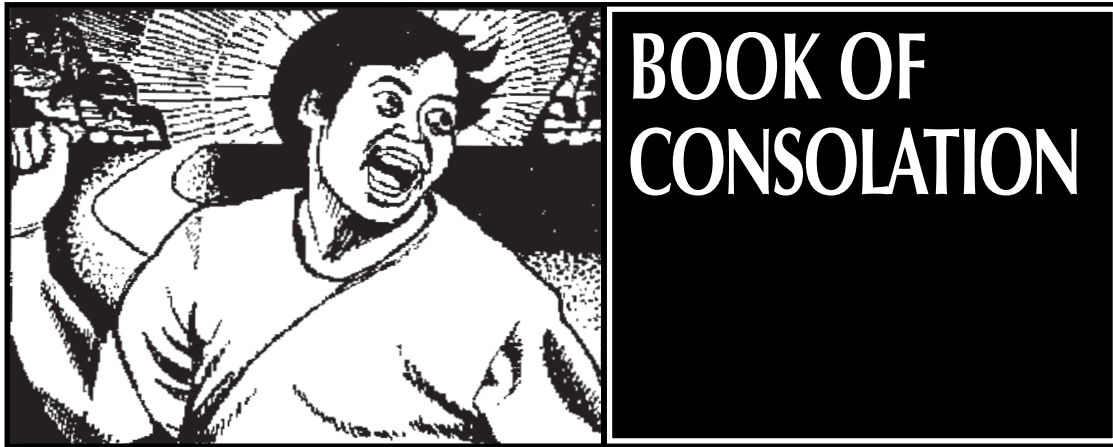
^{2K}
^{24:1}

• **39.1** This final incident related in the book of Isaiah comes from 2 Kings 20.

It emphasizes the meanness of Isaiah’s own friends.

Isaiah continues to be God’s servant, constant

in his faith. As for Hezekiah, in spite of having been favored by God, he remains selfish and irresponsible. One may ask why his son Manasseh (of all the kings of Judah) became most hostile to the faith.



Book of Isaiah chapters 40–55

The book of Isaiah ended with the deliverance of Jerusalem. Once more there was a manifestation of God's Providence: a spectacular miracle. Sennacherib chose to invade the Holy City and flout the God of Israel, but the following day he hastily decamped, returned home and was assassinated by his son.

Yet a century later, Nabuchodonosor took possession of Jerusalem, left the Temple in flames and set off for Babylon dragging behind him a troop of captives. With everything in shambles, faith was called into question to its very roots, for, if Yahweh, the Savior God was powerless, he was but nothing.

The prophet Ezekiel, who was among the deportees, affirms that the captives, converted as a result of their trials, would return to their country and rebuild their nation in justice.

Yet after this exile, should they expect a coming back to the happy times Israelites had known during the reign of David (or rather: as they were imagined with an aureole of times past)? What was it that God, so mysterious, had in store for Israel?

It was then that there arose a prophet who has remained anonymous. He was not one to preach and dispute like the great prophets of the past whose oracles were written later, but a man who wrote his poems and exclamations. His name fell into oblivion and tradition has placed his writings into Isaiah's book where they form chapters 40-55.

Four parts of these poems have attracted most attention: 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12. They are not detached sections drowned in a body foreign to them. They are highlights of a vision or of a meditation which develops the mystery of God's relationship with his people throughout the book. The Servant of God is Israel, without doubt, but it is a very poor servant of God: for the most part a people "incapable of seeing and understanding". Nevertheless there are among them genuine faithful believers, true disciples; God has "opened their ears", enabling them to grasp what he wants them to understand. From among them God chooses his servants, the prophets who are in the vanguard and whose example will benefit the rest. Again and again the prophet spoke of the Servant; in the first time this term was certainly applicable to all Israel but in the end the prophet is taken over by this image and lets it embodied in the portrait of Christ the Redeemer.

Finished are the images of the divinity that the religious person has sketched from the beginning attributing all that in this world breathes power and greatness: gold, marble and cedar for temples, bulls and goats consumed on the brasiers of altars... embroidered tunics... turbans and tiaras for priestly robes.... In the crucible of the Exile the prophet received a strange revelation from the Spirit: the God who saves is the God who loves, and he loves the humble.

Be comforted, my people49:13
51:12
52:7-
12**40**Ex
22:3
Jer
16:18
Lm
4:22Mic
3:1
Mt
3:3
Lk
1:76
Jn
1:23Jas
1:10
1P
1:24Ps
119:
89

- ¹ Be comforted, my people,
be strengthened, says your God.
- ² Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, proclaim to her
that her time of bondage is at an end,
that her guilt has been paid for,
that from the hand of Yahweh
she has received double punishment
for all her iniquity.
- ³ A voice cries,
“In the wilderness prepare the way for Yahweh.
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- ⁴ Every valley will be raised up;
every mountain and hill will be laid low.
The stumbling blocks shall become level
and the rugged places smooth.
- ⁵ The glory of Yahweh will be revealed,
and all mortals together will see it;
for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.”
- ⁶ A voice says, “Cry.”
and I say, “What shall I cry?”
“All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty as the flower of the field.
- ⁷ The grass withers, the flower wilts,
when the breath of Yahweh blows upon it.
- ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will forever stand.”
- ⁹ Go up onto the high mountain, messenger of Zion,
lift up your voice with strength,

So the faithful God was present in the midst of the deportees, preparing together with them the salvation of the world. All the suffering of the people of God, all their humiliations were clearly the price of their sin but much more a way God chose to manifest his loving-kindness and his power. One of the surprising features of this prophecy is that the God of Israel, the Savior of all the nations, made Israel his servant to carry out salvation and take on itself the burden of the world.

This revelation is a contrast to all our natural aspirations. It is not strange that most of the Jews upon their return from Chaldea soon forgot the message and had no other project than the restoration of the bygone kingdom of David. When Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom in the true spirit of the prophet of the Exile, the majority of Jews opposed him with Law and ritual of the Temple. It is an everlasting temptation to confuse the city of humans with the city of God, and a few centuries later the disciples of Jesus would display the same blindness when they continued to cherish an old dream of Christianity.

However, with the “second Isaiah” as he is usually called, a new way opens that will be followed by the Little Remnant announced by Amos and Isaiah. This way would be that of the “poor of Yahweh” who, like Mary, the Apostles and the disciples would recognize in Jesus of Nazareth the One sent by God and promised by the prophets.

fear not to cry aloud when you tell Jerusalem
and announce to the cities of Judah:
Here is your God!

¹⁰Here comes your God with might;
his strong arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and here before him is his booty.

¹¹Like a shepherd he tends his flock:
he gathers the lambs in his arms,
he carries them in his bosom,
gently leading those that are with young.

62:11
Rev
22:12

Ezk
34:1,
16
Lk
15:5

The great God

• ¹²Who has measured the waters of the sea in a cupped hand,
or the breadth of the sky in the span of a hand?

Who has collected the sands of the earth?
Who has weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?

¹³Who has probed the spirit of Yahweh
or as a counselor advised him?

¹⁴Whom has he consulted to enlighten
him,
and help him to decide?
Who gave him knowledge
and taught him the ways of success?

Job
21:22
Rom
11:34
1Cor
2:16

¹⁵The nations before him are like a drop on
the brim of the bucket,
or like dust on the scales.

The islands weigh no more than powder.
¹⁶Lebanon is not enough to burn as altar
fire,

nor will its animals provide a holocaust.

¹⁷All nations before him are as nothing,
all emptiness, all vanity in his eyes.

¹⁸To whom, then, will you liken God?
With whose image will you compare
him?

¹⁹To an idol cast by a craftsman,
covered with gold by a goldsmith
and adorned with silver chains?

Wis
11:12
Ps
62:10

44:9

• **40.1** The prophet discretely tells about his being called. As Isaiah, he is introduced in the Heavenly Council, where God, surrounded by his angels, makes his decisions. There, something mysterious is revealed to him:

Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, proclaim to her... that her guilt has been paid for. Yahweh has forgiven his people, and because of this he is about to reestablish them in the Promised Land. They should not be overwhelmed by the prestige of the invincible Babylon where they live as exiles. *All flesh (all mortals) is grass:* means that the famous city is only a human construction and it would pass like human ambitions (see James 1:10); but God's promises will always be fulfilled.

Angels are told to prepare for the return of the exiles. The arid and dangerous road of the desert would be leveled for them. And they will have a triumphant return. To all people (*all flesh*) in the world, the wonders would be so obvious that they would discover the glory of the one God and recognize Yahweh.

Then, across time and space, the prophet addresses the new community to be born, in order to announce the *Good News* to them. This is the first time these words appear in the Bible.

Comfort is another new word. In the Bible, it does not mean that God brings us to resignation, or to passive observance, but rather encourages us to continue our mission. Thus, in the following

chapters, the prophet would encourage the Jews to return, in spite of difficulties. In Paul's letters, we would find the words *to comfort* and *encourage* countless times. Like the other authors of the Bible, in recalling God's promises, Paul invites us to struggle against the forces of evil with perseverance.

In the wilderness prepare the way for Yahweh. The prophet saw Yahweh walking ahead of his people to guide them to their definitive homeland. When the exiles returned to Palestine, they realized that they neither found God nor a lasting peace: something was still missing which would only be fulfilled centuries later. In fact, at the appointed time, John the Baptist appeared preaching in the desert, and after him God "so that all mortals would see him," as the Gospel points out (Lk 3:6).

• 12. In later chapters, we will read other poems resembling this one, stressing the greatness of the Lord of creation. This insistence should not surprise us. The prophet repeats the same arguments against idols, not so much to convince us, as to delight in repeating the same praise of the one God.

In Babylon without a temple or organized worship, the Jews saw the splendor of pagan worship. The imperial city calmly flaunted the superiority of its secular gods and its famous temples. It was then dispersed among foreign nations, that the Jews discovered that their faith

Jer 10:1-16 20 Or to wood that will not rot, chosen and fashioned by a skilled craftsman into an image that cannot move?

Jer 16:20 21 Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning, that you may understand how the earth was founded?

Num 13:33 Ps 104:2 22 He sits far above the vault of the earth, with its inhabitants like grasshoppers; he stretches out the heavens as a curtain and spreads them out like a tent where he dwells.

Job 34:18 23 He reduces the princes to naught, and the rulers of the earth to nothingness. 24 No sooner are they planted or sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them, and they wither, a storm sweeps them away like stubble.

25 To whom, then, will you liken me or make me equal? says the Holy One. 26 Lift up your eyes and see: who has created all this? He has ordered them as a starry host and called them each by name. So mighty is his power, so great his strength, that not one of them is missing.

Bar 3:34-35 49:4 27 How can you say, O Jacob, how can you complain, O Israel, that your destiny is hidden from me, that your rights are ignored by Yahweh? 28 Have you not known, have you not heard that Yahweh is an everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth? He does not grow tired or weary, his knowledge is without limit.

29 He gives strength to the enfeebled, he gives vigor to the wearied. 30 Youth may grow tired and faint, young men will stumble and fall, 31 but those who hope in Yahweh will renew their strength. They will soar as with eagle's wings; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and never tire.

Ps 103:5

Cyrus, liberator of Israel

41 • 1 Keep silent before me, O islands, or be prepared to contend with me;

O nations, draw near and speak. Let us meet together for judgment. 2 Who has called from the east one that victory hails at every step? Who has given him the nations to rule and their kings to subdue? His sword makes dust of them and his arrows scatter them like chaff.

45:1 46:11

3 Unharmed he pursues them through paths

that his feet have scarcely touched.

4 Who really has done all this?

I, who call the generations from the beginning,

44:6 Rev 1:17 22:13

I, Yahweh, who am the first and will be with the last.

5 The islands have seen it and feared, the ends of the earth were scared.

6 (Each helps the other and says to his companion, "Take heart!") 7 So the craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who beats out with the hammer assures the other who strikes the anvil, saying, "It is ready for soldering"; and he fastens the idol with nails to hold it in place.)

40:19

could conquer the world: they alone knew where the world came from and where history was headed.

The Jews had experienced a God who was theirs, who saved them, but who exacted justice from them. In time they understood that Yahweh their God was none other than the master of the world, its laws, and all humankind. It was then that they became conscious of their mission to the world.

It could be the same for us. We should be conscious of the extent of our faith and appreciate the "absolute" the person of Christ is. Many are fond of him but without seeking to know who he is. They are not over-interested in knowing him in his concrete life, how he is portrayed in the Gospels: it is enough for them that his personality stands apart from all others. People formed by means of modern science know they are in solidarity with the whole universe. They know that a same power, a same law governs the stars, the atom including even the movements of the heart. Such persons cannot be satisfied with a Christ – "first revolu-

tionary" or superman or great prophet. They have to see him as greater than the world and one whom they can adore as the Creator-made-human.

Here the prophet begins by evoking the extent and the mystery of creation: the universe we perceive on a starry night. He goes on to say that this God-Creator is active in events and gives life to the one who believes (40:29). It is he who announces his plans for deliverance (41:2).

• **41.1** The first verses of the poem (vv. 1 to 3) present Cyrus, the conqueror who is progressing in his conquest of the Middle East. In previous times, pagan kings were sent by Yahweh to punish people. Now, one is chosen by God to save his people. This is a lesson in humility for believers: God saves them through a non-believer whom he makes his instrument. God does not always pick saints or believers to liberate nations.

Verses 6-7 concerning idolatry, are out of place, just as in 40:19-20.

Hope for a new exodusLk
1:54
Heb
2:16

• ⁸But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, seed of Abraham my friend, ⁹I have taken you from the ends of the earth. I have called you from the remotest corners, and I said,

“You are my servant, I have chosen you and will not cast you away.”

¹⁰Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will give you strength, I will bring you help, I will uphold you with the right hand of my justice.

¹¹All who rage against you will be put to shame and disgrace; all who fight against you will perish and come to nothing.

¹²You will seek, but will not find

them; those enemies of yours, those who took up arms against you will be destroyed, brought to nothing.

¹³For I, Yahweh, your God, take hold of your right hand and say to you: “Fear not, I am your assistance.”

¹⁴Fear not, Jacob, poor worm, and you, people of Israel, so frail.

I am your redeemer, says Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, your helper.

¹⁵I will make you a thresher, new and with sharp double teeth: you will thresh hills and mountains, crushing them and reducing them to chaff.

¹⁶You will winnow them, the wind will carry them off and the storm will scatter them. But you will rejoice in Yahweh and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁷The poor and the afflicted seek water, and find none.

Their tongues are parched with thirst.

But I, Yahweh, will hear them;

I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

¹⁸I will open up streams over the barren heights

and let the rivers flow through all the valleys;

I will turn the desert into lakes and brooks

and the thirsty earth

into a land of springs.

¹⁹I will plant in the wilderness the cedar,

the acacia, the myrtle and the olive;

I will plant in the wasteland fir, cypress and pine –

²⁰that all may see and know,

consider and understand,

that the hand of Yahweh has done this,

that the Holy One of Israel has created it.

• 8. The first verses of the chapter have celebrated the victories of Cyrus. Now God addresses Israel. It will be delivered from exile. A new departure is being prepared, greater than the exodus from Egypt. God will work miracles for those who want to return to their homeland: all he asks of his people is to open their eyes and trust him.

Apparently, an exaggeration! The return from exile would be a matter of small caravans, meet-

ing many difficulties, but it is a fact that the nation was to rise again and salvation history would continue to be written. We have here an example of what God offers to minority groups of believers, the small communities of his Church who cling to the hope given them in the Gospel: we often have the impression of achieving little, yet in reality the whole venture of the Kingdom is at stake in our will to exist.

6:3
44:6,
24
47:4
49:728:27-
28Mt
3:1235:6
Ps
107:
35

43:15 • ²¹ Present your case, says Yahweh.
44:6-11 Produce your evidence, says the King of Jacob.

²² Bring your idols and let them tell us what is going to happen. What have they foretold, so that we may consider them and reflect on the final outcome?

Jer 10:5 ²³ Let them foretell what is to come, that we may know that they are gods. Let them do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed and terrified.
Zep 1:12

²⁴ See, they are nothing,
their work is nothing,
and to choose them is foolishness.

41:2 ²⁵ From the north I have called him, and he
45:13 comes;
from the east I have called him by his name.
He tramples kings and princes down

as if they were mortar,
as if he were a potter working the clay.
²⁶ Has anyone announced this from the beginning, so we might know,
or foretold it long ago, so we might say, "It is true?"

No one among you foretold it,
no one proclaimed it.
No one heard a word from you.

²⁷ I was the first to announce to Zion:
"Look, here they come!"
and I sent a messenger to Jerusalem.

²⁸ But when I looked, there was no one,
there was not a single counselor among them
who, if asked, could give an answer.

²⁹ All of them are nothing,
emptiness are their works;
their images are wind and nothingness.

11:2 **Here is my servant**

Jer
50:44
Mt
3:16
12:18
17:5
Lk
2:26
Jn
1:32

42

• ¹ Here is my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight.
I have put my spirit upon him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.

² He does not shout or raise his voice
proclamations are not heard in the streets.

³ A broken reed he will not crush,
nor will he snuff out the light
of the wavering wick.

He will make justice appear in truth.

⁴ He will not waver or be broken
until he has established justice on earth;
the islands are waiting for his law.

⁵ Thus says God, Yahweh,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,

Ps
89:9

• 21. This passage celebrates Cyrus between two victories. When we read these verses, we understand that the prophet had anticipated the successes of the liberator when no one could have foreseen them. Thus, God revealed future events to his prophets as a proof that he himself was the real savior of his people. He had planned that Cyrus should come from afar to restore freedom to the Jews.

• **42.1** Here is the first of the songs of the *Servant of Yahweh* (see the introduction to this book). The other poems of the *Servant* are in 49:1; 50:4; 52:13.

The servant is at times Israel, in other passages it is the minority of the faithful, conscious of their vocation, who try to struggle against the indifference of the majority. It would also signify the prophet (or prophets) who share with the faithful the word of God.

In different passages of the Gospel Jesus

assures his disciples that they are the "sons of the prophets," and the Apostles, in their turn would understand that *the Servant* after all and before all others, is Jesus (Mt 12:8; Acts 3:13; 4:27). Jesus, Servant of his Father and Son of his maid servant (Ps 116:16 and Lk 1:38).

The prophet had just celebrated the victories of Cyrus. Those victories actually only prepared another victorious step forward, of a people of believers who, freed from captivity in Babylon, would declare to the world their faith and their hope.

This minority is the *covenant of the nation*: thanks to these faithful believers God continues to be present among this Jewish people where a majority do not listen to him. It is this same people that will re-establish the covenant with God. It will then give to *the nations* (the peoples of the East), and to *the islands* (the western world) *justice*, that is to say a new order willed by God.

who spread the earth and all that comes from it,
who gives life and breath to those who walk on it:

⁶I, Yahweh, have called you for the sake of justice;
I will hold your hand to make you firm;
I will make you as a covenant to the people,
and as a light to the nations,
⁷to open eyes that do not see,
to free captives from prison,
to bring out to light those who sit in darkness.

⁸I am Yahweh, that is my name,
I will not give my glory to another;
or my praise to graven images.

⁹See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things do I declare:
before they spring forth I tell you of them.

49:6
Mt
26:28
Lk
2:32
Jn
8:12
Ps
107:
10
Lk
1:79
Acts
26:18

43:19

Song of victory

Ps
33:3
96:1
Rev
5:9

• ¹⁰Sing a new song to Yahweh;
let his praise reach the ends of the earth.
Let the sea and all that it holds,
let the coastlands and their inhabitants
resound with song and praise of him.

¹¹Let the wilderness and the cities
lift up their voice,
together with the villages of Kedar.
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing,
and shout from the top of the mountain.

¹²Let them give glory to Yahweh
and praise him in the far islands.

Dt
10:17
Zep
1:14
Ps
24:8

¹³Yahweh comes like a mighty warrior,
he stirs up his fury before the fight.
He threatens, he raises the battlecry,
and he triumphs over his enemies.

¹⁴For a long time I have been silent;
I have kept still and restrained myself,
I moaned like a woman in labor,
breathing and panting:

¹⁵I will lay waste mountains and hills
and wither all their vegetation;
I will turn rivers into wasteland
and dry up the pools.

¹⁶I will lead the blind by ways
which they do not know;
along unseen paths I will guide them.
I will turn darkness into light before them
and make the rough ground smooth.
These are the things that I will do,
and I will not forsake them.

¹⁷But those who trust in graven images
and say to idols, "You are our gods" will be
turned back in shame.

• ¹⁸Listen, O deaf,
look, O blind, that you may see!

¹⁹Who is blind, but my servant,
or deaf as the messenger I send?
Who is blind but the one I am lifting up?
Who is deaf but the servant of Yahweh?

²⁰You have seen many things without
observing; your ears were open but without
hearing.

²¹It pleased Yahweh, the Just One,
that his Law receive glory and fame.

²²But this is a people robbed and plun-
dered,
all of them ensnared in pits or languishing
in prison.

Dt
4:6

44:18

• 10. Cyrus' steps are God's victory. Yahweh marches as a warring God (see Jdg 5:4), but inspired by maternal love.

The poem recalls the mission entrusted to Isaiah (6:10): "Through you the hearts of these people will be hardened and their eyes blinded." Yahweh has forgiven and wants to heal this people who do not know how to see and who have been called blind in 42:7. After being liberated they will be witnesses to the God who saves.

At times, it seems to us that the prophets were mistaken in announcing so often that God's coming was near, when they were still at an early

stage of their history. In fact, they were not so very different from us, when we believe we have won everything with the victory of one of our own people either in an election, or a sports event. We do not abandon Christ, the only savior and the only hope, when we struggle for very human goals and become excited about human saviors. We walk with them for a time, and then, let go of them to move forward, again to wherever Christ calls us.

• 18. This passage could be entitled: Exploited Peoples.

They have become a prey,
with no one to rescue them;
they have become a spoil,
with no one to order, "Send them back!"
23 Who among you will give ear to this?
Who will listen and hear for the time to
come?

24 Who handed Jacob to the spoilers
and Israel to the plunderers?
Was it not Yahweh,
against whom we have sinned,
in whose ways they would not walk,
and whose law they would not obey?

25 Therefore he poured out on them
the fury of his anger –
the violence of war.
It blazed round about them,
and they failed to know what it meant;
it burned and consumed them,
and they remained in bewilderment.

**In the midst of the flames,
you shall not be burned**

41:13 **43** 1 But now, thus says Yahweh,
who created you, Jacob,
who formed you, Israel:
Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name;
you are mine.

48:10
1Cor
3:15 2 When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you.
When you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through fire,
you will not be burned;
neither will the flames consume you.

3 For I am your savior,
I, Yahweh, your God,
the Holy One of Israel.

I give Egypt for your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

4 Since you are precious in my sight,
and important – for I have loved you,
I give people in exchange for you
and nations in return for your life.

5 Fear not, for I am with you:
I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.

6 I will say to the north, "Give them up!"
and to the south, "Do not hold them!"
Bring back my sons from afar,
my daughters from the ends of the earth,

7 all those called by my name
all I have created for my glory.

8 Lead out my people –
who have eyes but are blind,
who have ears but are deaf.

9 Let the nations gather together,
let the people assemble. 41:22

Who among them can foretell this
or declare to us the things to come?

Let them bring their witnesses to prove
them right;

let others hear so that they may say, "It is
true."

• 10 You are my witnesses, says Yahweh,
you are my servant whom I have chosen,
that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am He.
Before me no God was formed,
neither will there be one after me.

11 I, I am Yahweh,
there is no savior but me.

12 It is I who have foretold;
I have spoken and made it known,
I, not any of your foreign gods.
Therefore you are my witnesses
– it is Yahweh who speaks,
I am God.

13 From ever I am God
there is no one who can deliver from my
hand.

I act, and what I do no one undoes.

14 Thus says Yahweh,
your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
For your sake I send an army to Babylon
to bring down all their bars.
The Chaldeans' shout of joy
will turn into lamentation.

15 I am Yahweh, your Holy One,
the Creator of Israel, your King. Lev 19:2

16 Thus says Yahweh,
who opened a way through the sea
and a path in the mighty waters,

17 who brought down chariots and
horses,
a whole army of them,
and there they lay, never to rise again,
snuffed out like a wick.

18 But do not dwell on the past,
or remember the things of old.

19 Look, I am doing a new thing:
now it springs forth.
Do you not see?

Lev
19:2

Ex
14:21

Jer
23:7
Rev
21:5

• 43.10 The reliability of the triumphant
God is affirmed even more than in previous
poems: *I, I am...* Someone said that this "I" is
detestable on human lips, but it does befit God:
"I Am" was God's revelation to Moses in the
burning bush (Ex 3). And Jesus will also say many
times: "I Am" to reveal who he is (Jn 8:12).

Such is the God who lifts our spirits. *When you
walk through fire, you will not be burned.*

Everything is possible, including living according
to the Gospel in an environment of materialism.

In exchange for you, I will give many people
(4). With this figurative expression, Yahweh's
unique love for his children is reaffirmed. He is
ready to be reconciled at any cost with this
people, whom he chose and who were lost
through their own fault.

In the end, 43:16-21, we hear this once again:

I am opening up a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

35:6 ²⁰The beasts of the land will honor me, jackals and ostriches, because I give water in the wilderness and rivers in the desert that my chosen people may drink.

1P ²¹I have formed this people for myself; 2:9-10 they will proclaim my praise.

- ²²You have not called upon me, O Jacob, indeed you were tired of me, O Israel; ²³neither have you brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, nor wearied you asking for incense. ²⁴You have not spent money on sweet frankincense for me, neither have you satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. Instead you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses. ²⁵I it is, I am He who blots out your offenses for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more. ²⁶Remind me about the past; let us argue together. Speak up and prove your innocence. ²⁷Your first father sinned, and your mediators have rebelled against me. ²⁸Therefore I have disgraced the dignitaries of your temple, I have consigned Jacob to destruction, Israel to scorn.

44 ¹But now listen, Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen.

49:1 Jer 1:5 ²This is what Yahweh says – he who made you and will help you, he who formed you from the womb: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

the new Exodus from Babylon will surpass that from Egypt: you have done enough looking at the past; now look to the future.

- 22. People are ungrateful by nature. They usually maneuver events so that serving God does not deprive them of time nor money. Many people only think about God to complain to him. Yet, the love of God will be stronger than their lack of gratitude: *He will pour out his Spirit upon the human race.*

Neither have you brought me sheep for burnt offerings. The exiled Jews had neither temple nor rituals in Babylon. On the basis of this, Yahweh tells them: “If I come to save, it is not because you have bought my favors with

³For I will pour water upon the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground. I will pour my spirit upon your race and my blessing upon your offspring. ⁴They will spring up like grass, like poplars beside the flowing streams. ⁵One will say, “I belong to Yahweh”; another will call himself by Jacob’s name. On his hand another will write “Yahweh” and take the name of Israel. ⁶This is what the Lord says – Israel’s King and Redeemer, Yahweh Sabaoth: I am the first and the last, there is no other God besides me. ⁷Who then is like me? Let him stand up and speak, let him argue this out with me. Who from the beginning has foretold the future, and revealed to us what was to come? ⁸Do not be afraid or troubled. Have I not proclaimed and foretold this long ago? You are my witnesses; is there a God besides me or another Rock? I know of none.

Ezk 39:29
Jl 3:1
Zec 12:10
41:4
Rev 1:17
22:13

Dt 32:4
Ps 18:32

Mockery against those who worship idols

- ⁹Good-for-nothing are all idol makers, and useless are the works they prize so much. Their witnesses, blind and ignorant, will be put to shame. ¹⁰Who ever fashioned a god or cast an idol without hope of gain? See how its devotees will be ridiculed, for its craftsmen are but humans. ¹¹Let them all assemble, let them come to court; they will be both terrified and scorned.

41:7
Jer 10:3

¹²The blacksmith works on an iron image over the fire and beats it into shape with a hammer. He gets hungry and tired; if there is no water to drink, he gets exhausted.

¹³In like manner, the wood carver takes the measurement and marks the outline of an idol, carves it with chisels, giving it a bodily

your sacrifices.” God saves them, though they have not sacrificed anything for him, and have not even called on him.

You have burdened me with your sins... I am He who blots out your offenses for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more. After what he said through Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God continues declaring his love that is scorned by his people. In spite of their differences, all prophets use the language of passionate love. It allows them to express better what sin is: not just a fault against sacred laws, but rather a rejection of God’s love.

- 44.9 The passage 9-20, placed here though coming from elsewhere, should be read separately: it ridicules the makers of idols. We

form and a human face that it may live in a shrine. ¹⁴He cut down cedars or perhaps took an oak or cypress from the forest or maybe he planted a cedar which the rain caused to grow. ¹⁵For the common people, that means fuel which they use to warm themselves and to cook their food. But the craftsman carves out of the tree trunk an idol which he worships and before which he bows down. ¹⁶The remaining portion he burns to warm himself; over its live embers he roasts meat and is satisfied. He says, "Well and good, I feel warm and enjoy the light." ¹⁷The other portion

45:20

which he has made into an idol he worships and bows before it, praying "Rescue me, for you are my god."
¹⁸They have no knowledge, no discernment. For they have shut their mind to understanding, their heart to all reason. ¹⁹Not one of them has the intelligence to reflect and the sense to say, "Half of the log I burned, and on its embers I baked bread and roasted meat. Shall I then make a dirty idol of what remains? Am I to worship a block of wood?"

²⁰Only one of deluded mind can hold on to

ashes. Will he not save himself at least and confess, "What I hold is only a lie?"

²¹Remember this, Jacob, for you are my servant, O Israel, I have formed you to be my servant; Israel, do not forget me.

²²I have blotted out your offenses as a thick cloud, your sins as a mist. Return to me for I am redeeming you.

Hos
14:2
Lm
5:21

²³Sing gladly, O heavens, for Yahweh has done this. Shout aloud, O earth below! Burst into song, you mountains, you forests with all your trees! For Yahweh has redeemed Jacob and shown his glory to Israel.

²⁴Thus says Yahweh, your redeemer, who formed you from the womb: I am Yahweh who made all things,

I alone stretched out the heavens,
and spread out the earth. Who helped me?

1Cor
1:20

²⁵I am he who thwarts the omens of false prophets, who makes fools of diviners, who turns the wise back and makes nonsense of their knowledge.

²⁶I confirm the word of my servant and carry out the plan announced by my messengers.

I am he who says of Jerusalem,
"It shall be inhabited,"
and of the towns of Judah,
"They shall be rebuilt; I will restore their ruins."

²⁷I am he who says to the ocean, "Be dry, I will dry up your wellsprings!"

40:11
Ezra
1:1

²⁸I call on Cyrus, "My shepherd!" and he goes to fulfill my will. I say to Jerusalem, "Be rebuilt!" and see: the cornerstone is laid.

42:6

45

• ¹Thus says Yahweh to his anointed, to Cyrus:
"I have taken you by the right hand

will find other similar examples of irony in the Bible. They may still be of value today when people who are proud of scientific discoveries maintain superstitions. See the commentary on Isaiah 30:22 and Jeremiah 2:13.

• **45.1** A new message of the Lord to Cyrus, the conqueror, similar to the one in 41:25. There is here something unique in the Bible: this pagan king is called the *anointed one of Yahweh*, like the sons of David, and including

to subdue nations before you
and strip kings of their armor,
to open the gateways before you
so that they will be closed no more.

²I will go before you to level the slopes,
I will break the gates of brass
and destroy the iron bars;

³I will give you treasures hidden in darkness
and riches stored in secret places,
so that you may know that I am Yahweh,
the God of Israel who calls you by your name.

⁴For the sake of Jacob my servant,
of Israel my chosen one,
I have called you by your name
and given you your mission
although you do not know me.

⁵I am Yahweh, and there is no other;
there is no God besides me.
I armed you when you did not know me,
⁶so that, from the rising
to the setting of the sun,
all may know

that there is no one besides me;
I am Yahweh, and there is no other.
⁷I form the light and create the dark;
I usher in prosperity and bring calamity.
I, Yahweh, do all this.

•⁸Let the heavens send righteousness like dew
and the clouds rain it down.
Let the earth open and salvation blossom,
so that justice also may sprout;
I, Yahweh, have created it.

55:10
Hos
2:23
Ps
85:12

Christ the “Anointed of God.” Incredible thing for the Jews who were accustomed to thinking of Yahweh as only their God! History tells us that Cyrus was a “father” to his people, and the Bible will remember that his first deed, after the capture of Babylon, was to restore freedom to all those living there in exile (see Ezra 1:1).

Here, however, the prophet gives praise only to God who infallibly orients our history and will never let his promises fail.

• 8. Here, we have a magnificent expression of the work of God, the savior. As we said in reference to Isaiah 11:1, we must not see the salvation coming from God as opposed to or distinct from that which people can achieve. Rather, God’s work and human cooperation are joined in this unique endeavor of bringing us to the end of our labors.

Justice is total uprightness. We might express it briefly: a life according to truth and love. Such

justice must come from God, the only one who can create a new Man. In fact, it will come in the person of Christ, *the Just One* (Jn 16:10), the one who is born among us as the first *shoot* of a renewed humanity. Christ will not break into the world, *coming down* in glory from heaven, but rather, will be the *blossom* of our earth, being born a Jew to the Jews, true man, born of a virgin mother. Christ alone will not accomplish the work of our salvation for it must be realized in the course of history: Justice and Salvation will be the fruits of humanity made fertile by divine mercy.

Salvation here means total human liberation. This text is complemented by Psalm 85 where another image is used: two hands are joined, one coming down from heaven and another lifted up from the earth, to achieve the permanent covenant of God and his people in *Love* and *Faithfulness* (see Jn 1:17).

29:16 • ⁹Woe to him who argues with his Maker
 Jer being but a pot among pots. Will the clay say
 18:6 to him who fashions it, “What are you mak-
 Rom ing? You have no skill.” ¹⁰Woe to him who
 9:20 asks a father, “What have you begotten!” or
 a mother, “To what have you given birth?”

64:7 ¹¹Thus says Yahweh, the Holy One, he
 who fashions Israel: Is it for you to question
 me about my children, or decide the work of
 my hands for me?

¹²I am He who made the earth and created
 humankind upon it.

I am He who stretched out the heavens
 with my own hands and gave order to their
 whole array.

¹³I have raised Cyrus for the sake of jus-
 tice. I will direct his ways and make him
 rebuild my city. He will send my exiles home
 without ransom or indemnity. It is Yahweh
 Sabaoth who speaks.

• ¹⁴Thus says Yahweh:

The peasants of Egypt, the traders of
 Ethiopia and the tall men of Seba will pass
 near you in chains, and bow down facing you.

In worship they will say,

“Surely God is with you. There is no one
 else, there is no other god.”

¹⁵Truly you are the God who remains
 hidden, the God of Israel, the Savior.

¹⁶All idol makers will be put to shame,
 they will go away humiliated. ¹⁷But Israel will
 be saved by Yahweh – delivered with an ever-
 lasting salvation. You will never be put to
 disgrace for everlasting ages.

¹⁸Yes, this is what Yahweh says,
 he who created the heavens,

– for he is God,
 who formed and shaped the earth,
 – for he himself set it:

“I did not let confusion in it,
 I wanted people to live there instead”
 – for I am Yahweh and there is no other.

¹⁹I have not spoken in secret,
 from a dark place of the earth;
 I have not said to the race of Jacob:

“Seek me, but all will be confused,”
 – for I Yahweh tell the truth and I speak
 openly –

45:15
 Jn
 18:20
 Acts
 26:26

Every knee will bend

²⁰Come, gather together, and try to understand,
 survivors from among the nations:

They are but fools they who follow idols of wood
 and pray to gods that cannot move –

²¹Let them present their arguments
 take counsel together and tell me:

Who announced this from the beginning,
 who foretold it in the distant past?

Is it not me Yahweh?

There is no other God besides me,
 a Savior, a God of justice, there is no other one but me.

²²Turn to me and be saved,
 all you from the ends of the earth,
 for I am God and there is no other.

²³By my own self I swear it,
 and what comes from my mouth is truth,
 a word I say will not be revoked.

Gen
 22:16
 Rom
 14:11
 Phil
 2:10

• 9. The same themes are continued with
 different expressions.

45:9-13: the Lord, free Creator of all, is also
 in charge of history. Let us note in Jeremiah
 18:1 that the comparison of the potter and his
 clay is developed with a very different meaning.

• 14. The prophet looks upon the powerful
 of yesterday, now conquered by Cyrus. The
 conquered Egyptians and Ethiopians go back to
 Palestine in chains along the same road on which
 they had proudly trod. As they go by Jerusalem,

they see it glorious and filled with God’s favors,
 and falling on their knees facing Jerusalem, they
 beg God to save them too.

The liberation of Israel is God’s way of reveal-
 ing himself to the world; they will recognize
 Yahweh by the way he restored a dead people.
 They will come to adore the Lord of the Universe
 “hidden” in a people without countenance.

The same thing may be seen in the Church
 when it is scorned. One day those who mocked
 it discover God there. Some day, people will see
 that the Church kept the fire of God in the world.

Before me every knee will bend,
by me every tongue will swear, ²⁴ saying,
“In Yahweh alone are righteousness and strength.”

All who have raged against him will come to him in shame.

²⁵ But through Yahweh there will be victory and glory
to the people of Israel.

Difference between God and the false gods

^{Jer} ^{46:15} **46** • ¹ Bel bows down, Nebo collapses,
the carriages are weighed down with
their idols. Their sacred objects have become
a burden for the weary feasts.

² They cringe and crouch together, power-
less to save those who carry them, as they
themselves are taken captive.

^{44:2} ³ Hear me, O people of Jacob,
and all who remain of Israel,
whom I have cared for since you were
conceived,

and carried since you were born.

⁴ Even to your old age, I am he
and I will sustain you
even when your hair turns gray.
It is I who have done this,
and who bear the burdens,
I will sustain and save you.

⁵ To whom will you compare me or con-
sider me equal?

Against whom will you match me,
as though we were alike?

⁶ Some pour out gold from their purses,
and with silver weighed on the scales
they hire a goldsmith to make an image
before which they bow and worship.

^{115:6} ⁷ They carry it upon their shoulders
and set it up in its place;
and there it stands, unmoving and silent.
They cry out to it, but it does not answer,
it delivers no one from distress and disas-
ter.

⁸ Bear it well in mind, you rebels,

⁹ recall those things of long ago.

I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like me.

^{Ps} ^{33:11} ¹⁰ From the beginning I foretold the out-
come,
from ancient times, what was yet to come.
I say, and my plan will be fulfilled;
and what I wish, I will accomplish.

^{44:28} ^{45:13} ¹¹ From the east I call forth a bird of prey,
from a distant land, a man to carry out my
plan.

Yes, I have spoken, it will be done;
I have planned, it will be executed.

¹² Listen to me, you without hope,
you who are deprived of any right.

¹³ I am bringing my justice, it is not far
away;

my salvation will not delay.

I will make salvation appear in Zion,
upon Israel I will bestow my glory.

47 • ¹ Come down and sit in the dust,
O virgin daughter of Babylon!

No more throne! Sit on the ground,
O daughter of the Chaldeans.
No longer will you be called
dainty and delicate.

² Take the millstone and grind meal;
uncover your hair, bare your legs;
strip to the thighs and pass over the rivers.

³ Your nakedness will be exposed,
your shame will be uncovered.

I will take revenge on you
and no one will save you,

⁴ says our Redeemer, Yahweh Sabaoth.
His name is the Holy One of Israel.

⁵ Go creep into the shadows and sit in
silence,

O daughter of the Chaldeans,
for no more will you be called
sovereign lady of the kingdoms.

⁶ Angry with my people, I had left my
inheritance;

I gave them into your hands,
but you showed them no mercy.

You laid a heavy yoke on the aged.

⁷ You said, “I will reign forever;”
but you did not take this to heart
or ponder on what would ensue.

⁸ Listen, therefore, you wanton woman,

• **46.1** The prophet foresees the fall of Babylon. He imagines the Chaldeans carrying their idols in flight. Israel, on the other hand, does not have to carry its gods: Yahweh is the one who carries his people (46:1-7) and gives them life.

• **47.1** What we said in Is 13:1 applies here. This is a song of affliction over Babylon which

will become the image of an impious city. This is why in the Apocalypse (chaps. 17-18) St. John calls the Roman empire which persecutes the Christians, Babylon.

Virgin daughter of Babylon is Babel (or Babylon) according to the Hebrew way of designating capitals. Babylon says: *I will never be a widow*: this might mean: I will never be without my gods; or I will never be without my famous

Lm
1:19

Rev
18:7-
8

lounging in security and deluding yourself, “I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.”

⁹But these two things will come to you in a moment, on a single day – loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of all your witchcraft, in spite of the power of your spells.
¹⁰You have trusted in your wickedness, saying, “Nobody sees me.” Your intelligence and knowledge have perverted you, for you have said: “I am, and there is none besides me.”

¹¹Evil, suddenly, will come your way though you do not know it. Disaster will fall upon you, and no ransom will ward it off; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will come upon you suddenly.

¹²Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with the multitude of your sorceries, which you have labored at since your youth.

Do you think they will help you now? Do you think they will cause terror around you?

¹³Yet you are wearied with so many advisers. Let your astrologers stand up, your stargazers who foretell what will happen each month; let them save you from what is to come upon you.

¹⁴Look, they will be like stubble and the fire will burn them. They cannot even save themselves from the power of consuming flames. These are no embers to warm anyone, no fireside to sit by.

¹⁵This is your lot and of your wizards with whom you have labored from your youth.

Now each will go his own way – powerless to save you.

Dt 6:13
Jer 5:2
48 • ¹Listen to this, House of Jacob, called by the name of Israel and born out of Judah’s womb, you who swear by the name of Yahweh and invoke the God of Israel,

though not in truth or righteousness –
²calling yourselves after the holy city, and relying on the God of Israel whose name is Yahweh Sabaoth.

³From long ago I revealed things past: they went forth from my mouth; I declared them. Then suddenly I acted and the word came to be.

⁴Because I know that you are stubborn, your head as hard as iron, your forehead as bronze,

⁵So I told you about them; before they took place I let you hear of them, lest you should say: “My idols did these, my graven image, my molten image commanded them.”

⁶Now that you have heard and seen, will you not admit it?

From now on I will tell you new things, even hidden things you have not known before.

⁷They are created now and not long ago; up to this day you have not heard of them lest you should say, “I already knew.”

⁸You have not heard, you didn’t know nor were your ears opened before, for I knew how treacherous you were – you who from birth have been called a rebel.

⁹For my name’s sake I delayed my anger, for my honor’s sake I restrained it, lest I destroy you.

¹⁰See: I have refined you as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

¹¹But now for my own sake I will act, yes, for my own sake.

For how could I let my Name be defiled? Never will I yield my glory to another.

¹²Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel whom I have called, I am the same, I am the first, and I am also the last.

¹³My hand laid the foundation of the earth, my right hand spread out the heavens. When I call on the stars they all stand forth together.

Ex 32:9
Dt 9:6

Ezk 36:22

kings; or I will never know defeat. Babylon thought it would have a secure future because of its magicians, famous in Eastern countries. They pretended to know the future through their horoscopes.

Throughout the centuries the same confidence has inspired those who feel they have mastered progress.

You laid a heavy yoke on the aged. Prophets are always using this type of criterion to judge the value of a civilization.

• **48.1** In 48:17-22 the prophet looks at Israel’s past, reminding us of what we read about

the lost Paradise. If they had obeyed, God’s desire to lavish his blessings upon them would have been fulfilled, as well as God’s promises to Abraham.

But God will intervene again as the Redeemer of his people.

In 48:12-15, note that Cyrus is praised again. *The beloved of Yahweh will do what pleases him; I myself called him.* As we remarked on 42:10, the prophet always goes beyond present reality. The conqueror Cyrus is a savior and thus, his mission and his person are in some way joined with that of the only Savior, Christ.

44:28 ¹⁴ Assemble, all of you, and listen.
Who among them has foretold these things?
The beloved of Yahweh will do what pleases him
with Babylon and the people of Chaldea.
¹⁵ I, yes I myself, have spoken;
I myself called him and made him prosper in his way.

If you had obeyed my law

45:19 ¹⁶ Come near me and listen to this:
61:1 From the beginning I have not spoken
Mic 3:8 in secret; from the time that it happened I have been there. Know then, that Yahweh the Lord, with his Spirit has sent me!
41:14 ¹⁷ Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I, Yahweh, your God, teach you what is best for you; I lead you in the way that you must go.

¹⁸ Had you paid attention to my commandments, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

¹⁹ Your descendants would have been like the sand, and those born of your stock like its grains, their names never cut off nor blotted out from my presence.

²⁰ "Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea!" Declare this with shouts of joy, make this known to the ends of the earth. Proclaim: Yahweh has redeemed his servant Jacob!

²¹ Those he led through the desert were never thirsty. He made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out.

²² There is no peace for the wicked, Yahweh says.

Yahweh called me from my mother's womb

49

• ¹ Listen to me, O islands,
pay attention, peoples from distant lands.
Yahweh called me from my mother's womb;
he pronounced my name before I was born.
² He made my mouth like a sharpened sword.
He hid me in the shadow of his hand.
He made me into a polished arrow
set apart in his quiver.

41:1
44:2,
24
Jer
1:5
Gal
1:15
Dt
32:34,
41
Heb
4:12
Rev
1:16

• **49.1** Here we find the second Song of God's servant: see the Introduction to chapters 40–55.

Who is speaking in these verses? They are the Judean exiles at Babylon (some years later they will be called the Jews). And it is not a lamentation but rather a thanksgiving to God who has chosen them in a very special way for a unique mission.

The hope and the future of Israel have been entrusted to them, not to those remaining in the motherland. Soon they will return and *gather the remnant of the tribes of Jacob*, which means not only their kins in the ex-kingdom of Judah, but also the other in the northern kingdom.

From that moment on the dream of a final gathering of the whole people of God enters the Bible, and Gospel will announce that this goal will be achieved through and in Christ: Jn 11:52.

But there is more, for God wants this small group of exiles to bring *to the nations the light of salvation*. This marks the opening of the times of mission. The Jews will be the messengers of

the only God and of his law in the world. Those who welcome Christ will call on the pagans to the faith and Spirit will be bestowed to them (Gal 3:14). A humiliated people will be Yahweh's hidden arrow, his definitive weapon: through them God will unbar his madness which is wiser than human wisdom (1 Cor 1:21).

Yahweh called me from my mother's womb. These were Jeremiah's words (1:5). All that follows can be interpreted both of the believing minority or of the one who fully lives a prophetic vocation. Is the servant a single person, or is he a people of prophets? The apostles of Jesus quickly understood that the present text applied first to him. He is the Word and the two edged sword (Heb 4:12; Rev 19:15).

Paul in turn will take for himself these verses: Gal 1:15; Acts 13:47; 2 Cor 10:4, 12:8. This double interpretation, personal and collective, should not surprise us for the unique Savior is never a lonely savior. Jesus wanted to be identified with those who believe, who suffer and persevere to prepare for the salvation of the world.

³He said to me, “You are Israel, my servant,
Through you I will be known.”

40:27
Jer
20:7

⁴“I have labored in vain,” I thought
and spent my strength for nothing.”

Yet what is due me was in the hand of Yahweh,
and my reward was with my God.

I am important in the sight of Yahweh,
and my God is my strength.

⁵And now Yahweh has spoken,
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
to gather Israel to him.

42:6
Acts
13:47

⁶He said: “It is not enough
that you be my servant,

to restore the tribes of Jacob,
to bring back the remnant of Israel.

I will make you the light of the nations,
that my salvation will reach to the ends of the earth.”

53:3

⁷Thus says Yahweh,
the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel,
to him whom people despise,
to him whom nations abhor,
to the servant of tyrants:
“Kings will see you and stand up,
and princes will bow down
for the sake of Yahweh, the faithful one,
the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you.”

⁸This is what Yahweh says:
^{2Cor}6:2 “At a favorable time I have answered you,
on the day of salvation I have been your help;
I have formed you and made you to be my
covenant with the people.

You will restore the land, and allot its
abandoned farms. ⁹You will say to the cap-
tives: Come out; and to those in darkness:
Show yourselves.

They will feed along the road; they will find

pasture on barren hills. ¹⁰They will neither
hunger nor thirst, nor will the scorching wind
or the sun beat upon them; for he who has
mercy on them will guide them and lead them
to springs of water.

Rev
7:16

¹¹I will turn all my mountains into roads
and raise up my highways.

¹²See, they come from afar, some from
the north and west, others from the land of
Sinim.”

Though your mother forgets you

• ¹³Sing, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth;
break forth into song, O mountains:
for Yahweh has comforted his people
and taken pity on those who are afflicted.

• 13. Yahweh’s maternal love for his people.
He saves them from despair and from being
despised, rebuilding Jerusalem and gathering
those who were dispersed. He invites all the
nations to come and recognize the true city.

Here God again addresses the more conscious

minorities of Israel, those who held onto their
hope at a time they seemed to be lost amidst the
pagan inhabitants of the materialistic Babylon.
They would lift up their nation and become the
light of the world.

These promises started to be fulfilled when,

¹⁴But Zion said: “Yahweh has forsaken me,
my Lord has forgotten me.”

¹⁵Can a woman forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child of her womb?
Yet though she forget, I will never forget you.

Hos
11:8
Lm
5:22

^{44:5} ¹⁶See, I have written your name upon the
palm of my hands; your walls are ever before
me. ¹⁷Your sons hurry back, and those who
laid you waste hasten to depart from you.

^{60:4} ¹⁸Lift up your eyes, look around and see:
your children are all assembling and coming
to you. As I live, says Yahweh, you will wear
them all as your jewels; they will adorn you as
brides are adorned.

¹⁹Your lonely places and your ruins, your
wastelands and devastated country, will now
be too small for your people, while those who
destroy you will be driven off.

^{54:2} ²⁰The children you will have, after those
you lost, will also say in your hearing, “This
place is too small for us. Give us more space
to live in.”

²¹You will then say in your heart, “Who has
borne me these? I was bereaved and barren,
and who has brought these up? I was left
alone; but these – where have they come
from?”

^{60:4-} ²²Thus speaks the Lord Yahweh: See, I am
to make signs to the nations; and to raise my
¹⁶banner to the peoples, that they will bring
your sons in their arms, your daughters upon
their shoulders.

^{Ps} ²³Kings will be your foster fathers, their
^{25:3}queens your nursing mothers. They will bow
down before you with their faces to the

ground; they will lick the dust of your feet.
Then you will know that I am Yahweh and that
those who hope in me will not be put to shame.

²⁴Can booty be taken from a warrior, or
captives be rescued from a tyrant? But thus
says Yahweh: ²⁵Yes, captives will be taken
from warriors and booty rescued from a ty-
rant: for I will fight whoever fights you and I
will save your children.

²⁶I will make your oppressors eat their
own flesh and be drunk with their own blood,
as with wine. All peoples will know that I,
Yahweh, am your savior, your redeemer, the
Mighty One of Jacob.

Lk
11:21

Rev
16:6

50 ¹Thus says Yahweh: Where is the writ
of divorce with which I dismissed your
mother? Or to which of my creditors have I
sold you? It was for your sins that you were
sold, for your crimes that your mother was
dismissed.

Dt
24:1
Ps
44:18

²Why was there no one when I came?
Why did no one answer when I called?
Is my hand too short to reach out and save?
Have I not the power to deliver?
See how, at my threat, the sea dries up,
the rivers turn into desert,
their fish dying, for lack of water.

65:12
66:4

³I clothe the heavens in mourning;
I make sackcloth their covering.

Ex
10:21

Yahweh has opened my ear

• ⁴The Lord Yahweh has taught me
so I speak as his disciple
and I know how to sustain the weary.
Morning after morning he wakes me up
to hear, to listen like a disciple.

54:13

⁵The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear.
I have not rebelled,
nor have I withdrawn.

having returned to their land, the Jews became missionaries of the One God to all the countries of the Greek and Syrian world. Later, these promises would take on a new meaning for the Church which Christ established as the *New Jerusalem*. At times, this new Jerusalem seems downhearted and lifeless, and even disappears in some parts of the world. Yet, God brings it new children from other continents. He invites us to look beyond our communities to those who have not yet received the Kingdom.

• **50.4** “Who is the prophet talking about, himself or another?” (Acts 8:34). Actually the *servant* could be as in 49:1 the faithful minority, but it could also be, perhaps, the prophet himself, or who knows? a “Prophet” who is to come? The author refuses to choose between servant and servants.

Former prophets met with the same opposition. Moses had to endure a rebellious people; Jeremiah had been persecuted and imprisoned (see Jer 20:7 and 37). On the basis of these

Mt
26:67
27:30

⁶I offered my back to those who strike me,
my cheeks to those who pulled my beard;
neither did I shield my face
from blows, spittle and disgrace.

Jer
1:18
Ezk
3:8

⁷I have not despaired,
for the Lord Yahweh comes to my help.
So, like a flint I set my face,
knowing that I will not be disgraced.

Job
13:8
Rom
8:33

⁸He who avenges me is near.
Who then will accuse me?
Let us confront each other.
Who is now my accuser?
Let him approach.

Jn
8:46

⁹If the Lord Yahweh is my help,
who will condemn me?
All of them will wear out like cloth;
the moth will devour them.

¹⁰Let anyone among you who fears
Yahweh listen to the voice of his servant.
Whoever walks in darkness and has no light
to shine for him, let him trust in the name of
Yahweh, let him rely upon his God.

¹¹Yet all of you who kindle flames and
carry about burning torches, go into the
flames of your own fire, into the sparks you
have kindled. This will befall you from my
hand, you will lie down in torment.

God will save the children of Abraham

Mt
5:6
6:33

51 ¹Listen to me, you who pursue justice,
you who go in search of Yahweh. Look
to the rock from which you were hewn, to the
pit from which you were quarried.

Dt
32:18
Mt
3:9
Rom
4

²Look to Abraham, your father, and to Sa-
rah, who gave you birth. He was alone when I
called him; but I blessed and increased him.

Jer
33:11
Ezk
36:35

³Truly Yahweh's compassion is for Zion,
his mercy is upon all her ruins. He will make
her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like
Yahweh's garden. In her will be found joy and
rejoicing, melody and song of praise and
thanksgiving.

Awake, Yahweh

Ps
89:11

⁹Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of Yahweh!
Awake as in ancient days,
in times of generations long ago.

⁴Listen to me, you peoples,
hear me, O nations.
I am to give you my law,
my justice will be a light to the nations.

⁵Suddenly my justice will appear,
my salvation is on the way,
and my arm will impose my rule.
The islands also wait in hope for me,
trusting in my arm.

⁶Lift up your eyes to the heavens
and look upon the earth beneath.
Like smoke, the heavens will vanish,
and the earth wear out like a garment;
its inhabitants will fall like flies.
But my salvation will last forever,
my justice will never fail.

Ps
102:
26-
27
2P
3:7

⁷Hear me, you who know righteousness,
you who have my law in your hearts:
do not fear the reproach of men
or be terrified by their mocking.

Dt
30:14
Jer
31:33

⁸For they will be like garments eaten by
moths,
like wool consumed by grubs.
But my justice will last forever
and my salvation for all generations.

50:9

examples, we see a profile and mission of the perfect *servant* of Yahweh. This will be Jesus, but every one of his prophets can apply all these words to himself or herself.

Note the beginning of the poem. The Servant will be able to transmit the word and to encourage on behalf of God because he himself listens

every morning and keeps his ears open. To sustain those who are tired, we must be taught by God: the true prophet is a person of prayer, open to the Spirit of God. "No one but the Spirit of God knows the secrets of God... and through him we understand what God in his goodness has given us" (1 Cor 2:11-12).

Was it not you who split Rahab in two
and pierced the dragon through?

¹⁰Was it not you who dried up the sea,
the waters of the great deep,
to make a way on the seabed
for the redeemed to pass over?

¹¹The redeemed of Yahweh will return
and come to Zion singing with joy,
crowned with everlasting gladness,
while sorrow and mourning flee away.

¹²I, yes I, am your comforter.

How then can you be afraid of the one who dies,
of humans who fade like grass?

¹³Are you forgetting Yahweh who made you,
who stretched forth the heavens
and laid the foundations of the earth?

Why live every day in constant fear
of the fury of the oppressor,
when he sets out to destroy you?
And where is the fury of the oppressor?

¹⁴The captive exiles will soon be free;
they will not die in a deep prison,
nor will they want for food.

Jer
17:5

¹⁵I am Yahweh, your God,
the one who stirs the sea,
making its waves roar.

My name is Yahweh Sabaoth.

^{49:2} ¹⁶I have put my words in your mouth as I
stretched out the heavens; When I laid the
foundations of the earth, I said to Zion: "You
are my people, and I have shielded you in the
shadow of my hand."

¹⁷Awake, awake!

^{Jer}
^{25:15,}
²⁸
^{25:28}
^{Ps}
^{60:5} Arise, O Jerusalem, you who drank at the
hand of Yahweh the cup of his fury, the cup
which made you tremble, that you drank to
the last drop!

¹⁸Among all the children she bore, she has

no one to guide her; among all the sons she
reared, she has no one to take her by the
hand.

¹⁹These double calamities have befallen
you – ruin and destruction, famine and sword.
Who is there to console you?

²⁰Your children were found helpless at the
corner of every street, like wild bulls in a net.
They had drunk to the full the fury of Yahweh,
the wrath of your God.

²¹Therefore hear this now, you afflicted
one, you who are drunk but not with wine.

²²Thus says your Lord Yahweh, your God,
defender of your people's cause:

See, I am taking out of your hand the cup

Jer
15:5
Lm
1:2-
17

• **51.9** This poem is a double call to Yahweh and to Jerusalem that they may awaken. Yahweh is described as a hero asleep and Jerusalem as a humiliated and discouraged woman. The two must work together for the restoration of Jerusalem:

– Yahweh is the one to indicate the timing, preparing the historical conditions to make it feasible, and infusing hope in their hearts.

– First, the children of Jerusalem must want their own liberation and then they must go to rebuild the city.

God seems absent from the world where people follow their own fancies and seems asleep until his hour comes. We should not be fatalistic because of that, believing that problems

will be resolved when God decides. To call God and wake him means to go ahead and advance before the fog has lifted. Who is it that God encourages? The defeated who pay the price of their errors. He does not speak to saints but to sinners: in pardoning their past sins he gives them strength to rebuild the Holy City.

It is easy to criticize these realistic and primitive biblical expressions concerning Yahweh of Hosts. We should not replace the image of the Conqueror with that of a calm and unruffled God more in keeping with a conservative mentality. The events which were announced here were about to overturn the course of history.

Note the expressions *redeemed and sold* which were already used in 50:1. Each person

of trembling; the cup of my anger – you will drink of it no more. ²³But I will put it into the hands of your tormentors, those who ordered you to bow down, that they might trample on you, while you laid your body as a pavement, as a street for them to walk on.

^{Ezk 44:9} **52** ¹Awake, awake!
Put on your strength, O Zion;
put on your glorious garments, O Jerusalem, holy city.
For never will the uncircumcised or the unclean enter you again.
²Shake the dust off yourself and rise up, O Jerusalem.
Loose the bonds from your neck,

O captive Daughter of Zion.
³For thus says Yahweh:
You were sold for no amount,
you will be redeemed without money. ^{50:1 1P 1:18}

⁴Thus says the Lord God:
In the beginning
my people lived as aliens in Egypt;
then Assyria oppressed them without reason.

⁵But now, what am I doing here? says Yahweh. My people have been carried off for no money and their masters make a boast of it; all day long my name is scorned. ^{Rom 2:24}

⁶Therefore my people will know my name; therefore they will know on that day that it is I who say: “Here I am!” ^{41:4}

^{40:9 Rom 10:15 Rev 14:6}

• ⁷How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those
who bring good news,
who herald peace and happiness,
who proclaim salvation
and announce to Zion: “Your God is king!”

^{Ezk 43:1-5}

⁸Together your watchmen
raise their voices in praise and song;
they see Yahweh face to face returning to Zion.

⁹Break into shouts of joy,
O ruins of Jerusalem,
for Yahweh consoles his people
and redeems Jerusalem.

¹⁰Yahweh has bared his holy arm
in the eyes of the nations;
all the ends of the earth, in alarm,
will witness God’s salvation.

^{2Cor 6:17 Rev 18:4}

¹¹Depart, depart from that nation, come out!
Touch nothing unclean.
Purify yourselves, you who bear
all Yahweh’s holy vessels.

^{Ex 14:14}

¹²Yet not in escape, or in fright, will you come out,
you will not leave in headlong flight;
for ahead is Yahweh, your vanguard,
and behind, the God of Israel, your rearguard.

Through his punishment, we are made whole

^{Jn 12:32}

• ¹³It is now when my servant will succeed;
he will be exalted and highly praised.

belongs to God and finds freedom in obeying him. If we reject this dependence, we fall into another since we have been created for this kind of freedom which develops in mutual relationship and dependence of another one. Christ “purchases” us, or rescues us from every slavery as it is written in Isaiah 53:10 (Rom 6:15), but so as to make us sons and daughters.

• **52.7** The prophets, messengers of a victorious God: that is the meaning of the *good news*. See Rom 1:1; 2 Cor 2:14.

• 13. It is the fourth and last song of the Servant of Yahweh; it is here that the prophet, known as the “second Isaiah,” proclaims his whole message, and it is perhaps the last word of

¹⁴ Just as many have been horrified
 at his disfigured appearance:
 “Is this a man? He does not look like one,”
¹⁵ so will nations be astounded,
 kings will stand speechless,
 for they will see something never told,
 they will witness something never heard of.

Acts
 3:13
 Phil
 2:9

49:7
 Mic
 7:16
 Rom
 15:21

53

¹ Who could believe what we have heard,
 and to whom has Yahweh revealed his feat?

Jn
 12:38
 Rom
 10:16

² Like a root out of dry ground,
 like a sapling he grew up before us,
 with nothing attractive in his appearance,
 no beauty, no majesty.

11:1

³ He was despised and rejected,
 a man of sorrows familiar with grief,
 a man from whom people hide their face,
 spurned and considered of no account.

Mk
 9:12

⁴ Yet ours were the sorrows he bore,
 ours were the sufferings he endured,
 although we considered him as one
 punished by God, stricken and brought low.

Mt
 8:17
 Heb
 2:10

the Old Testament referring to Redemption. The prophet delivers to Israel the meaning of trials and shows what will be its mission. Israel has been placed at the center of the world history. It will have no rest until the other nations have discovered through its sufferings the only true God. The only title of Israel is to be God's servant, and it will not reach glory nor be saved before its mission has brought death.

Israel then, would necessarily be the victim, and, if God was to send a Savior, he too would be a victim.

For thousands of years people used to sacrifice animals – and at times human beings – thinking they could unload their sins on them, and be rid of them. These sacrifices or getting rid of those who were considered to be responsible for God's anger, never interrupted the cycle of violence. Here, however, we see God's response to our sins: he saves us through the suffering of the innocents and even more, through the willing sacrifice of the one who takes the sin of the world upon himself.

In writing this, the prophet had in mind the small group of faithful Jews exiled in Babylon: they were nothing more than *despised people*. Yet, they had not deserved such humiliation because of their own sins, rather they were *carrying the sorrows* of the violent, sinful world in which they lived. These believers were *punished for the crimes of their people*, Israel; but God would transform them into the seed of a holy people: *he will have a long life and see his descendants*. This wonder of God would surpass all the others and, in seeing it, kings would stand speechless.

This song is for our own wonder as well. The prophet, writing five centuries before Christ, was apparently referring to the humiliation of God's people who, then as now, are the instrument of salvation; but his poem outlined beforehand the image of God become human, who humbled himself even to death on the cross. When we read the Passion of Christ in the Gospel, we realize that the evangelists themselves were struck by the similarity between Jesus' trial and death and what was announced by the prophet. Many times, in presenting Jesus, the apostles would refer to this text. See Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 2:24.

Who could believe what we have heard? How would the hearers of Peter, Paul or John accept their proclamation of Jesus, the crucified savior? See John 12:38; 1 Corinthians 1:22; Romans 10:16. In our own day, perhaps many Christians do not understand why so many innocent people die as victims of injustice and Christians are especially persecuted.

He makes himself an offering for sin. In several passages of the Bible we are invited to adopt this same attitude when we suffer unjustly (1 P 1:20; 4:13). Christ alone has perfectly fulfilled this redemptive mission from the beginning to the end of his life (Heb 10; Jn 2:29; Rom 5:6).

My just servant will justify the multitude: that is to say, he will make them just and holy. The Hebrew text reads “the many”, which means *the multitude*. Jesus refers to this text at the Last Supper: “my blood poured out for many,” or for everyone (Mk 14:24). There Jesus clearly says that his death is the free and perfect sacrifice foretold in this song.

Rom
4:25
2Cor
5:21
Gal
3:13

⁵Destroyed because of our sins,
he was crushed for our wickedness.
Through his punishment we are made whole;
by his wounds we are healed.

Eph
2:14
2P
2:24

Ezk
34:15

⁶Like sheep we had all gone astray,
each following his own way;
but Yahweh laid upon him all our guilt.

1Cor
15:3

Jer
11:19
Wis
2:19
Mt
27:12,
14

⁷He was harshly treated,
but unresisting and silent, he humbly submitted.
Like a lamb led to the slaughter
or a sheep before the shearer
he did not open his mouth.

Jn
19:9
1P
1:19

Mt
9:15

⁸He was taken away to detention and judgment –
what an unthinkable fate!
He was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for his people’s sin.

Acts
8:32

Mt
27:38,
57-
60

⁹They made his tomb with the wicked,
they put him in the graveyard of the oppressors,
though he had done no violence nor spoken in deceit.

Mt
26:42
Rom
3:25

¹⁰Yet it was the will of Yahweh to crush him with grief.
When he makes himself an offering for sin,
he will have a long life and see his descendants.
Through him the will of Yahweh is done.

Heb
2:17
1Jn
2:2

¹¹For the anguish he suffered,
he will see the light and obtain perfect knowledge.
My just servant will justify the multitude;
he will bear and take away their guilt.

Ps
2:8
Mk
10:45
Lk
22:37
23:34

¹²Therefore I will give him his portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong.
For he surrendered himself to death
and was even counted among the wicked,
bearing the sins of the multitude
and interceding for sinners.

Phil
2:7
Heb
7:25
1P
2:24

Rejoice, O barren woman

1S
2:5
Ps
113:9
Gal
4:27

54 • ¹Rejoice, O barren woman who
has not given birth; sing and
shout for joy, you who never had chil-
dren, for more are the children of the

rejected woman than the children of the
married wife, says Yahweh.

²Enlarge the space for your tent,
stretch out your hangings, lengthen
your ropes and strengthen your stakes,

Jer
10:20

• **54.1** This concludes the songs in which
Isaiah addressed Jerusalem: 49:14; 51:17.

In a grandiose vision, Jerusalem becomes the
people of the future, the people reborn from the
ruins who will bring about a kingdom of peace.
Jerusalem is the ideal city we have dreamed of at
one time or another and which God wishes to
give us.

Shout for joy, you who never had children.
The Jewish people collapsed as a nation because

of their errors and they no longer had a future,
humanly speaking. This suits God. If they lack
the means to be great, God is going to touch
them. He will no longer be the one from whom
we expect favors but the one who gives himself:
your Maker is to marry you.

For a brief moment I have abandoned you.
Here we have the story of God’s love for us: the
total love of God, our infidelity, our sin. The
prophets announce the New Jerusalem,

^{Gen 28:14} ³for you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will take possession of the nations and inhabit cities that have been abandoned.

^{45:17} ⁴Do not be afraid for you will not be deceived, do not be ashamed for you will not be disgraced. You will forget the shame of your youth; no longer will you remember the disgrace of your widowhood.

^{49:14} ⁵For your Maker is to marry you: Yahweh Sabaoth is his name. Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel: He is called God of all the earth.

^{Jer 31:3}
^{Mal 2:14} ⁶For Yahweh has called you back as one forsaken and grieved in spirit. Who could abandon his first beloved? says your God.

⁷For a brief moment I have abandoned you, but with great tenderness I will gather my people. ⁸For a moment, in an outburst of anger, I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I have had mercy on you, says Yahweh, your Redeemer.

⁹This is for me like Noah's waters, when I swore that they would no more flood the earth; so now I swear not to be angry with you and never again to rebuke you. ¹⁰The mountains may depart and the hills be moved, but never will my love depart from you nor my covenant of peace be removed, says Yahweh whose compassion is for you.

¹¹O afflicted city, lashed by storm and unconsolated, I will set your stones with turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. ¹²I will crown your wall with agate, make your gates crystal, and your ramparts of precious stones.

¹³All your children will be taught by Yahweh, and they will prosper greatly. ¹⁴Justice will be your foundation; tyranny and the fear of oppression will never come near you.

¹⁵If ever you are attacked, it will not be of my doing; and your attacker will surely fail.

¹⁶Look, it is I who created the blacksmith, who fans the burning coals and forges his weapons. But I have also prepared the one who makes them useless.

¹⁷No weapon forged against you will succeed, and all who speak against you will be silenced. Such is the lot of the servants of Yahweh, and such is the right I grant them – says Yahweh.

Come to the water

55 ¹Come here, all you who are thirsty, come to the water!

All who have no money, come!

Yes, without money and at no cost, buy and drink wine and milk.

²Why spend money on what is not food and labor for what does not satisfy? Listen to me, and you will eat well; you will enjoy the richest of fare.

³Incline your ear and come to me; listen, that your soul may live. I will make with you an everlasting cov-

Yahweh's bride which will never again be abandoned.

We know that the Church is the Remnant of Israel, the new People united to God in an eternal covenant. Yet it is also at the same time, as the ancient Israel was, an unfaithful people whose sins the Bible describes: dull parishes, existing but not really alive; institutions where one might look in vain for the Spirit of Jesus; leaders of the church who are subservient to the powerful.... Somehow the New Jerusalem is in the Church of Christ, but it is also true that we need to continually look for it.

All your children will be taught by Yahweh. It is the same proclamation of a new covenant that was proclaimed by Jeremiah (Jer 31:31). Believers should always lean on the word of God and be guided by his commandments, but their link with God will be in a deep communication of spirit to spirit, a communion which immerses us

in the only truth. It is a kind of knowledge which teaches no particular truth, but enables us to appreciate, judge and coordinate all the fragmentary truths. It is an instinct of God that enables us to discover in depth the person of Christ through the brief testimonies of Scripture. This instinct in turn gives us the secrets of the Bible (Jn 6:45).

It is by meditating on these poems that we best understand how God makes virginity fruitful. It is not by accident that Jesus was born of a virgin mother; rather his birth came as the culmination of the expectation of "Jerusalem, the bride of God": see Isaiah 7:14.

• **55.1** The book ends with a call to hope.

55:1-3. Are you not tired of the happiness you thought you would easily get in the place of exile?

God is the one who always gives first. He only hopes that we will open the door for him. Jesus

Rev
21:10

1:26
Jer
31:34
Jn
6:45

45:13
52:3
Dt
8:3
Jer
2:13
Mt
4:4
5:6
Jn 4
7:37
Rev
21:6
Pro
9:3-6
Sir
24:19-
22
Ezk
16:60
Acts
13:34

enant, I will fulfill in you my promises to David.

⁴See, I have given him for a witness to the nations, a leader and commander of the people. ⁵Likewise you

will summon a nation unknown to you, and nations that do not know you will come hurrying to you for the sake of Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has promoted you. ^{Ps 18:44}

65:1
Dt
4:7
Jer
29:13
Ps
145:
18

⁶Seek Yahweh while he may be found;
call to him while he is near.

⁷Let the wicked abandon his way,
let him forsake his thoughts,
let him turn to Yahweh for he will have mercy,
for our God is generous in forgiving.

⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
my ways are not your ways, says Yahweh.

⁹For as the heavens are above the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts above your thoughts.

¹⁰As the rain and the snow come down
from the heavens and do not return
till they have watered the earth,
making it yield seed for the sower
and food for others to eat,

¹¹so is my word that goes forth out of my mouth:
it will not return to me idle,
but it shall accomplish my will,
the purpose for which it has been sent.

Ps
92:6
103:
11
Rom
11:33
2Cor
9:10

¹²Yes, in joy you will depart, in peace you will be led forth: mountains and hills will break into song before you, trees of the countryside will clap their hands.

¹³Instead of the thornbush, the cypress will thrive; instead of briars, the myrtle. This will make Yahweh famous and remain as an everlasting witness to him.

will offer us rest (Mt 11:28); he will give us the bread of life (Jn 6) and will give himself as "the" friend (Rev 3:20).

55:4-5. A universal mission awaits Israel in the homeland, after their return.

55:6-9. Allow yourselves to be conquered by the love of the Lord who is forming you even

more than you can imagine. Paul will use similar language in his letter to the Romans (5:1-11).

55:10-11. Here the word of God appears personified. It is already much more than the words spoken by the prophets. This Word which comes from the Father and returns to him will be presented by the apostle John in the first page of his Gospel: it is Christ. See also in 45:8.

Third part of the book of Isaiah

God calls everyone

- 56** • ¹This is what Yahweh says:
 Maintain what is right
 and do what is just,
 for my salvation is close at hand,
 my justice is soon to come.
- Ps 1 ²Blessed is the mortal who does these things, and perseveres in them, who does not defile the sabbath and who refrains from evil.
- Dt 23:3 ³Let no foreigner say, "Surely Yahweh will exclude me from his people." Neither let the castrated man say, "I have become a mere dry tree."
- Wis 3:14 ⁴For this is what Yahweh says: To the castrated men who keep my sabbaths, who choose to do what pleases me and remain faithful to my covenant:
- Wis 4:1 Rev 3:5 ⁵I will give them in my house and within its walls, a memorial and a name that are worth more than sons and daughters; I will give them a name that will never die away or be forgotten.
- 1K 8:41 ⁶Yahweh says to the foreigners who join him, serving him and loving his name, keeping his sabbath unprofaned and remaining faithful to his covenant:
- Mk 11:17 ⁷I will bring them to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. I will accept on my altar their burnt offerings and sacrifices, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations.
- Ps 147:2 Jn 11:16 ⁸Thus says the Lord God, Yahweh, who gathers the exiles of Israel: There are others I will gather besides those already gathered.

Reproaches

- ⁹All you wild beasts, come and devour, all you beasts of the forests! Jer 12:9
- ¹⁰Blind are Israel's watchmen: they all see nothing. They are dumb watchdogs they are unable to bark. Lying down and dreaming, they love to slumber.
- ¹¹Greedy dogs that are never satisfied; shepherds of no discretion, they all turn their own way, everyone of them to his own gain. Jer 23:1 Ezk 34:2
- ¹²"Come, bring wine," they say, "and let us all get drunk, and tomorrow will be as today, or perhaps even a happier day." 5:11 28:7
- 57** ¹Righteous people perish, and no one cares about it. Mic 7:2 Ps 12:2
- The just one is taken off, and no one understands that he is taken away from the calamity that comes, ²he enters into peace.
- ³But all you children of a witch, come here, you offspring of the whore and the adulterer. Ezk 16
- ⁴Who are you mocking?
 At whom are you making faces, opening wide your mouth and sticking out your tongue?
 You are children of sin, offspring of deceit and falsehood,
- ⁵burning with lust among the bushes, under spreading branches, sacrificing your children by the streams, in the clefts of rocks. Dt 12:2 Jer 2:20 7:31
- ⁶Your heart is with your idols, the smooth stones of the wadis to which you have poured out drink offerings and brought oblations of grain.

The Jews have come home, but the miracles announced in chapters 40–55 of this book have not occurred. A poor community tries to organize itself and to solve all kinds of problems stemming from the fact that during the seventy years of exile, others had taken their place.

A prophet, whose name we do not know, witnesses these beginnings. He announces that God comes to take revenge on his enemies, both those within Israel who do not want to give up their sins, and those outside. Above all God comes to save those who return to him, not only the members of the Israelite community, but strangers as well. In his own style this prophet continues the enthusiastic description of Zion-Jerusalem, and the Messiah: she is God's beloved and the wedding feast will be soon. The Messiah will come with the Spirit of Yahweh to deliver his Gospel to the poor.

The poems of this prophet are in chapters 56–66 of the book of Isaiah, there is a metrical arrangement of the poems with the announcement of the new Zion at the center:

56:1-8	The people of God welcome everyone	66:18-24.
56:9-58	Reproaches, warnings and promises	65 and 66:1-17.
59:1-4	Confession of sins	63:7–64:11.
59:15-20	God's vengeance	63:1-6.
60	The new Jerusalem	62.
61	The Spirit of the Lord is upon me	

Can I tolerate this?
 Ezk 16:15 ⁷You have made your bed upon a high and lofty mountain.
 You went up there to offer your sacrifice.
⁸You have set up your domestic idols behind your doorposts and your doors.
 Deserting me, you have uncovered your bed, climbed into it and spread it wide.
 You made a bargain with those whose bed you enjoy, and you had intercourse with them.
⁹With perfumed oil, you made yourself look your best for Molech; you sent envoys far afield – the children you sent to your pagan god through a sacrificial death.
¹⁰Although wearied with your misdeeds,

you have never given up; you have never tired or weakened, but instead found your strength revived.
¹¹Where had gone your fear of me that you should lie and disown me, refuse me a place in your heart and not remember me?
 Have I held my peace so long that you do not fear me any more?
¹²But now I will tell your merits and your deeds, it will not be for your advantage.
¹³When you cry out in distress, let your idols save you! The wind will blow them all away; a whiff of a breeze will carry them off.
 But he who takes refuge in me will take possession of the land, my holy mountain his inheritance.

Jer
2:25

Ps
37:9

There is no peace without justice

40:3 ¹⁴Then it shall be said:
 “Prepare, prepare, open up a way,
 remove all obstructions from my people’s way.”
 66:2 ¹⁵For thus says the Most High,
 he who is enthroned forever,
 he whose name is holy:
 “I reign exalted and holy
 but I am also with him who is contrite and humble in spirit,
 to give the contrite a heart revived
 and the humble in spirit a new life.
 Ps 103:9 ¹⁶For I will not contend forever,
 nor will I always be angry,
 lest the spirit of man faint before me,
 the very breath that I have created.
¹⁷His wickedness enraged me for a time,
 I smote him and hid my face,
 for he, a rebel, wanted to go his own drive.
 And I have seen his ways.
 Jer 3:22
 Hos 6:1
 Acts 2:39
 Eph 2:13, 17
 48:22 ¹⁸But from now on I will console,
 I will heal and fully comfort him,
 – all those of his people who mourn.
¹⁹I will bring smiles to their lips. Peace!
 Peace to him who is far and to him who is near.
 I will indeed heal you,” Yahweh says.
²⁰But the wicked are like a turbulent sea
 that finds no rest
 and whose waters cast up mire and slime.
²¹“There is no peace,” says my God,
 “for the wicked.”

• **56.1** The Jewish law – reflecting the thinking of the times – excluded foreigners in certain

circumstances, as well as eunuchs, (castrated men) from their religious assemblies.

The kind of fast that pleases me

58

¹ Cry out aloud for all you are worth;
raise your voice like a trumpet blast;
tell my people of their offenses,
Jacob's family of their sins.

Hos
8:1
Mic
3:8

² Is it true that they seek me
day after day, longing to know my ways,
as a people that does what is right
and has not forsaken the word of its God?

They want to know the just laws
and not to drift away from their God.

³ "Why are we fasting," they complain,
"and you do not even see it?"

Mal
3:14
Mt
6:18

We are doing penance and you never notice it."

Look, on your fast days you push your trade
and you oppress your laborers.

⁴ Yes, you fast but end up quarreling,
striking each other with wicked blows.

Fasting as you do
will not make your voice heard on high.

⁵ Is that the kind of fast that pleases me,
just a day to humble oneself?
Is fasting merely bowing down one's head,
and making use of sackcloth and ashes?

1:11
Am
5:21
Zec
7:5

Would you call that fasting,
a day acceptable to Yahweh?

⁶ See the fast that pleases me:
breaking the fetters of injustice
and unfastening the thongs of the yoke,
setting the oppressed free
and breaking every yoke.

Dt
15:12
Jer
34:8

⁷ Fast by sharing your food with the hungry,
bring to your house the homeless,
clothe the one you see naked
and do not turn away from your own kin.

Dt
22:1
Ezk
18:5
Job
31:16,
19

⁸ Then will your light will break forth as the dawn
and your healing come in a flash.
Your righteousness will be your vanguard,
the Glory of Yahweh your rearguard.

Mt
25:34
52:12
Jer
30:17

⁹ Then you will call and Yahweh will answer,
you will cry and he will say, I am here.

52:6
65:1

The prophet reveals that such exclusion is not endorsed by God.

In 56:9-13 we have poems against the leaders of Judah and against idolatry.

• **58.1** *Why are we fasting and you do not even see it.* The people of Judah fast so that God

will hear their petitions. These could be public prayers to ask for rain.

Is it true that they seek me... as a people that does what is right? In spite of having a clear conscience, they are concerned because of God's silence. They may have committed some sin without knowing it? Perhaps God likes to see

If you remove from your midst the yoke,
 the clenched fist and the wicked word,
 Ps 10 if you share your food with the hungry
 37:6 and give relief to the oppressed,
 Mt 5:14 then your light will rise in the dark,
 your night will be like noon.
 Jn 11 Yahweh will guide you always
 4:14 and give you relief in desert places.
 He will strengthen your bones;
 he will make you as a watered garden,
 like a spring of water
 whose waters never fail.
 61:4 12 Your ancient ruins will be rebuilt,
 the age-old foundations will be raised.
 You will be called the Breach-mender,
 and the Restorer of ruined houses.
 Ezk 13 If you stop profaning the sabbath
 20:12 and doing as you please on the holy day,
 if you call the sabbath a day of delight
 and keep sacred Yahweh's holy day,
 if you honor it by not going your own way,
 not doing as you please
 and not speaking with malice,
 Dt 14 then you will find happiness in Yahweh,
 32:12 over the heights you will ride trium-
 phantly,
 and feast joyfully on the inheritance of
 your father Jacob you.
 The mouth of Yahweh has spoken.

Penitential psalm

59 1 Yahweh's arm is not too short to save
 nor his ear too dull to hear.
 Dt 2 It is your sins, rather,
 31:17 that separate you from God.
 It is your iniquities that veil his face,
 so that he does not hear you.
 3 For your hands are blood-stained,
 your fingers blotted with crimes;

your lips have spoken lies,
 your tongues have uttered deceit.
 4 No one fights for a right cause;
 no one makes a truthful plea.
 They all tell lies and rely on vanity;
 they conceive mischief and bring forth
 iniquity.
 5 They hatch vipers' eggs
 and weave spiders' webs.
 Whoever eats their eggs dies;
 and from an egg that is crushed
 a venomous snake is hatched.
 6 Their thread gives useless cloth;
 their works are of help to no one.
 Their plans are evil plots
 executed in deeds of violence.
 7 Their feet rush to do evil;
 they are quick to shed innocent blood.
 Their minds are full of wicked thoughts,
 leaving in their wake ruin and havoc.
 8 They do not know the way of peace;
 from them no one can expect justice.
 They have made their roads tricky and
 crooked
 so that he who follows them is lost or
 waylaid.
 9 So, far away from us lies justice,
 and beyond reach is righteousness.
 We look for light but behold darkness;
 we long for brightness but walk in gloom.
 10 Like the blind we grope for the wall,
 like those without eyes we feel our way.
 We stumble at noon as at twilight;
 we are dead in the midst of our sins.
 11 We are like bears that growl;
 we are like doves that moan.
 We look for justice and find none;
 we wait for salvation that never comes.

Job 8:4
 Ps 58:3
 Mt 3:7
 Pro 1:16
 Rom 3:15

Am 5:18
 Dt 28:29

humiliated people ask for favors? So, they lie in sackcloth and ashes. They resemble many Christians who are satisfied with being "practicing" Christians without understanding that the kind of practice that God seeks is to give peace to all his people.

Is it perhaps only a matter of bowing the head? God neither wants the death of the sinner nor the humiliation of his creature. God loves people, but he loves them all and not only the little landowners of Judah fearful for their crops; he also loves the laborers and the slaves of these little landholders. God's demands are clear: do away with unjust chains and share with the rest.

Unfastening the thongs of the yoke. Here we have a glimpse of the tremendous effort demanded of all in order to do away with every form of slavery: from the small privileges that working companions compete for, to the laws that keep entire groups marginated. It includes breaking the yoke of husbands' domination over their wives and the disputes between neighbors when no one dares to take the first step.

Unfastening the thongs of the yoke. It is not enough to be converted to God "from the heart," for conversion comes about by changing both persons and structures. These make us share in the injustices and sins of the society in which we live. An incredible number of sins – corruption, prostitution, violence – are linked to colonialism and the economic and cultural dependence that go with it.

Sharing your food with the hungry: and that on a world scale for humankind is one, the only Adam of whom Christ is the head.

Your light will break forth as the dawn. We see the leaders of the nations come together, discuss and study in order to solve the urgent problems of humanity. No light breaks forth. It is a known fact that the research of a scientist does not bring him directly to great discoveries. Rather, he often finds the solution suddenly where he did not expect it. In the same way, human problems resist theoretical solutions, but unexpected ways will be found when every nation and every segment of society willingly shares and no longer oppresses others.

¹²For our offenses before you are many,
and our sins bear witness against us.
We acknowledge our offenses;
we know all our iniquities.

¹³Yes, we have betrayed and deceived
Yahweh,
turning away from following our God.
We have planned violence and rebellion;
we have thought and murmured lies.

¹⁴Justice has been withheld,
righteousness stands aloof,
for truth has fallen in the public square
and integrity is not allowed to enter.

¹⁵There is no sincerity nor honesty.
The one who turns from evil is despoiled.

• Yahweh has seen this and is aggrieved
that justice does not exist.

^{63:5} ¹⁶Appalled at seeing none would inter-
vene,
his own arm brought about the victory,
his justice giving him its support.

¹⁷He put on righteousness as a breast-
plate,
and salvation as a helmet upon his head.
He wrapped himself in garments of ven-
geance

and put on a mantle of fury.

¹⁸To each he will pay his due –
wrath to his enemy, reprisal to his foe.

¹⁹Those in the west will hear the name of
Yahweh;

those in the east will see his glory.

For it will come like a pent-up stream
driven by the breath of Yahweh.

²⁰But to Zion he will come as redeemer,
and to those of Jacob who turn from sin.
This is Yahweh speaking.

²¹For my part, this is my covenant with
them, says Yahweh. My spirit which I have
poured out on you, and my words which I
have put in your mouth, will never leave you,
nor your children, nor your children's chil-
dren forever and ever.

61:10
Wis
5:17
Eph
6:14
1Thes
5:8

Mal
1:11

48:16
51:16
61:1

The Glory of Yahweh rises upon you

60

• ¹Arise, shine, for your light has come.

The Glory of Yahweh rises upon you.

²Night still covers the earth

and gloomy clouds veil the peoples,

but Yahweh now rises

and over you his glory appears.

³Nations will come to your light
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴Lift up your eyes round about and see:
they are all gathered and come to you,
your sons from afar,
your daughters tenderly carried.

⁵This sight will make your face radiant,
your heart throbbing and full;
the riches of the sea will be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations will come to you.

⁶A flood of camels will cover you,
caravans from Midian and Ephah.

Rev
21:11

Ex
24:16

Mt
2:2
Rev
21:24

Bar
5:5-6

Mt
2:11

• **59.15** The Lord appears as a warrior as in
63:1. Here he appears with the weapons proper
to his Rule:

- justice, here it means the power of God who
comes to bring justice on earth;
- salvation, this is total human liberation in
order to make us holy;
- zeal, this is the jealous love of God for his
faithful people.

The book of Wisdom will use these words in
5:17 and so will Paul in Ephesians 6:14.

• **60.1** As the prophet looks at the humble
Jerusalem which is barely rising from its ruins, he
suddenly has a vision of the future Jerusalem,
filled with the Lord's riches, the city that will be
the bride of the Lord.

There all the aspirations of a humanity purified
and gathered in the light of God will be achieved
(see Rev 21). There all people will delight in the
fullness everything they ever longed for.

These promises point to the goals on which
the Church must focus. It is in the Church that all

Those from Sheba will come,
 bringing with them gold and incense,
 all singing in praise of Yahweh.

⁷The flocks of Kedar will be gathered for you,
 the rams of Nebaioth put at your service:
 they are acceptable offerings on my altar
 and will enhance the glory of my house.

Hos
 11:11

⁸Who are these as thick as clouds,
 flying like doves to their cote?

1K
 10:22

⁹Ah, they are ships, with those of Tarshish in the front,
 for the islands now trust in me.

They bear your sons from far away
 bringing their gold and silver with them,
 for the name of Yahweh your God,
 for the Holy One of Israel,
 for he has glorified you.

¹⁰Foreigners will rebuild your walls,
 and their kings will attend to you.
 For though in anger I have struck you,
 in love I will have mercy on you.

Rev
 21:25

¹¹Your gates will forever be open
 and never be shut by night or day,
 that you may receive the wealth of the
 nations,
 their kings leading them in procession;
 (¹²for the nations and kingdoms that
 refuse to serve you will perish; they will be
 destroyed.)

¹³The glory of Lebanon will come to you,
 the pine, the fir and the cypress, too,
 to adorn the place of my sanctuary,
 to give glory to the resting place of my feet.

Ps
 87:3
 Rev
 3:9

¹⁴The sons of those who oppressed you
 will come bending low;
 all who despised you will fall before your
 feet.

They will call you the City of Yahweh,
 Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁵Though you have been forsaken, hated
 and avoided,
 I will make of you an everlasting pride,
 a joy for all generations.

¹⁶You will suck the milk of nations
 and be nursed at royal breasts.

You will know that I, Yahweh, am your
 savior,

your redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.
¹⁷Instead of bronze I will bring you gold;
 instead of iron I will bring silver;
 instead of wood, bronze;
 instead of stones, iron.
 Peace will be overseers,
 justice your taskmasters.

¹⁸Violence will no more be heard in your
 land,
 nor ruin and destruction within your bor-
 ders.

Rev
 21:12

You will call your walls Salvation,
 and your gates Praise.

¹⁹No more will the sun give you light by
 day,

nor the moon shine on you by night.
 For Yahweh will be your everlasting light
 and your God will be your glory.

Lk
 1:78
 Rev
 21:23

²⁰No more will your sun go down,
 never will your moon wane.
 For Yahweh will be your everlasting light,
 and your days of mourning will come to an
 end.

²¹Your people will be upright;
 forever they will possess the land –
 they the shoot of my planting,

the real riches of humanity – faith, understand-
 ing, community – are and must be gathered.

“Raise your head, O Jerusalem. Contemplate
 the great multitude who are building and seek-
 ing: In laboratories and through studies, in
 deserts and in factories, in the enormous social
 melting pot.

“Do you see all these who are working hard?
 Well then, all that is bubbling in them, in the arts,

science and thoughts, all of this is for you! Come
 now, open your arms and your heart and wel-
 come this surge, this overflowing of human
 vitality as your Lord Jesus! Welcome this sap
 because, without its baptism, you will fade with-
 out aspirations, like a flower without water; and
 save it because, without your sun, it will be
 scattered in sterile branches” (Teilhard de
 Chardin).

the work of my hand –
in them I shall be glorified.
²²The least of them will become a clan,

the smallest a mighty nation.
I, Yahweh, will do this,
swiftly, in due time.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me

61

•¹The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me,
because Yahweh has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up broken hearts,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
freedom to those languishing in prison;
²to announce the year of Yahweh's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to give comfort to all who grieve;
³(to comfort those who mourn in Zion)
and give them a garland instead of ashes,
oil of gladness instead of mourning,
and festal clothes instead of despair.

42:1
Lk
4:18
7:22
Acts
10:38

63:4

They will be called oaks of integrity
planted by Yahweh to show his glory.
⁴They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and repair cities laid waste,
left desolate for many generations.
⁵Strangers will stand to feed your flocks,
foreigners to be your plowmen and
vinedressers.

Ex
19:6
Rev
1:6

⁶But you will be named priests of Yahweh,
you will be called ministers of our God.
You will feed on the wealth of nations
and bathe in the splendor of their riches.
⁷Since my people's shame has been two-
fold

55:3

and disgrace has been their lot,
they will possess a double portion
of inheritance in their land.
I will give them everlasting joy.
⁸For I, Yahweh, love justice,
I hate robbery and oppression;
I will give them their due reward
and make an everlasting covenant with
them.

⁹Their descendants shall be known
among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples.
All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a race Yahweh has blessed.
¹⁰I rejoice greatly in Yahweh,
my soul exults for joy in my God,
for he has clothed me in the garments of
his salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of his
righteousness,
like a bridegroom wearing a garland,
like a bride adorned with jewels.
¹¹For as the earth brings forth its growth,
and as a garden makes seeds spring up,
so will the Lord Yahweh make justice and
praise
spring up in the sight of all nations.

Lk
1:46
Rev
19:8
21:2

Your God will rejoice in you

62 •¹For Zion's sake I will not hold my
peace,
for Jerusalem I will not keep silent,

• **61.1** The prophet recalls the mission he received from God, to announce to the Jewish pioneers who returned to Jerusalem that God would bless their efforts. The ruins would be rebuilt; the people would come back in great numbers from the countries where they were exiled; those who doubt or are discouraged must persevere because, soon, God will come to visit his people.

Speaking in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus read this text and said: "Today it is being fulfilled" (Lk 4:21). And the people who heard him were saying: "God has visited his people."

And yet, we who come after him wonder: If Christ brought God's salvation twenty centuries ago, why are so many people still waiting for the good news of their liberation?

It is because the Gospel is a seed and the resurrection does not immediately bring about the transformation of the world. If the Jewish people endured fifteen centuries of searching and trials before their Savior came, how will other people obtain the definitive Peace of the Kingdom of God without first passing through the great trials preceding Christ's return? We are already quite blessed to have him in our midst and his Spirit upon us.

To heal, to fortify; perfume and garlands: the coming of God to his people fills us with happiness; without fear or boredom, so frequently at the heart of religious practices.

• **62.1** What was said on the subject in chapter 60 can be applied here. In a new way, this

until her holiness shines like the dawn
and her salvation flames like a burning
torch.

Rev
2:17
3:12
2 The nations will see your holiness
and all the kings your glory.
You will be called by a new name
which the mouth of Yahweh will reveal.

Ezk
16:2
3 You will be a crown of glory
in the hand of Yahweh,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

49:8
4 No longer will you be named *Forsaken*;
no longer will your land be called
Abandoned;
but you will be called *My Delight*
and your land *Espoused*.

For Yahweh delights in you
and will make your land his spouse.

5 As a young man marries a virgin,
so will your builder marry you;
and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride,
so will your God rejoice in you.

He who sows will reap

6 Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I
have stationed watchmen; all the day
and throughout the night they will not
be silent.

You who call on Yahweh, give your-

selves no rest; ⁷and give him no rest
either till he restores Jerusalem and
makes of it the pride of the earth.

8 Yahweh swears by his right hand
and by his mighty arm: Never again will
I give your grain as food for your en-
emies, nor will foreigners drink the wine
for which you have labored. ⁹But those
who toil will eat the harvest, and praise
Yahweh; and those working for the vin-
tage shall drink of the wine in the courts
of my sanctuary.

10 "Pass through, pass through the gates,
prepare the way for the people. Build it up,
bank up the highway, clear it of stones; raise
up a standard for the peoples."

11 For Yahweh proclaims to the ends of the
earth:

Say to the daughter of Zion, here comes
your salvation! Yahweh brings the reward of
his victory, his booty is carried before him.

12 They shall be called the holy people, the
redeemed of Yahweh; and you shall be called
The Sought After, a city no longer aban-
doned.

Why are your clothes red?

Rev
19:13

63

• ¹Who is this coming from Edom,
majestically arrayed
in crimson garments from Bozrah,
marching in great strength?
"It is I, proclaiming justice,
I who am powerful to save."

²Why are your clothes red?

Such garments have those who tread the winepress.

song repeats what was said about the future
Jerusalem in 4:2 and in chapters 40–55.

Jerusalem, the lasting city of the children of
God, the bride of the Lord, filled with his riches
and the delight of her God. Why does God
remind us so many times of those wonders which
have yet to happen?

– So that we may keep up our hope in trials
and dark times. This is how Paul encourages us
in Romans 8:16. Also, when things are going
well and we are filled with earthly hopes, the
same wisdom must help us to be detached from
all this, in the knowledge that something much
better still awaits us.

– On the other hand, the heavenly Jerusalem
is already present. Those who have come into
the church already have the favors promised to
David of which we have just spoken; they already
enjoy them if they have received the gifts of the
Holy Spirit (see Acts 13:34). These pages are an

invitation to see God at work in the world
through the Church.

• **63.1** The poem beginning here is wildly
beautiful. The neighboring people of Edom took
advantage of the ruin of Jerusalem to join its
wreckers and take part in the looting. So, the
simple mention of it was enough to arouse a
desire for revenge in the Jews. The prophets
wanted the destruction of a nation in which sin
was obvious and which had no mission in God's
plans. This poem imagines God relating his
victory over the pagans.

Believers reading this poem in early Christian
times understood it in another, figurative sense:
in the hero rescuing his people, they saw Christ
covered with his own blood (see Rev 19:13).
This was God's real victory and his way of
restoring justice.

Dt
28:30
Am
9:14

³“Alone I have trod the grapes;
not one of my people was with me.
I trampled them in my anger,
I trod them down in my wrath,
their lifeblood spattering my garments,
staining with crimson all my raiment.

Rev
14:19

⁴For I had set a day of vengeance
and my year of redemption had come.

34:8
61:2

⁵I looked about: there was no one to help.
I was appalled: there was no one to give support.
My own arm, then, brought about the victory,
and I was supported by my own fury.

⁶I crushed the peoples in my anger,
I trampled them down in my wrath,
and on the earth I poured their lifeblood.”

Rend the heavens and come down

Ps
89:2

⁷I will sing in praise of Yahweh and recall his kindness, according to all that he has done for us, his great goodness to the family of Israel. He has granted us mercy in the abundance of his blessings.

Dt
32:5

⁸For he said: “Surely they are my people, children who will not be disloyal.” So he proved himself their Savior ⁹in all their trials.

Ex
33:14
Mal
3:17

It was not a messenger or an angel but he himself who delivered them. Out of his love and mercy, he redeemed them, lifting them up and carrying them throughout the days of old.

Eph
4:30

¹⁰Yet they rebelled, giving grief to his holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy, fighting against them.

Num
11:17
Heb
13:20

¹¹His people then remembered the days of old, the days of Moses. Where is he who brought them out of the sea, the shepherd of his flock?

Where is he who in the midst of them poured out his holy Spirit, ¹²who sent his own power to accompany Moses, who divided the waters before them, winning for himself eternal renown, ¹³who made them go through the

depths as easily as a horse in the wilderness? ¹⁴Like cattle going down into the valley, they did not stumble.

Ps
77:21

The spirit of Yahweh led them to their rest; you guided your people, winning for yourself glorious renown.

¹⁵Look down from heaven, look down from your holy and glorious throne. Where is your zeal and your strength, the yearning of your heart and your compassion? How long will you ignore our pain? ¹⁶For you are our Father, whereas Abraham does not know us nor has Israel any knowledge of us. But you, O Yahweh, are our Father, from the beginning, you are our redeemer: this is your name.

Ps
80:15

¹⁷Why have you made us stray from your ways? Why have you let our heart become hard so that we do not fear you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your inheritance.

Dt
32:6
Mt
23:9

¹⁸Why have irreligious people invaded your sanctuary? Why have our enemies trampled it down?

¹⁹For too long we have become like those you do not rule, like those who do not bear your name.

Jer
14:9
Mk
1:10
15:38

Oh, that you would rend the heavens

• 7. This passage 63:7—64:11 is a psalm asking the forgiveness of Yahweh. The wonders of the past are recalled, and an anxious expecta-

tion of new blessings is expressed. Note especially 63:19-64:3 which would be understood later as asking for the coming of Christ.

and come down! The mountains would quake at your presence.

64 ¹As when fire sets brushwood ablaze and causes water to boil, make the nations know your name, and your enemies tremble. ²Let them witness your stunning deeds.

³No one has ever heard or perceived, no eye has ever seen a God besides you who works for those who trust in him.

Dt 4:32
1Cor 2:9

⁴You have confounded those who acted righteously and who joyfully kept your ways in mind. You are angry with our sins, yet conceal them and we shall be saved.

Ezk 36:17

⁵All of us have become like the unclean; all our good deeds are like polluted garments; we have all withered like leaves, blown away by our iniquities.

⁶There is no one who calls upon your name, no one who rouses himself to lay hold of you. For you have hidden your face, you have given us up to the power of our evil acts.

⁷And yet, Yahweh, you are our Father; we are the clay and you are our potter; we are the work of your hand.

⁸Do not let your anger go too far, O Yahweh, or think of our sins forever. See, we all are your people!

⁹Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wasteland, Jerusalem a desolation.

¹⁰Our holy and glorious house, where our ancestors used to pray to you, has been razed to the ground, and all that we treasure lies in ruins.

Zec 1:12

¹¹Can you still remain unmoved, O Yahweh, before all this? Will you punish us further with your silence?

God's response

Rom 10:20

65 ¹I let myself be found by those who did not ask for me; I have

been met by those who did not seek me.

I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation who did not call on my name. ²I have stretched out my hands all day to a rebellious people who chose the evil way, following their own wishes.

³These people provoked me to my face, continually, sacrificing in gardens, burning incense on bricks, ⁴living in tombs and spending nights in dark places; a people who eat the flesh of swine and broth of abominable meat.

Dt 32:21
Mk 5:2

⁵They cry out, "Stay away, do not come near, for I am too sacred to be touched." Such people and their acts arouse my anger like fire that burns all day.

⁶Look, all this is written in my book, I will not keep silent till I have settled my account with them ⁷for their crimes and the crimes of their fathers as well, Yahweh says. Because they burned incense on the mountains and blasphemed against me on the hills, I will pay them back in full.

God saves and blesses the just

⁸Yahweh says, When people find juice in a grape, they say: 'Do not destroy it, there is a blessing here.' So will I do with my servants; I will not destroy all of them.

⁹I will create a new race from Jacob and they will own the hills of Judah. My chosen people will inherit them, and my servants will dwell there.

¹⁰Sharon will be a pasture for flocks, the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds; they will be for my people who have sought me.

¹¹But as for you who have forsaken Yahweh, you who have forgotten my holy mountain, you who spread a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny, ¹²I have destined you to the sword. All of you will kneel for the slaughter.

For I called and you did not answer; I spoke and you did not listen. Instead you did what was evil in my sight and chose that in which I had no delight.

¹³Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Look, my servants will eat but you will go hungry; my servants will drink but you will be thirsty; my servants will rejoice but you will be disgraced;

Mt 25:34
Lk 6:20

¹⁴my servants will sing with gladness of heart,

• **65.1** Chapters 65-66 announce the judgment of the Lord on the earth. He will create a new heaven and a new earth in which his

servants will experience happiness. Verses 13-14 are a prelude to the beatitudes and the woes expressed in Luke 6:20-26.

but you will cry with grief in your heart and wail in anguish of spirit.

¹⁵ My chosen ones will use as a curse the name you will leave behind, as I strike you dead and give my servants a new name.

¹⁶ Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will receive the blessing from the God of truth; whoever takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth. For past troubles will be forgotten, and I will see them no more.

A new heaven and a new earth

¹⁷ I now create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind again.

¹⁸ Be glad forever and rejoice in what I create; for I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight. ¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people.

The sound of distress and the voice of weeping will not be heard in it any more.

²⁰ You will no longer know of dead children or of adults who do not live out a lifetime. One who reaches a hundred years will have died a mere youth, but one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant crops and eat their fruit. ²² No longer will they build houses for others to dwell in; no longer will they plant for others to eat the harvest.

For as the days of a tree will the days of my people be; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands.

²³ Their labor will not be in vain, nor will they bear children destined for misfortune, for they will be a people blessed by Yahweh, and their descendants with them.

²⁴ Before they call, I will have answered; while they are yet speaking, I will have heard.

• 17. No one could imagine the new heaven prepared for us by God (Mk 12:18). Let us rejoice that the prophet has described it in such a concrete way. For us the happiness of the "beyond" is part of our faith; but at this time it was not yet clear neither for the Jews nor the

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together, the lion will eat straw like the ox, (but the serpent will feed on dust).

They will not destroy nor do any harm over all my holy mountain, says Yahweh.

True worship of Yahweh

66 ¹ Thus says Yahweh: Heaven is my throne and earth my footstool. What house, then, could you build for me, and what could you offer as my resting place?

² My hands have made all this and it is all mine, but what I am looking for is the one who is meek and contrite of heart, who trembles at my word.

³ They sacrifice an ox, then they murder a human being. They sacrifice a lamb, then they break a dog's neck; they bring a cereal offering, then they offer swine's blood. They burn incense, but they burn it for idols.

Since they have chosen their own ways and taken delight in their dirty idols, ⁴ I will likewise choose afflictions for them that they fear and abhor.

For when I called no one answered, when I spoke no one listened. Instead they did what was evil in my sight and chose that in which I had no delight.

⁵ Hear the word of Yahweh, you who tremble at his word: Because of my name your own people hate and reject you, saying, "Let Yahweh show his glory, that we may see your joy."

These mockers will be put to shame. ⁶ Listen, an uproar from the city, a voice from the temple! It is the voice of Yahweh avenging and paying back his enemies.

Birth of the new Jerusalem

⁷ Long before being in labor, she has given birth; before having birth pangs she has been delivered of a son.

⁸ Has anyone ever heard of such a thing? Has anyone seen the like of it? How could a land spring forth in one day? How could a nation be formed in a moment?

Yet Zion had scarcely been in travail when she gave birth to her children.

⁹ Yahweh says: Do I allow to conceive and yet not to give birth? For I am the one who opens the womb and who closes it.

¹⁰ "Rejoice for Jerusalem and be glad for

prophet. God rewarded people while on earth and they preferred not to think about the lot of those already dead, or who would die before the time of happiness had come. God did everything so that his people would not neglect their earthly duties on the pretext of waiting for a "beyond."

11:7
Gen
3:14

1K
8:27
Mt
5:34
Acts
7:49

Ps
50:10

50:2
65:12

Rev
16:17

Jn
16:21
Rev
12:5

Rev
2:17

2Cor
1:20
Rev
3:14

2P
3:13
Rev
21:1

50:2
65:12

her, all you who love her. Be glad with her, rejoice with her, all you who were in grief over her, ¹¹ that you may suck of the milk from her comforting breasts, that you may drink deeply from the abundance of her glory.”

^{48:18} ^{60:14} ¹² For this is what Yahweh says: I will send her peace, overflowing like a river; and the nations’ wealth, rushing like a torrent towards her.

And you will be nursed and carried in her arms and fondled upon her lap.

¹³ As a son comforted by his mother, so will I comfort you. ¹⁴ At the sight of this, your heart will rejoice; like grass, your bones will flourish. For it shall be known that Yahweh’s hand is with his servant, but his fury is upon his enemy.

¹⁵ Look, Yahweh will come in fire, his chariots like the whirlwind, to release his anger with fury and his threat with flames of fire.

¹⁶ For by fire will Yahweh execute judgment, and by his sword, against all mortals. Those slain by Yahweh will be many.

^{65:4} ¹⁷ As for those who sanctify and purify themselves by going to the gardens and following the priestess in the midst – those who eat the flesh of pigs, reptiles and rats –

their deeds and thoughts will suddenly come to an end, says Yahweh.

The pagans enter the kingdom of God

• ¹⁸ Now I am going to gather the nations of every tongue, and they will witness my glory, ¹⁹ for I will perform a wonderful thing among them. Then I will send some of their survivors to the nations – Tarshish, Put, Lud, Moscheck, Rosh, Tubal, and Javan – to the distant islands where no one has ever heard of me or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. ²⁰ They will bring your kindred from all the nations as an offering to Yahweh on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules, on camels to my holy mountain in Jerusalem, says Yahweh, just as the Israelites bring oblations in clean vessels to the house of Yahweh. ²¹ Then I will choose priests and Levites even from them, says Yahweh.

²² Yahweh says, “As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make shall endure before me, so will your name and your descendants also endure.”

²³ From new moon to new moon, from sabbath to sabbath, every mortal will come to worship me, says Yahweh. ²⁴ And on their way out they will see the corpses of those who rebelled against me. Their worms shall not die, nor their fire be quenched, and they will be abhorrent to all.

• **66.18** This announces the day when Yahweh will conquer the pagan nations united against him, and that he will then save them by gathering them. Few passages of the bible express such a universal view of God’s salvation given “to all the families of the earth.” He had promised it to Abraham, but people had been so obsessed with resentment and hatred among themselves, among villages and religions, that they hardly paid attention.

Be careful to understand the expression “I am going to gather.” We already saw in Isaiah 6:9 how the Jews spoke about God because they were convinced that God rules everything. When someone undertook something they would say that God had moved him to do it, and when someone was doing something evil that God would later use for his own ends, they would say that God had driven him. Here, “I am going to gather” means “they will gather but I will use this to achieve the salvation of my people.”

The nations unite against Jerusalem as in the days of Sennacherib (see Is 31:4-9) and they are defeated in a miraculous way: but this time, the survivors, witnesses of the miracle, will reveal the true God everywhere. They will be admitted to God’s people and they will share the privileges of the Jews (“from among them I will take priests and Levites”).

The poem concludes with the vision of a world judged by Yahweh:

– within the city, those who have dedicated themselves to his service and come to adore him in his temple;

– outside, the corpses of those who were annihilated; they will always remain as the sign of God’s invincible justice.

What a tremendous vision! But it would be vain to seek escape by thinking that God, being so good, will not be able to condemn us definitely. Jesus refers to this text in Mark 9:48.

Zec
14:16

Zec
14:18

65:17
Ps
65:3

Jdt
16:17
Mk
9:48