



Hosea has come down through history as the prophet who never stopped loving his wife, in spite of her infidelities. God, who called him to speak on his behalf to an idolatrous and materialistic people, wanted his prophet to experience the grief and the shame of a betrayed husband. The prophets reveal a God who feels a love so real and so personal for us that it can be expressed in human words. Hosea was about to carry the same cross as God's: constantly loving and forgiving a fickle and unfaithful wife. Hosea will also shout God's indignation at Israel because of their sins.

Hosea began to preach around the year 746 B.C., at the end of the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II, in the northern kingdom of Israel. Right after that would begin the twenty years of decadence, which would conclude with the capture of Samaria, and the deportation of its inhabitants (the year 721 B.C.).

Hosea rises to accuse and threaten the people who are unconcerned. He continues to preach while the kingdom is collapsing and predicts the punishment of the people who are irresponsible and unfaithful to the Covenant with their God. He understands that God is an educator and does not allow the misfortunes, and even the destruction of the nation, without his reasons. Through such means, Israel will again become what they once were, when the Lord took them by the hand and brought them out of Egypt: they will become a poor and humble people, able to follow their God with faith and love.

The Book of Hosea begins with the story of the failure of his married life. From that, he draws a lesson for Israel, unfaithful to the Lord (Chaps. 1–3).

Then in Chapters 4–13 we have a mixture of reproaches, threats, invitations to conversion, and predictions of the exile. The final passage 14:2-10 offers hope for the future, when the Lord will have taken away all the riches in which Israel had trusted.

1 ¹The word of Yahweh was addressed to Hosea son of Beeri, during the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah in Judah, and of Jeroboam son of Joash, in Israel.

Take a wife: she will betray you

²When Yahweh began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, “Go, take for your wife a woman involved in sacred prostitution; and have children born of prostitution, for the land is wholeheartedly lapsing into prostitution and turning away from Yahweh.”

³So he married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim. And she was with child and bore a son. ⁴Yahweh told him, “Name him *Jezeel*, for I will soon punish the family of Jehu for the massacre at Jezeel. I will put an end to the king-

dom of Israel. ⁵The days are coming when Israel will be defeated in the Valley of Jezreel.”

⁶She conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then Yahweh said to him, “Name her ‘*No Pity*’ (*Lo-Ruhamah*) because I will no longer have pity on the nation of Israel. For I will certainly not forgive their guilt. ⁷(But I will have pity on the nation of Judah. I will deliver them by Yahweh their God; I will not deliver them by the warrior’s bow, by sword, by military victory, by chariot horses, or by chariots.)”

⁸When she had weaned ‘*No Pity*’ (*Lo-Ruhamah*) she conceived again; and gave birth to another son. ⁹Then Yahweh said, “Name him ‘*Not My People*’ (*Lo-Ammi*), because you are not my people, and I am not your God.”

- ⁴Denounce your mother, denounce
—for she is not my wife,
nor am I her husband.
Let her rid her face of her ornaments
and her breasts of her lewd idols;

• **1.2** Yahweh asks Hosea to marry one of the women involved in sacred prostitution of pagan worship. Those wishing to obtain the favors of the god Baal for their fields and their cattle would come to them.

This happened often in Israel and only Yahweh’s true faithful were scandalized. Deep down, Hosea is torn apart, always hoping that his fickle and idolatrous wife would change her ways, but also consumed by jealousy and anger, and tired of always forgiving.

Name her ‘No Pity’ (v. 6). In Israel every name had some meaning, usually a religious meaning. Here Hosea calls his children names which must shock everyone, but which convey what he is teaching the people; Israel will be defeated; they are a people whom Yahweh does not love and does not acknowledge as his people.

The family of Jehu (v. 4). Jeroboam II would be the last king of this dynasty.

Take note of *and I am not your God* (v. 9): here, there is an allusion to the name of Yahweh (Ex 3:15).

After Hosea, the prophets used the terms “prostitution” and “adultery” when speaking of idolatry. See Jeremiah 2:2; 3:1; Ezekiel 16:23.

They also say that God calls Israel to be his spouse: Isaiah 50:1; 54:6; 62:4 and the Song. See also Revelation 21:2. This conviction is found all along the prophetic books; and the last chapters of the New Testament will picture the heavenly Jerusalem, figure of the Church and the redeemed humankind coming towards her husband (Rev 21:2).

The paragraph 2:1-3 is not in place: it should be read after Chapter 3. My people and the One I pity: it is another version of the names given in 1:6 and 1:9.

• **2.4** In this discourse we have a merging of Hosea threatening his wife and Yahweh reproaching his people. (2:1-3 after Chap. 3)

In Israel nobody denied Yahweh, the God of their race. Yet even though they accepted him as savior in the national crises, they thought that the fertility of the earth and of cattle depended on other gods, the Baals, and that Yahweh had no power in these matters. So Yahweh threatens to deprive them of all the fruits of the earth and of the land itself in order for them to see that all these riches come from God alone.

Jer 2:20

2K
9-10Is 1:21;
Mic 6:1;
Is 50:1Jer
31:33

3:14

⁵or I will strip her naked
as on the day of her birth;
I will reduce her to an arid land,
making of her a desert—
I will let her die of thirst.

Ezk
16:7

⁶How could I love her children?
They are children of adultery;
⁷their mother has played the harlot
they are children of debauchery.
She said, "I will go after my lovers,
who give me my bread and water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink."
¹⁰Yet she would not acknowledge that it was I
who gave her the grain, the wine and the oil,
and the silver and gold
with which the people made their Baals.

Dt 7:13

¹¹So I will take back my grain when it ripens
and my new wine when it is ready;
I will take back my wool and my flax
which I gave to cover her nudity.

¹²Before her lovers I will lay bare her shame
and no one can rescue her from my power.

Jn
10:28

¹³I will bring an end to all her gladness,
her monthly feasts, Sabbaths and celebrations.

¹⁴I will lay waste her vines,
and her fig trees, for she said,
"My lovers gave them to me."
I will turn them into thickets
to be ravaged by wild beasts.

In all ages we tend to entrust various areas of existence to various gods. Some look for Jesus to solve their problems but at the same time ignore God's commandments and behave in a similar way to that of the devotees of Baal. Others revere God publicly, but establish an oppressive society in which money and strength confer all rights.

So I am going to allure her, lead her once more into the desert, where I can speak to her tenderly (v. 16). Yahweh is going to deprive Israel of everything so they will again be poor as they were in the desert in the days of Moses. Thus they will know that everything comes from God and will put their trust in him. *I was better off then than now* (v. 9). This is what the prodigal son will also say in Luke 15:17.

She will no longer call me my Lord (v. 18). Here Hosea uses the word my Baal. In Hebrew, Baal means Lord. This was the name given to

the Canaanite gods, but the Israelites also honored Yahweh with this title. However, Yahweh does not want to be a "Baal" among many, but "The" only husband.

You will be my spouse forever (v. 21). God is offering his people a new Covenant, a new alliance with him: Not a new religion with different commandments, but rather a personal relationship born of a purified and renewed heart (Jer 31:31).

John refers to this union "in enduring love" in John 1:17: Jesus is the one who brought it to humankind.

That day on her behalf I will make a Covenant with beasts of the field (v. 20). After the trials, Hosea foresees a happy period when Yahweh would give the land back to his renewed people. There will be no more hostile forces from nature, no more wars. *I will make people rest safe and secure* (v. 20).

¹⁵I will punish her for the feast days
when she brought burnt offerings to the Baals,
decked herself with her gaudy jewels,
ran after her lovers and forgot me, says Yahweh.
⁸With thorns, therefore, I will block her path,
wall her; and not let her find her way out.

⁹Pursuing her lovers,
she will not overtake them;
looking for her lovers, she will not find them.
Then she will say, "I will go back to my husband
for I was better off then than now."

¹⁶So I am going to allure her,
lead her once more into the desert,
where I can speak to her tenderly.
¹⁷Then I will give back her vineyards,
make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
There, she will answer me, as in her youth,
as when she came out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁸On that day, Yahweh says,
you will call me *my husband*,
and never again: *my Baal*.

¹⁹I will take the names of Baals from her lips
and no longer will they be invoked.
²⁰That day, on her behalf, I will make a Covenant
with beasts of the field and birds of the air,
with creatures creeping upon the ground.
I will wipe out the sword and war in the land;
I will make people rest safe and secure.

²¹You will be my spouse forever,
betrothed in justice and integrity;
we will be united in love and tenderness.

²²I will espouse you in faithfulness;
and you will come to know Yahweh.

²³This is what Yahweh says of those days,
"I will be at peace with the heavens,
and they will respond to the earth;
²⁴the earth will respond to the grain, wine and oil,
which will come up to the expectation of *Jezreel*.

²⁵I will sow them for myself in the land;
I will show my love to '*No Pity*';
I will say to '*Not My People*', "You are my people;"
and they will answer, "You are my God."

Jer
3:22;
Lk 15:17

Dt 8:2

Jer 2:2

Zec 13:2

Is 11:6;
Ezk
34:25

Is 54:5

Rom
11:31;
9:25;
1P 2:10

3 ^{2S 6:19; Jer 7:18; 44:19} ¹Yahweh said to me, “Welcome, once more, this woman, who makes love to others. Love her, just as Yahweh loves his people, who turn to other gods and offer raisin cakes to them.”

²So I bought her for fifteen pieces of silver and a whole measure of barley. ³Then I said to her, “You shall stay here with me many days, without giving yourself to anyone, and without deserting me for another man. And I, too, will stand aloof.”

⁴For the people of Israel shall be for many days without king or ruler, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without divination or household idol.

⁵Then the people of Israel shall turn back, looking for Yahweh, their God, and for David, their king. In the last days, they will come respectfully to Yahweh and to his blessings.

2 ^{Gen 22:17; 1K 4:20; Rom 9:26-27} ¹Yet, the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, that cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” they shall be called “children of the living God.” ²The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, they will appoint one leader to rule over them; and they will come up out of the land. For there will be a great victory in Jezreel. ³You will call your brothers My-people, and your sisters My-loved-ones.

4 ^{Is 3:13; Mic 6:1} ¹Hear the word of Yahweh, Israel! For Yahweh has an accusation to bring against the inhabitants of this land. There is neither truth nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the country; ²only perjury, lies, murder, theft and adultery, with continual bloodshed.

³That is why the country is in mourning, with all who live there wasting

away; the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, even the fish are dying. ⁴But let no one apologize or accuse another; for it is you, priest, whom I single out!

⁵You will stumble in broad daylight, and the prophet will fall with you, into darkness; I will silence you. ⁶You have destroyed my people by failing to acknowledge me! Because you refuse to acknowledge me, I will reject you as my priests. Because you reject the law of your God, I will reject your descendants.

⁷The more the priests increased in numbers, the more they rebelled against me. They have turned their glorious calling into a shameful disgrace, ⁸since they eat of the sacrifices for sin; they like my people to sin.

⁹Yet, it will be for the people as for the priest; I shall punish both for their conduct; and repay them for their deeds. ¹⁰They will eat and not be satisfied; they will multiply their prostitutions but remain without child, for they have no reverence for Yahweh. ¹¹Harlotry, wine and liquors have taken hold of their hearts.

¹²My people consult a wooden idol and rely on a rod for information. A spirit of adultery leads them astray and makes them unfaithful to their God. ¹³They sacrifice on the mountaintops and offer incense on the hills, under the oak, the poplar and the terebinth, wherever the shade is pleasant.

¹⁴That is why, if your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery, I will not punish them; for you, yourselves, go off with harlots and sacrifice with temple prostitutes. A senseless people destroys itself.

¹⁵Although you, O Israel, commit adultery, do not let Judah become guilty! Do not journey to Gilgal! Do not go up to

• **4.1** Other prophets will also condemn the faults and lack of responsibility of the civil and religious authorities: they are causing the suffering of the people (see Is 5:13; Mic 3:1).

In verses 11-14 Hosea continues to accuse the priests who are imitating the practices of the pagan priests: fortune-telling and prostitution.

Jer 5:4;
Mal 2:1

Jer 30:9;
Ezk
37:24

Is 56:11

Ezk
37:19

Is 28:7

Dt 12:2;
Jer 2:20

Is 24:4;
Zep 1:3

Jos 7:2

Beth-aven! Do not swear oaths 'by Yahweh's life').

¹⁶Since Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn cow, will Yahweh pasture it gently as a lamb? ¹⁷Ephraim is devoted to idols, let Yahweh leave him alone! ¹⁸They consume their alcohol, then engage in cult prostitution; they dearly love their shameful behavior. ¹⁹A whirlwind will sweep them away; and they will have gained nothing with their sacrifices.

Against the royal officials

5 • ¹Hear this, O priests! and you, people of Israel, pay attention! Hear, officials of the king, for you are to be judged. You have been a snare at Mizpah and a net on Tabor, ²and a deep pit at Shittim; so I am to punish you all.

³I know what Israel is like; he cannot hide from me. Ephraim is playing the harlot; Israel is a people which defiles itself.

⁴Their deeds prevent them from returning to their God; a spirit of prostitution has taken hold of them; and they do not know Yahweh. ⁵The pride of Israel is witness against him; these people are failing, because of their guilt.

⁶With their sheep and bulls they will go,

in search of Yahweh; but they will not find him, for he has gone far from them. ⁷He found they were unfaithful; and their children were not his. So now, the destroyer will do away with them; and their lands will be devastated.

• ⁸Blow the horn at Gibeah, the trumpet at Ramah, raise the battle cry in Beth-aven! For Benjamin has been defeated; ⁹the day has come in which Ephraim is ruined. Let the tribes of Israel know that this is about to occur! ¹⁰The princes of Judah are like those who remove border stones; and I shall pour out my anger on them like a flood. ¹¹In the same way, those of Ephraim are oppressors and trample justice.

¹²I will be like a moth for Ephraim, like rot for Judah. ¹³Ephraim saw he was sick; and Judah saw his ulcer. Then Ephraim turned to the great king of Assyria for help, but he will not cure you or heal your sores.

¹⁴I will be like a leopard for Ephraim and like a lion for Judah. I will tear them to pieces and leave them. When I carry them off, no one will rescue them. ¹⁵Then I will go away, and return to my place, until they admit their guilt and come back to me; for in their anguish they will earnestly seek me.

Eph
4:18

Am8:11;
Jn 7:34

Lm 3:40

Ps116:9

6

• ¹Come, let us return to Yahweh.

He who shattered us to pieces, will heal us as well; he has struck us down, but he will bind up our wounds.

²Two days later he will bring us back to life; on the third day, he will raise us up, and we shall live in his presence.

³Let us strive to know Yahweh.

His coming is as certain as the dawn;
^{5c}his judgment will burst forth like the light;
he will come to us as showers come,
like spring rain that waters the earth.

• **5.1** Let us not forget that the northern people, called kingdom of Israel, were formed by the tribes of Jacob or the tribes of Joseph (see Gen 35:23). There were two tribes of Joseph: Ephraim, the most important, and Manasseh. When Hosea uses *Ephraim*, *Joseph*, *Jacob*, *Israel*, he is, in fact, addressing only one people.

• 8. This deals with Israel's wars. Note the last sentence: Yahweh is hiding and leaves his people in darkness so they may come back to seek him.

• **6.1** People regret their errors, but they are not so sincere as to abandon their sins. They think they will please God by offering a few sacrifices but are far from real love which manifests itself in obedience; they prefer to offer the costly sacrifices which they choose rather than to do what God asks of them.

It is love that I desire, not sacrifice (v. 6). On several occasions Jesus refuted the Pharisees by quoting this saying (see Mt 9:13).

Dt 19:14

1K
15:19

Am 3:12

⁴O Ephraim, what shall I do with you?
 O Judah, how shall I deal with you?
 This love of yours is like morning mist,
 like morning dew that quickly disappears.
⁵This is why I smote you through the prophets,
 and have slain you by the words of my mouth.

13:3

Is 49:2;
Heb
4:12;1K 18;
Jer 5:14Jer
22:16;
Am 5:22;

⁶For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice;
 it is knowledge of God, not burnt offerings.

Mt 9:13;
12:72K
15:10

⁷At Adam they broke my Covenant; there, they were unfaithful to me. ⁸Gilead is a city of evildoers, stained with footprints of blood. ⁹Like thieves in an ambush, so are the priests; they murder on the road to Shechem and commit adultery. ¹⁰In Bethel I saw their disgraceful conduct; that is where Ephraim played the harlot and was defiled. ¹¹(For you, too, Judah, I have a harvest stored, when I bring back my captive people and heal Israel.)

¹⁰Israel's arrogance is witness against him but, even so, they will not turn back to Yahweh, their God, or search for him. ¹¹Ephraim is like a silly pigeon, now calling on Egypt, now turning to Assyria. ¹²But, wherever they turn, I shall throw my net over them, for they rebelled against me; and they will fall like birds.

Mt 10:16
Ezk
12:13

7 ¹The sin of Ephraim appears clearly; the wickedness of Samaria is obvious. They cheat one another; they break into houses while bandits raid outside. ²They do not realize that I am mindful of their evil deeds. They are engulfed by their sins, which are always before me. ³They amuse the king with their wickedness and the officials with their trickery. ⁴They are, and remain, adulterers, like an oven heated by a baker; he has not to stir the fire from the time the dough is kneaded until it rises.

¹³Woe to them who fled far from me; disgrace will fall on those who deceived me. I wanted to redeem them but they spoke evil of me. ¹⁴They did not call on me sincerely, when they groaned on their beds, because of their wheat and wine, and turned to me.

⁵On the day of the king, his officials get drunk; and the king joins hands with the revelers. ⁶In their plotting, they burn like an oven; all night, their anger smolders; and in the morning, blazes like a fire. ⁷They are all heated like an oven; and they devour their own rulers; all their kings fall; but none of them calls on me for help.

¹⁵When I made them successful and strong, they plotted evil against me. ¹⁶Now they turn to nothingness. They are deceptive as a twisted bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent talk; in the land of Egypt, people will make fun of them.

Ps 78:57

Rev
3:17

⁸Ephraim mixes with other nations. He is like a half-baked loaf; ⁹the nations around him consume his strength but he is unaware of it. He has become old and he does not know it.

8 ¹Sound the trumpet, sentry! Warn the people of Yahweh, because they have broken my Covenant and are unfaithful to my law. ²They cry to me, "We, Israel, acknowledge you, O God." ³But Israel rejected what is right; and this is why the enemy will hunt them down. ⁴Without my approval they set up kings and without my blessing appointed leaders. With their silver and gold they fashioned idols to their own ruin.

⁵To me, Samaria, your calf is loathsome; and my anger blazes against you. How long will you remain defiled? ⁶The calf

• 7. *Adam, Gilead, Bethel*: places where the worship of Yahweh is mixed with pagan customs.

• **8.1** The prophet is like a guard (see Ezk 3:17). Hosea condemns the kings who do not come from God since they were self-appointed:

only David's sons in the south were the chosen ones of God. Moreover, they were never concerned about representing God before the people, nor about fulfilling his designs.

Then we have the condemnation of the golden calves placed in Bethel to honor Yahweh (see 1 K 12:28).

is yours, Israel, a craftsman has made it; it is not God and will be broken into pieces. ⁷As they sow the wind, they will reap the whirlwind. Stalk without flower, it will never yield flower, or if they do, foreigners will devour it.

^{8,9}Israel lived apart as a wild donkey, but he was eaten up. Now, they are among pagans, as a worthless object. Ephraim went to Assyria with gifts. ¹⁰Now, they have been given up to the nations; and I shall gather them. For, in no time, they have been left with no prophets, or kings, or leaders.

• ¹¹Ephraim built many altars; but his altars made him more guilty. ¹²I wrote out for him the numerous precepts of my law; but they look on them as coming from foreigners.

¹³They offer sacrifices to me because they are those who eat the meat; but Yahweh does not accept their sacrifices, for he is mindful of their sin and remembers their wickedness. They will return to Egypt.

¹⁴Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; but I will set fire to their towns and burn their palaces.

The exile is foretold

9 ¹Do not rejoice and celebrate, Israel, like other nations, for you have deserted your God. You are fond of prostitution gifts and run to every threshing floor where there is wheat. ²This is why threshing floors and vats will not feed you; new wine will disappoint you. ³No longer will you remain in Yahweh's land. Ephraim will return to Egypt—in fact, to Assyria, where they will eat unclean food.

⁴No more will they be able to pour out the wine offering for Yahweh and no longer will they sacrifice to him. They will have only bread for mourners; all who eat it will be defiled. This food will be for themselves and it will not be taken into the house of Yahweh.

⁵What shall you do on the feast? You will leave; but not for the pilgrimage to Yahweh; rather you will flee because of the invaders. ⁶Egypt will gather you and Memphis entomb you. Nettles will take over your treasures of silver and thorns creep over your tents.

⁷The time of punishment has come, the day of retribution is here. The Israelites will know it. The prophets will go out of their mind; the seers will become like mad men because your defeat will be as great as your sins have been.

⁸Ephraim watches before my God; his prophets try to stop the enemy on every path to protect the house of their gods. ⁹Yet they are as corrupted as they were long ago in Gibeah. Yahweh will remember their wickedness and punish their sin.

¹⁰I found Israel like wild grapes in the desert. I saw your ancestors like the first fruits on a fig tree. But no sooner had they come to Baal-peor than they gave themselves to the idol; and they became as worthless as their dirty god. ¹¹The glory of Ephraim will flee away like a bird; it has died stillborn, miscarried, not even conceived. ¹²Had they brought out children, I would take them off before they were adults, for woe to them when I abandon them!

¹³I have seen that Ephraim will make his sons like a game; he will send his sons to be slaughtered. ¹⁴Give them, Yahweh, what you will; give them wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry.

¹⁵It is at Gilgal that their wickedness is seen. There, I hated them. I will expel them from my house because of their evil conduct. I will love them no longer, for all their leaders are rebels. ¹⁶Ephraim is blighted; his root is withered; he will produce no fruit. Even when they are with child, the child will die in the womb. ¹⁷My God will reject them because they did not listen; he will make them wander among the nations.

10 ¹Israel was a spreading vine, rich in fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; the more his land prospered, the more he adorned his sacred stones.

²Their heart is divided! They shall pay for it. Their altars will be thrown down and their sacred stones broken to pieces.

³Now they say, "We have no king (because we have no fear of God) and what good would a king do us?" ⁴Let them speak like this, take an oath and make

• 11. External practices and sacred banquets following the sacrifice do not make God forget their sin.

Hosea looks at Israel's past. *You will return to Egypt* (9:3), namely, you will be captive again.

covenants! Their sentence is growing like weeds in a plowed field.

⁵The people of Samaria tremble for their idols of Bethel; they mourn for their calf, as do the priests who were so proud of it. ⁶The glorious idol has been taken far away, carried off to Assyria as a tribute to the great king. Ephraim will reap the shame of this; the people of Israel will be disgraced. ⁷As for the king of Samaria, he has been carried off like foam on water.

⁸The idolatrous high places—the sin of Israel—will be destroyed. Thorn and thistle will creep over the altars. Then they will say to the mountains: “Cover us,” and to the hills: “Fall on us.”

⁹Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned and rebelled, Israel. Will not the battle against the evildoers of Gibeah overtake you again? ¹⁰I shall come and punish you, gathering the nations against you because of your double sin.

Admonition and call to conversion

¹¹Ephraim is a well-trained heifer fond of threshing; on her neck I shall place a yoke; Ephraim will be harnessed and plowed; the nation of Jacob will break the clods.

¹²Plow new ground, sow for yourselves justice and reap the harvest of kindness. It is the time to go seeking Yahweh, until he comes to rain salvation on you.

¹³For your part, you planted wickedness, reaped evil and ate the fruit of falsehood. When you rely on your own strength and your many warriors, confusion will overcome your people. ¹⁴See, your fortresses are destroyed, as when Shalman devastated Beth-arbel; all was crushed. ¹⁵That is what will happen to you, people of Israel, because of your great evil. The storm will blow away the king of Israel.

I called my son out of Egypt

11 • ¹I loved Israel when he was a child; out of Egypt I called my son. ²But the more I have called, the further have they gone from me—sac-

rificing to the Baals, burning incense to the idols.

³Yet, it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; yet, little did they realize that it was I who cared for them. ⁴I led them with cords of human kindness, with leading strings of love, and I became for them as one who eases the yoke upon their neck and stoops down to feed them.

⁵If they refuse to return to me, they will have to go back to Egypt and be ruled by an Assyrian king. ⁶Swords will flash in their cities, slaughtering their sons, putting an end to all their plans.

⁷They insist on turning away from me; they cry out because the yoke is upon them and no one lifts it. ⁸How can I give you up, Ephraim? Can I abandon you like Admah or make you like Zeboiim? My heart is troubled within me and I am moved with compassion. ⁹I will not give vent to my great anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not human. I am the Holy One in your midst; and I do not want to come to you in anger.

¹⁰You will follow Yahweh when he roars like a lion. When he roars, his sons will come trembling from the west; ¹¹they will come, with fear, like sparrows from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. For I will bring them to their homes again.

12 ¹Ephraim has surrounded me with lies; Israel comes to me with deceit. They follow Baal and run after the sanctuaries. ²Ephraim feeds on wind, forever chasing the east wind, always more given to falsehood and violence. They have made

• **11.1** Israel is God's spoiled child. In former days God brought them out of Egypt, and ever since then, has been calling them and trying to draw them to himself, but they continue their depraved ways which bring punishment upon them.

I am God and not human (v. 9). Our setbacks which seem to be God's punishment are, in fact, what God considers the most suitable ways to teach us (see Heb 12:7; 2 Mac 6:16; Wis 11:23).

Lk
23:30;
Rev
6:16

Gen
19:24;
Dt 29:22

Num
23:19;
Jer
10:24;
Ezk 18:
23, 32

Is 31:1

Ps 137:9

Is 1:2;
Dt 32:6;
4:22;
Jer 2:1-9;
Mt 2:15

a treaty with Assyria and brought oil to Egypt.

³Yahweh has brought Jacob to trial. He will call him to account for his ways and repay his deeds.

Gen
25:26

⁴In the womb he supplanted his brother and in his vigor he contended with a divine being; he struggled with an angel and prevailed. ⁵The angel, in fact, wept and pleaded with him! He met him at Bethel and there he spoke to him. ⁶(Yahweh, the God of armies, Yahweh is his name.)

Gen 32:
23-33;
28:12

⁷You must return to your God, practice love and justice and trust in your God.

⁸Canaan has dishonest scales and likes to cheat. ⁹Ephraim boasts, "I have become rich and possess a fortune." Yet he will be left with nothing of what he has treasured, for he was doing wrong.

Lk 12:
16-21;
Rev 3:
17-18

¹⁰I am Yahweh, your God, since the days of Egypt; I will have you live in tents again, as in the days of Meeting. ¹¹Then I will speak to the prophets, give them many visions and teach you through their parables.

13:4;
20:2

¹²The people of Gilead are wicked; they are false. They offered sacrifices to bulls in Gilgal. This is why their altars will become ruins on a plowed field.

Gen
29:15

¹³Jacob fled to the plains of Aram; Israel served to have a wife, and, for her sake, he cared for sheep. ¹⁴Yahweh, in turn, brought Israel out of Egypt through a prophet; by means of this prophet, he cared for them. ¹⁵Ephraim, nevertheless, angered him bitterly. The Lord will bring down on him the blood he shed and repay him for his contempt.

13 ¹When Ephraim spoke, all trembled; he was powerful in Israel; but became guilty of Baal worship and ruined himself. ²They now continue to sin and make images from molten metal, fashioning idols from silver, the work of craftsmen. And they call them God! They offer sacri-

fices to them; and humans adore calves! ³That is why they will be like morning mist and like dew which does not last, like the straw swept away on the threshing floor, like smoke escaping through a window.

6:4

⁴But I am Yahweh, your God who brought you out of Egypt; you have no God other than me and no savior but me.

12:10

⁵I knew you in the desert, in a land of scorching heat. ⁶When they had food they were satisfied; and when they were satisfied, they became proud and no longer remembered me. ⁷So I became for them like a leopard; like a tiger I watched out for them; ⁸and attacked them with the fury of a bear that has lost its cubs. I tore out their heart and, like a lion, I devoured them; like a savage beast I tore them apart.

⁹Israel, you had in me a helper; will I be now, your destroyer? ¹⁰Where is your king, that he may rescue your cities? Where are your rulers, about whom you said, "Give us a king and commanders." ¹¹So, in my anger, I gave you a king; and in my fury I took him away.

¹²The wickedness of Ephraim is deep-set; his sin is stored up. ¹³The pangs of woman in labor come upon him. But the child is capricious. When it is time he does not leave the womb.

¹⁴Will I ransom them from the power of the netherworld? Will I rescue them from death? Not at all! Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O netherworld, is your venom? Yet my eyes will not look with compassion ¹⁵on the one who excelled among his brothers. Yahweh will send the east wind from the desert, to dry up his sources of water and parch his fountains, to strip him of all his treasures.

10Cor
15:55

14 ¹Samaria is guilty, for she rebelled against her God. They will fall by the sword, their little ones will be crushed and women with child ripped open.

Am 1:13

• ²Return to your God, Yahweh, O Israel!
Your sins have caused your downfall.

³Return to Yahweh with humble words. Say to him,

32:31

• **14.2** The book of Hosea ends with these encouraging words. After the trials, Israel will seek Yahweh who will allow himself to be found. Humanity's reconciliation with God will be an authentic marriage and it will be accompanied

by a reconciliation of humanity with nature. This was already said in 2:17-22 and will be developed in the Song of Songs which will use some images taken from Hosea.

“Oh, you who show compassion to the fatherless,
 forgive our debt, be appeased.
 Instead of bulls and sacrifices,
 accept the praise from our lips.

⁴Assyria will not save us:
 no longer shall we look for horses,
 nor ever again shall we say ‘Our gods’
 to the work of our hands.”

⁵I will heal their disloyalty
 and love them with all my heart,
 for my anger has turned from them.

⁶I shall be like dew to Israel,
 like the lily will he blossom.
 Like a cedar, he will send down his roots;
⁷his young shoots will grow and spread.

His splendor will be like an olive tree,
 his fragrance, like a Lebanon cedar.

⁸They will dwell in my shade again,
 they will flourish like the grain,
 they will blossom like a vine,
 and their fame will be like Lebanon wine.

⁹What would Ephraim do with idols,
 when it is I who hear and make him prosper?
 I am like an ever-green cypress tree;
 all your fruitfulness comes from me.

¹⁰Who is wise enough to grasp all this?
 Who is discerning and will understand?
 Straight are the ways of Yahweh:
 the just walk in them, but the sinners
 stumble.

Song
 4:11

Ps
 107:43;
 Jer 9:11;
 Ecl 8:11



The Biblical prophets knew that everything is temporary in our world. In every event threatening the lives of the people, they saw the coming of the Lord who judges this world in order to establish the final world.

Joel speaks when the land is invaded by locusts. The people are looking at their ruined fields and their lost crops. Joel looks beyond: *The day of Yahweh is exceedingly great, terrible and dreadful—who can endure it?*

Along with the promise of freedom from this plague, God also promises a happy age in which there will be neither grief nor fear. A day is announced when God will give the Spirit of the prophets to all his children: for the Church, Joel is the prophet who announced Pentecost, as Peter said on that day (see Acts 2:17).

1 ¹ *This is the word of Yahweh that came to Joel, son of Pethuel.*

The attack of the locusts

² Hear this, you elders!
Listen, all you, land dwellers!

Has such happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? ³ Tell it to your children, then, your children to their children, and then, their children, to the next generation.

⁴ What the cutting locusts left, the swarming locusts ate. What the swarming locusts left, the hopping locusts ate. What the hopping locusts left, the destroying locusts ate.

⁵ Wake up, drunkards, and weep! Wail, drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine withheld from your mouths. ⁶ A nation, numerous and mighty, has invaded my country.

It has the teeth of a lion and the fangs of a lioness. ⁷ It has destroyed my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and left white their branches.

⁸ Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth, grieving for the husband of her youth.

⁹ Grain and drink offerings are not found in the house of Yahweh. The priests who minister before Yahweh are in mourning.

¹⁰ The fields are in ruin. The earth mourns, for the grain is destroyed; the wine fails and the oil dries up.

¹¹ Grieve, O you farmers; wail, O you vine growers, over the barley and the wheat, for the harvest of the field has perished. ¹² The vine withers, the fig tree wilts away; pomegranate, palm and apple—all the trees of the field dry up. Oh, how joy has faded away, among all these people!

¹³ Gird yourselves, O priests, and weep; mourn, O ministers of the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! For the house of your God is deprived of grain and drink offering.

¹⁴ Proclaim a fast, call an assembly. Summon the elders, and all who live in the land, into the house of your God,

and cry out to Yahweh, ¹⁵ "What a dreadful day—the day of Yahweh, that draws near, and comes as ruin, from the Almighty!"

¹⁶ Has not the food been taken away from us before our very eyes, and joy and gladness, too, from the house of our God?

Dt
28:38;
Am 4:9

Rev 9:8

Is 16:10

¹⁷The seed under the clods lies shriveled; the granaries are in ruins; the barns are broken down, for the harvest has dried up. ¹⁸How the cattle groan! The herds wander and moan, for they have no pasture. Even the flocks of sheep suffer. ¹⁹To you, Yahweh, I call. Fire has razed the open pasture; flames have burned the trees. ²⁰Even wild beasts cry out to you, for the streams have dried up, for the pastures have been devoured by fire.

2 ¹Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all dwellers in the land tremble, for the day of Yahweh is coming.

²Yes, the day is fast approaching—²a day of gloom and darkness, a day of clouds and blackness.

A vast and mighty army comes, like dawn spreading over the mountain; such as has never occurred before, nor will happen again in the future.

³In front, a fire devours, Behind, a flame consumes.

The land ahead, that appears like a garden, soon becomes like a desert, nothing escapes their onslaught.

⁴They look like horses, they gallop along like chargers.

⁵With the clattering of chariots, they leap over the mountains; with crackling like burning stubble, they charge—a mighty army arrayed for battle.

⁶Before them, nations are appalled, and every face turns pale.

⁷They attack like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. Marching in line, they move onward without swerving from their course,

⁸without jostling one another, everyone of them marches straight ahead; amid a hail of arrows they run, they press without breaking ranks.

⁹They rush upon the city; they leap over the walls; they break into the houses, like thieves enter through the windows.

¹⁰Before them, the earth shakes and the heavens tremble, the sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their twinkle.

¹¹Yahweh thunders before his army, his vast and mighty forces. The day of Yahweh is exceedingly great, terrible and dreadful—who can endure it?

Return to me with weeping

• ¹²Yahweh says, “Yet even now, return to me with your whole heart; with fasting, weeping and mourning. ¹³Rend your heart, not your garment. Return to Yahweh, your God—gracious and compassionate.”

Yahweh is slow to anger, full of kindness, and he repents of having punished.

¹⁴Who knows? Probably he will relent once more, and spare some part of the harvest, from which we may bring sacred offerings to Yahweh, your God.

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion, proclaim a sacred fast, call a solemn assembly.

¹⁶Gather the people, sanctify the community, bring together the elders, even the children and infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his bed, and the bride her room.

¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar, let the priests, Yahweh’s ministers, weep and say: Spare your people, Yahweh. Do not humble them or make them an object of scorn among the nations. Why should it be said among the people: Where is their God?

¹⁸Yahweh has become jealous for his land; he has had pity on his people. ¹⁹Yahweh has given an answer; he says to them,

• **2.12** *Return to me with your whole heart:* an invitation to penance. In times of hardship, public fasts were proclaimed in Israel. People would wear mourning clothes, or they would replace their clothes with sackcloth, or they would not comb their hair and cover their faces with ashes. In the Gospel, Jesus will not say that

these signs of physical penance, like fasting to express sorrow and to accompany prayer, are useless (see Mt 4:1 and Mk 2:20), but will make it clear that these external signs of penance are not everything, nor are they what is most important.

"I am sending you grain; new wine and oil, which will fully satisfy you; never again will you be scorned by the nations.

²⁰I will drive far from you, the enemy from the North; and pursue him, towards a land of drought and desolation: his vanguard to the Eastern Sea, his rearguard to the Western Sea. Its stench will rise everywhere. See that, I do great things."

²¹Fear not, O earth! exult and rejoice, for Yahweh has acted magnificently! ²²Do not be afraid, beasts of the field, for the desert prairies are green again; the trees are with fruit; the fig tree and the vine have yielded their riches.

²³Sons of Zion, be glad! Rejoice in Yah-

weh your God, for he has sent you the blessing of autumn rain and showers—the autumn and spring rains as in the past.

²⁴The threshing-floors will be full of grain, the vats overflowing with new wine and oil.

²⁵I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, the powerful army I sent against you. ²⁶You will eat and be satisfied; and you will praise the name of Yahweh, your God, who has done wonders for you.

²⁷And then you will know that I am in the midst of Israel; I, Yahweh your God, no other! Never again will my people be shamed. Is 42:8

I will pour out my spirit

3

• ¹In the last days, I will pour out my spirit on every mortal.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.

²Even upon my servants and maidens,
I will pour out my spirit on that day.

³I will show wonders in the heavens,
and on earth; blood and fire and columns of smoke.

⁴The sun will darken, and the moon, turn to blood
at the approach of the great and dreadful day of God.

⁵Then, all who call upon the name of Yahweh will be saved.

For on Mount Zion there will be a remnant,
as Yahweh has said;

in Jerusalem some will be saved—
those whom Yahweh will call.

Acts 2:
17-21;
Num 11:
25-30

Rev
6:12

Rom
10:13;
Ob 1:17;
Rev
14:1

• **3.1** Joel announces the Day of Yahweh, a term indicating God's coming Judgment, and the salvation of the elect, at the same time.

I will pour out my spirit on every mortal. Already, in the days of the Old Testament, God communicated his Spirit to the prophets and to saviors (see Is 11:1 and Jdg 11:1). Here, however, it is a decisive sign that the Spirit will be given to all believers. They will dream dreams and see visions. In those remote days, such were normal means of prophetic communication. Through these words, Joel announces what Isaiah did, when he said: *All your children will be taught by God* (Is 54:13 and Jer 31:31).

I will show wonders in the heavens (v. 3).

The wave of prophesy will accompany many signs, indicating a grave crisis in the world. The image of the sun turning to darkness expresses both chaos in nature and impossible situations in the life of humankind.

Then all... will be saved (v. 5). This will be a time when people will not be able to avoid a decisive choice: to retain their former lifestyles or to invoke the name of Yahweh, which means to surrender their lives and hopes to him, and rely on his powerful intervention.

It seems that these three factors were present for the Jewish people in the years following the resurrection of Jesus and before the destruction of the nation. Peter quotes this text on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17).

The final battle and salvation

- 4** • ¹In those days, and at that time, when I reestablish Judah and Jerusalem, ²I shall let all the nations gather together, and come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I shall uphold against them, the cause of Israel, my people and my heritage. For they have dispersed them among the nations and divided my land. ³They cast lots for my people; they gave a boy for a harlot, and a girl for the wine they drank.
- ⁴And, you, Tyre and Sidon, and all the districts of Philistia, what are you for me? Will you take revenge on me? If you want to do that, swiftly and immediately will I take reprisals against you! ⁵You, who carried off my silver and gold and my finest jewelry to your temples!
- ⁶You sold to the Greeks the people of Judah and Jerusalem, removing them far away from their own land. ⁷But now I am going to summon them from wherever you sold them; and I will return your deed on your head. ⁸Yahweh says: I will sell your sons and daughters to the Judeans, who will then sell them to the Sabaeans in a distant land.
- ⁹Make this known among the nations; proclaim the holy war; call the warriors; let men of war advance! ¹⁰Hammer your plowshares into swords; your sickles, into spears! Let the weak say: I am a warrior! And the meek: I, too, will fight!
- ¹¹Come quickly, neighboring nations, and assemble! ¹²Rise up, O people, and come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, nations.
- ¹³Bring a sickle for the harvest is ripe; come and tread, for the wine press is full, and the vats overflow; so great is their wickedness!
- ¹⁴Multitudes and more multitudes in the Valley of Verdict! The day of Yahweh is near in the Valley of Verdict! ¹⁵The sun and the moon become dark, the stars lose their radiance. ¹⁶Yahweh roars from Zion and raises his voice from Jerusalem; heaven and earth are shaken. Indeed, Yahweh is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the Israelites. ¹⁷You will know that I am Yahweh, your God, dwelling on Zion, my holy mountain. Jerusalem will be a holy place; and foreigners will never pass through there again.
- ¹⁸On that day, the mountains shall drip wine and the hills flow with milk; all the streams of Judah will run with water; and a fountain will spring from the house of Yahweh, and water the valley of Shittim.
- ¹⁹On the other hand, Egypt will be devastated; and Edom will become a deserted wasteland, because they committed violence against Judah, and shed innocent blood in their country. ²⁰But Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem through all generations. ²¹And I shall avenge their blood and not leave it unpunished, for Yahweh dwells in Zion.

Zec 12
Rev
16:16

Rev
14:14-
20

2:10

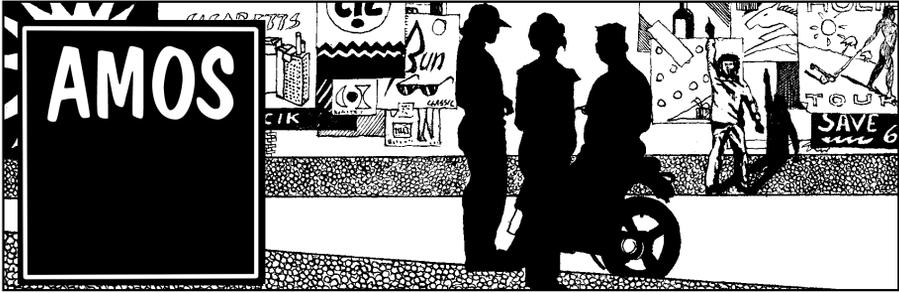
Am 1:2

Ezk
47:7;
Zec
14:8;
Jn 4

Zec 14;
Ezk
38-39
Is 2:4

Jer
17:25

• **4.1** We can apply to this chapter what is said concerning Zechariah 12-14. The prophet uses a crisis, in which the Jews were harshly oppressed, to emphasize that God is the Lord of history.



Towards the middle of the eighth century before Christ, the kingdom of Israel was rich and prosperous. Small properties were disappearing. Wealth was in the hands of a few rich people, while the poor increased in number. The luxury of the few was an insult to the destitute.

Unexpectedly, *Yahweh roars from Zion*. His voice thunders from Jerusalem through Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa, a little village located about nine kilometers south of Bethlehem, in the land of Judah.

God takes him from his flock and sends him to the neighboring land, to Israel in the north. So the prophet traveled through the cities of Israel, denouncing the social injustices and a religion which was satisfied with external practices only. He warned of God's punishment and the deportation of Israel; and, in the end, he predicted happy days.

Amos is the prophet of social justice. He reveals to us a God who defends the rights of the poor.

2K
14:23;
15:1

1 • ¹These are the words of Amos, one of the sheep-breeders of Tekoa, and the visions which he saw concerning Israel, during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah and Jeroboam, son of Jehoash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. ²He said,

Jl 4:16;
Jer
25:30

“Yahweh roars from Zion,
his voice thunders from Jerusalem.
The pastures of the shepherds are
scorched
and the choicest farmland is dried up.”

2K
10:32

³Yahweh says this, “Because Damascus has sinned, not once but three times; and even more, I will not relent. Because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron, ⁴I will send fire upon the people of Hazeal, that shall devour the strongholds of Benhadad. I will cut off the ruler from the Valley of Aven, and him who holds the scepter, from Beth-eden. ⁵I shall break the protective crossbar of Damascus.”

Condemnation of several nations

⁶Yahweh says this, “Because Gaza has sinned, not once but three times; and even more, I will not relent; because they carried a whole people into captivity, to deliver them over to Edom, ⁷I will send fire upon the wall of Gaza; and it will devour her strongholds. ⁸I will cut off the ruler from Ashdod, and him that holds the scepter, from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron and the remnant of the Philistines will perish,” says Yahweh.

Zep 2:4

⁹Yahweh says this, “Because Tyre has sinned, not once but three times; and even more, I will not relent; because they delivered over to Edom, a whole people, and did not remember the Covenant of brotherhood; ¹⁰I will send fire upon the walls of Tyre; and it shall devour her palaces.”

Ezk
26—28

¹¹Yahweh says this, “Because Edom has sinned, not once but three times; and even more, I will not relent; because he pursued

Is 34;
Ezk
25:12

his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, because his anger rages forever, and his wrath is always wild; ¹²I will send fire upon Teman; and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.”

¹³Yahweh says this, “Because the Amonites have sinned, not once but three times; and even more, I will not relent; because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border; ¹⁴I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah; and it shall devour her strongholds. Then there will be war cry and battle; then storm winds will blow. ¹⁵Their king will go into exile, he and his princes with him,” says Yahweh.

2 ¹Yahweh says this, “Because Moab has sinned, not once but three times; and even more, I will not relent; because they burned to a cinder the bones of the king of Edom, ²I will send fire on Moab and it shall be destroyed in the midst of the tumult, with war cries and the blast of the trumpet. ³I will do away with their ruler and all the princes with him,” says Yahweh.

⁴Yahweh says this, “Because Judah has sinned, not once but three times and even more, I will not relent. Because they rejected the law of Yahweh and did not keep his statutes, but have been led astray by the falsehood after which their fathers walked; ⁵I will send fire upon Judah; and it will devour the fortresses of Jerusalem.”

Judgment on Israel

• ⁶Yahweh says this, “Because Israel has sinned, not once but three times; and even more, I will not relent; They sell the just for money and the needy for a pair of sandals; ⁷they tread on the head of the poor and trample them upon the dust of

the earth, while they silence the right of the afflicted; a man and his father go to the same woman to profane my holy name; ⁸they stretch out upon garments taken in pledge, beside every altar; they take the wine of those they swindle and are drunk in the house of their God.

⁹It was I who destroyed the Amorites before them, whose height was like the height of the cedar; a people as sturdy as an oak. I destroyed their fruit above and their roots below.

¹⁰It was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness to take possession of the land of the Amorites.

¹¹It was I who raised up prophets among your sons, and Nazirites among your young men. Is this not so, people of Israel?” says Yahweh. ¹²“But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.

¹³Behold, I will crush you to the ground, as a cart does when it is full of sheaves. ¹⁴The swift shall be unable to flee and the strong man shall lose his strength. The warrior shall not save himself nor the bowman stand his ground. ¹⁵The swift of foot shall not escape nor the horseman save himself. ¹⁶Even the most stout-hearted among the warriors shall flee away naked on that day,” says Yahweh.

Punishment is near

3 ¹Hear this word which Yahweh speaks against you, people of Israel, against the whole family which he brought up from the land of Egypt.

²“Only you have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will call you to account for all your wrongdoings.”

• **1.1** Chapters 1 and 2 announce the judgment of God which is coming soon. Amos severely attacks the pagan nations which have drifted away from universal morality and from the rules of human life. Judah, a nation of believers, bears the sin of having forgotten the law of God (cf. 2:4).

• **2.6** He reproaches Israel for always trampling on the rights of the poor and, by so doing, falsifying religion. They keep up the religious rituals, which are a pretext for drunkenness and

prostitution. They silence the prophets who proclaim the word of God, the source of authentic religion.

You gave the Nazirites wine to drink (v. 12): see Numbers 6. The followers of a corrupted religion make fun of those men whose lifestyle, even externally, is different from their own, and expresses the personal aspect of their religious commitment: *let them drink!* let them be like everyone else because their lifestyle disturbs our consciences.

• ³Do two walk together unless they have agreed?

⁴Does a lion roar in the forest when it has no prey? Does a young lion growl in its den unless it has seized something?

⁵Does a bird get caught in a snare if the snare has not been baited?

Does a tiger spring up from the ground unless it has caught something?

⁶If a trumpet sounds in a city, will the people not be frightened?

If disaster strikes a city, has not Yahweh caused it? ⁷Yet Yahweh does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants, the prophets. ⁸If the lion roars, who will not be afraid? If Yahweh speaks, who will not prophesy?

⁹Call on the people living in the palaces of Ashur and in the palaces of Egypt: "Come together against the hill of Samaria and see the many scandals and the oppression that is there.

¹⁰These people do not know how to do what is right, says Yahweh, storing in strongholds what they have taken through violence and extortion. ¹¹Therefore, this is the word of Yahweh: The enemy shall surround the land; your strength shall be broken down and your strongholds plundered."

¹²Yahweh says this, "As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion a pair of legs or the tip of an ear, so shall some of you be saved, O Israelites of Samaria who loll on comfortable couches and rest on pillows of Damascus."

¹³"Hear and accuse the nation of Jacob," says Yahweh, God of hosts, ¹⁴"On the day that I call Israel to account for his crimes,

I will punish as well the altars of Bethel. The horns of the altar will be broken off and fall to the ground. ¹⁵Then I will strike the winter house and the summer house. The palaces of ivory shall be ruined, and the great house destroyed."

4 • ¹Listen to this word, you cows of Bashan, you women who live on the hills of Samaria, who oppress the weak and abuse the needy, who order your husbands, "Bring us something to drink quickly!"

²Yahweh has sworn by his holiness, "The time is coming upon you when you will be dragged away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. ³Through the breaks in the wall you will go out, straight ahead, driven out all the way to Hermon." It is Yahweh who speaks.

Prepare to meet your God

• ⁴"Come, sinners, to the Sanctuary in Bethel; go down to Gilgal and sin even more!

Each morning bring your sacrifices and, on the third day, your tithes. Burn leavened food for thanksgiving. ⁵Proclaim in public your freewill offering, for this is what makes you happy, people of Israel," says Yahweh.

⁶"Though I have made your teeth clean of food in every city, though I have made your bread in all your

1Cor 9:16

Mic 3:8

1K 13:1

Ps 22:13; Is 3:16; 22:12

Jer 16:16

Gen 28:22; Lev 2:1

Mt 6:2

Lev 26: 14-39; Mt 23:37

• **3.3** Those listening to Amos do not understand why this man, who is not a priest, nor a member of the "fellow prophets," came to preach to them. They are scandalized because he interferes into things which, according to them, have nothing to do with religion. The images which Amos uses in these verses have a clear message: he speaks because God forces him to speak.

In verses 9-15, Amos calls on Assyria and Egypt to come and level a society without faith and without law. Let them destroy temples and palaces, since all are maintained through exploitation, and promote sin.

• **4.1** It is worth noting how Amos deals with rich and selfish women. He compares them with nothing less than the cows of Bashan. Bashan is

on the other side of the Jordan and is famous in the Old Testament for its fattened flocks.

These women are getting fat at the expense of the poor and all they know is how to make cocktails. Amos announces the day when they will be taken from the conquered capital and exiled, with as little consideration as that given to a herd of cattle.

• **4.** Amos recalls the many hardships and trials which gave the people of Israel an opportunity for reflection.

He notes the contrast between the luxury, the frequency of religious celebrations and the evil behavior of the people. They think that, if they go through the rituals and offer sacrifices, God will not pay attention to their evil ways. But that is not the way it is.

dwellings scarce, yet you did not return to me,” says Yahweh.

⁷“Though I withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away, though I sent rain upon one town and withheld it from another, ⁸though people staggered from town to town, and found no water to quench their thirst, yet you never returned to me,” says Yahweh.

⁹“Though with blight and calamities I have stricken your garden and vineyard, though your fig and olive trees were devoured by the locusts, yet you never returned to me,” says Yahweh.

^{9:3} ¹⁰“Though, as in Egypt, I sent you a plague, though I slew your young men with the sword along with your captured horses, and nauseated you with stench from your own dead, yet you never returned to me,” says Yahweh.

¹¹“I overthrew you, a divine punishment, as happened to Sodom and Gomorrah; you were like a brand snatched from the blaze, yet you never returned to me,” says Yahweh.

¹²“Therefore, I will deal with you in my own way, Israel, and since I will do this to you, prepare, Israel, to meet your God!”

¹³For it is he who makes the thunder and creates the winds, and reveals his mind to humankind, who turns dawn to twilight, who strides upon the heights of the earth—Yahweh, God of hosts, is his name.

Seek me and you shall live

5 ¹Listen to these words, this lament I pronounce over you, nation of Israel, ²“Virgin Israel is fallen, never to rise again! With none to help her up, abandoned, she lies upon her own land.”

Ezk
19:1;
Lm 1:1

³For Yahweh says this, “The city that went forth to war a thousand strong shall be left with a hundred, and that which went forth with a hundred shall be left with ten in Israel.”

⁴For Yahweh says this to the nation of Israel, “Seek me, that you may live, ⁵but not in Bethel; nor come to Gilgal; nor pass through to Beersheba. For Gilgal shall be led into exile and Bethel brought to nothing.”

Hos
10:12;
Mt 19:16

⁶Seek Yahweh, that you may live; or he will rush like fire on the nation of Joseph and no one will be at Bethel to quench the blaze.

⁸He who made the Pleiades and Orion, ^{9:6} who turns dusk to dawn and darkens the day into night, who summons the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the earth—Yahweh is his name. ⁹He makes destruction flash forth against the strong, and brings ruin upon the fortified city.

⁷Woe to those whose decrees are bitterness, not justice, who trample on the rights!

¹⁰You hate him who reproves in court; you despise him who speaks the truth.

Is 5:20

¹¹Because you have trampled on the poor and extorted levies on their grain, though you have built mansions of hewn stones, you will not dwell in them; though you have planted choice grapevines, you shall not drink of their wine.

Mic
6:15;
Zep
1:13

¹²For I know the number of your crimes and how grievous are your sins: persecuting the just, taking bribes, turning away the needy at the gates. ¹³See, how the prudent keep silent at this time, for it is an evil time.

Mic 2:3

The day of the Lord will be darkness

• ¹⁴Seek good and shun evil, that you may live. Then Yahweh, the God of hosts, as you have claimed, will be with you.

Jer 7:4;
Mic 3:11

• **5.14** God’s complaints about his people sound like those of another time expressed through Isaiah: *This people approached me in*

words; they honor me with lip-service, while their hearts stay afar (Is 29:13).

Since the previous disasters were not enough

Dt 30:19 ¹⁵Hate wickedness and love virtue, and let justice prevail in the courts; perhaps Yahweh, the God of hosts, will take pity on the remnant of Joseph.

¹⁶Yahweh, God of hosts thus says: "In every square, wailing will be heard, in every street, cries of anguish. Farmers will be summoned to lament, and professional mourners, to weep noisily. ¹⁷There will be lamentation in every vineyard, for I will pass through your midst, says the Lord."

¹⁸Woe to you who long for Yahweh's day! Why should you long for that day? It is a day of darkness, not of dawn, ¹⁹as if a man fled from a lion only to run into a bear; or as if he entered his home, rested his hand against the wall, only to be bitten by a viper.

²⁰The day of Yahweh will be darkness, not light; gloom, without a glow of brightness.

²¹"I hate, I reject your feasts, I take no pleasure when you assemble ²²to offer me your burnt offerings. Your cereal offerings, I will not accept! Your offerings of fattened beasts, I will not look upon!

²³Away with the noise of your chanting, away with your strumming on harps. ²⁴But let justice run its course like water, and righteousness be like an ever-flowing river.

²⁵Did you, Israel, bring me offerings and sacrifices for forty years, in the wilderness? Act 7:42-43

²⁶Yet, now, you lift up king Sikkuth and Kiyun, your idols, which you made yourselves. ²⁷Therefore I will send you into exile, beyond Damascus," says Yahweh, whose name is God of hosts.

6 ¹Woe to those proud people, who live overconfident, on the hill of Samaria! Is 28:1; Lk 6:24

Woe to you, men of renown, from the first among the nations, to whom the people of Israel come!

²Pass through Kalneh and see; from there, go to Hamath the great, then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms were? Is your territory greater than theirs? ³You hope to postpone the evil day; in fact, you bring about a year of violence. Lk 18:11

⁴You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and sprawl on your couches; you eat lamb from the flock and veal from calves fattened in the stall. Is 5:11

⁵You strum on your harps, and like David, try out new musical instruments.

⁶You drink wine by the bowlful and anoint yourselves with the finest oils; but you do not grieve over the ruins of Joseph.

⁷Therefore, you will be the first to go into exile; and the feast of sprawlers will be over.

⁸Yahweh has sworn by his life, "I hate the proud city of Jacob, I hate its palaces. I will hand over the city and all that fills it."

⁹In those days, if ten people are left in one house, they shall die. ¹⁰Their kinsman will lift the corpses and bring the bones Hb 2:20

12:12; Is 5:5

Jl 2:2; Mk 13:19; Is 2:11; Zep 1:14; Jl 1:15; Is 11:11; 12:1; Jl 3:4; Mal 3:19

Is 1:11; Jer 6:20; Ps 50:8

to teach Israel to straighten its ways, Amos announces another disaster. Its nature is not specified, since what is unknown usually causes greater fear.

Amos speaks extensively of the *Day of Yahweh*. When the Israelites spoke of the Day of Yahweh, they meant the day of their triumph, when God would come to crush the enemy nations. Amos turns its meaning around. From then on, when used by the prophets, the Day of the Lord will mean, God coming to make his people accountable (see Zep 1:14). Even in the Gospel, and in other books of the New Testament, the Day of the Lord will mean the Day of universal Judgment (see Rom 1:18); but then, it will have a more specific meaning: the coming of Christ. He will judge those who rejected his

word, and will fulfill the hopes of those who put their faith in him.

Perhaps Yahweh, the God of Hosts, will take pity on the remnant of Joseph (v. 15). This is the first time the word remnant appears in the Scriptures. The people of Israel were formed by the descendants of Abraham, the man of faith. The prophets realize that they are heading for ruin because of their lack of faith; their provinces are taken away from them, their children die. Yet, God will reserve a small group, the Remnant of Israel. They will return to an authentic faith, and will be the "shoot" of the New People of God.

Ephraim, Joseph, Jacob, Israel: all these names refer to the same nation.

from the house; when he will say to his comrade at the back part of the house, "Are there any more?" the other will say, "No, but hush! We must not mention the name of Yahweh."

¹¹For this is Yahweh's command,

"The great house shall crumble, and the small house fall to pieces."

¹²Do horses run on craggy cliffs? Does anyone plow the sea with oxen? Well, you have turned the rights into a poisonous plant; and the sentences of the court into wormwood.

¹³You rejoice about unimportant matters when you say, "Are we not winners once more?" ¹⁴Yet, am I stirring up against you, Israel, a nation that will oppress you, from the pass of Hamath to the brook of the Arabah.

Dt 8:17;
Lk 12:19

Five visions

Jl 1:4

7 ¹This is what Yahweh showed me. He was forming a swarm of locusts just as the late sowing began to come up. It was the second growth which follows the king's mowing. ²When they were about to finish devouring all the crops of the land, I said, "Yahweh, forgive Israel! How shall Jacob survive, small as he is?" ³Yahweh relented and said, "It shall not happen."

32:11

Jer 26:3

Is 66:16

⁴This is what Yahweh showed me: he was calling for burning heat. It consumed the great deep and was consuming the land. ⁵I said, "Yahweh, stop! How shall Jacob survive small as he is?" ⁶Yahweh relented and said, "This, too, shall not happen."

⁷This is what Yahweh showed me. He was standing beside a wall with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸The Lord asked me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I answered, "A

plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am measuring my people Israel with a plumb line. I will forgive them no more. ⁹The high places of Isaac are to be made desolate, and the Sanctuaries of Israel laid waste. For I will arise, sword in hand, against the family of Jeroboam."

Conflict with the priest Amaziah

• ¹⁰Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, then sent word to king Jeroboam of Israel, "Amos is conspiring against you in the very center of Israel; what he says goes too far. ¹¹These are his very words: Jeroboam shall die by the sword and Israel shall be exiled from its land."

Jer 26:8

¹²Amaziah then said to Amos, "Off with you, seer, go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there by prophesying. ¹³But never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is a king's Sanctuary and a national shrine."

¹⁴Amos replied to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet or one of the fellow-prophets. I am a breeder of sheep and a dresser of sycamore trees. ¹⁵But Yahweh took me from shepherding the flock and said to me: Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

1S
10:10;
1K
20:35

2S 7:8;
Ps 78:71

¹⁶Now hear the word of Yahweh, you who say: No more prophecy against Israel, no more insults against the family of Isaac! ¹⁷This is what Yahweh says:

Dt
28:30;
Mic 2:4

• **7.1** The prophets are never content with simply threatening their people. They always intercede for them before God (see Ezk 33 and 22:30). In the first two visions, Amos tries to stop God's anger. In the third, he runs into God's firm purpose to destroy Israel.

• **10.** Notice the boldness of Amos' action. He goes to preach in the national temple, or to put it another way, in the country's cathedral. He does so though he has no title, nor the priest's permission, and begins to denounce the false order, which allows the accumulation of so much private wealth. Naturally, Amaziah, the king's chaplain, is scandalized. In our days, Amos would have been arrested, beaten and perhaps killed.

For Amaziah, his priesthood is a well-paid position; and he is convinced that Amos is preaching against his way of earning a living. In those days, there were many prophets who made a living from giving advice, without having been called directly by God as the great prophets were, (and as Amos was, as well).

Amos is not a prophet in the ordinary sense. He is a lay person, to whom God entrusted a mission when called personally. Apparently, he loses out, in the meeting with the religious authorities. It is not said that he used any other weapons than God's word; and God knows how to judge his envoys. We do not know if Amaziah succeeded in expelling him out of the country or if he only forbade him to preach in well-attended places.

Your wife shall be made a harlot in the city, your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword, your land shall be divided up and given to others, and you, yourself, shall die in a foreign land, for Israel shall be driven far from its land.”

Fourth vision: the basket of ripe fruit

Jer 24:1
Mt 24:14;
Rev 14:15

8 • ¹Yahweh showed me a basket of ripe fruit ²and asked, “Amos, what do you see?” I replied, “A basket of ripe fruit.”

Then Yahweh said to me, “My people Israel is ripe for destruction; I will no longer forgive them. ³The songs of the palace will become wailings on that day, says the Lord; heaps of corpses everywhere, all cast out, in silence.”

Ne 10:32;
Lev 19:35;
Hos 12:8;
Mic 6:11

⁴Hear this, you, who trample on the needy, to do away with the weak of the land. ⁵You who say, “When will the new moon or the Sabbath feast be over that we may open the store and sell our grain? Let us lower the measure and raise the price; let us cheat and tamper with the scales, ⁶and even sell the refuse with the whole grain. We will buy up the poor for money and the needy for a pair of sandals.”

⁷Yahweh, the pride of Jacob, has sworn by himself, “I shall never forget their deeds.”

9:5;
Hos 4:3

⁸Shall not the land tremble because of this, and all who dwell in it mourn, while it rises up and heaves like the Nile and settles back again like the river of Egypt?

Jl 2:2;
Zep 1:15

⁹Yahweh says, “On that day, I will make the sun go down at noon; and darken the earth in broad daylight.

Tb 2:6;
Jer 48:37;
6:26;
Zec 12:10

¹⁰I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your singing into wailing. Every-

one will mourn, covered with sackcloth; and every head will be shaved. I will make them mourn, as for an only son, and bring their day to a bitter end.”

¹¹Yahweh says, “Days are coming when I will send famine upon the land; not hunger for bread or thirst for water, but for hearing the word of Yahweh.

¹²Men will stagger from sea to sea, wander to and fro, from north to east, searching for the word of Yahweh; but they will not find it. Dt 28:28; Is 55:6; Hos 5:6

¹³On that day, fair virgins and strong young men will faint from thirst, ¹⁴all the young people who swore by the god of Samaria, and said: Long life to the god of Dan, long life to the god of Beersheba! They shall fall, never to rise again.” Hos 8:5

Fifth vision: fall of the Sanctuary

9 ¹I saw the Lord standing by the altar; and he said: “Strike the top of the columns, so that the beams shake and the roof falls down on the heads of them all. Those who are left I will slay with the sword; not one shall flee, not one shall escape.

²Though they dig down to the netherworld, my hand will take them from there; though they climb up to heaven, I will bring them down from there; Ps 139:7-12

³Though they hide on the top of Carmel, I will search them out there, and take them; though they hide from me in the depths of the sea, I will bid the sea serpent, bite them.

⁴When they are led into captivity by their enemies, there, I will command the sword to slay them.

For I have set my eye upon them, not for help but for harm.”

⁵When Yahweh of Hosts touches the earth, it melts; and all who dwell on it mourn. The earth rises up and heaves, like the Nile, and settles back again, like the river of Egypt. 8:8

⁶He has built heaven, his upper room, ^{5:8} and established the dome of the sky over the earth. He summons the waters of the

• **8.1** This fourth vision continues the vision of Chapter 7:1-9.

Amos describes the greed of the merchants and of the rich, the exploitation of the needy, the luxury of the wealthy, the bribing of judges, etc.

Not hunger for bread or thirst for water, but for hearing the word of Yahweh (v. 11), in

a little while, those who refuse to listen, because they lack nothing, will be so afflicted that they will long to hear a word of consolation from God, and that word will not come. The prophet’s words were to be fulfilled in several ways. We can read into them the prediction of the hunger and thirst for God’s word, which, in later times, would be the hallmark of the believer.

sea and pours them upon the face of the earth: Yahweh is his name.

⁷And now Yahweh says, “Are you Israelites more to me than the Ethiopians? Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt as I brought the Philistines from Caphtor and Aram from Kir?”

- ⁸My eyes are upon your sinful kingdom. I wanted to destroy it from the face of the earth, but I cannot do away completely with the nation of Jacob,” says Yahweh.

⁹“This is what I have ordered: I will sift the nation of Israel among the nations, as one sifts with a sieve, letting no pebble pass through. ¹⁰All sinners among my people shall die, those who say, ‘Evil will not reach or overtake us.’

- ¹¹On that day, I shall restore the fallen hut of David and wall up its breaches, and

raise its ruined walls; and so build it as in days of old.

¹²They shall conquer the remnant of Edom, and the neighboring nations, upon which my name has been called.” Thus says Yahweh, the one who will do this.

¹³Yahweh says also, “The days are coming when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes overtake the sower. The mountains shall drip sweet wine and all the hills shall melt.

¹⁴I shall bring back the exiles of my people Israel; they will rebuild the desolate cities and dwell in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will have orchards and eat their fruit. ¹⁵I shall plant them in their own country and they shall never again be rooted up from the land which I have given them,” says Yahweh your God.

Dt
28:64;
Ezk 5:10

Is 9:1;
11:1;
Act 15:
16-17

Lev
26:5

Jl 4:18;
Is 61:4

• **9.8** Following the threats of verses 1-6, verses 9-10 give the assurance, which is never lacking in the prophet’s words: God will not completely destroy Israel, but will leave a remnant to fulfill his promises.

• **11.** In verses 11-14—written after the exile of Israel—we have the promise of the future reuniting of the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, into a single people of God. The apostle James will refer to this promise, to show that God wills to extend the salvation earned by Jesus to all the nations, and not only to Israel (see Acts 15:16). Notice that James quotes this text in a differ-

ent form from what it is here. This is due to the fact that the apostles were using the Greek translation of the Scriptures, which many times changed the meaning, not to be unfaithful to the primitive text but rather because, in the course of time, the Jews had a better understanding of the will of God. For example, here Amos is speaking about Israel “conquering the nations” which, at the time, seemed to be a great favor from God. The Jews who later translated the Scriptures into other languages spoke of the “nations seeking God” because, in the meantime, the prophets had meditated deeply on God’s plan.



OBADIAH

Obadiah probably wrote after the year 500 B.C. and before the conquest of Edom in the year 312 B.C. His work is filled with calls for revenge which, deep down, shows his faith in God's justice.

Against Edom

Jer 49:
9-16

¹ *The Vision of Obadiah.* This is what the Lord Yahweh says about Edom:

We have heard news from Yahweh, and a messenger has been sent out to the nations to say, "Rise, let us go against Esau."

² The day has come: you now are small among the nations; you are utterly despised.

³ Your arrogance has led you astray, you, who live in the clefts of the rock; you, who make the heights your home; you, who say to yourself:

Who can bring me down to the ground?

⁴ Though you soar like the eagle, though you make your nests among the stars, I will bring you down again.

⁵ If thieves or plunderers come at night, what a disaster awaits you then!

Would they not ransack till they had enough? If grape gatherers worked in your vineyard, would they not leave only gleanings? ⁶ See how Esau has been looted, even his hidden treasures pillaged!

⁷ You have been driven to the frontiers: and those were your very friends!

Those who partook of your bread set for you a trap in secret.

⁸ Yahweh declares: Shall I not destroy the wise men of Edom on that day, and deprive of sages the mountain of Esau?

⁹ Your warriors, O Teman, will be afraid, and all from Mount Esau will be slaughtered.

¹⁰ For the violence done to Jacob, your brother,

you will be disgraced and destroyed forever.

¹¹ You stood aloof in waiting, when strangers carried off his wealth; when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were as guilty as the rest of them.

¹² Do not come to see and gloat over the misfortune of your brother.

Do not exult over Judah's ruin, nor brag on the day of her destruction.

¹³ Do not go through the gate of my people on the day of their disgrace; nor gloat over them in their misfortune on the day of their adversity; nor lay your hands upon their possessions

on the day of their destruction.

¹⁴ Do not wait at the crossroad to slay their stragglers; nor betray their survivors on the day of their disaster.

¹⁵ For the day of Yahweh is near for every nation.

As you have done to another, so, to you, will it be done. Whatever you have done will come back upon your head.

¹⁶ For as you have drunk on my holy mountain,

so will the surrounding nation drink; drink, and drink up to the brim...

Then they shall be as if they had never been.

¹⁷ But there will be survivors on Mount Zion — a holy remnant.

The house of Jacob will take possession of its own inheritance.

Is 19:
11-15

Jl 3:5

Mal 3:19

¹⁸The nation of Jacob will be a fire,
 the nation of Joseph a flame;
 but those of Esau will be a stubble;
 and they will burn and consume them.
 And of Esau's house, none will remain,
 for it is Yahweh who has spoken.

¹⁹People from the Negeb
 will occupy Esau's mountains;
 those from the plains,
 the land of the Philistines;

they will occupy Ephraim and Samaria,
 and Benjamin will possess Gilead.

²⁰The Israelite exiles who are in Canaan
 will possess Phoenicia as far as
 Zarephtah;
 the exiles from Jerusalem now in
 Sepharad

will possess the towns of the Negeb.

²¹Deliverers will ascend Mount Zion
 to rule over the mountains of Esau,
 —then Yahweh will reign.

Ps
22:29



Few people today misunderstand the nature of this story. The two questions often raised about it in the past are no longer heard: Did Jonah really exist? Did he really stay in the belly of a fish for three days?

The Book of Jonah is a story, but the author deserves to be considered a prophet because he very clearly underscored some truths which his contemporaries had forgotten.

This delightful narrative criticizes, not the idolatrous or godless people, but the pious Jews themselves who, locked in their nationalism, easily forget that God is the God of all peoples.

God, the Savior of All People

Jonah does not like pagans and if God saves them, Jonah does not feel like paying the price for it. This kind of pettiness, characteristic of an average believer, merely covers up another, much greater scandal for which God is responsible. How are we to understand that God saves everyone if, at the same time, he repeats throughout the Scriptures that Israel alone was chosen, that it alone has the word of life, that it alone has a Savior, that all that God demands (circumcision, or later, baptism, or the Eucharist, or sexual prohibitions) is absolutely necessary in order to be saved?

This scandal has always been at the heart of Christianity just as it was with the Jews. Does God speak two languages? Or should we believe that Christian salvation is only one among all those that are offered to peoples from different cultures and religions? This question was so formidable that Christians often tried to dismiss it without even naming it. Thus, following Saint Augustine, the Western Church locked itself in the doctrine of original sin as if in a fortress (see the commentaries on Gen 3 and Rom 5:12). We used to assert without batting an eye that after Adam's sin, all people were condemned to hell, except for those who were baptized, or at least desired baptism. We have said and preached that until the middle of the twentieth century. This is the reason why still-born babies were not buried on Christian ground. It is also the reason why many missionaries would have given their lives just to baptize a single pagan child.

Saint Augustine kindly contended that hell would be considerably softened for unbaptized children. At the same time, he felt bound to show that all the "virtues of pagans," all the good we see in them, was totally worthless before God: these virtues were a way of seeking their own perfection without God and therefore, were the product of pride. This denunciation by Augustine of many people (Christians

or not) who act and live beyond reproach in the eyes of others or in their own, was certainly insightful; but he would not have gone to such extremes if it had not been necessary to exorcise the famous question: does not God save non-Christians just as he saves us? This would definitely have dampened the enthusiasm of Christians.

To those asking about the will of God that all people be saved the answer was: "God wants to save all human beings provided they believe and become Roman Catholic." This wall officially began to crack only in the first half of the twentieth century. Throughout the three previous centuries, this concealed violence of the Christian doctrine (a condemnation without appeal of all religions and most of humanity that did not embrace Christianity) scandalized countless open-minded people, opening a path to Western atheism, yet the Church (we should say: the churches) did not budge. Therefore, we should not be surprised if as soon as God's will to save everyone was acknowledged most Christians began to question their faith. They were not denying it and even conceded that it may have been the best, but thought that all religions were equally valid. Some went farther and thought that everything was optional in this matter and we all save ourselves as best as we can.

So, now we must rethink our Christian identity: what are we in the midst of humanity? What are we saying when we profess that we are only saved by Christ? What does this salvation brought by Christ have to do with the rest of humanity?

No wonder that today countless Christians are perplexed about the subject. They should not be condemned instantly if they feel such a need to be in solidarity with the rest of humanity that they sell off the treasures God entrusted to them: they did not see that the call they received to be the people of Christ entrusts them a unique mission which is necessary for the salvation of the world. It is impossible to overcome such a drastic change in a few years, or even in a hundred years, and perhaps for a long time to come we will be incapable of understanding how God loves and saves everyone and at the same time how the call to the faith that we have received is an exceptional grace.

At least let us recall what the whole Scripture tells us, namely, that God is "predilection and fidelity." It is by the path of fidelity, rather than by the path of reasoning or feelings, that we will enter into this God who is truth.

Yahweh sends Jonah to Nineveh

2K
14:25

1 • ¹The word of Yahweh came to Jonah, son of Amittai, ²“Go to Nineveh, the great city, and preach against it, because I have known its wickedness.” ³But Jonah decided to flee from Yahweh and go to Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, found a ship bound for Tarshish, and paid the fare. Then he boarded it and went into the hold of the ship, journeying with them to Tarshish, far away from Yahweh.

Ps 107:
23-30

⁴Yahweh stirred up a storm wind on the sea, so there was a sea tempest, which threatened to destroy the ship.

Act 27
18

⁵The sailors took fright, and each cried out to his own god. To lighten the ship, they threw its cargo into the sea.

Mt 8:24

⁶Meanwhile Jonah had gone into the hold of the ship, where he lay fast asleep. The captain came upon him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god. Perhaps he will be mindful of us and will not allow us to die here.”

Jos 7:14

⁷The sailors said to each other, “Let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this disaster.” So they did, and the lot fell on Jonah.

⁸They questioned him, “So you are responsible for this evil that has come upon us? Tell us where you are from. What is your country, your nationality?” ⁹And Jonah told them his story, “I am a Hebrew and I worship Yahweh, God of heaven who made the sea and the land....”

¹⁰As they knew that he was fleeing from Yahweh, the sailors were seized with great fear and said to him, “What a terrible thing have you done!” ¹¹“What shall we do with you now, to make the sea calm down?” The sea was growing more and more agitated.

¹²He said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea. It will quiet down, for I know it is because of me that this storm has come.”

¹³The sailors, however, still did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea had grown much rougher than before. ¹⁴Then they called on Yahweh, “O Yahweh, do not let us perish for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us guilty of shedding innocent blood. For you, Yahweh, have done this as you have thought right.” ¹⁵They took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm again. ¹⁶At this the men were seized with great fear of Yahweh. They offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows to him.

Jonah in the belly of the fish

2 ¹Yahweh provided a large fish which swallowed Jonah. He remained in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

Job
7:12;
Mt
12:40;
Lk 11:30

²From the belly of the fish Jonah prayed to Yahweh, his God:

³*“In my distress I cried to Yahweh, and he answered me; from the belly of the netherworld you heard my voice when I called.*

⁴*You cast me into the abyss,*

Ps 42:3

• **1.1** Jonah refuses to obey the call from Yahweh: perhaps because he does not feel responsible for the salvation of the hated Ninevites. He is asleep while the sailors, good pagans, are trying to save the boat. (Though this is not a religious work, it does interest the pious Jonah too.) Jonah delights in thinking about the punishment that God is going to inflict on the pagans of Nineveh. He complains of God’s mercy toward the Ninevites, because his own reputation will suffer from this.

God guides the world according to a broad and generous vision. Because he created everyone, he feels responsible for everyone and wants to save *humans and cattle* (4:11) regardless of their race or religion. The story of Jonah soon became popular, and Jesus would mention it:

- The Ninevites’ conversion (Lk 11:30).
- The comparison with the three days that Jonah spent in the fish’s belly (Mt 12:40).

*into the very heart of the sea,
and the currents swirled about me;
all your breakers and your billows
passed over, engulfing me.*

⁵ Then I thought:

*I have been cast out from your presence,
but I keep on looking to your holy temple.*

⁶ The waters engulfed me up to my throat;
all around me was the abyss;
wrapped about my head were seaweeds.

⁷ I went down to the roots of the
mountains,
the bars of the netherworld closed
upon me,

*but you brought my life up from the pit,
Yahweh, my God.*

⁸ When my soul was fainting within me,
I remembered Yahweh,
and before you, rose my prayer
up to your holy temple.

⁹ Those who worship worthless idols
lose your grace

¹⁰ but I, with songs of praise,
will offer to you sacrifices.

*What I have vowed, I will make good—
deliverance comes from Yahweh, my
God.*

¹¹ Then Yahweh gave his command to
the fish, and it belched out Jonah onto dry
land.

The conversion of Nineveh

3 ¹The word of Yahweh came to
Jonah a second time: ²“Go to Ni-
neveh, the great city, and announce
to them the message I give you.”

³In obedience to the word of Yah-
weh, Jonah went to Nineveh. It was a
very large city, and it took three days
just to cross it. ⁴So Jonah walked a
single day’s journey and began pro-
claiming, “Forty days more and
Nineveh will be destroyed.”

⁵The people of the city believed
God. They declared a fast, and all of
them, from the greatest to the least,
put on sackcloth.

⁶Upon hearing the news, the king of
Nineveh got up from his throne, took
off his royal robe, put on sackcloth
and sat down in ashes. ⁷He issued a
proclamation throughout Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his
nobles, no people or beasts, herd or
flock, will taste anything; neither will
they eat nor drink. ⁸But let people
and beasts be covered with sackcloth.
Let everyone call aloud to God, turn
from his evil ways and violence. ⁹Who
knows? God may yet relent, turn from
his fierce anger and spare us.”

¹⁰When God saw what they did and
how they turned from their evil ways,
he had compassion and did not carry
out the destruction he had threatened
upon them.

God loves everyone

4 ¹But Jonah was greatly displeased
at this, and he was indignant. ²He
prayed to Yahweh and said, “O Yah-
weh, is this not what I said when I was
yet in my own country? This is why I
fled to Tarshish. I knew that you are a
gracious and merciful God, slow to
anger and full of love, and you relent
from imposing terrible punishment. ³I
beseech you now, Yahweh, to take
my life, for now it is better for me to
die than to live.” ⁴But Yahweh replied,
“What right have you to be angry?”

⁵Jonah then left the city. He went to
a place east of it, built himself a shel-
ter and sat under its shade to wait and
see what would happen to Nineveh.
⁶Then Yahweh God provided a cas-
tor-oil plant and made it grow up over
Jonah to give shade over his head
and to ease his discomfort. Jonah was
very happy about the plant.

⁷But the next day, at dawn, God
sent a worm which attacked the plant
and made it wither. ⁸When the sun
rose, God sent a scorching east wind;
the sun blazed down upon Jonah’s
head, and he grew faint. His death
wish returned and he said, “It is better
for me to die than to live.”

⁹Then God asked Jonah, “Do you
have a right to be angry about the

Job
16:17;
Jl 2:14

Mt 12:41

Lk 15:28
34:6

1K
19:14;
Tb 3:6

Ps 3:9

Jl 1:14;
Est 4:1;
Lk 11:
30, 32

castor-oil plant?” Jonah answered, “I am right to be angry enough to wish to die.”

¹⁰Yahweh said, “You are concerned about a plant which cost you no labor to make it grow. Overnight it sprang

up, and overnight it perished. ¹¹But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot distinguish right from left and they have many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned for such a great city?”

Mal
1:11;
Rev 7:9



Micah was Isaiah's contemporary. He spoke about the same situation, and yet it is easy to see a striking contrast between the two: Micah, a man from the country; Isaiah, distinguished and learned.

Micah was from Moresheth, a village at the edge of the lowland, through which all the armies of Assyria and Egypt passed. He was well acquainted with the suffering and the destruction of war; and with the exploitation of the peasants as well. One day God called him and gave him strength, justice and courage, to go, and denounce Israel's sins. He spoke in the name of a God whom no one loved and violently denounced the injustices which were practiced everywhere.

Some of the words which Micah addressed to Israel, whose ruin was imminent, were later modified to adapt them to the situation of Jerusalem and of the kingdom of Judah, when they were undergoing a similar crisis.

1 ¹This is the word of Yahweh which came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. These are his visions concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Against Samaria and Jerusalem

• ²Hear, all you peoples, let the earth, and all who are in it, listen. For Yahweh is witnessing against you from his holy temple.

³Yahweh has come forth from his place; he comes down and treads upon the heights of the earth. ⁴Beneath him, mountains collapse and valleys melt, like wax before the fire; as torrents pouring down the hillside.

⁵All this for the crime of Jacob, for the

sin of the nation of Judah. What is the crime of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? What is the sin of the nation of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?

⁶Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country, a place for planting vineyards. I will scatter her stones down into the valley and lay her foundations bare.

⁷All her carved images will be dashed to pieces and her filthy idols burnt by fire. I will make a waste heap of all her idols, for they were made with harlot's wages; and to harlot's wages they will return.

⁸For this reason I lament and wail, go barefoot and naked. I shall howl like a jackal and wail like an ostrich. ⁹For her wound cannot be healed; rather it has

Jer
8:18;
Is 10:26

• **1.2** Yahweh is about to leave the temple where he is present; so hidden, that everyone has forgotten him.

Verse 5: The first sin of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah is found in their capitals. They are the cities that have ruined the country; those who thrive by exploiting peasants live in the cities; and it is there that the riches of the land are transformed into palaces for a few.

We need only look at the capital cities of

some countries to verify what Micah was saying: the wealth of a country is spent on things as unproductive as the idols and prostitution of Micah's time.

In verse 8: *barefoot and naked*, other than the sackcloth, which was the only clothing of captives (see Is 20).

In verse 10: Micah predicts a new invasion and he describes it by playing on the names of various stages on the way.

come to Judah. It has reached the capital of my people, Jerusalem.

¹⁰Exult not in Gath; break down and weep in Acco. In Beth-leaphra roll in the dust. ¹¹Sound the bugle, O people of Shaphir, and do not let the dwellers in Zaanan come forth. Mourn greatly, Beth-ezel: your treasures are taken away.

¹²Surely they trembled, the people in Maroth, when calamity came down from Yahweh to the gates of Jerusalem.

¹³Hitch the horses to the chariot, citizens of Lachish. In you, the rebellions of Israel were found; and because of you, Zion began to sin. ¹⁴Therefore, you must give a redress to Moresheth-Gath. The houses of Achzib have become deceitful to the kings of Israel.

¹⁵Again, I will bring the conqueror to you, people of Maresha; and the elite of Israel will leave forever. ¹⁶Shave your hair for your delightful children. Make yourself bald as an eagle, for they have been deported far from you.

Against the rich

2 • ¹Woe to those who plot wickedness and plan evil even on their beds! When morning comes they do it, as soon as it is within their reach.

²If they covet fields, they seize them. Do they like houses? They take them. They seize the owner and his household; both, the man and his property.

³This is why Yahweh speaks, "I am plotting evil against this whole brood, from which your necks cannot escape. No more shall you walk with head held high, for it will be an evil time."

⁴On that day, they will sing a taunting song against you; and a bitter lamentation will be heard, "We have

been stripped of our property in our homeland. Who will free us from the wicked who allots our fields." ⁵Truly, no one will be found in the assembly of Yahweh to keep a field for you.

⁶What will you say to that? For there is no reply. Disgrace will not pass away; these words will strike the nation of Jacob.

⁷They answer, "Is the might of Yahweh weakened? Is this his way of working things out? Has he not good words for his people of Israel?" Hos 9:7

⁸But it is you who oppress my people and are his enemies. You strip off the garments of those who pass by confidently; ⁹you drive the women of my people from the home they love; you rob my blessing from their children forever. Dt 24:13
22:21;
Dt
27:19;
2K 4:1;
Ne 5:5

¹⁰Get up! Away with you! There is no resting place for you here! Because of this uncleanness of yours, you will go, roped up.

¹¹If a deceiver were to come and say, "I will preach to you of wine and strong drink," he would be the prophet for this people.

A comforting word

¹²I shall assemble you, nation of Jacob, and gather the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together, like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture. ¹³They have a leader in their midst. See: their king goes before them; Yahweh is heading them! Is
52:11;
62:10

Leaders and prophets oppress the people

3 • ¹Then I said, "You rulers of the house of Israel, is it not your duty to know what is right? ²Yet, you hate Hos 5:1;
Is 5:20

1K 21:
1-4;
Is 5:8;
Am 4:1

Am 5:13

• **2.1** He denounces the exploiters, those who always have legal means to despoil little people. We must not forget that the Scriptures had a code of laws—far ahead of any other nation—to defend the rights and the lives of the poor, the widows, etc. See Deuteronomy 23:16.

Everyone, naturally, is furious with the prophet who disturbs the established injustice.

Verses 12-13 probably do not come from Micah's hand. They may have been added here later (see Ezk 34).

• **3.1** He denounces those who are mainly responsible: the civil and the religious authorities.

There were prophets everywhere; they be-

good and love evil; you tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones.

³Those who eat my people's flesh and break their bones to pieces, who chop them up like meat for the pan and share them like flesh for the pot, ⁴when they cry, Yahweh will not answer. He will hide his face from them because of their evil deeds."

⁵This is what Yahweh says of the prophets who lead my people astray: "You cry: 'Peace' when you have something to eat, but to anyone with nothing for your mouths, it is 'War' that you declare. ⁶So night will come to you, without vision; and darkness, without divination. Then sun will set for the prophets; and the day will be dark for them.

⁷Then the seers will be disgraced and the diviners put to shame. They will all cover their faces because no answer will come from God. ⁸But as for me, I am filled with might, with the spirit of Yahweh, with justice and courage, to declare to Jacob his transgressions, to Israel his sins.

⁹Hear this, leaders of the nation of Jacob, rulers of the house of Israel, you who despise justice and pervert what is right, ¹⁰you who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with crime.

¹¹Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests prophesy for money; and yet they rely on Yahweh, and say, 'Is Yahweh not in our midst? No evil, then, will come upon us.' ¹²Therefore,

came prophets in the way someone is elected to a particular position. They practiced private consultation regarding a person's future and good luck. The role of a true prophet does not consist in getting people, who pay him for his visions and his dreams, out of trouble, but rather in denouncing evil.

Verses 9-11 again accuse the leaders and the civil servants who feel sheltered from the misery and from the disasters scourging the country. The long-standing confidence in Jerusalem, a city protected by Yahweh, reassures them

because of you, Zion will become a field; Jerusalem will be a heap of ruins, and the temple mount, a forest with sacred stones."

4 • ¹In the last days, the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be set over the highest mountains and will tower over the hills. ²All the nations will stream to it, saying, "Come, let us go to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; so 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."

³He 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; neither will they train for war any more. ⁴But each one will sit in peace and freedom, under a fig tree or a vine of his own, for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken.

⁵While peoples walk, each in the name of his god, we shall walk in the name of Yahweh, our God, forever and ever.

⁶Yahweh declares, "On that day, I will assemble the lame and gather the banished, those whom I have afflicted. ⁷I will make the lame a remnant and those driven out a mighty nation. Yahweh will reign over them on Zion from now and forever.

⁸As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O city of Zion, city of the king, your former dominion will be restored; the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.

⁹Now, why do you wail? Would it be, that you have no king; and your counselor has perished? Why are you in anguish like a woman in labor? ¹⁰Writhe and howl, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor; for now, you must leave the city and camp in the open country. To Babylon you must

in their false peace: for this reason, Jerusalem will be destroyed. Eighty years after this curse, Jeremiah's contemporaries had not forgotten it (Jer 26:18).

• **4.1** Here, we find an oracle similar to Isaiah's 2:2. Verses 9-10 announce the Exile. The text 11-13 is different: it resembles Isaiah's poems about Zion, the invincible (see Is 29:1 and 31:4).

Verses 6-7 show the confidence of God's people in the midst of hostile forces in the world.

Ezk
34:10Jer
11:11Zec
13:3Hb
2:12Is
23Jer
26:18;
Mt
23:38

Is 22:4

Mt 5:14;
Jer
51:44;
Hg 2:7;
Zec 8:20

Is 1:20

Ezk 34

Ezk 38:8

go; there, you shall be rescued; and Yahweh will redeem you from the hand of your enemies.

¹¹But now, many nations are massed against you; they say, "Let Jerusalem be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion." ¹²But they do not know Yahweh's thoughts, nor do they understand his purpose: that he has gathered them like sheaves on the threshing floor.

Jer 51:33; Dt 33:17 ¹³Arise and thresh, O Zion, for I will give you horns of iron and hooves of bronze; and you shall crush many peoples. You shall devote their plundered wealth to Yahweh; their treasures, to the Lord of the whole earth.

¹⁴Strengthen the walls of your fortress, for they have laid siege against us. With a rod they want to strike the cheek of Israel's ruler.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrata

2S 7:8; Is 7:14; 9:5; 11:1; 1S 16:1; Mt 2:6; Jn 7:42 **5** • ¹But you, Bethlehem Ephrata, so small that you are hardly named among the clans of Judah; from you shall I raise the one who is to rule over Israel. For he comes forth from of old, from the ancient times.

²Yahweh, therefore, will abandon Israel until such time as she, who is to give birth, has given birth. Then the rest of his deported brothers will return to the people of Israel.

Ps 78:70; Jer 23:4 ³He will stand, and shepherd his flock with the strength of Yahweh, in the glorious Name of Yahweh, his God. They will live safely, while he wins renown to the ends of the earth.

Ps 72:7 ⁴He shall be peace.

When the Assyrian invades our land and sets foot on our territory, we will raise against him not one, but seven shepherds; eight warlords.

⁵They will rule Assyria with the sword, and Babylonia with the bared blade. He will deliver us from the Assyrians when they come into our land, when they set foot within our borders.

⁶Then the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples, like dew dropping down from Yahweh, like showers falling upon the grass. For they do not put their hope in man or expect anything from mortals.

⁷The remnant of Jacob will then be in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion in a flock of sheep, trampling down as it goes, mangling its prey, and no rescuer in sight.

⁸May your hand be raised high over your foes, and all your enemies perish.

⁹"On that day—Yahweh speaks— I will drive away your horses;

I will wreck your chariots, I will demolish your cities and tear down your strongholds.

¹⁰I will do away with your witchcraft and rid you of soothsayers.

¹¹I will abolish your carved images, the sacred stones from your midst, so that you no longer worship the work of your hands.

¹²I will pull down your sacred poles and destroy all your idols.

¹³In raging fury I will take vengeance upon the nations that have not obeyed me."

O my people what have I done to you?

6 • ¹Listen to what Yahweh said to me, "Stand up, let the mountains hear your claim, and the hills listen to your plea."

²Hear, O mountains, Yahweh's complaint! Foundations of the earth, pay attention! For Yahweh has a case

Gen 49:8; Num 23:24

Hg 2:22; Zec 9:10

Dt 32:1; Is 1:2

Ps 50:6

• **5.1** *But you, Bethlehem Ephrata, from you shall I raise the one who is to rule over Israel.* That is to say, that the Messiah will come from the line of David whose roots are in Bethlehem. It is not clear if the Messiah must be born in Bethlehem, in spite of the fact that Micah seems to contrast this peaceful king, born in a rural area, with the useless kings of the capital.

Later, many believed that the Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem: see John 7:42. Matthew's Gospel shows how this prophecy was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus (Mt 2:6).

• **6.1** *O my people, what have I done to you? In what way have I been a burden to you (v. 3)?* Yahweh argues with his people. We

against his people, and will argue it with Israel.

³“O my people, what have I done to you? In what way have I been a burden to you? Answer me.

⁴I brought you out of Egypt; I rescued you from the land of bondage; I sent Moses, Aaron and Miriam to lead you.

⁵O my people, remember what Balaam, king of Moab, plotted, and what Balaam, son of Beor, answered him. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, how you have come to know Yahweh’s righteous paths.”

⁶“What shall I bring when I come to Yahweh and bow down before God the most high? Shall I come with burnt offerings, with sacrifices of yearling calves? ⁷Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams, with an overabundance of oil libations? Should I offer my firstborn for my sins, the fruit of my body for my wrongdoing?”

⁸“You have been told, O man, what is good and what Yahweh requires of you: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

⁹The voice of Yahweh calls to the city, in order to save those who fear his Name.”

¹⁰“Is there still within you unjust wealth and accursed short measure? ¹¹Shall I approve your false scales and your bags of false weights?

¹²O city, whose rich are full of violence, whose children speak falsehood, people of deceitful tongue! ¹³See, I am striking you a grievous blow, making you desolate because of your sins. ¹⁴You shall eat but not be satisfied; and your insides will go on crying.

see God’s love confronting his people’s indifference.

Micah is addressing a people without understanding. When they are in trouble or feel an inclination for religion, they think of expensive things: sacrifices, offerings and even the sacrifice of their children, according to the Canaanite religions.

To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (v. 8). The answer is short and clear:

What you overtake, you will not carry off; and those who escape I will hand them over to the sword. ¹⁵You shall sow but not reap. You shall tread your olives, but not anoint yourselves with the oil. You shall tread the grapes but not drink the wine.

¹⁶You keep the rules of Omri and follow the examples of Ahab’s court. So I will give you up to devastation, so that your citizens become an object of derision. You shall bear the scorn of the peoples.”

7 ¹How I sorrow! For I am like the gatherer of summer fruit, like the gleaner of the vintage, when there are no grapes to eat; none of the early figs I crave.

²The godly have vanished from the earth and not one upright man is to be found. All lie in ambush to shed blood, one hunts another with a net. ³Their hands are skilled at doing evil. The official demands a bribe, the judge judges for a price and the mighty decides as he pleases.

⁴Their kindness is like a brier, their justice worse than a thorn hedge. But the time of punishment has come, and now is the time of confusion.

⁵Do not rely on a friend nor trust an intimate companion. Be guarded in speech with the woman who shares your bed. ⁶For son treats father like a fool, daughter rebels against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. The enemies of each one are those of his household.

⁷As for me, I will watch expectantly for Yahweh, waiting hopefully for the God who saves me. My God will hear me.

Poem of exile—Jerusalem will rise

⁸Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; though I have fallen, I will rise again. Though I now dwell in darkness, Yahweh is my light.

⁹I will bear the wrath of Yahweh—for I have sinned against him—while he examines my cause and defends my rights.

- do justice is Amos’ message;
- to love mercy: see Hosea 2:21;
- to walk humbly with God: see Isaiah.

The psalm of hope which concludes the book was inserted here later, in the time of Exile.

The end (7:7) is similar to Habakkuk 3:17: the just one knows that while evil reigns, he must continue hoping for God’s justice.

Then he will bring me out to the light and I shall probe his justice.

¹⁰Then my enemy shall also see and shame will cover her. Did she not say, "Where is Yahweh, your God?" My eyes, then, shall rejoice: See how she is trampled like mud in the street!

¹¹The day is coming when your walls will be rebuilt and your boundaries extended.

Zec
9:10;
Ps 72:8

¹²On that day, they will come to you from Assyria to Egypt, from Tyre to the Euphrates, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain, ¹³while the earth will remain desolate because of its citizens and their deeds.

Ps 74:1

¹⁴Shepherd your people with your staff, shepherd the flock of your inheritance that dwells alone in the scrub, in the midst of a fertile land. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead ¹⁵as in the days of old, in the days when you went out of Egypt.

Show us your wonders. ¹⁶On seeing this, the nations will be put to shame, in the midst of all, their might. People will lay their hands upon their mouths and they will not believe the news.

Is 63:7

¹⁷They shall lick the dust like snakes, like creatures that crawl upon the ground. They will come, trembling out of their strongholds; they will be in fear of you.

Gen
3:14;
Ps 18:43

¹⁸Who is a God like you, who takes away guilt and pardons crime for the remnant of his inheritance?

Who is like you whose anger does not last? For you delight in merciful forgiveness.

¹⁹Once again you will show us your loving kindness and trample on our wrongs, casting all our sins into the depths of the sea.

²⁰Show faithfulness to Jacob, mercy to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

Lk 1:73;
Gen 22:
16-18;
28:13-
15



Nahum prophesied when the Assyrian power was collapsing, at the death of Ashurbanipal, the last king, in the year 626 B. C. In the year 612 B.C. the Medes and Babylonian allies attacked and destroyed Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians. Even before that, however, the Assyrians were losing their control over the people whom they had enslaved and who thoroughly hated them. The Jews were among them. Nahum's poems show the heart of a patriot who believes that the Lord governs the history of the nations.

What do you plot against Yahweh?

1 • ¹Oracle against Nineveh. This is the book of the vision which Nahum of Elkosh has seen.

Dt 7:10

²Yahweh is a jealous and avenging God, Yahweh takes vengeance in his wrath;

34:6;
Num
14:18

³Yahweh is slow to anger though immense in power. He does not overlook the evil. In storm and whirlwind is his path; clouds are the dust of his feet.

⁴He rebukes the sea and dries it; he drains rivers of their water. Bashan and Carmel wither; the blossoms of Lebanon fade.

⁵Before him the mountains quake and the hills melt; the earth trembles and all the people.

Rev
6:17

⁶Who can stand before his fury? Who can face his blazing anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are rent asunder.

⁷Yahweh is good for those who hope; in the day of trouble he shelters them. He remembers those who trust in him ⁸when the flood engulfs them.

He utterly destroys his adversaries and pursues his foes into darkness.

What are you plotting against him? Yahweh will bring it to an end, ⁹oppression will not rise a second time. Yahweh gives his foe no quarter, he stores up fury for his enemy.

¹⁰They will be entangled, devoured like thorns, and be consumed like dry stubble.

¹¹Yahweh will take off Judah his enemy

the one who plots evil.

¹²Thus Yahweh says to Judah: "Though they be strong and many they will be annihilated.

Though I had afflicted you, no more shall I afflict you.

¹³I will break their yoke from your neck and tear away your shackles."

¹⁴To the people of Nineveh, here is Yahweh's decree.

"No descendants shall bear your name.

I will abolish from your temple the carved image and the molten idol.

I will make your tomb an object of shame."

• **1.1** This introductory song presents the central theme of Nahum's prophecy: Yahweh is concerned about being acknowledged on earth as the only God; he is present in everything that takes place in nature, and above all, in the faithfulness towards his friends.

Trusting in God's words, in a terrible poem

Nahum prophesies the destruction of Nineveh blow by blow: it symbolizes liberation from all kinds of slavery.

Through Nahum, Scripture approves the happiness of all little people upon seeing the destruction of the powerful who ignored all their rights and dominated them through terror.

Is 40:9;
52:7;
Flom
10:15

2 ¹See, there on the mountains, the feet
of one
who brings good news, one who pro-
claims peace.

Judah, celebrate your feasts
and carry out your vows.
For the wicked have been destroyed,
they will not attack you any more.

Jer
51:12

³Yahweh will now restore
Jacob's magnificence, like Israel's
splendor.

For they had been plundered,
laid waste as a ravaged vineyard.

Nineveh shall fall

²Against Nineveh a destroyer
advances.

Watch the road, man the fortress;
brace yourselves, muster your forces.

⁴The shields of his soldiers are red;
his warriors are crimson-clad.
His chariots gleam as if on fire
when mustered in battle array,
while prancing horses and frenzied

horsemen

wait impatiently for bloody action.

⁵As chariots storm through the streets
and dash madly through the squares,
they look like flashing torches
or darting lightning bolts.

⁶The picked troops are called out;
ranks break at their charge.

Having set up the mantelet
they rushed toward the rampart.

⁷The river gates are thrown open,
and the palace defense collapses.

⁸The goddess is taken captive
together with all her handmaids,
moaning like doves and beating their
breasts.

⁹Nineveh looks like a pool
with its waters running away:
All flee: "Stop, stop!"

but no one comes back.

¹⁰All kinds of wealth, gold and silver—
it is an endless treasure, a heap of the
most precious things.

¹¹Waste and ruin, desolation and empti-
ness, failing hearts and trembling knees,
terror and agony on all blanched faces!

¹²Where now is the lion's cave,
the den of the cubs

where the lion would bring his prey,
and the cubs lie down undisturbed?

¹³The lion tore to pieces for his whelps,
and strangled for his mates;

he filled his caves with prey
and his dens with mangled flesh.

¹⁴Yahweh Sabaoth speaks:

I have come against you.

I will send up your chariots in smoke,
give your cubs to the sword;

wipe the earth clear of your plunder,
and your envoys' voices will be heard
no more.

The city of blood

3 ¹Woe to the bloody city, city of lies and
booty,

O city of unending plunder!

²But what! Crack of whips,
rumble of wheels and clatter of hoofs!

³See the frenzied chargers,
the flashing swords and glittering
spears,

the heaps of the wounded,
the dead and dying
—we trip over corpses!

⁴The harlot is paying for her harlotry,
her deadly charms, her sorcery.

She traded nations with her

prostitutions

and caught people by her spells.

⁵"I am against you," Yahweh Sabaoth
says.

"I will lift your skirts over your face.

I will show the nations your nakedness
and the kingdoms your disgrace.

⁶I will pelt you with filth,

I will treat you with contempt
and make of you a shameful show,

⁷so that all who look on you
will turn their backs in disgust
and say: Nineveh—a city of lust—is in
ruins.

Who will mourn for her?

Where can we find one to comfort her?

⁸Are you any better
than Thebes by the Nile,

surrounded by water,
her rampart the river,
and the water her wall?

⁹Ethiopia and Egypt were her stay,
Put and Libya were her allies,

¹⁰yet she was carried away
and held captive among the exiles.
Her infants were dashed to pieces

at the head of every road;
lots were cast for her nobles,
her great men bound in chains.

¹¹You, too, shall drink of this:
you will also hide from your enemies.

Rev
17:1;
18:3;
19:2

Is 47:3

Ezk
29:3

2K 8:12

Rev
6:13

¹²Your fortresses are like fig trees
laden with early-ripening fruits
which fall, when shaken,
into the waiting mouths.

¹³Look at your braves—they are like
women!

Your gates are wide open,
the bars consumed by fire,
and the enemies freely enter.

¹⁴Brace yourselves for the siege: draw
water,

strengthen the bulwark,
tread the clay and the mortar
and repair the brickwork.

Jl 2:3

¹⁵There, the fire will devour you
and the sword will cut you down,
though you were numerous as locusts,
beyond count like grasshoppers.

Ezk
28:16

¹⁶You had multiplied your merchants
more than the stars of the sky;

¹⁷like grasshoppers were your officials
and your soldiers like swarms of locusts
which settle on the walls on a cold day.
But the sun appears; they fly away
and they are gone; no one knows
where.

¹⁸O king of Assyria, your shepherds
slumber,

Jer
51:39

your nobles lie down fast asleep,
while over the mountains your people
scatter,

and there is no one to gather them up.
¹⁹Nothing can heal your wounds; your
injury is fatal.

All clap their hands
when they hear about your fall,
for who has not suffered constantly
the plague of your cruelty?

HABAKKUK



In the Scriptures the prophet Habakkuk is the first one to dare call God to account. For centuries, faith had been announcing God's justice. However, this justice had not always been obvious. After many kept silent about their doubts, Habakkuk was the first biblical author who asked boldly: Why does the Lord allow injustice to triumph? Why, when he punishes one oppressor, does he replace him with someone worse?

The answer is twofold:

– The Lord keeps secret how he rules the world and all he asks is that we remain faithful: *the upright will live by his faithfulness.*

– The prophet contemplates the glory of the Lord who will judge in the end.

Habakkuk spoke his oracles from the years 605-600 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar, who had just destroyed the cruel Assyria, became very powerful himself and plundered Israel.

Why do you make me see injustice?

1 • ¹This is the message and the vision of Habakkuk, the prophet.

²Yahweh, how long will I cry for help while you pay no attention to me? I denounce the oppression and you do not save.

³Why do you make me see injustice?

Are you pleased to look on tyranny? All I see is outrage, violence and quarrels.

⁴That is why the law has been put aside and just decrees are no longer issued. The wicked overrule the upright and they get crooked sentences.

First reply

⁵Look, traitors, and pay attention; be amazed and astounded, for I am going to do in your own days, something that you would not believe if you were told it.

⁶I am going to call the Chaldeans, that terrifying and violent people, who raid to the ends of the earth, to seize the lands of others. ⁷I call a terrible and dangerous nation who obey no other law but their own will. ⁸Their horses are speedier than leopards, fiercer than wolves on the plain; their riders gallop on, and come from afar; they swoop like the eagle descending on its prey.

⁹When they launch themselves for an attack, pushed forward by the desert wind, they round up prisoners like sand. ¹⁰These people make fun of kings and laugh at

Jer
20:8;
14:9

Jer 6:7;
Am
3:10

Is 29:9;
Act
13:41

• **1.1** Two complaints from the prophet and two answers from God:

– Verses 1-4. First complaint: Why is there so much wickedness in Judah?

– Verses 5-11. God's ironic answer: Shortly the Chaldeans will restore order by invading and plundering everything.

– Verses 12-16. Second complaint: Why does Yahweh use such means as the Chaldean invasion to restore his justice?

2:1-4. Yahweh's answer: One day it will be clear that the good and the evil ones are not treated the same. Those who remain faithful will be saved.

princes; they make light of fortified cities, for they build up an embankment and seize them. ¹¹Thus they come and go like the wind! Their strength is their god!

Ps 90:1 ¹²But you, are you not Yahweh from past ages? You, my holy God, you cannot die. You have set these people to serve your justice and you have made them firm as a rock, to fulfill your punishment.

Ps 5:6 ¹³Yahweh, your eyes are too pure to tolerate wickedness and you cannot look on oppression. Why, then, do you look on treacherous people and watch in silence while the evildoer swallows up one better than himself?

¹⁴You treat human beings like the fish in the sea, like reptiles who are nobody's concern. ¹⁵This nation catches all on its hook, pulls them out with its net and piles them up in its dragnet. ¹⁶Pleased and delighted at their catch, they offer sacrifices to their net and burn incense to their drag-nets, since these supplied them with fish in plenty and provided them with food in abundance. ¹⁷Will they continue, then, to constantly empty their nets, slaughtering nations without mercy?

Second reply: the upright will live by his faithfulness

Is 21:8 **2** ¹I will stand in my watchtower and take up position on my battlements; I will see what he replies, if there is an answer to my question.

Is 8:1; Jer 30:2; Rev 1:19 ²Then Yahweh answered me and said,

³"Write down the vision, inscribe it on tablets so it can be easily read, ³since this is a vision for an appointed

Dn 8:19; 10:14; Heb 10:37; 2P 3:9

• **2.1** The divine answer remains mysterious. Later, God will clearly reveal how he rewards the best beyond this life. Before that moment comes it was difficult to clarify the mystery: Apparently the misfortunes which were announced as God's punishment affected everyone equally. After Habakkuk, Jeremiah asked the same question (Jer 12:1); faced with the unbelief of his companions, Ezekiel tried to reaffirm the justice of Yahweh towards everyone (Ezk18); the Book of Job looks for the solution; but its answer will only be partial.

• **6.** Habakkuk reveals the destiny of the conqueror who, for a while, will terrorize the world.

time; it will not fail but will be fulfilled in due time. If it delays, wait for it, for it will come, and will not be deferred. Look:

⁴I don't look with favor on the one who gives way; the upright, on the other hand, will live by his faithfulness." Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38

⁵The grasping conqueror is always ready to devour, he enlarges his mouth like the netherworld; he is as insatiable as death, he seizes on all the nations and monopolizes all the people for himself. ⁶But will not all the people mock him, as with one voice? Will they not write fierce satires to show him up? They will say, Is 5:14

Against the oppressor

• Woe to him who amasses what is not his and fills himself with extorted pledges. ⁷Your creditors will come suddenly; your money collectors will waken and take away all your goods.

⁸Since you have plundered so many nations, shedding blood, stripping the land, their cities and homes, all the remaining nations will turn on you. Jer 50:29; Rev 18:6

⁹Woe to him who raises his house on unjust profits and fixes his nest so high that he thinks he can thereby escape misfortune! Is 14:13; Jer 49:16

¹⁰You have willed the disgrace of your house; you draw evil on your own head. ¹¹The very stones of your walls cry out against you and the rafters reply from the roof. Lk 19:40

The Assyrians have used weapons to overpower nations, just as other conquerors in history have dominated by their technological advances. They have taken over the control of trade, natural resources from which they take a large portion in the name of services which they can no longer do without. They have imposed their religion, their culture and their own style of development. Uprooted from their slower rhythm of growth, or from their wiser but less efficient civilization, or from their more nonchalant lifestyle, these dominated people now lag behind the powerful of their time, running the risk of losing their souls and of ending up in the garbage bin of history. Habakkuk announces the judgment of God.

Mic 3:10 ¹²Woe to the one who builds a city on bloody foundations and sets up a town by means of evil! ¹³Has Yahweh of hosts not willed that the work of the nations go to the fire and the people toil for nothing?

Is 11:9 (¹⁴For as the waters fill the sea, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.)

Gen 9:20 ¹⁵Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors and drugs them, to make them drunk, so that everyone looks at their nakedness! ¹⁶This will bring you more shame than glory. You will also drink and uncover your foreskin. The cup turns over in Yahweh's hand and pours out onto you: disgrace will swallow your glory.

¹⁷The violence you did in Lebanon will befall you and the animals will devour you, since you slaughtered human beings, destroyed the country with its cities and put an end to all who lived there.

Is 40:19; 44:9; Ps 115:4 ¹⁸What use is a statue? Why do the sculptors make them? Why these images and deceiving answers? Why do their makers trust them and produce mute idols? ¹⁹Woe to the one who says to a piece of wood, "Wake up," and to a dumb stone, "Get up." Can it give any answer? For, even though it is plated with gold and silver, there is not a single breath of life in it.

1K 8:30; Mic 1:2; Rev 8:1; Zep 1:7; Zec 2:17 ²⁰But Yahweh lives in his holy temple: let the whole earth be silent before him!

Prayer of Habakkuk

3 • ¹Prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet. To the tune of a dirge.

²I have heard, Yahweh, of your renown; I stand in awe of your work, O Yahweh. In the middle of years make it known; in your wrath even, remember mercy.

Ne 1:7; Jdg 5:4 ³God comes from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran.

His glory shrouds the heavens,
his praise fills the earth,
⁴his splendor is like the daylight

with rays flashing from his hand,
radiating from his hidden power.

⁵Pestilence goes before him,
plague follows close behind.

⁶He stands and the earth sways;
he looks and the nations tremble.

The ancient mountains crumble,
the time-honored hills collapse.

⁷I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,
the pavilions of Midian in anguish.

⁸Was your anger against the rivers,
Yahweh?

Was your wrath against the sea
that you drive your steeds
with your invincible chariots?

⁹You bare and ready your bow
and set upon it your arrow.

With rivers you cleave the earth.

¹⁰At your sight the mountains writhe.
Torrents of water ragingly sweep by,
the deep roaring, lifting its waves high.

¹¹The sun and moon stood still
at the glint of your flying arrows,
at the gleam of your flashing spears.

¹²You stride the earth in wrath,
you trample the nations in rage.

¹³You came out to redeem your people,
to save your anointed one—
you crush the head of the wicked,
you lay him bare from head to foot.

¹⁴You pierce with your shafts his warriors,
who came like a whirlwind to scatter
us in joy,

to devour the wretched quietly.

¹⁵You trample the waters with your
horses,
amid the churning of the great seas.

¹⁶I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound.
Decay crept into my bones;

my legs tottered under my body.

Yet I wait confidently for the day of
distress,

when we face the people coming
against us.

The last verse: *Yahweh lives in his holy temple: let the whole earth be silent before him!* (v. 20) introduces the triumphant manifestation of Yahweh in the following chapter.

• **3.1** The prophet calls on Yahweh begging him to reveal himself. Then he describes his triumphant coming through a series of poetic images, recalling his past interventions in the

history of Israel: the passage through the Red Sea, Sinai, Deborah's victory.

I wait confidently for the day of distress (v. 16; see Is 8:11). *Yet in God my Savior will I exult* (v. 18): these words are found in Mary's canticle (Lk 1:47). In the midst of crises and anguish, the just one steps upon the heights (v. 19).

Hos 9:2;
Jer 5:17

¹⁷For though the fig trees blossom not,
nor grapes be on the vines,
though the olive crop fail
and the fields produce no food,
though the flock be lost from the fold,
and the herd be gone from the stalls,
¹⁸yet in Yahweh will I rejoice,

Lk 1:47;
Is 61:10;
Mic 7:7

in God, my savior, will I exult.
¹⁹My Lord Yahweh is my stronghold;
he makes my feet as fleeting as the
hinds;
he steadies my steps upon the heights.
*For the choirmaster: with stringed
instruments.*

Ps
18:34;
Dt 32:13

ZEPHANIAH



Around the year 630 B.C., Zephaniah's voice breaks the silence of the seventy-year lull, during which they had not heard the word of God. Isaiah concluded his mission around the year 690 B.C., and after that, the faithful of Judah went through more than fifty years of persecution in the reign of Manasseh.

2K 22:1 **1** When Josiah, son of Ammon, reigned in Judah, the word of Yahweh was addressed to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah. He said:

Jer 7:20 ² "I will wipe out everything from the face of the earth. ³ I will put an end to humans and animals, to the birds of heaven and the fish of the sea. I will wipe humankind from the face of the earth. ⁴ I will raise my hand to punish Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will bring out of that place all the remnants of Baal with their priests.

Dt 4:19; 2K 21:3 ⁵ I will also drive away those who kneel on the roofs to worship the stars, those who invoke at the same time Yahweh and Milcom, ⁶ those who have deserted Yahweh and no longer look toward him or consult him.

Acts 2:20 ⁷ Silence before Yahweh! For his day is near: Yahweh has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his invited guests. ⁸ Yahweh says, 'On the day that sacrifice is made, I will call to account the officials, the king's sons and all who clothe themselves in foreign fashion. ⁹ I will also give the corresponding punishment to everyone who jumps over the threshold without stepping

on it and fills the house of their lords with the fruits of their crimes and thefts.'

¹⁰ On that day, a great cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the new city and a frightful noise from the nearby hills. ¹¹ Wail, inhabitants of the lower district, for all the traders have disappeared, all who counted the silver have perished.

¹² On that day, I will explore Jerusalem with torches, and call to account those who have sunk in their vices and think in their hearts: Well, Yahweh does not do good or evil! ¹³ Their riches will be pillaged, their houses demolished.

You have built houses but will not live in them. You have planted vineyards but you will not taste the wine."

A day of wrath

• ¹⁴ The great day of Yahweh is near, it already comes. Jl 2:1

Its sound is so frightening that even the valiant cries out in terror.

¹⁵ It is a day of wrath, anguish and distress; Am 5:18; Jl 2:2

a day of destruction and devastation, of gloom and darkness; it is a day of dark clouds

• **1.14** Zephaniah presents the *day of Yahweh* in a threatening way. The Jews maintained that the coming of Yahweh would be a liberation for the chosen people. This would allow them to continue to live without justice or faith.

The prophet knows that Yahweh will achieve his own designs; his salvation is not what the indifferent imagine it to be and it will begin with the destruction of the unconverted.

¹⁶and fog, when the trumpet sounds the call for battle, and the enemy attacks the fortresses and the high fortified towers.

¹⁷I will bring misfortune on these people and they will grope along like the blind. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their remains will lie like dung.

¹⁸Neither their gold nor their silver will rescue them when the anger of God burns against them. The land of Judah will be burned in the fire of his zeal, when he destroys even the traces of all who dwell in that land.

2 ¹Gather together and assemble, O shameless people, ²that you may be scattered by the wind like a heap of straw when the anger of Yahweh comes upon you!

³Seek Yahweh, all you poor of the land, who fulfill his commands, do justice and be meek; and perhaps you will find refuge on the day Yahweh comes to judge.

Is 14:28; JI 3:4 ⁴Gaza shall be a desert; Ashkelon completely destroyed to its very foundation. ⁵Woe to the nation of the Cherethites on the seacoast, for Yahweh has spoken against it: "O Canaan, land of the Philistines, I will destroy you so that no one will be left in you."

⁶The seacoast shall be like pastures where the shepherds and their flocks go and the lambs gather. ⁷This region will belong to the remnant of the tribe of Judah; there, they shall bring their flocks to graze; and they will sleep at night in the houses of Ashkelon, when Yahweh their God comes to visit them and bring their captives back.

Is 15-16 ⁸Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel says, "I have heard the affronts of Moab and the mockery of the Ammonites who insulted my people and extended their boundaries at the expense of my territory.

Gen 19:24 ⁹Therefore I swear that, as I live, Moab shall become like Sodom, and Ammon like Gomorrah, as desert indeed. The remnant of my people shall plunder them, the survivors of my nation shall receive them as an inheritance. ¹⁰This shall be their lot, in payment for their pride, for they

insulted the people of the God of hosts and have enriched themselves at my people's expense." ¹¹Yahweh will be inflexible with them when he calls to account all the gods of the earth. ¹²Then the pagans who live on the islands shall worship him, each in his own land.

"The threat of my sword also hangs over you, Ethiopians." ¹³Yahweh will raise his hand against the north and reduce Assyria to ruins. ¹⁴He will leave Nineveh in utter desolation, barren as the desert. Herds of all kinds of animals shall find shelter in her, and even the pelican and the heron shall dwell in her ruins; the owl shall hoot from the window and the raven from the threshold. Nh 2-3

¹⁵The cedar has been uprooted! So Is 47:8, 10 will be the end of the happy city, that felt secure in her own power and said to herself: I; and no one, but me. Why is it, now, a heap of ruins, where animals take shelter? Everyone who passes by her hisses, making signs with the hand.

Against Jerusalem

3 ¹Woe to the rebellious, the defiled, the city that oppresses! ²She did not pay attention to the call nor accept the correction; she did not trust Yahweh; nor did she approach her God. ³Her kings are like roaring lions, her rulers like evening wolves, that do not leave even a bone for the next day. ⁴Her prophets are blabbermouths and treacherous people; her priests defile whatever is sacred, with no respect for the law. Jer 6:6; Ezk 22:25-27

⁵However, Yahweh, the Just One, is in her midst; he never commits injustice. Every morning he says what must be done; but the unjust do not even feel ashamed.

⁶I have wiped out the nations, demolished their watchtowers, left their streets abandoned; and no one walks in them; their cities have been leveled, and no one lives there.

⁷I thought: "If you took into account my correction" I said: "she will not forget my threats." But you were eager to behave still more corruptly.

⁸Therefore, wait for me, says Yahweh, for the day when I come to accuse, when I have the nations gathered and the kingdoms assembled, to vent my wrath on you with all the fury of my anger. Then the fire of my jealous wrath will burn the whole land.

Is 6:5; Mal 1:11 ⁹At that time, I will give truthful lips to the pagan nations, that all of them may call on the name of Yahweh, and serve him with the same zeal. Is 18:7 ¹⁰From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia they will bring offerings to me.

God in the midst of the meek

Is 54:4 • ¹¹On that day, you will no longer be ashamed of all your deeds, when you were unfaithful to me; I will have removed from your midst the conceited and arrogant; and my holy mountain will no longer be for you, a pretext for boasting.

¹²I will leave within you a poor and meek people who seek refuge in God.

Is 53:9; Rev 14:5 ¹³The remnant of Israel will not act unjustly nor will they speak falsely, nor will deceitful words be found in their mouths. They will eat and rest, with none to threaten them.

Is 12:6; 54:1; Zec 2:14; 9:9 ¹⁴Cry out with joy, O daughter of Zion; rejoice, O people of Israel! Sing joyfully with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem!

Is 40:2 ¹⁵Yahweh has lifted your sentence

and has driven your enemies away. Yahweh, the King of Israel is with you; do not fear any misfortune.

¹⁶On that day, they will say to Jerusalem: Do not be afraid nor let your hands tremble, ¹⁷for Yahweh your God is within you, Yahweh, saving warrior. Jer 32:41; Is 62:5 He will jump for joy on seeing you, for he has revived his love. For you he will cry out with joy, as you do in the days of the feast.

¹⁸I will drive away the evil I warned you about, and you will no longer be ashamed.

¹⁹On that day, I will face your oppressors; I will save the lame sheep and bring the lost back into the fold. I will give them renown and honor in all the lands where humiliation was your lot. Ezk 34:16; Mic 4:6

²⁰On that day, I will be good to you; Is 61:9 and gather you, to make you famous and honorable, among all the peoples of the earth, when I bring back the captives before your eyes,—this is Yahweh's word.

• **3.11** This is the first vision of God's people, a *poor and meek people* (v. 12).

The destruction on the Day of Yahweh has left a remnant in Zion. This is the first time that those who wait for God are called poor. It is not mainly a question of being economically poor, but rather of having the attitude of those who have nothing and are open to receive everything from God. The word poverty formerly implied failure; now it will be the condition needed to seek God. After that time, the "poor of Yahweh" will mean all those in Israel who hope to find Yahweh. The Gospel, especially the Gospel

of Luke, will proclaim the happiness of the poor (see Lk 6:20).

Yahweh will be in Jerusalem to share his happiness with them. The holy God suddenly shows that he is like a young man in love who is not concerned about social considerations.

Cry out with joy, O daughter of Zion; Yahweh, the King of Israel, is with you; do not fear any misfortune (vv. 14-15). In the Gospel of Luke, the same words are addressed to Mary at the Annunciation: "Rejoice, the Lord is with you. Do not fear, Mary, you will bear the Savior" (Lk 1:28).



HAGGAI

Haggai is the first of the postexilic prophets. These three: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi proclaim the word of God in an entirely new age. The former prophets denounced Israel's sins and announced the imminent Judgment. Now, after the trial of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile in Babylon, the Jewish community must rebuild the nation; and this is when the prophets demand that, first, the temple must be rebuilt. It is a fact that the Jews (and this is true for us, too) had to serve God before asking him for the solution to their problems.

Haggai's message is prophetic in another sense: it initiates a new stage in Sacred History in which the growth of the Jewish people will depend on their faithfulness to the law and on their worship. The temple is already the dwelling place of God among his people. They have to wait also for a mysterious coming of God: that day when he will come to visit his people.

Against those who think only of their own house

Zec 1:1

1 In the second year of the reign of Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, a word of Yahweh was directed to the prophet Haggai, for the benefit of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

² "So says Yahweh of hosts: This people claim that the time to rebuild the house of Yahweh has not yet come. ³ Well now, hear what I have to say through the prophet Haggai:

2S 7:2

⁴ Is this the time for you to live in your well-built houses while this house is a heap of ruins? ⁵ Think about your ways: ⁶ you have sown much but harvested little; you eat and drink, but are not satisfied; you clothe yourselves, but still feel cold; and the laborer puts the money he earned in a tattered purse.

Zec 8:10

⁷ Now think about what you must do: ⁸ go to the mountain and look for wood to rebuild the house. This will make me happy; and I will feel deeply honored, says Yahweh. ⁹ You expected much, but it turned out to be very little. I blew away what you had piled up. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, while each of you goes running home. ¹⁰ Therefore the heavens have withheld rain, and the earth has not produced anything. ¹¹ I sent drought upon the valley and the hills, upon the wheat and the vines, the oil, and whatever the soil produces; upon people and animals, and upon any work of your hands."

Lev 26:19

Jer 14:2

¹² Now, when Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, ¹³ and all the people heard these words of the prophet Haggai, whom

Zec 8:11

Yahweh had sent to speak to them, they paid attention to what Yahweh had told them; and the people were filled with respect for God.

¹⁴Then Haggai, the messenger of Yahweh, passed on to the people this word of Yahweh, "I am with you." Then Yahweh moved the heart of Zerubbabel, Joshua and all the people, and they began rebuilding the house of Yahweh of hosts, their God. ¹⁵It was the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.

2 ¹On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, of the second year of the reign of Darius, this word of Yahweh was sent through the prophet Haggai, ²"Give this message to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the high priest, and to all the people:

The glory of the new temple

³Is there left among you one of those who saw this house long ago, in the time of its glory? What do they think, of what they see now? Is it not a very little thing? ⁴But I say to you, Zerubbabel, Joshua and my people: do not be discouraged. Begin to work, for I am with you, says Yahweh. ⁵Do not be afraid, for my spirit is in your midst.

⁶Thus says Yahweh of hosts, within a short while, I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the continents. ⁷Then I will shake all the nations; and bring in the treasures of the whole world. I will fill this house with glory, says Yahweh. ⁸I will have as much silver and gold as I wish. ⁹The renown of this temple will be greater than before, and in this place I will give peace," says Yahweh of hosts.

• **2.3** With utter frankness, Haggai points out how modest was the work they have achieved. It was better that way, since they did not build the temple for the sake of the temple to be proud of it; but rather, to show that they had surrendered to Yahweh.

Do not be afraid, for my spirit is in your midst (v. 5). We already pointed out that Spirit achieves union. Here the prophet emphasizes that Spirit removes our fears.

I will fill this house with glory (v. 7): the very poverty of the temple invites God to hasten the time of his visitation, to fill it with his glory. In a short time, Yahweh will end this transitory world, in which the Jews are living, and will establish his kingdom.

¹⁰On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh was directed again to the prophet Haggai. ¹¹He should ask the priests to resolve the following case in accordance with the law: ¹²"If someone brings consecrated meat wrapped in his cloak, and the edge of his cloak touches bread, cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will all these become consecrated food?" They immediately answered, "No."

¹³Haggai went on to say, "But if someone becomes unclean by having touched a dead body, and then touches any of these things, will all these become unclean?" This time the priests said, "Yes."

¹⁴Then Haggai addressed them, "So it is with this people and this nation before me, says Yahweh, so with everything they do and all they offer here: all is unclean.

¹⁵Pay attention to this from now on: how was it with you, before the rebuilding of the temple was begun? ¹⁶You expected twenty sacks of wheat, but there were only ten. You thought of drawing out fifty measures of wine but there were only twenty. ¹⁷I spoiled all your work with blight, mildew and hail. Yet none returned to me, says the Lord.

¹⁸Pay attention, then, from now on, since the first stone of the Sanctuary of Yahweh was laid. ¹⁹See if the wheat, the vine, the fig tree and the pomegranate go on yielding little! From this day on, I will bless your olive trees."

Promises to Zerubbabel

• ²⁰The word of Yahweh came again to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the same month, ²¹"Say to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah: ²²I will overthrow

• 10. The question posed to the priests was in line with the mentality of those days (see commentary on Lev 8:1 and 11:1): there are "clean" or "holy" things; and persons that may come into contact with God, and others, which are "unclean" or "profane," that cannot enter the temple. Besides, "uncleanliness" is seen as something which can be transmitted through contact.

The conclusion is the following: These people are unclean as long as they do not provide for their God a house worthy of him; thus all their prayers and offerings are unclean, simply for having passed through their hands.

• 20. Just like Zechariah (Zec 6:12), Haggai thinks that Zerubbabel, a descendant of David,

Ezr 3:10

Heb 12:26

Is 60:7

Zec 8:12

Zec 7:3

Lev 22:4

Is 1:13

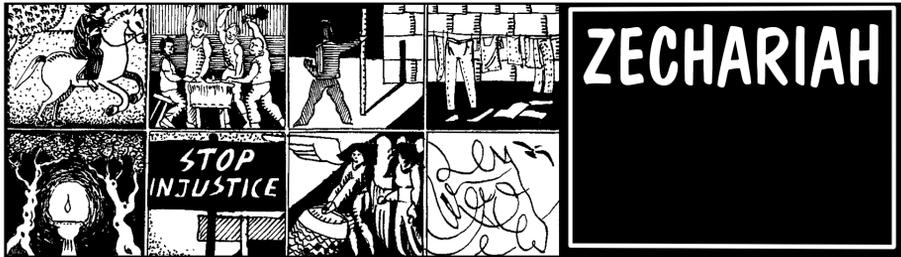
Am 4:9

the thrones of the kings and destroy the power of the nations. I will overturn the chariot and its driver; the horses and their riders shall tumble down to the ground. They will kill one another. ²³On that day,

I will take you, Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel; and for me you will be like a ring on my finger with my initials on it. For I have chosen you, says Yahweh of hosts.”

might be the Messiah who will restore the nation of Israel. He does not clearly say so, but suggests it in interpreting a word of God as congratulating Zerubbabel. The prophet was wrong

in that; his mistake shows how divine truth and human interpretation—always fallible—can be intertwined even in the words of an authentic prophet.



Like Haggai, Zechariah took part in the “restoration” of God’s people and the temple, when the Jews returned from Babylon (in the year 520 B.C.).

When they returned from exile, the fabulous promises of the prophets while they were captives in Babylon were not fulfilled (see Is 40:55). So they continued to hope. Zechariah sees their building of the temple as a symbol: a new age has begun and the Lord is preparing for the day of his salvation. The visions found in the first six chapters teach the Jews who are gathered round their temple, that they must be watchful and wait for the Day of the Lord.

The Second Part of the Book of Zechariah

Chapters 9–14 are the work of another prophet who lived two centuries later, possibly when the famous conqueror, Alexander, came to the Eastern countries. He teaches the Jews that they must not be afraid: the victory of God and the coming of his kingdom will take place in the midst of very painful events.

Hb 1:1 **1** • ¹In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo:

Mal 3:7 ²“Yahweh was very angry with your ancestors. ³Then you will tell them these words of Yahweh Sabaoth: ‘Return to me and I will return to you.’ ⁴Do not be like your ancestors, whom the earlier prophets warned, reiterating to them Yahweh Sabaoth’s words: ‘Turn from your evil ways and your wicked deeds.’ But they would not listen or pay attention to me. Yahweh asks you, ⁵“Where are your ancestors now? Those prophets also died; ⁶but my words and decrees, entrusted to my servants, the prophets, overtook your ancestors. They repented and confessed: “Yahweh Sabaoth has treated us just as he had determined to do, according to our ways and deeds.”

Jer 3:22;
Jas 4:8

Is 55:11;
1K 8:47;
Dn 9:10

The visions

⁷On the twenty-fourth of Shebat, the eleventh month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to the

prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, in the following manner.

⁸In a vision at night, I saw a man riding a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine, and behind him were red, brown and white horses. ⁹I asked, “What are these, my lord?” The angel with whom I was talking answered, “You will know.” ¹⁰The man standing among the myrtle trees spoke, “They are those whom Yahweh sent to patrol the earth.” ¹¹These then reported to Yahweh’s angel standing among the myrtle trees, “We have patrolled the whole earth and found it peaceful and tranquil.”

¹²The angel of Yahweh spoke, “O Yahweh of hosts, how long will you be without mercy for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah which you have afflicted in anger these seventy years?” ¹³Yahweh replied with comforting words to the angel who spoke to me. ¹⁴This angel then turned to me and said, “Proclaim this word which Yahweh Sabaoth speaks: ‘I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, ¹⁵but I am very

Am 7:1;
Dn 7:1

Rev 6:1

Dn 7:16

Rev 5:6

Jer 25:11;
Dn 9:2

Is 54:7;
Hos 11:8

angry with complacent nations. At first, I was only a little angry with Jerusalem, but they made things worse.¹⁵ ¹⁶Therefore Yahweh says: 'I will turn again with mercy to Jerusalem, where my house will be rebuilt and the measuring line stretched.'"

Then Yahweh Sabaoth said, ¹⁷"Proclaim this as well: 'My towns will once more overflow with prosperity; Yahweh will again comfort Zion and make Jerusalem his favorite.'"

The second vision

2 ¹I raised my eyes and saw four horns. ²I asked the angel who spoke to me what these were, and he answered, "These horns are the nations that scattered Judah and Jerusalem." ³Yahweh then showed me four blacksmiths, and I asked, "What are they coming to do?"

⁴He answered, "Here are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one dared raise his head. But these blacksmiths have come to strike down the power of the nations that scattered the people of Judah."

The third vision

⁵Raising my eyes again, I saw a man with a measuring line in his hand. I asked, "Where are you going?" ⁶He answered, "I'm going to measure Jerusalem, to find its width and its length." ⁷As the angel who spoke to me came forward, another angel met him ⁸and said, "Run and tell this to that young man: 'Jerusalem will remain unwallled because of its multitude of people and livestock.' ⁹For this is the word of Yahweh: I, myself, will be around her like a wall of fire, and also within her, in glory."

¹⁰"Come, come! Flee from the land of the north," says Yahweh, to all those whom he scattered to the four winds of heaven.

• **1.1** Zechariah is blessed with a series of night visions in which the plan of God, fixed and determined in heaven, is revealed to him. The events will certainly take place.

– First vision, 1:7-17, apparently nothing in the external situation leads one to think that the day of the Lord is drawing near. However, the Lord is watching and does not forget Jerusalem.

– Second vision, 2:1-4, the powers which will destroy their political enemies are already in place.

– Third vision, 2:5-9, if now the Jews have to protect Jerusalem with walls, God will shortly provide complete security.

¹¹"Come, escape O Zion, you who dwell in Babylon." ¹²For thus Yahweh Sabaoth says, after his glory sent me to condemn the nations that have plundered you, "Whoever touches you touches the apple of my eye. ¹³Look, I will raise my hand against those nations, and they will be plundered by their slaves." Thus you will know that Yahweh Sabaoth has sent me.

A call to the daughter of Zion

• ¹⁴"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for I am about to come, I shall dwell among you," says Yahweh.

¹⁵"On that day, many nations will join Yahweh and be my people, but my dwelling is among you." ¹⁶The people of Judah will be for Yahweh as his portion in his holy land. He will choose Jerusalem again.

¹⁷Keep still in Yahweh's presence, for he comes, having risen from his holy dwelling."

Fourth vision: the Messiah comes soon

3 • ¹He showed me, then, the high priest Joshua, standing before the angel of Yahweh. At Joshua's right side stood Satan, ready to accuse him. ²But the angel of Yahweh said to Satan, "May Yahweh rebuke you, Satan! Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem—may he rebuke you! Is not this man a burning brand snatched from the fire?"

³Clad in filthy garments, Joshua stood before the angel, ⁴who said to those in front of him, "Take off his filthy garments." Then turning to Joshua, he said, "See, I have taken away your guilt. Now I will clothe you with rich garments." ⁵He added, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they

• **2.14** In the following we have one of the two calls to the captives: a call to rejoicing because God lives with his people. We now have more motives for rejoicing. In the Scriptures the expression *Daughter of Zion* is one of the many names for the people of God.

Zechariah foretells the new times when he says that God will be permanently at work in Zion, figure of the Church in which all people of the earth will gather together.

• **3.1** This new vision of the high priest, Joshua, seems to predict the renewal of the priesthood. In the beginning, Joshua is identified with the whole people, sad and in mourning to atone

Is 51:3

Dn 7:8;
Rev
13:1Rev
21:5Is 48:20;
Rev
18:4

Dt 32:10

Zep
3:14;
Is 52:9Zep 1:7;
Acts
2:20Jd 1:9;
Am 4:11

put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, as the angel of Yahweh looked on.

⁶The angel of Yahweh gave Joshua this assurance, ⁷“Listen to this word of Yahweh Sabaoth: ‘If you walk in my ways and heed my charge, you shall rule my house and keep my courts, and I will give you free access among those standing here. ⁸Listen further, O high priest Joshua, and your associates who join in council with you: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. ⁹See, I am setting (before Joshua) a stone with seven eyes. I myself will engrave an inscription on it, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. ¹⁰On that day, you will invite one another under your vines and fig trees.’ This is what Yahweh Sabaoth says.”

The fifth vision

4 ¹The angel who talked with me returned, and shook me, as one does to wake another from sleep. ²He asked, “What do you see?” I answered, “I see a lamp stand all of gold, with a bowl on top. On the stand are seven lamps and there are seven pipes to feed them. ³There are also two olive trees, one at the right of the bowl and another at the left.” ⁴I asked the angel, “What are these, my lord?” ⁵He replied with a question, “Don’t you know what they are?” I answered, “No, my lord.”

^{10b}He explained, “These seven are the eyes of Yahweh which range throughout the earth.”

¹¹I asked the angel, “What are these two olive trees to the right and left of the lamp stand?” (¹²Before he could reply I asked again, “What are these two extensions of the olive trees, which are emptying out the golden oil through the two golden pipes?”) ¹³His reply was a question. “Don’t you know what these are?” I answered, “No, my lord.” ¹⁴He said, “These are the two anointed with fresh oil, who serve the Lord of the whole earth.”

for sin. Later Joshua is alone and announces the future priesthood, that of Christ, appointed by God as the mediator between him and humankind.

The Branch (v. 8). This name was to designate the Messiah. However, let us take note of 6:12; this last text perhaps referred at first to Zerubbabel, descendant of kings (see Acts 2:21 and Mt 1:12). But Zerubbabel later fell into oblivion and power passed to the priests. The text was, no doubt, altered in favor of the high

⁶This is a word of Yahweh for Zerubbabel, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit.”

⁷“What are you, O mighty mountains? You will be leveled before Zerubbabel. He will quarry, from you to the last stone which crowns the temple amid shouts of blessing, blessing on it!”

⁸The word of Yahweh then came to me, ⁹“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands also shall finish it. (Then you will know that Yahweh Sabaoth has sent me to you.) ¹⁰Perhaps the beginning seems a small thing to you, yet, you will rejoice on that day, to see the crowning stone in the hands of Zerubbabel.”

The sixth vision

5 ¹Again, I raised my eyes and saw a flying scroll. ²He asked me, “What do you see?” And I answered, “A flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide.”

³He said to me, “This is the curse going forth throughout the earth. On one side it is written, that every thief shall be banished; on the other side, that everyone who swears falsely shall be expelled. ⁴I will send it out to the house of the thief, as well as to the house of anyone who swears falsely. It will lodge there and destroy the house—timber, stone and everything.”

The seventh vision

⁵Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said, “Look up, and see what this is that is coming forth.” ⁶I asked, “What is it?” He answered, “This is a bushel container. This is the guilt of the people throughout the land.” ⁷The lead cover was lifted, and, there, sitting inside, was a woman. ⁸“This is wickedness,” he said and thrust the woman inside the bushel, stopping the opening with the lead cover.

⁹I looked up and saw two winged women coming; their wings were like that

priest. From then on, for many Jews the Messiah would be of priestly origin.

• **4.1** Fifth vision: the new Israel will be subject to civil and religious authorities and both will be faithful to God.

Sixth vision: criminals and thieves will be expelled from the new city.

Seventh vision: evil itself will be rejected.

Eighth vision: those sent by the Lord already prepare the realization of his plan for Salvation.

of a stork. As they lifted the bushel into the air, ¹⁰I asked the angel who was speaking to me, “Where are they taking the bushel?” ¹¹He answered, “To Babylonia, to build a temple for it and set it down on a plinth.”

The eighth vision

Rev 6:
2-8

6 ¹Once more, I raised my eyes and saw four chariots coming out, from between two mountains of bronze. ²Harnessed to the first chariot were red horses, to the second, black horses, ³to the third, white horses, and to the fourth, spotted horses; all of them strong. ⁴I asked the angel talking with me, “What are these, my lord?”

⁵The angel replied, “These are the four winds of heaven, going forth, after presenting themselves before the Lord of the whole earth. ⁶The chariot with the black horses is going to the north country and the white ones are going after them, but the spotted ones are going to the south country.

⁷All these strong ones are scattering; they have sought permission to go, and walk about, over the earth.” The Lord had said, ‘Go! Walk over the earth!’ So they are doing so.” ⁸Then he cried out to me, “Look, those have just gone to the land of the north; and they will set my spirit at rest in the land of the north.”

⁹The word of Yahweh came to me, ¹⁰“Take offerings from the returned captives, from the hands of Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, and go this very day to the house of Josiah, Zephaniah’s son, where they have arrived from Babylonia. ¹¹Take silver and gold and have crowns made, which you will set on the head of the high priest Joshua, son of Jehozadak. ¹²Repeat to him these words of Yahweh Sabaoth: ‘Here is the man whose name is Branch. From where he is, he will branch out and build the temple of Yahweh. ¹³It is he who will build the temple of Yahweh, and this will be his glory. He will sit and rule upon his throne. A priest will sit at his right; and there will be harmony between both.’ ¹⁴As for the crowns, they will remain in the temple of Yahweh as a memorial of what Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Josiah, Zephaniah’s son, have done. ¹⁵Those from

3:8

afar will come and help build the temple of Yahweh; and you will know that Yahweh Sabaoth has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently listen to the voice of Yahweh your God.”

7 ¹On the fourth day of the ninth month, in the fourth year of Darius, the king, ²the people of Bethel sent Sharezer and Regemmelech, with their men, to win the favor of Yahweh; ³and to question the priests of the house of Yahweh, God of hosts, and the prophets, “Must we mourn and fast in the fifth month as we have done these many years?”

Lm 2:18;
Jl 1:12

The true religion

• ⁴And the word of Yahweh, God of hosts came to me: ⁵“Speak to all the people and priests of the land as follows: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth and seventh months through all these seventy years, did you truly fast for me—for me, indeed? ⁶Were you not those who decided to eat and to drink or not to do so?”

Is 58:5;
Mt 6:16

⁷Remember the message that Yahweh proclaimed through earlier prophets, when Jerusalem was peacefully inhabited, and the surrounding region as well; when the Negeb and the western foothills were settled.

(⁸Again the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah.) ⁹Render true judgment; be kind and merciful to each other. ¹⁰Do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the alien or the poor; do not plot evil in your heart against one another.

Dt 24:17;
Am 8:4;
Is 1:17

¹¹But they refused to listen; and stubbornly turned their backs, stopping their ears. ¹²They made their hearts hard, as diamonds, so as not to hear the law, or the words that Yahweh, the God of hosts spoke by his spirit, through the earlier prophets.

Is 6:10;
Ezk 2:4

• **7.4** The authority is asked whether it is fitting to continue fasting. The prophet repeats the teachings of other prophets before him, a teaching summed up in Hosea’s phrase: “I want love, says God, not sacrifices.” Many people believe

that by sacrifices and gifts they can bargain with God and obtain favors. Yet, true religion is what Zechariah says and the letter of James will also say: see James 1:27 (Is 58).

¹³Then Yahweh, God of hosts, in his great anger, proclaimed that, just as they had not listened when he called to them, so when they cried to him, he would not listen. ¹⁴Yahweh said he would scatter them, as in a whirlwind, among nations they did not know and the land behind them would be devastated, without anyone passing through it. In that way, a pleasant land was made desolate.”

8 • ¹The word of Yahweh, the God of hosts was directed to me in this way, ²“I am intensely jealous for Zion, stirred by a burning anger for her sake. ³Yahweh says: I will return to Zion and live in her midst. Jerusalem shall be called the *city of faithfulness* and the *mountain of holiness*.”

⁴Yahweh, God of hosts speaks, “Old men and women will again sit in the squares, each with a stick in hand on account of their great age. ⁵The squares of the city will be filled with girls and boys playing.”

⁶Yahweh, God of hosts declares, “If that seems impossible in the eyes of those who have returned from exile, will it be impossible for me as well?”—word of Yahweh.

⁷Yahweh, God of hosts says, “See, I am going to save my people, ⁸bringing them from the east and from the west; and they will live in Jerusalem. They will be my people and I shall be their God, in truth and in justice.”

⁹Yahweh, God of hosts declares, “In these days, you have just heard the words of the prophets, because, on this day, the foundation stone is laid for the reconstruction of the temple. Now do not be discouraged. ¹⁰Before that time, there was no compensation for man or animal, nor was there any relief from adversity for those who came and went, because I had pitted

everybody—each one—against everyone else. ¹¹But from now on I will deal differently with this people.”

¹²Yahweh says, “I am sowing peace. The vine will give its fruit, the earth its produce, the heavens its dew; and to the remnant of this people I will give all these things.

¹³So it will happen, that, just as you were a curse among the nations, now I will save you, Judah and Israel, and make you a blessing. Have no fear and let your hands be strong!”

¹⁴This is what Yahweh, God of hosts, says: “Just as I resolved to do you harm, because your fathers angered me and I did not relent, ¹⁵so now, in these days, I am determined to deal kindly with Jerusalem and Judah. Have no fear! ¹⁶This is what you must do: Speak the truth to one another; let those who judge give peace, through honest sentences ¹⁷and do not plot evil in your heart against one another. Refrain from false oaths, for it is what I detest”—word of Yahweh.

¹⁸The word of Yahweh came to me, saying: ¹⁹“This is what you will say for my sake: From now on the fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will be days of joy, happy feastdays. Only, be peacemakers and sincere people.”

²⁰Yahweh, the God of hosts speaks, ²¹“Peoples will come from other nations, people from great cities. ²²The inhabitants of one town will talk with those of another, and, say: ‘Come, let us go and implore the favor of Yahweh, and I, too, will seek Yahweh.’ ²³Many great peoples and powerful nations will come, seeking Yahweh, God of hosts, in Jerusalem and pray to him.”

²⁴Yahweh, the God of hosts assures you, “In those days, ten men of different languages spoken in various lands, will take hold of a Jew by the hem of his garment and say: We, too, want to go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

• **8.1** God expresses all his love for the chosen people who are personified in their city, Jerusalem. He promises prosperity and the happiness of salvation. Above all, he brings them to discover their role in the world: to be a point for gathering all the people.

For us these are words of hope, but they also require us to behave in such a way that unbelievers may really become aware that God is pres-

ent in us. We can apply what was said about Isaiah 65 here: we must guide our countries toward this peace, full of rejoicing that only God can bring about.

In verse 8 notice the expression: *They will be my people and I shall be their God*. This is the typical messianic promise and the sign of the new Covenant.

SECOND PART OF THE BOOK

9 • An oracle:
¹Word of Yahweh. Yahweh dwells in the land of Hadrach and Damascus, for the cities of Aram belong to him, as do all the tribes of Israel, ²and Hamath as well, on its border, and Tyre and Sidon, the people who do good business. ³Tyre built herself a stronghold and piled up silver like dust, gold like the mud in the street. ⁴But the Lord will take away her possessions and throw down her power on the sea; and she, herself, will perish by fire.

⁵Ashkelon will see and be afraid; Gaza, too, will tremble, and Ekron, as well; for her hope will fade. The king will disappear from Gaza; and Ashkelon will be without inhabitants. ⁶People of low birth will occupy Ashdod. I will put an end to the pride of the Philistines. ⁷I shall take the meat with blood from their mouth and their unclean food from between their teeth. Only a remnant of them will be left; and they will become like a clan among the Judeans. The people of Ekron will be like the Jebusites at the present time. ⁸I shall camp, as a guard, near my house, to protect it from all who come and go. No longer shall an oppressor crush them now, for I am aware of their affliction.

Your king comes, riding on a donkey

• ⁹Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout for joy, daughter of Jerusalem! For your king is coming, just and victorious,

humble and riding on a donkey,
 on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰No more chariots in Ephraim,
 no more horses in Jerusalem,
 for he will do away with them.
 The warrior's bow shall be broken when
 he dictates peace to the nations.
 He will reign from sea to sea,
 and from the River to the ends of the
 earth.

¹¹As for you, for the sake of your Covenant sealed with blood, I shall release your prisoners from the ancient cistern. ¹²The prisoners who wait in expectation will return to you, O Zion; today, I declare that I will repay you double for your exile. ¹³I shall bend my bow—Judah—and Ephraim shall be my arrow. I shall send your sons, O Zion, against the Greeks! For me, you shall be a warrior's sword.

¹⁴Yahweh will appear above them, his arrows flashing like lightning. He will sound his horn and come, in a storm from the south. ¹⁵Yahweh, God of hosts, will protect them; they will triumph; and trample the wicked. They will drink blood like wine and be filled with it, like the bowls of the drink offering, like the horns of an altar.

¹⁶On that day, Yahweh, their God, will save them and pasture them, like a flock. ¹⁷How happy! how beautiful it will be! Grain will make young men flourish and new wine, the maidens!

Trust in Yahweh

10 ¹Ask from Yahweh, the spring rain; and Yahweh, who makes the lightning, will send showers of rain and make grass sprout in each one's field.

²The home idols utter empty words and diviners have false visions; dreams that foretell illusions and offer empty comfort. ³This is why the people stray, like sheep without a shepherd. Against these shepherds my anger is aroused; and I will punish the leaders.

When Yahweh of hosts visits his flock, the nation of Judah, he will make it his proud war horse. ⁴He will provide the host and the spear, the bow in battle and all the leaders. ⁵They will be like warriors trampling mud in battle. They will fight, recalling that Yahweh is with them, and rout those on horses.

⁶"I will strengthen the nation of Judah and save the descendants of Joseph. I will bring them back, for I have compassion

• **9.1** This is the beginning of the second part of the book (see Introduction). The prophet announces a liberation of the people after a very cruel trial. A mysterious Shepherd (another name for the Messiah) will achieve this liberation when, having been rejected and killed by his people, he will arouse feelings of repentance

in them. These texts remind us of the Songs of the Servant of Yahweh in the second part of the book of Isaiah.

• **9.** Announcing a humble Messiah. When he solemnly enters Jerusalem, Jesus will fulfill this prophecy literally (see Mt 21:5).

Zep
 3:14;
 Ps 95:11;
 Gen
 49:11;
 Mt 21:5

Is 24;
 Ps 72:8

24:4

19:16;
 Mt 24:31

Is 66:19;
 Ezk
 38:3;
 Jl 4:6

Jer
 31:12

Ezk 34:5

on them; and they will be as if I had never rejected them, for I am Yahweh, their God, who hears their cry.

⁷Ephraim's men will be like heroes and feel joyful, as if warmed by wine. Their children will rejoice on seeing it; their hearts will exult in Yahweh.

⁸Yahweh says: I shall whistle and gather them together, for I have redeemed them and they shall be as numerous as before. ⁹Then, I shall spread them among the nations; but from the most distant lands they will remember me. There, they shall raise their children, who will return.

¹⁰I shall bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I shall give them, again, the land of Gilead and Lebanon; but these will not suffice for them. ¹¹They will pass through the sea of Egypt and the depths of the Nile will be dried up. Then the arrogance of Assyria will be cast down; and Egypt will no longer have a king. ¹²I shall strengthen them, says Yahweh, and they shall advance confident in my name."

11 ¹Open your gateways, Lebanon, to let fire devour your cedars. ²Lament, cypresses, for the cedar has fallen. The majestic ones have been brought low. Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the impenetrable forest has been cut down. ³The sighs of the shepherds reecho because their beautiful plain has been ravaged. The young lions' roar reechoes because the fruitful valley of the Jordan is laid waste.

The example of the good shepherd

• ⁴Yahweh, my God, said to me: "Pasture the sheep to be slaughtered, ⁵for their buyers slay them and get away with it, whereas those who sell them say: 'Praised be Yahweh! I am rich!' And their shepherds hardly give them a thought. ⁶Yahweh says: I shall no longer give a thought to the inhabitants of this land; and I am handing over each one to the power of his shepherd; although their king may oppress the land, I shall not rescue this people from their power."

⁷So I became the shepherd of the sheep to be slaughtered; and provided myself with two staffs—one I called Favor and the other, Bonds. I then pastured my flock, ⁸doing away with three leaders in one month. I lost patience with them; and they, for their part, were disgusted with me. ⁹So I said, "No longer shall I shepherd you: whatever is to die, let it die; and let what is to perish, perish; and let those who are left, devour each other's flesh." ¹⁰Then I took and broke my staff Favor, to break the Covenant I had made with all nations.

¹¹It was broken off that day; and the sheep merchants who watched, knew it was Yahweh who had spoken.

¹²I then said to them, "If you agree, give me my wages, otherwise let it go." So they weighed out my wages, thirty pieces of silver. ¹³And Yahweh said to me, "Throw it into the treasury, this splendid sum at which they valued me!" So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the treasury in Yahweh's house.

¹⁴I, then snapped, in two, my second staff, Bonds; doing away with the friendship between Judah and Israel.

¹⁵Then Yahweh said to me, "Take another disguise, one that is fitting for a foolish shepherd; ¹⁶for I am going to raise up another shepherd, who will care nothing for lost sheep, nor will he search for strays, or bind up the injured, and pasture those that survive. No, but he will eat the fat ones and tear off their hoofs."

¹⁷Woe to the worthless shepherd who abandons his flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm wither and his right eye be blind!

The final battle

12 • ¹An oracle. This is the word of Yahweh concerning Israel. Word of Yahweh, who spread out the heavens, laid the foundations of the earth and formed humans with inner spirit:

²"See, I am making of Jerusalem a cup, that will send the nations reel-

• **11.4** This is a parable. The prophet plays the role of Yahweh himself. It seems to mean the following: Because the people did not want to be led by Yahweh, Yahweh will deliver them to evil shepherds who will take advantage of them. Yahweh is dismissed for thirty pieces of silver. A mysterious gesture which the Gospel

will recall in dealing with Judas' betrayal (see Mt 27:10). Elsewhere in the Scriptures God threatens the evil rulers. Here, he reproaches the people, who now have the shepherds they deserve.

• **12.1** This chapter announces the tragedy which will move the Jewish people: all the

ing; it will happen when Jerusalem is besieged.

³On that day, I shall make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations around her. All the nations will be united against her and all who try to lift the rock will be badly injured."

⁴Yahweh says: "On that day, I will make every horse wild with fright, every rider, demented. All the horses of the nations will be blinded. But I will watch over Judah; ⁵and the leaders of the clans of Judah will say to themselves: 'The strength of the inhabitants of Jerusalem comes from Yahweh their God.'

⁶On that day, I will make the leaders of the clans of Judah like a fire in a woodland and a flaming torch among the sheaves. They will devour, right and left, all the nations around them, while Jerusalem will continue to hold its site.

⁷Yahweh will first save the towns and villages of Judah; so that David's people and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not feel more important than the rest of Judah.

⁸On that day, Yahweh will strengthen the inhabitants of Jerusalem in such a way, that the weaklings among them shall be like David; and David's people, who lead them, will be like God, like an angel of Yahweh.

⁹On that day, I will see to the destroying of all the nations that came against Jerusalem.

¹⁰I will pour out on the family of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of love and supplication. They will look at the one who was pierced; and mourn for him, as for an only child, weeping bitterly, as for a firstborn. ¹¹The mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning of Haddadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

¹²Each family will mourn individually: Ezk 8:14 the family of David by themselves, and their wives separately; the family of Nathan by themselves, and their wives separately; ¹³the family of Levi by themselves, and their wives separately; the family of Shimei by themselves and their wives separately ¹⁴and the same with the other families, each family by themselves and their wives separately.

13 • ¹On that day, a spring will be opened for the family of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse themselves of sin and defilement. Ezk 47:1; 36:25

Yahweh, God of hosts says: ²On that day, I will wipe out the names of idols from the land and never again will they be mentioned. ³I will also remove the prophets and their unclean spirits; and expel them from the land. If a prophet does prophesy, his parents, father and mother, will say to him: "You shall live no longer, for you uttered lies in the name of Yahweh." His own father and mother will stab him when he prophesies. Mic 5:11

nations will be opposed to them and they will be saved by God. Verses 8-11, which John will recall in John 19:37 and Revelation 1:7, show the death of Christ in a veiled way. The Jews will be converted when they see the one they have pierced. From his sacrifice the fountain mentioned in 13:1 will spring forth, a fountain of forgiveness and of holiness.

Note that Haddadrimmon was a Phoenician god; the inhabitants of the plain of Megiddo celebrated his death every year.

- **13.1** In the final days an answer will be

given to the thirst for forgiveness, which the Scriptures itself aroused in the faithful (see Jn 7:37 and 20:22). The fountain mentioned here is like the river coming from the temple (Ezk 47).

I will also remove the prophets and their unclean spirits (v. 3). The days of the great prophets are over and the author of these lines realizes that the only prophets left are fortune-tellers, liars and charlatans. There is no room for those in a community which has received all the truth that God can reveal to us in the person of his Son.

⁴On that day, the prophets will be ashamed of their prophetic visions; and no longer wear a prophet's garment of hair, in order to deceive. ⁵Instead, each of them will say: "I am not a prophet, I am a farmer, the land has owned me since my youth." ⁶And if anyone says to him: "What are these wounds on your hands?" He will answer: "With these, I was wounded in my friend's house."

Am
7:14;
Mt 7:15

1K
18:28

Final persecution

• ⁷"Sword, awake, and strike my shepherd, the man who is near to me!" says Yahweh, God of hosts. "Strike the shepherd and let the flock be scattered!" Yahweh threatens, "I will turn against the little ones, ⁸and in all the land, two thirds shall be destroyed and one third left. ⁹This third shall be cleansed by fire; I shall refine them, as silver is refined; I shall test them, as gold is tested. They shall call upon my name and I will hear them. I will say, 'They are my people,' and they shall say, 'Yahweh is my God.'"

Mt 26:31

Mal 3:2;
Hos 2:25

Another description of the final battle

14 • ¹The day of Yahweh will come when people will divide spoils in your midst. ²I will let all the nations come against Jerusalem to attack it. The city will be taken and houses pillaged, women violated. Half of the city will be deported but the rest will not be removed. ³Then Yahweh will go forth and fight against the nations, as he does on the day of battle. ⁴On that day, his feet will rest on the Mount of Olives, facing Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in two, from east to west, by a deep valley; leaving half of the mountain to the north and half, to the south. ⁵You will flee through my mountain valley, for it will extend as

Is 66:18;
Ezk 38

Mic 1:4;
Gen 28:12

Job 1:6;
2Thes 1:10;
Ps 89:6

far as Azel. You will flee, as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah; and Yahweh will come, and all his holy ones with him.

⁶On that day, there will be no cold or frost. ⁷It will be a unique day, known to Yahweh, without day or night, and when evening comes, there will still be light.

Rev
22:5

⁸On that day, living water will flow from Jerusalem, half to the sea in the east, half to the sea in the west; it will never dry up in summer or in winter. ⁹Yahweh will be king of all the earth. On that day, there will be Yahweh alone, and only his name.

Ezk 47:1

¹⁰All the land will be turned into a plain, from Geba to Rimmon in the Negeb, but Jerusalem shall be outstanding on its heights, from the Benjamin Gate to the First Gate, to the Corner Gate and from the tower of Hananel to the royal wine press. ¹¹Its people shall no longer fear any disaster. Jerusalem shall be inhabited and secure.

Jer
31:40;
Rev
22:3

¹²And this is how Yahweh will punish all the nations that made war on Jerusalem: each one's flesh will rot even as he stands, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, their tongue in their mouths. ¹³A similar plague shall strike the horses, mules, camels and donkeys, and all the animals in their camps. ¹³On that day, Yahweh will cause great panic among them: they will take hold of one another and attack one another, ¹⁴while the men of Judah fight in Jerusalem. The wealth of all the neighboring nations will be left in that place; gold, silver and garments in great quantities.

Ezk
38:21

¹⁶The survivors of all the nations that fought against Jerusalem will come, year by year, to worship Yahweh, God of hosts and celebrate the feast of Tabernacles. ¹⁷If any people of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King Yahweh,

Dt 16:13

• 7. Another text referring to the good shepherd, whom *Yahweh strikes*. This means that the shepherd will be wounded and that Yahweh will use this event for his plan of salvation. See what was said in Isaiah 66:8 about this form of expression of the Jews.

Matthew remembers this place in 26:31.

• **14.1** This chapter describes with amazing images the coming of the kingdom of God after the great trial: A vision of the heavenly Jerusalem which the apostle John will amplify in Revelation. All the nations of the world have found the living God and they come to adore

him. This is similar to the end of Chapter 66 of Isaiah.

Yahweh will come and all his holy ones with him (v. 5). These are his angels, responsible for his works, just as in Psalms 89:6; 138:2; 149:1. See Matthew 16:27.

In the new Jerusalem, religion will not be an activity apart from other human activities: men and women will no longer be believers merely at Mass on Sundays, and the rest of the week act the same as everybody else, mediocre and sinful. Rather everything will be holy. Zechariah says this by using images peculiar to his time (vv. 20-21).

God of hosts, they will have no rain. ¹⁸If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they, too, will be afflicted, with the plague destined for those who do not go up to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles. ¹⁹That shall be the punishment of Egypt; and of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles.

²⁰On that day, even the bells of the horses shall be inscribed: "Consecrated to

Yahweh." ²¹The cooking pots of the temple will be as sacred as the bowls of offering that are used for the altar, and even the ordinary cooking pots of the people of Jerusalem and Judah will be consecrated to Yahweh, God of hosts. So everyone who offers sacrifice may use them for cooking. Still more: from that day, there will no longer be merchants in the house of Yahweh, God of hosts. Jn 2:16



Shortly after Haggai and Zechariah, this prophet intervenes to correct several evil customs within the community. Through Malachi, the Lord argues with those who call him to account, but who do not acknowledge his love.

1 ¹An oracle. These are the words that Yahweh directed to Israel through Malachi.

Dt 4:27

Rom 9:13;
Gen 27

Ezk 25:12

²When Yahweh says, “I love you,” you reply, “How do you show that love?” So Yahweh asks you, ³“Was Esau not Jacob’s brother? Yet I loved Jacob and hated Esau. See how I left his mountains desolate; and abandoned his land to the jackals of the desert. ⁴If Edom decides to rebuild its ruins, after having been destroyed, Yahweh of hosts says: They may rebuild, but I will demolish. You will call them: ‘Accursed country’ and ‘Nation with which Yahweh is forever displeased.’ ⁵You will see this with your own eyes, then you will exclaim: The power of Yahweh goes beyond the borders of Israel.”

Where is your respect for me?

- ⁶The son honors his father, the servant respects his master. Now, if I am a father, where is the honor due to me? If I am your master, where is your respect for me? This is what Yahweh of hosts wants you to know, priests,

who despise his name. But you will only ask: How have we despised your name?

⁷You present defiled foods on my altar, yet you say: How did we defile you? You think that my table does not deserve respect. ⁸When you bring a blind animal as a sacrifice, or when you present one that is lame or sick, are you not doing wrong? Go, present these to the governor; will he be pleased and receive you well?” says Yahweh of hosts.

Dt 15:21

⁹So now, ask God, that he may have mercy on us. But if it goes badly for us because of your sin, are you those who should entreat him? ¹⁰Who among you would close my doors, that you may no longer come, to kindle fire upon my altar in vain? I am not pleased with you, says Yahweh of hosts, nor am I pleased with your offerings.

- **1.6** The sin of those who offer their surplus to God. *From the rising of the sun...* (v. 11). Malachi observes that if the Jews are God’s people, they cannot avoid doing what other people do, who in their own way worship God sincerely even though they do not know his revelation.

- The sin of the priests who do not know how to teach the law which is their responsibility. If they do not commit themselves to educating

the people of God about their obligations, God will not allow them to continue their external rituals.

- The sin of those who dismiss their wives. The law and customs allowed divorce with specific guarantees for the wife. Malachi says what Jesus will teach with full authority in Matthew 19:1: the will of God regarding marriage is that the two remain together as one. The one who betrays his wife cannot encounter God.

^{Zep 3:9} ¹¹See, from the rising of the sun to its setting, all the nations revere my name and everywhere, incense is offered to my name as well as a pure offering. I am rightly esteemed among the nations, says Yahweh of hosts. ¹²But you despise my name when you say: “The Lord’s table is dirty and his food is good for nothing.” ¹³When you complain that you do not like this food, you despise me, says Yahweh. You bring a stolen animal, lame or diseased, to offer to me in sacrifice. Do you think that I will accept it? ¹⁴Cursed be the cheater, who, after promising me a bull from his herd, sacrifices a stunted animal. For I am a great king; and my name is respected through all the nations, says Yahweh of hosts.

Warnings for the priests

2 ¹This warning is also for you, priests. If you do not listen to it, ²or concern yourself, to glorify my name, says Yahweh of hosts, I will send the curse on you and curse even your blessings.

³I will curse you; for none of you takes his ministry seriously. Right now, I am going to break your arm, throw dung in your face, the very dung of your animals, and sweep you away with them. ⁴And you will realize that it was I who threatened to put an end to my Covenant with Levi, your ancestor, says Yahweh.

⁵My Covenant with him spoke of life and peace, and I gave him these; it also spoke of respect; and he respected me and revered my name. ⁶His mouth taught the true doctrine and nothing evil came from his lips; he walked in accord with me, being peaceful and upright, and brought back many people from their wickedness. ⁷The lips of the priest speak of knowledge, and the law must be found in his mouth, since he is the messenger of Yahweh of hosts.

⁸But you, says Yahweh of hosts, have strayed from my way, and, moreover, caused many to stumble because of your

teaching. You have broken my Covenant with Levi. ⁹Therefore, I let all the people despise you and consider you unworthy, because you do not follow my ways; and you show partiality in your judgments.

¹⁰Do we not all have the same father? Has the same God not created all of us? Why, then, does each of us betray his brother, defiling the Covenant of our ancestors?

¹¹Judah has been unfaithful, a grave sin has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem: the people of Judah have defiled the sacred inheritance of Yahweh by loving, and marrying, the daughters of a foreign god. ¹²Let whoever does this be cut off from the homeland of Jacob; and let there be no one to defend him in the tribunal, or present an offering for him to Yahweh.

Respect for marriage

¹³You also commit another offense. As Yahweh refuses to look at your offerings and does not take them into account, you come, weeping and wailing, and cover the altar with tears. ¹⁴And then you ask: “Why?”

It is because Yahweh has seen how you dealt with your first wife, the wife of your youth. You betrayed her although she was your companion, with whom you made a covenant. ¹⁵Has God not made a single being and given him breath? And what does he seek, but a family, given by God? Do not betray, then, the wife of your youth.

¹⁶I hate divorce, says Yahweh, the God of Israel, and those who are actually covering their violence. Be very careful, and do not betray.

¹⁷You annoy Yahweh with your discourses; and you dare say: “How did we annoy him?” You annoy him whenever you say that Yahweh looks favorably on those who do evil, and lets everything go well with them; or when you ask: “Where is the God who does justice?”

Eph 5:25

Mt 19:6

I send my messenger to prepare the way

Mt
11:10;
Mk 1:2

3 • ¹Now I am sending my messenger ahead of me, to clear the way; then, suddenly, the Lord, for whom you long, will enter the Sanctuary. The envoy of the Covenant which you so greatly desire, already comes, says Yahweh of hosts. ²Who can bear the day of his coming and remain standing when he appears? For he will be like fire in the foundry and like the lye used for bleaching.

3:19

³He will be as a refiner or a fuller. He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them, like gold and silver. So Yahweh will have priests who will present the offering as it should be. ⁴Then Yahweh will accept with pleasure the offering of Judah and Jerusalem, as in former days.

Ezk 16

⁵When I will draw near to you to do justice, I shall demand the immediate punishment of the sorcerers and the adulterers, of those who swear false oaths, who oppress the wage-earner, the widow and the orphan, who do not respect the rights of the foreigner. They do all this, and have no fear of me, says Yahweh.

Hos
2:25;
Zec 1:3

• ⁶I, Yahweh, have not changed in anything; just as you, children of Jacob, are always the same. ⁷Since the day of your ancestors, you stray from my ordinances and do not practice them. Return to me and I will return to you, says Yahweh of hosts. But you ask: "Why do we have to return?" ⁸Can a man deceive God? Yet,

you cheat me and, moreover, ask: "How did we cheat you?" I point out your sacred tributes and the tenth which is due to me.

⁹Cursed be you who cheat me! Cursed be all the nation! ¹⁰Turn over, into the temple treasury, the tenth part of all, that there may be food in my house. Then you may test me, says Yahweh of hosts, to see, if I will not open the gates of heaven and bring blessed rain to you, up to the last drop. ¹¹I will rebuke the locusts, that they may not devour your fields, and let not the vines wither in your land, says Yahweh. ¹²Then all the nations will congratulate you because your land will be the choicest.

Dr 28:8

¹³You say very harsh things about me, says Yahweh, and, yet, you say: "What harsh things did we say against you?" ¹⁴You say: "It is useless to serve God. There is no benefit in observing his commandments or in leading an austere life for his sake. Happy are the shameless!" ¹⁵Those who do evil succeed in everything; though they provoke God, they remain unharmed."

Ps 37:1;
73

¹⁶Those were the very words of those who fear Yahweh. Yahweh listened and heard what they said. He ordered at once, that the names of those who respect him and reverence his name be written in a record.

Ezk
13:9;
Rev
21:27

¹⁷And he declared, "They will be mine on the day I have already set. Then I shall care for them, as a father cares for his obedient son. ¹⁸And you will see the different fates of the good and the bad, those who obey God and those who disobey him.

• ¹⁹The day already comes, flaming as a furnace. On that day, all the proud and evildoers will be burned, like straw in the fire. They will be left without branches or roots. ²⁰On the other hand, the sun of justice will shine upon you who respect my name and bring health in its rays. You will come out leaping, like fattened calves.

Lk 1:78;
Jn 8:12

• **3.1** *Now I am sending my messenger.* To those complaining that God does not reveal his justice nor reward sufficiently those who serve him, Malachi responds by declaring that the Lord will come soon. He announces the coming of a messenger of God who will be responsible for preparing the way for him, and that will be the sign of his coming soon.

Paragraphs 3:1-2 and 4:22-24 complement each other, and point to John the Baptist. The Gospel will recall them in Luke 1:17; 7:27; John 3:22. Also see Mark 9:11.

• 6. Then comes the discussion with those expecting material favors as a reward for their devotion; they wish to be rewarded for having done no evil. God agrees to dialogue with such believers, and through Malachi speaks to them in the only language they can understand: if they do good, one day they will see the Sun of justice and will jump around like calves trampling the wicked underfoot.

• 19. Verses 19-24 in Hebrew manuscript are Chapter 4:1-6 in Greek manuscript.

²¹You will trample on the evildoers and they will be like ashes scattered on your way when I do this, says Yahweh.

I will send Elijah soon

²²Remember the law of my servant Moses, the laws and ordinances I gave him at Mount Horeb for the

whole of Israel. ²³I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the day of Yahweh comes, for it will be a great and terrible day. ²⁴He will reconcile parents with their children, and the children with their parents, so that I may not have to curse this land when I come.”

Mt 17:
10-13

Sir
48:10;
Lk 1:17

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