

# INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETS

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

## *Prophets in Israel*

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

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

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

## *A people of prophets*

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

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

### ***Real men***

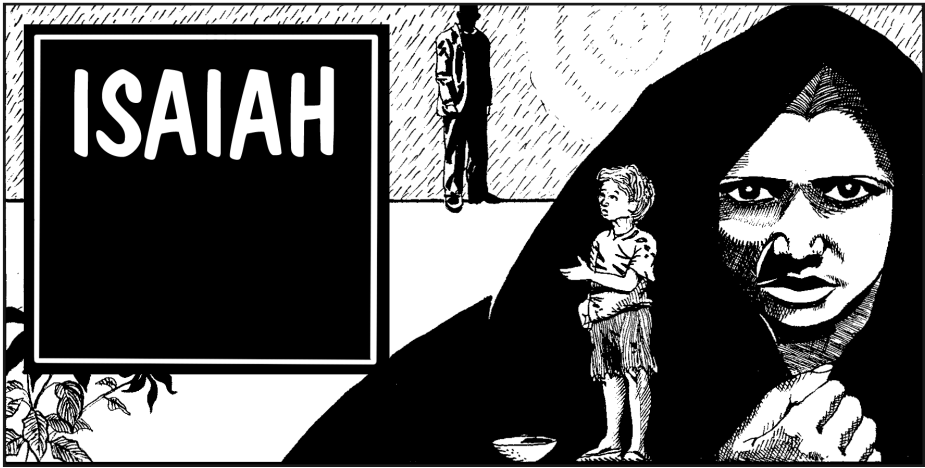
Prophetism is neither connected with some type of disposition nor with social status. Isaiah was a distinguished man, one of those that the New Testament would call the elders and who were the sons of leaders of tribes or groups from the nomadic period. After the exile, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah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

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

### ***A prophetic vision of history***

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

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



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

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

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

What do we find in the following poems?

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

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

- God's promises to David's descendants. Whether the rulers are good like Hezekiah or estranged like Ahaz, they are mediocre men not to be trusted with such great promises. Yet, in the darkest hours, Isaiah will declare that the Lord has chosen Jerusalem and David, his king. From David's line, Christ, the king of Peace, will be born.

***Some Facts About Isaiah's Time***

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

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

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

***The Book of Isaiah***

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

For the second part of the book of Isaiah and the poems of the Servant of Yahweh (chaps. 40–55), see Introduction on page 719.

For the third part of the book of Isaiah (chaps. 56–66), see Introduction on page 746.

### Against an unthinking people

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

<sup>2</sup>Listen, O heavens!  
Give heed, O earth! for the Lord speaks:

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup>Shall I strike you again and again? People always rebelling, your whole head is diseased and your heart also afflicted.

<sup>6</sup>From the soles of your feet

to the top of your head— all is wounds and bruises, sores uncleaned and unbound, not eased with soothing ointment.

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

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

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

<sup>10</sup>Hear the warning of Yahweh, rulers of Sodom. Listen to the word of God, people of Gomorrah.”

• <sup>11</sup>“What do I care,” says Yahweh “for your endless sacrifices? I am fed up with your burnt offerings, and the fat of your bulls.

Dt 30:19;  
31:28;  
32:5;  
32:18

Jer 5:3;  
Hos 6:1

Lk 10:34

Rom  
9:29;  
Gen  
18:16—  
19:29

Gen  
18:20;  
Dt 29:22

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

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

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

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

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

*The Daughter of Zion* means the city of Zion, or Jerusalem. Zion was the area of Jerusalem where David had established his residence.

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

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

• **11.** *What do I care for your endless sacrifices?* It is characteristic of the prophets to condemn external worship that does not express a true surrender to God. The sacrifices and the festivals in question here were required by the law of God; yet God says that he detests them, because when done without proper dis-

The blood of fatlings, and lambs  
and he-goats  
I abhor.

<sup>12</sup>When you come before me and  
trample on my courts,  
who asked you to visit me?

<sup>Am 5:22;</sup>  
<sup>Hos 6:6;</sup>  
<sup>Jer 7:22;</sup>  
<sup>Ps 50:8;</sup>  
<sup>Mt 9:13</sup> <sup>13</sup>I am fed up with your oblations.  
I grow sick with your incense.  
Your New Moons, Sabbaths and

meetings,  
evil with holy assemblies,  
I can no longer bear.

<sup>Jer 15:6</sup> <sup>14</sup>I hate your New Moons and  
appointed feasts  
they burden me.

<sup>15</sup>When you stretch out your hands  
I will close my eyes;  
the more you pray,  
the more I refuse to listen,  
for your hands are bloody.

<sup>16</sup>Wash and make yourselves clean.  
Remove from my sight  
the evil of your deeds.  
Put an end to your wickedness

<sup>22:21;</sup>  
<sup>Job 31:17</sup> <sup>17</sup>and learn to do good.  
Seek justice and keep in line the  
abusers;

give the fatherless their rights  
and defend the widow.”

<sup>Mic 6:2;</sup>  
<sup>Ps 51:9</sup> <sup>18</sup>“Come,” says the Lord,  
“let us reason together.

Though your sins be like scarlet,  
they will be white as snow;  
though they be as crimson red,  
they will be white as wool.

<sup>19</sup>If you will obey me,  
you will eat the goods of the earth;  
<sup>20</sup>but if you resist and rebel,  
the sword will eat you instead.”  
Truly the Lord has spoken.

Jer 2:7

Dt 32:42;  
Is 40:5;  
58:14;  
Mic 4:4

### You became a harlot

• <sup>21</sup> Zion, the faithful city,  
has become a harlot!  
She who abounded in justice,  
in whom righteousness lodged,  
has become a hideout of murderers!

Ezk 16;  
Hos 1:2

<sup>22</sup>Your silver has turned to dross,  
your best wine thinned with water.

<sup>23</sup>Your rulers are tyrants,  
partners of thieves.

5:23;  
Hos 9:15;  
23:8

They love a bribe  
and look around for gifts.  
No one protects the orphan,  
or listens to the claim of the widow.

<sup>24</sup>This is why the Lord speaks,  
Yahweh Sabaoth,  
the Mighty One of Israel:

“I will subdue my foes  
and exact payment from my  
enemies.

<sup>25</sup>I will turn my hand against you,

Ezk  
22:18

positions, they are a lie (see Ps 40:7 and  
50:16, also, Mt 5:23).

*Give the fatherless their rights.* The Mo-  
saic commandments condemned theft (Ex  
20:14). The prophets denounce a social sys-  
tem which crushes the lowly.

Some people are fond of great ceremonies,  
others of their own devotions and prayers and  
still others, of doing generous and philan-  
thropic works. When doing this, we may be  
covering up the injustice we do every day.

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

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

*The deliverance of Zion will be like a judg-*  
*ment.* Israel, plundered and ruined, prays for  
salvation. God says: “My salvation means pun-  
ishing what you are doing.”

Here we have something very new. Up to  
this time people always prayed for the salva-  
tion of Israel, and if they were faithful God  
promised them prosperity in the land of Pales-  
tine. Here Isaiah opens up other perspectives.

I will smelt away your dross and  
remove your impurities.

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

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

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

17:10;  
57:5;  
Hos 4:13  
• 29 Yes, you will be ashamed of your  
sacred oaks which have

given you delight;  
you will blush for your gardens  
which you have chosen.

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

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

### God promises lasting peace

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

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

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

4 He will rule over the nations and  
settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into plow-  
shares and their spears into pruning

Mic 4:1-3;  
Zec 8:20;  
14:4

60:3;  
66:20;  
Zec  
14:16;  
Ps 122:4

11:1;  
Hos 2:20;  
Zec 9:10

God comes to judge his people and *it is the just who will be saved*. A new world is beginning, and Isaiah understands that this future will be beyond the present world where violence prevails. A new age is foreseen.

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

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

Jesus and the Apostles will in their turn, speak of a judgment. God prepares something new and he cannot but condemn and destroy a world that has grown old in evil to which we become too easily accustomed. Certain liberations in history bring to mind the coming of a kingdom (as in Ex, Is 37, in the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem...). More often moments of anguish prepare for it, less through the good they bring than because they destroy ancient struc-

tures in which sin was embedded (Lk 21, 28 and Rev).

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

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

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

The law of God teaches us the meaning of human life and the mission of humankind. The answer to such questions is finally found in the person of Christ, Son of God become human, the model for his brothers and sisters. Recall how Jesus also went up a mountain to be

hooks. Nation will not raise sword against nation; they will train for war no more.

10:20 <sup>5</sup>O nation of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

### Hide in the dust

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

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

Dt 17:16; Ps 20:8; 2K 14:25 <sup>7</sup>Their land is full of silver and gold, there is no end to their treasures.

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

Jer 25:6 <sup>8</sup>Their land is full of idols, and they bow down before the work of their hands, before the things their fingers have made.

5:15 <sup>9</sup>Man will be humbled and the mortal fallen,

forgive them not!

<sup>10</sup>Get behind the rocks, hide in the dust, for fear of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty!

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

<sup>12</sup>Yahweh will stand up on that day against all the proud and arrogant, against all that is high or great,

<sup>13</sup>against all the cedars of Lebanon and all the oaks of Bashan,

<sup>14</sup>against all the lofty mountains, and all the soaring hills,

<sup>15</sup>against every high tower and fortified walls,

<sup>16</sup>against all the ships of Tarshish and their luxurious load.

<sup>17</sup>The arrogance of man will be humbled; the pride of mortal will be brought low. Yahweh alone will be

Hos 10:8;  
Lk 23:30

Lk 1:51

transfigured before his apostles. It is there that they were given *the Law and the Teaching*: "Listen to him."

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

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

In the final analysis, this is what prepares for the coming of the "new creature." Isaiah alone has done more for human progress than all the

kings of Assyria with their armies, their victories and their laws. This leaven of authentic civilization is what, one day, will be placed "on the high mountains", or "on a lampstand" to enlighten the world. (See Mt 5:14.)

• 6. This text is not addressed to Jerusalem (capital of Judah), but to the northern kingdom (Samaria is the capital) which bears the name of their ancestor Jacob-Israel.

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

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

*Their land is full of idols.* An idol in our life is like a cancer in the body; it is something overly important which consumes our real life. This is what science, progress, conveniences, a house, a car or money do, when they are no



exalted on that day, <sup>18</sup>and all the idols will pass away.

Num  
10:35;  
Ps 82:8

<sup>19</sup>People will flee  
into the hollows of the rocks,  
into the caverns of the earth,  
from the terror of Yahweh,  
from the splendor of his majesty,  
when he arises to terrify the earth.

<sup>20</sup>On that day,  
they will throw to the moles and to  
the bats  
their idols of silver and gold,  
which they made for themselves to  
worship.

<sup>21</sup>They will flee  
into the caverns of the rocks,  
into the crevices of the crags,  
from the terror of the Lord,  
from the splendor of his Majesty,  
when he arises to terrify the earth.

Gen 2:7;  
Job 7:16;  
34:14

<sup>22</sup>Rely not on man,  
who has but a breath in his nostrils.  
What is he worth?

**3** <sup>1</sup>See how the Lord,  
Yahweh Sabaoth,  
takes away provisions and supplies  
from Judah and Jerusalem—

<sup>2</sup>the hero and the soldier,  
the judge and the prophet,  
the diviner and the elder,

<sup>3</sup>the captain and the man of rank,  
the counselor, the wise man, the  
craftsman, and the enchanter.

<sup>4</sup>I will make striplings their princes  
and raw lads their rulers.

<sup>5</sup>People will oppress each other—

Mic 7:6

every neighbor his neighbor;  
the young will bully the old  
and the base will insult the honorable.

<sup>6</sup>When that day comes,  
a man will take hold of his brother  
in the house of his father  
and say, "You have clothes,  
so be our leader  
and rule over this heap of ruins."

<sup>7</sup>But he will cry out in protest:  
"I cannot undertake to remedy all this,  
when in my own house  
there is neither food nor clothing;  
do not make me leader of the people."

<sup>8</sup>See how Jerusalem crumbles  
and Judah falls,  
for in word and deed  
they have defied the Lord,  
and insulted his glorious presence.

### Alas for the wicked!

• <sup>9</sup>The look on their faces de-  
nounces them: they do not hide their  
sin; instead, they parade it, like So-  
dom: Woe to them! They bring about  
their own downfall!

<sup>10</sup>Say, "Fortunate are the right-  
eous, they will eat of the fruit of their  
deeds."

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

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

<sup>13</sup>Yahweh takes his place in court  
and stands to try his people. <sup>14</sup>Yah-  
weh calls to judgment the elders and  
the princes:

Jer 2:5

longer a means of fulfilling God's plans but in-  
stead we devote to them all our energy and  
hope.

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

God and it demands amendment: the more di-  
vine love is, the more demanding and jealous  
it is.

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

“You have devoured my vineyard. The spoil of the poor is in your houses. <sup>15</sup>What right have you to crush the people and to grind down the poor?” declares Yahweh Sabaoth.

**How haughty are these women!**

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

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

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

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

<sup>25</sup>Your men will fall by the sword; your heroes, in battle.

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

**4** <sup>1</sup>On that day, seven women will fight over one man.

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

**A remnant saved on Mount Zion**

• <sup>2</sup>On that day the *Shoot* of Yahweh will be beautiful and glorious; and the *Fruit* of the earth will be honor and splendor for the survivors of Israel.

<sup>3</sup>Those who are left in Zion and remain in Jerusalem will be called holy all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem,

47:1;  
Lm 2:10

Gen  
30:23;  
Lk 1:25

Jer 23:5;  
33:15;  
Zec 3:8;  
6:13

Mal 3:16;  
Ezk 9:8;  
Rev 13:8

• 16. Isaiah castigates the wealthy women of Jerusalem, all equipped to seduce like the idols whose jewels have been paid for with the blood of the poor. We have the same maledictions in Amos 4:1. Maledictions that the poor of today could legitimately call down on our materialist countries: we think of the astronomical sums dispensed for dogs, drugs and pornography, not to mention the remedies for those who have over-eaten.

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

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

Notice here, as in 1:27, that the kingdom of God begins with a “judgment.” This means that human beings alone cannot build the last-

ing city. Isaiah denounces at the same time the sin of individuals and the sin of the nation. No nation can present itself as the kingdom of God on earth. The Jewish people directed by the law of Moses, and the kingdom of David consecrated by God, only represented the first phase of sacred history. They would have to give up their ambitions and their human limitations (a kingdom of God in Palestine!) to receive from God a new covenant: see Jer 31:31. It is Christ who judges the world (Jn 12:31) and who pardons its sins (Jn 20:22).

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

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

– He will provide rest for the weary: “Come to me and I will refresh you” (Mt 11:28).

– The new trends in the world can harm the unwary and the isolated but not those who live in the church community.

It seems however, that only a small remnant is assembled there on Mt. Zion. Let us not say that only a small number of the elect (in which we number of course), will be saved for eter-

<sup>4</sup>when Yahweh washes away the filth of the women of Zion and purges Jerusalem of the bloodstains in its midst with the blast of searing judgment, the blast of fire.

<sup>25:4;</sup>  
<sup>49:10;</sup>  
<sup>14:20</sup> <sup>5</sup>Then will Yahweh create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its assemblies a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of fire by night.

For the Glory of the Lord will be a canopy and a pavilion for all, <sup>6</sup>a shade from the scorching heat by day, a refuge from the storm and rain.

### The song of the vineyard

**5** <sup>1</sup>Let me sing for my beloved the love song of my beloved about his vineyard.

My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

<sup>2</sup>He dug it up, cleared the stones, and planted the choicest vines. He built there a watchtower and hewed out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only wild grapes.

<sup>3</sup>Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

<sup>4</sup>What more was there to do

that I have not done for my vineyard?

Good grapes was the yield I expected, why did it yield only sour grapes?

<sup>5</sup>Now I will let you know what I am going to do with my vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be burned; I will break down its wall and it will be trampled on. <sup>6</sup>I will make it a wasteland, I will neither prune nor hoe it, and briars and thorns will grow there.

I command the clouds, as well, not to send rain on it.

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

### Woe to you rich!

• <sup>8</sup>Woe to you who join house to house, who add field to field!

<sup>3:14;</sup>  
<sup>27:2-5;</sup>  
Hos 10:1;  
Jer 2:21;  
<sup>5:10;</sup>  
<sup>6:9;</sup>  
<sup>12:10;</sup>  
Ps 80:9;  
Mt 20:1;  
<sup>21:28;</sup>  
21:33-44;  
Jn 15  
Dt 32:32

32:13

Dt 1:8;  
Jer 24:10;  
Lev  
25:23;

nity. It is better to say that the Church in this world will always seem to be a small remnant; likewise in what is called the Church or people of God, only a small number will live the promises of God (Lk 12:32).

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

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

The vineyard is the people whom Yahweh nurtured over the centuries of their history and among whom so many prophets worked, watering it with their sweat, if not with their blood. Perhaps we should not look for a spe-

cific meaning in every detail of the parable: the tower, the wine press. In a somewhat similar text, in Micah 6:1-5, God reminds us of all he has done for his people.

After seeing how considerate the Lord has been, Isaiah denounces the injustice and oppression which rule daily life in Jerusalem. In that, he sees proof that the law, the miracles and the blessings of the Lord have been in vain. Their history shows that the kingdom of David is already a failure and Judah will be destroyed.

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

• **8.** God does not tolerate that some occupy all the land when many are without a plot to live (see Lev 25:8). There is no justification

Dt 15:1;  
Mic 2:2

So no room will remain,  
with you alone in the land?

<sup>9</sup>Yahweh Sabaoth has sworn in my  
hearing:

“Many houses will remain in ruins,  
beautiful mansions without  
occupants.

<sup>10</sup>Ten acres of vineyard  
will yield only a barrel of wine;  
ten bushels of seed,  
only a bushel of grain.”

28:7  
6:12;  
Am 4:1

<sup>11</sup>Woe to those who rise early in the  
morning

to run after strong drink,  
and tarry late in the evening  
till they are inflamed with wine.

<sup>12</sup>They have lyres and harps,  
timbrels and flutes,  
and wine at their banquets;  
but they have no thought for the  
deeds of the Lord,  
nor do they see his plans.

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

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

2:9, 11

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

1:26;  
Num  
20:13

<sup>16</sup>But Yahweh Sabaoth will be exalted  
when he comes in judgment;  
the sentences of the holy God  
will reveal his holiness.

(<sup>17</sup>Then will the lambs graze as at  
pasture,  
fatlings and kids will browse among  
the ruins.)

<sup>18</sup>Woe to those who haul their wrongs  
with cords of deceit,

to those who pull a cart of sins,

<sup>19</sup>to those who say, “Let God hurry,  
let him speed up his work  
so that we may see it.

Let the plans of the Holy One of Israel  
draw near and come true,  
which we are eager to learn about!”

Jer  
17:15;  
2P 3:4

<sup>20</sup>Woe to those who call evil good,  
and good evil,

who change darkness for light  
and light for darkness,  
who give bitter for sweet  
and sweet for bitter.

Mic 3:2

<sup>21</sup>Woe to those who are wise in their  
own eyes

and take themselves for sages.

<sup>22</sup>Woe to those who are champions in  
mixing drinks

and valiant at drinking bouts,

<sup>23</sup>but acquit the guilty for a bribe  
and deprive the innocent of his right.

Rom  
1:21-22

<sup>24</sup>Therefore, as the tongues of fire lick  
up stubble,

as dry grass sinks down in the flames,  
so their roots will rot,  
and their flowers be blown away like  
dust,

for they have rejected the law of  
Yahweh Sabaoth  
and scorned the word of the Holy  
One of Israel.

<sup>25</sup>Therefore the Lord,  
his wrath burning against his  
people,

raises his hand against them  
and strikes them down.

either for a society leaving all the capital in the hands of owners so that most of the workers cannot benefit from the riches of their own country. Isaiah's words also condemn those who take over all the real power in a society, preventing others from exercising their human responsibilities.

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

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

Isaiah predicts the exile without hesitation. It would have been wiser to understand the will of God and the way in which he rules over events. The people unfortunately make use of their intelligence only to advance their own interests or to excel in the empty games of the rich. They allow their own people to sink into poverty.

The mountains quake:  
the corpses litter the streets.  
Yet for all this his anger does not  
subside,  
his hand is still raised, poised to strike.

Jer 5:  
15-17;  
6:22-30

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

Nh 2:2

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

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

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

8:22;  
Jl 2:2;  
Zep 1:15

<sup>30</sup>On that day they will roar over  
these people  
like the roaring of the sea.  
Just look at the land—  
darkness and distress,  
the light flickering out in shadows,  
darkened finally by the clouds.

## The call of Isaiah

**6**<sup>1</sup>In the year that king Uzziah  
died I saw the Lord seated on a  
throne, high and exalted; the train of  
his robe filled the Temple. <sup>2</sup>Above  
him were seraphs, each with six  
wings: two to cover the face, two to  
cover the feet, and two to fly with.

1K 22:19;  
Rev 4:2

Num  
21:6;  
Dt 8:15;  
Is 14:29;  
Ezk 1:11

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

Ps 29:9;  
Rev 4:8;  
Num  
14:21

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

19:16;  
40:34-35;  
1K 8:  
10-12;  
Jn 12:41

Zep 3:9;  
3:6;  
Jdg 6:22

<sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to  
me; in his hands was a live coal  
which he had taken with tongs from  
the altar. <sup>7</sup>He touched my mouth with  
it and said,

29:36

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

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

Isaiah speaks of the *holy* God, that is to say, totally other, infinitely different from any creature. At the very moment of becoming present, he is out of our reach. *Holy God* is a way of saying that God is mystery. Isaiah continues to hold on to the presence of God and at the same time he is invaded by a fear which is not frightening. In the presence of the Holy One we experience ourselves as sinners, not because of a particular sin, but because of our

very nature; we feel incapable of placing ourselves in the hands of God who surrounds us with his presence.

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

*Seraphim, that is, the burning ones.* The Israelites always believed in good and evil spirits. From their time in the desert, they attribute to some of these spirits the form of burning serpents; read Numbers 21:4-9; 2 Kings 18:4 on the subject. These texts help us to understand why Yahweh appears surrounded by fantastic Seraphim with human faces. Being superior to humans, these beings can live close to God, but they must shield themselves from the splendor of his glory.

The Glory of God is the radiance coming from God, who is present in the Jerusalem Temple, as in the center of the world, radiating

“See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin is forgiven.”

1K 22:20 <sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the Lord, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” I answered, “Here I am. Send me!” <sup>9</sup>He said, “Go and tell this people: ‘Much as you hear, you will not understand; much as you see, you do not perceive.’”

Mt 13: 14-15; Acts 28: 26-27  
Ezk 2:5; Jn 9:39; Is 35:5; 42:18; 29:9; Jn 12:40; 10:1  
<sup>10</sup>Let their hearts be hardened, make their ears deaf and their eyes blind; what a misfortune for them, should they hear and see! Yet if they understood and came back to me I would heal them.”

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

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

4:3 <sup>13</sup>Even though a tenth remain in

it, it will be burned. Yet there a stump will remain like that of a fallen oak; this stump is a holy seed.”

### First warning to Ahaz

**7** <sup>1</sup>When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, king Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, laid siege to Jerusalem but they were unable to capture it.

2K 16: 5-9

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

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

36:2; 2K 18:17

<sup>4</sup>Say to him,

Stay calm and fear not; do not lose courage before these two stumps of smoldering firebrands—the fierce anger of Rezin the Aramean and the blazing fury of the son of Remaliah. You know that <sup>5</sup>Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah’s son

8:12

his power from one end of the earth to the other.

Isaiah receives his mission:

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

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

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

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

It is evident that if this irony is not seen—it will be found in numerous texts of the prophets—or if the special mood of the Hebrew verb is not noted, a person could be scandalized in thinking that God sends the prophet for the sole purpose of not being listened to and consequently for the people to be lost.

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

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

have plotted against Judah, saying: <sup>6</sup>Let us invade and scare it, let us seize it and put the son of Tabeel king over it. <sup>7</sup>But the Lord Yahweh says:

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

<sup>8a</sup>For Damascus is only the head of  
Aram

and Rezin the lord of Damascus.

<sup>9a</sup>Samaria is only the head of Ephraim  
and Remaliah's son is only the lord of  
Samaria.

<sup>8b</sup>Within fifty-six years,  
Ephraim will be shattered  
and will no longer be a people.

<sup>9b</sup>But if you do not stand firm in faith,  
you, too, will not stand at all.

### The Virgin is with child

• <sup>10</sup>Once again Yahweh addressed Ahaz, <sup>11</sup>“Ask for a sign from Yahweh your God, let it come either from the deepest depths or from the heights of heaven.”

<sup>12</sup>But Ahaz answered, “I will not ask, I will not put Yahweh to the test.”

Mic 5:2  
Jdg 6:36;  
Mt 16:1

17:2

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

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

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

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

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

*The Virgin* is with child and bears a son and calls his name *Immanuel*.

<sup>15</sup>He will live on curds and honey by the time he learns to refuse evil and choose good. <sup>16</sup>For before the child knows how to reject evil and cherish virtue, the land of the two kings that you abhor will be deserted. <sup>17</sup>Yahweh will bring a time much worse than any since Ephraim broke away from Judah.

<sup>18</sup>On that day Yahweh will whistle for flies from the farthest streams of Egypt

and for bees from the land of Assyria.

<sup>19</sup>They will come and settle

in the steep ravines,

in the clefts of the rocks,

Gen  
16:11;  
Jdg 13:3;  
Mic 5:2;  
Mt 1:23;  
Lk 1:31

7:22

8:4

1K 12

absurd politics would certainly bring total ruin to the country.

Now a few points need to be clarified.

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

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

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

3. Since God is giving a sign to all the people, the question of time must be exact: otherwise how could it be a sign? The *young* (mother) was perhaps Ahaz's wife whose

on all the bushes,  
and on every pasture.

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

<sup>21</sup>On that day a man will raise  
a heifer and a couple of sheep,  
<sup>22</sup>and from the abundance of milk  
those who survive in the land  
will feed on curds and honey.

<sup>23</sup>On that day every place  
planted with a thousand vines  
worth a thousand silver shekels  
will be covered with briars and thorns.

<sup>24</sup>Men will go there  
armed with bows and arrows,  
for the whole country  
will be covered with briars and thorns.

<sup>25</sup>No one will dare come  
to all the hills which used to be  
cultivated with hoe,  
for fear of briars and thorns.  
There, cattle will be let loose  
and sheep left to graze.

### The waters of Shiloah gently flowing

**8** • <sup>1</sup>The Lord said to me, “Take a large cylindrical seal and write on it in ordinary characters: *Quick to plunder-Booty is Close*. <sup>2</sup>Do this before Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jebe-rechiah my reliable witness.”

<sup>3</sup>I went to my wife; she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then Yahweh said to me, “Call him *Quick to plunder-Booty is Close*, for this is Yahweh’s word:

<sup>4</sup>Before the child knows how to say “father” or “mother”, the wealth of Damascus and the booty of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.”

<sup>5</sup>Again Yahweh spoke to me: <sup>6</sup>“Because this people refuses the gently flowing waters of Shiloah, and cowers in fear before Rezin and the son of Remaliah, <sup>7</sup>therefore the Lord will bring against them the waters of the River, deep and mighty—the king of Assyria with all his pomp.

It will rise over all its channels  
and overflow all its banks;

<sup>8</sup>it will sweep on to Judah,  
it will overflow and pass on,  
reaching up to the neck.

motherhood would have anticipated salvation. However Ahaz’s son and successor Ezekiah whom the Bible considers as a good king was already born at that time. Moreover, how is it possible that Isaiah spoke about him in such an extraordinary manner (see 9:1-6)?

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

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

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

Isaiah is giving a sign to king Ahaz, to his heirs, *David’s descendants* (v. 13), and to all who live in a world devastated by sin, and this sign points to Christ. Just as in the lost earthly Paradise we have the image of a woman, or of the *son of a woman* who will crush the serpent’s head, here we have another image, that of the virgin with her son, *God-with-us*. Immanuel suffers for his brothers’ and sisters’ sins, and that is why he can reconcile us with God.

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

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

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

10:6;  
Jer 32:11

7:14

30:15

Jer 46:7;  
Dn 11:10

10:28

32:13



It will spread its wings over the whole breadth of your land, O Immanuel!

<sup>9</sup>Know it, O you nations.

Hear, O you distant lands;  
gird yourselves for war and be dismayed!

Rom 8:31

<sup>10</sup>Devise a plan and it will be thwarted,  
make a resolve and it will not stand,  
for God-is-with-us.

### Yahweh, a hidden God

Jer 20:7

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

7:13;  
7:2;  
1P 3:14

<sup>12</sup>“Do not speak of conspiracy whenever these people dread conspiracy; do not fear what they fear nor be in dread. <sup>13</sup>Only Yahweh Sabaoth is holy, only him must you fear, only him must you dread.

Rev  
21:22;  
Lk 2:34;  
Rom  
9:32;  
1P 2:8

<sup>14</sup>He will be a sanctuary and at the same time a stumbling-stone, the rock that brings down, for both houses of Israel. He will be like trap and snare for the people of Jerusa-

lem. <sup>15</sup>Many of them will stumble, many will fall and be broken, be trapped and captured.”

Mt 21:44

<sup>16</sup>Yahweh added: “Bind this testimony and seal it in the midst of my disciples.”

29:11;  
Jer  
32:11;  
Dn 12:4

<sup>17</sup>So I will wait for Yahweh who hides his face from the people of Jacob. I will hope in him. <sup>18</sup>Here am I and the children he has given me. We are signs and portents in Israel from Yahweh Sabaoth, who dwells on Mount Zion.

Ps 22:25

Ps  
132:13;  
Heb 2:13

• <sup>19</sup>Should people tell you to consult mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter, you must say to them: “A people, of course, must consult its gods! On behalf of the living, will you consult the dead?”

1S 28:7;  
2K 21:6

<sup>20</sup>This is what is said through the law and revelations: this word will not fade away.

8:16

<sup>21</sup>Distressed and famished,  
they will roam the land.

The *waters of Shiloah* (v. 6) are the only source of water supply for Jerusalem, located on a plateau. They symbolize the secret protection of the Lord, present in the midst of his people and in whom all should place their faith. Whereas the king of Assyria whom Ahaz called for help, would be like the river whose raging waters will flood everything. He will destroy Judah's enemies, but will also leave Judah in ruins. In this, we also have the prophecy about the destiny of modern nations that believe they will solve their internal problems by jumping on the bandwagon of more powerful nations.

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

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

*We are signs in Israel.* Isaiah has concluded his interventions and they have not listened to him. All he can do now is to wait in silence for the events to occur. His two sons, to whom he

gave symbolic names: *Quick to plunder—Booty is Close* (v. 3) and *A-remnant-will-return* (7:3) remind everyone of his predictions. The first of these names refers to the near future; the second, to the end of the crisis. (See 10:20.)

*Only Yahweh Sabaoth is holy; only him must you fear.* For Jerusalem, it is a privilege to have God in its midst. Rather than being frightened by human dangers, the Jews should look to God and obey him. In their midst, God is like the stone which hardly emerges from the ground but causes a fall for those who do not see it. Jesus will appear as a stumbling stone (Mt 21:44).

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

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

In their hunger they will fume  
and curse their God and their king.  
They will look upward,  
<sup>22</sup>and then look towards the earth,  
but they will only find distress and  
darkness,  
and frightening gloom.

<sup>23</sup>Yet, where there was but anguish,  
darkness will disappear.  
He has just afflicted the land of Zebu-  
lun and the land of Naphtali; but in the  
future he will confer glory on the way of  
the sea, on the land beyond the Jordan—  
the pagans' Galilee.

2K 15:29;  
Mt 4:  
15-16

**To us a child is born**

8:23;  
Lk 1:78;  
Is 60:1;  
Mic 7:8

**9**

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup>For a child is born to us,  
a son is given us;  
the royal ornament is laid upon his shoulder,  
and his name is proclaimed:

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

7:14;  
Lk 2:11;  
Jn 3:16;  
Ps 110:2;  
Rev  
19:12;

Ps 2:6;  
45:7;  
72:17;  
Dt 10:17;  
Mic 5:1-3;  
Zec 9:9

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

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

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

– a people dominated by every kind of oppressors;

– a people seeking light and without hope.

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

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

As was already the case for Emmanuel, God-with-us, these appellations which seem at

“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

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

11:9;  
32:18;  
33:20

The zealous love of Yahweh Sabaoth will do this.

### Threats against Israel

• <sup>7</sup>The Lord has sent a word against Jacob: the sentence fell upon Israel.

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

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

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

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

<sup>13</sup>Therefore, Yahweh has cut off from Israel both head and tail, palm branch and reed in a single day. <sup>14</sup>The elders and prominent men are the head, the tail is the prophet of lies. <sup>15</sup>The guides of these

people mislead them, the leaders have lost their way. <sup>16</sup>The Lord, therefore, does not spare their young men nor have compassion on their orphans and widows. For everyone has become evil and ungodly; every mouth speaks folly.

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

<sup>17</sup>Their wickedness has become like a fire

which consumes both thorn and brier; it rages, sets thickets ablaze, and all of them vanish like smoke.

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

<sup>19</sup>Snatching left and right, they still go hungry and they remain unfilled: each one devours his neighbor’s flesh.

<sup>20</sup>Manasseh devours Ephraim, Ephraim devours Manasseh; and against Judah together they march.

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

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

### WE DO NOT ABANDON HOPE

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

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

and a lasting kingdom, but Christ is the definitive king, not Solomon.

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

What the prophet condemns on God’s behalf is their social injustice.

10:2, “the widows, the orphans,” which means those who have no protection.

The Bible often calls our attention to them; it also mentions “the foreigner,” meaning the immigrant.

## Legal injustice

Pro 22:22

10

<sup>1</sup>Woe to those who enact unjust laws  
and issue oppressive decrees!

<sup>2</sup>Woe to those who rob the poor of their rights  
and deprive the helpless of justice!  
They prey on widows and plunder the orphans.

<sup>3</sup>What will you do on the day of punishment?  
Where will you flee for help

when disaster suddenly comes?  
Where will you save your wealth?

<sup>4</sup>You can do nothing but cringe  
among the captives and exiles  
or fall down among the slain.

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

22:22;

Dt 24:17;

Job 31:14

Zep 1:18

## Assyria: instrument of God

10:27;

14:24;

30:27

• <sup>5</sup>Woe to Assyria, the rod of my  
anger, the staff of my fury!

Jer 51:20

<sup>6</sup>Against a godless nation I send him,  
against a people who provoke my  
wrath I dispatch him,  
to plunder and pillage,  
to tread them down like mud in the  
streets.

Mic 4:12

<sup>7</sup>But the mind of his king is far from  
this,

his heart harbors other thoughts;  
what he wants is to destroy,  
to make an end of all nations.

<sup>8</sup>For he says:

“Are not my commanders like kings?”

<sup>9</sup>Was it not the same for Calno as for  
Carchemish,  
for Hamath as for Arpad,  
and for Samaria as for Damascus?

37:12

<sup>10</sup>Just as my hands have seized idol-  
atrous kingdoms, whose graven images  
excelled those of Samaria and Jerusalem,

<sup>11</sup>just as I have dealt with Samaria  
and her idols, shall I not do to Jerusalem  
and her idols?”

<sup>12</sup>When Yahweh has finished all his  
work on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,  
he will punish the king of Assyria for his  
willful pride and arrogant insolence. <sup>13</sup>For  
the king says:

“By my own strength I have done this  
and by my own wisdom, for I am clever.

I have moved the frontiers of peoples,  
I have plundered treasures,  
I have brought inhabitants down to  
the dust,  
I have toppled kings from their thrones.

<sup>14</sup>As one reaches into a nest,  
so my hands have reached into  
nations' wealth.

As one gathers deserted eggs,  
so have I gathered the riches of the  
earth.

No one flapped a wing  
or opened its mouth to chirp a protest.”

<sup>15</sup>Does the axe claim more credit  
than the man who wields it?  
Does the saw magnify itself  
more than the one who uses it?

This would be like a rod wielding the  
man who lifts it up;  
will those not made of wood, be  
controlled by the cudgel?

<sup>16</sup>Therefore the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth,  
is ready to send a wasting sickness  
upon the king's sturdy warriors.  
Beneath his plenty, a flame will burn  
like a consuming fire.

<sup>17</sup>The Light of Israel will be a fire  
and his Holy One a flame—  
to burn and devour his thorns and  
briers

all in a single day.

<sup>18</sup>The splendor of his forest and  
fruitful land

comes undone and raves,

31:9

• **10.5** This poem addresses the Assyrians when they were still a threat, perhaps in the campaign of 701 (see the commentary on chap. 31).

body and soul disappears and passes away.

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

### A remnant will return

1:9;  
4:2;  
6:13

• <sup>20</sup>On that day, the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the people of Jacob will no longer rely upon the tyrant who struck them down, but instead will truly rely upon the Holy One of Israel. <sup>21</sup>*A-remnant-will-return*—a remnant of Jacob—to the mighty God.

Rom 9:27

<sup>22</sup>Yes, Israel! Though your people be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return; their end has been ordered, justice shall be fully done. <sup>23</sup>The Lord will make a full end, as decreed by Him, all over the land.

28:22

37:6;  
5:14

<sup>24</sup>Thus says the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth, “O my people, who dwell in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians who strike you with the rod and lift up their staff against you as did the Egyptians. <sup>25</sup>In a little while my anger against you will be over and will be directed to their destruction.

<sup>26</sup>Yahweh Sabaoth will lash at them with a scourge, as he did with the Midianites at the rock of Oreb, as he did in

Egypt when he raised his rod over the sea.

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

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

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

<sup>30</sup>Lift up your voice, O daughter of Gallim,

let it be heard at Laishah and answered at Anathoth.

<sup>31</sup>Madmenah is in flight; the people of Gebim flee for their lives.

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

1S 21:2

<sup>33</sup>Suddenly, the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth lops off the boughs with terrifying violence.

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

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

### The Prince of Peace

**11**

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

<sup>2</sup>The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him—  
a Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
a Spirit of counsel and power,  
a Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.

4:2;  
Jer 23:5;  
Rom 15:12;  
Rev 22:16;  
1S 16;  
Ps 72

2S 23:2;  
Pro 8:  
12-14;  
Jn 1:32;  
Col 2:3

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

From the time God spoke to Elijah of the “seven thousand Israelites” (1 K 19:18), the prophets are constantly repeating that the sins of Israel will not cancel God’s plans. A rem-

nant will remain when Israel is destroyed, and they *will return*. This has a double meaning:

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

• **11.1** Those who have read the New Testament know that the Jews of Jesus’ time were expecting a Messiah. This, however, was not always the case. From Abraham to David, the Israelites were looking for the land promised by God and they conquered it. After David,

<sup>3</sup>Not by appearances will he judge,  
nor by what is said must he decide,  
<sup>4</sup>but with justice he will judge the poor  
and with righteousness decide for the meek.

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

<sup>5</sup>Justice will be the girdle of his waist,  
truth the girdle of his loins.

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

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

Like cattle, the lion will eat hay.

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

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

Rev 2:16;  
19:11, 15;  
2Thes  
2:8;  
Eph 6:14

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

Gen 3:15

Jer 31:  
33-34

they thought that a better king could not be found and, during the two and a half centuries that followed, they hoped only that their present and future kings would resemble David. The very promise that God made to David about his descendants (2 S 7:14) was not understood as the announcement of a future Messiah.

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

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

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

*To do justice for the meek* was and continues to be the first function of sovereigns. The Messiah-King would be God's deputy, atten-

tive to the poor, and he must receive the Spirit, or Breath of God for this endeavor. We must not see material liberation as opposed to spiritual liberation as if believers were to let others build a more just world. God's work that saves persons, can never be separated from educating people: it demands *the repression of the oppressors and ruling in the fear of the Lord*.

It would be wrong to think that, with Christ, this longing for justice was finished. The love and forgiveness that Jesus proclaims bring about the salvation of humankind through truth, justice and shared food. Should we forget these requirements, "spiritual" and naive love would be nothing but an illusion.

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

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

Rom 15:12; Rev 22:16 • <sup>10</sup>On that day the “Root of Jesse” will be raised as a signal for the nations. The people will come in search of him, thus making his dwelling place glorious.

3:20; Is 40:3 <sup>11</sup>On that day Yahweh will again raise his hand to reclaim the remnant of his people from Assyria; from Egypt, Pathros and Ethiopia; from Elam, Shinar, Hamath and from the coastlands of the sea.

<sup>12</sup>He will set up a signal that can be seen from all the countries and assemble the exiles of Israel; he will gather the scattered people of Judah from all the corners of the earth.

<sup>13</sup>Then Ephraim will cast off its jeal-

ousy and Judah will be rid of its enemies. Ephraim will not envy Judah nor Judah be hostile to Ephraim. <sup>14</sup>But the two will sweep down together upon the shoulder of Philistia to the west and plunder the nations to the east. They will lay their hands upon Edom and Moab and make the Ammonites their subjects.

14:21 <sup>15</sup>Yahweh will dry up the tongue of the Egyptian sea; he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates in scorching fury, and break it into seven streams that people can cross dry-shod. <sup>16</sup>Then there will be a highway for the remnant of his people coming back from Assyria, as there was when Israel came out of Egypt. 40:3

### Song of the saved

**12**

<sup>1</sup>On that day you will say:

“I give praise to you, O Lord.

Although you have been angry with me  
your anger has been appeased  
and you have consoled me.

<sup>2</sup>He is the God of my salvation;

in him I trust and am not afraid,

Yahweh is my strength: him I will praise,  
the one who saved me.”

<sup>3</sup>You will draw water with joy

from the very fountain of salvation.

<sup>4</sup>Then you will say: “Praise to the Lord,

break into songs of joy for him,

proclaim his marvellous deeds among the nations  
and exalt his Name.

<sup>5</sup>Sing to the Lord: wonders he has done  
let these be known all over the earth.

<sup>6</sup>Sing for joy, O people of Zion,

for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

55:1;  
Zec 14:8;  
Jer 2:13;

15:2

17:13;  
Ezk 47:1;  
Jn 4:14

Ps 105:1

Jl 1:15

### Against Babylon

**13**

<sup>1</sup>An oracle concerning Babylon, seen by Isaiah, son of Amoz:

<sup>2</sup>On a bare hilltop raise a banner;  
cry aloud to them,

wave a hand for them  
to enter the Gates of the Nobles.

<sup>3</sup>I have ordered my sacred  
knights,  
I have summoned my holy ones—

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

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

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

• **13.1** Chapters 13 to 33 are a series of oracles against the neighboring people. The

all those who rejoice in my triumph—  
I have commanded them to carry  
out my wrath.

<sup>4</sup>Listen, a rumbling on the mountains  
as of a great multitude!  
Listen, a tumultuous uproar  
as of kingdoms massing together!  
Yes, Yahweh Sabaoth is mustering  
his army.

<sup>5</sup>From faraway lands,  
from the ends of the heavens  
they come—Yahweh  
and the instruments of his wrath—  
to destroy the whole earth.

<sup>6</sup>Wail, for the day of Yahweh is near;  
it will come as destruction from the  
Almighty.

<sup>7</sup>All arms will go limp,  
every human heart will fail him.

Ezk 7:17

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

Zep 1:14;  
Job 38:13

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

<sup>10</sup>The stars and constellations at night  
will send forth no light, the moon  
will not shine; in the morning the sun  
will be dark as it rises.

<sup>11</sup>I punish the world for the evil it does,  
and the wicked for their sins.

I make the arrogance of the proud  
cease.

I end the haughtiness of the ruthless.  
<sup>12</sup>I will make mortals scarcer than  
gold

and humans more rare than the gold  
of Ophir.

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

<sup>14</sup>Like a hunted gazelle,  
or like a flock without a shepherd  
everyone returns to his own people,  
each one flees to his native land.

Jer 51:9

<sup>15</sup>Whoever is captured will be  
butchered,  
whoever is caught will be slaughtered.

<sup>16</sup>Their babies will be dashed to  
pieces before their eyes,  
their houses will be looted,  
their wives raped.

Ps 137:9

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

<sup>18</sup>Their bows and arrows will strike  
down young men

without mercy or compassion.  
They do not spare infants and children.

<sup>19</sup>Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms,  
pride and glory of the Chaldeans,  
will be like Sodom and Gomorrah  
when overthrown by God.

<sup>20</sup>She will never be inhabited,  
nor dwell in from age to age.

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

Bible calls them *the nations*, and since the Word of God was not addressed to these people, they were pagans. And so, whenever we read "the nations" in the Bible, we can translate it as "the pagans" or "the foreigners."

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

For example, 14:28-32. An embassy of Philistines came to Jerusalem after a number of set-backs at the hands of the Assyrians. Isaiah's message is: Assyria will recover, Judah

will be saved if it remains neutral, trusting in Yahweh.

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

The poem 13:1-22 has been inserted much later in the book of Isaiah, certainly well after the end of Babylon which it recounts. It is equally true for 14:1-2 and 22-23. We note in 13:3 the "saints," (or holy ones) meaning celestial personages also termed "sons of God," or "angels." During the last centuries before Christ, it was thought that through their intermediary God directed history (Dn 4:14).



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

<sup>22</sup>There mad dogs will cry out in her  
strongholds,  
and jackals in her palaces.  
Her time is close at hand;  
her days are now numbered.

56:3;  
Zec 2:15;  
Ezk  
37:14

**14** <sup>1</sup>The Lord will take pity on Jacob,  
he will choose Israel again and set-  
tle them in their own land. Then foreign-  
ers will join them and be counted with the  
people of Jacob.

66:20;  
Zec 2:13

<sup>2</sup>Nations will take them and bring  
them to their own place. But as soon as  
they are back home, the people of Israel  
will subdue them and make them ser-  
vants and maids. Thus the people of Is-  
rael will make captives of their captors  
and rule over their oppressors.

### How you have fallen, shining star!

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

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

9:3;  
Ezk  
26:17;  
Lm 1:1

<sup>5</sup>Yahweh has broken the staff of the  
wicked,

the scepter of the tyrant  
<sup>6</sup>who struck down the people  
with blow after blow,  
who ruled the nations in anger,  
with unrelenting persecution.

<sup>7</sup>The whole earth is at rest and at peace,  
breaking forth into song.

<sup>8</sup>Even the cypresses exult  
and the cedars of Lebanon say:

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

<sup>9</sup>The netherworld is all astir  
to meet you when you come.  
It stirs up the dead to greet you—  
all who were leaders of the world.  
It raises from their thrones—  
all who were kings of the nations.

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

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

<sup>12</sup>How you are fallen from heaven,

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

<sup>13</sup>You said in your heart,  
“I will ascend to heaven,  
I will raise my throne  
higher than the stars of God;  
I will sit on the Mount of Assembly,  
in the far recesses of the North.

Ps 48:3

<sup>14</sup>I will climb up above the clouds;  
I will be like the Most High!”

Gen 3:5;  
Ezk 28:2;  
Dn 11:36;  
2Thes  
2:4

<sup>15</sup>But down to the netherworld you go,  
to the deep recesses of the Pit.

<sup>16</sup>All who see you stare at you  
and ponder over your fate:

“Is this the man who shook the  
earth,

who made kingdoms quake,  
<sup>17</sup>who made the world a waste,  
who overthrew its cities

and would not give its captives  
release?”

<sup>18</sup>All kings of nations lie in state,  
each in his own tomb.

Ezk  
32:23

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

The poem in verses 3-21 was spoken by  
Isaiah on the occasion of the death of an As-  
syrian king; here these words are applied  
much later to the ruin of Babylon which had

become the symbol of the fall of God's ene-  
mies.

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

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

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

Gen 11:8 <sup>21</sup>Go up, slaughter the sons for the  
sins of their fathers,  
lest they rise and possess the land  
and cover the earth with their cities.

<sup>22</sup>"I will rise up against them," says  
Yahweh Sabaoth. "I will cut off from  
Babylon her name, her remnant, off-  
spring and posterity," says Yahweh.

<sup>23</sup>"I will turn her into a swampland, a  
habitation of reptiles and crocodiles; I will  
sweep her with the broom of destruc-  
tion," says Yahweh Sabaoth.

10:5 <sup>24</sup>Yahweh Sabaoth has sworn:  
"As I have planned, so will it be!  
As I have decided, so will I do;  
<sup>25</sup>I will destroy the Assyrian in my land,  
trample him down on my mountains;  
take his yoke off my people's neck,  
and remove his burden from their  
shoulders.

Dn 4:32 <sup>26</sup>This is the sentence he pronounced  
for the whole earth; with his hand stretched  
out over all nations. <sup>27</sup>Yahweh has made a  
decision, and who will annul it? His hand  
is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

### Warning to the Philistines

<sup>28</sup>In the year king Ahaz died this ora-  
cle was proclaimed:

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

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

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

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

### Lament for Moab

**15** <sup>1</sup>An oracle concerning Moab:  
Laid waste in a night,

Jer 48

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

<sup>2</sup>The people of Diman have gone  
to the high places to weep.  
Over Nebo and Medeba Moab wails.  
Every head is shaved,  
every beard is shorn.

Am 8:10;  
Jon 3:6

<sup>3</sup>In the streets they wear sackcloth,  
on the rooftops and in the squares;  
everyone wails,  
every heart melts in tears.  
<sup>4</sup>Heshbon and Elealeh cry out;  
their howling is heard as far as Jahaz;  
the armed men of Moab cry aloud  
and their hearts are faint.

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

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup>Their cry rings round the border of  
Moab,

resounds as far as Eglaim,  
reaches as far as Beer Elim.

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

2K 17:25;  
Am 1:2

**16** <sup>1</sup>Like bewildered birds  
cast out of their nests,

the daughters of Moab  
stay at the fords of Arnon.

2K 3:4 <sup>2</sup>From Sela, across the wilderness,  
they send lambs to the mount of Zion:  
are they not the rulers of the land?

<sup>3</sup>They say: "Take counsel,  
render decision with justice.  
Even at high noon  
let your shade be like the night  
to hide the fugitives.

Do not betray the refugees.  
<sup>4</sup>Let the outcasts from Moab  
sojourn among you;  
be a refuge to them  
against the destroyer."

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

2S 7:13 <sup>5</sup>a throne will be established  
steadfast in love.

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

Jer 48:  
29-33 <sup>6</sup>We have heard of the pride of Moab,  
of her arrogance and insolence,  
of her empty pretensions.

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

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

<sup>9</sup>Therefore I weep as Jazer weeps  
for the vines of Sibmah.

I drench you, O Heshbon,  
O Elealeh, with my tears!  
For over your fruit and your vintage  
have been heard loud battle cheers.

<sup>10</sup>But they are gone: joy and gladness  
have now vanished from your  
orchards.

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

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

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

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

#### Against Damascus

**17** • <sup>1</sup>An oracle concerning Damascus:  
"Damascus will cease to be a city  
and will become a heap of ruins.

<sup>2</sup>Her towns will be abandoned  
and left as pasture for flocks;  
there they will lie down afraid of no one.  
Damascus will no longer be a

kingdom,  
<sup>3</sup>so Ephraim will be left undefended.

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

This is Yahweh Sabaoth speaking.

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

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

<sup>6</sup>Yet some gleanings remain,  
as when an olive tree is beaten—

Ps 46:7

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

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

two or three olives are left on the  
topmost bough,  
four or five on the fruitful branches,  
says Yahweh, the God of Israel.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>11</sup>you may make them grow  
on the day you plant them,  
you may make them blossom  
on the day you sow,  
yet they dwindle and the harvest is  
gone:

then you may cry!

### The upsurge of nations

<sup>12</sup>Oh, the rage of many peoples—  
they rage like the raging sea!  
Oh, the thunder of many nations—  
they thunder like the thundering of  
mighty waves!

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

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

### Against Ethiopia

**18** <sup>1</sup>Woe to the land of whirring wings  
beyond the rivers of Cush,

<sup>2</sup>which sends ambassadors by sea  
in papyrus boats over the waters!  
Go, swift messengers,  
to a people tall and bronzed,  
to a nation feared far and wide,  
a nation conquering and strong,  
whose land the rivers divide.

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

When a horn on the hill is sounded,  
listen!

<sup>4</sup>For thus Yahweh spoke to me:  
“From where I dwell, I gaze untroubled,  
like heat shimmering in the sunshine,  
like a dewy mist in the heat of  
harvest.”

<sup>5</sup>For before the vintage,  
when the flowers fall,  
and the blooms become ripened  
grapes,

I will cut shoots and prune  
and hew away spreading branches.

<sup>6</sup>They will be left to the birds of prey  
and to the beasts of the earth.

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

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

### Against Egypt

**19** <sup>1</sup>*An oracle concerning Egypt:*  
Yahweh rides on a swift cloud and  
comes to Egypt.

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

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

<sup>3</sup>The Egyptians will lose heart for I  
will confound their plans;

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

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

they will consult idols and sorcerers,  
ghosts and necromancers.

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

<sup>5</sup>The waters of the river will dry up;  
the river bed will be parched.

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

The reeds and rushes will wither.

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

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

<sup>9</sup>The flax worker will despair,  
the carders, too, and white cloth  
weavers;

<sup>10</sup>the spinners will be crushed;  
the hired laborers despondent.

<sup>11</sup>The princes of Zoan are utter fools,  
and brutish is the counsel  
of the wisest of Pharaoh's counselors.  
How can you say to Pharaoh,  
"I am one of the wise men,  
a disciple of ancient kings?"

<sup>12</sup>Where are your wise men?  
Let them come forward now,  
let them explain to you  
what Yahweh will do against Egypt.

<sup>13</sup>The princes of Zoan have become  
fools;

the princes of Memphis have been  
deceived;

Egypt is led astray by the chiefs of  
her tribes.

<sup>14</sup>Yahweh has poured into them a spirit  
which makes Egypt err in all her  
ventures,

as a vomiting drunkard errs.

<sup>15</sup>And Egypt will never succeed  
in anything it attempts

by head or by tail, by palm or by reed.

### Egypt will be converted

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

<sup>18</sup>On that day there will be five cities  
in the land of Egypt speaking the lan-  
guage of Canaan, in which people will  
call upon Yahweh Sabaoth. One of them  
is called the City of the Sun.

<sup>19</sup>On that day there will be an altar to  
Yahweh in the center of the land of Egypt  
and a sacred pillar to Yahweh at its bor-  
der. <sup>20</sup>It will be a sign and a remembrance  
of Yahweh Sabaoth in the land of Egypt,  
so that they may call to him when they  
are oppressed, and he will send a savior  
to defend and deliver them. <sup>21</sup>Yahweh will  
reveal himself to the Egyptians. They will  
acknowledge him on that day and wor-  
ship him with sacrifice and burnt offer-  
ings. They will make vows to Yahweh  
and perform them. <sup>22</sup>Yahweh will strike  
Egypt and then cure it. When they turn  
to him, he will heal them and heed their  
supplications.

<sup>23</sup>On that day there will be a highway  
from Egypt to Assyria. Assyrians will  
come to Egypt, and Egyptians to As-  
syria. Egyptians and Assyrians will wor-  
ship together.

<sup>24</sup>On that day, Israel will be a third  
party with Egypt and Assyria—a bless-  
ing on earth. <sup>25</sup>And Yahweh will bless  
them saying, "Blessed be Egypt my peo-  
ple, Assyria my creation, and Israel my  
heritage."

### The Sign of the Naked Prophet

**20** • <sup>1</sup>In the year that the general  
sent by Sargon, king of Assyria,  
made an assault upon Ashdod,  
capturing it, <sup>2</sup>Yahweh gave a warn-  
ing through Isaiah, the son of Amoz,

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

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

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

Jer 46:26

Hos 6:1

Gen 12:2;  
Zec 8:13

2K 18:17

saying, “Hang the sackcloth from your hips, take off your sandals and go.” He did so, and walked naked and barefoot.

<sup>3</sup>Then Yahweh said: Just as my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and portent for Egypt and Ethiopia, <sup>4</sup>so will the king of Assyria lead away captives from Egypt and exiles from Ethiopia, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, their buttocks uncovered, to the disgrace of Egypt. <sup>5</sup>Those who pinned their hope upon Ethiopia and made a boast of Egypt will be frightened and put to shame.

<sup>6</sup>On that day the inhabitants of this coastland will say, “Look at what happened to those we trusted and fled to for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! What are we going to do now to save ourselves?”

### Fall of Babylon

**21** <sup>1</sup>*An oracle concerning the Desert by the Sea:*

A fearful vision is shown to me:  
As whirlwinds sweep over the Negeb,  
coming in waves from the desert,  
from the fearful land,

<sup>2</sup>the traitor betrays,  
the plunderer plunders.

“Go up, O Elam!  
Lay siege, O Media!”  
“I have silenced all the groanings.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>9</sup>And look, here come riders,  
horsemen in pairs.”

And he spoke up again:  
“Fallen is Babylon, fallen,  
and all the graven images of her gods  
lie shattered on the ground!”

<sup>10</sup>O my people, threshed and  
winnowed,

I announce to you what I have heard  
from Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of  
Israel.

### Against Edom and Arabia

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>16</sup>For thus Yahweh says to me, “In a  
year’s time, as a worker bound by con-  
tract would reckon it, all the glory of Ke-  
dar will come to an end. <sup>17</sup>Few of Kedar’s  
archers and warriors will remain.” Yah-  
weh God of Israel has spoken.

**22** <sup>• 1</sup>*An oracle concerning the Valley of Vision.*

What ails you now,

Jer 51:8;  
Rev 14:8;  
18:2

41:15

that you have all gone up to the  
housetops,  
<sup>2</sup>you with your hustle and bustle  
a tumultuous city, a wanton town?  
Your slain men  
have not been killed by the sword,  
nor have they died in battle.  
<sup>3</sup>Together your leaders have fled;  
they were captured under the threat  
of the bow.

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

Jer 9:17;  
8:19

<sup>4</sup>That is why I say,  
“Look away from me.  
I will weep bitterly.  
Do not try to comfort me  
over the ruin of the daughter of my  
people.”

<sup>5</sup>There comes from the Lord Yahweh  
Sabaoth a day of trampling and rout.

In the Valley of Vision they undermine  
the walls  
and the cries for help ascend to the  
mountains.

<sup>6</sup>Elam bears the quiver  
with charioteers and horsemen;  
Kir uncovers the shield.

<sup>7</sup>Chariots are all over your choicest  
valleys;  
horsemen are stationed at the gates.  
<sup>8</sup>Judah is stripped of her defenses.

1K 7:2

### Let us eat and drink!

• On that day you turned your  
eyes to the arsenal at the Palace of  
the Forest. <sup>9</sup>You saw the many  
breaches in the defenses of the city

of David. You gathered together the  
waters of the lower pool.

<sup>10</sup>You counted the houses of Jeru-  
salem and tore down some of them  
to strengthen the wall. <sup>11</sup>You built a  
reservoir between the two walls for  
the water of the old Pool.

7:3;  
5:12;  
30:1

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

<sup>13</sup>But look, instead of that, there  
is wanton revelry: oxen are butcher-  
ed and sheep are slaughtered. You  
eat meat and get drunk, saying, “Let  
us eat and drink for tomorrow we  
die.”

Ecl 3:12;  
Wis 2:7-9;  
1Cor  
15:32

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

### Against a minister

<sup>15</sup>Thus says the Lord Yahweh Saba-  
oth: Go and talk to this man Shebna, who  
is the palace steward. Ask him:

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

<sup>17</sup>Look here, O you strongman,  
Yahweh will seize you;

• **22.1** *Against the Valley of Vision*, namely, the cursed valley “Gehenna,” bordering Jerusalem on the south. All the people went up to express their delight. Hezekiah’s military victory or costly surrender to the Assyrians? Isaiah knows that today’s meager success means tomorrow’s defeat and humiliation. If they had listened to him instead of relying on their strength and their diplomacy, the Lord would have saved them.

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

Isaiah looks at the restlessness of those who refused to hear the call of Yahweh: he asked

them to stay out of fruitless struggles and to dedicate themselves to bringing about justice.

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

Isaiah seemingly forgets what is needed for

Am 7:17

he will take you captive  
and take firm hold of you.

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

<sup>19</sup>You will be deposed, strongman.  
I will hurl you down from where you  
are.

<sup>20</sup>On that day I will summon  
my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah.

<sup>21</sup>I will clothe him with your robe,  
I will strengthen him with your girdle,  
I will give him your authority,  
and he will be a father

to the inhabitants of Jerusalem  
and to the people of Judah.

Rev 3:7

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

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

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

### Against Tyre

Ezk  
26—28

**23** <sup>1</sup>*An oracle concerning Tyre:*  
Wail, O ships of Tarshish,  
for Tyre is destroyed!  
When you return from Kittim  
you will hear the news and wonder.

<sup>2</sup>Keep silent, merchants of Sidon,  
all you inhabitants of the coast.  
Your messengers passed over the sea,  
<sup>3</sup>across the wide oceans;  
the grain of Shihor,  
the harvest of the Nile,  
was your income  
and you were the fair of the nations.

<sup>4</sup>Be ashamed, O Sidon, refuge on  
the sea!

The queen of the sea wonders:  
“Have I not had labor pains  
and brought forth children?  
Have I not nourished young men  
and brought up daughters?”

<sup>5</sup>Those in Egypt will be in anguish  
when they learn the fate of Tyre.

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

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

<sup>8</sup>Who has planned this against Tyre,  
the imperial city whose merchants  
are princes,  
whose traders are among the great  
ones of the world?

<sup>9</sup>It is Yahweh Sabaoth who has  
planned it,

to bring down her proud majesty,  
to humble the great ones of the world.

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

<sup>11</sup>Yahweh has stretched out his hand  
over the sea to make kingdoms  
tremble.

He has ordered the destruction  
of the fortresses of Phoenicia.

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

Rev  
18:23

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

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

• **23.1** The poem against Tyre is perhaps Isaiah's. Tyre, the great commercial center of Palestine was for them what the great centers of international commerce are for us. The prophet speaks of “prostitution”: one could find there the embryo for which we can reproach the society of consumption. Verses 15–18 were most probably written centuries later when Tyre was for a time in the orbit of the Jewish nation.



<sup>13</sup>Look at the land of the Chaldeans,  
a people now of no account.  
The Assyrians have destined the land  
to be a place for wild beasts.  
They have erected siege towers  
and demolished her bastions,  
razed her palaces, completely  
reducing her to ruins.  
<sup>14</sup>Wail, O ships of Tarshish,  
for your haven is destroyed.

<sup>15</sup>On that day, Tyre will be forgotten  
for seventy years, about the span of a  
king's life. Then at the end of seventy  
years, it will happen to Tyre as in a har-  
lot's song:

<sup>16</sup>Take a harp, go about the city, for-  
gotten harlot, sing your sweetest song,  
play your best melody, that they may re-  
member you.

<sup>60:7</sup> <sup>17</sup>At the end of seventy years, Yahweh  
will visit Tyre. She will return to her hire  
and once again play whore with all the  
kingdoms of the world on the face of the  
earth. <sup>Dt 23:19</sup> <sup>18</sup>But her wages and activities as  
harlot will be dedicated to Yahweh, in-  
stead of being stored or hoarded. Her  
profits will go to those who live in the  
presence of Yahweh, that they may have  
abundant food and beautiful clothes.

### The sentence

**24** • <sup>1</sup> See how Yahweh breaks  
the land and makes it crack,  
how he turns it upside down  
and scatters its inhabitants,  
<sup>Hos 4:9</sup> <sup>2</sup> priest and people alike,  
servant and master, maid and mis-  
tress;  
buyer and seller, lender and borrower.

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

<sup>3</sup>Cracked is the earth,  
worn out is the world,  
for Yahweh has spoken.

<sup>4</sup>The earth mourns and withers,  
the world pines and fades,  
both heaven and earth languish.

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

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

(<sup>7</sup>The new wine mourns,  
the vine pines away,  
all the revelers groan.

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

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

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

<sup>11</sup>In the streets they cry for wine:  
all joy is gone,  
all cheer has left the land.

<sup>12</sup>The city is left in distress,  
its ruined market is deserted.)

<sup>13</sup>Some remain where nations have been  
as olives after the beating of the trees,  
as grapes after the vintage.

<sup>14</sup>They lift up their voices and shout  
for joy,  
from the vast lands they acclaim  
Yahweh.

Num  
35:3;  
Gen 17:7

Lev  
26:15

Am 6:5

25:2

12:6

• **24.1** When Isaiah was announcing the coming of Emmanuel and a new "victory of Midian," he was expecting this to happen soon. He could foresee that events were heading for a crisis in which God would give victory to his people.

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

This expectation is characteristic of the books termed "apocalyptic," it is expressed in

a part of the poems of chapters 24–27: they were inserted in the book of Isaiah a long time after him.

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

In verses 21-23, all nature is judged, the heavenly powers, cosmic spirits charged with the good order of the universe as well as the earthly kings charged with doing justice here below.

<sup>15</sup>People give him glory from the western islands:

“Islands, sing to Yahweh, the God of Israel!”

Ps 7:10

<sup>16</sup>From the remotest part of the earth we hear songs of praise:  
“Glory to the Righteous One.”

Yet I said: “Woe is me! Woe is me! there is but treachery and traitors!”

<sup>17</sup>Not at all!

Terror, pit and snare  
await you, inhabitants of the earth.

Am 5:19;  
Gen 7:11

<sup>18</sup>He who flees at the cry of terror  
falls into the pit,  
and he who climbs out of the pit  
gets caught in the snare.

For the floodgates of heaven are opened  
and the earth shakes to its foundation.

<sup>19</sup>The earth is broken into fragments,  
the earth is in convulsion.

<sup>20</sup>The earth reels like a drunkard,  
it sways like a hut in the storm,  
weighed down by its transgression,  
and it falls, never to rise again.

<sup>21</sup>On that day Yahweh will punish  
the host of the heavens above,  
and the kings of the earth below.

2P 2:4

<sup>22</sup>They will be gathered together  
as prisoners are gathered in the pit;  
they will be shut up in a dungeon  
and after a time, punished.

4:5;  
Mic 4:7;  
24:9-11;  
Rev 4:4

<sup>23</sup>Then the moon will be confounded  
and the sun ashamed,  
when Yahweh Sabaoth reigns  
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,  
and lets his Glory be shown to his  
elders.

## Thanksgiving

Ps 118:28

**25** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh, you are my God; I exalt you and praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, faithful and true, planned long ago.

<sup>2</sup>You have made the city a heap, the massively defended city a ruin. The bastion of foreign domination is

a city no more, nor will it ever be rebuilt.

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

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

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

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

Pro 9:2

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

2S 15:30

for Yahweh has spoken.

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

Rev 21:4;  
1Cor  
15:26,  
54;  
Rev 7:17Ps 93:1;  
97:1;  
1P 1:8

Moab instead will be trodden down, as straw trodden down on a dunghill.

<sup>11</sup>He will stretch forth his hands there, as a swimmer spreads out his hands to swim. But Yahweh will strike down their pride together with their falsehood. <sup>12</sup>He will raze the high-walled fortress; he will level it to the ground, as dust.

## Song of victory

**26** <sup>1</sup>On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

• **25.1** Chapters 25 and 26:1-6: a thanksgiving to Yahweh who has done away with the presence of the oppressor. His citadel, installed, it would seem, in Jerusalem itself had been completely destroyed. Stanza 25:6-9 re-

calls that this victory is only one stage: the great hope is “the banquet of the elect” after the judgment when God will destroy death. John will use these images in Revelation 7:17 and 21:4.

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

<sup>2</sup>Open the gates!

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

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

<sup>4</sup>Trust in Yahweh forever,  
for Yahweh is an everlasting Rock.

<sup>5</sup>He brought down those who  
dwell on high,

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

<sup>6</sup>Now it is trampled  
the poor and the lowly tread  
upon it.

### Psalm of hope

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Phil 2:13

13:8;  
Mt 24:8Ps 63:2;  
77:3;  
130:6-7

Ecd 8:11

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

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

The people returned from exile, full of hope. The masters to whom they were subjected were perhaps foreigners, possibly their own kings before the exile (vv. 13-14). Now all has changed, now the community wants no other sovereign than God and counts only on

the Law (vv. 8 and 16). They hoped for their liberation (v. 17). They believed that upon return, they would build a better world, but this apparently did not happen (v. 18), since the pagans remained in the Holy Land and continued to make the life of believers difficult (vv. 10-12). So the people pray to God for the time of their restoration. God, being just, will not only grant them the liberation of the living, but will raise up the innocent victims who trusted in him, so that they may also know God's peace (vv. 19-21).

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

Gen 4:10; Job 16:18 <sup>21</sup>For look, Yahweh is coming out of his dwelling; he will punish the inhabitants of the earth for their sins. The earth will reveal the blood shed upon her and will not conceal her slain any longer.

**The vineyard of Yahweh**

51:9; Ps 74:14; Job 26:13; Ezk 32:2; Rev 12 **27** <sup>1</sup>On that day, with his fierce, strong, and powerful sword, Yahweh will punish Leviathan, the twisting serpent always fleeing; he will slay the dragon of the sea.

26:1; 5:1 • <sup>2</sup>On that day, he will say, “Praise my fruitful vineyard! <sup>3</sup>I, Yahweh, am its keeper; I water it every moment. So that no one will harm it, day and night I guard it.”

<sup>4</sup>—“I have no wall, who will cleanse me from thorns?”

—“I myself will march against them, I will burn them altogether. <sup>5</sup>Or if they come to me for refuge, let them make peace with me, yes, let them make peace with me.”

11:1; Hos 14:4 <sup>6</sup>In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will blossom and bear many a shoot

and fill the face of the earth with fruit.

<sup>7</sup>Has Yahweh beaten them as he beat those who beat them?

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

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

she has been pursued and carried off.

Dt 7:5 <sup>9</sup>By this, therefore, the guilt of Jacob will be expiated

and he will atone for his sins when he pulverizes all the altar stones like chalkstones crushed to pieces. No more Asherah poles or incense altars!

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

25:2

There the calves graze, there they lie down, and there they strip bare its branches.

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

<sup>12</sup>On that day, between the Euphrates and the Wadi of Egypt,

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

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

**The irresponsible rulers**

**28** • <sup>1</sup>Woe to the drunkards of Ephraim proudly adorned, to that fading flower of luxurious beauty

5:22

on the head of a rich valley— all are dizzy with wine.

<sup>2</sup>Look, the Lord is sending a powerful and strong one. Like a downpour of hail, like a destructive tempest, like flooding water in torrential rain, he will cast it down to the ground—

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

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

ent sources.

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

<sup>3</sup>that proud ornament  
of the drunkards of Ephraim.

He will trample it underfoot—

Ne 3:12 <sup>4</sup>that fading flower of glorious beauty  
on the head of a rich valley.  
It will be like an early fruit  
which ripened before summer:  
as soon as someone sees it  
he picks it, and while it is yet  
in his hand he eats it.

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

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

### Scoffers beware

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

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

<sup>9</sup>“Who does he think he is teaching?  
Who does he think listens to him?  
Babies just weaned from their  
mother’s milk?

Babies just taken from their mother’s  
breast?

<sup>10</sup>Who cares to hear his

‘Keep quiet, keep quiet!  
Wait a little, wait a little!’

<sup>11</sup>Yes, surely with stammering lips  
and in a strange tongue,  
he will talk to this nation,  
<sup>12</sup>he who once said to them,  
“This is rest, give rest to the weary”;  
and, “This is repose.”

But they would not listen.

<sup>13</sup>That is why Yahweh now says:

Keep quiet, keep quiet!  
Wait a little, wait a little!  
So that when they have to go forward,  
they will instead fall backward;  
they will be injured and snared  
and taken captive.

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

<sup>15</sup>Because you make a boast,  
“We have made a covenant with death,  
we have made a pact with the  
netherworld.

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

### The cornerstone

<sup>16</sup>Therefore the Lord Yahweh says  
this:

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

33:19;  
Jer 5:15;  
1Cor  
14:21

8:19;  
Wis 1:16

Ps 118:  
22-23;  
Mt 21:42;  
16:18;  
1Cor 3:11;  
Rom 9:33;  
1P 2:6

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

The priests and false prophets make fun of Isaiah, saying his words make no sense other than warnings to little children. Isaiah tells

them: since you refuse to understand Yahweh’s warnings, he will speak to you in a stronger way through events where you will not know what to do and you will have in your homeland strangers whose language you will not understand (the same message in 29:14).

• 14. Verses 14-15 and 18-19: the king’s counselors enter into political alliances, playing Egypt against Assyria; Isaiah demands that they seek salvation elsewhere than in these games that can only lead to disaster. It is in the midst of these reproaches that we have the word *cornerstone*.

Verses 16-22: See, *I lay in Zion a granite stone*. The Lord builds the foundation of the new Jerusalem. Regarding the cornerstone we

<sup>17</sup>I will make justice the measure and righteousness the plumb line.

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

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

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

<sup>19</sup>Morning after morning,  
by day and by night,  
the scourge will seize and crush you.  
If you understood this message,  
you would be terrified.

<sup>20</sup>“The bed will be too short to stretch out on, the blanket too narrow to wrap around you.”

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

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

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

### Parable of the farmer

• <sup>23</sup>Listen to my words, pay attention and understand what I say.

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

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

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

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

<sup>29</sup>All comes from Yahweh Sabaoth whose advice is excellent, whose wisdom is wonderful.

2S 7:14;  
Jer 10:24

Rom  
11:33

### Hurricane in Jerusalem

**29** • <sup>1</sup>Woe to Ariel—Ariel,  
the city against which David encamped!

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

2S 5:6;  
Is 36—  
37

read: *He who relies on it shall not be put to shame.* God assists at the events where the elite and the politicians bustle about. He begins to create in his own way a new history, and already places in the midst of his people that which or he whom no one will be able to ignore, he on whom a believing person may lean. In Hebrew the same word denotes “believe” and “lean on.”

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

Already before Christ, the Jews held that this “stone” designated the Messiah (see Ps 118:22). In any case Isaiah refuses to speak of a “king consecrated by God” (which is what Messiah means), for already it was obvious that kings only deceive. The salvation promised by

God would go far beyond what was expected then from a savior.

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

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

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

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

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

Lk 19:43

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

<sup>4</sup>Thrown down, you will speak from  
the ground:

from the dust your words will come  
muffled,

your voice will rise as a ghost's,  
your speech will be a whisper in the  
dust.

But in a flash,

<sup>5</sup>the horde of your enemies will be  
like dust,

the horde of tyrants, flying chaff.

30:27;  
66:15

<sup>6</sup>For suddenly, Yahweh Sabaoth will  
come

with thunder, earthquake and great  
noise,

with whirlwind and thunderstorm  
and flames of consuming fire.

<sup>7</sup>The hordes of all nations

that fight against Ariel,  
that attack and besiege her fortress,  
will vanish like a dream,  
like a vision in the night.

<sup>8</sup>As when a hungry man dreams he  
is eating

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

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

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

Rom  
11:8;  
Mic 3:6

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

Rev 5:1-3

<sup>11</sup>The revelation of all this has be-  
come for you like the words of a sealed  
scroll. When someone gives it to another  
who knows how to read and says, "Read  
this," the other one answers, "I cannot; it  
is sealed." <sup>12</sup>When the scroll is given to

one who doesn't know how to read," he  
answers, "I do not know."

### This people honors me with words

• <sup>13</sup>Yahweh has said; "These peo-  
ple approach me in words; they  
honor me with lip-service, while their  
hearts stay afar. The worship they  
offer me is useless, these are no  
more than traditions and human  
rules.

1:11;  
Ps 78:36;  
Mt 15:  
8-9;  
Mk 7:6

<sup>14</sup>Because of this I will surprise  
them once more; the wisdom of the  
wise will be useless and the under-  
standing of their prudent men will be  
at a loss.

1:Cor  
1:19

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

<sup>16</sup>You turn things upside down,  
as though the potter were the clay,  
and of him it could say,  
"He did not make me; he knows  
nothing."

45:9;  
Jer 18:6;  
Rom 9:  
20-21

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

<sup>18</sup>On that day  
the deaf will hear the words of the  
book,

and out of the dark and obscurity  
the eyes of the blind will see.

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

<sup>20</sup>For the tyrant will be no more  
and the scoffers gone forever,  
and all who plan  
to do evil will be cut down—

28:14

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

<sup>22</sup>Therefore Yahweh, Abraham's  
redeemer,  
speaks concerning the people of Jacob:

45:17

• 13. If we cease to be seekers of God, if we have not orientated our life to allow God to enter, our religion quickly becomes a collection of beliefs and practices similar to what all

social groups have, which became like elements of a school program. Jesus will recall it in Mark 7:6.

No longer will Jacob be ashamed;  
 no longer will his face grow pale.  
<sup>23</sup>When he sees the work of my  
 hands,  
 his children again in his midst,  
 they will sanctify my name,  
 they will sanctify the Holy One of  
 Jacob,  
 and stand in awe of the God of Israel.  
<sup>24</sup>Those who err in spirit will  
 understand;  
 those who murmur will learn.

### Do not rely on the great powers

5:21;  
 28:15;  
 29:15

**30** • <sup>1</sup>“Woe to the rebellious children,”  
 says the Lord; “they make plans  
 which are not mine, they form alliances I  
 did not inspire, and thus add sin upon  
 sin.

<sup>2</sup>They go down to Egypt without my  
 advice to take refuge in Pharaoh’s pro-  
 tection and seek shelter in the shadow of  
 Egypt.

<sup>3</sup>Therefore Pharaoh’s protection will  
 be your shame and Egypt’s shadow your  
 confusion.

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

<sup>6</sup>*An oracle concerning the beasts of  
 the Negeb:*

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

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

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

• 18. God loves us and teaches us. This

### Just tell us pleasant things

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

<sup>9</sup>These are a rebellious people, their  
 children deceitful. They do not listen to  
 Yahweh’s advice.

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

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

<sup>14</sup>It will be like the breaking of a pot-  
 ter’s vessel, smashed so ruthlessly that  
 among its fragments not one shard re-  
 mains big enough to scoop cinder out of  
 the hearth or ladle water out of the cis-  
 tern.”

<sup>15</sup>For thus said the Lord Yahweh, the  
 Holy One of Israel: “Conversion and  
 calmness would have been your salva-  
 tion, quietness and trust your strength.”

<sup>16</sup>But instead you said, “No, we will  
 flee on horses!” Very well then, flee! And  
 you added, “We will ride on swift steeds.”  
 Your pursuer will be swifter.

<sup>17</sup>At the threat of one, a thousand will  
 flee, at the threat of five all will flee, till  
 what is left of you will be like a staff on a  
 mountaintop, like a banner on a hill.

### The coming prosperity

• <sup>18</sup>Yet Yahweh waits to give you  
 grace; he rises to show you compas-  
 sion. For Yahweh is a God of justice.  
 Blessed are all who wait for him.

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

Ezk  
 13:14

Dt 32:30

Hos 14;  
 Ps 1:1;  
 2:12;  
 33:12

poem speaks of all the marvels to be discov-  
 ered when meeting God through tears.

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



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

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

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

Lev 26:4 <sup>23</sup>He will then give rain for the seed you sow and make the harvest abundant from the crops you grow. On that day your cattle will graze in wide pastures. <sup>24</sup>Your beasts of burden will eat silage tossed to them with pitchfork and shovel.

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

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

#### Assyria will be sacrificed

10:5-19 <sup>27</sup>Look, from afar the Name of Yahweh is coming, burning in anger, with a heavy hand. Filled with fury are his lips, like a consuming fire is his tongue.

8:8; 37:29 <sup>28</sup>Like a rushing torrent is his breath,

rising up to the neck, shaking the nations as in a sieve of destruction, putting the bit of his bridle between the jaws of the peoples causing them to err and stray.

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

<sup>30</sup>Yahweh will make his majestic voice heard and show his arm descending in devastating fury and consuming fire, with sweeping wind and crashing thunder.

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

<sup>32</sup>At every beat of the punishing rod the plagues will fall on him. For Yahweh will fight him with outstretched hand.

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

#### Look to the Holy One of Israel

**31** • <sup>1</sup>Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who pin their hopes on cavalry, putting their trust in chariots because they are many, relying on horsemen because they are strong.

Why did they not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult Yahweh? <sup>2</sup>And yet he is very wise, and from him disaster will come.

He does not go back on his word;

18:2;  
29:15;  
30:1

5:12

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

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

he will rise against the evildoers, and cut off the help the wicked waited for.

Ps 146:3

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

Hos 5:14;  
Am 1:2

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

Dt 32:12;  
Ps 36:7

<sup>5</sup>Like birds that hover, so will Yahweh Sabaoth shield Jerusalem: he will protect and deliver, rescue and save.

<sup>6</sup>Return, O children of Israel, to him you have so wickedly betrayed.

2:20

<sup>7</sup>On that day each one of you will throw away the idols of silver and gold that his sinful hands have made.

<sup>8</sup>Assyria will fall by a sword not wielded by a man. They will be devoured by a sword not held by a mortal. They will flee before the sword, their young men will be captured and put to forced labor. <sup>9</sup>They will desert their post and the officers, in terror, will abandon the standard."

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

### A king will reign with justice

**32**

• <sup>1</sup>A king will reign with justice

and princes reign in righteousness.

<sup>2</sup>Each will be like a shield from the wind  
and a shelter from the rain,

like streams of water in a dry, parched land,  
like the shade of a rock in a weary land.

<sup>3</sup>The eyes that see will not be shut;  
the ears that hear will not be stopped.

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

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

Pro 15:2;  
Sir 10:13

<sup>6</sup>For the fool speaks folly and his mind thinks sinfully: he practices wickedness and takes pride in godlessness; he lets the hungry go without food, and the thirsty without drink.

10:2;  
Mic 2:1

<sup>7</sup>The ways of the scoundrel are also evil, scheming wickedly against the poor, destroying the needy with lies even when their plea is just.

<sup>8</sup>But those who are noble plan noble things, and so are their deeds.

### Tremble, you idle women

3:16;  
Am 4:1

<sup>9</sup>Rise up, women who are at ease;

hear my voice, carefree daughters; give heed to my words.

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

<sup>11</sup>Tremble, you women who are at ease; be troubled, you carefree ones. Strip yourselves bare, with only a sackcloth to cover your loins.

20:2;  
Mic 1:8

<sup>12</sup>Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine, <sup>13</sup>for the soil of my people overgrown with briars and thorns, for all the houses of joy, for the city of the wanton.

Lk 23:48

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

placed in the future Prince of Peace (see Is 11).

The just king will give his spirit to the rulers and to the people in charge. Then, the people will be attentive to the Word of God.

• **32.1** Another poem about the hopes

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

### My people will live in peace

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

<sup>16</sup>Justice will dwell in the wilderness; and in the fertile land, righteousness. <sup>17</sup>Justice will bring about peace; justice will produce calm and security forever.

<sup>18</sup>My people will live in comfort and bliss in a land of secure dwellings and undisturbed resting places.

<sup>19</sup>While the forest will be beaten down and the fortress laid waste.

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

### Psalm of hope

**33** <sup>1</sup>Woe to you, O ravager who never have been ravaged,

you O treacherous one who have not been betrayed! When your ravaging is over, you yourself will be ravaged; when your treacherous deals are ended, you yourself will be betrayed.

<sup>2</sup>O Yahweh, have mercy on us who put all our hope in you.

Be our strength every morning, our salvation when trouble comes.

<sup>3</sup>Peoples flee when you thunder and threaten, nations scatter when you rise majestically.

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

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

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

### The intervention of Yahweh

<sup>7</sup>The people of Ariel lament in the street, their envoys of peace bitterly weep.

<sup>8</sup>The highways lie waste with no traveler in sight.

For the covenants were broken, the promises trampled down; no one has been respected.

<sup>9</sup>The earth mourns and languishes, Lebanon withers away with shame, Sharon has become a wilderness, and Bashan and Carmel are stripped bare.

<sup>10</sup>Yahweh says: now I will rise up, now I will be exalted, now I will lift myself up.

<sup>11</sup>You conceived chaff, you will deliver stubble, my breath like fire will devour you.

<sup>12</sup>The nations will be burned to lime, like thorns cut down and burned in the fire.

<sup>13</sup>You who are afar, hear what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge my might.

<sup>14</sup>The sinners of Zion shake, trembling in fear are the hypocrites. "Who among us will dwell with flames?

Who can subsist in the midst of fire?

<sup>15</sup>He who walks uprightly and speaks righteously, spurns profit from oppression, shakes his fists at graft and corruption, stops his ears against suggestions of bloodshed

and averts his eyes from evil plans.

<sup>16</sup>This is the one who will dwell on the heights, his stronghold a fortress of rocks; bread is given to him, his water will not fail.

### After the oppression

• <sup>17</sup>Your eyes will behold a king in his splendor and a land that stretches afar.

29:1

Ps 12:6

Ps 7:15

30:27;  
Dt 4:24

Ps 15:5

• **33.17** This poem, inserted in the book of Isaiah later, emphasizes the hope for a

peaceful time when oppression will only be a memory.

<sup>1</sup>Cor 1:20 <sup>18</sup>Yet your mind may still dwell on its old fears: Where is the oppressor who counted and weighed the taxes and enrolled our sons?

28:11; 36:11 <sup>19</sup>But you will see no more of those fierce people with obscure speech you cannot comprehend, with stammering tongue you cannot understand.

46; Ps 122 <sup>20</sup>Look to Zion, the city of our festivals; see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode, a tabernacle never to be destroyed. Not one of its stakes will ever be removed nor any of its ropes severed.

2:4; Ps 50:6 <sup>21</sup>But there is Yahweh mighty for our sake, in place of broad rivers and streams. Here you see no galley with oars; no stately sailing ship. <sup>22</sup>But Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our king: he will save us.

**The oppressor pillaged**

<sup>23</sup>Your rigging hangs loose: it cannot hold the mast firm, it cannot keep the sail spread out.

Such have been the prey and spoil that even the lame pounced on it. <sup>24</sup>On that day no one apologized, "I am sickly." The people who dwell there have been forgiven their sins.

**The end of Edom**

**34** <sup>1</sup>Come, O nations, hear and take heed, O peoples!

Listen, O earth and all that is in you; listen, O world and all that comes from you.

<sup>2</sup>The wrath of Yahweh is upon all nations. His fury is upon all their armies. He has doomed them, he has given them over for slaughter.

<sup>3</sup>Their slain will be thrown away, stench coming from the carcasses, mountains will flow with blood.

<sup>4</sup>The heavens will dissolve and the skies roll up like a scroll, all their hosts shall fall, as the leaf falls from its vine, as the fruit falls from its tree.

<sup>5</sup>My sword waited in the heavens; and look, it descends upon Edom, to judge the people I have doomed.

<sup>6</sup>The sword of Yahweh is bathed in blood and covered with fat—the blood of goats and lambs, the fat of the saddle of rams. For Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom.

<sup>7</sup>Wild oxen will fall and young steers with the bulls. Their land will be drenched with blood; their soil enriched with fat.

<sup>8</sup>For Yahweh has a day of vengeance, Zion's defender has a year of recompense.

<sup>9</sup>The streams of Edom will become pitch, her soil will be turned into brimstone, her land will be burning pitch.

<sup>10</sup>Never will its fire be quenched, night or day, forever will its smoke go up.

From generation to generation the land will lie desolate and none will ever pass through it.

<sup>11</sup>It will be the haunt of pelican and wild hog,

24:23; Rev 6: 13-14; Mt 24:29

63:1; 2S 1:22; Jer 46:10

Gen 19: 24-28; Rev 14: 10-11

Zep 2:14

Zion, Jerusalem, is the tent which will never be moved. It enjoys Yahweh's secret protection, already mentioned in 8:1 in the image of the waters of Shiloah. A silent presence, yet more powerful than the presence of the great nations. These nations are on the shores of large rivers (Babylon, Egypt and also Tyre, on the seacoast) and are proud of their large boats. In Zion, the city without power or riches, but under the Law of God, believers feel secure in the face of events.

Look to Zion, the city of our festivals; see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode. This is the way

the believer looks at the Church where Christ is found. Staying on the fringe, without commitment, one can easily criticize. If a person really comes in and shares his or her life in depth, he or she discovers that only the Church can communicate strength, peace and God's presence to everyone.

• **34.1** – 34:1. Yahweh's judgment upon Edom. See the introduction to chapter 24. – 35:1. Announcement of the return of the exiles and of the Messiah's coming. See commentary on Isaiah 40-41.

the dwelling place of the owl and the hawk.

God has decided to make it empty,  
he has destined it to be desolate.

<sup>12</sup>There will be no more kings to be proclaimed,

no princes to be acclaimed,  
for the nobility will vanish  
in a kingdom doomed to perish.

<sup>13</sup>Thorns will grow over the castles,  
nettles and brambles over the  
citadels;

the place will be a haunt of reptiles,  
an abode of owls and ostriches.

<sup>14</sup>Wild beasts will meet there,  
wild goats will call to one another;

there will the night creatures alight  
to find for themselves a resting place.

<sup>15</sup>There will the great owl make her nest  
to lay and hatch and also find rest.  
There will the vultures gather,  
each with its mate.

<sup>16</sup>Seek and read from the book of  
Yahweh:

not one of them will be missing,  
for his mouth has given the order  
and his spirit has brought them  
together.

<sup>17</sup>He has cast the lot for them.  
His hand has divided it among them.  
They will possess the land forever,  
and from generation to generation  
they shall dwell there.

### The return of the exiles

**35**

<sup>1</sup>Let the wilderness and the arid land rejoice,  
the desert be glad and blossom.

<sup>2</sup>Covered with flowers, it sings and shouts with joy,  
adorned with the splendor of Lebanon,  
the magnificence of Carmel and Sharon.  
They, my people, see the glory of Yahweh,  
the majesty of our God.

41:18;  
60:13;  
40:5

<sup>3</sup>Give vigor to weary hands  
and strength to enfeebled knees.

<sup>4</sup>Say to those who are afraid:  
“Have courage, do not fear.

40:10

See, your God comes, demanding justice.  
He is the God who rewards,  
the God who comes to save you.”

<sup>5</sup>Then will the eyes of the blind be opened  
and the ears of the deaf unsealed.

29:18;  
Mt 11:5

<sup>6</sup>Then will the lame leap as a hart  
and the tongue of the dumb sing and shout.  
For water will break out in the wilderness  
and streams gush forth from the desert.

Acts 3:8;  
Is 41:18;  
43:20;  
48:21

<sup>7</sup>The thirsty ground will become a pool,  
the arid land springs of water.

In the haunts where once reptiles lay,  
grass will grow with reeds and rushes.

<sup>8</sup>There will be a highway  
which will be called The Way of Holiness;  
no one unclean will pass over it  
nor any wicked fool stray there.

<sup>9</sup>No lion will be found there  
nor any beast of prey.

Only the redeemed will walk there.  
<sup>10</sup>For the ransomed of Yahweh will return:  
 with everlasting joy upon their heads,  
 they will come to Zion singing,  
 gladness and joy marching with them,  
 while sorrow and sighing flee away.

51:11;  
 Ps 126

### Sennacherib's invasion

2K 18:  
 13-37;  
 Is 37:10

**36** <sup>1</sup>In the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. <sup>2</sup>From Lakish the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army to king Hezekiah in Jerusalem. They halted at the channel of the Upper Pool on the highway of the Fuller's Field. <sup>3</sup>So Eliakim son of Hilkiah, the palace administrator, went out to him together with Shebna the secretary and Joah son of Asaph the recorder.

<sup>4</sup>The field commander said to them, "Give Hezekiah this message of the great king of Assyria: How can you be so confident? <sup>5</sup>Do you think words can replace strategy and military strength? On whom are you relying to rebel against me?"

<sup>6</sup>You rely on Egypt, a broken staff which pierces the palm of him who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, for all who rely on him. <sup>7</sup>Yes, you may say to me: 'We rely on Yahweh our God.' But isn't he the one whose altars and high places Hezekiah removed when he commanded Judah and Jerusalem: You shall worship before this altar?"

<sup>8</sup>Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king. I will give you two thousand horses if you are able to supply rid-

ers. <sup>9</sup>How could you ever repulse one of the least of my master's generals? And you rely on Egypt for chariots and horsemen! <sup>10</sup>Do you think that I have come to attack and destroy this land without consulting Yahweh? He himself said to me: Go up to this land and conquer it!"

<sup>11</sup>Then Eliakim and Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, "Speak to your servants in Aramaic, we understand it. Do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of these people on the walls."

<sup>12</sup>But the field commander said, "Do you think that my master sent me to speak these words only to your master and you? Isn't it also to the men on the walls who with you will have to eat their own dung and drink their urine?"

<sup>13</sup>Then the field commander stood and cried out with a loud voice in Hebrew, "Hear the words of the great king of Assyria: <sup>14</sup>Do not let Hezekiah deceive you! No, he will not be able to help you! <sup>15</sup>Do not listen to him when he tells you to trust in Yahweh, saying, 'Yahweh will save us; this city will not be given over to the king of Assyria.' <sup>16</sup>Do not listen to Hezekiah but to what the king of Assyria says, 'Make your peace with me' <sup>17</sup>and surrender. So I will let each of you eat of your vine and of your fig tree and drink the water of your cistern until I come again. Then I will take you to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, of bread and vineyards."

<sup>18</sup>Hezekiah is misleading you when he says that Yahweh will save you. Have the gods of the nations rescued their lands

• **36.1** The next two chapters repeat chapters 18 and 19 of 2 Kings, that relate the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib's army. The first story was taken up in the commentary on 2 Kings 18:17.

Now, we look at the second event. Isaiah encourages resistance even though there is no human hope of salvation. He promises an intervention from God which occurs in the form

of an epidemic—the *angel of Yahweh* wiping out the Assyrian army.

In 22:8 we remarked on Isaiah's opposition to any compromise with the great powers—a seemingly negative attitude for a small insecure nation. Here he relies solely on the power of faith—as Elijah had done before—and saves his nation.

from the hands of the king of Assyria?<sup>19</sup> Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Shepharvaim? And have the gods delivered Samaria from my hand?<sup>20</sup> Who among all the gods of these nations has been able to save his country from me? Do you think that Yahweh could deliver Jerusalem from my hand?<sup>21</sup> ”

<sup>21</sup>The people were like deaf and remained silent, for the king had commanded them not to answer him.

<sup>22</sup>Then Eliakim with Shebna and Joah came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him what the field commander had said.

### King Hezekiah consults Isaiah

2K 19:  
1-19

**37**<sup>1</sup>When king Hezekiah heard this he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and went to the house of Yahweh. <sup>2</sup>He sent Eliakim, Shebna and the elders among the priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz.

<sup>3</sup>And they said to Isaiah, “This is what Hezekiah says: Today is a day of distress, rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to birth and there is no strength to deliver. <sup>4</sup>May your God hear the words of the field commander, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent. May Yahweh your God rebuke him for the words he said, insulting the living God. Therefore offer a prayer for the few of us that are left.”

<sup>5</sup>When king Hezekiah’s officials came to Isaiah, <sup>6</sup>he said to them: “Tell your master this word of Yahweh: Do not fear because of what you heard when the servants of the king of Assyria insulted me. Listen! <sup>7</sup>I will let him be disturbed by certain news, so he will return to his country and there I will have him slain by the sword.”

2K 19:  
8-9

<sup>8</sup>The field commander returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that the king

had left Lachish. <sup>9</sup>This was because king Sennacherib had heard that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was going out to fight him.

Again Sennacherib sent messengers to Hezekiah with these words, <sup>10</sup>“Say to Hezekiah king of Judah that his God in whom he trusts might deceive him in saying that Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria. <sup>11</sup>Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands they have destroyed! And will you be spared? <sup>12</sup>Have the gods saved the nations that my fathers destroyed? Gozan and Haran, Rezep and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar? <sup>13</sup>Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the kings of the cities of Sepharvaim, of Hena and of Ivvah?”

<sup>14</sup>Hezekiah took the letter from the messengers and when he had read it he went to the house of Yahweh where he unrolled the letter <sup>15</sup>and prayed saying, <sup>16</sup>“O Yahweh, God of hosts and God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim! You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth, give ear Yahweh and hear! <sup>17</sup>Open your eyes and see! Listen to all the words of Sennacherib who has sent men to insult the living God!

<sup>18</sup>It is true, Yahweh, that the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the countries of the earth. <sup>19</sup>They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not true gods but made of wood and stone by human hands. <sup>20</sup>Now, O Yahweh our God, save us from his hand and let all the kingdoms of the earth know that you alone, Yahweh, are God.”

• <sup>21</sup>Then Isaiah, son of Amoz, sent word to Hezekiah: “You have called upon Yahweh and he has heard your prayer regarding Sennacherib, king of Assyria. This is what Yahweh has spoken against him:

2K 19:  
9-19

Dn 9:18

38:5;  
2K 19:  
20-37

• **37.21** It is important to underscore the following in Isaiah’s prophecy:

– God cannot stand the pride of the powerful who, by despising the poor who trust in God, despise God himself.

– The promise of liberation includes the promise of national restoration. After their trial,

the survivors will be like a new plant.

If we look carefully at world history we see how God protects defenseless people and the human groups who remain faithful to their mission. More than anyone, the Church experiences this protection when it is reduced to a persecuted minority.

<sup>22</sup>The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises and scorns you; the Daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head behind you.

<sup>23</sup>Whom have you insulted and blasphemed?  
Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted up your brow?  
Against the Holy One of Israel!

<sup>24</sup>Through your servants you have insulted Yahweh. For you have said:  
With my numerous chariots, I have climbed the heights of the mountains, the topmost recesses of Lebanon. I have felled its tallest cedars and its choicest fir trees.

I have reached the remotest heights of its border, the best of its forests.

<sup>25</sup>I have dug wells and drunk waters;  
I dried up with the sole of my foot all the streams of Egypt.

<sup>26</sup>But have you not heard how I decreed it long ago?  
I have just brought to pass what I planned from days of old:  
to lay waste fortified cities, to turn them into heaps of ruins.

<sup>27</sup>Shorn of power, their inhabitants have been dismayed and confounded;  
they have been as the grass and green plants in the field, as the grass on the housetops, as corn scorched before it blooms.

<sup>28</sup>I know whenever you rise or sit, whenever you come or go.

<sup>29</sup>Because of your rage against me and of your arrogance that has reached my ears,

I will put my hook in your nose and my bridle in your mouth, and I will turn you back on the way by which you came.

<sup>30</sup>This will be a sign for you, O Hezekiah: This year you will eat the gleaning of the fields and next year the self-sown grain, but in the third year sow and reap, plant vines and eat the fruit.

<sup>31</sup>A remnant of the people of Judah shall take root below and produce fruit above. <sup>32</sup>For a remnant will come from Jerusalem and survivors from Mount Zion. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will accomplish this. That is why Yahweh has spoken concerning the king of Assyria. <sup>33</sup>He shall not enter this city nor shoot his arrows. <sup>34</sup>He shall not raise a shield to oppose it nor build a siege ramp against it. He shall leave by the way he came and he shall not enter the city, word of Yahweh.

<sup>35</sup>I will protect this city and so save it for my own sake and for the sake of David, my servant.”

<sup>36</sup>That night the angel of Yahweh went and struck one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people rose early next morning there lay all the corpses.

<sup>37</sup>So Sennacherib, king of Assyria departed, returned home and lived in Nineveh. <sup>38</sup>While he was worshiping in the temple of his god, Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer slew him with the sword and then escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon, his son, succeeded him as king.

### Illness and cure of Hezekiah

**38** • <sup>1</sup>In those days Hezekiah fell mortally ill and the prophet

33:20

30:19;  
1K 11:32

Ezk 38:4

2K 20:  
1-11

• **38.1** This incident must have taken place before the 701 siege. Here we see king Hezekiah sick and worried about his health.

Isaiah offers to cure him on God's behalf and adds the promise to protect and defend the Holy City. Yahweh's perspective is much



Isaiah, son of Amoz, went to him with a message from Yahweh, "Put your house in order for you shall die; you shall not live."

<sup>2</sup>Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Yahweh, <sup>3</sup>"Ah Yahweh! Remember how I have walked before you in truth and wholeheartedly, and done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

<sup>4</sup>Then the word of Yahweh came to Isaiah, <sup>5</sup>"Go and tell Hezekiah what Yahweh, the God of his father David, says: I have heard your prayer and I have seen your tears. See! I am adding fifteen years to your life <sup>6</sup>and I will save you and this city from the power of the king of Assyria. I will defend it for my sake and for the sake of David my servant.

<sup>22</sup>Hezekiah asked, "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" <sup>7</sup>Isaiah answered, "This shall be for you a sign from Yahweh, that he will do what he has promised.

<sup>37:30</sup> <sup>8</sup>See! I shall make the shadow descending on the stairway of Ahaz go back ten steps." So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had covered on the stairway.

<sup>21</sup>Isaiah then said, "Bring a fig cake to rub on the ulcer and let Hezekiah be cured!"

### Canticle of Hezekiah

<sup>9</sup> *Canticle of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery:*

<sup>Job 17:11</sup> <sup>10</sup>Once I said: In the noontime of my life I go;  
I am sent to the land of the dead,  
for the rest of my years.

<sup>11</sup>I said: Never again shall I see Yahweh in the land of the living;  
never again shall I see the inhabitants of the earth.

<sup>12</sup>Like a shepherd's tent, my dwelling has been pulled down and thrown away;

like a weaver, you rolled up my life and cut it from the loom:  
from day to night you made me waste away.

<sup>13</sup>I have cried for help until morning. Like a lion, he has broken all my bones.

<sup>14</sup>I have uttered shrill cries like a swallow or a crane,  
I have moaned like a dove.  
My eyes all the while are growing weary as I look up to the heavens:  
Come and help me, O Lord!  
For I am troubled.

<sup>15</sup>But how can I speak and what shall I say to him, if he himself is doing this to me?  
I will have to walk all my years bearing this anguish of my soul.

<sup>16</sup>O Lord, give me back my health and give me back my life!

<sup>17</sup>My anguish has turned to peace; you have retrieved my life from the pit of corruption;  
you have cast all my sins behind you.

<sup>18</sup>For the dead cannot give you thanks, death cannot give you praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your kindness.

<sup>19</sup>The living, the living alone can give you thanks and praise, as I do; fathers will tell their sons of your fidelity.

<sup>20</sup>O Yahweh, come and save me!  
We will sing, accompanied by harps, in the Temple of Yahweh all the days of our life.

### Babylonian Embassy

**39** <sup>1</sup>At that time Merodach-Baladan, son of Baladan, king of

2S 8:  
9-12;  
2K 20:  
12-19

broader than that of the pious Hezekiah. If God cures him it is with a view to his own plan of salvation for all.

Hezekiah's canticle is a psalm of thanksgiving like those we find in the book of Psalms. It expresses the profound feelings of the believ-

ers of the Old Testament for whom dying meant losing everything and who tried to convince God that he would gain nothing in letting his faithful disappear forever.

• **39.1** This final incident related in the book of Isaiah comes from 2 Kings 20.

Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah after hearing that he was recovering from an illness. <sup>2</sup>Hezekiah was pleased and showed the envoys all that was in his treasure house, the silver, gold, spices and fine oil, his entire armory and all that was in his treasury. In fact there was nothing in his palace or in his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.

<sup>3</sup>Isaiah the prophet came to Hezekiah and asked him, “What did these men say and from where did they come?” Hezekiah answered, “They came to me from a distant country—from Babylon.”

<sup>4</sup>And Isaiah said, “What have they seen in your palace?” Hezekiah re-

plied, “They have seen everything in my palace; there is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them.”

<sup>5</sup>Isaiah then said, “Hear this word of Yahweh, the God of hosts: <sup>6</sup>Behold the days are coming when all that is in your palace, and which your fathers have treasured to this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left. <sup>7</sup>And some of your descendants, born of you, will be taken and will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

<sup>8</sup>Hezekiah then said to Isaiah, “The word of Yahweh which you have spoken to me is good!” For he thought: there will be peace and truth in my lifetime.

2K 24:13

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It emphasizes the meanness of Isaiah's own friends.

Isaiah continues to be God's servant, constant in his faith. As for Hezekiah, in spite of

having been favored by God, he remains selfish and irresponsible. One may ask why his son Manasseh (of all the kings of Judah) became most hostile to the faith.



# BOOK OF CONSOLATION

## Book of Isaiah chapters 40–55

The book of Isaiah ended with the deliverance of Jerusalem. Once more there was a manifestation of God's Providence: a spectacular miracle. Sennacherib chose to invade the Holy City and flout the God of Israel, but the following day he hastily decamped, returned home and was assassinated by his son.

Yet a century later, Nabuchodonosor took possession of Jerusalem, left the Temple in flames and set off for Babylon dragging behind him a troop of captives. With everything in shambles, faith was called into question to its very roots, for, if Yahweh, the Savior God was powerless, he was but nothing.

The prophet Ezekiel, who was among the deportees, affirms that the captives, converted as a result of their trials, would return to their country and rebuild their nation in justice.

Yet after this exile, should they expect a coming back to the happy times Israelites had known during the reign of David (or rather: as they were imagined with an aureole of times past)? What was it that God, so mysterious, had in store for Israel?

It was then that there arose a prophet who has remained anonymous. He was not one to preach and dispute like the great prophets of the past whose oracles were written later, but a man who wrote his poems and exclamations. His name fell into oblivion and tradition has placed his writings into Isaiah's book where they form chapters 40-55.

Four parts of these poems have attracted most attention: 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13—53:12. They are not detached sections drowned in a body foreign to them. They are highlights of a vision or of a meditation which develops the mystery of God's relationship with his people throughout the book. The Servant of God is Israel, without doubt, but it is a very poor servant of God: for the most part a people "incapable of seeing and understanding". Nevertheless there are among them genuine faithful believers, true disciples; God has "opened their ears", enabling them to grasp what he wants them to understand. From among them God chooses his servants, the prophets who are in the vanguard and whose example will benefit the rest. Again and again the prophet spoke of the Servant; in the first time this term was certainly applicable to all Israel but in the end the prophet is taken over by this image and lets it embodied in the portrait of Christ the Redeemer.

Finished are the images of the divinity that the religious person has sketched from the beginning attributing all that in this world breathes power and greatness: gold, marble and cedar for temples, bulls and goats consumed on the brasiers of altars... embroidered tunics... turbans and tiaras for priestly robes.... In the crucible of the Exile the prophet received a

**Be comforted, my people****40**49:13;  
51:12;  
52:7-12  
22:3;  
Jer 16:18;  
Lm 4:22

• <sup>1</sup>Be comforted, my people,  
be strengthened, says your God.

<sup>2</sup>Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, proclaim to her  
that her time of bondage is at an end,  
that her guilt has been paid for,  
that from the hand of Yahweh  
she has received double punishment  
for all her iniquity.

Mal 3:1;  
3:23-24;  
Mt 3:3;  
Lk 1:76;

<sup>3</sup>A voice cries,  
“In the wilderness prepare the way for Yahweh.  
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

3:4-6;  
Is 45:2;  
Jn 1:23

<sup>4</sup>Every valley will be raised up;  
every mountain and hill will be laid low.  
The stumbling blocks shall become level  
and the rugged places smooth.

<sup>5</sup>The glory of Yahweh will be revealed,  
and all mortals together will see it;  
for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.”

Jas 1:  
10-11;  
1P 1:  
24-25

<sup>6</sup>A voice says, “Cry.”  
and I say, “What shall I cry?”  
“All flesh is grass,  
and all its beauty as the flower of the field.

<sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower wilts,  
when the breath of Yahweh blows upon it.

<sup>8</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades,  
but the word of our God will forever stand.”

51:12;  
Job 14:2;Ps 37:2;  
90:5Ps  
119:89;  
Mt 24:35;  
Jn 1:1

strange revelation from the Spirit: the God who saves is the God who loves, and he loves the humble.

So the faithful God was present in the midst of the deportees, preparing together with them the salvation of the world. All the suffering of the people of God, all their humiliations were clearly the price of their sin but much more a way God chose to manifest his loving-kindness and his power. One of the surprising features of this prophecy is that the God of Israel, the Savior of all the nations, made Israel his servant to carry out salvation and take on itself the burden of the world.

This revelation is a contrast to all our natural aspirations. It is not strange that most of the Jews upon their return from Chaldea soon forgot the message and had no other project than the restoration of the bygone kingdom of David. When Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom in the true spirit of the prophet of the Exile, the majority of Jews opposed him with Law and ritual of the Temple. It is an everlasting temptation to confuse the city of humans with the city of God, and a few centuries later the disciples of Jesus would display the same blindness when they continued to cherish an old dream of Christianity.

However, with the “second Isaiah” as he is usually called, a new way opens that will be followed by the Little Remnant announced by Amos and Isaiah. This way would be that of the “poor of Yahweh” who, like Mary, the Apostles and the disciples would recognize in Jesus of Nazareth the One sent by God and promised by the prophets.

<sup>9</sup>Go up onto the high mountain, messenger of good news to Zion,  
 lift up your voice with strength,  
 fear not to cry aloud when you tell Jerusalem  
 and announce to the cities of Judah:  
 Here is your God!

<sup>10</sup>Here comes your God with might;  
 his strong arm rules for him;  
 his reward is with him,  
 and here before him is his booty.

<sup>11</sup>Like a shepherd he tends his flock:  
 he gathers the lambs in his arms,  
 he carries them in his bosom,  
 gently leading those that are with young.

62:11;  
 Rev 22:12

Ezk  
 34:16;  
 Lk 15:5

### The great God

• <sup>12</sup>Who has measured the waters of  
 the sea in a cupped hand,  
 or the breadth of the sky in the span  
 of a hand?

Who has collected the sands of the earth?  
 Who has weighed the mountains in  
 scales

and the hills in a balance?

<sup>13</sup>Who has probed the spirit of Yahweh  
 or as a counselor advised him?

<sup>14</sup>Whom has he consulted to  
 enlighten him,  
 and help him to decide?  
 Who gave him knowledge  
 and taught him the ways of success?

<sup>15</sup>The nations before him are like a  
 drop on the brim of the bucket,  
 or like dust on the scales.

The islands weigh no more than powder.

<sup>16</sup>Lebanon is not enough to burn as  
 altar fire,

Ps 62:10;  
 Wis 11:22

Rom 11:34;  
 1Cor 2:16;  
 Job 15:8;  
 21:22;  
 36:22-26;  
 38:2-21

• **40.1** The prophet discretely tells about his being called. As Isaiah, he is introduced in the Heavenly Council, where God, surrounded by his angels, makes his decisions. There, something mysterious is revealed to him:

*Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, proclaim to her... that her guilt has been paid for.* Yahweh has forgiven his people, and because of this he is about to reestablish them in the Promised Land. They should not be overwhelmed by the prestige of the invincible Babylon where they live as exiles. *All flesh (all mortals)* is grass: means that the famous city is only a human construction and it would pass like human ambitions (see James 1:10); but God's promises will always be fulfilled.

Angels are told to prepare for the return of the exiles. The arid and dangerous road of the desert would be leveled for them. And they will have a triumphant return. To all people (*all flesh*) in the world, the wonders would be so obvious that they would discover the glory of the one God and recognize Yahweh.

Then, across time and space, the prophet addresses the new community to be born, in order to announce the *Good News* to them. This is the first time these words appear in the Bible.

*Comfort* is another new word. In the Bible, it does not mean that God brings us to resignation, or to passive observance, but rather encourages us to continue our mission. Thus, in the following chapters, the prophet would encourage the Jews to return, in spite of difficulties. In Paul's letters, we would find the words *to comfort* and *encourage* countless times. Like the other authors of the Bible, in recalling God's promises, Paul invites us to struggle against the forces of evil with perseverance.

*In the wilderness prepare the way for Yahweh.* The prophet saw Yahweh walking ahead of his people to guide them to their definitive homeland. When the exiles returned to Palestine, they realized that they neither found God nor a lasting peace: something was still missing which would only be fulfilled centuries later. In fact, at the appointed time, John the Baptist appeared preaching in the desert, and after him God "so that every human being would see him," as the Gospel points out (Lk 3:6).

• 12. In later chapters, we will read other poems resembling this one, stressing the greatness of the Lord of creation. This insistence should not surprise us. The prophet repeats the same arguments against idols, not so much

nor will its animals provide a holocaust.

<sup>17</sup>All nations before him are as nothing, all emptiness, all vanity in his eyes.

<sup>18</sup>To whom, then, will you liken God? With whose image will you compare him?

44:9 <sup>19</sup>To an idol cast by a craftsman, covered with gold by a goldsmith and adorned with silver chains?

Jer 10: 1-16 <sup>20</sup>Or to wood that will not rot, chosen and fashioned by a skilled craftsman into an image that cannot move?

Jer 16:20 <sup>21</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning, that you may understand how the earth was founded?

Num 13:33; Ps 104:2 <sup>22</sup>He sits far above the vault of the earth, with its inhabitants like grasshoppers; he stretches out the heavens as a curtain and spreads them out like a tent where he dwells.

Job 34:18 <sup>23</sup>He reduces the princes to naught, and the rulers of the earth to nothingness.

<sup>24</sup>No sooner are they planted or sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground,

than he blows on them, and they wither, a storm sweeps them away like stubble.

<sup>25</sup>To whom, then, will you liken me or make me equal? says the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup>Lift up your eyes and see: who has created all this? Bar 3:34 He has ordered them as a starry host and called them each by name. So mighty is his power, so great his strength, that not one of them is missing.

<sup>27</sup>How can you say, O Jacob, how can you complain, O Israel, that your destiny is hidden from me, that your rights are ignored by Yahweh? 49:4

<sup>28</sup>Have you not known, have you not heard Rom 11:33

that Yahweh is an everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth? He does not grow tired or weary, his knowledge is without limit.

<sup>29</sup>He gives strength to the enfeebled, he gives vigor to the wearied.

<sup>30</sup>Youth may grow tired and faint, young men will stumble and fall,

<sup>31</sup>but those who hope in Yahweh will renew their strength.

They will soar as with eagle's wings; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and never tire. Ps 103:5

to convince us, as to delight in repeating the same praise of the one God.

In Babylon without a temple or organized worship, the Jews saw the splendor of pagan worship. The imperial city calmly flaunted the superiority of its secular gods and its famous temples. It was then dispersed among foreign nations, that the Jews discovered that their faith could conquer the world: they alone knew where the world came from and where history was headed.

The Jews had experienced a God who was theirs, who saved them, but who exacted justice from them. In time they understood that Yahweh their God was none other than the master of the world, its laws, and all human-kind. It was then that they became conscious of their mission to the world.

It could be the same for us. We should be conscious of the extent of our faith and appreciate the "absolute" the person of Christ is. Many are fond of him but without seeking

to know who he is. They are not over-interested in knowing him in his concrete life, how he is portrayed in the Gospels: it is enough for them that his personality stands apart from all others. People formed by means of modern science know they are in solidarity with the whole universe. They know that a same power, a same law governs the stars, the atom including even the movements of the heart. Such persons cannot be satisfied with a Christ—"first revolutionary" or superman or great prophet. They have to see him as greater than the world and one whom they can adore as the Creator-made-human.

Here the prophet begins by evoking the extent and the mystery of creation: the universe we perceive on a starry night. He goes on to say that this God-Creator is active in events and gives life to the one who believes (40:29). It is he who announces his plans for deliverance (41:2).

**Cyrus, liberator of Israel**

**41** • <sup>1</sup>Keep silent before me, O islands, or be prepared to contend with me;

O nations, draw near and speak.  
Let us meet together for judgment.

<sup>2</sup>Who has called from the east one that victory hails at every step? Who has given him the nations to rule and their kings to subdue? His sword makes dust of them and his arrows scatter them like chaff.

<sup>3</sup>Unharméd he pursues them through paths that his feet have scarcely touched.

<sup>4</sup>Who really has done all this? I, who call the generations from the beginning,

I, Yahweh, who am the first and will be with the last.

<sup>5</sup>The islands have seen it and feared, the ends of the earth were scared.

<sup>6</sup>(Each helps the other and says to his companion, "Take heart!" <sup>7</sup>So the craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who beats out with the hammer assures the other who strikes the anvil, saying, "It is ready for soldering"; and he fastens the idol with nails to hold it in place.)

**Hope for a new exodus**

• <sup>8</sup>But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, seed of Abraham my friend, <sup>9</sup>I have taken you from the ends of the earth. I

have called you from the remotest corners, and I said,

"You are my servant, I have chosen you and will not cast you away."

<sup>10</sup>Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will give you strength, I will bring you help, I will uphold you with the right hand of my justice.

<sup>11</sup>All who rage against you will be put to shame and disgrace; all who fight against you will perish and come to nothing.

<sup>12</sup>You will seek, but will not find them; those enemies of yours, those who took up arms against you will be destroyed, brought to nothing.

<sup>13</sup>For I, Yahweh, your God, take hold of your right hand and say to you: "Fear not, I am your assistance."

<sup>14</sup>Fear not, Jacob, poor worm, and you, people of Israel, so frail.

I am your redeemer, says Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, your helper.

<sup>15</sup>I will make you a thresher, new and with sharp double teeth: you will thresh hills and mountains, crushing them and reducing them to chaff.

<sup>16</sup>You will winnow them, the wind will carry them off and the storm will scatter them. But you will rejoice in Yahweh and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

6:3;  
44:6;  
44:24;  
47:4;  
49:7

28:28

Mt 3:12

• **41.1** The first verses of the poem (vv. 1 to 3) present Cyrus, the conqueror who is progressing in his conquest of the Middle East. In previous times, pagan kings were sent by Yahweh to punish people. Now, one is chosen by God to save his people. This is a lesson in humility for believers: God saves them through a non-believer whom he makes his instrument. God does not always pick saints or believers to liberate nations.

Verses 6-7 concerning idolatry, are out of place, just as in 40:19-20.

• **8.** The first verses of the chapter have celebrated the victories of Cyrus. Now God addresses Israel. It will be delivered from exile. A new departure is being prepared, greater than

the exodus from Egypt. God will work miracles for those who want to return to their homeland: all he asks of his people is to open their eyes and trust him.

Apparently, an exaggeration! The return from exile would be a matter of small caravans, meeting many difficulties, but it is a fact that the nation was to rise again and salvation history would continue to be written. We have here an example of what God offers to minority groups of believers, the small communities of his Church who cling to the hope given them in the Gospel: we often have the impression of achieving little, yet in reality the whole venture of the Kingdom is at stake in our will to exist.

<sup>17</sup>The poor and the afflicted seek water, and find none.  
 Their tongues are parched with thirst.  
 But I, Yahweh, will hear them;  
 I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

<sup>18</sup>I will open up streams over the barren heights  
 and let the rivers flow through all the valleys;  
 I will turn the desert into lakes and brooks  
 and the thirsty earth  
 into a land of springs.

<sup>19</sup>I will plant in the wilderness the cedar,  
 the acacia, the myrtle and the olive;  
 I will plant in the wasteland fir, cypress and pine—

<sup>20</sup>that all may see and know,  
 consider and understand,  
 that the hand of Yahweh has done this,  
 that the Holy One of Israel has created it.

• <sup>21</sup>Present your case, says Yahweh.  
 Produce your evidence, says the king  
 of Jacob.

<sup>22</sup>Bring your idols and let them tell us  
 what is going to happen. What have they  
 foretold, so that we may consider them  
 and reflect on the final outcome?

<sup>23</sup>Let them foretell what is to come,  
 that we may know that they are gods. Let  
 them do good or do evil, that we may be  
 dismayed and terrified.

<sup>24</sup>See, they are nothing,  
 their work is nothing,  
 and to choose them is foolishness.

<sup>25</sup>From the north I have called him,  
 and he comes;  
 from the east I have called him by  
 his name.  
 He tramples kings and princes down

as if they were mortar,  
 as if he were a potter working the clay.

<sup>26</sup>Has anyone announced this from  
 the beginning, so we might know,  
 or foretold it long ago, so we might  
 say, "It is true?"

No one among you foretold it,  
 no one proclaimed it.

No one heard a word from you.

<sup>27</sup>I was the first to announce to Zion:  
 "Look, here they come!"

and I sent a messenger to Jerusalem.

<sup>28</sup>But when I looked, there was no  
 one, there was not a single counselor  
 among them who, if asked, could give an  
 answer.

<sup>29</sup>All of them are nothing,  
 emptiness are their works;  
 their images are wind and nothingness.

### Here is my servant

42

• <sup>1</sup>Here is my servant whom I uphold,  
 my chosen one in whom I delight.  
 I have put my spirit upon him,  
 and he will bring justice to the nations.

• 21. This passage celebrates Cyrus between two victories. When we read these verses, we understand that the prophet had anticipated the successes of the liberator when no one could have foreseen them. Thus, God revealed future events to his prophets as a proof that he himself was the real savior of his

people. He had planned that Cyrus should come from afar to restore freedom to the Jews.

• 42.1 Here is the first of the songs of the *Servant of Yahweh* (see the introduction to this book). The other poems of the Servant are in 49:1; 50:4; 52:13.

35:6;  
 Ps  
 107:35

43:15;  
 44:6-11

Jer 10:5;  
 Zep 1:12

41:2;  
 45:13

Mt 12:  
 18-21;  
 Is 11:2;  
 Mt 3:17;  
 Lk 2:26;  
 Mt 17:5;

Jn 1:  
 32-34;  
 Jer  
 50:44



<sup>2</sup>He does not shout or raise his voice  
proclamations are not heard in the streets.

<sup>3</sup>A broken reed he will not crush,  
nor will he snuff out the light  
of the wavering wick.

He will make justice appear in truth.

<sup>4</sup>He will not waver or be broken  
until he has established justice on earth;  
the islands are waiting for his law.

<sup>5</sup>Thus says God, Yahweh,  
who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread the earth and all that comes from it,  
who gives life and breath to those who walk on it:

<sup>6</sup>I, Yahweh, have called you for the sake of justice;

I will hold your hand to make you firm;

I will make you as a covenant to the people,  
and as a light to the nations,

<sup>7</sup>to open eyes that do not see,  
to free captives from prison,  
to bring out to light those who sit in darkness.

<sup>8</sup>I am Yahweh, that is my name,  
I will not give my glory to another;  
or my praise to graven images.

<sup>9</sup>See, the former things have come to pass,  
and new things do I declare:  
before they spring forth I tell you of them.

61:3

Ps 89:9

49:6;  
Mt 26:28;  
Lk 2:32;  
Jn 8:12Ps  
107:10;  
Acts  
26:18;  
Lk 1:79

43:19

### Song of victory

Ps 33:3;  
96:1;  
Rev 5:9

• <sup>10</sup>Sing a new song to Yahweh;  
let his praise reach the ends of the earth.  
Let the sea and all that it holds,  
let the coastlands and their  
inhabitants

resound with song and praise of  
him.

<sup>11</sup>Let the wilderness and the cities  
lift up their voice,  
together with the villages of Kedar.  
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing,

The servant is at times Israel, in other passages it is the minority of the faithful, conscious of their vocation, who try to struggle against the indifference of the majority. It would also signify the prophet (or prophets) who share with the faithful the word of God.

In different passages of the Gospel Jesus assures his disciples that they are the “sons of the prophets,” and the Apostles, in their turn would understand that *the Servant* after all and before all others, is Jesus (Mt 12:8; Acts 3:13; 4:27). Jesus, Servant of his Father and Son of his maid servant (Ps 116:16 and Lk 1:38).

The prophet had just celebrated the victories of Cyrus. Those victories actually only prepared another victorious step forward, of a

people of believers who, freed from captivity in Babylon, would declare to the world their faith and their hope.

This minority is the *covenant of the nation*: thanks to these faithful believers God continues to be present among this Jewish people where a majority do not listen to him. It is this same people that will re-establish the covenant with God. It will then give *to the nations* (the peoples of the East), and *to the islands* (the western world) *justice*, that is to say a new order willed by God.

• 10. Cyrus' steps are God's victory. Yahweh marches as a warring God (see Jdg 5:4), but inspired by maternal love.

and shout from the top of the mountain.

<sup>12</sup>Let them give glory to Yahweh and praise him in the far islands.

Ps 24:8;  
Dt 10:17;  
Zep 1:14

<sup>13</sup>Yahweh comes like a mighty warrior, he stirs up his fury before the fight. He threatens, he raises the battlecry, and he triumphs over his enemies.

<sup>14</sup>For a long time I have been silent; I have kept still and restrained myself, I moaned like a woman in labor, breathing and panting:

<sup>15</sup>I will lay waste mountains and hills and wither all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into wasteland and dry up the pools.

<sup>16</sup>I will lead the blind by ways which they do not know; along unseen paths I will guide them. I will turn darkness into light before them

and make the rough ground smooth. These are the things that I will do, and I will not forsake them.

<sup>17</sup>But those who trust in graven images and say to idols, "You are our gods" will be turned back in shame.

- <sup>18</sup>Listen, O deaf, look, O blind, that you may see!

<sup>19</sup>Who is blind, but my servant, or deaf as the messenger I send?

Who is blind but the one I am lifting up? Who is deaf but the servant of Yahweh?

44:18

<sup>20</sup>You have seen many things without observing; your ears were open but without hearing.

Dt 4:6

<sup>21</sup>It pleased Yahweh, the Just One, that his Law receive glory and fame.

<sup>22</sup>But this is a people robbed and plundered,

all of them ensnared in pits or languishing in prison.

They have become a prey, with no one to rescue them; they have become a spoil, with no one to order, "Send them back!"

<sup>23</sup>Who among you will give ear to this? Who will listen and hear for the time to come?

<sup>24</sup>Who handed Jacob to the spoilers and Israel to the plunderers?

Was it not Yahweh, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey?

<sup>25</sup>Therefore he poured out on them the fury of his anger—the violence of war.

It lashed round about them, and they failed to know what it meant; it burned and consumed them, and they remained in bewilderment.

**In the midst of the flames,  
you shall not be burned**

**43** <sup>1</sup>But now, thus says Yahweh, who created you, Jacob, who formed you, Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine.

41:13

<sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through fire, you will not be burned; neither will the flames consume you.

<sup>3</sup>For I am your savior, I, Yahweh, your God, the Holy One of Israel.

48:10;  
1Cor 3:15

The poem recalls the mission entrusted to Isaiah (6:10): Through you the hearts of these people will be hardened and their eyes blinded. Yahweh has forgiven and wants to heal this people who do not know how to see and who have been called blind in verse 7. After being liberated they will be witnesses to the God who saves.

At times, it seems to us that the prophets were mistaken in announcing so often that God's coming was near, when they were still at an early stage of their history. In fact, they

were not so very different from us, when we believe we have won everything with the victory of one of our own people either in an election, or a sports event. We do not abandon Christ, the only savior and the only hope, when we struggle for very human goals and become excited about human saviors. We walk with them for a time, and then, let go of them to move forward, again to wherever Christ calls us.

- 18. This passage could be entitled: Exploited Peoples.

I give Egypt for your ransom,  
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.  
4 Since you are precious in my sight,  
and important—for I have loved you,  
I give people in exchange for you  
and nations in return for your life.

5 Fear not, for I am with you:  
I will bring your children from the east  
and gather you from the west.

6 I will say to the north, "Give them up!"  
and to the south, "Do not hold them!"  
Bring back my sons from afar,  
my daughters from the ends of the  
earth,

7 all those called by my name  
all I have created for my glory.

8 Lead out my people—  
who have eyes but are blind,  
who have ears but are deaf.

41:22 9 Let the nations gather together,  
let the people assemble.

Who among them can foretell this  
or declare to us the things to come?  
Let them bring their witnesses to

prove them right;

let others hear so that they may say,  
"It is true."

• 10 You are my witnesses, says  
Yahweh,  
you are my servant whom I have  
chosen,  
that you may know and believe me  
and understand that I am He.  
Before me no God was formed,  
neither will there be one after me.

11 I, I am Yahweh,  
there is no savior but me.

12 It is I who have foretold;  
I have spoken and made it known,  
I, not any of your foreign gods.  
Therefore you are my witnesses

—it is Yahweh who speaks,  
I am God.

13 From ever I am God  
there is no one who can deliver from  
my hand.

I act, and what I do no one undoes.

14 Thus says Yahweh,  
your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:  
For your sake I send an army to  
Babylon

to bring down all their bars.  
The Chaldeans' shout of joy  
will turn into lamentation.

15 I am Yahweh, your Holy One,  
the Creator of Israel, your King.

Lev 19:2

16 Thus says Yahweh,  
who opened a way through the sea  
and a path in the mighty waters,

14:21

17 who brought down chariots and  
horses,

a whole army of them,  
and there they lay, never to rise again,  
snuffed out like a wick.

18 But do not dwell on the past,  
or remember the things of old.

19 Look, I am doing a new thing:  
now it springs forth.

Jer 23:

7-8;

2Cor

5:17;

Rev 21:5

Do you not see?

I am opening up a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.

20 The beasts of the land will honor me,  
jackals and ostriches,  
because I give water in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert  
that my chosen people may drink.

35:6

21 I have formed this people for myself;  
they will proclaim my praise.

1P 2:9

• 22 You have not called upon me, O  
Jacob,  
indeed you were tired of me, O Israel;

49:1;

Jer 1:5

• **43.10** The reliability of the triumphant God is affirmed even more than in previous poems: *I, I am*... Someone said that this "I" is detestable on human lips, but it does befit God: "I Am" was God's revelation to Moses in the burning bush (Ex 3). And Jesus will also say many times: "I Am" to reveal who he is (Jn 8:12).

Such is the God who lifts our spirits. *When you walk through fire, you will not be burned.* Everything is possible, including living according to the Gospel in an environment of materialism.

*I give people in exchange for you* (v. 4). With this figurative expression, Yahweh's unique love for his children is reaffirmed. He is ready to be reconciled at any cost with this people, whom he chose and who were lost through their own fault.

In the end, verses 16-21, we hear this once again: the new Exodus from Babylon will surpass that from Egypt: you have done enough looking at the past; now look to the future.

• 22. People are ungrateful by nature. They usually maneuver events so that serving

Ezk  
39:29;  
Jl 3:1;  
Zec  
12:10

<sup>23</sup> neither have you brought me sheep  
for burnt offerings,  
nor honored me with your sacrifices.  
I have not burdened you with

offerings,  
nor wearied you asking for incense.

<sup>24</sup> You have not spent money on  
sweet frankincense for me,  
neither have you satisfied me with the  
fat of your sacrifices.

Instead you have burdened me with  
your sins  
and wearied me with your offenses.

<sup>25</sup> I it is, I am He  
who blots out your offenses for my  
own sake,  
and remembers your sins no more.

<sup>26</sup> Remind me about the past;  
let us argue together.  
Speak up and prove your innocence.

<sup>27</sup> Your first father sinned, and your  
mediators have rebelled against me.

<sup>28</sup> Therefore I have disgraced the digni-  
taries of your temple, I have consigned  
Jacob to destruction, Israel to scorn.

**44** <sup>1</sup> But now listen, Jacob my servant,  
Israel whom I have chosen.

<sup>2</sup> This is what Yahweh says—  
he who made you and will help you,  
he who formed you from the womb:  
Fear not, O Jacob my servant,  
Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

<sup>3</sup> For I will pour water upon the thirsty  
land

and streams on the dry ground.

I will pour my spirit upon your race  
and my blessing upon your offspring.

<sup>4</sup> They will spring up like grass,

like poplars beside the flowing  
streams.

<sup>5</sup> One will say, "I belong to Yahweh";  
another will call himself by Jacob's  
name.

On his hand another will write  
"Yahweh"

and take the name of Israel.

<sup>6</sup> This is what the Lord says—  
Israel's King and Redeemer, Yahweh  
Sabaoth:

I am the first and the last,  
there is no other God besides me.

<sup>7</sup> Who then is like me?

Let him stand up and speak,  
let him argue this out with me.  
Who from the beginning has foretold  
the future,

and revealed to us what was to come?

<sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid or troubled.

Have I not proclaimed  
and foretold this long ago?

You are my witnesses;  
is there a God besides me  
or another Rock? I know of none.

41:4;  
48:12;  
Rev 1:8,17;  
21:6;  
22:13;  
Dt 32:39

41:21-29;  
43:8-13

Dt 32:4;  
Ps 18:32

#### Mockery against those who worship idols

• <sup>9</sup> Good-for-nothing are all idol mak-  
ers, and useless are the works they prize  
so much. Their witnesses, blind and  
ignorant, will be put to shame. <sup>10</sup> Who  
ever fashioned a god or cast an idol with-  
out hope of gain? See how its devotees  
will be ridiculed, for its craftsmen are but  
humans. <sup>11</sup> Let them all assemble, let  
them come to court; they will be both  
terrified and scorned.

<sup>12</sup> The blacksmith works on an iron  
image over the fire and beats it into

41:7;  
Jer 10:3

God does not deprive them of time nor  
money. Many people only think about God to  
complain to him. Yet, the love of God will be  
stronger than their lack of gratitude: *He will  
pour out his Spirit upon the human race.*

*Neither have you brought me sheep for  
burnt offerings.* The exiled Jews had neither  
temple nor rituals in Babylon. On the basis of  
this, Yahweh tells them: "If I come to save, it is  
not because you have bought my favors with  
your sacrifices." God saves them, though they  
have not sacrificed anything for him, and have  
not even called on him.

*You have burdened me with your sins... I  
am He who blots out your offenses for my  
own sake, and remembers your sins no*

*more.* After what he said through Jeremiah  
and Ezekiel, God continues declaring his love  
that is scorned by his people. In spite of their  
differences, all prophets use the language of  
passionate love. It allows them to express bet-  
ter what sin is: not just a fault against sacred  
laws, but rather a rejection of God's love.

• **44.9** The passage 9-20, placed here  
though coming from elsewhere, should be read  
separately: it ridicules the makers of idols. We  
will find other similar examples of irony in the  
Bible. They may still be of value today when  
people who are proud of scientific discoveries  
maintain superstitions. See the commentary  
on Isaiah 30:22 and Jeremiah 2:13.

shape with a hammer. He gets hungry and tired; if there is no water to drink, he gets exhausted.

<sup>13</sup>In like manner, the wood carver takes the measurement and marks the outline of an idol, carves it with chisels, giving it a bodily form and a human face that it may live in a shrine. <sup>14</sup>He cut down cedars or perhaps took an oak or cypress from the forest or maybe he planted a cedar which the rain caused to grow. <sup>15</sup>For the common people, that means fuel which they use to warm themselves and to cook their food. But the craftsman carves out of the tree trunk an idol which he worships and before which he bows down. <sup>16</sup>The remaining portion he burns to warm himself; over its live embers he roasts meat and is satisfied. He says, "Well and good, I feel warm and enjoy the light." <sup>17</sup>The other portion which he has made into an idol he worships and bows before it, praying "Rescue me, for you are my god."

45:20

<sup>18</sup>They have no knowledge, no discernment. For they have shut their mind to understanding, their heart to all reason. <sup>19</sup>Not one of them has the intelligence to reflect and the sense to say, "Half of the log I burned, and on its em-

bers I baked bread and roasted meat. Shall I then make a dirty idol of what remains? Am I to worship a block of wood?"

<sup>20</sup>Only one of deluded mind can hold on to ashes. Will he not save himself at least and confess, "What I hold is only a lie?"

<sup>21</sup>Remember this, Jacob, for you are my servant, O Israel, I have formed you to be my servant; Israel, do not forget me.

<sup>22</sup>I have blotted out your offenses as a thick cloud, your sins as a mist. Return to me for I am redeeming you.

<sup>23</sup>Sing gladly, O heavens, for Yahweh has done this. Shout aloud, O earth below! Burst into song, you mountains, you forests with all your trees! For Yahweh has redeemed Jacob and shown his glory to Israel.

<sup>24</sup>Thus says Yahweh, your redeemer, who formed you from the womb: I am Yahweh who made all things,

Hos 14:2;  
Lm 5:21

I alone stretched out the heavens,  
and spread out the earth. Who helped me?

<sup>25</sup>I am he who thwarts the omens of false prophets,  
who makes fools of diviners,  
who turns the wise back  
and makes nonsense of their knowledge.

1Cor  
1:20

<sup>26</sup>I confirm the word of my servant  
and carry out the plan announced by my messengers.

I am he who says of Jerusalem,  
"It shall be inhabited,"  
and of the towns of Judah,  
"They shall be rebuilt; I will restore their ruins."

<sup>27</sup>I am he who says to the ocean, "Be dry,  
I will dry up your wellsprings!"

<sup>28</sup>I call on Cyrus, "My shepherd!"  
and he goes to fulfill my will.  
I say to Jerusalem, "Be rebuilt!"  
and see: the cornerstone is laid.

40:11;  
Ezra 1:1

42:6

45

• <sup>1</sup>Thus says Yahweh to his anointed, to Cyrus:  
 “I have taken you by the right hand  
 to subdue nations before you  
 and strip kings of their armor,  
 to open the gateways before you  
 so that they will be closed no more.

<sup>2</sup>I will go before you to level the slopes,  
 I will break the gates of brass  
 and destroy the iron bars;

<sup>3</sup>I will give you treasures hidden in darkness  
 and riches stored in secret places,  
 so that you may know that I am Yahweh,  
 the God of Israel who calls you by your name.

<sup>4</sup>For the sake of Jacob my servant,  
 of Israel my chosen one,  
 I have called you by your name  
 and given you your mission  
 although you do not know me.

<sup>5</sup>I am Yahweh, and there is no other;  
 there is no God besides me.  
 I armed you when you did not know me,  
<sup>6</sup>so that, from the rising  
 to the setting of the sun,  
 all may know

that there is no one besides me;  
 I am Yahweh, and there is no other.  
<sup>7</sup>I form the light and create the dark;  
 I usher in prosperity and bring calamity.  
 I, Yahweh, do all this.

• <sup>8</sup>Let the heavens send righteousness like dew  
 and the clouds rain it down.  
 Let the earth open and salvation blossom,  
 so that justice also may sprout;  
 I, Yahweh, have created it.

55:10;  
 Hos 2:23;  
 Ps 85:12

• **45.1** A new message of the Lord to Cyrus, the conqueror, similar to the one in 41:25.

There is here something unique in the Bible: this pagan king is called the *anointed one of Yahweh*, like the sons of David, and including Christ the “Anointed of God.” Incredible thing for the Jews who were accustomed to thinking of Yahweh as only their God! History tells us that Cyrus was a “father” to his people, and the Bible will remember that his first deed, after the capture of Babylon, was to restore freedom to all those living there in exile (see Ezra 1:1).

Here, however, the prophet gives praise only to God who infallibly orients our history and will never let his promises fail.

• 8. Here, we have a magnificent expression of the work of God, the savior. As we said in reference to Isaiah 11:1, we must not see the salvation coming from God as opposed to or distinct from that which people can achieve. Rather, God’s work and human cooperation are joined in this unique endeavor of bringing us to the end of our labors.

*Justice* is total uprightness. We might ex-

29:16;  
Jer 18:6;  
Rom 9:20

• <sup>9</sup>Woe to him who argues with his Maker being but a pot among pots. Will the clay say to him who fashions it, “What are you making? You have no skill.” <sup>10</sup>Woe to him who asks a father, “What have you begotten!” or a mother, “To what have you given birth?”

<sup>64:7</sup> <sup>11</sup>Thus says Yahweh, the Holy One, he who fashions Israel: Is it for you to question me about my children, or decide the work of my hands for me?

<sup>12</sup>I am He who made the earth and created humankind upon it.

I am He who stretched out the heavens with my own hands and gave order to their whole array.

<sup>13</sup>I have raised Cyrus for the sake of justice. I will direct his ways and make him rebuild my city. He will send my exiles home without ransom or indemnity. It is Yahweh Sabaoth who speaks.

• <sup>14</sup>Thus says Yahweh:

The peasants of Egypt, the traders of Ethiopia and the tall men of Seba will

pass near you in chains, and bow down facing you. In worship they will say, “Surely God is with you. There is no one else, there is no other god.”

<sup>15</sup>Truly you are the God who remains hidden, the God of Israel, the Savior.

<sup>16</sup>All idol makers will be put to shame, they will go away humiliated. <sup>17</sup>But Israel will be saved by Yahweh—delivered with an everlasting salvation. You will never be put to disgrace for everlasting ages.

<sup>18</sup>Yes, this is what Yahweh says, he who created the heavens,

—for he is God,  
who formed and shaped the earth,  
—for he himself set it:

“I did not let confusion in it,  
I wanted people to live there instead”  
—for I am Yahweh and there is no other.

<sup>19</sup>I have not spoken in secret,  
from a dark place of the earth;  
I have not said to the race of Jacob:  
“Seek me, but all will be confused,”  
—for I Yahweh tell the truth and I

speak openly—

45:15;  
Jn 18:20;  
Acts  
26:26

### Every knee will bend

<sup>20</sup>Come, gather together, and try to understand,  
survivors from among the nations:

They are but fools they who follow idols of wood  
and pray to gods that cannot move—

<sup>21</sup>Let them present their arguments  
take counsel together and tell me:

press it briefly: a life according to truth and love. Such justice must come from God, the only one who can create a new Man. In fact, it will come in the person of Christ, *the Just One* (Jn 16:10), the one who is born among us as the first shoot of a renewed humanity. Christ will not break into the world, *coming down* in glory from heaven, but rather, will be the *blossom* of our earth, being born a Jew to the Jews, true man, born of a virgin mother. Christ alone will not accomplish the work of our salvation for it must be realized in the course of history: Justice and Salvation will be the fruits of humanity made fertile by divine mercy.

*Salvation* here means total human liberation.

This text is complemented by Psalm 85 where another image is used: two hands are

joined, one coming down from heaven and another lifted up from the earth, to achieve the permanent covenant of God and his people in *Love and Faithfulness* (see Jn 1:17).

• 9. The same themes are continued with different expressions.

Verses 9-13: the Lord, free Creator of all, is also in charge of history. Let us note in Jeremiah 18:1 that the comparison of the potter and his clay is developed with a very different meaning.

• 14. The prophet looks upon the powerful of yesterday, now conquered by Cyrus. The conquered Egyptians and Ethiopians go back to Palestine in chains along the same road on which they had proudly trod. As they go by Jerusalem, they see it glorious and filled with

Who announced this from the beginning,  
 who foretold it in the distant past?  
 Is it not me Yahweh?  
 There is no other God besides me,  
 a Savior, a God of justice, there is no other one but me.

<sup>22</sup>Turn to me and be saved,  
 all you from the ends of the earth,  
 for I am God and there is no other.

<sup>23</sup>By my own self I swear it,  
 and what comes from my mouth is truth,  
 a word I say will not be revoked.

Before me every knee will bend,  
 by me every tongue will swear, <sup>24</sup>saying,  
 "In Yahweh alone are righteousness and strength."

All who have raged against him will come to him in shame.

<sup>25</sup>But through Yahweh there will be victory and glory  
 to the people of Israel.

Gen  
 22:16;  
 Rom  
 14:11;  
 Phil 2:10

**Difference between God and the false gods**

Jer 46:15

**46** • <sup>1</sup>Bel bows down, Nebo collapses,  
 the carriages are weighed down  
 with their idols. Their sacred objects have  
 become a burden for the weary feasts.

<sup>2</sup>They cringe and crouch together,  
 powerless to save those who carry them,  
 as they themselves are taken captive.

44:2

<sup>3</sup>Hear me, O people of Jacob,  
 and all who remain of Israel,  
 whom I have cared for since you  
 were conceived,  
 and carried since you were born.

<sup>4</sup>Even to your old age, I am he  
 and I will sustain you  
 even when your hair turns gray.  
 It is I who have done this,  
 and who bear the burdens,  
 I will sustain and save you.

<sup>5</sup>To whom will you compare me or  
 consider me equal?

Against whom will you match me,  
 as though we were alike?

<sup>6</sup>Some pour out gold from their purses,  
 and with silver weighed on the scales  
 they hire a goldsmith to make an image  
 before which they bow and worship.

<sup>7</sup>They carry it upon their shoulders  
 and set it up in its place;  
 and there it stands, unmoving and  
 silent.

They cry out to it, but it does not  
 answer,  
 it delivers no one from distress and  
 disaster.

<sup>8</sup>Bear it well in mind, you rebels,  
<sup>9</sup>recall those things of long ago.  
 I am God, and there is no other;  
 I am God, and there is none like me.

<sup>10</sup>From the beginning I foretold the  
 outcome,  
 from ancient times, what was yet to  
 come.

Ps 115:6

Ps 33:11

God's favors, and falling on their knees facing  
 Jerusalem, they beg God to save them too.

The liberation of Israel is God's way of re-  
 vealing himself to the world; they will recog-  
 nize Yahweh by the way he restored a dead  
 people. They will come to adore the Lord of  
 the Universe "hidden" in a people without  
 countenance.

The same thing may be seen in the Church  
 when it is scorned. One day those who

mocked it discover God there. Some day, peo-  
 ple will see that the Church kept the fire of  
 God in the world.

• **46.1** The prophet foresees the fall of  
 Babylon. He imagines the Chaldeans carrying  
 their idols in flight. Israel, on the other hand,  
 does not have to carry its gods: Yahweh is the  
 one who carries his people (vv. 1-7) and gives  
 them life.



I say, and my plan will be fulfilled;  
and what I wish, I will accomplish.

44:28;  
45:13

<sup>11</sup>From the east I call forth a bird of prey,  
from a distant land, a man to carry  
out my plan.

Yes, I have spoken, it will be done;  
I have planned, it will be executed.

<sup>12</sup>Listen to me, you without hope,  
you who are deprived of any right.

<sup>13</sup>I am bringing my justice, it is not  
far away;

my salvation will not delay.

I will make salvation appear in Zion,  
upon Israel I will bestow my glory.

**47** • <sup>1</sup>Come down and sit in the dust,  
O virgin daughter of Babylon!

No more throne! Sit on the ground,  
O daughter of the Chaldeans.

No longer will you be called  
dainty and delicate.

<sup>2</sup>Take the millstone and grind meal;  
uncover your hair, bare your legs;  
strip to the thighs and pass over the  
rivers.

<sup>3</sup>Your nakedness will be exposed,  
your shame will be uncovered.

I will take revenge on you  
and no one will save you,

63:4

<sup>4</sup>says our Redeemer, Yahweh Sabaoth.  
His name is the Holy One of Israel.

<sup>5</sup>Go creep into the shadows and sit  
in silence,

O daughter of the Chaldeans,  
for no more will you be called  
sovereign lady of the kingdoms.

Lm 1:19

<sup>6</sup>Angry with my people, I had left  
my inheritance;

I gave them into your hands,

but you showed them no mercy.

You laid a heavy yoke on the aged.

<sup>7</sup>You said, "I will reign forever;"

but you did not take this to heart  
or ponder on what would ensue.

<sup>8</sup>Listen, therefore, you wanton wo-  
man, lounging in security and deluding  
yourself, "I am, and there is none besides  
me. I will never be a widow or suffer the  
loss of children."

Rev  
18:7-8;  
Zep 2:15

<sup>9</sup>But these two things will come to you  
in a moment, on a single day—  
loss of children and widowhood.  
They will come upon you in full  
measure,

Rev  
18:23

in spite of all your witchcraft,

in spite of the power of your spells.

<sup>10</sup>You have trusted in your wickedness,  
saying, "Nobody sees me."

Your intelligence and knowledge  
have perverted you, for you have said:  
"I am, and there is none besides me."

<sup>11</sup>Evil, suddenly, will come your way  
though you do not know it.

Disaster will fall upon you,  
and no ransom will ward it off;  
a catastrophe you cannot foresee  
will come upon you suddenly.

<sup>12</sup>Keep on, then, with your magic  
spells and with the multitude of your sor-  
ceries, which you have labored at since  
your youth.

Do you think they will help you now?  
Do you think they will cause terror  
around you?

<sup>13</sup>Yet you are wearied with so many  
advisers. Let your astrologers stand up,  
your stargazers who foretell what will  
happen each month; let them save you  
from what is to come upon you.

<sup>14</sup>Look, they will be like stubble  
and the fire will burn them.

They cannot even save themselves  
from the power of consuming flames.  
These are no embers to warm anyone,  
no fireside to sit by.

<sup>15</sup>This is your lot and of your wizards

• **47.1** What we said in Is 13:1 applies here. This is a song of affliction over Babylon which will become the image of an impious city. This is why in the Apocalypse (chaps. 17–18) St. John calls the Roman empire which persecutes the Christians, Babylon.

*Virgin daughter of Babylon* is Babel (or Babylon) according to the Hebrew way of designating capitals. Babylon says: *I will never be a widow*: this might mean: I will never be without my gods; or I will never be without my fa-

mous kings; or I will never know defeat. Babylon thought it would have a secure future because of its magicians, famous in Eastern countries. They pretended to know the future through their horoscopes.

Throughout the centuries the same confidence has inspired those who feel they have mastered progress.

*You laid a heavy yoke on the aged*. Prophets are always using this type of criterion to judge the value of a civilization.

with whom you have labored from your youth.

Now each will go his own way— powerless to save you.

Dt 6:13;  
Jer 5:2

**48** • <sup>1</sup>Listen to this, House of Jacob, called by the name of Israel and born out of Judah's womb, you who swear by the name of Yahweh

and invoke the God of Israel, though not in truth or righteousness—  
<sup>2</sup>calling yourselves after the holy city, and relying on the God of Israel whose name is Yahweh Sabaoth.

<sup>3</sup>From long ago I revealed things past: they went forth from my mouth; I declared them. Then suddenly I acted and the word came to be.

32:9;  
Dt 9:6

<sup>4</sup>Because I know that you are stubborn, your head as hard as iron, your forehead as bronze,

<sup>5</sup>So I told you about them; before they took place

I let you hear of them,

lest you should say: "My idols did these, my graven image, my molten image commanded them."

<sup>6</sup>Now that you have heard and seen, will you not admit it?

From now on I will tell you new things, even hidden things you have not known before.

<sup>7</sup>They are created now and not long ago;

up to this day you have not heard of them

lest you should say, "I already knew."

<sup>8</sup>You have not heard, you didn't know nor were your ears opened before, for I knew how treacherous you

were—

you who from birth have been called a rebel.

Ezk  
36:22

<sup>9</sup>For my name's sake I delayed my anger,

for my honor's sake I restrained it, lest I destroy you.

<sup>10</sup>See: I have refined you as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

<sup>11</sup>But now for my own sake I will act, yes, for my own sake.

For how could I let my Name be defiled?

Never will I yield my glory to another.

<sup>12</sup>Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel whom I have called, I am the same, I am the first, and I am also the last.

<sup>13</sup>My hand laid the foundation of the earth, my right hand spread out the heavens.

When I call on the stars they all stand forth together.

<sup>14</sup>Assemble, all of you, and listen.

44:28

Who among them has foretold these things?

The beloved of Yahweh will do what pleases him with Babylon and the people of Chaldea.

<sup>15</sup>I, yes I myself, have spoken;

I myself called him and made him prosper in his way.

### If you had obeyed my law

<sup>16</sup>Come near me and listen to this: From the beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time that it happened I have been there. Know then, that Yahweh the Lord, with his Spirit has sent me!

45:19;  
61:1;  
Mic 3:8

<sup>17</sup>Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I, Yahweh, your God, teach you what is best for you; I lead you in the way that you must go.

41:14

<sup>18</sup>Had you paid attention to my commandments, your peace would

• **48.1** In verses 12-15, note that Cyrus is praised again. *The beloved of Yahweh will do what pleases him; I myself called him.* As we remarked on 42:10, the prophet always goes beyond present reality. The conqueror Cyrus is a savior and thus, his mission and his person are in some way joined with that of the only Savior, Christ.

In verses 17-22 the prophet looks at Israel's past, reminding us of what we read about the lost Paradise. If they had obeyed, God's desire to lavish his blessings upon them would have been fulfilled, as well as God's promises to Abraham.

But God will intervene again as the Redeemer of his people.

have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Gen  
22:17

<sup>19</sup>Your descendants would have been like the sand, and those born of your stock like its grains, their names never cut off nor blotted out from my presence.

Jer 51:6;  
Rev 18:4

<sup>20</sup>“Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea!” Declare this with

shouts of joy, make this known to the ends of the earth. Proclaim: Yahweh has redeemed his servant Jacob!

<sup>21</sup>Those he led through the desert were never thirsty. He made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out.

17:1

<sup>22</sup>There is no peace for the wicked, Yahweh says.

### Yahweh called me from my mother's womb

49

• <sup>1</sup>Listen to me, O islands,  
pay attention, peoples from distant lands.  
Yahweh called me from my mother's womb;  
he pronounced my name before I was born.  
<sup>2</sup>He made my mouth like a sharpened sword.  
He hid me in the shadow of his hand.  
He made me into a polished arrow  
set apart in his quiver.  
<sup>3</sup>He said to me, “You are Israel, my servant,  
Through you I will be known.”  
<sup>4</sup>“I have labored in vain,” I thought  
and spent my strength for nothing.”  
Yet what is due me was in the hand of Yahweh,  
and my reward was with my God.  
I am important in the sight of Yahweh,  
and my God is my strength.  
<sup>5</sup>And now Yahweh has spoken,  
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant,  
to bring Jacob back to him,  
to gather Israel to him.

41:1;  
44:2;  
44:24;  
Jer 1:5;  
Gal 1:15

Heb 4:12;  
Rev  
1:16;  
Dt 32:  
34, 41

Mt 3:17

40:27;  
Jer 20:7

• **49.1** Here we find the second Song of God's servant: see the Introduction to chapters 40–55.

Who is speaking in these verses? They are the Judean exiles at Babylon (some years later they will be called the Jews). And it is not a lamentation but rather a thanksgiving to God who has chosen them in a very special way for a unique mission.

The hope and the future of Israel have been entrusted to them, not to those remaining in the motherland. Soon they will return and *gather the remnant of the tribes of Jacob*, which means not only their kins in the ex-kingdom of Judah, but also the other in the northern kingdom.

From that moment on the dream of a final gathering of the whole people of God enters

the Bible, and Gospel will announce that this goal will be achieved through and in Christ: John 11:52.

But there is more, for God wants this small group of exiles to bring *to the nations the light* of salvation. This marks the opening of the times of mission. The Jews will be the messengers of the only God and of his law in the world. Those who welcome Christ will call on the pagans to the faith and Spirit will be bestowed to them (Gal 3:14). A humiliated people will be Yahweh's hidden arrow, his definitive weapon: through them God will unbar his madness which is wiser than human wisdom (1 Cor 1:21).

*Yahweh called me from my mother's womb.* These were Jeremiah's words (1:5). All that follows can be interpreted both of the be-

42:6;  
Acts  
13:47;  
Lk 2:32

<sup>6</sup>He said: "It is not enough  
that you be my servant,  
to restore the tribes of Jacob,  
to bring back the remnant of Israel.  
I will make you the light of the nations,  
that my salvation will reach to the ends of the earth."

53:3

<sup>7</sup>Thus says Yahweh,  
the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel,  
to him whom people despise,  
to him whom nations abhor,  
to the servant of tyrants:  
"Kings will see you and stand up,  
and princes will bow down  
for the sake of Yahweh, the faithful one,  
the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you."

2Cor 6:2;  
Is 42:6

<sup>8</sup>This is what Yahweh says:  
"At a favorable time I have answered you, on the day of salvation I have been your help; I have formed you and made you to be my covenant with the people.

42:7

You will restore the land, and allot its abandoned farms. <sup>9</sup>You will say to the captives: Come out; and to those in darkness: Show yourselves.

They will feed along the road; they

will find pasture on barren hills. <sup>10</sup>They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the scorching wind or the sun beat upon them; for he who has mercy on them will guide them and lead them to springs of water.

Rev 7:16;  
Is 25:4-5

<sup>11</sup>I will turn all my mountains into roads and raise up my highways.

<sup>12</sup>See, they come from afar, some from the north and west, others from the land of Sinim."

### Though your mother forgets you

- <sup>13</sup>Sing, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth; break forth into song, O mountains: for Yahweh has comforted his people and taken pity on those who are afflicted.

<sup>14</sup>But Zion said: "Yahweh has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me."

<sup>15</sup>Can a woman forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child of her womb? Yet though she forget, I will never forget you.

Hos 11:8;  
Lm 5:22

lieving minority or of the one who fully lives a prophetic vocation. Is the servant a single person, or is he a people of prophets? The apostles of Jesus quickly understood that the present text applied first to him. He is the Word and the two edged sword (Heb 4:12; Rev 19:15).

Paul in turn will take for himself these verses: Galatians 1:15; Acts 13:47; 2 Corinthians 10:4, 12:8. This double interpretation, personal and collective, should not surprise us

for the unique Savior is never a lonely savior. Jesus wanted to be identified with those who believe, who suffer and persevere to prepare for the salvation of the world.

- 13. Yahweh's maternal love for his people.

He saves them from despair and from being despised, rebuilding Jerusalem and gathering those who were dispersed. He invites all the nations to come and recognize the true city.

44:5 <sup>16</sup>See, I have written your name upon the palm of my hands; your walls are ever before me. <sup>17</sup>Your sons hurry back, and those who laid you waste hasten to depart from you.

60:4 <sup>18</sup>Lift up your eyes, look around and see: your children are all assembling and coming to you. As I live, says Yahweh, you will wear them all as your jewels; they will adorn you as brides are adorned.

<sup>19</sup>Your lonely places and your ruins, your wastelands and devastated country, will now be too small for your people, while those who destroy you will be driven off.

54:2 <sup>20</sup>The children you will have, after those you lost, will also say in your hearing, "This place is too small for us. Give us more space to live in."

<sup>21</sup>You will then say in your heart, "Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, and who has brought these up? I was left alone; but these—where have they come from?"

60:4-16 <sup>22</sup>Thus speaks the Lord Yahweh: See, I am to make signs to the nations; and to raise my banner to the peoples, that they will bring your sons in their arms, your daughters upon their shoulders.

Ps 25:3 <sup>23</sup>Kings will be your foster fathers, their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces

to the ground; they will lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am Yahweh and that those who hope in me will not be put to shame.

<sup>24</sup>Can booty be taken from a warrior, or captives be rescued from a tyrant? But thus says Yahweh: <sup>25</sup>Yes, captives will be taken from warriors and booty rescued from a tyrant: for I will fight whoever fights you and I will save your children.

Lk 11:21

<sup>26</sup>I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh and be drunk with their own blood, as with wine. All peoples will know that I, Yahweh, am your savior, your redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Rev 16:6

**50** <sup>1</sup>Thus says Yahweh: Where is the writ of divorce with which I dismissed your mother? Or to which of my creditors have I sold you? It was for your sins that you were sold, for your crimes that your mother was dismissed.

Dt 24:1;  
Ps 44:18

<sup>2</sup>Why was there no one when I came? Why did no one answer when I called? Is my hand too short to reach out and save?

65:12;  
66:4

Have I not the power to deliver? See how, at my threat, the sea dries up, the rivers turn into desert, their fish dying, for lack of water.

<sup>3</sup>I clothe the heavens in mourning; I make sackcloth their covering.

10:21

## Yahweh has opened my ear

- <sup>4</sup>The Lord Yahweh has taught me so I speak as his disciple and I know how to sustain the weary. Morning after morning he wakes me up to hear, to listen like a disciple.

54:13

Here God again addresses the more conscious minorities of Israel, those who held onto their hope at a time they seemed to be lost amidst the pagan inhabitants of the materialistic Babylon. They would lift up their nation and become the light of the world.

These promises started to be fulfilled when, having returned to their land, the Jews became missionaries of the One God to all the countries of the Greek and Syrian world. Later, these promises would take on a new meaning for the Church which Christ established as the *New Jerusalem*. At times, this new Jerusalem seems downhearted and lifeless, and even dis-

appears in some parts of the world. Yet, God brings it new children from other continents. He invites us to look beyond our communities to those who have not yet received the Kingdom.

- **50.4** "Who is the prophet talking about, himself or another?" (Acts 8:34). Actually the servant could be as in 49:1 the faithful minority, but it could also be, perhaps, the prophet himself, or who knows? a "Prophet" who is to come? The author refuses to choose between servant and servants.

Former prophets met with the same oppo-

<sup>5</sup>The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear.  
I have not rebelled,  
nor have I withdrawn.

<sup>6</sup>I offered my back to those who strike me,  
my cheeks to those who pulled my beard;  
neither did I shield my face  
from blows, spittle and disgrace.

<sup>7</sup>I have not despaired,  
for the Lord Yahweh comes to my help.  
So, like a flint I set my face,  
knowing that I will not be disgraced.

<sup>8</sup>He who avenges me is near.  
Who then will accuse me?  
Let us confront each other.  
Who is now my accuser?  
Let him approach.

<sup>9</sup>If the Lord Yahweh is my help,  
who will condemn me?  
All of them will wear out like cloth;  
the moth will devour them.

<sup>10</sup>Let anyone among you who fears Yahweh listen to the voice of his servant. Whoever walks in darkness and has no light to shine for him, let him trust in the name of Yahweh, let him rely upon his God.

<sup>11</sup>Yet all of you who kindle flames and carry about burning torches, go into the flames of your own fire, into the sparks you have kindled. This will befall you from my hand, you will lie down in torment.

#### God will save the children of Abraham

**51** <sup>1</sup>Listen to me, you who pursue justice, you who go in search of Yahweh. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the pit from which you were quarried.

<sup>2</sup>Look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. He was

alone when I called him; but I blessed and increased him.

<sup>3</sup>Truly Yahweh's compassion is for Zion, his mercy is upon all her ruins. He will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like Yahweh's garden. In her will be found joy and rejoicing, melody and song of praise and thanksgiving.

<sup>4</sup>Listen to me, you peoples,  
hear me, O nations.  
I am to give you my law,  
my justice will be a light to the nations.

<sup>5</sup>Suddenly my justice will appear,  
my salvation is on the way,  
and my arm will impose my rule.  
The islands also wait in hope for me,  
trusting in my arm.

<sup>6</sup>Lift up your eyes to the heavens  
and look upon the earth beneath.

Ezk  
36:35;  
Jer  
33:11

Ps 102:  
26-27;  
Jer  
2P 3:7

situation. Moses had to endure a rebellious people; Jeremiah had been persecuted and imprisoned (see Jer 20:7 and 37). On the basis of these examples, we see a profile and mission of the perfect servant of Yahweh. This will be Jesus, but every one of his prophets can apply all these words to himself or herself.

Note the beginning of the poem. The Servant will be able to transmit the word and to

encourage on behalf of God because he himself listens *every morning* and keeps his ears open. To sustain those who are tired, we must be taught by God: the true prophet is a person of prayer, open to the Spirit of God. "No one but the Spirit of God knows the secrets of God... and through him we understand what God in his goodness has given us" (1 Cor 2:11-12).

Mt 26:67;  
27:30

Jer 1:18;  
Ezk 3:8

Rom  
8:33;  
Job 13:8

Jn 8:46

Mt 5:6;  
6:33

Dt 32:18;  
Mt 3:9;  
Rom 4

Like smoke, the heavens will vanish,  
and the earth wear out like a garment;  
its inhabitants will fall like flies.  
But my salvation will last forever,  
my justice will never fail.

Jer 31:33;  
Dt 30:14

<sup>7</sup>Hear me, you who know righteousness,  
ness,

you who have my law in your hearts:  
do not fear the reproach of others  
or be terrified by their mocking.  
<sup>8</sup>For they will be like garments eaten  
by moths,  
like wool consumed by grubs.  
But my justice will last forever  
and my salvation for all generations.

50:9

## Awake, Yahweh

• <sup>9</sup>Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of Yahweh!

Awake as in ancient days,  
in times of generations long ago.  
Was it not you who split Rahab in two  
and pierced the dragon through?

<sup>10</sup>Was it not you who dried up the sea,  
the waters of the great deep,  
to make a way on the seabed  
for the redeemed to pass over?

<sup>11</sup>The redeemed of Yahweh will return  
and come to Zion singing with joy,  
crowned with everlasting gladness,  
while sorrow and mourning flee away.

<sup>12</sup>I, yes I, am your comforter.  
How then can you be afraid of the one who dies,  
of humans who fade like grass?

<sup>13</sup>Are you forgetting Yahweh who made you,

Ps 89:11

Jer 17:5

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• **51.9** This poem is a double call to Yahweh and to Jerusalem that they may awaken. Yahweh is described as a hero asleep and Jerusalem as a humiliated and discouraged woman. The two must work together for the restoration of Jerusalem:

– Yahweh is the one to indicate the timing, preparing the historical conditions to make it feasible, and infusing hope in their hearts.

– First, the children of Jerusalem must want their own liberation and then they must go to rebuild the city.

God seems absent from the world where people follow their own fancies and seems asleep until his hour comes. We should not be fatalistic because of that, believing that problems will be resolved when God decides. To call God and wake him means to go ahead and advance before the fog has lifted. Who is it that God encourages? The defeated who pay the price of their errors. He does not speak to saints but to sinners: in pardoning their past

sins he gives them strength to rebuild the Holy City.

It is easy to criticize these realistic and primitive biblical expressions concerning Yahweh of Hosts. We should not replace the image of the Conqueror with that of a calm and unruffled God more in keeping with a conservative mentality. The events which were announced here were about to overturn the course of history.

Note the expressions *redeemed and sold* (52:3) which were already used in 50:1. Each person belongs to God and finds freedom in obeying him. If we reject this dependence, we fall into another since we have been created for this kind of freedom which develops in mutual relationship and dependence of another one. Christ “purchases” us, or rescues us from every slavery as it is written in Isaiah 53:10 (Rom 6:15), but so as to make us sons and daughters.

who stretched forth the heavens  
and laid the foundations of the earth?

Why live every day in constant fear  
of the fury of the oppressor,  
when he sets out to destroy you?  
And where is the fury of the oppressor?

<sup>14</sup>The captive exiles will soon be free;  
they will not die in a deep prison,  
nor will they want for food.

Jer 31:35 <sup>15</sup>I am Yahweh, your God,  
the one who stirs the sea,  
making its waves roar.

My name is Yahweh Sabaoth.

49:2 <sup>16</sup>I have put my words in your mouth  
as I stretched out the heavens; When I  
laid the foundations of the earth, I said to  
Zion: "You are my people, and I have  
shielded you in the shadow of my hand."

Jer 25:15;  
25:28;  
Ps 60:5

<sup>17</sup>Awake, awake!

Arise, O Jerusalem, you who drank at  
the hand of Yahweh the cup of his fury,  
the cup which made you tremble, that  
you drank to the last drop!

<sup>18</sup>Among all the children she bore,  
she has no one to guide her; among all  
the sons she reared, she has no one to  
take her by the hand.

Lm 1:  
2-17;  
Jer 15:5

<sup>19</sup>These double calamities have be-  
fallen you—ruin and destruction, famine  
and sword.

Who is there to console you?

<sup>20</sup>Your children were found helpless at  
the corner of every street, like wild bulls  
in a net. They had drunk to the full the  
fury of Yahweh, the wrath of your God.

<sup>21</sup>Therefore hear this now, you af-  
flicted one, you who are drunk but not  
with wine. <sup>22</sup>Thus says your Lord Yah-  
weh, your God, defender of your people's  
cause:

Jos 10:24 See, I am taking out of your hand the  
cup of trembling; the cup of my anger—  
you will drink of it no more. <sup>23</sup>But I will

put it into the hands of your tormentors,  
those who ordered you to bow down, that  
they might trample on you, while you  
laid your body as a pavement, as a street  
for them to walk on.

**52** <sup>1</sup>Awake, awake!  
Put on your strength, O Zion;  
put on your glorious garments, O  
Jerusalem, holy city.

51:9;  
Ezk 44:9;  
Rev 21:27

For never will the uncircumcised  
or the unclean enter you again.

<sup>2</sup>Shake the dust off yourself  
and rise up, O Jerusalem.  
Loose the bonds from your neck,  
O captive Daughter of Zion.

<sup>3</sup>For thus says Yahweh:  
You were sold for no amount,  
you will be redeemed without money.

50:1;  
1P 1:18

<sup>4</sup>Thus says the Lord God:  
In the beginning  
my people lived as aliens in Egypt;  
then Assyria oppressed them without  
reason.

<sup>5</sup>But now, what am I doing here? says  
Yahweh. My people have been carried off  
for no money and their masters make a  
boast of it; all day long my name is  
scorned.

Ezk 36:  
20-22;  
Rom 2:24

<sup>6</sup>Therefore my people will know my  
name;  
therefore they will know on that day  
that it is I who say: "Here I am!"

41:4

- <sup>7</sup>How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those  
who bring good news,  
who herald peace and happiness,

Mk 16:  
15-16;  
Rev 14:6

• **52.7** The prophets, messengers of a victorious God: that is the meaning of the *good news*.  
See Romans 1:1; 2 Corinthians 2:14.



who proclaim salvation  
and announce to Zion: “Your God is king!”  
<sup>8</sup>Together your watchmen  
raise their voices in praise and song;  
they see Yahweh face to face returning to Zion.

Ezk 43:1

<sup>9</sup>Break into shouts of joy,  
O ruins of Jerusalem,  
for Yahweh consoles his people  
and redeems Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup>Yahweh has bared his holy arm  
in the eyes of the nations;  
all the ends of the earth, in alarm,  
will witness God’s salvation.

<sup>11</sup>Depart, depart from that nation, come out!  
Touch nothing unclean.

2Cor  
6:17;  
Rev 18:4

Purify yourselves, you who bear  
all Yahweh’s holy vessels.

<sup>12</sup>Yet not in escape, or in fright, will you come out,  
you will not leave in headlong flight;  
for ahead is Yahweh, your vanguard,  
and behind, the God of Israel, your rearguard.

14:14

### Through his punishment, we are made whole

• <sup>13</sup>It is now when my servant will succeed;  
he will be exalted and highly praised.

Acts 3:13;  
Jn 12:32;  
Phil 2:9

<sup>14</sup>Just as many have been horrified  
at his disfigured appearance:

Mt 27:  
29-31;  
Jn 19:5

“Is this a man? He does not look like one,”

<sup>15</sup>so will nations be astounded,  
kings will stand speechless,

49:7;  
Mic 7:16;  
Rom  
15:21

for they will see something never told,  
they will witness something never heard of.

• 13. It is the fourth and last song of the Servant of Yahweh; it is here that the prophet, known as the “second Isaiah,” proclaims his whole message, and it is perhaps the last word of the Old Testament referring to Redemption. The prophet delivers to Israel the meaning of trials and shows what will be its mission. Israel has been placed at the center of the world history. It will have no rest until the other nations have discovered through its sufferings the only true God. The only title of Israel is to be God’s servant, and it will not reach glory nor be saved before its mission has brought death.

Israel then, would necessarily be the victim, and, if God was to send a Savior, he too would be a victim.

For thousands of years people used to sacrifice animals—and at times human beings—thinking they could unload their sins on them, and be rid of them. These sacrifices or getting rid of those who were considered to be responsible for God’s anger, never interrupted the cycle of violence. Here, however, we see God’s response to our sins: he saves us through the suffering of the innocents and even more, through the willing sacrifice of the one who takes the sin of the world upon himself.

In writing this, the prophet had in mind the small group of faithful Jews exiled in Babylon: they were nothing more than *despised people*. Yet, they had not deserved such humilia-

Jn 12:38;  
Rom 10  
16  
11:1

53

<sup>1</sup>Who could believe what we have heard,  
and to whom has Yahweh revealed his feat?

<sup>2</sup>Like a root out of dry ground,  
like a sapling he grew up before us,  
with nothing attractive in his appearance,  
no beauty, no majesty.

<sup>3</sup>He was despised and rejected,  
a man of sorrows familiar with grief,  
a man from whom people hide their face,  
spurned and considered of no account.

<sup>4</sup>Yet ours were the sorrows he bore,  
ours were the sufferings he endured,  
although we considered him as one  
punished by God, stricken and brought low.

<sup>5</sup>Destroyed because of our sins,  
he was crushed for our wickedness.  
Through his punishment we are made whole;  
by his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup>Like sheep we had all gone astray,  
each following his own way;  
but Yahweh laid upon him all our guilt.

<sup>7</sup>He was harshly treated,  
but unresisting and silent, he humbly submitted.  
Like a lamb led to the slaughter  
or a sheep before the shearer  
he did not open his mouth.

Ps 22:  
7-8;  
Mk 9:12

Mt 8:17;  
Heb 2:10

1P 2:24;  
2Cor  
5:21;  
Gal 3:13;  
Rom 4:25;  
Eph 2:14

Ezk  
34:15;  
1P 2:25;  
1Cor 15:3

Wis 2:19;  
Mt 26:63;  
27:12;  
Jn 1:29;  
19:9;  
Acts 8:  
32-33;  
Jer 11:19;  
1P 1:19

tion because of their own sins, rather they were carrying the sorrows of the violent, sinful world in which they lived. These believers were punished for the crimes of their people, Israel; but God would transform them into the seed of a holy people: *he will have a long life and see his descendants*. This wonder of God would surpass all the others and, in seeing it, kings would stand speechless.

This song is for our own wonder as well. The prophet, writing five centuries before Christ, was apparently referring to the humiliation of God's people who, then as now, are the instrument of salvation; but his poem outlined beforehand the image of God become human, who humbled himself even to death on the cross. When we read the Passion of Christ in the Gospel, we realize that the evangelists themselves were struck by the similarity between Jesus' trial and death and what was announced by the prophet. Many times, in presenting Jesus, the apostles would refer to this text. See Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 2:24.

*Who could believe what we have heard?* How would the hearers of Peter, Paul or John accept their proclamation of Jesus, the crucified savior? See John 12:38; 1 Corinthians 1:22; Romans 10:16. In our own day, perhaps many Christians do not understand why so many innocent people die as victims of injustice and Christians are especially persecuted.

*He makes himself an offering for sin.* In several passages of the Bible we are invited to adopt this same attitude when we suffer unjustly (1 P 1:20; 4:13). Christ alone has perfectly fulfilled this redemptive mission from the beginning to the end of his life (Heb 10; Jn 2:29; Rom 5:6).

*My just servant will justify the multitude:* that is to say, he will make them just and holy. The Hebrew text reads "the many", which means *the multitude*. Jesus refers to this text at the Last Supper: "my blood poured out for many," or for everyone (Mk 14:24). There Jesus clearly says that his death is the free and perfect sacrifice foretold in this song.

<sup>8</sup>He was taken away to detention and judgment—  
what an unthinkable fate!

He was cut off from the land of the living,  
stricken for his people's sin.

<sup>9</sup>They made his tomb with the wicked,  
they put him in the graveyard of the oppressors,  
though he had done no violence nor spoken in deceit.

<sup>10</sup>Yet it was the will of Yahweh to crush him with grief.  
When he makes himself an offering for sin,  
he will have a long life and see his descendants.  
Through him the will of Yahweh is done.

<sup>11</sup>For the anguish he suffered,  
he will see the light and obtain perfect knowledge.  
My just servant will justify the multitude;  
he will bear and take away their guilt.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore I will give him his portion among the great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong.  
For he surrendered himself to death  
and was even counted among the wicked,  
bearing the sins of the multitude  
and interceding for sinners.

Mt 9:15

Mt 27:38;  
27:60;  
1P 2:221Jn 2:2;  
Heb 2:17;  
Mt 26:42Rom 3:  
25-26Ps 2:8;  
Phil 2:7;  
Mk 15:28;  
Lk 22:37;  
1P 2:24;  
Jn 1:29;  
1P 2:24;  
Mk 10:45;  
Lk 23:34;  
Heb 7:25

### Rejoice, O barren woman

**54** <sup>1</sup>Rejoice, O barren woman  
who has not given birth; sing  
and shout for joy, you who never had  
children, for more are the children of  
the rejected woman than the children  
of the married wife, says Yahweh.

<sup>2</sup>Enlarge the space for your tent,  
stretch out your hangings, lengthen

your ropes and strengthen your  
stakes, <sup>3</sup>for you will spread out to the  
right and to the left; your descen-  
dants will take possession of the na-  
tions and inhabit cities that have  
been abandoned.

<sup>4</sup>Do not be afraid for you will not  
be deceived, do not be ashamed for  
you will not be disgraced. You will

Gen  
28:14

45:17

Gal 4:27;  
Ps 113:9;  
1S 2:5

Jer 10:20

• **54.1** This concludes the songs in which  
Isaiah addressed Jerusalem: 49:14; 51:17.

In a grandiose vision, Jerusalem becomes  
the people of the future, the people reborn  
from the ruins who will bring about a kingdom  
of peace. Jerusalem is the ideal city we have  
dreamed of at one time or another and which  
God wishes to give us.

*Shout for joy, you who never had chil-  
dren.* The Jewish people collapsed as a nation  
because of their errors and they no longer had  
a future, humanly speaking. This suits God. If  
they lack the means to be great, God is going  
to touch them. He will no longer be the one  
from whom we expect favors but the one who  
gives himself: *your Maker is to marry you.*

*For a brief moment I have abandoned  
you.* Here we have the story of God's love for

us: the total love of God, our infidelity, our sin.  
The prophets announce the New Jerusalem,  
Yahweh's bride which will never again be  
abandoned.

We know that the Church is the Remnant  
of Israel, the new People united to God in an  
eternal covenant. Yet it is also at the same  
time, as the ancient Israel was, an unfaithful  
people whose sins the Bible describes: dull  
parishes, existing but not really alive; institu-  
tions where one might look in vain for the  
Spirit of Jesus; leaders of the church who are  
subservient to the powerful.... Somehow the  
New Jerusalem is in the Church of Christ, but  
it is also true that we need to continually look  
for it.

*All your children will be taught by Yah-  
weh.* It is the same proclamation of a new

forget the shame of your youth; no longer will you remember the disgrace of your widowhood.

49:14 <sup>5</sup>For your Maker is to marry you: Yahweh Sabaoth is his name. Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel: He is called God of all the earth.

Mal 2:14;  
Jer 31:3

<sup>6</sup>For Yahweh has called you back as one forsaken and grieved in spirit. Who could abandon his first beloved? says your God.

<sup>7</sup>For a brief moment I have abandoned you, but with great tenderness I will gather my people. <sup>8</sup>For a moment, in an outburst of anger, I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I have had mercy on you, says Yahweh, your Redeemer.

<sup>9</sup>This is for me like Noah's waters, when I swore that they would no more flood the earth; so now I swear not to be angry with you and never again to rebuke you. <sup>10</sup>The mountains may depart and the hills be moved, but never will my love depart from you nor my covenant of peace be removed, says Yahweh whose compassion is for you.

<sup>11</sup>O afflicted city, lashed by storm and unconsolated, I will set your stones with turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. <sup>12</sup>I will crown your wall with agate, make your gates crystal,

Rev  
21:10

and your ramparts of precious stones.

<sup>13</sup>All your children will be taught by Yahweh, and they will prosper greatly. <sup>14</sup>Justice will be your foundation; tyranny and the fear of oppression will never come near you.

Jer 31:34;  
Jn 6:45;  
Is 1:26

<sup>15</sup>If ever you are attacked, it will not be of my doing; and your attacker will surely fail.

<sup>16</sup>Look, it is I who created the blacksmith, who fans the burning coals and forges his weapons. But I have also prepared the one who makes them useless.

<sup>17</sup>No weapon forged against you will succeed, and all who speak against you will be silenced. Such is the lot of the servants of Yahweh, and such is the right I grant them—says Yahweh.

### Come to the water

**55** • <sup>1</sup>Come here, all you who are thirsty, come to the water!

All who have no money, come!

Yes, without money and at no cost, buy and drink wine and milk.

<sup>2</sup>Why spend money on what is not food and labor for what does not satisfy? Listen to me, and you will eat well; you will enjoy the richest of fare.

<sup>3</sup>Incline your ear and come to me; listen, that your soul may live. I will make with you an everlasting cove-

Mt 5:6;  
Is 45:13;  
52:3;  
Rev 21:6;  
Jer 2:13;  
Jn 4;  
Dt 8:3;  
Mt 4:4;  
Jn 7:37

Pro 9:3;  
Sir 24:  
19-22

Ezk  
16:60;  
Acts  
13:34

covenant that was proclaimed by Jeremiah (Jer 31:31). Believers should always lean on the word of God and be guided by his commandments, but their link with God will be in a deep communication of spirit to spirit, a communion which immerses us in the only truth. It is a kind of knowledge which teaches no particular truth, but enables us to appreciate, judge and coordinate all the fragmentary truths. It is an instinct of God that enables us to discover in depth the person of Christ through the brief testimonies of Scripture. This instinct in turn gives us the secrets of the Bible (Jn 6:45).

It is by meditating on these poems that we best understand how God makes virginity fruitful. It is not by accident that Jesus was born of

a virgin mother; rather his birth came as the culmination of the expectation of "Jerusalem, the bride of God": see Isaiah 7:14.

• **55.1** The book ends with a call to hope.

Verses 1-3. Are you not tired of the happiness you thought you would easily get in the place of exile?

God is the one who always gives first. He only hopes that we will open the door for him. Jesus will offer us rest (Mt 11:28); he will give us the bread of life (Jn 6) and will give himself as "the" friend (Rev 3:20).

Verses 4-5. A universal mission awaits Israel in the homeland, after their return.

Verses 6-9. Allow yourselves to be conquered by the love of the Lord who is forming

nant, I will fulfill in you my promises to David.

<sup>4</sup>See, I have given him for a witness to the nations, a leader and commander of the people. <sup>5</sup>Likewise you

Ps 18:44

will summon a nation unknown to you, and nations that do not know you will come hurrying to you for the sake of Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has promoted you.

<sup>6</sup>Seek Yahweh while he may be found;  
call to him while he is near.

<sup>7</sup>Let the wicked abandon his way,  
let him forsake his thoughts,  
let him turn to Yahweh for he will have mercy,  
for our God is generous in forgiving.

<sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
my ways are not your ways, says Yahweh.

<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are above the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways,  
and my thoughts above your thoughts.

<sup>10</sup>As the rain and the snow come down  
from the heavens and do not return  
till they have watered the earth,  
making it yield seed for the sower  
and food for others to eat,

<sup>11</sup>so is my word that goes forth out of my mouth:  
it will not return to me idle,  
but it shall accomplish my will,  
the purpose for which it has been sent.

65:1;  
Dt 4:7;  
Ps 145:18;  
Jer 29:13

Ps 103:11;  
92:6;  
Rom  
11:33

2Cor 9:10

Wis  
18:15;  
Zec 1:6

<sup>12</sup>Yes, in joy you will depart, in peace you will be led forth: mountains and hills will break into song before you, trees of the countryside will clap their hands.

<sup>13</sup>Instead of the thornbush, the cypress will thrive; instead of briars, the myrtle. This will make Yahweh famous and remain as an everlasting witness to him.

you even more than you can imagine. Paul will use similar language in his letter to the Romans (5:1-11).

Verses 10-11. Here the word of God appears personified. It is already much more than

the words spoken by the prophets. This Word which comes from the Father and returns to him will be presented by the apostle John in the first page of his Gospel: it is Christ. See also in 45:8.

## Third part of the book of Isaiah

### God calls everyone

**56** <sup>1</sup>This is what Yahweh says:  
Maintain what is right

and do what is just,  
for my salvation is close at hand,  
my justice is soon to come.

Ps 1 <sup>2</sup>Blessed is the mortal who does these things, and perseveres in them, who does not defile the sabbath and who refrains from evil.

Dt 23:3 <sup>3</sup>Let no foreigner say, "Surely Yahweh will exclude me from his people." Neither let the castrated man say, "I have become a mere dry tree."

Wis 3:14 <sup>4</sup>For this is what Yahweh says: To the castrated men who keep my sabbaths, who choose to do what pleases me and remain faithful to my covenant:

Wis 4:1; Rev 3:5 <sup>5</sup>I will give them in my house and within its walls, a memorial and a name that are worth more than sons and daughters; I will give them a name that will never die away or be forgotten.

1K 8:41 <sup>6</sup>Yahweh says to the foreigners who join him, serving him and loving his name, keeping his sabbath unprofaned and remaining faithful to his covenant:

Mk 11:17 <sup>7</sup>I will bring them to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. I will accept on my altar their

burnt offerings and sacrifices, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations.

<sup>8</sup>Thus says the Lord God, Yahweh, who gathers the exiles of Israel: There are others I will gather besides those already gathered. Ps 147:2; Jn 10:16

### Reproaches

<sup>9</sup>All you wild beasts, come and devour, all you beasts of the forests! Jer 12:9

<sup>10</sup>Blind are Israel's watchmen: they all see nothing. They are dumb watchdogs they are unable to bark. Lying down and dreaming, they love to slumber.

<sup>11</sup>Greedy dogs that are never satisfied; shepherds of no discretion, they all turn their own way, everyone of them to his own gain. Jer 23:1; Ezk 34:2

<sup>12</sup>"Come, bring wine," they say, "and let us all get drunk, and tomorrow will be as today, or perhaps even a happier day." 5:11; 28:7

**57** <sup>1</sup>Righteous people perish, and no one cares about it. Mic 7:2; Ps 12:2

The just one is taken off, and no one understands that he is taken away from the calamity that comes, <sup>2</sup>he enters into peace.

<sup>3</sup>But all you children of a witch, come Ezk 16

The Jews have come home, but the miracles announced in chapters 40–55 of this book have not occurred. A poor community tries to organize itself and to solve all kinds of problems stemming from the fact that during the seventy years of exile, others had taken their place.

A prophet, whose name we do not know, witnesses these beginnings. He announces that God comes to take revenge on his enemies, both those within Israel who do not want to give up their sins, and those outside. Above all God comes to save those who return to him, not only the members of the Israelite community, but strangers as well. In his own style this prophet continues the enthusiastic description of Zion–Jerusalem, and the Messiah: she is God's beloved and the wedding feast will be soon. The Messiah will come with the Spirit of Yahweh to deliver his Gospel to the poor.

The poems of this prophet are in chapters 56–66 of the book of Isaiah, there is a metrical arrangement of the poems with the announcement of the new Zion at the center:

56:1-8	The people of God welcome everyone	66:18-24.
56:9-58	Reproaches, warnings and promises	65 and 66:1-17.
59:1-4	Confession of sins	63:7–64:11.
59:15-20	God's vengeance	63:1-6.
60	The new Jerusalem	62.
61	The Spirit of the Lord is upon me	

here, you offspring of the whore and the adulterer.

<sup>4</sup>Who are you mocking?

At whom are you making faces, opening wide your mouth and sticking out your tongue?

You are children of sin, offspring of deceit and falsehood,

Dt 12:2;  
Jer 2:20;  
7:31

<sup>5</sup>burning with lust among the bushes, under spreading branches, sacrificing your children by the streams, in the clefts of rocks.

<sup>6</sup>Your heart is with your idols, the smooth stones of the wadis to which you have poured out drink offerings

and brought oblations of grain.

Can I tolerate this?

Ezk  
16:15

<sup>7</sup>You have made your bed upon a high and lofty mountain.

You went up there to offer your sacrifice.

<sup>8</sup>You have set up your domestic idols behind your doorposts and your doors.

Deserting me, you have uncovered your bed, climbed into it and spread it wide.

You made a bargain with those

whose bed you enjoy, and you had intercourse with them.

<sup>9</sup>With perfumed oil, you made yourself look your best for Molech; you sent envoys far afield—the children you sent to your pagan god through a sacrificial death.

Jer 2:25

<sup>10</sup>Although wearied with your misdeeds,

you have never given up; you have never tired or weakened, but instead found your strength revived.

<sup>11</sup>Where had gone your fear of me that you should lie and disown me, refuse me a place in your heart and not remember me?

Have I held my peace so long that you do not fear me any more?

<sup>12</sup>But now I will tell your merits and your deeds, it will not be for your advantage. <sup>13</sup>When you cry out in distress, let your idols save you! The wind will blow them all away; a whiff of a breeze will carry them off.

Ps 37:9

But he who takes refuge in me will take possession of the land, my holy mountain his inheritance.

### **There is no peace without justice**

<sup>14</sup>Then it shall be said:

40:3

“Prepare, prepare, open up a way, remove all obstructions from my people’s way.”

<sup>15</sup>For thus says the Most High, he who is enthroned forever, he whose name is holy:

66:2

“I reign exalted and holy

but I am also with him who is contrite and humble in spirit, to give the contrite a heart revived and the humble in spirit a new life.

<sup>16</sup>For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry,

Ps 103:9

lest the spirit of man faint before me, the very breath that I have created.

<sup>17</sup>His wickedness enraged me for a time,

• **56.1** The Jewish law—reflecting the thinking of the times—excluded foreigners in certain circumstances, as well as eunuchs, (castrated men) from their religious assemblies.

The prophet reveals that such exclusion is not endorsed by God.

In verses 9-13 we have poems against the leaders of Judah and against idolatry.

I smote him and hid my face,  
for he, a rebel, wanted to go his own drive.  
And I have seen his ways.

Jer 3:22;  
Hos 6:1

<sup>18</sup>But from now on I will console,  
I will heal and fully comfort him,  
—all those of his people who mourn.  
<sup>19</sup>I will bring smiles to their lips. Peace!  
Peace to him who is far and to him who is near.  
I will indeed heal you,” Yahweh says.

Acts 2:39;  
Eph 2:13;  
2:17

<sup>20</sup>But the wicked are like a turbulent sea  
that finds no rest  
and whose waters cast up mire and slime.

48:22

<sup>21</sup>“There is no peace,” says my God,  
“for the wicked.”

### The kind of fast that pleases me

Hos 8:1;  
Mic 3:8

**58**

• <sup>1</sup>Cry out aloud for all you are worth;  
raise your voice like a trumpet blast;  
tell my people of their offenses,  
Jacob’s family of their sins.

<sup>2</sup>Is it true that they seek me  
day after day, longing to know my ways,  
as a people that does what is right  
and has not forsaken the word of its God?

They want to know the just laws  
and not to drift away from their God.

<sup>3</sup>“Why are we fasting,” they complain,  
“and you do not even see it?”

Mal 3:14;  
Mt 6:18

We are doing penance and you never notice it.”

• **58.1** *Why are we fasting and you do not even see it.* The people of Judah fast so that God will hear their petitions. These could be public prayers to ask for rain.

*Is it true that they seek me... as a people that does what is right?* In spite of having a clear conscience, they are concerned because of God’s silence. They may have committed some sin without knowing it? Perhaps God likes to see humiliated people ask for favors? So, they *lie in sackcloth and ashes*. They resemble many Christians who are satisfied with being “practicing” Christians without understanding that the kind of practice that God seeks is to give peace to all his people.

Is it perhaps only a matter of *bowing the head*? God neither wants the death of the sinner nor the humiliation of his creature. God loves people, but he loves them all and not

only the little landowners of Judah fearful for their crops; he also loves the laborers and the slaves of these little landholders. God’s demands are clear: do away with unjust chains and share with the rest.

*Unfastening the thongs of the yoke.* Here we have a glimpse of the tremendous effort demanded of all in order to do away with every form of slavery: from the small privileges that working companions compete for, to the laws that keep entire groups marginated. It includes breaking the yoke of husbands’ domination over their wives and the disputes between neighbors when no one dares to take the first step.

*Unfastening the thongs of the yoke.* It is not enough to be converted to God “from the heart,” for conversion comes about by changing both persons and structures. These make



Look, on your fast days you push your trade  
and you oppress your laborers.

<sup>4</sup>Yes, you fast but end up quarreling,  
striking each other with wicked blows.

Fasting as you do  
will not make your voice heard on high.

<sup>5</sup>Is that the kind of fast that pleases me,  
just a day to humble oneself?

Is fasting merely bowing down one's head,  
and making use of sackcloth and ashes?

Would you call that fasting,  
a day acceptable to Yahweh?

<sup>6</sup>See the fast that pleases me:  
breaking the fetters of injustice

and unfastening the thongs of the yoke,  
setting the oppressed free  
and breaking every yoke.

<sup>7</sup>Fast by sharing your food with the hungry,  
bring to your house the homeless,  
clothe the one you see naked  
and do not turn away from your own kin.

<sup>8</sup>Then will your light break forth as the dawn  
and your healing come in a flash.

Your righteousness will be your vanguard,  
the Glory of Yahweh your rearguard.

<sup>9</sup>Then you will call and Yahweh will answer,  
you will cry and he will say, I am here.

1:11;  
Am 5:21;  
Zec 7:5

Dt 15:12;  
Jer 34:8

Ezk 18:5;  
Mt 25:34;  
Dt 22:1;  
Job 31:16;  
31:19

Jer 30:17;  
Is 52:12

52:6;  
65:1

If you remove from your midst the yoke,  
the clenched fist and the wicked word,

<sup>10</sup>if you share your food with the hungry  
and give relief to the oppressed,  
then your light will rise in the dark,  
your night will be like noon.

<sup>11</sup>Yahweh will guide you always  
and give you relief in desert places.  
He will strengthen your bones;

he will make you as a watered garden,  
like a spring of water  
whose waters never fail.

<sup>12</sup>Your ancient ruins will be rebuilt,  
the age-old foundations will be raised.  
You will be called the Breach-mender,  
and the Restorer of ruined houses.

<sup>13</sup>If you stop profaning the sabbath  
and doing as you please on the holy day,

61:4

Ezk 20:12

Ps 37:6;  
Mt 5:14

Jn 4:14

us share in the injustices and sins of the society in which we live. An incredible number of sins—corruption, prostitution, violence—are linked to colonialism and the economic and cultural dependence that go with it.

*Sharing your food with the hungry:* and that on a world scale for humankind is one, the only Adam of whom Christ is the head.

*Your light will break forth as the dawn.* We see the leaders of the nations come together, discuss and study in order to solve the

urgent problems of humanity. No light breaks forth. It is a known fact that the research of a scientist does not bring him directly to great discoveries. Rather, he often finds the solution suddenly where he did not expect it. In the same way, human problems resist theoretical solutions, but unexpected ways will be found when every nation and every segment of society willingly shares and no longer oppresses others.

if you call the sabbath a day of delight  
and keep sacred Yahweh's holy day,  
if you honor it by not going your  
own way,  
not doing as you please  
and not speaking with malice,  
14 then you will find happiness in  
Yahweh,  
over the heights you will ride  
triumphantly,  
and feast joyfully on the inheritance  
of your father Jacob.  
The mouth of Yahweh has spoken.

Dt 32:12

### Penitential psalm

**59** 1 Yahweh's arm is not too short to  
save nor his ear too dull to hear.

Dt 31:17

2 It is your sins, rather,  
that separate you from God.  
It is your iniquities that veil his face,  
so that he does not hear you.

3 For your hands are blood-stained,  
your fingers blotted with crimes;  
your lips have spoken lies,  
your tongues have uttered deceit.

4 No one fights for a right cause;  
no one makes a truthful plea.  
They all tell lies and rely on vanity;  
they conceive mischief and bring  
forth iniquity.

Job 8:4;  
Ps 58:3;  
Mt 3:7

5 They hatch vipers' eggs  
and weave spiders' webs.  
Whoever eats their eggs dies;  
and from an egg that is crushed  
a venomous snake is hatched.

6 Their thread gives useless cloth;  
their works are of help to no one.  
Their plans are evil plots  
executed in deeds of violence.

Pro 1:16;  
Rom 3:  
15-17

7 Their feet rush to do evil;  
they are quick to shed innocent blood.  
Their minds are full of wicked

thoughts,  
leaving in their wake ruin and havoc.

8 They do not know the way of peace;  
from them no one can expect justice.

They have made their roads tricky  
and crooked

so that he who follows them is lost  
or waylaid.

9 So, far away from us lies justice,  
and beyond reach is righteousness.  
We look for light but behold darkness;  
we long for brightness but walk in  
gloom.

Am 5:18

10 Like the blind we grope for the wall,  
like those without eyes we feel our way.  
We stumble at noon as at twilight;  
we are dead in the midst of our sins.

Dt 28:29

11 We are like bears that growl;  
we are like doves that moan.  
We look for justice and find none;  
we wait for salvation that never comes.

12 For our offenses before you are  
many,  
and our sins bear witness against us.  
We acknowledge our offenses;  
we know all our iniquities.

13 Yes, we have betrayed and deceived  
Yahweh,  
turning away from following our God.  
We have planned violence and  
rebellion;

we have thought and murmured lies.

14 Justice has been withheld,  
righteousness stands aloof,  
for truth has fallen in the public square  
and integrity is not allowed to enter.

15 There is no sincerity nor honesty.  
The one who turns from evil is  
despoiled.

• Yahweh has seen this and is  
aggrieved  
that justice does not exist.

16 Appalled at seeing none would  
intervene,  
his own arm brought about the victory,  
his justice giving him its support.

63:5

17 He put on righteousness as a  
breastplate,  
and salvation as a helmet upon his  
head.

He wrapped himself in garments of  
vengeance  
and put on a mantle of fury.

61:10;  
Wis 5:  
17-23;  
Eph 6:  
14-17;  
1Thes  
5:8

• **59.15** The Lord appears as a warrior as  
in 63:1. Here he appears with the weapons  
proper to his Rule:  
– justice, here it means the power of God  
who comes to bring justice on earth;  
– salvation, this is total human liberation in

order to make us holy;  
– zeal, this is the jealous love of God for his  
faithful people.

The book of Wisdom will use these words in  
5:17 and so will Paul in Ephesians 6:14.

Mal 1:11 <sup>18</sup>To each he will pay his due—  
wrath to his enemy, reprisal to his foe.  
<sup>19</sup>Those in the west will hear the name  
of Yahweh;  
those in the east will see his glory.  
For it will come like a pent-up stream  
driven by the breath of Yahweh.  
Rom 11:  
26-27 <sup>20</sup>But to Zion he will come as  
redeemer,

and to those of Jacob who turn from  
sin.

This is Yahweh speaking.  
<sup>21</sup>For my part, this is my covenant  
with them, says Yahweh. My spirit which  
I have poured out on you, and my words  
which I have put in your mouth, will  
never leave you, nor your children, nor  
your children's children forever and ever.

48:16;  
51:16;  
61:1

## The Glory of Yahweh rises upon you

**60**

• <sup>1</sup>Arise, shine, for your light has come.  
The Glory of Yahweh rises upon you.

Rev 21:11

<sup>2</sup>Night still covers the earth  
and gloomy clouds veil the peoples,  
but Yahweh now rises  
and over you his glory appears.  
<sup>3</sup>Nations will come to your light  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

24:16

Mt 2:2;  
Rev  
21:24

<sup>4</sup>Lift up your eyes round about and see:  
they are all gathered and come to you,  
your sons from afar,  
your daughters tenderly carried.

Bar 5:5-6

<sup>5</sup>This sight will make your face radiant,  
your heart throbbing and full;  
the riches of the sea will be turned to you,  
the wealth of the nations will come to you.

<sup>6</sup>A flood of camels will cover you,  
caravans from Midian and Ephah.  
Those from Sheba will come,  
bringing with them gold and incense,  
all singing in praise of Yahweh.

Mt 2:11

<sup>7</sup>The flocks of Kedar will be gathered for you,  
the rams of Nebaioth put at your service:  
they are acceptable offerings on my altar  
and will enhance the glory of my house.

• **60.1** As the prophet looks at the humble Jerusalem which is barely rising from its ruins, he suddenly has a vision of the future Jerusalem, filled with the Lord's riches, the city that will be the bride of the Lord.

There all the aspirations of a humanity purified and gathered in the light of God will be achieved (see Rev 21). There all people will delight in the fullness of everything they ever longed for.

These promises point to the goals on which the Church must focus. It is in the Church that

all the real riches of humanity—faith, understanding, community—are and must be gathered.

"Raise your head, O Jerusalem. Contemplate the great multitude who are building and seeking: In laboratories and through studies, in deserts and in factories, in the enormous social melting pot.

"Do you see all these who are working hard? Well then, all that is bubbling in them, in the arts, science and thoughts, all of this is for you! Come now, open your arms and your

Hos  
11:11

<sup>8</sup>Who are these as thick as clouds,  
flying like doves to their cote?

1K  
10:22;  
Is 55:5

<sup>9</sup>Ah, they are ships, with those of Tarshish in the front,  
for the islands now trust in me.

They bear your sons from far away  
bringing their gold and silver with them,  
for the name of Yahweh your God,  
for the Holy One of Israel,  
for he has glorified you.

<sup>10</sup>Foreigners will rebuild your walls,  
and their kings will attend to you.  
For though in anger I have struck you,  
in love I will have mercy on you.

Rev 21:  
25-26

<sup>11</sup>Your gates will forever be open  
and never be shut by night or day,  
that you may receive the wealth of  
the nations,  
their kings leading them in proces-  
sion;

(<sup>12</sup>for the nations and kingdoms that  
refuse to serve you will perish; they will  
be destroyed.)

<sup>13</sup>The glory of Lebanon will come to  
you,  
the pine, the fir and the cypress, too,  
to adorn the place of my sanctuary,  
to give glory to the resting place of  
my feet.

Rev 3:9;  
Ps 87:3

<sup>14</sup>The sons of those who oppressed  
you will come bending low;  
all who despised you will fall before  
your feet.

They will call you the City of Yahweh,  
Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

<sup>15</sup>Though you have been forsaken,  
hated and avoided,  
I will make of you an everlasting pride,  
a joy for all generations.

<sup>16</sup>You will suck the milk of nations  
and be nursed at royal breasts.

You will know that I, Yahweh, am  
your savior,  
your redeemer, the Mighty One of  
Jacob.

<sup>17</sup>Instead of bronze I will bring you  
gold;

instead of iron I will bring silver;  
instead of wood, bronze;  
instead of stones, iron.  
Peace will be overseers,  
justice your taskmasters.

<sup>18</sup>Violence will no more be heard in  
your land,  
nor ruin and destruction within your  
borders.

You will call your walls Salvation,  
and your gates Praise.

<sup>19</sup>No more will the sun give you light  
by day,  
nor the moon shine on you by night.  
For Yahweh will be your everlasting  
light

and your God will be your glory.

<sup>20</sup>No more will your sun go down,  
never will your moon wane.

For Yahweh will be your everlasting  
light,  
and your days of mourning will  
come to an end.

<sup>21</sup>Your people will be upright;  
forever they will possess the land—  
they the shoot of my planting,  
the work of my hand—  
in them I shall be glorified.

<sup>22</sup>The least of them will become a  
clan,  
the smallest a mighty nation.  
I, Yahweh, will do this,  
swiftly, in due time.

Rev  
21:12Lk 1:78;  
Rev  
21:23;  
22:5

heart and welcome this surge, this overflowing  
of human vitality as your Lord Jesus! Welcome  
this sap because, without its baptism, you will  
fade without aspirations, like a flower without

water; and save it because, without your sun, it  
will be scattered in sterile branches" (Teilhard  
de Chardin).

## The Spirit of the Lord is upon me

**61**

- <sup>1</sup> The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me,  
because Yahweh has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up broken hearts,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
freedom to those languishing in prison;  
<sup>2</sup> to announce the year of Yahweh's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to give comfort to all who grieve;  
<sup>3</sup> (to comfort those who mourn in Zion)  
and give them a garland instead of ashes,  
oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
and festal clothes instead of despair.

42:1;  
Lk 4:  
18-19;  
Mt 3:16;  
Acts  
10:38;  
Lk 7:22

63:4

They will be called oaks of integrity  
planted by Yahweh to show his glory.

<sup>4</sup> They will rebuild the ancient ruins  
and repair cities laid waste,  
left desolate for many generations.

<sup>5</sup> Strangers will stand to feed your  
flocks,  
foreigners to be your plowmen and  
vinedressers.

<sup>6</sup> But you will be named priests of  
Yahweh,  
you will be called ministers of our  
God.

You will feed on the wealth of nations  
and bathe in the splendor of their  
riches.

<sup>7</sup> Since my people's shame has been  
twofold

and disgrace has been their lot,  
they will possess a double portion  
of inheritance in their land.  
I will give them everlasting joy.

<sup>8</sup> For I, Yahweh, love justice,  
I hate robbery and oppression;  
I will give them their due reward  
and make an everlasting covenant  
with them.

<sup>9</sup> Their descendants shall be known  
among the nations  
and their offspring among the peo-  
ples.

All who see them will acknowledge  
that they are a race Yahweh has  
blessed.

<sup>10</sup> I rejoice greatly in Yahweh,  
my soul exults for joy in my God,  
for he has clothed me in the garments  
of his salvation,

he has covered me with the robe of  
his righteousness,  
like a bridegroom wearing a garland,  
like a bride adorned with jewels.

<sup>11</sup> For as the earth brings forth its  
growth,

55:3

Lk 1:46;  
Rev 19:8;  
21:2

19:6;  
Rev 1:6

• **61.1** The prophet recalls the mission he received from God, to announce to the Jewish pioneers who returned to Jerusalem that God would bless their efforts. The ruins would be rebuilt; the people would come back in great numbers from the countries where they were exiled; those who doubt or are discouraged must persevere because, soon, God will come to visit his people.

Speaking in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus read this text and said: "Today it is being fulfilled" (Lk 4:21). And the people who heard him were saying: "God has visited his people."

And yet, we who come after him wonder: If Christ brought God's salvation twenty cen-

turies ago, why are so many people still waiting for the *good news* of their liberation?

It is because the Gospel is a seed and the resurrection does not immediately bring about the transformation of the world. If the Jewish people endured fifteen centuries of searching and trials before their Savior came, how will other people obtain the definitive Peace of the Kingdom of God without first passing through the great trials preceding Christ's return? We are already quite blessed to have him in our midst and *his Spirit upon us*.

*To heal, to fortify; perfume and garlands:* the coming of God to his people fills us with happiness; without fear or boredom, so frequently at the heart of religious practices.

and as a garden makes seeds spring up,  
so will the Lord Yahweh make justice  
and praise  
spring up in the sight of all nations.

### Your God will rejoice in you

**62** • <sup>1</sup>For Zion's sake I will not hold  
my peace,  
for Jerusalem I will not keep silent,  
until her holiness shines like the dawn  
and her salvation flames like a  
burning torch.

Rev  
2:17;  
3:12;  
Ezk  
16:12

<sup>2</sup>The nations will see your holiness  
and all the kings your glory.

You will be called by a new name  
which the mouth of Yahweh will reveal.

<sup>3</sup>You will be a crown of glory  
in the hand of Yahweh,

a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

49:8

<sup>4</sup>No longer will you be named *Forsaken*;  
no longer will your land be called  
*Abandoned*;

but you will be called *My Delight*  
and your land *Espoused*.

For Yahweh delights in you  
and will make your land his spouse.

<sup>5</sup>As a young man marries a virgin,  
so will your builder marry you;

and as a bridegroom rejoices in his  
bride,

so will your God rejoice in you.

### He who sows will reap

<sup>6</sup>Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I

have stationed watchmen; all the day  
and throughout the night they will  
not be silent.

You who call on Yahweh, give  
yourselves no rest; <sup>7</sup>and give him no  
rest either till he restores Jerusalem  
and makes of it the pride of the earth.

<sup>8</sup>Yahweh swears by his right hand  
and by his mighty arm: Never again  
will I give your grain as food for your  
enemies, nor will foreigners drink the  
wine for which you have labored.

Am 9:14;  
Dt 28:30

<sup>9</sup>But those who toil will eat the har-  
vest, and praise Yahweh; and those  
working for the vintage shall drink of  
the wine in the courts of my sanctuary.

<sup>10</sup>"Pass through, pass through the  
gates, prepare the way for the people.  
Build it up, bank up the highway, clear it  
of stones; raise up a standard for the  
peoples."

<sup>11</sup>For Yahweh proclaims to the ends  
of the earth:

40:10

Say to the daughter of Zion, here  
comes your salvation! Yahweh brings the  
reward of his victory, his booty is carried  
before him.

<sup>12</sup>They shall be called the holy peo-  
ple, the redeemed of Yahweh; and you  
shall be called *The Sought After*, a city  
no longer abandoned.

### Why are your clothes red?

**63**

Rev  
19:13

• <sup>1</sup>Who is this coming from Edom,  
majestically arrayed  
in crimson garments from Bozrah,  
marching in great strength?

• **62.1** What was said on the subject in  
chapter 60 can be applied here. In a new way,  
this song repeats what was said about the fu-  
ture Jerusalem in 4:2 and in chapters 40–55.

Jerusalem, the lasting city of the children of  
God, the bride of the Lord, filled with his riches  
and the delight of her God. Why does God re-  
mind us so many times of those wonders  
which have yet to happen?

– So that we may keep up our hope in trials  
and dark times. This is how Paul encourages  
us in Romans 8:16. Also, when things are  
going well and we are filled with earthly hopes,  
the same wisdom must help us to be detached

from all this, in the knowledge that something  
much better still awaits us.

– On the other hand, the heavenly Jerusa-  
lem is already present. Those who have come  
into the church already have the favors prom-  
ised to David of which we have just spoken;  
they already enjoy them if they have received  
the gifts of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 13:34).  
These pages are an invitation to see God at  
work in the world through the Church.

• **63.1** The poem beginning here is wildly  
beautiful. The neighboring people of Edom  
took advantage of the ruin of Jerusalem to join

“It is I, proclaiming justice,  
I who am powerful to save.”

<sup>2</sup>Why are your clothes red?  
Such garments have those who tread the winepress.

<sup>3</sup>“Alone I have trod the grapes;  
not one of my people was with me.  
I trampled them in my anger,  
I trod them down in my wrath,  
their lifeblood spattering my garments,  
staining with crimson all my raiment.

<sup>4</sup>For I had set a day of vengeance  
and my year of redemption had come.

<sup>5</sup>I looked about: there was no one to help.  
I was appalled: there was no one to give support.  
My own arm, then, brought about the victory,  
and I was supported by my own fury.

<sup>6</sup>I crushed the peoples in my anger,  
I trampled them down in my wrath,  
and on the earth I poured their lifeblood.”

Rev  
19:15;  
14:19-20

34:8;  
61:2

### Rend the heavens and come down

Ps 89:2

• <sup>7</sup>I will sing in praise of Yahweh and recall his kindness, according to all that he has done for us, his great goodness to the family of Israel. He has granted us mercy in the abundance of his blessings.

Dt 32:5

<sup>8</sup>For he said: “Surely they are my people, children who will not be disloyal.” So he proved himself their Savior <sup>9</sup>in all their trials.

33:14;  
Mal 3:17

It was not a messenger or an angel but he himself who delivered them. Out of his love and mercy, he redeemed them, lifting them up and carrying them throughout the days of old.

<sup>10</sup>Yet they rebelled, giving grief to his holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy, fighting against them.

Eph 4:30

<sup>11</sup>His people then remembered the days of old, the days of Moses. Where is he who brought them out of the sea, the shepherd of his flock?

Heb  
13:20;  
Num  
11:17

Where is he who in the midst of them poured out his holy Spirit, <sup>12</sup>who sent his own power to accompany Moses, who divided the waters before them, winning for himself eternal renown, <sup>13</sup>who made them go through the depths as easily as a horse in the wilderness? <sup>14</sup>Like cattle

Ps 77:21

its wreckers and take part in the looting. So, the simple mention of it was enough to arouse a desire for revenge in the Jews. The prophets wanted the destruction of a nation in which sin was obvious and which had no mission in God's plans. This poem imagines God relating his victory over the pagans.

Believers reading this poem in early Christian times understood it in another, figurative sense: in the hero rescuing his people, they

saw Christ covered with his own blood (see Rev 19:13). This was God's real victory and his way of restoring justice.

• 7. This passage 63:7–64:11 is a psalm asking the forgiveness of Yahweh. The wonders of the past are recalled, and an anxious expectation of new blessings is expressed. Note especially 63:19–64:3 which would be understood later as asking for the coming of Christ.

going down into the valley, they did not stumble.

The spirit of Yahweh led them to their rest; you guided your people, winning for yourself glorious renown.

Ps 80:15 <sup>15</sup>Look down from heaven, look down from your holy and glorious throne. Where is your zeal and your strength, the yearning of your heart and your compassion? How long will you ignore our pain? <sup>16</sup>For you are our Father, whereas Abraham does not know us nor has Israel any knowledge of us. But you, O Yahweh, are our Father, from the beginning, you are our redeemer: this is your name.

Dt 32:6;  
Mt 23:9

<sup>17</sup>Why have you made us stray from your ways? Why have you let our heart become hard so that we do not fear you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your inheritance.

<sup>18</sup>Why have irreligious people invaded your sanctuary? Why have our enemies trampled it down?

Jer 14:9;  
Mk 1:10;  
15:38;  
Rev  
19:11 <sup>19</sup>For too long we have become like those you do not rule, like those who do not bear your name.

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down! The mountains would quake at your presence.

**64** <sup>1</sup>As when fire sets brushwood ablaze and causes water to boil, make the nations know your name, and your enemies tremble. <sup>2</sup>Let them witness your stunning deeds.

Dt 4:32;  
1Cor 2:9 <sup>3</sup>No one has ever heard or perceived, no eye has ever seen a God besides you who works for those who trust in him.

<sup>4</sup>You have confounded those who acted righteously and who joyfully

kept your ways in mind. You are angry with our sins, yet conceal them and we shall be saved.

<sup>5</sup>All of us have become like the unclean; all our good deeds are like polluted garments; we have all withered like leaves, blown away by our iniquities.

Ezk  
36:17

<sup>6</sup>There is no one who calls upon your name, no one who rouses himself to lay hold of you. For you have hidden your face, you have given us up to the power of our evil acts.

<sup>7</sup>And yet, Yahweh, you are our Father; we are the clay and you are our potter; we are the work of your hand.

<sup>8</sup>Do not let your anger go too far, O Yahweh, or think of our sins forever. See, we all are your people!

<sup>9</sup>Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wasteland, Jerusalem a desolation.

<sup>10</sup>Our holy and glorious house, where our ancestors used to pray to you, has been razed to the ground, and all that we treasure lies in ruins.

<sup>11</sup>Can you still remain unmoved, O Yahweh, before all this? Will you punish us further with your silence?

Zec 1:12

### God's response

**65** <sup>1</sup>I let myself be found by those who did not ask for me; I have been met by those who did not seek me.

Rom  
10:20

I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation who did not call on my name.

<sup>2</sup>I have stretched out my hands all day to a rebellious people who chose the evil way, following their own wishes.

Rom  
10:21

<sup>3</sup>These people provoked me to my face, continually, sacrificing in gardens, burning incense on bricks, <sup>4</sup>living in

Dt 32:21

Mk 5:2

• **65.1** Chapters 65–66 announce the judgment of the Lord on the earth. He will create a new heaven and a new earth in which his

servants will experience happiness. Verses 13–14 are a prelude to the beatitudes and the woes expressed in Luke 6:20–26.



tombs and spending nights in dark places; a people who eat the flesh of swine and broth of abominable meat.

<sup>5</sup>They cry out, "Stay away, do not come near, for I am too sacred to be touched." Such people and their acts arouse my anger like fire that burns all day.

<sup>6</sup>Look, all this is written in my book, I will not keep silent till I have settled my account with them <sup>7</sup>for their crimes and the crimes of their fathers as well, Yahweh says. Because they burned incense on the mountains and blasphemed against me on the hills, I will pay them back in full.

### God saves and blesses the just

<sup>8</sup>Yahweh says, When people find juice in a grape, they say: 'Do not destroy it, there is a blessing here.' So will I do with my servants; I will not destroy all of them.

<sup>9</sup>I will create a new race from Jacob and they will own the hills of Judah. My chosen people will inherit them, and my servants will dwell there.

<sup>10</sup>Sharon will be a pasture for flocks, the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds; they will be for my people who have sought me.

<sup>11</sup>But as for you who have forsaken Yahweh, you who have forgotten my holy mountain, you who spread a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny, <sup>12</sup>I have destined you to the sword. All of you will kneel for the slaughter.

For I called and you did not answer; I spoke and you did not listen. Instead you did what was evil in my sight and chose that in which I had no delight.

<sup>13</sup>Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Look, my servants will eat but you will go hungry;

my servants will drink but you will be thirsty; my servants will rejoice but you will be disgraced; <sup>14</sup>my servants will sing with gladness of heart, but you will cry with grief in your heart and wail in anguish of spirit.

<sup>15</sup>My chosen ones will use as a curse the name you will leave behind, as I strike you dead and give my servants a new name.

<sup>16</sup>Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will receive the blessing from the God of truth; whoever takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth. For past troubles will be forgotten, and I will see them no more.

### A new heaven and a new earth

• <sup>17</sup>I now create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind again.

<sup>18</sup>Be glad forever and rejoice in what I create; for I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight. <sup>19</sup>I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people.

The sound of distress and the voice of weeping will not be heard in it any more.

<sup>20</sup>You will no longer know of dead children or of adults who do not live out a lifetime. One who reaches a hundred years will have died a mere youth, but one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

<sup>21</sup>They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant crops and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup>No longer will they build houses for others to dwell in; no

56:5;  
62:2;  
Rev 2:17

2Cor  
1:20;  
Rev 3:14

51:6;  
66:22;  
2P 3:13;  
Rev 21:1

62:5;  
Rev 21:4

Mt 25:34;  
Lk 6:20

• 17. No one could imagine the new heaven prepared for us by God (Mk 12:18). Let us rejoice that the prophet has described it in such a concrete way. For us the happiness of the "beyond" is part of our faith; but at this time it was not yet clear neither for the Jews nor the prophet. God rewarded people while

on earth and they preferred not to think about the lot of those already dead, or who would die before the time of happiness had come. God did everything so that his people would not neglect their earthly duties on the pretext of waiting for a "beyond."

longer will they plant for others to eat the harvest.

For as the days of a tree will the days of my people be; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands.

<sup>23</sup>Their labor will not be in vain, nor will they bear children destined for misfortune, for they will be a people blessed by Yahweh, and their descendants with them.

<sup>24</sup>Before they call, I will have answered; while they are yet speaking, I will have heard.

<sup>25</sup>The wolf and the lamb will feed together,  
the lion will eat straw like the ox,  
(but the serpent will feed on dust).  
They will not destroy nor do any harm  
over all my holy mountain, says  
Yahweh.

### True worship of Yahweh

**66** <sup>1</sup>Thus says Yahweh:  
Heaven is my throne and earth my  
footstool. What house, then, could you  
build for me, and what could you offer as  
my resting place?

<sup>2</sup>My hands have made all this and it is  
all mine, but what I am looking for is the  
one who is meek and contrite of heart,  
who trembles at my word.

<sup>3</sup>They sacrifice an ox, then they murder  
a human being. They sacrifice a lamb,  
then they break a dog's neck; they bring  
a cereal offering, then they offer swine's  
blood. They burn incense, but they burn  
it for idols.

Since they have chosen their own  
ways and taken delight in their dirty  
idols, <sup>4</sup>I will likewise choose afflictions  
for them that they fear and abhor.

For when I called no one answered,  
when I spoke no one listened.

Instead they did what was evil in my  
sight  
and chose that in which I had no  
delight.

<sup>5</sup>Hear the word of Yahweh, you who  
tremble at his word: Because of my  
name your own people hate and reject  
you, saying, "Let Yahweh show his glory,  
that we may see your joy."

These mockers will be put to shame.  
<sup>6</sup>Listen, an uproar from the city, a voice  
from the temple! It is the voice of Yahweh  
avenging and paying back his enemies.

### Birth of the new Jerusalem

<sup>7</sup>Long before being in labor,  
she has given birth;  
before having birth pangs  
she has been delivered of a son.

<sup>8</sup>Has anyone ever heard of such a  
thing? Has anyone seen the like of it?  
How could a land spring forth in one  
day? How could a nation be formed in a  
moment?

Yet Zion had scarcely been in travail  
when she gave birth to her children.

<sup>9</sup>Yahweh says: Do I allow to conceive  
and yet not to give birth? For I am the  
one who opens the womb and who  
closes it.

<sup>10</sup>"Rejoice for Jerusalem and be glad  
for her, all you who love her. Be glad with  
her, rejoice with her, all you who were in  
grief over her, <sup>11</sup>that you may suck of the  
milk from her comforting breasts, that  
you may drink deeply from the abundance  
of her glory."

<sup>12</sup>For this is what Yahweh says: I will  
send her peace, overflowing like a river;  
and the nations' wealth, rushing like a  
torrent towards her.

And you will be nursed and carried in  
her arms and fondled upon her lap.

<sup>13</sup>As a son comforted by his mother,  
so will I comfort you. <sup>14</sup>At the sight of  
this, your heart will rejoice; like grass,  
your bones will flourish. For it shall be  
known that Yahweh's hand is with his  
servant, but his fury is upon his enemy.

<sup>15</sup>Look, Yahweh will come in fire,  
his chariots like the whirlwind,  
to release his anger with fury  
and his threat with flames of fire.

<sup>16</sup>For by fire will Yahweh execute  
judgment,  
and by his sword, against all mortals.  
Those slain by Yahweh will be many.

<sup>17</sup>As for those who sanctify and purify  
themselves by going to the gardens and  
following the priestess in the midst—  
those who eat the flesh of pigs, reptiles  
and rats—their deeds and thoughts will  
suddenly come to an end, says Yahweh.

Rev  
16:17

Jn 16:21;  
Rev 12:5

50:2;  
65:12

11:7;  
Gen 3:14

1K 8:27;  
Mt 5:34;  
Acts 7:  
49-50

Ps 50:10

50:2;  
65:12

48:18;  
60:14

65:4

### The pagans enter the kingdom of God

Zec  
14:16

• <sup>18</sup>Now I am going to gather the nations of every tongue, and they will witness my glory, <sup>19</sup>for I will perform a wonderful thing among them. Then I will send some of their survivors to the nations—Tarshish, Put, Lud, Moscheck, Rosh, Tubal, and Javan—to the distant islands where no one has ever heard of me or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. <sup>20</sup>They will bring your kindred from all the nations as an offering to Yahweh on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules, on camels to my holy mountain in Jerusalem, says Yah-

Zec  
14:18

weh, just as the Israelites bring oblations in clean vessels to the house of Yahweh. <sup>21</sup>Then I will choose priests and Levites even from them, says Yahweh.

<sup>22</sup>Yahweh says, “As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make shall endure before me, so will your name and your descendants also endure.”

<sup>23</sup>From new moon to new moon, from sabbath to sabbath, every mortal will come to worship me, says Yahweh. <sup>24</sup>And on their way out they will see the corpses of those who rebelled against me. Their worms shall not die, nor their fire be quenched, and they will be abhorrent to all.

65:17;  
Ps 65:3

Jdt 16:17;  
Sir 7:17;  
Mk 9:48

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• **66.18** This announces the day when Yahweh will conquer the pagan nations united against him, and that he will then save them by gathering them. Few passages of the bible express such a universal view of God’s salvation given “to all the families of the earth.” He had promised it to Abraham, but people had been so obsessed with resentment and hatred among themselves, among villages and religions, that they hardly paid attention.

Be careful to understand the expression “I am going to gather.” We already saw in Isaiah 6:9 how the Jews spoke about God because they were convinced that God rules everything. When someone undertook something they would say that God had moved him to do it, and when someone was doing something evil that God would later use for his own ends, they would say that God had driven him. Here, “I am going to gather.” means “they will gather but I will use this to achieve the salvation of my people.”

The nations unite against Jerusalem as in the days of Sennacherib (see Is 31:4-9) and they are defeated in a miraculous way: but this time, the survivors, witnesses of the miracle, will reveal the true God everywhere. They will be admitted to God’s people and they will share the privileges of the Jews (“from among them I will take priests and Levites”).

The poem concludes with the vision of a world judged by Yahweh:

– within the city, those who have dedicated themselves to his service and come to adore him in his temple;

– outside, the corpses of those who were annihilated; they will always remain as the sign of God’s invincible justice.

What a tremendous vision! But it would be vain to seek escape by thinking that God, being so good, will not be able to condemn us definitely. Jesus refers to this text in Mark 9:48.

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