



# Prophet, the messenger Of God

Pastor Tânia Cristina Giachetti  
Ministério Seara Ágape

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# Prophet, the messenger of God



*Ministério Seara Ágape*  
*Estudo Bíblico Evangélico*

Pastor Tânia Cristina Giachetti  
São Paulo – SP – Brazil – 2007

This book is dedicated to the chosen by God to be His voice on earth and His true messengers to exhort, to comfort and teach the people He separated to Him; to all those who endure all difficulties in order to fulfill the divine call, aiming the good and the growth of the Body of Christ in love.

I thank the King of kings and Lord of lords for His wisdom, love and patience as a Father and for sustaining me in my calling, guiding me and molding me, day by day, so that I can obey Him and serve Him with my whole being.

“Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet  
will receive a prophet’s reward” (Matt. 10: 41a).

“See, I am sending my messenger to prepare  
the way before me...” (Mal. 3: 1a).

“Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint,  
but happy are those who keep the law” (Prov. 29: 18).

Have you ever thought to be a prophet?

What does it mean to be a prophet of God?

Being a prophet is to occupy God's call to this ministry, one of the five that was established by Him (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers).

The bible describes the prophecies of sixteen men of God who received this gift from Him to be His mouth on earth to warn His people and take them out of the bondage of sin, guiding them through the paths of holiness. According to the Word of God, there are four prophets called 'major' and twelve 'minor.' The Major Prophets are: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel; the Minor Prophets are: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

We can see a basic characteristic in all of them that was *obedience* to God's will, often difficult to be exerted from the human point of view, but certainly doable from the divine point of view.

This book aims to instruct about the prophetic ministry; more than that, to make clear the main characteristics of a true "*man of God*", as the *prophets* are also known.

In 1 Cor. 14: 32 ("And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets"), the bible suggests that the prophecy varies from one to another child of God, as a result of his own spiritual growth and inner interpretation, and this is not the same as saying that there are several manifestations of the gifts. In this verse in particular, we can imagine that the human part of man is involved, as well as his faith, allowing greater or lesser degree of the flow of the Spirit, the same way the mental and spiritual content gives each one a different interpretation of the same fact. However, if we read the verse that follows ("God is a God not of disorder but of peace ...") we realize that even with the particularities of each human being who the Lord uses as His instrument, His message is concordant in its core. The bible also says: "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith" (Rom. 12: 6), which completes our reasoning above.

*Prophet* comes from the Greek word *Prophetes*, spokesman; *pro* = *before* and *phetes* = *speaker*; verb *phenai* = '*to speak*.' Prophet means: spokesman, messenger, who reveals the divine thoughts; who interprets oracles (prophecy or the word of God; divine counsel, responses or utterances; in Hebrew, *dabar*, דָּבָר, 'thing', 'word', Strong #1697; in Greek: λόγιον, *logion*, 'divine responses or utterances', Strong #3051); who is moved by the Holy Spirit and, thereafter, offers himself, solemnly, to declare to man what he has received from God by inspiration; the man who is used by the Spirit of God and to whom is given the authority and wisdom in the Word so that it has the weight that it should have; it also means poets. The prophet has *the power to instruct, to comfort, to encourage, to rebuke, to convince of error, to declare guilty and stimulate people*. There are references in the NT about prophets in Acts 11: 27; Acts 13: 1; Acts 15: 32; Acts 21: 10, which makes us think that prophets existed not only in the Old Testament, but also in the Early Church. Even within the prophetic ministry there are various manifestations of the Spirit, because some are endowed with clairvoyance (prediction of the future), others not. Some are more used by God for exhortation, others for instruction and revelation of the Word and so on. In Matt. 10: 41 it is written: "Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward." The word of God tells us to test everything and hold fast to what is good (1 The. 5: 21). How do I know if a prophet is truly from God? See some important references in Jer. 23: 31-32; Deut. 13:

1-5; Deut. 18: 21-22. In short, the prophet who comes from God does not lead to error or sin, doesn't bring lies or yoke; the true prophet does not say things of his flesh nor reports dreams or visions that are not God's, and, the most important of all, what comes from the mouth of God is fulfilled. The false prophecies sooner or later come to light and are unmasked, because the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that they are in contradiction with the divine design for our lives. In addition, the gift of discernment of spirits (given by the Holy Spirit) helps us to distinguish the true from the false prophet.

The main function of the prophet in the NT was to convey the divine revelations of temporary significance that proclaimed to the Church what it needed to know and do in special circumstances. His message was of *edification, exhortation* (gr. *paraklesis*) and *consolation* (Rom. 12: 8; 1 Cor. 14: 3: "the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness"; "On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation") and included occasional statements of *authority* about the will of God in particular cases (Acts 13: 1-3: "Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off") and *predictions about the future* (Acts 11: 28: "One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius"; Acts 21: 10-11: "While we were staying there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. He came to us and took Paul's belt, bound his own feet and hands with it, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit', 'This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles'").

We often read in the prophetic books the expression "*Day of the Lord*". It can mean a specific day marked by God to bring judgment and justice, as it can also mean the first coming of Christ or the second coming and the day of Judgment.

Although some men of God described in this book have not been considered *prophets* in the broad sense of the word, they were used by His Spirit to prophesy in some specific situations, for example, the family, as was the case of *Isaac* and *Noah*; others like *Joseph* were used to reveal dreams and interpret puzzles of kings from other nations. *David* also was considered a prophet (Acts 2: 29-31: "Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a *prophet*, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades [Ps. 16: 10], nor did his flesh experience corruption"). As mentioned earlier, one meaning of the word *prophet* is '*poet*' and he took advantage of every situation in his life, through poetry, to bring the people the words of the Lord. He himself said: "The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue" (2 Sam. 23: 2). He also wrote Messianic psalms with prophetic nature, especially with regard to the sacrifice of the cross.

All of these men developed important characteristics to a true prophet, beginning with the *love* and *discipline*. In 1 Cor. 13: 2 it is written: "And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." This tells us that to be a prophet it's necessary to develop first the spiritual sensitivity and love of God, because without this, the gift cannot be properly used. Secondly, we need the discipline that puts

us at His disposal every second of our day and makes us forget ourselves and our own interests to do what He commands us. Other characteristics to be developed by a prophet will be described in the chapters of the book.

Before finishing the introduction, it is necessary to make very clear that one thing is to be used by God *in the Spirit* as a true prophet, to point out an error with the purpose of correction and salvation; another thing is to be in *the flesh* pointing and accusing people without the gift of revelation from the Holy Spirit, simply because of a human custom of criticizing and putting others down.

May we grow and learn more about the Lord's infinite choices for us through the experiences of these chosen ones.

Have a good reading.

I love you in Jesus.

Tânia Cristina Giachetti

#### Notes:

- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [ / ] or parenthesis ( ), in italics, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995)
- NIV = New International Version (will be used in brackets in some verses to make it easier for readers to understand).
- Email: [relacionamentosearaagape@gmail.com](mailto:relacionamentosearaagape@gmail.com)



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## The divided kingdom

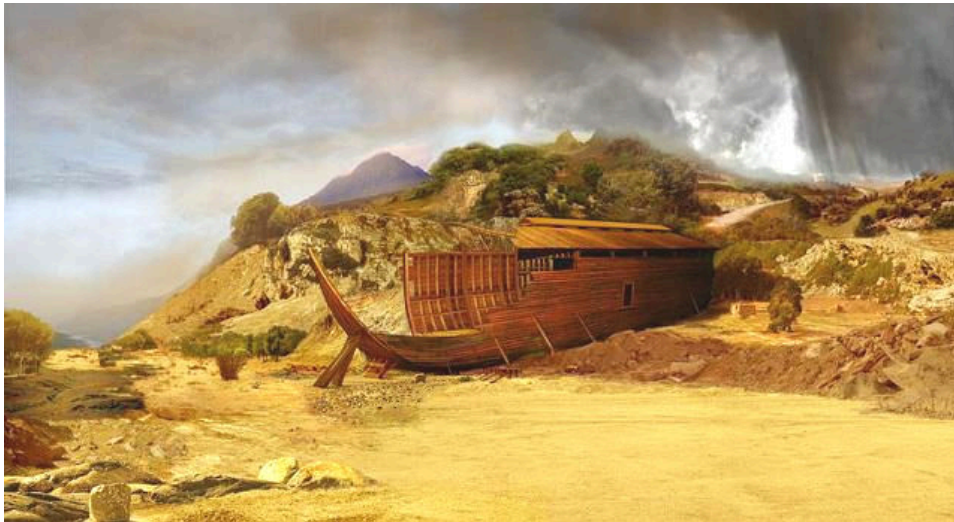
Judah (south)		Prophets South      North		Israel (North)
950 BC	Rehoboam (931-914 BC) Abijah (914-911 BC) Asa (911-870 BC)			Jeroboam I (931-910 BC)  Nadab (910-909 BC)
900 BC	Jehoshaphat (870-848 BC)		Elijah 875-848 BC	Baasha (909-886 BC)  Elah (886-885 BC) Zimri (885 BC) Omri (885-874 BC)  Ahab (874-853 BC)  Ahaziah (853-852 BC)
850 BC	Jehoram (848-841 BC)  Ahaziah (841 BC) Athaliah (841-835 BC)  Joash (835-796 BC)	Joel?	Elisha 848-797 BC	Jehoram or Joram (852-841 BC)  Jehu (841-814 BC)  Jehoahaz (814-798 BC)
800 BC	Amaziah (796-781 BC)  Uzziah (781-740 BC)	Isaiah 740-681 BC	Jonah 785-750 Amos 760-750 Hosea 755-715	Jehoash (798-782 BC)  Jeroboam II (782-753 BC)
750 BC	Jotham (740-732 BC)  Ahaz (732- 716 BC)  Hezekiah (716-687 BC)	Micah 742-687  Joel?		Zechariah (753-752 BC) Shallum (752 BC) Menahem (752-742 BC) Pekahiah (742-740 BC) Pekah (740-732 BC) Hoshea (732-723 BC)  Fall of Samaria 722 BC

## Last Years of the Kingdom of Judah

## Kings

## Prophets

700 BC	Manasseh (687-642 BC)	Nahum (663-612 BC)
650 BC	Ammon (642-640 BC) Josiah (640-609 BC)  Jehoahaz (609 BC)  Jehoiakim (609-598 BC) / 1 <sup>st</sup> stage of the exile of Judah: 605 BC	Zephaniah (640-621 BC) Jeremiah (626-585 BC) Habakkuk (610-597 BC)  Obadiah (605-583 BC) Daniel (605-536 BC)
600 BC	Jehoiachin (598 BC) Zedekiah (598-587 BC) / 2 <sup>nd</sup> stage of the exile of Judah: 597 BC Fall of Jerusalem (July 587 or 586 BC)  Inhabitants of Judah taken to Babylon - 587-586 BC / 3 <sup>rd</sup> stage of the exile of Judah: 586 BC	Ezekiel (592-571 BC)
550 BC	Beginning of Persian rule – 539 BC Cyrus the Persian emperor ordered the return of the Jews – 538 BC (1 <sup>st</sup> return of the exiles). In 536 BC begins the building of the temple (Ezra 3: 8) and stops till 520 BC (Ezra 4: 24). Beginning of the rebuilding of the temple – 520 BC; conclusion 516 BC 2 <sup>nd</sup> return to Jerusalem (Ezra) 458 BC Rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem 445 BC (3 <sup>rd</sup> return: Nehemiah)	Haggai and Zechariah (520-480 BC)  Malachi (450-400 BC)



# Noah

**To obey and not to question**

“After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth... These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God... Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him...In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.” (Gen. 5: 32; Gen. 6: 9; 22; Gen. 7: 11)

“He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers’. He also said, ‘Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. May God make space for Japheth, and let him live in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.’” (Gen. 9: 21-27)

## Noah

Noah was a righteous man and walked with God. He was a different person of all in his generation, people who were corrupted by sin and did not fear the Lord. Finding favor with the Almighty, he received a task: to build an ark to shelter him and his family during the time of tribulation and destruction decreed by the Creator because of the wickedness and corruption of mankind and that was to come. If we think in the human conditions of Noah at the time, we'll be almost certain of the impossibility of building an ark of the size stipulated by God so as to contain within it all species to be preserved and that would populate the earth again after the Flood. The only materials available were the bitumen to caulk the wood; flint and substandard instruments of brass (perhaps iron – cf. Gen. 4: 22) to transform tree trunks into logs and beams. Thus, *Noah's obedience to God's voice without questioning* put him in a leadership level before all the people, even his own family. The fact of hearing His voice, as described in the Word, makes us infer that there was an intimacy between him and the Lord.

The bible says that Noah took one hundred years to build the ark, and during this time he must have faced all kinds of opposition trying to make him give up the divine plan. However, his persevering and resolute attitude was, in itself, a prophetic way to show people their sin, their spiritual smallness and to call them to repentance not to suffer under the wrath of God.

We can imagine that during these one hundred years building the ark, he was also wrought by the Creator increasing his communion with Him and giving him security as a leader. Likewise, his sensibility to spiritual things was improved, not only in relation to the sinful attitude of people around, but the sinful and distorted attitudes within himself and within his own family. Possibly, he had time to observe the human perversions with other eyes and discern them from the holiness of God. Thus, with the divine revelations enlightening his thoughts and emotions he could feel safe to pronounce the blessing upon his sons Shem and Japheth and the curse on Ham. In this stage of his spiritual growth he already had the ability to place the covenant with God above the carnal links and to judge sin within his own family with justice and rightness.

Bringing this experience to our days, we can say that the prophet must have, first, a life of communion with the Lord in order to be attentive to His voice and, thus, to fulfill his calling. Secondly, the prophet must have the same attitude of Noah: *obedience without questioning* or thinking in his human possibilities. Probably, Noah thought to himself in the madness of the divine plan in face of his carnal weakness. However, the bible does not say that he discussed or argued with God until decide to perform the work that had been proposed; he simply obeyed. We often walk in the Spirit, we hear His voice, we receive His revelations, but the first thing we do is to present Him our weakness and impossibilities. Here comes an extremely important factor that makes us overcome all things and transports us to a higher level of anointing. I'm talking about faith, not only the *common measure* of faith that is generated in the human heart by God Himself (Rom. 12: 3), but the *gift of faith* (1 Cor. 12: 9), given by the Holy Spirit to enable us to His work. A true prophet of God obeys Him, simply because the faith that he has within him speaks louder than reason. He does not let himself to be led by words or by the human opposition of the unbelievers and carnal people used by the devil to thwart the divine plan. Armed with the certainty of God's love and His sovereign choice and power over all things the prophet is able to utter words of the trial against the works of darkness, for the wisdom of the Spirit enables him to do so. There is a word written by the Apostle Paul that says: "Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking;

rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults” (1 Cor. 14: 20). The prophet doesn’t need to fear the words that the Lord puts in his mouth, for He Himself is responsible for them. The bible tells us that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account” (Heb. 4: 12-13).

Noah judged with wisdom within his own family to prevent the evil to go ahead or that the mistakes of the past came to be repeated in his kindred. Therefore, the prophet, by obeying God without questioning, even not knowing clearly why he performs certain tasks, he can be sure that He who gave the word is responsible for bringing it into existence and has a correct purpose that, often, will only be understood later. That’s what Jesus told His disciples: “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand” (Jn. 13: 7).

Noah was protected by God from the Flood, for his obedience assured this protection from above. He had the covenant with the Creator confirmed by seeing the rainbow in the sky. Likewise, when we obey the Lord and respond positively to His call, we can be certain that we will be protected from any ‘flood’ that stands in our way and that, beyond it, there is a rainbow waiting for us.

“The lips of the righteous feed many,  
but fools die for lack of sense.” (Prov.  
10: 21)



## Isaac

**Surrender / To have the blessing and the curse in hands**



“So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!" (Gen. 27: 27-29)

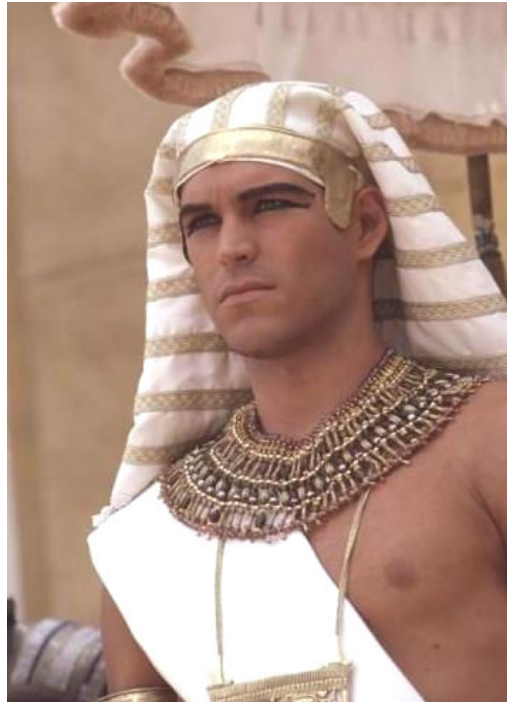
“Then his father Isaac answered him: "See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck." (Gen. 27: 39-40)

Abraham, as “*the father of faith*”, also made the will of God without questioning, just as Noah. According to his predecessor, he walked with the Lord and talked to Him generating great wealth for his entire family (the blessing of prosperity, offspring and intimacy with God) and to all mankind. Comparing with the story of Abraham, Isaac’s story is short, occupying a much smaller space in the Scriptures. However, it has an extreme importance to us, for Isaac represents the Lamb who was slain for our sin, who surrendered unconditionally to the will of the Father without protesting, and therefore, could be justified and bring us victory. Just as Jesus by dying on the cross fulfilled the divine plan and gave back to man the free will to choose between the blessing (those who accept Him as Lord and Savior) and the curse (those who reject Him as the Son of God), Isaac, for having remained in the center of His sovereign will, received from Him the legality of *having in hands the power to release the blessing and the curse*. We’re talking about the blessing released over Jacob and the curse over Esau. Isaac acted as a prophet, punishing sin within his own home. As we read the Scriptures, we can see that the whole plot between Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau involved the birthright blessing, therefore, the blessing delegated by God to Abraham and his descendants. In fact, Esau was not cursed by being the firstborn or the second child, because the only difference between the firstborn and other children is that he received a double portion of inheritance and the leadership of the clan. Esau’s sin was to reject God’s blessing because of his carnal desires. Of course, everything had been determined by God and was under His control, because He knew that by giving the free will to man since Eden, some would follow the path of blessing, others would follow the path of curse, simply by rejecting Him as Lord of their lives. Thus, Isaac, by submitting to God’s will, received from Him the prophetic anointing to judge the circumstances. Jacob, similarly, even fighting the wrong manner, wanted to be blessed by God, for he knew the difference between blessing and curse, and could later bless his children. Esau did not value the blessing or the approval of God; he threw away his chance to be happy, so he was cursed by Isaac. Things got worse for him even more by keeping hatred against Jacob and wanting to kill him. Esau acted as those who today reject Jesus as Lord of their lives and despise the inheritance of *ETERNAL LIFE* that He conquered for us. In other words, today we can act rightly like Jacob, giving value to the things of God, therefore, being blessed, or act like Esau, rejecting the Son, therefore, choosing the curse. The interesting thing in the story of Isaac and Esau is that even cursing him to live in barren places of the earth, to be a servant of the younger brother and fight with his own arm to survive, Isaac leaves to Esau an option of return to beatitude: “but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck” (Gen. 27: 40b). This means that, if he repented of his sin, he could enjoy the ‘blessing of the second child’, no longer live the curse. He would release himself through sincere repentance. Esau, after many years of suffering, understood the value of the things of God and of the family inheritance, repented, left the hatred against his brother and the wish to kill him, was reconciled with him and was also blessed by the Lord with prosperity and offspring.

Bringing this experience to our days, we can say that the prophet of God, when obeys and remains under ‘His wings’, even before the , receives from Him the ability to judge good and evil, to utter the blessing and the curse. Therefore, the anointing of the prophet does not come upon him at once, but it is conquered (perfected) through *surrender*. This implies a deep knowledge and intimacy with the Lord, because when we know Him in truth, we began to wield the sword that He puts in our hands skillfully;

we began to have His trust, because what comes out of our mouth does not go out with the folly or the violence of the flesh, but with wisdom and love of His Spirit. In fact, we let Him speak for us. So, we judge rightly between good and evil, giving people the chance to choose to be happy too, through repentance of their sins, for we become watchmen of the Most High among men. In the Gospels, Jesus said repeatedly that He judges no one, because He came to save men, but also makes it clear that whoever doesn't believe in Him is condemned already (Jn. 12: 46-48: "I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge"). This means that when we present the choice of the right ways before those who live in error, somehow we are letting them choose for themselves between the blessing and the curse. They themselves will be blessed or cursed by their own spiritual choice. In Jam. 5: 20 it is written: "you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

"The blessing of the Lord makes  
rich, and he adds no sorrow with it."  
(Prov. 10: 22)



## Joseph

**Integrity / Interpretation of dreams**

“And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it’. Joseph answered Pharaoh, ‘It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.’” (Gen. 41: 15-16)

## Joseph

Joseph was the son of Jacob's old age after a long period of sterility of Rachel, thus much loved by him. As the 'pampered son' Joseph had certain privileges that the others did not, yet he wasn't spared by God, who disciplined him as His instrument. From adolescence of Joseph, the Lord gave him prophetic dreams, yet he was still immature to understand and deal with the gift he had received. His innocence in reporting them to the family generated hatred and jealousy in the brothers and fear in his father. God waited for the right moment to work with Joseph with the purpose of bringing a great blessing to his whole house. However, this was only understood much later, after having been forged through the trials and experiences of life, which gave him not only maturity, but also prudence in the use of the gifts given to him.

We can say that some of the spiritual gifts of Joseph were *prophetic dreams and their interpretation*. Other qualities, however, should be developed in his personality, in order to become a prophetic instrument more in tune with his Maker. One quality that seems to be his 'trademark' is *integrity*. After being sold to the Midianites by his own brothers and become a slave in Egypt, the integrity of Joseph to God began to be improved, because at this stage he needed it more than ever to survive in a strange and hostile environment. Despite being under tribulation as all his predecessors before him, Joseph remained with the blessing of God upon him, therefore, he let himself be molded by the Lord and availed himself of the adverse circumstances to learn and thrive; so he proved worthy of the confidence of his master Potiphar. His resistance to temptations and his integrity and faithfulness to God assured him his life during the thirteen years that he was in captivity. When he interpreted the dreams of two officials of Pharaoh, and then the dreams of the king himself, releasing the prophetic word with truth, Joseph could experience a new phase in his life as a reward of the Lord for his perseverance, showing that he was ready to occupy a position of leadership. Joseph was no longer an immature kid, but a man of God, conscious of his gifts and his position as His chosen. From there, the Lord would use him to rescue his own family and give him the promised prosperity.

If we bring the learning of Joseph as a man of God for our days we can say that the integrity of a prophet is an essential factor to survive in the midst of adverse conditions, for he can show through it, 'the difference between who serves God and who doesn't serve Him.' Prophetic dreams from God are given as gift to some of His children, but they need to be under His dominion and wisdom, mainly to be associated with the gift of understanding and knowledge, which allows their revelation and interpretation. Above all, a prophet of God often needs to learn how to keep certain spiritual experiences for himself, instead of telling them to everyone, because this can cause not only envy in those who are carnal and want the same gift, but also antipathy in those who do not understand the things of God and confuse the divine authority and the spiritual empowerment with human arrogance.

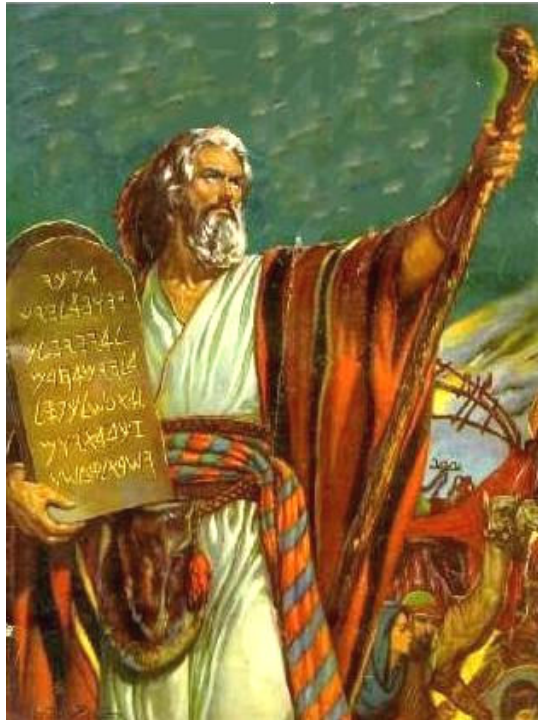
The same gift of interpreting dreams was shed on Daniel, another prophet of God who had a spiritual walk much similar to Joseph's in regard to find grace and honor before the wicked.

When we mention the word '*integrity*' we are referring to the coherence, authenticity, that is, to walk according to what we preach; our exterior reflecting our interior. A prophet of God cannot be discordant in relation to what he preaches and lives, otherwise he will not win the confidence of anyone. It's no use trying to be what we are not. It's no use to preach a word that we do not live, for it will be just a word that

does not generate *dunamis*, the power of God to perform miracles. And the true prophet needs the *rhema* word (that is, the revealed word uttered by God's mouth) acting in his interior so that the miracles that are prophesied come to happen. The anointing goes increasing according to the true knowledge of the Word, that is, not only the intellectual understanding of it, but its true action of healing and inner transformation, which only the Holy Spirit performs with no hurry, simply in the safe, patient and persistent move of God. The use of the gifts perfects them and generates others that interact and complement each other so that we can be most helpful instruments in His hands. Joseph perfected those gifts throughout his life, so he reaped abundantly the fruit he had sown. His name means "*may be added, may God add.*" When Joseph spoke, everyone knew that God was speaking through him, because His authority was seen on Joseph. Pharaoh gave him the name of *Zaphnath-Paneah*, which in Hebrew means "*the man who lives when the deity speaks*" or "*God speaks and He lives.*" In Egyptian it means "*Savior of the world.*" Likewise, when a true prophet of God speaks, His light is seen on him, His word comes to life.

Another interesting feature in the character of Joseph is that he did not seek the glory of achievement for himself; rather, he affirmed before the Egyptians that what was flowing from him came solely from God. Therefore, the prophet of the Lord must also have this humility. He must always keep in mind that what he says was given as a stewardship of what does not belong to him; therefore, he shall to account to the One who is the real owner of all things.

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. The archers fiercely attacked him; they shot at him and pressed him hard. Yet his bow remained taut, and his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, by the God of your father, who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb." (Gen. 49: 22-25)



## Moses

**Meekness / Intimacy with God /  
To teach the way to freedom /  
Ability to overcome obstacles**



“And he said, “Hear my words: When there are prophets among you, I the Lord make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face – clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (Num. 12: 6-8).

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.” (Deut. 18: 15).

“This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up a prophet for you from your own people as he raised me up.’ He is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living oracles to give to us.” (Acts 7: 37-38)

## Moses

Moses was a great man of God, the lawgiver of Israel, teaching the chosen people the path of freedom. He was born in a very troubled time for the whole nation, for it was captive in Egypt, and according to the order given by Pharaoh all newborn males should be thrown into the Nile to die. Thanks to the intervention of YHWH, for Moses was His plan for that time of mankind, he was rescued by Pharaoh's own daughter and raised as a prince in the Egyptian court. *Moses* means '*taken from the waters*', because from the Nile he was taken out. He grew up and was trained as a prince and warrior, but the Lord had a much greater purpose for him. So, after killing an Egyptian and fleeing to the land of Midian, where he married the daughter of a priest (Jethro, also called Reuel), Moses had a first and great encounter with God in the desert of Sinai where He spoke to him in a burning bush. There he received his calling as deliverer of the people. Like all prophets, he came across his own human weaknesses and tried to argue with God about the seeming impossibility of His project; however, like all others, he ended up giving in to the sovereign will of the Lord and carrying on the call until seeing it fulfilled totally. One of the striking features of the personality of Moses, worked over the years, was *meekness*, that is, he allowed himself to be molded, to be controlled by God and he accepted His laws and submitted to them. So he was able to accomplish a mission of such responsibility for forty years. Another secret of his success as a prophet, logically connected to his obedience, was the *intimacy* that he gradually developed with the Lord. This also increased his anointing as well as helped him gain the respect of all his brothers and enabled him to overcome the obstacles in his ministry. Moses and Aaron, his brother, spoke to Pharaoh in the name of YHWH asking for the liberation of the Israelites, which was only truly conquered after the total surrender of the Egyptian king to His power through the ten plagues sent to his homeland and that culminated in the death of all the firstborn, including his own son. The people were persecuted, but managed to escape through the Red Sea, which was divided by the Lord's hands, swallowing up all their enemies. In the desert, the training of Moses as leader and prophet began for real, because then he was faced indeed with the difficulties of teaching and directing a people totally rebellious and of hardened heart to the divine will. It was in the desert that his meekness was proven, and he could also be honored by the Creator, who made clear before everyone His choice of Moses as a prophet of the Israelite nation, as His herald on earth. The intimacy with His anointed was growing day by day through the exercise of his faith until allow him to see His glory. Hence the Lord said that He spoke to Moses differently than He had spoken to any other prophet: face to face, that is, clearly and not in riddles, dreams or visions. He was the first one to prophesy about the Messiah, when he told the people that God would raise a prophet after him whom Israel would respect.

Thus, we can learn great lessons with the life of this chosen of God and draw the essence of his prophetic ministry. First, a prophet must develop within himself the *meekness* that brings that calm needed to overcome situations seemingly hopeless, by the fact of having given himself to the shaping of God. A meek person, who lets himself be led by the Lord, can have more *intimacy* with Him, for trusts in Him, and goes acquiring patience and calm that seems impossible to most people. The person also begins to have a spiritual vision clearer and deeper of the divine truths, and thus can overcome the obstacles and difficulties because he knows and understands what is behind all things. He "*sees the face of God*", that is, he begins to realize His power in action and can see Him in all people and circumstances around him. He is sure of who

holds the sovereignty over everything. Therefore, *the intimacy with the Lord* is the second feature to be developed by the prophet, at the same time a reward, for it is conquered through the commitment with Him and the surrender of his entire being into His hands. When intimacy with the Most High is established, His anointing enables him to be an instrument of liberation in the lives of other children of God and to teach them how to achieve this freedom for themselves, following the example of the leader. They begin to discover the path to the altar and have the strength to overcome their own obstacles and win.

Moses as leader, lawgiver and prophet of God faced the severe test of the *true teaching*, while lie and idolatry, sin and rebellion of the flesh of the people opposed the will of the Lord constantly. Moses was quite used *to teach* what was right, *to exhort*, to “*call back*” to the holy paths, having often to use his authority more firmly so that the weak were protected from greater damage. He not only prophesied, and exhorted, but he knew *how to shepherd* that troubled flock with wisdom until delivering it in a sanctified way in the hands of his successor; a people ready to conquer the promise that had been given to their ancestors. What can we learn from this is that the prophet of God receives empowerment to teach, exhorting the people to stand firm in the gospel and making way for them through the prophetic word that is placed in his mouth; a word that comes removing the walls and the strongholds of the enemy, illuminating the path ahead of the brothers so that they can cross the difficulties with the certainty of victory that comes next.

Several times the authority of Moses was challenged to the point of people trying to steal his post, but in all these situations the Lord gave him escape, confirming His election on him. He felt like a simple human being who can no longer stand the opposition; however, he sought strength in the Lord, for was sure of who had commissioned him. Thus, the prophet, despite the opposition, can always be sure that he is *the mouth of God on earth* and what He says will be fulfilled; no one can take away what was given him from above. So John the Baptist said: “No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven” (Jn. 3: 27).

“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” (Lk. 9: 35)



## Joshua

**The strength of the leader**

“Joshua then pronounced this oath, saying, ‘Cursed before the Lord be anyone who tries to build this city – this Jericho! At the cost of his firstborn he shall lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest he shall set up its gates!’ So the Lord was with Joshua; and his fame was in all the land.” (Josh. 6: 26-27)

“In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua son of Nun.” (1 Kin. 16: 34)

Joshua, Moses' successor, was known as the conqueror of the Promised Land and received in his hands a people already transformed in the flesh by the trials of the desert, ready to take possession of the promise made hundreds of years ago to Abraham; however, it was a people who still needed to have more experiences of miracles with God to exercise their faith in Him.

Joshua had been a faithful disciple of Moses and learned from him all the spiritual and military strategies, acquiring his own intimacy with YHWH, thus gaining the strength of His Spirit to lead his brothers to victory. By being obedient and submissive, he won the trust of the Israelites and was placed in honor by God before them.

Joshua, when entering the Promised Land, received a *word of strength from God*, confirming His election on him, which caused him to take the land of his enemies and be an example and a security for the entire nation. With the victories that he was going conquering, his prophetic anointing and self-confidence were also getting steady, leading him to the daring of releasing very strong words, even threatening, but who came to be fulfilled, giving him renown among the idolatrous people who lived in Canaan. His name began to be feared as well as the name of the God of Israel. Foreigners who acknowledged the lordship of the Lord received the chance of a new life and joined the chosen people, becoming heirs of the promise given to the patriarchs too. One example of this was Rahab, who was honored by God being placed as an ancestor of David and grafted on the family tree of the Messiah by seeing His power through Joshua.

One of the prophecies made by Joshua in the name of God was that anyone who tried to rebuild Jericho would pay the price for disobedience, seeing both his firstborn and his youngest son dead. Centuries later the prophecy was fulfilled and the people could believe once again in the words of a true man of God.

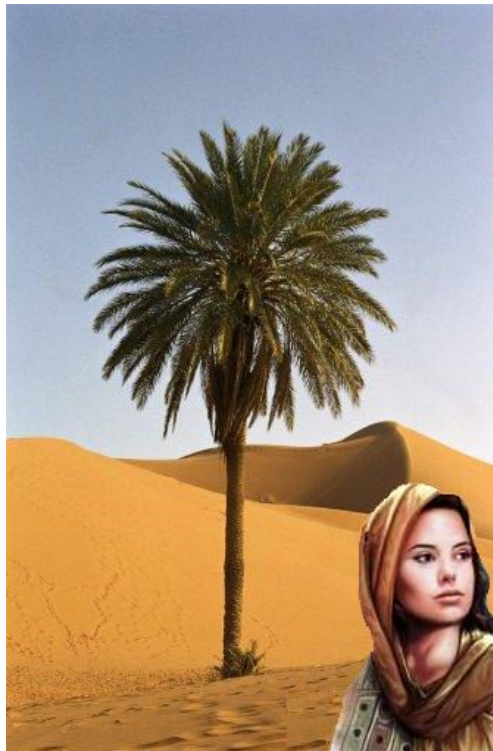
Joshua showed the *strength of the Lord* by defeating the Anakim (giants) who occupied the Promised Land, by defeating mighty kings, by persevering in the covenant passed through Moses exhorting the people to observe it and by being an instrument of the miracle, taking the land of the Amorites, when the sun and the moon stood still in the sky at Gibeon and Ajalon, until the battle was won. The power of the Spirit made him a witness of God's faithfulness in relation to His promises, besides to reveal the people what He can accomplish through those who truly consecrate themselves to Him.

Bringing these experiences to our days, we can see that when a leader chosen by God is faithful to Him and follows His guidelines, great miracles happen and people who did not believe in Him starts to see with their own eyes that He is real and fulfills fully all His promises. The prophet cannot be afraid of the challenges that the Lord puts in his ways, nor can fear or doubt the word that is given, which is often strong and decisive, because through it many can be released or remain in chains. Moreover, God confirms that His word through a true man of God will never fall to the ground, but will fulfill all His will.

Some examples of the anointing bestowed on Joshua to give him victory were *daring* and *conquest*. When God leads us to the land that He has already determined for us, we can feel some fear of moving forward. We tend to look back, clinging to the defeats suffered until reach this point or to the victories that were achieved, conforming to them and thinking that what we have is enough, that we don't need anything else. However, our growth with Him does not stop. While we're alive we'll be in constant growth and transformation, being forged for greater achievements for His kingdom.

Therefore, we don't need to be afraid to want more of Him, or to hear what He has for us, because we can be sure that He will never leave us devoid of supply or anointing. Thus, the prophet of God, besides needing the courage to release His word, also needs this same boldness and anointing of conquest to act on earth in a practical way, bringing to the natural world what he prophesied and saw in the spiritual world. The action complements the prayer as a way to show to God and men an active faith that was placed within us. Our example will lead other lives to conquer their own victories and to serve the same God than us. Joshua was in His presence, heard His voice, believed in the promise and acted in a practical way in order to fulfill the mission that the Lord had already determined to him. When a prophet follows these steps, he conquers the victory he yearns and strengthens his faith.

“And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one thing has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you; all have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed.” (Josh. 23: 14).



# Deborah

**Decision and revival**



“At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment.” (Judg. 4: 4-5)

“Village life in Israel ceased, ceased until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel.” (Judg. 5: 7 – NIV). In Hebrew: “warriors in Israel ceased, ceased until you, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel.”

## Deborah

Deborah judged Israel of the judges. The bible calls her ‘the wife of Lappidoth.’ We do not know if Lappidoth [*Hebrew, Lappidoth (lapiiüdhôth), torches*] refers to the name of her husband or if it’s a reference to her anointing (a “woman of torches” or a “woman of lightning” – this term is given by those who think that Deborah was wife of Barak, in Hebrew, *bārâq, lightning*), for the word of God came out of her mouth like torches, such was the *revival* that was on her. Anyway, Deborah took on this position in her nation, for no other volunteered to judge it and free it from its enemies. As a prophetess, she used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah and all the children of Israel came up to her to judge their causes. The bible says that she arose as a ‘mother in Israel’, meaning authority in Israel. Therefore, her *decision* to lead the people and deliver them from oppression ensured the protection and empowerment from God to this work. Through Deborah, many lives were revived, starting with Barak, the commander of the armies of Israel who led ten thousand soldiers to the Kishon River where people achieved definitive victory over their oppressors. This makes us think that when a person at the center of God’s will and takes on its position, it can stimulate others that are not yet.

Deborah probably took a risky decision and also unusual because it was easier to accept that a man should be commissioned by God to lead His people; however, as no one else volunteered, she placed herself in His hands, in order to be His instrument of blessing to many lives. She decided to put at His disposal not only her life but her gifts. The Lord, in turn, rewarded her, pouring His authority over her, causing her to acquire the reliability of all. The people recognized that God spoke through her mouth, and obeyed her. The Scriptures say that during the period of the ministry of Deborah, the land stayed at peace for forty years.

Many tribes helped and were by her side and Barak’s in the fight against Jabin the Canaanite king, and Sisera the commander of his army. Others moved away and ignored God’s call; nevertheless, she didn’t give up. The victory was won by those who put themselves at the disposal of YHWH to the challenge. Even without the unity among them, the victory was achieved; however, the act of a woman, Jael, putting an end in the oppression by killing Sisera inside her own tent, taught an important lesson to the people: God does not choose the most qualified, but empowers His chosen. Jael’s act also taught that all those who didn’t omit had their reward, being placed in honor in the “*Song of Deborah*” for the future generations.

Bringing the learning this woman of God for our days, we can see, first, that the prophet receives an order directly from the Lord, without others command him to the task that was already determined by Him. It’s just to be aware of His voice and have a heart bold and available for the service. In second place, when a situation bothers, not only us but the entire community around us, it is necessary a strong decision so that the situation of captivity has an end. By walking, step by step, under the direction of God, the prophet goes gaining strength and security to achieve the goals that already were determined by Him. The fire of the Spirit begins to strengthen in him and be lit in other hearts, *reviving* those who were dead by their sins. Through the attitude of loyalty, obedience and rightness of the prophet, other lives will take a stand and rise up, even as a factor of help so that God’s work succeeds. The third important factor in the story of Deborah is that precisely the tribes who were already accustomed to the oppression and the hard work came to aid. Those who were used to well-being denied help. That’s what happens with any prophet who calls God’s people to a challenge, but has to face the

barriers of self-indulgence and selfishness of certain brothers, ending up to face the struggles only with the few who truly dispose themselves to be servants.

Regarding the prophetic gift of Deborah, we can see an interesting feature that was the strength of the word of God through the spiritual song, not only reporting the fact of victory itself, as also sealing it for the future generations. Many prophets of God, by singing the Word, release the cure, open the way to the altar, remove spiritual barriers and describe what God is doing and still will do for His children.

If you have prophetic call, but didn't yet decided to take it on, whatever the reason, remember that perhaps the Lord is giving you a unique opportunity to lead a people who have not yet seen the light and must have the fire of Spirit burning in their hearts; a people who need to see the impossible of God manifested in the life of a similar to pluck up courage to fight for their own causes and to take on their spiritual position.

**“So perish all your enemies, O Lord!  
But may your friends be like the sun  
as it rises in its might.” (Judg. 5: 31)**



## Samson

**Exclusive separation / Vigilance to keep the anointing**

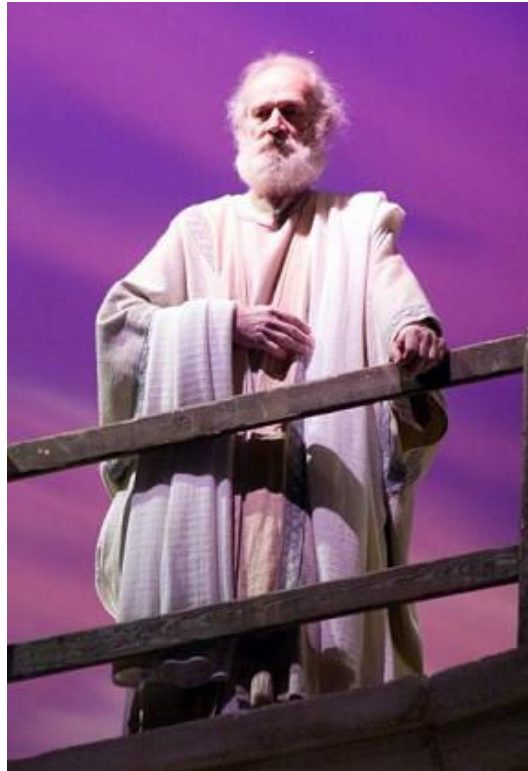
“Now be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean, for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” (Judg. 13: 4-5)

## Samson

Samson was one of the judges of Israel. His mother was barren, and the Lord has blessed her with a son, who He declared consecrated to His service from the womb as a Nazirite. Samson was then created in accordance with the laws regarding the Naziriteship [*exclusive separation to God*], but disobeyed them all during the years that followed in favor of his carnal desires. Though he was not a prophet divinely established we can draw some examples to us about the conditions necessary for the prophetic ministry and that Samson didn't comply with. In other words, through his wrong attitude, we can extract "*opposite*" information about the spiritual characteristics which should also be part of the life of a man of God. One of the conditions imposed on the Nazirite was not to drink wine or strong drink or to eat any fruit from the vine, as well not to touch a corpse and not to cut the hair. All this presents us to with the meaning of not to get inebriated with the things of the flesh; on the contrary, to renounce to them and have emotional control and mastery over ourselves; not to leave the spiritual covering of God and not to touch again the old things, in the dead things of the past that no longer serve to God's purpose for us. During his ministry, for several times Samson moved away from the covering of the Spirit by the fact of not being able to master his passions, to touch a corpse (in the case of a dead lion) and by letting himself be dominated by a woman like Delilah who cut off his hair and allowed the enemies captured him, taking him as a slave. Hence, Samson was an example to us of what the contempt for the Lord's call and of what the lack of *watchfulness* in the spiritual area can endanger a project and harm many innocent people. The people of Israel, despite being released from the Philistines by the hands of Samson, suffered with the reprisals of the enemy when he took some reckless attitude.

For our practical life, it remains the learning that the prophet should 'invest' in his holiness and his exclusive separation to God, not allowing other gods to interfere in his life with the Lord, surrendering more and more to the dominion of the Spirit over his flesh, because the more he is close to the throne, more people will be blessed through him. If he neglects his calling and the development of his holiness, many may be affected and even diverted from their communion with God. Walking alongside the separation goes watchfulness, in all aspects, including on what comes out of his mouth, because besides the word having a greater power of anointing for good, it also has a more destructive power. Both on his life and on the lives of his fellow men, the word that comes out of his mouth will generate construction or spiritual devastation. The vigilance of the prophet covers the flesh as to the wounds and the sins not confessed, for they may be gaps for Satan to act and destroy. It also regards to his relationships and his holy behavior before those who are wicked so that the testimony about him is positive among the outsiders, as the word says (1 Tim. 3: 7: "Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil." Paul talked about the attitude of the bishops, but it also applies to any child of God, especially those who have post in a ministry). Samson talked too much, he revealed his secrets to those who were not worthy of his trust and lost his anointing.

“From the fruit of the mouth one’s stomach is satisfied; the yield of the lips brings satisfaction. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.” (Prov. 18: 20-21)



# Samuel

**Dedication / Rightness / Fidelity**



“And she made a vow, saying, ‘O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head’” (1 Sam. 1: 11 – NIV)

“As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.” (1 Sam. 3: 19-20)

## Samuel

From Samuel on, except for Moses, the men of God used as watchmen in the midst of His people began to be truly recognized as prophets. According to History, Samuel, like Samson, he was born of a woman previously sterile, but that was heard by the Lord and blessed by Him with a son. In the case of Hannah, Samuel's mother, she herself devoted her son as a Nazirite for life. The Scriptures say at that time the visions of God were rare and, since very young, Samuel received a call from the Almighty to take the place of the priest Eli, for both he and his sons had behaved in ways that displeased Him. Samuel heard God's call when he was lying in the tabernacle, where the ark of the Lord was, but he didn't still have intimacy with Him to be able to distinguish His voice. When he knew who was calling him, Samuel responded positively, and then God began to talk to him and confirm His choice on him before the nation. Three features (*dedication, rightness and loyalty*) made of Samuel, besides a great priest and judge of Israel, one of the greatest prophets that the people had ever respected. The Word says that Hanna made a robe every year and took it to Samuel, which means, symbolically, the anointing that God poured over him more and more. The Scriptures also say that God's words were so faithful and correct in the mouth of Samuel that none of them fell on the ground; all of them were fulfilled. Samuel acted powerfully during the reign of Saul, being called by the Lord to consecrate him king of Israel, satisfying the will of the people. However, as Saul was not obedient to the divine commands, Samuel had some work and even disappointments in relation to guide the ruler in the ways of YHWH to the nation. Through Samuel, David was anointed successor of Saul, however, the prophet died before seeing him ascend the throne. Samuel had a big participation in the affairs of state as well as in religious matters. He was a person totally dedicated to God and his calling, besides that his rightness in relation to the commandments of the Lord never allowed him to deviate by the wrong ways. His fidelity to Him was always incontestable, what not only assured him reliability, as well as closed any possibility of false accusations or comments about his life.

If we bring the life experiences of Samuel and his behavior as a prophet for our days, we'll draw very edifying conclusions and lessons that will direct our ministry properly. Unlike Samson, Samuel learned to value his calling and his exclusive separation to God, devoting himself to his duties as priest and prophet. He never ceased to intercede with the Lord for the people (1 Sam. 12: 23), he fulfilled his task to teach and lead Saul by the right ways, and warned the Israelites as to the consequences resulting from disobedience to the divine laws; therefore, he *devoted* himself totally to his ministry. He was also *upright* as to the orientations and the prophetic words that were given him from above; therefore, he was not conniving with mistakes, even coming from the royal throne. He had no fear of losing the friendship of men and preferred the trust of God upon him. His *fidelity* to the divine commands often led to him to suffer; however, he preferred to comply with them, because any mistake could put the innocent at risk. He remained unshaken and incorruptible, especially before Saul, declaring him God's desire that another child of His should succeed him on the throne. In his old age he retired from his duties; he died in old age and was buried in his hometown, Ramah. His sons, Joel and Abijah did not follow the holy ways of the father.

This way, the prophet of God, in possession of these three characteristics (dedication, loyalty and rightness), can certainly play his ministry without taking the risk of incurring the wrath of God, in the destruction of the devil or in human criticism. When we *dedicate* ourselves to the Lord and His call for us with all our body and soul,

we can be assured of His protection and of the increasing shedding of His anointing, empowering us to do our work, even to endure the hardships that may arise in our way. *Rightness*, that is, *not deviating from the Word*, even in the face of impure proposals, assures us of divine justification over our lives when someone comes to accuse us or divert us from His plans for us. Also, the fidelity keeps us clung to Him when our own flesh tempts us to give up in face of the most difficult challenges. The firm covenant with Jesus is what keeps our spirit strong in the face of hard trials of our Christian walk and makes our soul remains submissive to His will. Being like Samuel guarantees the reliability before God and draws us closer and closer to Him.

“For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.”  
(Mal. 2: 7)



## David

**Knowledge of God / Take advantage of the opportunities /  
To be an example for others**

“Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, ‘He was not abandoned to Hades [Ps. 16: 10], nor did his flesh experience corruption.’” (Acts 2: 29-31)

“The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue.” (2 Sam. 23: 2)

David's reign was from 1010 to 970 BC.

As we saw previously, *prophet* means: spokesman, messenger, who reveals the divine thoughts; who interprets oracles (prophecy or the word of God; divine counsel, responses or utterances; in Hebrew, *dabar*, דָּבָר, 'thing', 'word', Strong #1697; in Greek: λόγιον, *logion*, 'divine responses or utterances', Strong #3051); who is moved by the Holy Spirit and, thereafter, offers himself, solemnly, to declare to man what he has received from God by inspiration; the man who is used by the Spirit of God and to whom is given the authority and wisdom in the Word so that it has the weight that it should have; it also means *poets*. The prophet has the power *to instruct, to comfort, to encourage, to rebuke, to convince of error, to declare guilty and stimulate people*.

We can say that David, besides king was a prophet of God, because through his gift as a poet, he was a powerful instrument of the Lord for the edification of His people. His prophetic gift not only was revealed in the well-known messianic psalms [2 (this psalm we don't know for sure if it was David who wrote), 22, 69 and 110], but also in those in which he wrote during other moments of his life and bring us teaching, exhortation, comfort, encouragement and the request for justice against the enemies (in the form of supplication to the Lord and even imprecations against them).

What is most interesting about David is his intimate relationship with God, what we can see in some of his psalms; he speaks to God and God talks to him from a verse to another. We read and often we feel so much the divine presence within him that is even difficult to distinguish when David is talking and when it is the Lord. His feeling and his thought are God's, and God's are his. His heart is God's, and God's, his; a total surrender to the Creator, the whole space of his being handed over to the Spirit.

Let's take a look, first, in the Messianic psalms to understand what David prophesied. He actually was going through a situation of distress; however, the Spirit of God was already using him to prophesy the suffering and the victory of the Messiah on the cross.

The most evident, as I said above, are the Psalms 22, 69 and 110. Ps 2: 7; Ps 16: 10; Ps 31: 5; Ps 68: 18 and Ps 129: 3 also express the words and the feelings experienced by Jesus in His earthly ministry, His death on the cross or the words of God the Father to Him.

**Ps. 22** – the clearest verses of the messianic prophecy are:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? ... All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; ‘Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—let him rescue the one in whom he delights!’ Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled [NVI: they have pierced my hands and my feet]... they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots... and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.”

Here David describes exactly what happened on the cross with Jesus and what He had to endure: human mockery, the affront of the devil and his demons ('dogs, bulls'), physical torture of pain and dehydration, the feeling of having all His bones disjointed and the sadness to see His clothes being divided by the wicked; however, as it is written in Isaiah that He would see with joy the fruit of His hard work, here David also speaks that His deliverance, because of His giving on the cross, will be announced among all peoples.

**Ps. 69** – “I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God... It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother’s children. It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. When I humbled my soul with fasting, they insulted me for doing so. When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. I am the subject of gossip for those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me... You know the insults I receive, and my shame and dishonor; my foes are all known to you. Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison [NIV, gall] for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink... For they persecute those whom you have struck down, and those whom you have wounded, they attack still more... Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous.”

In these verses, David expresses the experience on the cross and of what Jesus felt with the insults and the disappointment of not having comforters, of having to drink the gall, the bitterness of human sin and the vinegar, just before He die and commit His spirit into the hands of the Father.

**Ps. 110** – “The Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool’... The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ (Heb. 5: 6; Heb. 6: 20; Heb. 7: 17; Heb. 7: 21). The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.”

These verses speak of Jesus’ authority, sitting at the right hand of the Father, for having obeyed Him in His purpose, which was the cross, for the salvation of all men. His priesthood was prophesied in the Old Testament in the person of Melchizedek, priest of Salem; and God the Father confirms it on Jesus as a priest for life. On the cross God’s wrath was propitiated and it crushed the evil.

**Ps. 2: 7** (we don’t know if it was David who wrote this psalm) – “I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my *son*; today I have begotten you’” (cf. Acts 13: 33; Heb. 1: 5; Heb. 5: 5 – God the Father saying to Jesus on the cross, at the same time that He said to David, confirming His sovereign choice on him as king, for in the OT, the king was known as son of God).

**Ps. 2: 12** – “kiss his feet, or he will be angry, and you will perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled. Happy are all who take refuge in him” [in NIV it’s written: “Kiss the *Son*, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him”].

**Ps. 2: 2-3** – “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his *anointed*, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.’” In NIV it is written: “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord e against his *Anointed One*” – v. 2]

In the OT, the words ‘*anointed*’ and ‘*son*’ often refer to the kings. But here [at least in NIV], the word ‘*Son*’ (also in verse 7), as well the word ‘*Anointed*’ (v. 2), is written

with a capital letter, making clear a reference to Jesus and the fact that He deserves our reverence. This means that rejecting the Son of God, Jesus, the Anointed, the Messiah, brings the wrath of God; moreover, death (*'destroyed in your way' [NIV] or 'perish in the way' [NRSV]*).

**Ps. 16: 10** – “For you do not give me up to Sheol [*the place of the dead*], or let *your faithful* one see the Pit” [NIV, “because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let *your Holy One* see decay”] – 1 Cor. 15: 4 – in relation to the resurrection of Jesus; Acts 13: 35). “*Your Holy One*” or “*Your faithful*” in this Psalm refers to Jesus.

**Ps. 31: 5** – “Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.” The same sentence said by Jesus by dying on the cross.

**Ps. 68: 18** – “You ascended the high mount, leading captives in your train and receiving gifts from people, even from those who rebel against the Lord God’s abiding there” [Some manuscripts bring: “You received men as gifts”]. David was referring to our redemption conquered by Jesus on the cross. The same thought was used by Paul in Eph. 4: 8: “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”

**Ps. 129: 3** (we don’t know if it was David who wrote this psalm) – “The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long.” It’s about how Jesus’ back was after the scourging.

Other Psalms where David seems to have exercised his prophetic gift are:

- **Ps. 18: 7-17** where he seems to have had a spiritual vision of God’s deliverance on his life, like John, apostle of the Lord, and other prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel had visions about the throne of God and His image as Savior, Deliverer and ‘Man of War.’

- **Ps. 139: 13-16**: Did David have a divine inspiration or revelation about the formation of a human being, or it was just a human wisdom, knowing the majesty of God over all His creation?

- **Ps. 8: 4-8**: Did David have a revelation about the authority that God delegated to man in Eden over all creation, or simply repeated what was written in the Torah (Gen. 1: 26-28) or what was in Job (Job 7: 17-18)?

If we remember how the prophets can be used by God, with power *to instruct, to comfort, to encourage, to rebuke, to convince of error, to declare guilty and stimulate people*, we can say that David did all this, even in the psalms of supplication to God, for he took advantage of the tribulations of his life to leave a consolation, an exhortation, a comfort and an encouragement to all of us, besides to leave recorded in all psalms the sovereignty and power of God over all the situations and people.

I want to separate the Psalms for specific situations, for example:

- 1) Psalms written during persecution or some kind of court intrigue: 3 (fleeing from Absalom), 6; 11; 13; 34; 52; 54; 56 (fleeing from the Philistines); 57; 59; 63; 142 (fleeing from Saul).
- 2) In respect to falsehood, betrayal and human malice: 12 (v.5); 36; 39; 41; 55 (v.13-14; cf. Ps. 41: 9; Ps. 35: 12-17).
- 3) Sin: 14; 32; 38; 51 (this latter with Bathsheba); 53 (v. 6b).
- 4) Protection, help and rescue: 17; 20; 25; 26; 28; 40; 60; 108 (War against the Syrians), 61; 62 (confidence); 64; 70; 71; 86; 122; 141; 143.
- 5) Comfort: 23; 62; 131.
- 6) Asking for justice: 35 (v.8); 58 (the fate of the wicked judges); 109; 140.
- 7) Model of a good king: 101. It is not known if Psalm 2 is also of David or Solomon’s. Psalm 72 (The righteous king and his eternal reign) and 127 (All good comes from God) were written by Solomon.



- 8) Psalms of thanksgiving: 8; 9; 15; 18; 19; 21; 24; 28; 29; 30; 65; 68; 103; 124; 133; 138; 139; 144; 145.

With all this, we can say that a prophet must have, like David, a great intimacy with God, feeling His heart as if it were his own, giving the chance to be used by the Spirit as a vehicle of blessings. He must take advantage of the tribulations of life to exhort, to comfort, to teach and to convince of the error, to correct crooked ways, to curse evil and to drive it out of a person (spirits of disease, for example), to denounce injustice, to rebuke, and declare what God still intends to do with someone (clairvoyance). David had the knowledge of God, took advantage of the opportunities and set an example for others.

“The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue.” (2 Sam. 23: 2)



## Elijah

**Authority / Being a channel to God's power**

“At the time of the offering of the oblation, the prophet Elijah came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your bidding." (1 Kin. 18: 36)

“Know then that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the word of the Lord, which the Lord spoke concerning the house of Ahab; for the Lord has done what he said through his servant Elijah.” (2 Kin. 10: 10)

## Elijah

The period of the prophetic exercise of Elijah varies from 875 to 848 BC, covering the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah and Joram.

Elijah ( *'lîyyâhû and 'elîyyâ*, from Hebrew; *Eleiou* (Septuagint) and *Eleias*, Greek, NT, *YHWH is God*) was the prophet of the northern kingdom.

The birthplace of Elijah is uncertain; the bible talks about Thisbe in Gilead, eight miles to the north of Jabbok River.

When the bible speaks of his struggles against Baal, it refers to *Baal-Melcart*, the official protective deity of Tyre, which was connected to nature.

Elijah participated in important episodes in the life of Israel. He came to King Ahab and predicted a drought. Then, according to the Lord's guidance, he fled across the Jordan River, near the Kerith's stream (Cherith), where he drank from the brook and the ravens brought him food (bread and meat), in the morning and in the evening. In the course of time, for it was not raining, the stream also dried up. Then the Lord sent His prophet to Zarephath in the territory of Sidon, outside the boundaries of Israel and there, miraculously, a widow sustained him for three years, living a true miracle of God's supply. That's when the widow's son died. The Lord used him once again, resurrecting her son. Soon after, He commanded Elijah to return to Israel and present himself before Ahab, because there would be rain upon the earth. Jezebel, wife of the king, had exterminated all the true prophets, but his butler Obadiah, who feared YHWH, hid a hundred of them and fed them with bread and water. Elijah presented himself before Ahab and ordered him to gather together all the people of Israel and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, as well as the four hundred prophets of the Asherah Pole on Mount Carmel. When he invoked the name of the Lord over the burnt offering that had been prepared, fire fell from heaven and consumed everything that was on the altar. The people recognized the miracle and bowed before the Lord. The four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were slain at the Kishon River, as well the other four hundred prophets of Asherah. He also told Ahab to go up into the chariot because there would be rain. Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel and bent over with his face between his knees. He said to his servant to climb higher on the hill and look to the sea side. He did so seven times. The seventh time the servant saw a cloud with the size of a man's hand. Then Elijah sent a word to Ahab that the rain would come. A great storm came as the prophet had predicted. The king climbed into the car and went to Jezreel. The hand of the Lord came upon Elijah, who ran ahead of Ahab down the mountain along the road to the entrance of that city.

The king told Jezebel all that had happened and she sent a messenger to Elijah, threatening him with death. Elijah, afraid of what he had heard, fled to save his life, and went into the wilderness. He asked God to kill him. Overcome by weariness he fell asleep, then an angel touched him saying to get up and eat, because at his side there had been put bread and a jar with water. He ate, drank and slept again. For the second time, the angel of the Lord woke him and told him to eat. With the strength of that food he walked forty days and forty nights to *Horeb* (= *dry, desert*), known as '*The Mount of God*.' Horeb was the sacred mountain where God made a covenant with Moses. Elijah, figuratively, was returning to the very source of faith for which he had struggled. There, he entered a cave and was where he had an encounter with the Lord, renewing his strength to continue his ministry. YHWH revealed him that He had preserved seven thousand people in Israel who had not bowed down to Baal (1 Kin. 19: 18).

Afterwards, there was the incident with Naboth, when Ahab annexed the land of his subject to the royal palace (1 Kin. 21: 19). According to the Israelite thinking, the land owned by a family or clan was understood as a gift from God and everyone should respect that right. Therefore, this incident was considered a violation of rights, moving Elijah once again to Samaria by the Lord's command to prophesy the fate of Ahab, Jezebel and their offspring (1 Kin. 21: 17-29). Ahaziah, son of Ahab, reigned in his stead. Ahaziah depended on the Syrian god of life, *Baal zebul*, or *Beelzebul* (*lord or master, the prince*), whom God's people ridiculed calling *Baalzebub* (*the lord of the flies*), to see if he would live or die, because he was ill for having fallen through the bars of a high room in Samaria. Elijah was sent by God to rebuke the king and to confirm his death. Ahaziah sent to Elijah two companies of soldiers, but God used again His prophet with fire from heaven, killing one hundred and two of them. The third troop was sent; so, the Lord commanded His anointed to go with them. Ahaziah died, as it had been prophesied, and Joram, his brother, reigned in his stead, because he had no children.

Elijah was then caught up by God in a whirlwind. Elisha succeeded him as prophet of Israel.

When we read the story of Elijah, we can notice that God chose him seemingly out of nothing, for no reference is made to him before the episode of drought in Israel. The divine authority granted to him provided him not only great experiences with the Lord, as showed the entire nation who the true God was and the power that He could pour over those who obeyed Him. We can summarize the actions of Elijah *in the proper use of authority and in surrender to the Lord to be a channel of His power*. Things seemingly impossible to happen were made possible by the faith of the prophet and the correct use of his authority, denouncing the idolatry and sin of the nation, not caring about the consequences, especially for being denouncing them before the king himself. Elijah only faltered in face of the threats from the queen because of the extreme fatigue that fell on him after a decisive battle against evil. However, he never ceased to be an instrument in the hands of the Lord; when regaining his strength he resumed his mission until it was fully accomplished.

Thus, a prophet must have in Elijah the example of *surrender and obedience in order to be a powerful channel for God* to accomplish His plans, whether to pour out His blessings on the humble and needy or to execute justice on certain situations. It is clear to everyone that Jesus by dying on the cross accomplished salvation of sinners and their justification, as well the reconciliation with the Father. He also showed the revelation of God's character through this act, namely, His love and His righteousness; and, finally, the conquest over evil, represented by the victory over the devil, the flesh, the world, law and death. The sacrifice of the cross brought, moreover, a new level of relationship with God, based on boldness, love and joy. Today, our prophetic ministry is different from that of the Old Testament, but by no means the Lord spares us from taking certain attitudes and to speak His word so that His justice can be made. Exhorting and revealing the error, showing the correct path and not being conniving with sin, we'll be like Elijah, a channel for the divine power to manifest. The bible says that Jesus came to destroy the devil's work. As children of God we must do the same thing; we must be an 'Elijah' in our generation, not giving heed to the threats of the enemy; on the contrary, walking in faith toward our promise and bringing other lives for the kingdom of heaven.

“And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says the Lord, from now on and forever.” (Isa. 59: 21)



## Elisha

**The blessing of the firstborn: the double portion of anointing.  
To release the healing and the miracle**

“When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.’ Elisha said, ‘Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.’” (2 Kin. 2: 9)

“When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. So he went in and closed the door on the two of them, and prayed to the Lord... then got up again and bent over him; the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, ‘Call the Shunammite woman.’ So he called her. When she came to him, he said, ‘Take your son.’” (2 Kin. 4: 32-33; 35a-36)



The prophetic exercise of Elisha goes from 848 to 797 BC.

Elisha (*ʿēlishā, God is salvation*) was a prophet of the northern kingdom and contemporary of Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz and Joash; therefore, his ministry covered about fifty years of Israel's history.

We can say that the ministry of Elijah was reproduced by John the Baptist, just as the ministry of Elisha was a shadow of the future ministry of Jesus.

Elisha was called when he was still a young man and his calling was an *ordination*, when Elijah threw the prophetic mantle on him (1 Kin. 19: 19-21). From then on, he served his master.

Some years passed and when the Lord was about to take Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, Elisha accompanied the master from Gilgal to Bethel, then to Jericho and the Jordan River, where the waters parted at the touch of the mantle of Elijah. Fifty disciples of the prophets followed them, trying to dissuade Elisha to follow Elijah. When they passed the river, Elijah asked Elisha what he wanted before being taken by God. Elisha requested *a double portion of the spirit* that was upon his master, that is, the double of his spiritual power, as the eldest son inherited a double portion of his father's property (Deut. 21: 17). Anyway, Elisha wanted the divine power to fulfill his new mission as spiritual leader of the nation (2 Kin. 2: 9; 15). Elijah then told him he would have it if he saw him when he was caught. They continued walking until a chariot of fire (symbol of God's spiritual authority), and horses of fire separated them from each other; and Elijah ascended to heaven in a whirlwind. Then, Elisha said out loud what he was seeing. He tore his clothes in two and took the mantle that Elijah let fall. As his master had done, he smote the waters and they were divided, and Elisha passed. The disciples of the prophets saw everything and acknowledged the authority of Elisha as prophet of Israel (2 Kin. 2: 15).

Elisha was used by God in a mighty way as was Elijah. Among the many facts in which Elisha participated and showed the power of God was the case of the water of Jericho that was bad for drinking, but became wholesome (2 Kin. 2: 19-21) because Elisha threw salt in it. Another incident that showed the power of YHWH over the prophet was the mockery of the forty-two boys because of his baldness. He cursed them in the name of the Lord and they were killed by two bears. It was not a case of revenge against harmless guys but a judgment of God against a generation that showed increasing disrespect to Him and His laws. Their insult was not really a mockery against Elisha's baldness, but a mockery against the God that the prophet represented, a rejection of his prophetic authority.

With Elisha it happened the similar miracle to that Elijah did to the widow of Zarephath (1 Kin. 17: 8-16). This time it was with a woman also widow of the disciples of the prophets (2 Kin. 4: 1-7), who was in debt, and feared that the creditors took their children as payment (they would be slaves). Elisha gave her detailed instructions on how to make money, putting oil in jars. She obeyed the orders, saw the miracle of God, she paid her debt and her faith in the Lord increased.

There was a town in the region occupied by the tribe of Issachar, to the north of Israel, and in the NT corresponding to the Galilee, named Shunem (*shūnem, resting place*). There, lived a rich woman who offered him bread. Whenever the prophet passed there, he entered her house to eat. It was she who suggested to her husband that made a small room to the prophet, furnished in simple way, so that when the prophet returned, he could take refuge in it. So it happened. The servant of Elisha was called Gehazi and

the prophet asked him what he could do for the woman to reciprocate her hospitality. Gehazi suggested that perhaps God could do a miracle to give her a son, since she had none and her husband was old. Elisha called her again and told her that about that time in the next year she would bear a son. And the miracle happened as he had promised (2 Kin. 4: 15-17). The boy grew up and one day he got ill and died. The mother put him on the bed of Elisha and went looking for him. She found him on Mount Carmel. She told the prophet of her pain and he ordered Gehazi to put his staff (Elisha's staff) on the boy's face. The mother did not want anyone other than the prophet, so he went along with her. Gehazi even put his staff as he was told to, but nothing happened. So Elisha prayed to the Lord and laid himself upon the child (his eyes, his mouth and his hands on the dead boy); the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. Elisha took the boy and gave him to his mother.

After having resurrected the boy, another episode that is placed in sequence also seems related to the period of seven years of famine in Israel, described in 2 Kin. 8; this episode is about the brotherhood of prophets in Gilgal. Elisha told Gehazi to put the large pot on the fire and cook some stew for the prophets (2 Kin. 4: 38-41). Something in the food, however, did not please the men; probably was poisoned by the herbs that were placed there. Elisha put flour in the pot and made the food wholesome. The next miracle anticipates the miracle of the first multiplication of loaves and fish performed by Jesus (Mk. 6: 35-44). Here, Elisha multiplied twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears to feed one hundred men.

In 2 Kings 5: 1-27 the bible describes the story of Naaman, which has no precise date. Perhaps it has occurred during a period when the Assyrians tried to dominate Syria, perhaps a period of truce between Syria and Israel. Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Syria and esteemed by his master. Through him, God gave victory to his people, but Naaman thought that it came from his military skill. He was a war hero, but a leper. Syria's troops had made captive an Israelite girl who was in the service of Naaman's wife. It was she who spoke to her mistress about Elisha, who was in Samaria, and was able to cure Naaman from leprosy. He spoke to his king, who sent him to Israel. He stopped at the door of the prophet, who sent him a messenger with the instruction for Naaman to dip seven times in the Jordan River to be healed. Naaman was furious, because he expected another answer and another way of being healed. Yielding to the advice of his officers he did what the prophet had commanded, and was free from leprosy.

The next miracle of Elisha concerns having made an ax to float (2 Kin. 6: 1-7), which probably occurred around the same time of the other miracles in the dwellings of the prophets.

Elisha had a remarkable political participation, especially in the wars between Moab and Israel and between Syria and Israel (2 Kin. 6: 8-24). In all of them, Elisha, under the direction of God, performed miracles and confirmed his calling as a prophet of the nation. At the siege of Syria against Samaria, another miracle took place when the prophet predicted the abundance of food in the midst of such a famine they were in. Four lepers invaded the camp of the enemies, who moved by the Lord, had fled because He had made them heard the noise of an army and chariots of war; they panicked and fled leaving everything. The lepers ate and drank and saw the clothes and gold. They hid the spoils and returned to Samaria to tell the king and the citizens the miracle of the Lord. Confirming the miracle, the king of Israel plundered the camp of the Syrians. Thus the prophecy of Elisha was fulfilled.

Elisha died about eighty-five to ninety years old and was buried. Bands of Moabites used to invade the land. When the Israelites who were burying a man saw them, they

threw the body in the grave of Elisha and, when the corpse touched the bones of the prophet, the man came to life. This miracle served as a sign to the people that the God of Elisha lived.

Elijah held seven miracles throughout his ministry. Elisha had asked for a double portion and performed fourteen miracles (not all of them were described here).

Observing the life of Elisha and his boldness to start his ministry, asking Elijah for a double portion of the power that was on him, we can draw important lessons regarding the behavior of a man of God. First, *not to be afraid of the responsibility* that He puts in his hands. Second, not to be afraid to ask Him whatever it is; for a great mission it is necessary the “*double portion of the firstborn.*” In the third place, the prophet begins to discover that in his mouth *is the anointing of healing and performance of miracles*, because what goes out of it comes from the mouth of the Spirit and is an “*anointed weapon*”, filled with the power to overthrow evil and build the lives of many. The secret is to surrender ourselves entirely to Him, especially our mouth under His dominion. Thus, we need not to be afraid of what comes out of it because we know who our *Lord* is. As the ministry of Elijah symbolized that of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Messiah, and the ministry of Elisha was a shadow of the anointed ministry of Jesus in regard to miracles, we can also say that our ministry can be a living mirror of Christ’s ministry in our days, as He Himself said: “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father” (Jn. 14: 12).

“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” (Rev. 19: 10 b)



## Jonah

**To learn to hear God's voice  
and have compassion for the neighbor**

“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, ‘Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.’” (Jon. 1: 1-2)

“And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?” (Jon. 4: 11)

The prophet Jonah acted during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (782-753 BC), century VIII BC; therefore, between 785 and 750 BC. He was born in Gath Hepher (Zebulun), near Nazareth, and his father was called Amittai (2 Kin. 14: 25). Jonah was ordered by God to go to Nineveh and protest against the wickedness of its people; however, he rebelled and went the opposite direction, to Joppa [*Jafo* – Josh. 19: 46 – belonging to the tribe of Dan; the Hebrew word is *yāphô* and the Greek one is *Ioppe*; in Arabic is *Yāfā* (*Jaffa*), which means: *beauty, beautiful place*], where he would board to Tarshish (probably corresponds to current Spain). Nineveh, a large commercial city of Assyria, would be looted a hundred years later (612 BC) by the Medes, when its wickedness would be punished. It was bloodthirsty and cruel, a warlike city and had killed many nations through its prostitution and sorcery, so the Lord would turn against it and would expose it to ridicule, but the prophet Nahum would be His chosen to prophesy its defeat. Jonah, in this case was being commissioned by YHWH to convince its inhabitants to turn to Him and be saved from His wrath. The book of Jonah intends to show us that the interest and mercy of God extend to the entire human race. He taught Jonah to have mercy on all human beings (experience with the plant, in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of his book).

There are several interpretations of the story of Jonah. According to rabbinic tradition, Jonah represents the nation of Israel; the fish represents Babylon; the fact that Jonah was swallowed represents the exile, etc. Others interpret it as a parable with moral report with didactic purpose, that is, when we disobey the orders of the Lord, we can lose ourselves and be ‘swallowed by the enemy’, for we leave the divine purpose for our lives. But the opinion of being a real story still prevails, where the experience of the prophet is already a prophecy. All of us know the story of Jonah: he disobeyed God and took a ship to the west, toward Tarshish, for he feared to fulfill the mission that had been entrusted to him, besides not to have any desire of seeing the enemy (Assyria) be rescued by God. Jonah thought that the Assyrians should be punished for their cruelty, so the Lord wanted to teach him the lesson of divine mercy that loves the sinner although hates and abhors sin, always seeking to give the man a chance of repentance and salvation. Jonah did not yet understand this, therefore, he fled from the challenge; however, he paid the price for this because his rebellion was discovered by the companions of the ship, who for fear of die under the wrath of YHWH threw Jonah overboard not to perish along with him (in fact, the suggestion came from the prophet himself). He was swallowed by a huge fish and stayed inside it for three days, meditating on his attitudes and on the majesty of God; by reminding of Him, he shouted asking for help. The Lord heard him, and commanded the fish to spew Jonah out upon the dry land (Jon. 2: 10). Thus, he went to Nineveh, which repented of its sin and was rescued by the Lord. Then it was finished Jonah’s learning about compassion and mercy of his fellow men, leaving judgment to God.

In addition to the learning described above about *hearing the voice of God and have compassion and mercy for human beings*, which should be part of the life of a man of God, we can see in the book of Jonah a shadow of what happened to Jesus after having died and spent three days in the tomb, for His work of redemption truly culminated with His resurrection. By dying on the cross, Jesus performed a great victory over the darkness. But the victory went further, when after His death He stayed in the tomb for three days, like Jonah in the belly of the fish, and rose from that place and showed Himself alive again. Hence, Jesus said that the only sign He would give the Pharisees

would be the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12: 38-41; Lk. 11: 29-30): “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you’. But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!’”

What He meant is that the Ninevites did not see great signs from God, yet they repented with Jonah’s preaching, after he stayed three days and three nights in the fish’s belly. However, the teachers of the law, even though they heard Jesus’ preaching during His ministry, still did not believe in Him. Perhaps some would be converted after seeing His resurrection or, at least, an account of it through the mouths of the disciples and apostles.

What Jonah felt inside the fish’s belly was like death, that is, a place of darkness where he felt separated from God, for his sin of disobedience brought that punishment. Human being was always afraid of death. Jesus came to free us from the fear of it (Heb. 2: 15; 1 Co 15: 17-20; 25-26). He paid for us the penalty of sin. The devil had the power of death (Heb. 2: 15) because all men had sinned and he imprisoned their souls; but Jesus came as a man, without sin (Rom. 8: 3), condemning it in His own flesh, buying us through His blood. By resurrecting and returning to earth, He brought the keys of death and hell with Him, therefore, taking from Satan his dominion over the souls of men (Rev. 1: 18: “and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades”).

In that place, Jonah suffered anguish and oppression; he also cried out to God for help (Jon. 2: 1-2: “Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, ‘I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol [NIV, ‘from the depths of the grave’] I cried, and you heard my voice’”). The anguish he went through, the doubts put into his mind about God’s ability to save him (Jon. 2: 3-4: “You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; how shall I look again upon your holy temple?’”); the waves of terror and wickedness that passed over his soul, the bad thoughts that were wrapped around his head (Jon. 2: 5: “The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head”) and the doors closed upon him by Satan made his soul faint, but he continued to cry out and God heard him (Jon. 2: 6-7: “at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God. As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple”). On the third day deliverance came (Jon. 2: 6b: “yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God”), as if the doors that had been closed upon him were opened and the chains that bound him were broken. God Himself spoke to Satan (the great fish) in verse 10, ordering that Jonah was released (‘spewed out upon the dry land’).

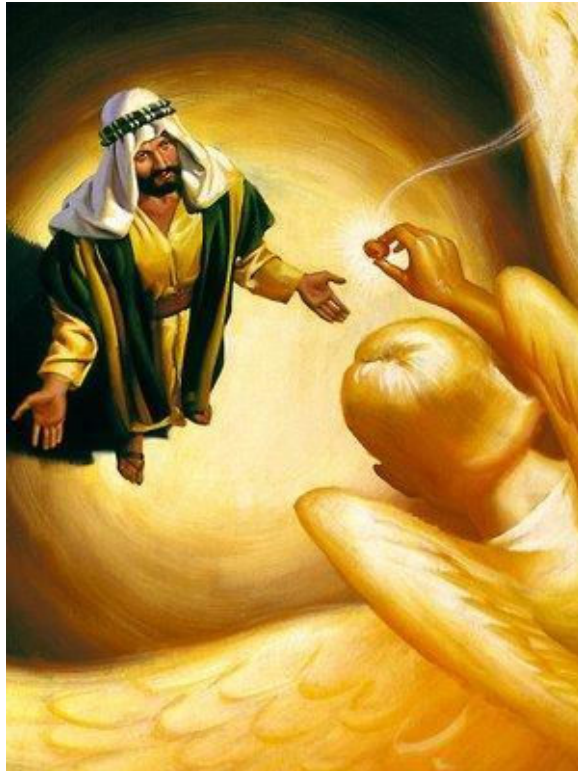
If the Holy Spirit broke the chains and the doors closed upon Jonah, if He raised Jesus from the dead, He will also do in our lives because we have His power within us. Nothing can hold us anymore. The hand of God can reach us in the deepest and most hidden places and rescue us. If Jesus triumphed over the darkness, we will also triumph over what oppresses us. We no longer need to fear death; the keys are now with Jesus, not with Satan. Death, which means separation from God, no longer frightens us because we are continually with Him. Jonah disobeyed God and only remembered Him

when he was swallowed by the sea animal; Jesus obeyed the Father and was victorious in the ‘interior of the great fish’ (the tomb), giving us the same victory over evil.

Thus, the prophet has some important lessons from Jonah. The *first*, already mentioned, is *to hear the voice of God and obey Him fully*, without fear of what He may ask us to do. The *second* is *to exercise the same compassion and the same mercy* that He has for those who are in error and do not seem to be worthy of His grace. The *third*, which happened to Jonah inside the fish, is *to remember God* in our troubles and afflictions. He is the only one who can get us out of them, besides that He is the only one who can give us true understanding of why we are going through them. The *fourth* is that we must always *learn and grow* leaving our hearts free to the acting of the Spirit, even if we do not understand what is happening to us or what is in the mind of God. The *fifth* is *to receive from Him* the same love, the same grace and same mercy upon us, so that we may become increasingly stronger to perform our mission.

“Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins.” (Isa. 58: 1)





## Isaiah

**To recognize the error / to be available in God's hands /  
The choice between good and evil / To respect the free will**

“Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.” (Isa. 1: 2)

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’” (Isa. 6: 1-8)

Isaiah (Hebrew, *Yēsha'yāhii*, *YHWH is salvation*) was son of Amoz (*'āmôç* = *strong, firm*). His ministry was in Judah (740–681 BC). He lived in Jerusalem (Isa. 7: 1-3; Isa. 37: 2) and was of royal blood. In 722 BC there was the exile of Israel, and in 586 BC, the exile of Judah. During his ministry four kings of Judah reigned: Uzziah (or Azariah; 781-740 BC – since 791 BC in co-regency with Amaziah), Jotham (740-732 BC – since 748 BC in co-regency with Uzziah), Ahaz (732-716 BC) and Hezekiah (716-687 BC – since 729 BC in co-regency with Ahaz). He was married and his wife was called 'the prophetess' (Isa. 8: 3), probably because she also prophesied. He had two children with symbolic names (Isa. 8: 18): "*A remnant will return*" (*Shear-Jashub* – Isa. 7: 3), regarding the remnant of the people of God that would come back from the heart to Him, and "*Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil*" (Isa. 8: 1-4 – *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz*, because of the invasion of the Assyrians in Syria and Samaria). During the reign of Ahaz, Syria and Israel united against Judah and went up to Jerusalem. The king did not accept the word of Isaiah about asking for a sign from God. Then Isaiah spoke about Immanuel, born of a virgin (in reference to Jesus and Mary). Ahaz sought help in Egypt and God did not approve.

In the reign of Sargon II (722-705 BC), king of Assyria, Isaiah (Isa. 20: 2-3) lived naked for three years (barefoot and with buttocks uncovered) as a staging, a sign against Egypt and Ethiopia in relation to the destruction of Assyria that would take them as prisoners and exiles; this would bring shame on Israel, because they had sought help in these nations against the Assyrians as well. During the reign of Hezekiah, Isaiah also prophesied in the time of the campaign of Sennacherib (701 BC) when he rebuked Hezekiah for showing all his treasures to the king of Babylon (after God having freed him from a deadly disease, as well as Jerusalem from the hands of Sennacherib). When he had the vision of the fall of Babylon, he got very sad by the conditions in which he saw the people of Israel (Isa. 21: 3-4). Isaiah also prophesied about Cyrus, who would conquer Babylon and would deliver the Israelite nation from the hands of the enemy. He also prophesied about the exile of Judah and its salvation by God for the sins of the people and the princes, of the prophets and priests, who were in idolatry. The salvation would come from the Messiah.

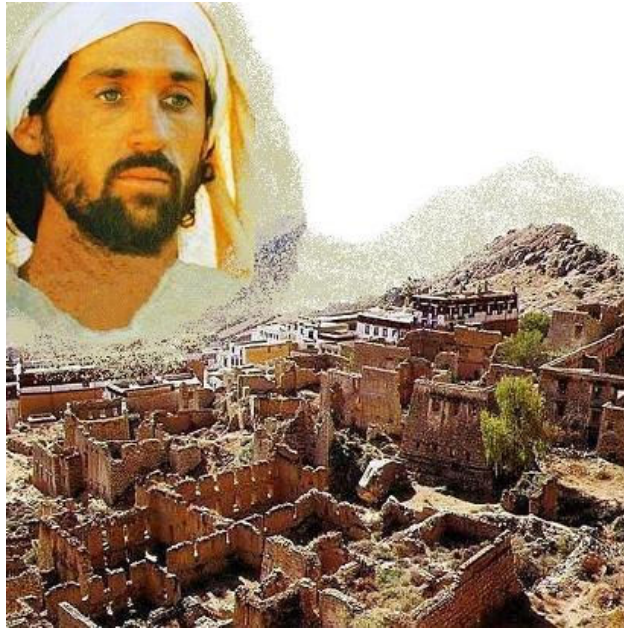
He mentions the religiosity, the spiritual blindness and hypocrisy of the people (Isa. 30: 10). They didn't want to hear the truth, only good things, but that were lies; Isaiah, therefore, criticizes the dual position of Israel before God, its accommodation and lack of true love to the Lord. The prophet worked to give people the clarity of this hypocrisy in the hope of changing their attitude. Through him and his prophecy, God showed the people His two sides: mercy and judgment, justice and forgiveness, exile and salvation. He prophesied the coming of the Messiah, so he was called the messianic prophet [Isa. 2: 1-5; Isa. 4: 2; Isa. 7: 14; Isa. 9: 1-7; Isa. 11: 1-5; Isa. 16: 5; Isa. 41: 1-29, in special verses 2 and 25; Isa. 42: 1-9; Isa. 44: 26; Isa. 44: 28; Isa. 45: 1; Isa. 45: 13; Isa. 48: 14-15; Isa. 49: 1-7 with special focus on verse 7; Isa. 50: 1-11, with special focus on verse 10; Isa. 52: 13; Isa. 53: 1-12, with special focus on verses 2 and 11; Isa. 59: 16-21; Isa. 63: 1-6]. In Isa. 30: 20-21, he mentions the restoration of the nation after the exile. In addition to prophesy about religious matters, he also arose against social injustice. According to tradition, Isaiah was sawn in half during the reign of Manasseh (687-642 BC), son of Hezekiah.

With all this, we can say that Isaiah, in the first place, *acknowledged his own mistake* before God, for he was of noble lineage, and as all his people, had unclean lips,

and was somewhat away from Him. By being forgiven (the vision of live coal burning his lips), he offered himself as an instrument at the service of the Most High to reveal to his brothers what the Lord wanted to show them. In other words, he put himself *available* for God's Work. Like all prophets, Isaiah got sad, not only by the sin of the nation but also by the divine punishment upon those whom he loved, but needed to be corrected and disciplined to attain salvation. However, Isaiah *respected the free will* given by God to all His children, making of his prophecies a very clear means of *choice between good and evil, between blessing and curse*. By giving them knowledge of right and wrong, they would be able to choose their own path. Isaiah did not stay at the margin of the conflicts; on the contrary, he was concerned about everything that compromised Israel as a whole and made God's people a shame among the nations, both in religious and social area. He did not care about what men thought, but with what God thought. He suffered desolation, sadness, threats, confrontations with the powerful, however, never failed to give God's message to His people. We can say that in the midst of so much suffering, the vision of the restoration after the exile and the salvation of men through the Messiah gave him strength and comfort in order to carry out his mission, because he understood the true purposes and desires of the Lord for those who were His. He didn't see the circumstances only through human vision, but through the spiritual vision. He saw far; therefore, he could be happy in some way with the discipline of God upon the Jews because he knew that in the end there would be restoration of the honor of Israel.

The same way as the prophet, we must, first, make an "*internal inspection*", asking God's forgiveness for our failures and, more than that, correct ourselves, taking attitudes that please the Lord. Thenceforth, we are able to *place ourselves at His disposal* as messengers of His word, bringing lives into His kingdom. Another attitude that we must learn from Isaiah is *to respect the free will* given by God to all men, showing them the correct path, however, leaving in their own hands the right to decide their path. This often costs us, for it makes us suffer for hardened and insensitive hearts, proud before God, which have no spiritual vision, but the carnal one, and reject salvation and grace. They prefer to continue suffering instead of recognize their error, prefer to have reason rather than to repent and be freed. What we really need as prophets is to ask the Lord to teach us the proper way to love, as He loves, not to carry unnecessary burdens or to do things that can get us out of His presence. We need not to be insensitive to injustice or ignore the challenges and circumstances around us. What we need to do is to keep ourselves in God's presence and not let be influenced by evil, releasing the Word when He commands us to do it and leaving to each one the right to choose between right and wrong, between the death of the world and the life of God.

"How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger who  
announces peace, who brings good  
news, who announces salvation, who  
says to Zion, "Your God reigns." (Isa.  
52: 7)



## Jeremiah

**Self-denial / Loyalty to the mission /  
To manage the conflict between flesh and Spirit**

“Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’ Then I said, ‘Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.’ Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, ‘Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.’” (Jer. 1: 4-10)

His ministry goes from 626 to 585 BC. The last verses of his book were added after 561 BC, years after the destruction of Jerusalem. From the references in Jer. 1: 1 and Jer. 17: 16 we can infer that he was a shepherd (priest), not only a prophet. His assistant, Baruch wrote down the prophecies as Jeremiah dictated them. He received his call as prophet when he was still young to call the people to God before the country was destroyed (cf. Jer. 1: 4-10, where, in v. 6, the word that it is written is 'boy', in the original, 'child' (*na'ar*), meaning: *childhood and the last years of adolescence*, out of the normal age at which the prophets were called, that is, between 20 and 30 years old). Probably he was still in the beginning of his second decade of life when the Lord commissioned him. He was raised in a priestly family (he was the son of Hilkiah, the priest). His name, Jeremiah, means "*YHWH exalts or establishes.*" He prophesied during the reigns of five kings: Josiah (from the 13<sup>th</sup> year of his reign), Jehoahaz or Johanan or Shallum (2 Kin. 23: 31-34; 2 Chr. 36: 1-4; 1 Chr. 3: 15 cf. Jer. 22: 11-12), Jehoiakim (Eliakim – 1 Chr. 3: 15), Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah – Jer. 24: 1; Jer. 27: 20; or Coniah, in Hebrew, Jer. 37: 1) and Zedekiah (until the 11<sup>th</sup> year of his reign; he was the youngest son of Josiah, and Jehoiakim's brother). The last prophecies reach up to the 5<sup>th</sup> month of the exile of Jerusalem (Jer. 1: 1-3; Jer. 52: 12). When Josiah died, his son Jehoahaz (also known as Johanan or Shallum) ascended the throne, and was deposed by the king of Egypt who put in his place his brother, Eliakim, as king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim (2 Chr. 36: 1-4). When Jehoiakim was taken captive to Babylon, Jehoiachin his son, took his place (2 Chr. 36: 8b). In the spring, Jehoiachin was also taken to Babylon (2 Chr. 36: 9-10; years later he was released from captivity: Jer. 52: 31-34) by Nebuchadnezzar who established Mattaniah (whose name was changed to Zedekiah), his paternal uncle, as king (2 Kin. 24: 17. In 2 Chr. 36: 10 it is written about another Zedekiah, the brother, not the uncle of Jehoiachin or Jeconiah). Zedekiah did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah, who spoke from the Lord. He was taken into exile like the others before him (Jer. 39: 5-7).

At the beginning of his ministry, Jeremiah saw a branch of an almond tree that *symbolizes the ready fulfillment of God to His promises* (Jer. 1: 12). The almond tree is one of the first fruitful trees to bloom in winter. White or pink flowers are an analogy with the gray hairs of the elderly (Ecc. 12: 5). As a producer of oil, its fruit was very appreciated in Palestine. The almond was also used as a gift. Jeremiah was commissioned by the Lord to prophesy against Israel and against the cities of Judah that suffered under His wrath because of idolatry (both of the people, the prophets and priests). There are many particularities of Jeremiah's personality that made him a singular prophet in his generation. *The authority of God* was clear in him; yet his flesh fought against the Spirit, because, besides being called too young and having been denied to him the natural aspirations of youth [for example, in Jer. 16: 2, God forbade him to marry\* (explanation in the end of the paragraph), not to suffer the destruction that would come upon Judah], *his emotions were vivid, he was hated by those whom he loved* (whom he was obliged by the Lord to exhort for their sin: Jer. 11: 19, when men plotted to kill him). Several times Jeremiah received God's comfort during the persecutions: Jer. 11: 21-22; Jer. 15: 11-15; Jer. 15: 18-21; Jer. 17: 12-18; Jer. 18: 18-23 (a new plot of death). Hence, we can see him much like David, who suffered countless persecutions, but managed to overcome them by the support and comfort from God. In Jer. 20: 1-13, Pashhur, son of the priest, put Jeremiah in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the Lord. *The stocks* (Jer. 29: 26), in Hebrew,



mahpekheth, ‘pillory’; sadh, ‘handcuffs’; çinôq (tsiynoq), ‘a collar’, only appears in the last books of the OT. In Jer. 20: 2-3, the word used is mahpekheth, ‘pillory’, ‘prison’, ‘stocks’, ‘wrench’ [a sudden violent twist or pull; pull or twist (someone or something) suddenly and violently]. The stocks was an instrument of punishment composed of two large pieces of wood in which were inserted the feet of the victim, and sometimes also the hands and the neck. The prophets Jeremiah (Jer. 20: 2-3) and Hanani (2 Chr. 16: 10) were put in the stocks. In the NT, the Greek word is ‘xulon’, ‘timber’ (as fuel or material); by implication, a stick, club or tree or other wooden article or substance: staff, stocks, tree or wood. This word was used to describe the episode of the arrest of Paul and Silas in Philippi, when the jailer fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16: 24).

In Jer. 20: 1-3 it is written: “Now the priest Pashhur son of Immer [*the head of the 16<sup>th</sup> group of priests (1 Cr 24: 14)*], who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things [*The evil that the Lord would bring upon Jerusalem for all their sins, in special, idolatry*]. Then Pashhur struck the prophet Jeremiah, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the Lord. The next morning when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, ‘The Lord has named you not Pashhur but ‘Terror-all-around’ (Magormissabib or mâghor missâbhiybh) [*Jeremiah also foretold that he and his family would die in captivity in Babylon*]” (NRSV; in NIV: “Terror on Every Side”).



Returning to the prophet Jeremiah:

\*Jeremiah, unlike Paul and John the Baptist, was a case of celibacy determined by God (Jer. 16: 2: “You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place”). For a Jew, who has the family institution as something strong and as a sign of God’s blessing upon him, the fact of receiving the order from the Creator Himself not to marry must have been a great burden on Jeremiah, almost a curse, but this attitude was necessary in order to carry out the ministry to which he was called. Furthermore, it was a protective attitude of God in relation to the prophet, for many families in Israel would be destroyed by the Babylonian bondage, including Jeremiah’s, and he would also



suffer because of it. Because of this we can see the conflicts in his personality. He was called the weeping prophet by many people. Perhaps his loneliness and his affective deprivation, besides his great responsibility, have brought him the feeling of living a great burden, instead of a pleasant life, despite the difficulties inherent to it. For him, the world must have seemed quite hostile. Only the power of God on him and on his call should have made him to overcome his mission.

His *internal conflicts* were resulting from seeing what he did not want and to say what he did not intend. He prophesied, saw the horrors that would befall his people and writhed in pain (Jer. 4: 19-21; Jer. 20: 8-9). In fact he felt, just like David, the pain of God. He prophesied *against the false prophets* who prophesied peace and that the Lord would not destroy them for their sin, for not wanting to acknowledge their error (Jer. 14: 14; Jer. 23: 9-40). We can feel the sorrow of the prophet (Jer. 8: 18; Jer. 8: 21-22; Jer. 20: 10) by the deceit, slander, betrayal between brothers; it is as if God saw His children committing mistakes and persevering in sin. He also talks about the future exile. He asks God about the perversity of men and is comforted by Him (Jer. 12: 1-6). He comes to the point of cursing the day of his birth (Jer. 20: 14-18). The nation's sin was so great and God was so determined to punish it that He rejects the intercession of Jeremiah for several times (Jer. 7: 16; Jer. 11: 14; Jer. 14: 11; Jer. 14: 13-18; Jer. 14: 19-22; Jer. 15: 1).

Jehoiakim had little respect for the person of Jeremiah, who rebuked the king for rebelling against Babylon. Hence he was persecuted and imprisoned, suffered conspiracy and was declared worthy of death. His prophecies against Judah, Jerusalem and other nations, written in scroll by order of the Lord (Jer. 36: 2-6) were destroyed (Jer. 36: 23). Later, Baruch rewrote the scroll (Jer. 36: 28; 32). He remained interceding for Judah, unmasking the false prophets and predicting the destruction of the temple. Zedekiah (Mattaniah) was the youngest son of Josiah and appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to the throne of Judah. During the siege of Jerusalem, the prophet was so harshly beaten by his enemies that he lost hope in life. Arrested on charges of having gone to the side of the enemy, he was thrown into a dungeon. Removed to a prison in the courtyard of the guard near the palace and accused of treason, he was thrown by the princes of Judah into an abandoned cistern, where he would have died if not for the intervention of Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian (or Cushite – Jer. 38: 7-13). By having done this for His prophet, God spared him from death at the hands of the Babylonians (Jer. 39: 17-18). In the prison yard, King Zedekiah secretly met with him (Jer. 37: 17; Jer. 38: 14). During the last stages of the siege, he bought a field from his cousin at Anathoth (Jer. 32: 7-9) and prophesied restoration\*. Nebuchadnezzar treated the prophet with kindness (Jer. 39: 12; 14) and, when he appointed Gedaliah as governor of Judah, Jeremiah joined him at Mizpah (Jer. 40: 5-6). Gedaliah was murdered by Ishmael, the captain of the army of Israel (Jer. 41: 2), and the people decided to flee to Egypt, against the will of Jeremiah (Jer. 42: 10-12; 17), who was compelled to go with them (Jer. 43: 6-7) along with Baruch, his scribe and copyist, to the Egyptian city of Tahpanhes. Possibly he died there.

\* About the field at Anathoth bought by Jeremiah, we can read in Jer. 32: 6-15: "Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.' Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to

him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar [in other words, a clay pot], in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.’”

Anathoth was a city on the territory of Benjamin that was given to the Levites in the distribution of land made by Joshua (Josh. 21: 18); therefore, it was a land of priests, being Jeremiah himself, prophet and priest of God (his father Hilkiah was a priest of the descendants of Abiathar, who served in the reign of David, and of the lineage of Ithamar, brother of Eleazar, this one the living firstborn of Aaron – 1 Kin. 2: 26 cf. Jer. 1: 1).

Anathoth means ‘answered prayers.’ For us, this means that we are kings and priests and as such, we must pray according to God’s word, like the priests did, so that our goals are achieved. Anathoth is the field of our promises, where God grants us peace, the restoration and the return from captivity. Anathoth is the field where He renews our hope and restores our faith in what is being bought with crying in time of bondage. The message that Jeremiah preached was rejected by his countrymen and this behavior saddened him, in addition to suffer for their sins. This not only saddened him; it weakened him too. But God gave him hope of a future ransom for Israel after their repentance.

As for the reason why God made Jeremiah buy the field of Anathoth that was his by right, it was a prophetic act of what would happen to Israel after the Babylonian exile, when they could take back a land that was theirs by divine right; or it could refer to the Jubilee year (which occurred every fifty years), described in Lev. 25, especially in this case, in verses 31-34: “But houses in villages that have no walls around them shall be classed as open country; they may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee. As for the cities of the Levites, the Levites shall forever have the right of redemption of the houses in the cities belonging to them. Such property as may be redeemed from the Levites – houses sold in a city belonging to them – shall be released in the jubilee; because the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession among the people of Israel. But the open land around their cities may not be sold; for that is their possession for all time.”

The prophet says: “Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard...Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.’” (Jer. 32: 10-15)

At that time it is probable that in such sales among the Jews, two copies of the deed were made: one sealed to be kept by the purchaser, and the other opened, to be shown to the judges, and ratified by them. In other words: one was the original for private use of the purchaser; and the other, a copy that would be placed on the public register for

anyone interested to consult or resort to any occasion. This could avoid a great deal of injustice and contention. The purchase deeds were placed in an earthenware jar (a symbol of the nature of all the guarantees that this world intends to give us, brittle things and soon broken) so that they could be kept for many days, for the use of the heirs of Jeremiah after returning from captivity, for they could have the benefit of this purchase (descendants of their cousins, for example). The deeds would be kept as a sign of God's promise of deliverance.

As we said above, Anathoth means 'answered prayers' and this means that when we pray according to the will of the Spirit, all our petitions will be heard and answered by God (1 Jn. 5: 14-15: "And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him"). Jesus, through His sacrifice, has already bought spiritually this field for us, that is, we can enter His presence freely to get what we want ("Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" – Heb. 4: 16). But here on earth, in moments of pain, suffering and bondage, we buy the field of Anathoth; we pay the price for it. Then God provides the negotiations so that it returns to us, as is our right. The guarantee of return is the promise of God in His word, as well as the deliverance and restoration. In other words, Jeremiah had an inheritance and a ransom, the ransom in times of anguish. There is a heritage given to us by right here on earth and in the New Jerusalem.

The seal mentioned above means that, on the part of God, we are assured of the answer and that His determination will not be revoked. It also means: the mark and the dominion of the Holy Spirit upon it, making it prevail. The clay pot [earthenware jar, as written in the biblical text] represents us, more specifically our soul, where faith makes us believe in the answer, taking possession (materially) of what belongs to us by right (already released in the spiritual world), at the same time that we must wait until the promise is fulfilled in the natural world (hence, the open copy). What we asked can benefit many and build our lives through people that the Lord will bring to bless us ("Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land") with all sorts of blessings in heavenly places in Christ. The nearer we get to the throne through prayer, the greater will be our anointing and the faster will be the answers we need, for it is our perseverance that helps us to take ownership of this field that belongs to us.

Jeremiah staged his prophecies in order to become more vivid, more easily understood. In Jer. 13: 1-11, God made him put a linen belt, not to water it, and then bury it and later take it out of the pit where it had been placed to show the people that He would make rot the pride Judah and Jerusalem. They did not want to cling to the Lord, so they would rot (die). In Jer. 18: 1-6, YHWH sent him to the potter's house to show that it is He who shapes the hearts of men and will shape His people. In Jer. 19: 1-15, we see the case of broken clay jar that represents the judgment of God on the prostitution of Judah and Jerusalem. In Jer. 27: 1-22, God tells him to make a yoke of straps and crossbars, and put them on his neck, and send them also to the nations around Israel as a divine sign that they would be under the Babylonian bondage. Whoever did so would be saved. Who rebelled and ran away, would die. The prophet Hananiah took the bars of Jeremiah's neck and broke them (Jer. 28: 10) not to hear the truth from the mouth of the man of God. Hananiah preached to the Israelites the rebellion against YHWH about to surrender to Babylon. As prophesied by Jeremiah, Hananiah died that same year (Jer. 28: 16-17). Like Isaiah, Jeremiah also refers to the Messiah (Jer. 23: 5-6; Jer. 33: 15-16).

There is an interesting comment about the Rechabites, mentioned by Jeremiah in chapter 35. The Rechabites (Jer. 35: 2, 3, 5, 18) belonged to the tribe of the Kenites (1 Chr. 2: 55: Hammath, father of the house of Rechab; 2 Kin. 10: 15; Jer. 35: 1-19), whose ancestor was Cain (Gen. 4: 16 – he dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden). They followed the teachings of Jonadab son of Rechab (9<sup>th</sup> century BC), as a form of reaction and protest against the luxury and licentiousness of the reign of Ahab and Jezebel. The Rechabites rejected the fixed agricultural and civilized life. They followed the nomadic life, as happened to Israel during the period that went through the wilderness in faithfulness to God. For almost two and a half centuries they faithfully fulfilled their norms, but when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah in 605 BC (1<sup>st</sup> invasion), they then had to abandon their tents and live within the walls of Jerusalem.

In the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 BC), Jeremiah took Jaazaniah to the Temple, along with his brothers and sons, and offered them cups of wine, which they refused to drink, thus demonstrating fidelity to the teachings of Jonadab. It is written in Jer. 35: 5-7; 10-11: “Then I set before the Rechabites pitchers full of wine, and cups; and I said to them, ‘Have some wine.’ But they answered, ‘We will drink no wine, for our ancestor Jonadab son of Rechab commanded us, ‘You shall never drink wine, neither you nor your children; nor shall you ever build a house, or sow seed; nor shall you plant a vineyard, or even own one; but you shall live in tents all your days, that you may live many days in the land where you reside.’... but we have lived in tents, and have obeyed and done all that our ancestor Jonadab commanded us. But when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up against the land, we said, ‘Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and the army of the Arameans.’ That is why we are living in Jerusalem.”

The prophet Jeremiah was sent to the Rechabites by the Lord as a sign to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they would know what He expected of them regarding the acts of idolatry that they practiced and their rebellion against the voice of the prophets that He had sent. The Rechabites had obeyed the commandments of their ancestors for centuries, but the Jews had not heeded the Lord’s words of warning until that time. Therefore, they would be handed over into the hands of the Chaldeans, while the Rechabites would be spared.

Bringing the experience of Jeremiah to our days, we can learn three basic things: *loyalty to the mission, self-denial and to manage the conflict between flesh and Spirit*. Jeremiah was a human being who lived a great conflict, because he had to learn *to deny himself* for the sake of God’s cause, leaving aside the normal desires and aspirations of his soul in order to perform the difficult task of revealing a people their sin, and urge them to return to YHWH. He faced great opposition and rejection, especially by those whom he loved, but were not walking on the right track. Like David, who often suffered persecution and conspiracies by putting himself on the side of justice against sin and hypocrisy, giving more value to God’s approval, Jeremiah also had to overcome all of these tests in order to succeed. From the human point of view, his life was a failure; however, from the divine point of view the prophet was a holy and anointed instrument, with complete victory for what he was called. Thus, the man of God, even suffering the same oppositions and rejections, getting sad for the wrong things he sees and having to deny himself in favor of the projects of the Lord, he must stand firm on his way, being sure of His comfort and His approval on him. He begins to understand the truth of his life and the value of the true surrender in the hands of the Lord, which brings peace and puts an end to the inner conflict between flesh and Spirit. The higher spiritual vision of the circumstances, and the victories that were achieved, reveal by themselves the grandiosity of what is inside him and the intimacy that he begins to have with the Most

High, which begins to supply him in what he could not have materially and emotionally. He begins to feel important and leaves aside the human values that seek a false self-esteem, in order to find the true self-esteem and identity forged by God Himself. Nothing frightens him anymore; on the contrary, the tests come to be seen as another challenge that will generate growth, victory and knowledge of his Maker. His *cross* no longer has the burden of the obligation or punishment but the taste of life and the resurrection.

“Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? – says the Lord. Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23: 28-29)



## Ezekiel

**Hope / Incentive / God's judgment on sin**

“Then go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them. Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God’; whether they hear or refuse to hear.” (Ezek. 3: 11)

“So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.” (Ezek. 33: 7)

History tells about three stages of the exile of Judah: 605, 597 and 586 BC.

Ezekiel the priest was taken captive to Babylon. His name comes from the Hebrew *Yehhezqel* or *Jeezquel*, *God strengthens*. Son of Buzi, he was deported to Babylon in 597 BC (Ezek. 1: 1-2; 2 Chr. 36: 9-10; 2 Kin. 24: 14-17 – the exile of Jehoiachin or Jeconiah king of Judah) and settled in the village of Tel Abib near the River Chebar. Five years later he received his call as a prophet (Ezek. 1: 2), probably at thirty years old (Ezek. 1: 1). In Chebar, his prophetic visions began for those who were with him in exile, trying to enliven them, saying that God would lead them back to their land. Major themes of the book:

1) Warnings of the coming judgment on Jerusalem because of its sin (The third stage of exile and the most devastating).

2) Promises of judgment on other nations.

3) Words of hope for the future of Israel.

4) The vision of the new temple and the restored country.

According to the bible, his wife died suddenly on the day that Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem (Ezek. 24: 1-2; 15-18; 21-24; 2 Kin. 25: 1-2), that is, besieged it: the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month (Tevet – December-January) of the 9<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Zedekiah. The siege lasted more or less one year and a half (2 Kin. 25: 2-3). On the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month (Tammuz – June-July) of the 11<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Zedekiah, the city wall was broken through, and the king was taken captive (2 Kin. 25: 3-4; Jer. 39: 2-7; Jer. 52: 4-12). On the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month (Av – July-August) of the 19<sup>th</sup> year of Nebuchadnezzar (586 BC – 2 Kin. 25: 8 – 1 month after Zedekiah's exile) Jerusalem was completely devastated and burned, including the temple of the God of Israel. The death of Ezekiel's wife was also a sign of God to the people who should not grieve or mourn the exile, but to conform to the decision of the Lord. There is no mention of children.

The first return of exiles to Jerusalem only occurred in 538 BC.

One of the first visions of Ezekiel was of the four living creatures and the glory of God, who made his calling as a prophet clear (Ezekiel 1 to 3):

[https://www.searaagape.com.br/avisaodeezequiel\\_querubinscomfacesdeanimais.html](https://www.searaagape.com.br/avisaodeezequiel_querubinscomfacesdeanimais.html)

Just as with Jeremiah, sometimes God used the staging with Ezekiel, so that the learning was understood as a sign of what He was doing or would do to His people. One of them is the brick (Ezek. 4: 1-17), symbolizing the siege of Jerusalem; another was that of the sword (Ezek. 5: 1-4), representing the nation's destiny: some would die of hunger or burned in the city that would be taken by the Babylonians, others would be killed by the sword, others would be scattered among the nations, of which, some would be spared, others would be killed far from their homeland.

Before talking about the four major themes of his book, let's return to the paragraph above, for it's about one of his most dramatic staging, that is, the brick as a symbol of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. History speaks of three stages of Israel's exile: 605; 597; 586 BC; and marks the year 538 BC as the end of the Babylonian exile. Ezekiel was deported to there in 597 BC. Let's start with the biblical text of Ezek. 4: 1-17 (NRSV):

<sup>1</sup> And you, O mortal, take a brick and set it before you. On it portray a city, Jerusalem;

<sup>2</sup> and put siegeworks against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a ramp against it; set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around.



<sup>3</sup> Then take an iron plate and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Then lie on your left side, and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it [Or upon your side]; you shall bear their punishment for the number of the days that you lie there.

<sup>5</sup> For I assign to you a number of days, three hundred ninety days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment; and so you shall bear the punishment of the house of Israel.

<sup>6</sup> When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah; forty days I assign you, one day for each year.

<sup>7</sup> You shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and with your arm bared you shall prophesy against it.

<sup>8</sup> See, I am putting cords [ropes, NIV] on you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have completed the days of your siege.

<sup>9</sup> And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt; put them into one vessel, and make bread for yourself. During the number of days that you lie on your side, three hundred ninety days, you shall eat it.

<sup>10</sup> The food that you eat shall be twenty shekels a day by weight [about 8 ounces or about 230 grams]; at fixed times you shall eat it [NIV: Weigh out twenty shekels [about 8 ounces or about 230 grams] of food to eat each day and eat it at set times].

<sup>11</sup> And you shall drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin [about 2/3 quart or about 0.6 liter]; at fixed times you shall drink.

<sup>12</sup> You shall eat it as a barley-cake, baking it in their sight on human dung [NIV: Eat the food as you would a loaf of barley bread; bake it in the sight of the people, using human excrement for fuel].

<sup>13</sup> The Lord said, "Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread, unclean, among the nations to which I will drive them".

<sup>14</sup> Then I said, "Ah Lord God! I have never defiled myself; from my youth up until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by animals, nor has carrion flesh come into my mouth".

<sup>15</sup> Then he said to me, "See, I will let you have cow's dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread".

<sup>16</sup> Then he said to me, Mortal, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with fearfulness; and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay [NIV: He then said to me: "Son of man, I am about to cut off the food supply in Jerusalem. The people will eat rationed food in anxiety and drink rationed water in despair],

<sup>17</sup> Lacking bread and water, they will look at one another in dismay, and waste away under their punishment [Or away in their sin] [NIV: for food and water will be scarce. They will be appalled at the sight of each other and will waste away because of their sin].

Ezek. 4: 1-8 talks about the brick, the siegeworks, a siege wall and a ramp, camps and battering rams all around it, as well as an iron plate as an iron wall between the prophet and the city; this way Jerusalem would be in a state of siege. This would be a sign for the house of Israel. For us, the iron wall represents the separation between God and His people, because of their sins and the hardness of their hearts.

The prophet would lie on his left side for 390 days, symbolizing the 390 years of sin by the house of Israel; then Ezekiel would lie down for 40 days on his right side,

symbolizing the 40 years of sin by the house of Judah. It is difficult to specify the exact dates as a basis for counting these years. Many hypotheses have been made, but they are neither satisfactory nor coherent for Israel and Judah. The ropes around the prophet (v. 8) symbolized the siege of Jerusalem (coinciding with some years of the period of prophetic exercise of Jeremiah [626-585 BC], when Jerusalem was besieged for two years by Nebuchadnezzar – Jer. 39: 1-2).

Ezek. 4: 9-17 can be summarized in few words: the bread of God's wrath, and the period of famine experienced by Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege of two years (Jer. 39: 1-2). Verse 9 tells about the ingredients used in the preparation of bread: wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet (a grass whose ears serve as food) and spelt (a kind of wheat of lower quality). This means that there would be such a great famine that would be a joy to eat anything, like grain and even grasses.

In NIV verse 12 says: 'Eat the food as you would a loaf of barley bread; bake it in the sight of the people, using human excrement for fuel', symbolizing the unclean bread that the Israelites would eat among the nations to which the Lord would drive them. As Ezekiel was a priest, he argued with the Lord about the human excrement, for he had never put anything impure in his mouth. Then the Lord said that the prophet's bread would be prepared (baked) on cow's dung (v. 15). Because they never had enough to make a loaf with, they eat them as barley cakes, a small portion.

The prophet would eat it during the 390 days that he lay down on your left side for the house of Israel. And in v.13 the Lord Himself says, "Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread, unclean, among the nations to which I will drive them." The 'unclean bread' would be a way of saying that since they rejected the spiritual bread from God, as well as the material bread as a sign of His blessing for their faithfulness and took pleasure in idolatry, feeding themselves with food consecrated to idols, then they would eat an unclean thing, and this would be shame to them before the nations, even because they did not distinguish between the food of the Jews and of the Gentiles.

The verses 10-11 say that Ezekiel should eat 20 shekels (equivalent to 8.46 ounces or 240 grams) of bread and drink the sixth part of a hin of water (about 2/3 quart or about 0.6 liter) a day. This meant that as the prophet would eat and drink with scarcity, the people would also eat and drink little, with fearfulness because of the anguish of the siege (vs. 16-17 – cf. Ezek. 12: 18-20). As stated above, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem for two years until break into it completely and burn it.

As we mentioned in the beginning, one of the contents of the prophecies of Ezekiel was the warning of the judgment of God on a rebellious and idolatrous nation. Being a priest, God showed him clearly the abominations within His House by the priests; the prophet suffered to have the vision of the destruction and the abomination in the temple. God also showed him His judgment against the princes of Judah, who lived on false prophecies and wrongly counseled the people, leading them to idolatry (Ezek. 11: 1-13). Another staging made by the prophet was when he prepared the baggage of exile and came out from among the people to another place by order of the Lord. This illustrated what had happened to them and still would happen to the remnant that had been left in Jerusalem (Ezek. 12: 11-15). Ezekiel made clear to Israel that their rebellion prevented them from understanding the word of the Lord, hence they did not believe that the prophecies would be fulfilled. However, God affirms that all of them would be fulfilled and would not be delayed (Ezek. 12: 25-28), distinguishing them from the false prophecies they heard. In fact, the attack of Ezekiel to the false prophets was as intense as that of Jeremiah (Ezek. 13: 3; Ezek. 13: 6-9; 16), as well as in relation to the false prophetesses (Ezek. 13: 17-23, especially verses 21-23). God Himself would make their false visions cease. The punishment against idolatry had already been decreed by God

(Ezek. 14: 6-8; 14: 16; 14: 21-22), both for the prophets and the priests, the princes and the people. In Ezek. 18: 1-32, YHWH makes it clear that responsibility is personal, that He respects the free will of His children and that each will bring to his life what he practices; moreover, He ends up revealing Himself to His chosen, saying He has no pleasure in the death of anyone, but what is happening to them is His discipline, to bring them back to the beatitude and communion with Him. His *holy wrath* against the idolatrous behavior of Israel and Judah is compared to the indignation of a husband betrayed by an adulterous wife (Ezek. 23: 1-49; Ezek. 16: 1-63); His vengeance is infallible.

The second topic talked about at the beginning makes clear the divine punishment on the other nations around Israel (Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre and Egypt – Ezek. 25–29), not only for their particular wickedness, by being clearly sinful nations but mainly because they rejoiced at the exile of the chosen people and in the desecration of the temple of the Lord. When Ezekiel speaks of Tyre, he lets us the impression of conveying something else, as if he was talking about the fall of Satan himself (Ezek. 28: 11-19), which occurred in the past, or his new fall in the next coming of Jesus. As happened with Jeremiah, Ezekiel was also despised by the people (Ezek. 33: 30-33), who did not value his prophecies and didn't put them into practice.

God reinforces to Ezekiel the responsibilities of the true *watchman* (Ezek. 33: 1-20 – “So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me [NIV: Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me]” – Ezek. 33: 7; Ezek. 3: 16-27) and also prophecies against the unfaithful shepherds of Israel (Ezek. 34: 1-10), saying that He Himself will take care of His flock (Ezek. 34: 11-31). Allusions to the Messiah can be seen in Ezek. 34: 23; Ezek. 37: 24; Ezek. 17: 22-24.

The third feature of Ezekiel's prophecies concerns the restoration of the nation after the exile (Ezek. 36: 24-28) and that, as an army of dry bones, they will be resurrected (Ezek. 37: 1-14 – “The vision of the valley of dry bones”); the nation will no longer be two (Israel and Judah), as it has been until that moment, and will be united again like in the times of David (Ezek. 37: 15-28). We can extrapolate this prophecy to the first coming of Jesus, when Israel and Judah will be united under His love:

Ezek. 34: 23: “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David (= Jesus), and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.”

Ezek. 34: 24: “And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David (= Jesus) shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.”

Ezek. 37: 22: “I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king (= Jesus) shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms.”

Ezek. 37: 24: “My servant David (= Jesus) shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes.”

Completing the prophecies about the restoration of the nation, God gives Ezekiel a vision of the new temple (Ezek. 40–44), as well as emphasizes the duties of the priests (restoration of the Levitical priesthood) and the Mosaic laws (Ezek. 45–48). The temple seen by Ezekiel was never built; the temple of Ezra after the return of exiles to their homeland had a much simpler appearance and was an attempt to reconstruct the pattern of Solomon's temple. However, erected or not, the temple of Ezekiel gave people a new hope to feel again as the chosen people. Perhaps the dimensions and the appearance of

the temple and the City of David to be reconstructed, shown in vision to the prophet, are an allusion to the *New Jerusalem* (Rev. 21: 12-13; Ezek. 48: 30-38).

In Ezekiel 47: 1-12 we can be sure of the outpouring of the Spirit and His anointing (symbolized by the increasingly abundant waters on the prophet – v. 3-5) to renew many lives (v. 7-10; 12 ), as well as God's project for those who repent and turn to Him. Let's read the text:

<sup>1</sup> Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.

<sup>2</sup> Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side.

<sup>3</sup> Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep.

<sup>4</sup> Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the waist.

<sup>5</sup> Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed.

<sup>6</sup> He said to me, 'Mortal, have you seen this?' Then he led me back along the bank of the river.

<sup>7</sup> As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other.

<sup>8</sup> He said to me, 'This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh.

<sup>9</sup> Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes.

<sup>10</sup> People will stand fishing beside the sea from En-Gedi to En-Eglaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets; its fish will be of a great many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea.

<sup>11</sup> But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt.

<sup>12</sup> On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.'

En-Gedi ('en-gedhî, 'fountain of the goat' or 'spring of the kid') is an oasis of fresh water to the west of the Dead Sea, in the desert of Judea. The fertility of this area, in the midst of a so barren region, made it appropriate for the outlaws, to find food (Song 1: 14) and as a hiding place (David, for example: 1 Sam. 23: 29; 1 Sam. 24: 1-3). His former name was Hazazon Tamar, 'clefts of the palm trees' (Gen. 14: 7; 2 Chr. 20: 2), because it was bathed by a constant hot stream, and was once famous for its palm trees and vineyards (Song 1: 14). En-Gedi (Josh. 15: 62; Song 1: 14; Ezek. 47:10) is the current Ain Jidi, to the west of the Dead Sea, and halfway between the north and south ends. In the desert, behind the gorge, there are innumerable caves, in which David and his companions took refuge. Through En-Gedi passed the road that the Moabites and Ammonites followed when they attacked Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20: 1-2). The fountain still exists, a fine spring rising on a kind of terrace and goes on forming a stream that

comes from the hill, from a height of a hundred and thirty-two yards above the level of the Dead Sea, where it empties. There, a steep slope began, 'the ascent of Ziz' (2 Chr. 20: 16), which seems to have been the present gorge that is still crossed.



David Waterfall in En-Gedi, Israel



Shulamit Waterfall in Nahal David in En-Gedi, Israel



Ein Gedi National Park was founded in 1972 and is one of Israel's most important nature reserves. It has two main streams fed by springs that run throughout the year: Nachal David (the brook of David) and Nachal Arugot (the brook of Arugot). There are also two other springs that flow into the reserve: the Shulamit and Ein Gedi waterfalls. Arugot brook runs west to east in the West Bank, 31 km long. It empties into the Dead Sea south of Ein Gedi. The three sections of the wadi are called Wadi el-Jihar, Wadi el-Ghar and Wadi Areijeh in Arabic. Arugot, in Hebrew, is the plural of Arugah, which means 'terrace or bed in the garden', and derives from the Arabic, Areijeh. Ghar means 'cave.'

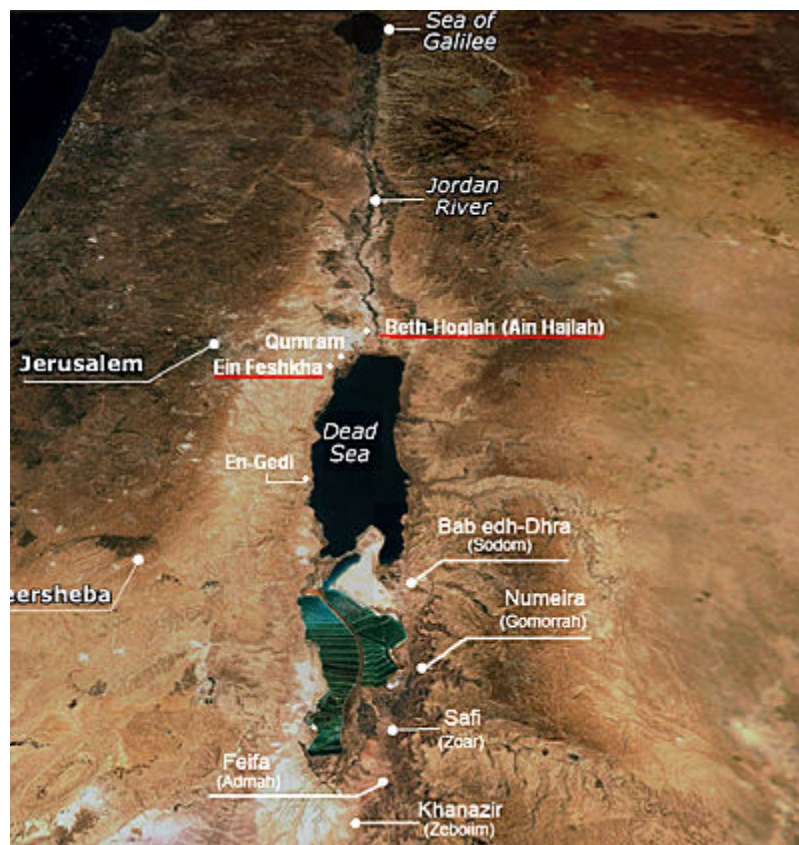


Nachal Arugot (Waterfall in the brook of Arugot) in En-Gedi, Israel

En-Eglaim ('ên-'eghlayim, 'fountain of the two heifers' or 'fountain of the two calves') is a site mentioned in a vision of the prophet Ezekiel. In his view, the Dead Sea (a salt lake in which fish cannot live) would one day be full of fresh water and the fishermen would cast their nets 'from En-Gedi to En-Eglaim.' According to Thomas Kelly Cheyne (1899), one likely theory would be that the place referred to is close to where the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea, resulting in freshwater fish being washed into the Dead Sea and dying from the excessive salt content. Cheyne suggested Ain Hajleh (Ain Hajlah) as a possible location – thinking that the Hebrew Eglaim might be a later version in a text that originally reads 'Hoglah' – as in the place name 'Beth-Hoglah.' The exact location has yet to be identified, although the proposals include Ain Hajlah, Ain Al-Fashka (Ein Feshkha) and Eglaim ('eghlayim, Isa. 15: 8, a village in Moab).

Beth-Hoglah (or Ain Hajlah) was in the territory of Benjamin, on the border with Judah. Ain Hajlah or Ein Hajla means 'Fountain of the Partridge.'

Ein Feshkha (Hebrew: עִינֹת צֻקִּים, Einot Tzukim; lit. 'Cliff springs') or Ain Al-Fashka is a 2,500-hectare nature reserve and archaeological site on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, about 3 km south of Qumran in the West Bank and 30 km north of En-Gedi. Ain Al-Fashka is located north of the headland of Feshkhah (Râs Feshkhah). Within the reserve is a group of springs of brackish water. The nature reserve comprises an open section with mineral water pools for bathing, surrounded by tall foliage and a closed section to visitation to protect native flora and fauna (source: wikipedia.org).



Possible location of En-Eglaim

Many people read this text of Ezekiel, as well as many OT prophecies, looking for its fulfillment in a physical, material and palpable way; however, they forget that this is one of the prophecies that has already been fulfilled by God in Jesus' presence, especially when He came to Jerusalem to teach or heal. He was the temple of God with men and the waters that flowed from Him were the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel says that the temple was facing east and the waters flowed from the south of the house: "Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar" (v.1).

Jesus was always turned to spiritual things ("for the temple faced east"), because His mission was spiritual. The east symbolizes the spiritual world, the spiritual things. In the OT, the belief was that God always entered the temple from the east side (Ezek. 43: 1-2; 4; Ezek. 44: 2). Ezekiel also says that the water was flowing down from below



the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar, and flowed towards the east.

The south represents our own lives, our humanity and imperfection in comparison with the majesty and fullness of God, that is, the north (the north, in the bible, means the throne of God, what guides our lives, His Word and His abundant life for us). So, Jesus incarnate received the anointing of the Spirit and let it flow freely, without fear of exhaustion, because He knew that, as a human being like us, it did not come from Him, but from Him who was greater and was on high, the Father. And He let this life and this healing flow for those who suffered the tribulations on earth, in the natural life; however, they could not obtain the favor of God by their own will power or piety, or by any sacrifice ('altar'). Only His ultimate sacrifice made for us would open the door to the throne of God (north). The altar the prophet speaks of is the bronze altar or the altar of burnt offering, where animals were sacrificed as atonement for sins.

Then he goes on saying: "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh" (v.8). They flowed south through the barren, rocky region between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, along the Jordan Valley, to the Dead Sea.





The Dead Sea is the body of water with the highest saline concentration in the world (approximately 25% salt) and currently cannot support the life of any species of aquatic animal. It is the lowest altitude point on the planet (450 meters below sea level), and is 450 meters deep. Its evaporation even kills the birds that fly over it. The Dead Sea receives the waters of the Jordan, but has no exit for them.

The prophet was saying that this sea that was dead would show life of all kinds in its waters and on its banks (fish and vegetation), from En-Gedi to En-Eglaim. The amount of fish would be large, and the vegetation would always be productive (v.12) because of this river whose waters flow out of the sanctuary (v.1). Therefore, the waters of the Dead Sea would be healthy (“the water will become fresh” – v.8-9) and suitable for all forms of life. But the swamps would be left to salt; they would not become fresh (v.11). The increasingly abundant waters on the prophet (v.3-5) symbolize the Holy Spirit and its increasing anointing on him, and they came out of the temple to renew many lives (v.7-10; 12). The living water of God (cf. Jn. 7: 37-39, where the evangelist writes: “as the Scripture has said”) has power to restore and resurrect life.

In other words, the Holy Spirit is like a river of water that flows from the throne of God to everyone who believes in Jesus, and this river has the power to renew, restore and resurrect life, even in dry and desert places or in a sea that is dead, as the Dead Sea in Israel. Here, fish can symbolize souls enlivened by the word of God; ‘all kinds of trees for food’ can symbolize the children of God, who bear fruit through the presence of the waters of the Holy Spirit, and the fruit they bear for the kingdom of God are continuous (all year long) and serve as food for the hungry souls; and its leaves provide healing for the needy and sick for their sins.

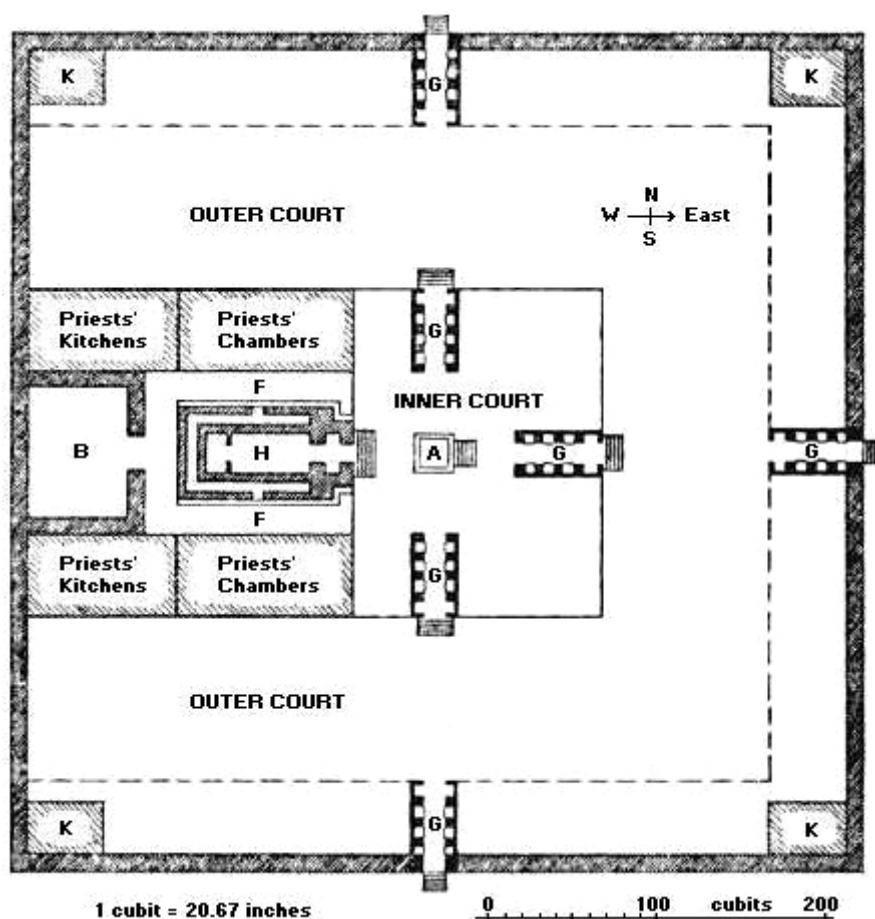
We can see that the river (v. 9) is sufficient for all creatures at the same time, which means that the Lord does not limit His blessing or His anointing on anyone who seeks Him and drinks His word of life. It is interesting to use the expression ‘will become fresh’ in reference to everything that is reached and watered by the waters that flow from the sanctuary, because when there is no water there is no life or health, everything dies and everything dries up; all creatures and plants perish. So is a heart that rejects the word of God, His spirit and His teaching and that clings only to earthly and small things: it is sick, dry, hardened, cold, having nothing good to give to anyone, in short, it is dead. It doesn’t smile, it doesn’t see beauty in anything; it has no more motivation to live.

The Holy Spirit is a gift given by God to all who accept the lordship of Jesus and want a reason to be on earth, all who want to serve Him and multiply what they receive from Him. Thus, both for people who believe in God but have not yet confessed Jesus as Lord of their lives, and for those who already have a deeper communion with Him but need more of His strength, the Holy Spirit becomes an available blessing from God. However, for those who reject Him and for those who rebel against Him, the only thing that is left for them is barrenness, ‘the salt,’ which, when in excess, dehydrates and removes life (“But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt.”).

Receive this message from the Lord:

“My Spirit is pure and crystalline water that flows from my heart to yours, always leading you forward, watering the dry lands and enlivening the fish that live on it. My word is water that cools and heals, that renews and restores. Nothing can stop its flow in your life. Open your mouth with faith and confidence, because I will fill it, and you will glorify me. Thus, you will see that it will never be lacking to you. Seek my understanding every day, the wisdom and the revelation of my Spirit, and when you read my word, it will be alive for you. I have desired to speak to you. I have new things

to reveal to you, treasures to show you. I have blessings to bestow upon you, because I made you a vessel of honor to be light for the blind, refreshment to the afflicted and the hopeless and instrument of deliverance to the captives; also to bring joy and peace, to exhort, to comfort and teach. When you do this for others, when you do it for my little ones, you receive the double portion of anointing. I am your reward and your inheritance.”



Plan of the temple of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40; 41 and 42):

A = the altar

B = building mentioned in Ezekiel 41: 12

G = gatehouses

K = kitchens

H = Holy place

F = free space; 'temple courtyard' (NIV) or 'the separate place' (KJV – Ezek. 42: 13); the priests' chambers had three floors.

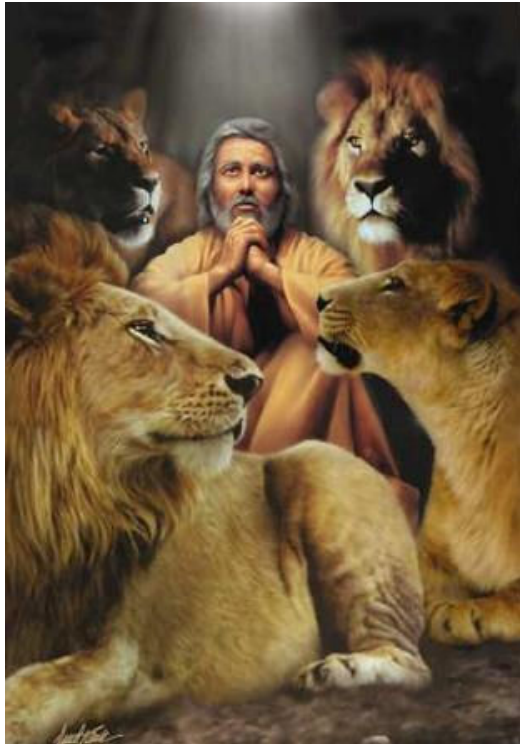
Ezek. 40: 5; 43: 13, cubit (a cubit plus a handbreadth) = 51.8 cm or 20 inches;

'Measuring reed' (kaneh), for measuring the buildings had 6 cubits (3.11 meters or 3.40 yards).

The exiles in Babylon were revived in their sorrow (Ps. 137) with the vision of a new temple (Ezek. 40 to 43), which was given to Ezekiel (572 BC – Ezek. 40: 1). It was never built. The second temple of Ezra (rebuilt in 536 BC) was an attempt to reconstruct what had been built by Solomon.

The main lessons learned with Ezekiel are summarized again in *the justice and judgment of God against sin and in the hope and encouragement* to those who are repentant, weakened and humiliated, bringing them back to a state of perfect communion with Him. The word of God tells us that *God is love*, but also tells us that He is *righteous and faithful*, not denying Himself. Therefore, as true watchmen we must make clear to people that the Lord loves the sinner; however, He abhors sin, and when there is no repentance, He leads them to His discipline, hands them over to the enemy until they see for themselves who their true Lord and Deliverer is. He respects the free will given to man to choose his way, so He says that responsibility is personal. When man recognizes His lordship and turns to Him, then he comes to experience the restoration of his soul (the walls of his city) and the rebuilding of his inner temple (his spirit). Thus, he can have free access to the *Holy of Holies* (the intimacy with God's heart), a true communion between Father and son, between husband and wife, without suspicion of treachery and without the lies caused by sin. When we speak of Jesus to someone we are talking about the power of His sacrifice on Calvary, rescuing us from the 'exile' caused by our impieties and iniquities, and bringing a real change to our whole being, besides to give us the certainty of our adoption as God's children (Rom. 8: 15). The same authority that the Lord gives us to cast out demons, He also gives us to show our brothers the nature of the devil within the flesh, which must be handed over to the Son of God to be truly uprooted, and for the soul to be really cured. Like Ezekiel, despite the oppositions and captivities around us, we must continue as watchmen, showing our fellow men *the way to Salvation*. In doing so, having the spiritual vision of things, not the carnal one, we can rejoice in the future restoration not only in our own lives but in the lives of our brothers.

“I have put my words in your mouth, and hidden you in the shadow of my hand, stretching out the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and saying to Zion, ‘You are my people.’” (Isa. 51: 16)



## Daniel

**Revelation of the power and the superiority of God  
over other gods / To judge difficult cases**

“Because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.” (Dan. 5: 12)

“I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; the people who were with me did not see the vision, though a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled and hid themselves.” (Dan. 10: 7)

“He said to me, “Daniel, greatly beloved, pay attention to the words that I am going to speak to you. Stand on your feet, for I have now been sent to you.” (Dan. 10: 11a)

Among the four Major Prophets, Daniel is different from all others in relation to the divine revelations. God gave him visions and dreams, not only referring to the Babylonian kings he was serving, but also regarding the distant future of His chosen people. His visions are still a bit difficult to interpret because they contain apocalyptic revelations. It is interesting what the word of God says in Dan. 12: 4; 9: “But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book *sealed* until the time of the end. Many shall be running back and forth, and evil shall increase... He said, ‘Go your way, Daniel, for the words are *to remain secret and sealed* until the time of the end.” This means: the prophecies will be fulfilled in full, without being changed, at the same time that they are somewhat hidden in the eyes of men so that they don’t discover completely the secrets belonging to God alone, until the time determined by Him. We can see this truth today, when many have speculated about the future events, however, they still cannot discover them entirely. The revelation of God is not for everyone, but for His children who are faithful and fearing because by speaking of His mysteries we must have the fear of speaking only what really comes through His Spirit.

Daniel (*Dāniyye’l* or *Dāni’el*, *God is my judge*) was a descendant of royal or noble family and was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, around 605 BC (History talks about three stages of the exile of Judah: 605, 597, 586 BC), having been trained to the service of the Babylonian monarch in the company of three companions: Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, respectively named by the Babylonians Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Dan. 1: 1-7). The book was probably written between 536 and 530 BC, shortly after Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC. Briefly, it speaks of *God’s faithfulness and His power over the leaders and empires*, always proving His superiority over all other gods. Daniel gained reputation interpreting the visions of others, and then, as an interpreter of his own visions in which he foretold the future time of the Messianic kingdom, both the first and the second coming of Jesus. He held the major government posts under Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius the Mede and Cyrus, having his last vision on the banks of the Tigris River. Darius the Mede, who succeeded Belshazzar, descendant of Nebuchadnezzar, came to power at sixty-two years old, appointed by Cyrus the Persian, as Babylonian provincial governor. This *Darius the Mede* is another person, different from *Darius II* (Neh. 12: 22) who ruled Babylon and Persia from 424 to 404 BC, after Artaxerxes (see below the list of Persian kings). He is also different from *Darius I, the successor of Cambyses*, who ruled from 522 to 486 BC, when began the construction of the temple of Jerusalem (520-516 BC). The order for its reconstruction had already been given by Cyrus around 536 BC, two years after the first return of exiles to Jerusalem (538 BC), but its reconstruction was extended because of frailty of the Jews before the governmental powers around. The 2<sup>nd</sup> return to Jerusalem (Ezra) was in 458 BC and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, around 445 BC (3<sup>rd</sup> return: Nehemiah).

The Babylonian kings (Neo-Babylonian Empire) were:

- Nabopolassar – 626-605 BC
- Nebuchadnezzar II – 605-562 BC
- Amel-Marduk (or Evil-Merodach) – 562-560 BC
- Nergal-sharezer or Neriglissar (brother-in-law of Amel-Marduk, whom he assassinated to take the power) – 559-556 BC. The Akkadian name of Neriglissar is Nergal-šar-ušur, which means, ‘God Nergal preserves / defends the king.’ His name is

mentioned as one of the high-ranking officers of king Nebuchadnezzar II in the Book of Jeremiah 39: 13 (Nergal-Sharezzer).

- Labashi-Marduk, son of Neriglissar – 556 BC (for nine months), and was deposed by the priests.

- Nabonidus – 556-539 BC, and whose son, Belshazzar, reigned as co-regent. Nabonidus was married to Nitocris, daughter of Nebuchadnezzar II

In 539 BC, Cyrus II or Cyrus the Great invaded Babylon and incorporated this kingdom to the vast empire of the Media and Persia, making of it a satrapy under the rule of Darius the Mede.

The Persian kings after the fall of Babylon were:

- Cyrus the Persian emperor (Cyrus II or Cyrus the great) who ordered the return of the Jews in 538 BC (1<sup>st</sup> return of the exiles), by invading Babylon. He reigned as king of the Persians, Medes, Lydians and Babylonians (559–530 BC)

- Cambyses II (son of Cyrus): 530–522 BC.

- Darius I (brother-in-law of Cambyses II): 522–486 BC. In his reign the temple began to be rebuilt (520–516 BC). It had begun in 536 BC (2<sup>nd</sup> year of the reign of Cyrus in Babylon and stopped until 520 BC – 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Darius I). According to Strong's Concordance, 'Darius', Dārayavahuš (Strong #1867), comes from the Persian origin 'Dareyavesh', the title (rather than name) of a Persian king. According to Evandro de Souza Lopes – 'Os nomes bíblicos e seus significados, CPAD, 8<sup>a</sup> ed. 2002' – 'Darius' comes from the Persian name 'Dozenda dara', which in Hebrew means: owner, lord; in Greek: the powerful, rich. Other sources give its meaning as: 'He who holds, the one who maintains.'

- Xerxes I (Ahasuerus): 486–465 BC (son of Darius I). Xerxes (great warrior, warlike, bellicose, lion) is a Greek transliteration of his Persian name after his ascension, Jshāyār Shah, meaning 'ruler of heroes.' In the bible his name is mentioned as Ahasuerus (Achashverosh or Achshrush, in Hebrew = prince, head, chief, lion); Hebrew equivalent of Persian 'Khshayarshan' = king lion; written as Ahashuerus, in Chaldean; or Axashverosh, in Greek. According to Strong's Concordance (Strong #325), Ahasuerus or Achshrush) is the title (rather than name) of a Persian king.

- Artaxerxes I: 465–424 BC (son of Xerxes I, but not the firstborn). There was a 2<sup>nd</sup> return of the exiles to Jerusalem with Ezra in 458 BC to minister in the rebuilt temple. Rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, 445 BC (3<sup>rd</sup> return with Nehemiah).

- Xerxes II (son of Artaxerxes I) reigned one month and a half. He was murdered by his brother Secydianus or Sogdianus (the form of the name is uncertain). In his turn, he was killed by Ochus, satrap of Hyrcania (region southeast of Caspian Sea, modern Iran), who rose to power and adopted the name of Darius II.

- Darius II (Neh. 12: 22) ruled Babylon and Persia (424–404 BC); he was called Darius the Persian. His birth name was Ochus; then he adopted the name of Darius II (Persian: Dārayavahuš; that's why the Greek sources call him Darius Nothos, 'Bastard').

Artaxerxes II Mnemon, meaning: 'whose reign is through truth' (404–358 BC). He was son of Darius II.

- Artaxerxes III or Ochus (3<sup>rd</sup> son of Artaxerxes II): 358–338 BC.

- Artaxerxes IV or Arses (youngest son of Artaxerxes III): 338–336 BC

- Darius III (great-grandson of Darius II and cousin of Arses): 336–330 BC when Alexander the Great defeated him in Macedonia. Originally called Artashata; in Latin: Codomannus, and in ancient Greek: Kodomanos (Κοδομανός) was the last king of the Achaemenid Dynasty of Persia. Darius (Dārayavahuš, in Persian) was the name he adopted after ascending the throne.

To facilitate the learning about Daniel, let's talk about each chapter separately.

In the first chapter we see Daniel being exiled to Babylon in the company of his three friends, where they stay under the custody of Ashpenaz, the chief eunuch, to be fed with delicacies of the king's table for three years, until they are prepared to attend before him. We can see some resemblance with Esther, who also was taken to the palace of Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) with many girls of Susa, among which she was chosen to be the wife of the monarch and was prepared for one year. Daniel decided not to defile himself with the food that was given to him and God made him find favor in the eyes of the master of the eunuchs, allowing him to feed only on vegetables and water for ten days (Dan. 1: 14-15). Seeing the victory of the three young men after the test of ten days, they were allowed to continue with this diet to complete the three years waiting to be taken to the king (Dan. 1: 16-18). After the term determined by the king, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were brought to the presence of Nebuchadnezzar along with all the other youngsters. The bible says that God endowed them with knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and wisdom, but to Daniel, He added the ability to interpret dreams and visions. Talking with them, Nebuchadnezzar chose them among all the other young men and they started to be in the king's presence. They were more qualified than all the magicians and enchanters that were in the whole kingdom (Dan. 1: 19-21).

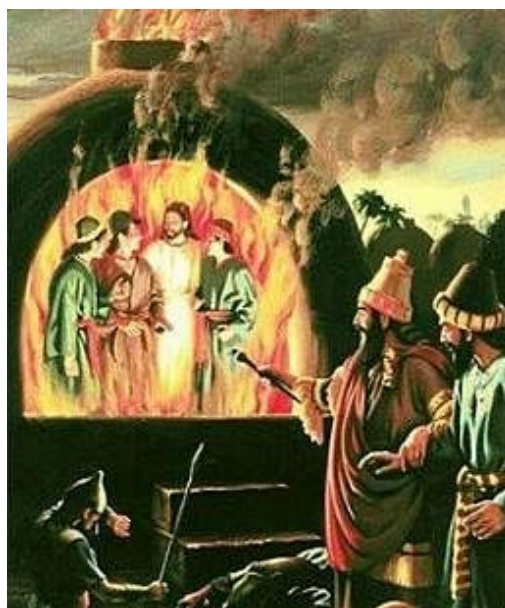
In chapter 2 we see Daniel interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the statue which had four parts. The king had already given a death decree to all the wise men because they could not reveal his dream. However, entering in prayer, Daniel received from God the revelation of that mystery. He was then brought before the king. The statue seen in the dream had the head of gold, the chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze; its legs of iron and the feet, part iron, part of clay (Dan. 2: 32 -33). The dream was completed with the vision of Nebuchadnezzar of a stone that struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces (Dan. 2: 34-35), doing the same with the other materials (bronze, silver and gold) and that were dispersed by the wind. The stone became a great mountain that filled the whole earth (v.35).





Daniel interpreted the dream and Nebuchadnezzar knew that he was the head of gold; the other parts were the kingdoms that would follow (Media-Persia – silver, Greece – bronze, and Rome – iron). The stone is a reference to Jesus and His church growing and advancing over the earth, dominating the other kingdoms (v. 44-45), like the Roman Empire was divided into many nations (iron and clay). Here, there is also an apocalyptic reference to Rome that will culminate in its ten contemporary kings (Dan. 2: 41-44; Rev. 17: 12), which will be destroyed by Christ at His second coming (Dan. 2: 45). By interpreting the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel was aggrandized and made governor of the whole province, as the supreme chief of all the wise men of Babylon (like Joseph before Pharaoh). The bible mentions the word ‘satraps’, especially in this book of Daniel. *Satrap*s, in Hebrew, *’ahashdarp<sup>e</sup>nīm*, and in Persian: *khshathrapāvan*, means “*protector of the kingdom*.” They were viceroys invested with considerable power, and had their own subjects and territories. Daniel was elevated to their category in matter of power.

In chapter 3, we see another arbitrariness of the Babylonian king, making a statue of gold with the image of his god and forcing all citizens to bow down before it to worship it. Everybody submitted, however, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach) and Azariah (Abednego) didn’t bow down, preferring to be burned in the furnace of fire that had been prepared for those who opposed the king. When the youngsters were thrown into the furnace, the king was astonished, for he saw four men loose walking in it (Dan. 3: 25) and the flames had no power over them (Dan. 3: 27). Taking them out of the furnace, the king acknowledged the power of the God of the Jews over any other god and promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.



In chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar has another dream, this time with a huge tree that spreads its branches across the nations; it grows and bears much fruit. However, an angelic being gives an order to be cut, leaving only the stump with the roots, with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field, being bathed with the dew of heaven, until seven times pass over it (7 years). The angelic being (‘Holy watcher’, as the bible says) also commands that the heart of the king becomes of animal, no longer of man. Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), again, gives the interpretation that the tree

represents the king who exalted himself and became proud of his strength, despising the dominion of God. He would be driven away from people, like the tree that was cut, seen in the dream, until he acknowledged the sovereignty of the Most High over the kingdoms of men. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar went mad, his mind and his appearance became like that of an animal such was his tragedy, until that, after having passed the time of the prophecy, he recovered his mind and he magnified God for His majesty and power over all kingdoms of the earth. He acknowledged that God can humble those who walk in pride.

The 5<sup>th</sup> chapter relates to Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, who gives a banquet for a thousand people, but with irreverence and lack of fear of God, decides to drink wine in the vessels that had been brought from the temple of Israel. In that very moment, the bible says, he sees a man's hand writing a few words on the palace wall and he gets scared at the sight. He fears and trembles before that, until Daniel is brought before him to interpret the riddle. The prophet reminds him of his forefather, Nebuchadnezzar, whose heart was lifted up and his spirit became proud before God, so he was overthrown and his glory was over. Daniel also recalled that his grandfather was treated like an animal until he knew that the God Most High has dominion over the kingdom of men, and sets over it who He wishes. The words written on the wall were: *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN*. *MENE, MENE* means: *God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end*. *TEKEL* means: *you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting*. *PARSIN* (plural of *PERES*; in Aramaic, *UPARSIN*) means: *your kingdom was divided and given to the Medes and Persians*. Belshazzar honored Daniel putting on him a purple robe, a chain of gold around his neck, and commanded to be proclaimed throughout the kingdom that he would be the third in the government. That's when the kingdom of Babylon fell and was handed over to the Medes and Persians, in the person of Darius the Mede, chosen by Cyrus as governor.



Some time passed and in chapter 6, we see Daniel faced with another challenge, for the other satraps, governors and princes, jealous of his correct behavior, forged a law in which was written that for one month, any citizen who asked anything to any god or any man besides the king should be thrown into the den of lions. The king signed the decree considered irrevocable according to the law of the Medes. Thus, Daniel was accused of being praying to his God, something that he did regularly three times a day. As the

decree had already been sealed, the king didn't see any other alternative but to throw Daniel into the lion's den. He was sad and did not sleep. In the morning, in reaching the mouth of the cave, he called by Daniel, who answered him that he was alive because God had sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions, for he was found innocent before Him. The king rejoiced and ordered that the prophet was taken out of the den, throwing into it all those who had plotted against his life, including their wives and children. All died devoured by the animals. The God of Daniel was again magnified in the face of that whole nation and the prophet prospered in a foreign land once more.



From the chapter 7 the visions of Daniel begin to be described. The seventh chapter brings a divine revelation to the prophet much like Nebuchadnezzar's dream concerning the nations to come after the fall of Babylon. In this chapter, the prophet has a vision of four animals.

The first is similar to the *lion and had eagle's wings* (Dan. 7: 4), which were torn; it was lifted from the ground and became the image of man and was given it the mind of man. This animal symbolized Babylon. The second animal was like a *bear* and in its mouth *there was three ribs*; everybody said to it: "Arise, devour many bodies!" This animal symbolized the kingdoms of Media and Persia. The three ribs refer to Egypt, Babylon and Lydia conquered by Medo-Persian Empire. They were called 'ribs' because they strengthened it; and 'between its teeth' because they were as if been ground or crushed by Medes and Persians. The third was like a *leopard and had four wings of a bird on its back and four heads*. It symbolizes Greece. The fourth animal to be seen by Daniel had a *terrifying look, with great iron teeth*, and was exceedingly strong (Dan. 7: 7) devouring everything around and presenting ten horns on its head (Dan. 7: 7; 19). It symbolizes Rome. In verse 8 (Rev. 13: 5-6), Daniel says that from the horns emerged a little horn which not only destroyed three of them, as there was eyes like human eyes in it and a mouth speaking arrogantly, with insolence. Here we can see an allusion to the Antichrist and, from this verse, some references with apocalyptic content (see vs. 20; 24) where the ten kings are described again, and that will be destroyed at the second coming of Jesus. It is interesting to realize the vision of the glorified Christ described by Daniel (*Ancient of Days*), in Dan. 7: 9; 13 and Dan. 10: 5-6, similar to that described by John in Rev. 1: 13-15; Rev. 19: 6; 12; Rev. 14: 14 and Rev. 1: 7 (coming with the clouds). In Dan. 7: 18, the word written is similar to that written by John in Rev. 17: 14; Rev. 11: 15, that is, the Antichrist will fight against the saints (Dan. 7: 25, referring to three years and a half), but these will possess the kingdom. The ten contemporary kings are interpreted by some scholars as the barbarian peoples that occupied the Earth after the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476 AD): Alamanni (Germany); Franks (France); Burgundians (Switzerland); Anglo-Saxons (England); Visigoths (Spain); Swabians or Suebi (Portugal); Lombards (Russia and divisions); Vandals (North Africa, Mediterranean); Heruli (Italy) and Ostrogoths (Austria).

In chapter 8 Daniel has another vision consistent with the earlier ones in which he describes the image of a ram and a goat. The *ram* symbolizes Media and Persia (2 horns) and the *goat*, Greece. The goat also had a horn between its eyes. The horn symbolizes *power*. The interesting thing in this vision is that Daniel sees a little horn that grows in the place of the largest that was broken. This horn is no longer related to the Antichrist (Dan. 7: 8; 24), but to Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8: 9-11), a Seleucid persecutor of Israel.

Here I want to make a parenthesis to put the list of nations and kings who ruled over Israel after the fall of Persia. Alexander the Great, king of Macedonia, after conquering his great empire, led the Greek language and culture to his domains, thus laying the foundations of Hellenistic civilization (Greek), which caused a fundamental change in worldwide culture. When in the year 323 BC, Alexander died at only 33 years old his empire began to fall and was divided among his generals. Two of them remained with the eastern part: Ptolemy I, founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty, with Egypt (323-198 BC); Seleucus I (198-166 BC) founder of the Seleucid dynasty, with the region of Syria, Iraq, Persia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of India. Thus, Israel was subjected to pagan rulers several times. During the first hundred years, it stood under Egyptian rule, and in the end of the second century BC it went to Seleucid rule, against which the Jews



would undertake a riot. While Israel was under the control of Ptolemy II, Jews were permitted to live according to their faith. The king himself considered the *Torah* (Book of the Law of Moses) a cultural heritage, and forced 72 Jewish sages (around 250 BC) to translate it into Greek (Septuagint or Version of the Seventy).

When the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes (Antiochus IV) rose to power, the situation for Jews worsened considerably. The monarch was determined to oppress the people who showed unbending in not accepting the Greek culture. It was instituted as law the destruction of the copies of the Scriptures, and the decree was carried out with extreme ruthlessness. The oppressed Jews revolted under the leadership of Judas Maccabee (Judas ben Mattathias). His family name was Hasmon, therefore they were known as Hasmonean, and lived in a village called Modiín. The leader was Mattathias, father of five children: John, Simon, Judas (Maccabee), Eleazar, and Jonathan. The riot erupted when a group of Greeks gathered the villagers in the square where it had been erected an altar to idols. The Greek general demanded that John made offerings there. He, however, refused vehemently and his attitude provoked the revolt. During the war, Mattathias died, quite old, and his son, Judas Maccabee was appointed general. He adopted the strategy of guerrilla, taking the enemy in surprise attacks. Judas wanted to retake Jerusalem to cleanse the temple. But by arriving in the holy temple he found only desolation, ruins, statues and idols everywhere. Jesus refers to this fact, when Antiochus IV committed sacrilege by killing a pig (unclean animal) on the altar, with the words: “So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand)” (Matt. 24: 15; Mk. 13: 14, taken from Dan. 9: 27; Dan. 11: 31; Dan. 12: 11), a fact that would be repeated with the destruction of temple by the Romans in 70 AD. The table below illustrates the facts:

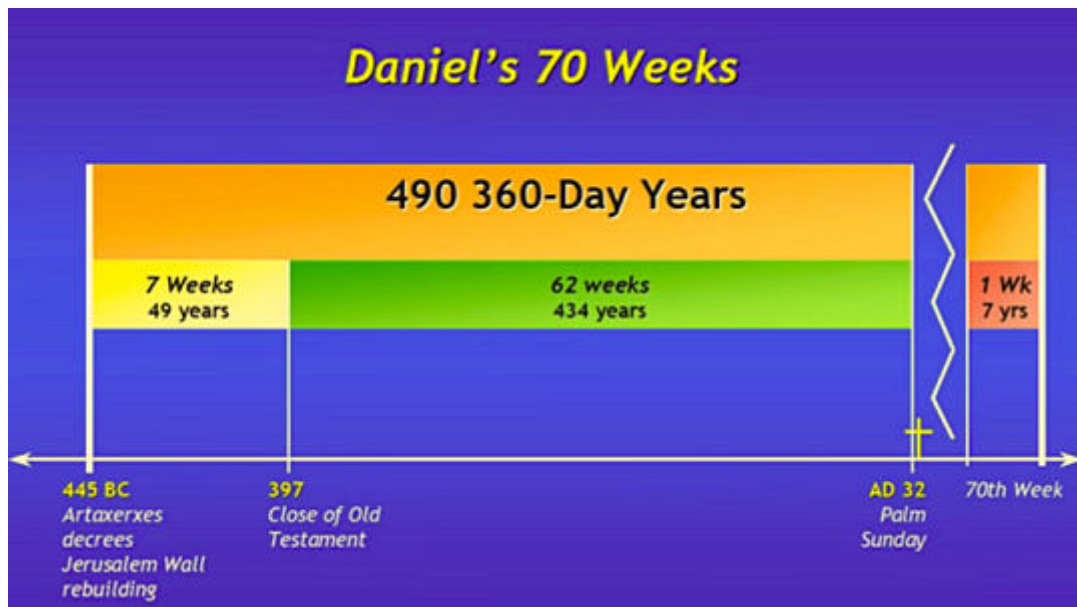
400 BC	Alexander the Great rules Palestine; Macedonian dominion – 333-323 BC Dominion of the Ptolemies on Palestine – 323-198 BC
200 BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominion of the Seleucids on Palestine – 198-167 BC</li> <li>• Revolt of Judah Maccabee and dominion of Judas’ family and his descendants, the Hasmonean on Palestine – 167-63 BC</li> <li>• Conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey, Roman general, annexing Palestine to the Roman Empire – 63 BC</li> <li>• Reign of Herod the Great, on Palestine, appointed by Rome – 37-4 BC</li> </ul>

After the vision described in Chapter 8, Daniel gets sick (Dan. 8: 27) and his revelation came to him later.

In chapter 9, Daniel prays to God for himself and for the people, recognizing their sin, and therefore the cause of the captivity of seventy years. Here it is given him a revelation through the angel Gabriel (Dan. 9: 21 cf. Dan. 8: 16), sent by God to him, about the seventy weeks that were determined on the people of Israel (Dan. 9: 24). The seventy weeks represent a time (according to some theologians, the years after the rebuilding of Jerusalem walls in 445 BC plus God’s period of silence, after the prophet Malachi – 400 years), until the death and ascension of Jesus Christ, having the six divine targets fulfilled with His death on the cross:

- 1) To make the transgression cease.
- 2) To put an end to sins.
- 3) To make atonement for iniquity.

- 4) To bring the everlasting justice.
- 5) To seal the vision and the prophecy (in Jesus the prophecies about the messianic restoration over Israel were finished).
- 6) To anoint the *Holy of Holies*.



In the image above (cf. Dan 9: 25) the angel separates the seven weeks (forty-nine years, which goes from the construction of Jerusalem to the beginning of the Intertestamental Period, and the other four hundred and thirty-four years, that is, sixty-two weeks, until the death and ascension of Jesus). The space with the zigzag line, in white, corresponds to the period between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, the church period, where there was the destruction of the temple by Titus in 70 AD. And the last week (seven years) at the end of the figure corresponds to the Great Tribulation and will complete the seventy weeks (four hundred and ninety years) described by the prophet in Dan. 9: 24. Therefore, this vision not only concerns the first coming of Christ, but also to His second coming.

In verse 26, there is a reference to Titus (79 a 81 AD), who would destroy the temple of Jerusalem again around 70 AD, in the government of Vespasian his father. The gospel of Christ was preached exclusively to the Jews until 33 AD, completing the sixty-nine weeks of Dan. 9: 24-26, when the first martyrs like James and Stephen appeared. After Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans (Titus), the time of God's covenant with the Jews was finished and the time of God's reign began for the Gentiles (Matt. 21: 43; Lk. 21: 24; Rom. 11: 25). Thus, the covenant with Israel will only be restored at the second coming of Christ, when through repentance, they begin to cry out for the name of Jesus (Lk. 13: 34-35, Matt. 23: 39, Acts 1: 6-7, Rom. 11: 26-37). "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Lk. 13: 34-35).

But verse 27 (Dan. 9: 27) is a clear reference to the eschatological Antichrist.

Daniel had another vision in chapter 10 [Dan. 10:1: “In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia,” that is, 536 BC, as king of Babylon as well]. Some theologians think of an earlier chronological date because of Dan. 9:1 [“In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, of the Medes, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans,” that is, 539 BC], because they say that there was a confusion on the part of the writer, placing Darius the Mede in the place of Darius II (the Persian), successor of Artaxerxes, and who reigned after Xerxes (Ahasuerus). But there was no confusion at all: in Dan. 9:1 it is about Darius the Mede, Cyrus’ maternal uncle, who was placed as governor of the province of Babylon, while he, Cyrus, governed the Persian empire in Pasargadae. What happens is that both the name “Darius” and “Ahasuerus” are given by Strong’s Concordance as being the title (rather than name) of a Persian king. ‘Darius’, Dārayavahuš (Strong #1867), comes from the Persian origin ‘Dareyavesh’; or ‘Dozenda dara’ [according to Evandro de Souza Lopes, ‘Os nomes bíblicos e seus significados, CPAD, 8ª ed. 2002’], and which in Hebrew means: owner, lord; in Greek: the powerful, rich. Other sources give its meaning as: ‘He who holds, the one who maintains.’ And ‘Ahasuerus’ (Achashverosh or Achshrush – Strong #325), in Hebrew means: prince, head, chief, lion; in Persian, Khshayarshan = king lion.

Here in Daniel 10, he has a vision, more or less ten days after the Jewish Passover, which makes us think of the revelation that he sought in relation to the end times described in Chapter 8, for the angel appears again, telling him about the difficulty he had to win over the Prince of Persia (a spiritual Ruler) assisted by Michael, the prince of war of the Lord, and that after this he would fight against the prince of Greece. The interpretation (Dan. 11 –

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/revelacaodanielcapitulo11.html>) is what we said above about the Macedonian dominion of Alexander the Great (v. 3) and the subsequent dominions of the Ptolemies and Seleucids – Dan. 11: 4-34:

[https://www.searaagape.com.br/periodointertestamentario\\_seleucidaseptolomeus.html](https://www.searaagape.com.br/periodointertestamentario_seleucidaseptolomeus.html)

In Dan. 11: 2, the fourth king refers to Xerxes (Ahasuerus).

Chapter 12 continues the theme, when the archangel Michael will rise up to separate the saints, which are inscribed in the *Lamb’s Book of Life*. Returning to the beginning of the chapter, the words of this book have been sealed by order of God to be fulfilled at the same time it gives us the impression that it is still a sealed book for us in many ways. Chapter 12 ends with a great promise of eternal life to Daniel: “But you, go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days.” In other words, Daniel will resurrect to the eternal life along with all the servants of God.

Although describing the whole book of this prophet and the apocalyptic content of his revelations, we’ll return now to our goal that is to draw from his life experience the important lessons for us, as servants and prophets of the Lord. We can have two great lessons with Daniel: *the revelation of the power and the superiority of God over other gods and His empowerment that is given to judge the difficult cases and to interpret dreams and visions*. Daniel can be compared in some aspects to Joseph, because he also had prophetic dreams and the ability to interpret them, which not only put him in a position of prominence and honor before the Gentiles, but also magnified greatly the name of YHWH before all peoples. However, Daniel came at a time of mankind that the Lord was doing a great work in the lives of His people, hence his visions and his prophetic experiences were stronger and more profound. Daniel was recognized as a true prophet of God. It is interesting to realize that his gift was used, multiplied and intensified in the course of his life, for was already prepared to receive it and use it correctly.

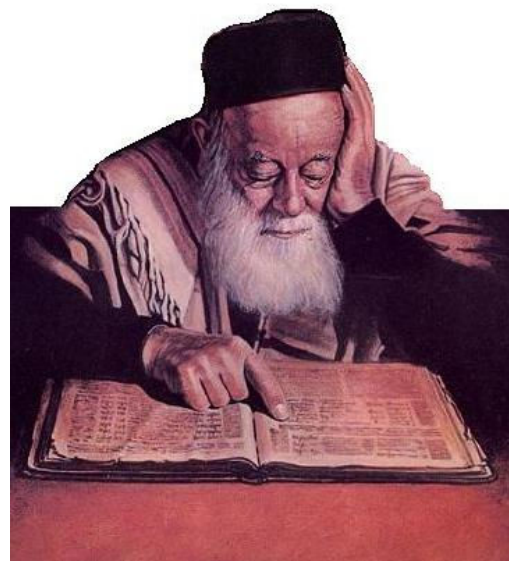
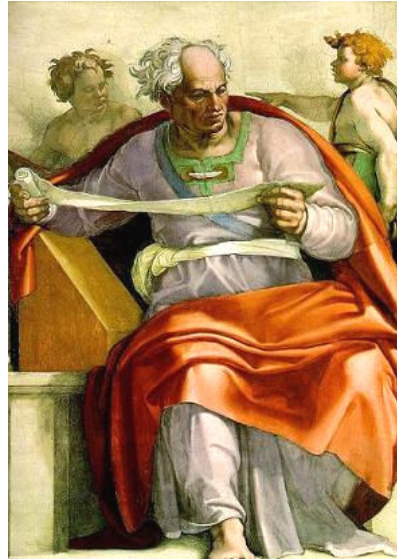
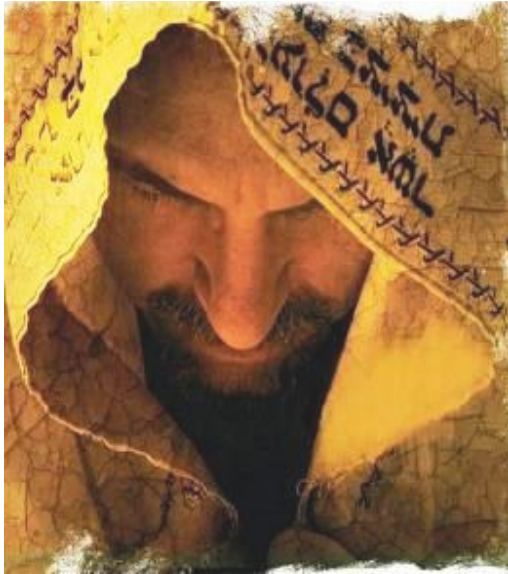
Thus, we the Lord's prophets, by releasing His word and His revelations, are bringing, in fact, the revelation of His own person to those who do not yet know Him. Although we have different manifestations of the spiritual gifts, for to none of us is given the same capacity nor the same way to see and understand God's truths, the Spirit asks us not to bury our talent; on the contrary, that we may put it in the presence of God to be multiplied and used for good and for the aggrandizement of His Body on earth. We can show through our struggles and challenges that our God is a true God, a God of constant deliverances, of solutions and endless revelations and is able to grant us powers to perform His work more fully among the peoples. In order to have spiritual gifts such as Daniel and other prophets, it is necessary that we approach the Lord more and more and that our faithfulness to Him remains intact. It doesn't mean that we ourselves have the ability or the human will to do this, but when our commitment with Him is sincere, His own Spirit keeps us on the path of holiness and perseverance until, like Daniel, we can reach the end of our journey in the eternity and have our names found in the *Book of Life* (Dan. 12: 1; Rev. 13: 8; Rev. 17: 8; Rev. 21: 27). Even if the fights seem to tire you, my brother, don't give up, persevere and remain faithful to Jesus and He will never deny you. On the contrary, He'll confirm your name before the Father and His angels. May the gift that He gave you be always under the dominion of the Holy Spirit and be perfected and sealed on you to never be stolen.

Reference:

- J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995.

“Righteous lips are the delight of a king, and he loves those who speak what is right.” (Prov.16: 13)





## Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah

**Never give up from exhorting people to the covenant and to the commitment with the Lord**

“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” (Hos. 6: 6)

## Hosea:

Hosea, the prophet of Israel, the northern kingdom, exercised his prophetic ministry from 755 to 715 BC, covering the exile of the Israelites in 722 BC. The book tells Hosea's love for Gomer, his unfaithful wife (Hos. 1: 1; Hos. 3: 5), which illustrates God's love for us even when we are unfaithful to Him. Jeroboam II (782-753 BC) was a wicked king whose reign produced a materialistic society, immoral and unjust. The six kings that followed in the next twenty-five years contributed to the fall of Israel in 722 BC. Hosea announces the corruption, the pride and idolatry of Israel (Hos. 4: 1; Hos. 8: 14). He describes the certainty of the trial (Hos. 9: 1; Hos. 10: 5), the triumph of love and mercy of God (Hos. 11: 1-11; Hos. 14: 1-9, the repentant people), and the infidelity and rebellion of Israel that will result in judgment and destruction (Hos. 11: 12, Hos. 13: 16). As mentioned above, his book shows his love for the nation and humanity as well as his love for his wife. His suffering became a mirror of God's suffering, expressed in the cry, "How can I give you up, Ephraim?" (Hos. 11: 8). Like all his brothers in the past, Hosea found peace in the Lord through his suffering, that is, in the mismatch with his wife he found God.

The time of his prophetic exercise was a period of political instability (more or less, seven kings held the power), when Israel vacillated between and Egypt and Assyria, less toward God (Hos. 5: 13; Hos. 7: 11; Hos. 12: 1). But the hesitation could never save the nation, which ended with the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. Hosea made it very clear what God asked the people (Hos. 6: 6: *Hesedh or Chesed*, mercy). In the past, the mercy of God had called Israel (Hos. 11: 1). At present, His mercy was the hope of Israel, which was without moral direction (Hos. 5: 4; Hos. 11: 7) and needed a sincere conversion. In the end, God's love for His people would be more successful than that of the prophet to Gomer. Both Amos and Hosea show the exile as something that awaited Israel in the future as punishment for his sin.

The names of Hosea's children: **1) Jezreel** [*Yizre'el*, Hos. 1: 4 means 'God sows', a contrast to the symbol of this name that would be the condemnation of Israel as for the royal household, for Jezreel was a city of Issachar where the army encamped before the battle of Gilboa; it was also the site of the tragedy of Naboth and his vineyard; there, Joram the king was slain by Jehu as prophesied by Elijah to exterminate the house of Ahab; therefore, Jezreel was a symbol of the judgment of God over the nation, besides being a harbinger of the Day of the Final Judgment: Hos. 1: 11]; **2) Not loved** (Hos. 1: 6, *Lo-Ruhamah* = 'Not loved' or 'God will not have mercy') and **3) Lo-Ammi** (Hos. 1: 9, 'not my people') show the displeasure of God with all His people to the point of rejecting them as His people (*Lo-Ammi*). Gomer was left alone by the prophet until she no longer clung to her idolatry and lust of the past. It was the same discipline that YHWH was using, abandoning those who didn't tolerate His conditions until they awakened to the spiritual reality. The lack of knowledge that Israel had of Him had caused all forms of iniquity. Hosea bought Gomer back from her owner, as a second wife or concubine (Hos. 3: 2-3).

## Joel:

The book of Joel was written at a time unknown. The period of his ministry is also questioned. It may have been when king Joash (835-796 BC) was still a child. Joel means 'YHWH is God.' He prophesies the descent of the Holy Spirit, and connects the work of God in the OT to the birth of the Church in the NT. The book shows the intense desire that God has to maintain intimacy with all His people. Joel urged them to turn to Him. He describes a plague of locusts (Jl. 1: 1-20) that attacked successively in groups of astounding dimensions and devoured the bark of fig trees, wheat fields, vineyards and orchards, extinguishing the materials for the sacrifices of the priests. In Jl. 1: 9; 13, the prophet says that the sacrifices were cut off from the House of the Lord, more specifically the grain offerings and the drink offerings. The grain offerings were made with the fine flour, that is, the flour of better quality and with olive oil. With a period of drought and famine, with bad harvests and the plague of locusts devouring fig trees, wheat fields, vineyards and orchards (apple trees, palm trees and pomegranates), it is understood why grain offerings were cut off from the temple. In Jl. 1: 18; 20 the bible says that the animals were also suffering because they had no pasture and because of the fire that took place during the drought (Jl. 1: 19). The plague is a symbol of divine wrath and His punishment against sin. The natural disasters mentioned in the first chapter are a figurative language in relation to the foreign enemies who would destroy Judah (Jl 2: 1-11). The invasion of the locusts turned the land into desolation.

The Jews should mourn in the day of God's wrath, that is, on the day of His judgment (Jl 1: 13-16). The prophet mentions 'The Day of the Lord' many times: Jl 1: 15; Jl 2: 1; Jl 2: 11; Jl 2: 31; Jl 3: 14, that is, the day on which He rises to execute His judgment. However, it is never too late for repentance, and a new call for the special worship in the temple is given, both for the priests and for the people (Jl 1: 13-16 cf. Jl 2: 12-17). God wants a sincere conversion to start to act. The devastation of the locusts will then be replaced by the abundance that the Lord will provide (Jl. 2: 18-27) through the outpouring of the Spirit (Jl. 2: 28-32), fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2: 17-21); and the manifestations of nature may have an apocalyptic meaning (Jl. 2: 30-32 cf. Rev. 6: 12-13). Thus, after repentance the restoration of the people will come. Joel also reports the judgments of God against the enemy nations (Jl. 3: 13 cf. Rev. 14: 14-20; Rev. 19: 15).

In Jl 3: 8 the Lord mentions the name of a people, the Sabeans (Shba'iy or Shba'), referring to the first progenitors of a district of Ethiopia. Shba'iy is a variation of the Hebrew word Cba'iy, or Cba' (Isa. 45: 14), referring to the descendants of Cush, the son of Ham, who established his nation (Seba or Sheba; in Hebrew, s<sup>e</sup>bha' or sh<sup>e</sup>bha'), which later came to be Ethiopia. Seba is related to Sheba, also son of Cush, that settled down to the south of Arabia. Seba (s<sup>e</sup>bha') and Sheba (sh<sup>e</sup>bha') are the forms (ancient Arabic and Hebrew) of the people of the kingdom of Sheba. The bible talks about 'selling the sons of Tyre and the Philistines to the Sabeans' (Jl 3: 4-8, with focus on verse 8) – Darius II and Artaxerxes II (404-358 BC), his son, and especially Alexander the Great, reduced the power of the Phoenicians and the Philistines. According to the historian Flavius Josephus, after the capture of Tyre and Gaza by the latter conqueror, thirty thousand Tyrians and multitudes of Philistines were sold as slaves. Thus, God speaks to the Jews (Jl 3: 8), in the same way, to sell these foreign slaves to the Sabeans.

Another interesting quotation is in Joel 3: 18 where the prophet speaks of a fountain of water that will come out of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim (or valley of acacias). Shittim (Num. 25: 1; Josh. 2: 1; Mic. 6: 5) was a place of idolatry and immorality, in front of Jericho in the plains of Moab, to the east of the Jordan River. This means that after sincere repentance, the people who were once

depraved will receive the life-giving water on the Day of the Lord (The first coming of Jesus). Acacia is a shrub that only grows in desert regions; therefore, this also means that even the wilderness, a place devoid of life, will be watered by the blessing (the water) from Jerusalem. Hence, Ezekiel (Ezek. 47: 1-12) describes the waters coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the Dead Sea and making the salt water fresh. Also in Zech. 14: 8 the waters flow from one side to the Mediterranean, on the other side to the Dead Sea, nearby Shittim, signifying the gospel sprouting like a source of uninterrupted water for the whole world, for conversion of Jews and Gentiles.

It is interesting to realize that both prophets (Hosea and Joel) mention the early and later rains (NIV: autumn and spring rains). Let's read the texts:

- Hos. 6: 1-3: "Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth."

By dying on the cross Jesus accomplished a great victory over darkness. But the victory went further, when after His death He stayed in the tomb for three days, as Jonah in the belly of the fish, he rose from that place and showed himself alive again, to save our soul from death for the rest of eternity. It is interesting to read in Hos. 6: 1-2 a reference to the cross: "Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him." We can compare this quotation with Lk. 24: 46 and 1 Cor. 15: 3-4 that confirm His resurrection. Here in Hosea we have an important revelation: the 'yesterday' in our lives, when we were in 'Egypt' (world) and did not know Jesus, was a moment when God struck us and torn us, so that we could approach Him and be redeemed and healed. "After two days he will revive us" speaks of 'today' (the second day) when we have Jesus and we are strengthened by His power and His grace that work in us. And 'the third day' refers to our future that is logically linked to our choice of today to walk with Him and serve Him, that is, to the resurrection and eternal life. So it is important to live everyday our 'today' in His presence, because this way our past will be only a testimony of victory, healing and deliverance; now there is no condemnation over our lives. The present is our moment of victory and resurrection of the problems of 'the yesterday', and our future will always be glorious because it was generated and shaped by our attitudes of our present time. We will live eternally with Him. According to Jewish interpretation up to the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the 1<sup>st</sup> day corresponded to the time of sin; the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, the day of God's forgiveness, and the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the time of the redemption of God's people.

After these verses from Hosea, the Lord tells us to continue in our knowledge of Him, for His coming is certain ('his appearing is as sure as the dawn'). This not only refers to His first coming when He would pour out the Holy Spirit on those who believed in Him ('showers'), but to His second coming ('the spring rains that water the earth').

In the bible, the terms 'early rain' and 'later rain' ('spring rains' written in this text) are used as a symbol of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and are related to the annual rainy season in Palestine. The early rain fell during autumn (October, early winter) in time to sow the land, thus ensuring the harvest of winter. It was the time of planting. This rain was necessary for the seed to germinate, for the seed to sprout. The later rain fell during the first weeks of spring (April, early summer) before harvest, and it was necessary to make the plantation ripen for harvest. In other words, it was the period of ripening and the harvest of the fruit. Symbolically, the early rain means the outpouring

of the Holy Spirit that happened at the beginning of the Early Church (Acts 2: 1-47). This manifestation of the Holy Spirit came to germinate the seed of the Gospel that was being sown. In other words: the early rain enabled the apostles to do God's prodigious work. The later rain represents the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to be manifested in the last days of human history and will prepare the ground for the harvest that Christ will accomplish in His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming (Hos. 6: 3; Hos. 10: 12; Jl. 2: 23):

- Hos. 6: 3: "Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth."

- Hos. 10: 12: "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground [NIV: unplowed ground]; for it is time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you." – cf. Jer. 4: 3: "For thus says the Lord to the people of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Break up your fallow ground [NIV: unplowed ground], and do not sow among thorns."

- Jl. 2: 23: "O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication [NIV: the autumn rains in righteousness], he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before [NIV: both autumn and spring rains, as before]."

So we need to receive the early rain that the Holy Spirit poured and wants to continue to bestow upon us, so that we may receive the later rain for the Rapture, that is, a special force to preach the gospel as the last chance of repentance given the man before the Divine Judgment. It is to separate definitely those who are destined for salvation.

As a summary of all this, we can say that we should let the Holy Spirit do the work in our souls as in a land that needs to be tilled and sown in order to bear fruit, even if we seem wounded by God. He Himself will heal our wounds, because it was necessary for our growth. In the second place, we must be open to His spiritual revival, seeking the gifts of the Holy Spirit and being instruments in His hands to continue the work that was started by Jesus.

## Amos:

Amos (*'carrier of burden'*; unlike 'Amoz', *'āmôç*, which means *'strong, firm'*), lived (Am. 1: 1) during the reigns of Uzziah king of Judah (781-740 BC) and Jeroboam II king of Samaria (782-753 BC). Probably Amos acted in the midway between the parallel reigns of these two kings, between 760 and 750 BC, before the exile of Israel in 722 BC. Born in Tekoa, to the south of Jerusalem (Am. 1: 1), he was a herdsman of Judah, besides a "gatherer of sycamore-fig trees" [NRSV, dresser of sycamore trees] (Am. 7: 14-15), which meant that he did not belong to the class of which the prophets usually originated, or was trained to the prophetic office in the houses of the prophets. He was a prophet without known credentials, except by the fact that he had a word from God.

Amos talks about God's displeasure against the exploitation of the poor and defenseless (Am. 2: 6-7), and criticizes materialism and the low moral level of Israel, who had absorbed these characteristics from its pagan neighbors (Am. 2: 8-16). Justice leant towards those who could pay higher bribes. Although the people complied with the religious rituals, they remained internally in the wickedness and immorality, trying to mask the injustice of their daily lives, and God rejected these rituals (Am 4: 4-5; Am 5: 21-27). Amos proclaims God's trial against the surrounding peoples, against Judah

and Samaria by their sins against the moral laws that underpin society (Am. 6: 1-14) and also talks about the Day of the Lord, when Assyria would be His rod to strike Israel (Am. 9: 1-10). The visions he had are symbols of God's Judgment (locusts: Am. 7: 1-7; fire: Am. 7: 4-6; plumb line: Am. 7: 7-9; a basket of ripe fruit: Am. 8: 1-14). The central message of his prophecy é the divine sovereignty over all things: nature, nations, human beings. Amos also considered justice the most important moral attribute of the Lord's nature over injustice, immorality and dishonesty. The book ends with a prophecy about the future conversion of the Gentiles (Am. 9: 11-12 cf. Acts 15: 16-18) – in Am. 9: 11-12 it's written, "On that day I will raise up the booth of David (\*) [NIV, 'David's fallen tent'] that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says the Lord who does this"... cf. Acts 15: 14-18: "... Simon [Peter] has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written, 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago.'"

(\*) Raising David's fallen tent ('to raise up the booth of David that is fallen') is a prophetic reference about the spiritual reign of Jesus, where Israel and Judah would be together and could live free before the Lord, worshiping Him without unnecessary and empty rituals, and a reign in which the Gentiles could also have the right to participate, for Jesus would be the shepherd of all. 'David's fallen tent' meant the humiliation of the House of David, with no reliable ruler in order that God might keep His promise of a Davidic descendant on the throne. And this had happened because of Israel's idolatry and rebellion, which defiled the house of Judah, provoking likewise the wrath of God upon it. However, Jesus came to bring a spiritual kingdom for all who accepted Him as Lord and Savior. We the Gentiles are the spiritual Israel of God. What in the past (OT) was physical (material), now is spiritual (Eph. 6: 12; 2 Cor. 10: 3-6).

There is an interesting reference in Am. 8: 11-13 about the 'thirst for the word of God' in the end days, which makes us think not only in the probable apocalyptic content of the prophecy, but also about the Intertestamental Period, when the people lived through a long period of silence from God, who no longer spoke through the mouth of His prophets. This passage is also regarded by scholars as the moment of captivity in Assyria or the rejection from the Jews to Christ, which caused His word and His grace to be taken from them and passed to the Gentiles.

### Obadiah:

Obadiah (*'Obhadhyāhii* or *'Obhadhyā* = 'servant of YHWH' or 'worshiper of YHWH') comes from the same Hebrew root of *Obed* ('who worships YHWH'), and probably prophesied between 605 and 583 BC (during the exile of Israel) and was a prophet of Judah. In fact, there is very little consistent information about Obadiah. He talks about the strife between Israel and Edom (a distant relative of Israel through Esau) because when Judah was invaded and conquered by Babylon, Edom not only didn't help Judah but also helped the enemy to plunder the southern kingdom, handing the Israelites over in Babylonian's hands. God condemned the Edomites by arrogance and treason, therefore, they would be judged by their inhumanity to Israel (Obad. 10-11).

Besides the trial of Edom, Obadiah preaches the universal trial and the restoration of the chosen nation.

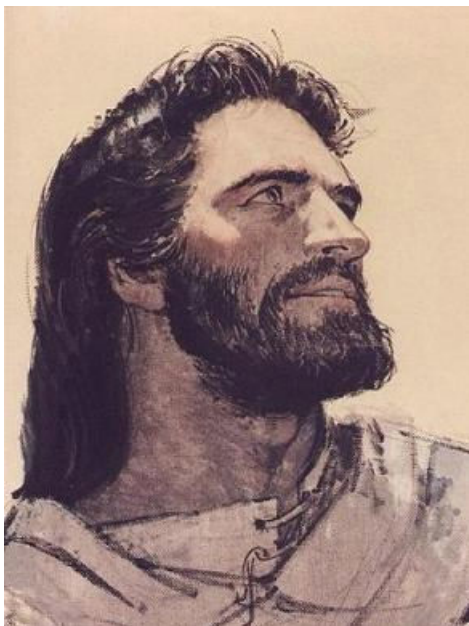
Observing the prophetic profile of these four men of God, we can draw the conclusion that they all proclaimed the wickedness of their people and once again urged them to the covenant and commitment to the Lord, reinforcing in them the idea of the inevitable divine judgment over all kind of sin. Even having lived long after other brethren who brought the same message of YHWH to Israel, and which was rejected and disobeyed, these prophets obeyed the voice of the Most High to exhort His people again; they didn't give up to cry out, they continued to prophesy the word of justice, judgment, mercy and restoration, as a way of saying that the Creator always gives us a new chance to reassess our lives, to rethink about our attitudes and to exercise our free will, choosing between salvation and punishment. Hence, the prophet of God *should not give up of exhorting*, despite having proclaimed the same message before, until He performs what He promised. He should also call his brothers to the covenant and communion with their Creator, assuming the perfect commitment to be His instrument on earth. It is often the life example of the Prophet the best way to witness that what he preaches is real and true and thus be able to reveal his God to the world.

Reference:

- J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995.

“For my mouth will utter truth;  
wickedness is an abomination to my  
lips.” (Prov. 8: 7)





## Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

**The zeal of the Lord for His people and His Holiness**

“Do not my words do good to one who walks uprightly?” (Mic. 2: 7b)

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6: 8)

“The Lord is good, a stronghold in a day of trouble; he protects those who take refuge in him.” (Nah. 1: 7)

## Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

## Micah:

Micah (*Mikhâ*, abbreviated form for *Mikhâyehii*, ‘who is like YHWH?’) prophesied around 742 to 687 BC, during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He was born in Moresheth (Mic. 1: 1), referring to Moresheth-Gath in the lowlands of Judah. He was younger contemporary of Isaiah. He wrote to the inhabitants of Judah to warn them that the divine judgment was imminent for having rejected God and His law (condemnation against the princes and prophets – Mic. 3: 1-12). There would be the punishment of Israel and its restoration, the glory and peace would come over Jerusalem, there would be the suffering and the restoration of Zion, the corruption of society (Mic. 7: 1-6) and the final statement of confidence in God (Mic. 7: 7). His vigorous style and the consistent revelation of the divine judgment go along with compassion and hope of God. He prophesied against Jerusalem (Mic. 4: 10) and, like Amos and Isaiah, he stood up against the exploitation of poor peasants and farmers on the part of the land owners (Mic. 2: 1-5). He emphasized the essential rightness and morality of the divine nature. Like Amos, Hosea and Isaiah, Micah thought that God would use a pagan nation to punish His own guilty people. He foretold clearly the depredations made by Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) in the northern kingdom, as well the final destruction of Samaria and Judah (later) because of idolatry and social corruption. He also waited for the Messiah who would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 2: 13; Mic. 5: 2-5) and would bring restoration to the nation. He stressed that the saving grace of God could not be obtained by merit (Mic. 6: 6-8) in the form of pretentious offerings of sacrifices and formalities, but by humility, mercy and justice as a daily experience in someone’s life.

## Nahum:

Nahum means ‘consolation’, ‘comfort.’ Prophetic Period: 663-612 BC. Nahum reminds us that God holds the control of History and will not allow evil to prevail forever (Nah. 1: 1-3). He was born in Elkosh (Judah). The capture of Thebes (No-Ammon, Nah. 3: 8-10) had already occurred (661 BC) under Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), king of Assyria, after three years of siege. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell in 612 BC, when was conquered by Babylon and Media, more or less, one hundred and fifty years after Jonah deliver God’s message to it. Nahum describes the trial to come by the zeal of God, which consists in to carry on His aims both to make His own kingdom prevail and to punish His adversaries. Nahum also describes the enemy that will put siege to Nineveh (Nah. 3: 1-19), the Medes, who came from the plains of Persia and turned their attention against the Assyrians in the plain of Mesopotamia. Nineveh, a large commercial city (Nah. 3: 16) of Assyria and its last capital, would be plundered. Its wickedness would be punished. It was bloodthirsty and cruel, full of lies and robbery (Nah. 3: 1), a warlike city and had killed many nations through its prostitution and sorcery (Nah. 3: 4). The Hebrew word for Nineveh (*nînēweh* or *Nīnewē* – נִינְוָה), in Greek, *nineue* (Νινευη), in Latin, *Nineve*; in Arabic: *Nānuwa*, an ‘exceedingly large city’, is a translation of the Assyrian, *ninua*, in Old Babylonian, *ninuwa*, which in turn is transliteration of the even more ancient Sumerian name, *Nina*, the name of the goddess *Ishtar*, goddess of fertility, love and war, the protective deity of that city and whose

name was written with a sign representing a fish in a womb. Nina was the ancient Assyrian name of the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 44: 17; 18; 19; 25), therefore, place of great abomination and idolatry, witchcraft and prostitution.

### Habakkuk:

Habakkuk, a prophet of Judah, prophesied more or less between 610 and 597 BC during the reign of king Jehoiakim (609-598 BC). He speaks to God as an intercessor of the people, asking Him to put an end in the corruption of Judah (Hab. 1: 1-4). He cries out to God because of the iniquity he sees around him and asks how long it would continue without being punished. God replies that He is preparing the Chaldeans, and describes the ferocity of their armies and their contempt for all who dared to bar their way (Hab. 1: 5-11). The prophet expects that God solves his internal conflict regarding his thoughts: how a Holy God would also allow such atrocities by the Chaldeans? (Hab. 1: 12-17). Then he listens (*'watch post'*) and the response comes, confirming that the pride of the Chaldeans will destroy them, and the faithfulness of the righteous will be his salvation (Habakkuk 2: 1-5). His name is linked to the Hebrew root that means *'embrace'* (*h-b-k*) or the name of the Assyrian plant *'hambakuku.'* The Greek form is *Hambakoum*. Actually, little information is found about the prophet. In the last chapter, his prayer is in the form of song, not only describing the judgment of God over His people and over His enemies, but also affirming their faith in Him until all His will be done.

Verse 2 of the prayer of Habakkuk (Hab. 3: 1-19) has been widely used by many servants of God as an inspiration to beseech Him for revival, but we can also see that this prayer shows us the majesty and power of the Lord, judging our causes and responding to the enemy with the same violence he used against us. God will always save His anointed ones, even if He has made use of discipline with them because of their transgressions. Just as the prophet Habakkuk standing in awe and feeling helpless before what he could not change (Hab. 3: 2), seeing and predicting the destruction and desolation, we can also hold fast to our faith in the Lord, being sure that every trial will be overcome, and in the end of all things He will do justice and will bring us honor, because He Himself helped us to stand firm in His promise and in His word (Hab. 3: 17-19), and led us to overcome the obstacles, putting us in a higher level of understanding (*'he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights'*).

### Zephaniah:

Zephaniah (*'YHWH hid'*) prophesied during the reign of king Josiah of Judah, in 640 to 609 BC, but before the destruction of Nineveh in 612 BC. After the death of Hezekiah the Jewish religion deteriorated, being revived the idolatrous worship by his son Manasseh. Probably, Zephaniah was born during the period of the atrocities committed by this latter king, who, in accordance with the tradition, sawed in half the prophet Isaiah (Heb. 11: 37). Zephaniah was related to Josiah, the great-grandson of Hezekiah (Zeph. 1: 1 – son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah; this one was another son of Hezekiah and brother of Manasseh). Josiah ascended the throne at the age of eight years (640 BC) and was much influenced by Hilkiah the high priest of the time, who advised the king and leading him to piety. Josiah, at eighteen years old, ordered the renovation of the temple; during the religious reformation, the Book of the

Law was found and changed the life of the nation. Zephaniah wrote to the people of Judah, warning them of God's judgment for their sins and ensuring that the divine trial would open the way for a new society, in which justice would prevail and all mankind would worship the Lord (Zeph. 3: 1-20). After the purification of the people, there would be only a humble remnant that would trust in the Lord, because the accusations against them would be removed by Him (Zeph. 3: 12). He talks about "the remnant of Baal" in Jerusalem (Zeph. 1: 4 cf. Hos. 2: 16-17), as well as other idolatrous customs that were abandoned (Zeph. 1: 5; 2 Kin. 23: 4-20; 24; 2 Chr. 34: 1-7) after the discovery of the Book of the Law (2 Kin. 22: 8-10; 2 Kin. 23: 21; 2 Chr. 34: 14-18). Among these customs was that of to worship the stars or angelic beings ("the host of the heavens" – NRSV – or "starry host" – NIV) and the worship of Molech or Milcom, god of the Ammonites (Zeph. 1: 5). Zephaniah is concerned with the Day of the Lord, through the judgment of all things; the judgment of foreign nations (Philistia, Moab and Ammon, Egypt and Assyria), as well as Judah and Jerusalem. With the judgment of God, Zephaniah wanted to illustrate that He had to make His people go through the flames of affliction, in order to prepare them to be a blessing that would extend to all humanity.

Therefore, by speaking of these four prophets we are speaking of *the zeal of the Lord for His people* despite their sin, also punishing those who make fun of their suffering and of *His zeal for His own holiness*, for when His chosen commit atrocities and iniquities, His holy name is ashamed and blasphemed. What He asks of us is the humility and the true worship. This way, the prophet must be an instrument of *zeal of the Lord* where there is sin, irreverence, abomination, lack of fear and lack of knowledge of the true God. The prophet must not let the world influence him or the things of the flesh and evil seduce him and divert him from the truth, for all this leaves a stain in our spirit and hurts the Holy Spirit who is in us. We should know that the love and mercy of the Lord will always be available to all those who sincerely repent of their error, and that His restoration is complete, removing of us all charges of the enemy. It is He who justifies us before those who humiliated us and lifts us before those who wished to see us fall. When we are at the center of His will, His protection and His righteousness are on us. We must intercede like Habakkuk for those who are in error, but not to carry the burden for their sins, their rebellion and their idolatry. When the sinner rejects the correction through the mouth of the intercessor and the prophet, it's time to stop praying and let God's sovereign purpose take action to discipline, to convince of error, of sin, of righteousness and judgment, and thus vindicate His own holiness.

#### Reference:

- J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995.

"And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one." (Ezek. 22: 30)

"But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (Hab. 2: 14)





## Haggai

**Strength to  
rebuild**



## Zechariah

**Salvation comes  
from the Messiah**



## Malachi

**To teach the holy  
priesthood**

“Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord’s message, saying, I am with you, says the Lord.” (Hag. 1: 13)

“For thus said the Lord of hosts (after his glory sent me) regarding the nations that plundered you: Truly, one who touches you touches the apple of my eye.” (Zech. 2: 8)

“For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.” (Mal. 2: 7)

## Haggai:

Haggai prophesied in 520 BC (Hag. 1: 1 – Hag. 2: 10 in 112 days). His name means *'joy, feast.'* Although the Jews had started the rebuilding of the temple sixteen years before this prophecy (around 536 BC), the opposition of their neighbors managed to intimidate them and cause them to abandon the work of reconstruction. Haggai encourages the people to rebuild, in the second year of Darius I, that is, in 520 BC (Hag. 1: 1; Ezra 4: 24; Ezra 5: 1-2). Haggai and Zechariah are the first prophets described after the return of the first exiles in 538 BC. The order of reconstruction had already been given by Cyrus in 539 BC when the Persian Empire began. The temple began to be built in 536 BC, however, stopped for sixteen years, and that was why Haggai cried. Its conclusion was in 516 BC (Ezra 6: 15 cf. Hag. 2: 18 – its beginning). According to History, the second return of the exiles to Jerusalem (under the command of Ezra) was in 458 BC; and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in 445 BC (3<sup>rd</sup> return: Nehemiah). Haggai witnessed the growing apathy during that period and, in reaching the appropriate age, the Spirit of God worked on him with the gift of prophecy. There are four prophecies in Haggai:

- 1: 1-11, sixth month, the first day. It is addressed to Zerubbabel and Joshua, leaders of the people, talking about the *negligence* of the past sixteen years, during which the people should come rebuilding the temple (Ezra 3 and 4). On the contrary, they had preferred to build houses for themselves, experiencing natural disasters that destroyed the crops and kept the people in poverty. Thus, God reminded them to put Him first in their lives. In twenty-four days the people reacted to the prophecy.

- 2: 1-9, seventh month, the twenty-first day. *Words of encouragement* to those who felt that the new temple was poor compared with the old. The glory of the present house would be greater than the former. "*The treasure of all nations*" [NRSV] described in verse 7 refers to the contributions of the Gentiles, that would help to adorn the temple (Herod, for example, who rebuilt it, but probably at the expense of taxes on Jews and Gentiles, subjects of Rome). The Gentiles began to be attracted to Judaism and were allowed to occupy its outer court, when they came to worship and bring their offerings. The prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus (Eph. 2: 17-22).

- 2: 10-19, the ninth month, the twenty-fourth day. The ruins of the temple were filthy *and defiled the nation and the things they touched*. Hence, putting the new foundation would make all the difference and from that point forward the work of the people would be blessed (Ezra 3: 10). In 536 BC the inauguration ceremony took place. We can extrapolate our thinking saying that the impure things from the world mustn't be offered to God (Hag. 2: 14). Not even the priest can make them holy. God can purify the sinner through the blood of Jesus, but He doesn't sanctify the mundane impurity (sin).

- 2: 20-23, the ninth month, the twenty-fourth day. Special promise to Zerubbabel governor of Judah; he would be kept secure, in spite of the disturbances that devastated the Persian Empire.

## Zechariah:



God remembers' or 'Jah has remembered.' Like Haggai, Zechariah also prophesied from 520 to 480 BC, during the reign of Darius I. He was a prophet and priest, born in exile. When he was a young man he returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. He motivated the people to restore the temple and made predictions about the Messiah (Zech. 3: 8-10; Zech. 9: 9; Zech. 10: 4). Mentioned along with Haggai in Ezra 5: 1; Ezra 6: 14, he was an enthusiast in favor of the reconstruction of the temple in 520 BC. From 536 to 520 AC reconstruction was neglected. Zechariah was young when he began to prophesy (Zech. 2: 4). The second part of the book refers to his prophecies in the period when he was already old. The first vision refers to the angelic horsemen, who are told that God will restore Jerusalem. The second is about the four horns and four craftsmen. The third vision, the Jerusalem rebuilt will be like a city without walls, for the Lord will bring many people there; it will be homeland both to Jews and Gentiles (Zech. 2: 1-13). The fourth vision: Joshua the high priest, accused by Satan, is vindicated by God, receiving access to His presence and appears as a symbol of the Messiah, the Branch (Zech. 3: 1-10). The fifth is the lampstand of seven shafts, fed by two rods with olive oil from two olive trees, which can be an encouragement to Zerubbabel and Joshua (Zech. 4: 1-14) or they can refer to the two witnesses put in Rev. 11: 4 (apocalyptic content in the prophecy of Zechariah). In Zech. 4: 14 it is written: "Then he (*the angel who spoke to the prophet*) said, 'These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.'" In NIV it's written in Zech. 4: 14: "So he said, 'these are the two are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.'" In the original in Hebrew, it is written: "the two who bring oil and serve." The sixth is a huge flying scroll that takes God's words condemning sin (Zech. 5: 1-4). The seventh is a woman in an ephah, symbolizing sin, and that is removed to the filthy land of Babylon, the place of exile (Zech. 5: 5-11). The eighth shows four chariots that go throughout the earth as executors of God (Zech. 6: 1-8). Joshua is crowned as a symbol of the Messiah, the Branch, who builds the temple and governs as king and priest (Zech. 6: 9-15). In some of them, we can see a clear reference to the Messiah and in others we can only presume the content of the apocalyptic visions (for instance, Zech. 14: 1-15). Zechariah also speaks of fasting that does not please God (Zech. 7: 1-7 cf. Isa. 58: 1-14).

In Zech. 7: 3-5 it's written: "... and to ask the priests of the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets, 'Should I mourn and practice abstinence in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?' Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me: Say to all the people of the land and the priests: 'When you fasted and lamented in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted?'"

In Zech. 8: 9 we can see four months of fasting observed by the Jews and instituted post-exile, which marked the disasters of Jewish history. The bible says: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace."

Let's explain what situation God was referring to:

Four month (2 Kin. 25: 3 – the city of Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians)

Fifth month (2 Kin. 25: 8 – the temple was burned)

Seventh month (Jer. 41: 1 – Gedaliah was killed). Gedaliah (Jer. 40: 5), son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, was whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the towns of Judah. This fasting is not to be confused with the fasting of Atonement (Ex. 30: 10; Lev. 16: 29-34; Lev. 23: 26-32), 'Yom Kippur'.

Tenth month (2 Kin. 25: 1; Ezek. 24: 1 – when Babylonian army besieged the city of Jerusalem).

The other prophecies of the end period of Zechariah bring the messianic nature with His salvation for the people truly repentant (In regard to the ancient Jews, we have here the impression that the first enthusiasm had given way to coldness, formality, to a weak leadership and the fear of the attack from Greece).

#### Malachi:

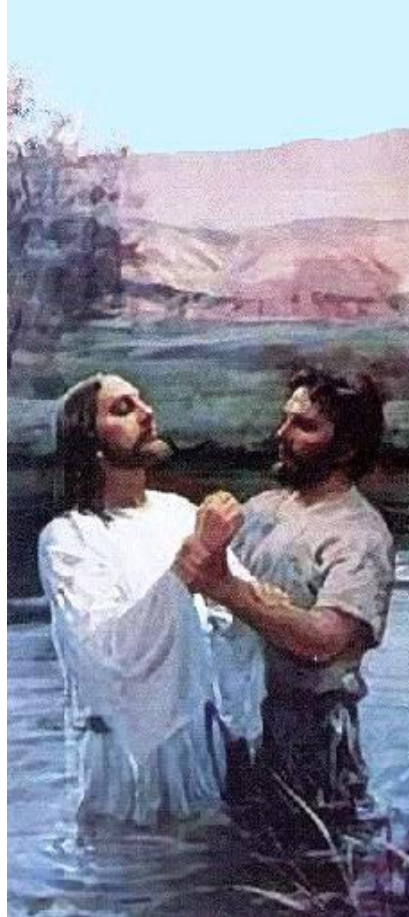
Malachi prophesied around 450-400 BC, after Israel returned from Babylonian captivity, after the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem (516 BC). He attacks the self-indulgence and the indifference among the people. He helps to reassess the relationship with God. His name means "*My messenger*." The law had been almost forgotten, both by the priests who offered defective animals, and the people who married women of foreign religion. There was no more zeal for the things of the Lord, neglecting the tithes. Through him, the Lord makes clear the duty of the priest. His book can be divided into two parts: 1) the sin of Israel and the judgment that would come to the wicked; and 2) the bliss that will come upon those who repent (here we can see also references concerning the Messiah and as for John the Baptist: Mal. 3: 1-5; Mal. 4: 2; Mal. 4: 5-6). From his death, Israel entered the "God's period of silence", predicted by Am. 8: 11-13, where the nation was handed over to pagan kings because of their negligence with the sacred things until they repented and were prepared to receive salvation through the Messiah. The coming of Jesus would be terrible for the wicked, but would bring comfort and joy to the pious (Mal. 4: 1).

What we see in the lives of these three last prophets of God is *the strength of the prophetic word that helps us to rebuild* what was destroyed in our lives, in addition to what He reminds us of what "*holy priesthood*" is, of what we need to do to please Him as our Lord. He doesn't wish to see us apathetic in relation to our calling or to His work because it could discourage all His Church. Each of us has the responsibility to persevere in our own way and look after the spiritual gifts given to us so that we can be a channel of His blessings to other lives. Therefore, through our living testimony, we'll be prophesying and bringing the salvation of the Messiah to all who are in darkness. In our mouth, His words are alive, and also bricks to help our neighbors rebuild their 'temples.' Therefore, as prophets, we must obey the voice of the Spirit of God in everything, both to exhort, to rebuke, to convince of error and to eliminate sin, and to bring comfort and encouragement to those to whom the Lord brings to us. Even condemning evil and bringing to light the errors of the flesh, we are contributing to the 'edification of walls and the repair of breaches' (cf. Isa. 58: 12).

#### Reference:

- J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995.

"Hear, for I will speak noble things,  
and from my lips will come what is  
right." (Prov. 8: 6)



## John the Baptist

To be a watchman and proclaim repentance,  
preparing the way for the Lord

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Lk. 1: 76-79)

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matt. 3: 2)

## John the Baptist

John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin and he was considered by Jesus Himself as the last and greatest member of the prophetic succession, besides being compared by the Lord with Elijah:

- Lk. 16: 16: "The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force."

- Matt. 11: 10-14: "This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you'. Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and the violent take it by force (NIV, "the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it"). For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come."

Jesus said that among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, for he came at the dawn of the Gospel and had a greater privilege than all the prophets of the OT, which was to see the presence of the Messiah but he didn't see Jesus' resurrection nor made the miracles in His name as the apostles did.

- Matt. 17: 12-13: "but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist."

In fact, in Mal. 3: 1 and Mal. 4: 5-6 it had already been prophesied about John, who would come to prepare the way for the Messiah of Israel: "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts... See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse."

John (*Yôhānān*, means *YHWH is gracious*) was announced to his father Zechariah, who was a priest of the division of Abijah, in the temple of Jerusalem when he was offering the evening sacrifice. The angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that God had heard his prayers and would give him a son and his name would be John and he would be a prophet, preparing the people to receive Lord's redemption through the awaited Messiah. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were already old and had waited for a child all their lives, but only now they would be parents. The shock and disbelief invaded the priest's heart because he didn't believe that he could be a father with advanced age, besides that Elizabeth, his wife, was barren. By the angel's words, Zechariah got dumb, until John was born and was circumcised. He sang a song to the Lord, not only exalting His power, but also prophesying about his own son (Lk. 1: 5-25; 57-80). John was Jesus' cousin, for his mother, Elizabeth, was cousin of Mary, mother of Jesus.

The Bible records that John the Baptist ate locusts and wild honey (Greek: ἀκρίδες καὶ μέλι ἄγριον, romanized: akrides kai meli agrion) while living in the wilderness (Matt. 3: 4; Mk. 1: 8). The Greek word ἀκρίδες (akrides) is the plural of ἀκρίς (akris), locust (Strong #G200). Some attempts have been made to explain the Greek word as

‘carob’, which would therefore be a vegetarian food, but the clear meaning of the Greek word ‘akrides’ is ‘locusts’, which corresponds to the Hebrew arbeh (אַרְבֵּה, from rabah – Strong #697), grasshopper, locust (Ex. 10: 4; Jl. 1: 4). Carob is a tree of the legume family, whose fruit is a pod of sweet pulp, commonly used to treat intestinal infections in infants, and whose red and hard wood is used in carpentry.

According to the bible, John grew up in the desert, far from civilization, following the rules established for the Nazirites (consecrated to the Lord), because he was dedicated to the Lord for all his life. He lived in the desert until the Holy Spirit began to use him as a prophet, preaching repentance among the people and preparing their hearts to receive the Word through Jesus. His sermons were harsh and the words, very strong, which caused clash among the scholars as the Pharisees and scribes. John brought certain confusion to them, for they thought that he was the announced Messiah; but he testified that he was only his forerunner (Matt. 3: 2-12; Lk. 3: 15-17). Through him, the people were baptized in the baptism of repentance and prepared to receive the truths of God’s kingdom through Jesus, who was baptized by His cousin in the River Jordan (Lk. 3: 21-22). John the Baptist baptized at first, probably in Bethany (other Bethany than the Bethany of Lazarus) in the region of Perea, ruled by Herod (Jn. 1: 28; Jn. 10: 40) or in Aenon (ainōn, from Arabic ‘ain = fountains), near Salim, on the western side of the Jordan River, about eight miles to the south of Scythopolis in the region of Decapolis – Jn. 3: 23.

John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod Antipas, by being rebuked by the prophet about his impure relationship with his sister-in-law, and from there on, Jesus began His ministry, at first heading for the north of Israel where He settled in Capernaum, a city at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In prison, John heard about the deeds of Jesus and sent disciples to confirm to be He Himself the prophesied Messiah. They returned with a response that testified of His miracles among the people, which made it clear to His cousin who He was (Matt. 11: 2-6).

John the Baptist was killed at the hands of Herod. His head was delivered on a tray in the hands of the king at the request of the daughter of Herodias, his sister-in-law, with whom he lived the relationship condemned by the prophet (Matt. 14: 1-12; Mk. 6: 14-19).

According to Christian tradition, the birth of John the Baptist occurred in the village of Ain Karem (Hebrew, Ein Kerem or Ain Karem = ‘Spring of the Vineyard’ in Arabic: ‘Ein Kārem or ‘Ayn Karim = ‘Generous spring’), southwest of Jerusalem. According to the bible, Mary went to Elizabeth and Zechariah in a city in the hill country of Judah (Lk. 1: 39-40). The distance between Jerusalem and Ein Karem was five miles (a measure calculated by Emperor Theodosius in 530 AD). Today, two churches with the same name (Church of St. John the Baptist) occupy this place. One of them is a Catholic church built in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the remnants of previous Byzantine churches and of the Crusaders. In this church we can see remains of an old mosaic floor and a cave where, according to Christian tradition, John the Baptist was born. It was converted into a stable by the Muslims for more than four centuries, until the Franciscans, at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1674) managed to take possession of the place. Next to it there is a monastery. The other church is an Eastern Orthodox Church built in 1894, also on the remains of an ancient church. A modern church, the Church of the Visitation, was built in 1955 by an Italian architect, also on remains of an ancient church built against a rocky slope, southwest of the Church of St. John the Baptist. It may be a second location of John the Baptist’s birth (according to some apocryphal books). It was built to honor Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, and according to Catholic tradition, it was there that Mary made her song of praise to God.

In Nehemiah (Neh. 3: 14) and Jeremiah (Jer. 6: 1) the town is called Beth-haccherem or Bethhaccerem or Beth Hakkerem ('House of the vineyard'). The name Ein Kerem or Ain Karem seems to have been recorded only after the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem in AD 637 by the Orthodox Rashidun Caliphate ('Well-Guided Caliphate') in the person of Sultan Omar or Umar (579-644; reign: 634–644), although some earlier accounts mention a village called 'Enqarim' as the site of the dwelling of Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah.

As a man of God, John preached repentance among the people, repeating what for centuries was done by the mouth of his brothers, the prophets. More than anything, his preaching was decisive so that Israel was handed over to the very Son of God who would make a new covenant with men, once for all, never to be broken. His sowing was not in vain. Thus, we as prophets should be like John the Baptist for some who live in error for long and need to take a definitive position in their lives, letting come the redemption through Jesus. Our mouth must proclaim the truth, whether men hear or not. Thus, the hearts that are already broken will be able to receive the salvation through our preaching; they will receive words of comfort and encouragement. Those who are still hardened and resistant to His truth and will, will receive strong words of exhortation that will place before them the decision to choose their own way: salvation or perdition. It was Jesus Himself who said, "I know whom I have chosen" (Jn. 13: 18). And Paul says, "So then, each of us will be accountable to God" (Rom. 14: 12).

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" (Matt. 3: 3b)