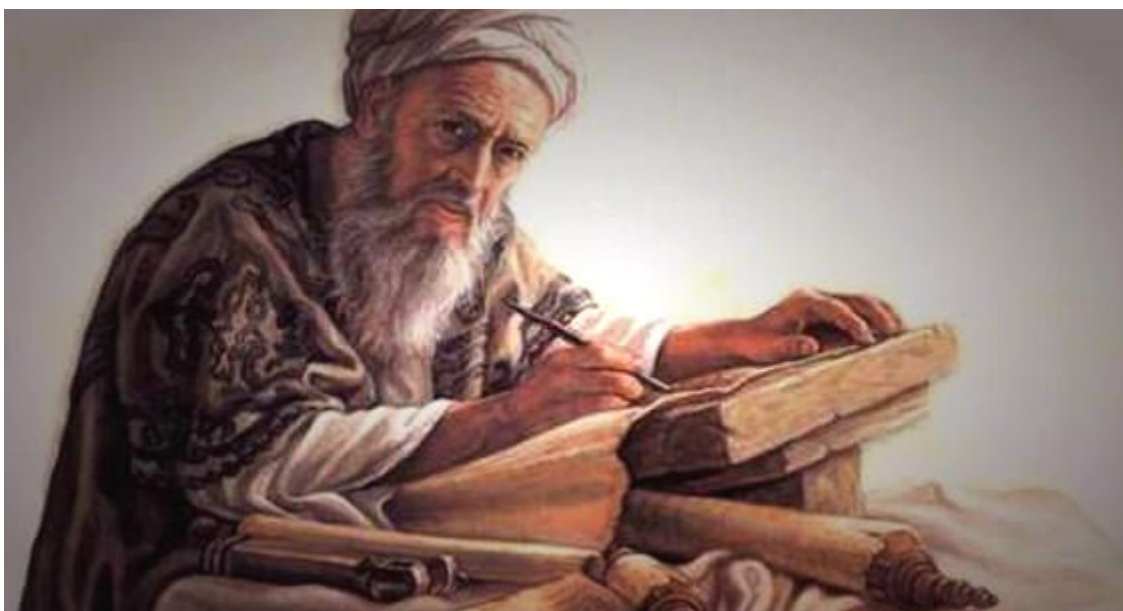


The book of prophet Isaiah – volume 1

(Explanation on the prophecies – 1 to 39)



Pastor Tânia Cristina Giachetti
Ministério Seara ágape

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Estudo Bíblico Evangélico

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This book is dedicated to all the children of God who seek the knowledge of His will and believe in the immutability of His word, in His goodness to us, and in His power to liberate our lives.

I thank the Holy Spirit, a God always present and a faithful companion, who teaches me every day how to overcome His challenges by faith and makes me know a little more about Jesus, the Lord and King of all things, whose faithful and unchanging word is capable to transform all situations, in order to fully accomplish the project of the Father for our lives.

“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this” (Isa. 9: 6-7).

Introduction

This is the first volume of ‘The Book of Prophet Isaiah’, addressing chapters from 1 to 39. We can divide the book of Isaiah into three parts: from chapter 1 to 39; from chapter 40 to 55, and from chapter 56 to 66. The first part of Isaiah’s prophecy conveys messages of punishment and judgment for the sins of Israel, Judah and the surrounding nations, and deals with some events that occurred during the reign of Ahaz and Hezekiah. From chapter 40 to chapter 55 the prophet speaks to the people who are in exile in Babylon, giving them the hope of liberation, as well as prophesying about the Messiah and His saving mission in the person of the ‘Servant’ of the Lord. From 56th chapter the prophecy is not only addressed to the returning exiles, but seems to be addressed again to the people who are still in Israel practicing idolatry and sin of rebellion, at the same time speaking more intensely about the Messianic kingdom to come.

This book initially arose as a curiosity on my part concerning the prophets of the Old Testament, not the same way I wrote some years ago, but with the thirst to know more deeply what they meant in each verse. I sought to know how to situate prophecy in History, what characters they were referring to, the location of the cities there, and the figures of speech used at that time to give me more insight about the writings of the prophets.

As for the spiritual interpretation for us today, as a message from God for our day to day, we know that the bible is applicable to all ages and situations of mankind and the Holy Spirit gives us personal revelation every time we read His word.

As for the fulfillment of all of them, I don’t have enough theological knowledge to compare them with the present worldwide events. The only thing I know is that, anyway, all the prophets were used by God to prophesy about the coming of Jesus, in whom the prophecies were fulfilled. Moses prophesied about Jesus and called Him ‘the great prophet.’ He brought a new dispensation to mankind, which was like an ‘Apocalypse’ to the people of that time (Isaiah is an example of this), like a new Creation. Apocalypse means ‘revelation.’ Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Joel, and others have undoubtedly left something about eschatological events, but it is Jesus who gives us the certainty of present and future events through His prophecy set forth in the Gospels. What happens today and will happen at His second coming is a result of what He prophesied about the end times. His prophecy is being fulfilled. Under this point of view, little of the prophecies of the OT remained to be fulfilled still as an apocalyptic (eschatological) event, especially for those who already have salvation in Christ. Most prophecies have already been fulfilled. Jesus left, so to speak, what is important for us to know about His second coming; and His apostles John and Paul left their complementation on the subject, using the words of the OT prophets to corroborate their writings and the revelations given by God to them.

What I have come to realize from all the research I have done is a mistaken and confused view of many prophetic writings by some people, even ‘alarming’ texts about the Apocalypse, but actually resulting from a rational conclusion (and with little biblical basis), not necessarily of a particular divine revelation. Daniel wrote about it: “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” (Dan. 12: 4). Certain things only bring weight and darkness to the soul. Sorry for my opinion, dear reader, but I think it’s no use to watch television or read newspapers every day with an excessive concern to relate everything to the fulfillment of the OT prophecies and just think that Jesus is

coming back tomorrow. In this way, one ceases to live life, one does not live the present. It doesn't matter to know when He comes, but to be inwardly prepared for His coming.

He told us: "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet" (Matt. 24: 6). All evil that is occurring is due to lack of love and human selfishness.

He also said: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly'" (Lk. 21: 33-34). I say, not only the worries of this life, of this world, but equally the worry with certain 'things of God' (quotation mark), which are traps for the unsuspecting and only lead to wrong ways. God's Word tells us in the book of Daniel: "Many shall be purified, cleansed, and refined, but the wicked shall continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand" (Dan. 12: 10). God Himself will show His children, the wise, what they must know.

Jesus gave a pertinent answer to the question of His disciples concerning some appointed times: "He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority'" (Acts 1: 7).

Going back to the writing of this book, as I wrote it, I experienced many things, and the main teaching was to know God more comprehensively, to see Him from another perspective, as a greater God than I imagined; a God who has an infinite, timeless consciousness, and is able to see a distant future as if it had already happened, and to turn thousands of years into few seconds before His eternal eyes. While we think of such small things close to us, He is 'flying high' and planning things that we will only come to understand a little later.

I did a reading and a general study of the major and minor prophets and I could see that Isaiah writes differently from other prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel or Daniel, where we are able to temporarily locate the prophecy at the moment it was delivered, and therefore, to understand to whom it was addressed and what happened to them that time (for example: 'in the fifth year of the reign of such a king, the word of the Lord came to the prophet', etc.). The impression it gives is that Isaiah's prophecies do not have a chronological sequence. It is as if the prophet addressed a king, then returned to his grandfather, and in the next verse or chapter passed to the great-grandson or to a distant future (Messianic); so it is a bit difficult to understand them from a historical point of view. Moreover, it is easy to see the change of anointing in the three parts of the book; it is as if three different people are writing; of course, under the anointing of the Spirit of God.

It is interesting to notice the Jewish view of that time and the figures of speech that were used for a particular historical moment. It was all fitting into a larger plan already designed by God for mankind, timing precisely every second and moving each character into His service so that Jesus would come to us at the right time. The Gentiles were already in God's plan. We can see Jesus in every verse and in every prophecy, using even the prophet as a mirror of Him.

There is also an interesting particularity in Isaiah when we compare him with the three other Major Prophets quoted above. He does not begin his book describing his calling. He only describes it in Chapter 6.

The Book of Isaiah was written around 700-681 BC. It speaks of the double position of the people of Israel before God (especially Jerusalem, for he was prophet of the southern kingdom), their accommodation and lack of true love to the Lord. Isaiah

worked to give the people the clarity of this hypocrisy in the hope of changing their attitude.

Isaiah (prophetic period: 740-681 BC) was an educated man connected to the court. Like Amos (760-750 BC), Isaiah attacks the dominant groups of society: authorities, magistrates (judges), landowners and politicians; also rises against social injustices. Isaiah is hard and ironic with the ladies of the court from the upper class of Jerusalem (Isa. 3: 16-26; Isa. 4: 1; Isa. 32: 9-14). During his ministry four kings of Judah reigned: Uzziah or Azariah (781-740 BC, from 791 BC as co-ruler of Amaziah), Jotham (740-732 BC, from 748 BC as co-ruler of Uzziah), Ahaz (732-716 BC) and Hezekiah (716-687 BC, since 729 BC as co-regent of Ahaz).

According to historical sources (The Bible of Jerusalem) Isaiah was born in 765 BC, so he was 25 years old when he was called by the Lord to be His prophet.

Isaiah was the first prophet to speak about the coming of the Messiah. Some references can be seen in relation to this: 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, especially 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 v. 7; Isa. 50: 1-11, with special focus on v. 10; Isa. 52: 13; Isa. 53: 1-12, with special focus on vs. 2 and 11; Isa. 59: 16-21; Isa. 63: 1-6.

Here, many explanatory texts are repeated in several chapters so that people can read each one separately without losing sight of the whole.

I hope you enjoy this work and have your own experiences with the Lord as you read about Isaiah.

May the Holy Spirit be your guide and teacher in this reading!

Tânia Cristina

Notes:

- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995). The New International Version (NIV) will be used in brackets in some verses to make it easier for readers to understand.
- 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].
- In many texts we'll use 'Lexicon Strong's Concordance.' Strong's Concordance is a concordance of the King James Bible (KJV), created by the English theologian Dr. James Strong (1822-1894), along with a team of theologians, and first published in 1890. It is about a cross-reference between each word in the KJV and the original text in Hebrew or Greek. To each word in its original language is given an entry number for the biblical concordance of KJV. Lexicon means a dictionary of ancient classic languages. In order to interpret Lexicon Strong's Concordance properly it's necessary to take into account the cultural context of that time, because Strong's numbers do not consider figures of speech, metaphors, idioms, common phrases, cultural references, references to historical events, or alternate meanings used by the writers of that time period to express their thoughts in their own language (source: Wikipedia.org).

Source of research:

- J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2nd edition 1995.
- Wikipedia.org and crystalinks.com (for some images).
- Email: relacionamentosearaagape@gmail.com

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Volumes 2 and 3 of this book:

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/thebookofprophetisaiah2.pdf>

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/thebookofprophetisaiah3.pdf>

Chapter 1

In chapter 1 (in particular Isa. 1: 10-17), he speaks violently against a hypocritical religious worship, which tries to mask the injustices of everyday life. He even calls the princes of Jerusalem, rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah goes against the wealthy and proud landowners, who are arrogant, living at parties and perks at the expense of the work of the poor, denying them justice and exploiting them. Isaiah defends the orphans, the widows and the oppressed, the people exploited and mismanaged by the civil leaders.

During his ministry four kings of Judah reigned: Uzziah or Azariah (781-740 BC, from 791 BC as co-ruler of Amaziah), Jotham (740-732 BC, from 748 BC as co-ruler of Uzziah), Ahaz (732-716 BC) and Hezekiah (716-687 BC, since 729 BC as co-regent of Ahaz). Probably the opening chapters (1 to 7) contain the prophetic reprimands of Jotham's reign; at most, the last years of Uzziah, to something that is already happening or will happen in the reign of the son of Jotham, Ahaz (Isa. chapter 7).

The sins of Judah – v.1-4.

- Isa. 1: 1-4: “The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. 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. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil [NIV: brood of evildoers], children who deal corruptly, who have forsaken the Lord, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged! [NIV: they have spumed the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him].”

The people had turned away from God and rebelled against Him. Then their knowledge of God ceased. Judah became a sinful nation, with people of corrupt character, full of iniquity and blasphemy. They turned their backs on the Lord.

His judgments – v. 5-9.

- Isa. 1: 5-9: “Why do you seek further beatings? Why do you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they have not been drained, or bound up, or softened with oil [NIV: there is no soundness – only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil]. Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a shelter in a cucumber field, like a besieged city [NIV: like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege]. If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.”

Rebellion was drawing the wrath of God upon them. From the greatest of them to the least there was only filth and corruption, hearts bruised and hardened to a covenant with the Lord. The land was desolate, the cities were burned; the crops had been destroyed by the enemies (Assyrians). Jerusalem was in a state of abandonment. Some faithful survivors were still seen by the Lord, who listened to their prayers.

Their worship is rejected – v. 10-15.

• Isa. 1: 10-15 (cf. Am. 5: 21-22): “Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity [NIV: Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies]. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.”

The rulers of Jerusalem are called by Isaiah rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah because of so much corruption among them. God was already tired of empty rituals, hypocritical worships and vain sacrifices. The Lord no longer endured the iniquity mixed with worship to Him. Even the appointed festivals, instituted by Him, were already wearisome. He no longer heard the prayers of His people because their hands were stained with blood.

Exhortations to repentance – v. 16-17.

• Isa. 1: 16-17: “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed [NIV: encourage the oppressed; or ‘rebuke the oppressor’], defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

God calls them to repentance, to take evil out of their hearts and their deeds. They should learn to do good, to pay attention to justice, to defend the orphans and the widows and to rebuke the oppressor. This concerned the Jews, especially the ruling classes, who lived at parties and perks at the expense of the work of the poor, denying them justice and exploiting them.

Promises of grace and mercy – v. 18-20.

• Isa. 1: 18-20: “Come now, let us argue it out [NIV: Let us reason together], says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land [NIV: the best from the land]; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Even if their sins stained their spiritual garments with the red color of blood, they could become white again. If the people listened to God, they could eat of the best fruit of the land. But if they continued in rebellion, doing things according to their own conscience and will, they would die by the sword of their enemies. And the Lord would not turn back on His word.

The judgment and redemption of Jerusalem – v. 21-31.

• Isa. 1: 21-31: “How the faithful city has become a whore! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her – but now murderers! Your silver has become dross, your wine is mixed with water. Your princes [NIV: rulers] are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow’s cause does not come before them. Therefore says the Sovereign, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: Ah, I will pour out my wrath on my enemies, and

avenge myself on my foes! [NIV: Ah! I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies]. I will turn my hand against you; I will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy [NIV: I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities]. And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness. But rebels and sinners shall be destroyed together, and those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed. For you shall be ashamed of the oaks [NIV: the sacred oaks] in which you delighted; and you shall blush for the gardens that you have chosen. For you shall be like an oak whose leaf withers, and like a garden without water. The strong shall become like tinder, and their work like a spark; they and their work shall burn together, with no one to quench them [NIV: The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire].”

The Lord says that the city that once was faithful to Him now resembled a harlot. Where rightness and justice once were, now was a house of murderers. The kings and princes, counselors and judges, were all corrupt; they accepted bribes, robbed the people and did not do justice to the less privileged. Therefore, God would reach out to them to cleanse them from all this. He would restore their judges and their counselors as at the beginning. Zion would be redeemed by justice, and the sinners who repented would know the righteousness of God, and therefore His forgiveness and His freedom. Those who did not accept this covenant would be destroyed.



Oak (*Quercus pedunculata* B.)

The oak (cf. Isa. 3: 13; Isa. 61: 3) is a tree of the genus *Quercus*, which has twenty-four species in Palestine; so it is difficult to determine which species belong to Hebrew words such as ‘allâ, ‘allôn (or ‘allown) and ‘elâ. The latter seems to be the most used in the bible (‘elâ). The oak was the favorite tree under whose shade the Israelites sat (1 Kin. 13: 14) or buried their dead (Gen. 35: 8; 1 Chr. 10: 12, where it’s written ‘the great tree’, in NIV). Its wood, though hard, was not employed in construction. It was used in the making of oars (Ezek. 27: 6) and graven images (Isa. 44: 14-15). Bashan was a region full of oaks (Isa. 2: 13; Ezek. 27: 6; Zech. 11: 2). ‘The Amorite was as strong as oaks’ (Am. 2: 9). Some species are perennially green, but most change leaves annually (Isa. 6: 13). It is a vigorous, hardwood tree that lives many centuries. Therefore, it symbolizes power, strength, longevity, stability and determination.

The Hebrew term ‘asherâ was translated (according to the Septuagint, ‘alsos’) as ‘wood’, ‘grove’ or an idolatrous ‘high place’ (Ex. 34: 13; Deut. 16: 21; 2 Kin. 17: 16),

thinking that it was about oak woods. But current researchers say the reference here is not to a tree, but to an image or Asherah pole, the pagan goddess of fertility and love.

- Isa. 1: 29: “For you shall be ashamed of the oaks [NIV: the sacred oaks] in which you delighted; and you shall blush for the gardens that you have chosen.”

The Hebrew word used here for ‘oaks’ is *’ayil* [Strong #352], meaning: strength; anything strong; specifically a political leader; powerful man; also a ram (from his strength); a pilaster (as a strong support); an oak or other strong tree. Therefore, it was used in the sense of lintel, post, a pilaster, a pole as was the Asherah pole (Astarte or Ashtoreth), where the sacrifice was made to this pagan goddess, or the trees that served for them to make graven images (cf. Isa. 44: 14-15).

- Isa. 1: 30-31: “For you shall be like an oak whose leaf withers, and like a garden without water. The strong shall become like tinder, and their work like a spark; they and their work shall burn together, with no one to quench them [NIV: The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire].”

The Hebrew word used here is *’elâ* [Strong #424], meaning: an oak or other strong tree: elm; teil tree (European linden) or oak (the type of oak present in eastern Palestine whose leaves were deciduous). Under the oaks the dead (Gen. 35: 8) or idols were often buried, as did Jacob, who buried the idols of his clan on leaving Shechem for Bethel: Gen. 35: 2; 4.

When the Lord began to act, they would be ashamed of the oaks (or pilasters) where they had offered sacrifices to the strange gods or from which they took the wood to make images, and they would dislike the gardens where they worshiped idols and participated in their feasts. There would be severe judgment for those who continued in these practices: “For you shall be like an oak whose leaf withers, and like a garden without water. The strong shall become like tinder, and their work like a spark; they and their work shall burn together, with no one to quench them [NIV: The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire]”, that is, God would remove what was strength for them.

Chapter 2

The Mountain of the Lord – v. 1-5.

- Isa. 2: 1-5: “The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come [NIV: In the last days] the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth instruction [NIV: the law will go out from Zion], and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples [NIV: He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples]; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”

Here the prophet makes mention of the future kingdom of the Messiah and the calling of the Gentiles to be His people, for the temple of the Lord would be on the mountains and the people would go there to learn His law. This text refers to the times of the gospel when Jesus would be in the temple at Jerusalem teaching all those who wanted to know God’s truth. In the temple of the Lord the people would be taught to throw away the weapons of war and to learn peace.

The future kingdom of the Messiah is called by the prophet ‘the days to come’ or ‘the last days’, implying an important spiritual change for mankind.

‘The mount of the House of the Lord’ in many prophetic passages is called Mount Zion. ‘Zion’ means ‘dry place’, ‘bathed with sun’, or ‘ridge.’ Mount Zion is the name of one of the hills of Jerusalem and by the biblical definition is the City of David, and later became synonymous with the Land of Israel. Zion (in Hebrew צִיּוֹן – Tzion or Tsion or Tsiyyon; in Arabic, Şuhyūn) was the name specifically given to the Jebusite fortress that was located on the hill southeast of Jerusalem, called Mount Zion, which was conquered by David. After his death, the term ‘Zion’ began to be used to refer to the hill where the Temple of Solomon was located (on Mount Moriah, 2 Chr. 3: 1, to the north of Mount Zion, where was the Jebusite fortress taken by David) and then to the temple itself and its grounds. After that, the word ‘Zion’ was used to symbolize Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

The Day of the Lord – v. 6-22.

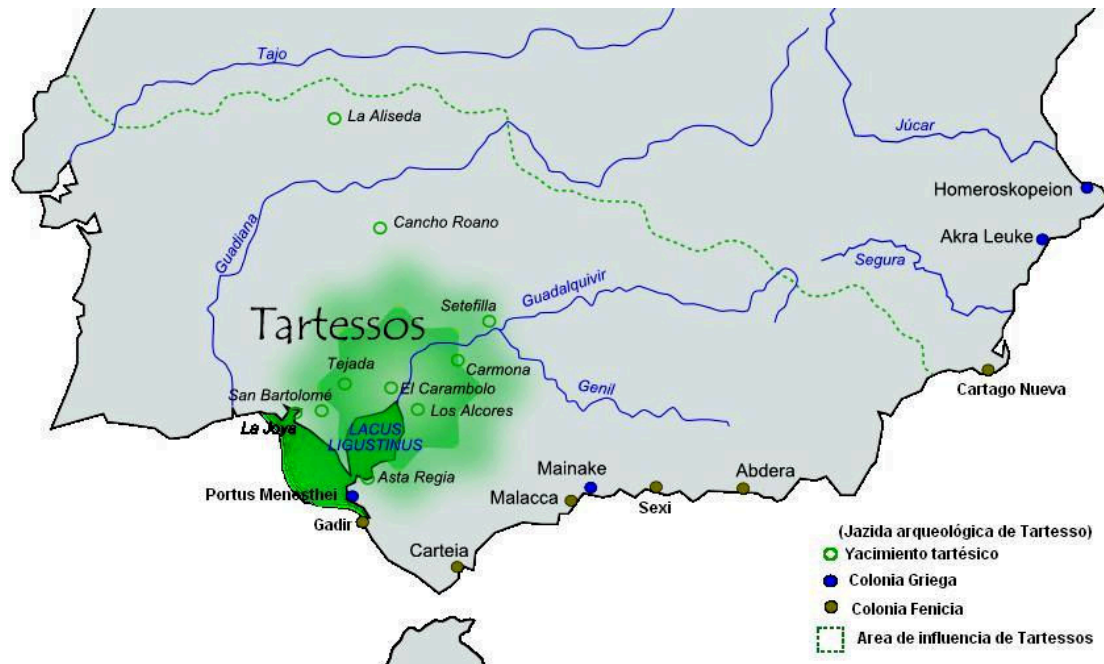
- Isa. 2: 6-22: “For you have forsaken the ways of your people, O house of Jacob. Indeed they are full of diviners from the east and of soothsayers like the Philistines, and they clasp hands with foreigners [NIV: You have abandoned your people, the house of Jacob. They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans]. Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made. And so people are humbled, and everyone is brought low—do not forgive them! [NIV: So man will be brought low and mankind humbled—do not forgive them (or ‘do not raise them up’)]. Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust from the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty. The haughty eyes of people shall be brought low, and the pride of everyone shall be humbled; and the Lord alone will be exalted on that day. For the Lord of hosts has a day

against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high; against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; against all the high mountains, and against all the lofty hills; against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft [NIV: for every trading ship and every stately vessel]. The haughtiness of people shall be humbled, and the pride of everyone shall be brought low; and the Lord alone will be exalted on that day. The idols shall utterly pass away. Enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. On that day people will throw away to the moles and to the bats their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship [NIV: In that day men will throw away to the rodents and bats their idols of silver and idols of gold, which they made to worship], to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts in the crags, from the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth [NIV: when he rises to shake the earth]. Turn away from mortals, who have only breath in their nostrils, for of what account are they? [NIV: Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?].”

The prophet describes the causes of the abandonment of God in relation to His people: they joined the wicked; they were wizards (soothsayers); they gave too much value to wealth, generally illicitly acquired; the land of Israel and Judah was full of idols made by human hands; they were arrogant and proud and showed no repentance in their hearts. Therefore, the prophet warned them that the Day of the Lord was near and He would punish everybody because of these things, especially those who were haughty. He would humiliate them, as He would destroy all that seemed to be a source of pride to His people. Not only haughtiness of men would be brought low, but the idols would be destroyed. Before the terror of God, men would hide in the caves of the rocks or in the holes of the earth or in the clefts in the crags and they would not even remember to carry their idols with them, for these would have no profit for them nor could not defend them from the wrath of God.

As this passage follows the prophecy about the coming of the Messiah ‘in the last days’, we may think that this destruction of the idolatry and arrogance of His people, restoring the righteousness and taking revenge against injustice, according to the prophet’s conception, would come in a terrifying and somewhat violent way, for they deserved it. It is not related to any empire conquering Judah as an instrument of God’s judgment, but to the coming of the Messiah, which would destroy the idolatry of His people.

As for the term ‘ships of Tarshish’, we can translate it by ‘ships of refining or mining’, equipped for transporting molten ore (load of gold, silver), hard wood, jewelry, ivory and varieties of monkeys (1 Kin. 9: 26-28; 1 Kin. 10: 22. The word translated as peafowl or peacocks – NRSV – can refer to baboons). NIV translates the verse term as ‘trading ship.’ The prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 23: 1; 14) also mentions the ships of Tarshish in relation to their trade with Tyre. The correct location of Tarshish, where there was a colony of Tyre, is still unknown, and may refer to a port from the Indian Ocean to Carthage (in Africa) or a Phoenician port in Spain. According to the Easton’s Bible Dictionary, the word, anglicized as ‘tarshish’, is of Sanskrit origin (Sanskrit is the ancestral language of India) or Aryan origin (relative to the ancient Iranian peoples), and means ‘the coast of the sea.’



Location of Tarshish, south of Spain



Location of Ezion Geber

According to the Lexicon Strong's Concordance (tarshiysh – Strong #8659; #8658) may refer to the region of topaz or beryllium; or Tarshish, a place in the Mediterranean, hence the epithet of a merchant vessel (as if 'to' or 'from' that port). The location of

Tarshish could be: an eastern city on the Indian Ocean coast based on the statement that 'ships of Tarshish' left Ezion Geber in the Red Sea, or could refer to a Phoenician port in Spain, located between the two mouths of the river Guadalquivir. The term 'ships of Tarshish' possibly referred to a class of ships: 1) Ships intended for long voyages. 2) Large ships prepared to sail in the sea, carrying ore; so were called the ships of King Solomon. In Greek, Tarshish is called Tartessus or Tartessos. Tartessos (Greek: Τάρτησος) was the name by which the Greeks knew the first civilization of the West. It was heir of the culture of Andalusia, and developed in the triangle formed by the present cities of Huelva, Seville and San Fernando (Cádiz), on the southwest coast of the Iberian Peninsula. Tartessos had the Tartessos River as a central river that divided the country in half; the Romans called it Baetis, and the Arabs, Guadalquivir.

Ezion Geber (1 Kin. 9: 26) most likely refers to the current Aqaba, a coastal town in the southernmost of Jordan, the capital of the province of the same name. This is the only seaport in the country, so the city is of strategic importance to Jordan. The city borders Elath or Eilat (1 Kin. 9: 26), located in Israel. Both Aqaba (Ayla) and Elath (Eilat) are at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba. The city of Aqaba was called Ayla in Ancient times (it was a medieval Islamic city, in proximity to copper mines), which is a Semitic name written in historical sources in several different ways: Ayla, Ailana, Elana, Haila, Ailath, Elath and Wayla.

Chapter 3

Judgment on Jerusalem and Judah – v. 1-4.

- Isa. 3: 1-4: “For now the Sovereign, the Lord of hosts, is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and staff [NIV: both supply and support]—all support of bread, and all support of water – warrior and soldier, judge and prophet, diviner and elder [NIV: the hero and warrior, the judge and the prophet, the soothsayer and elder (meaning ‘authority’)], captain of fifty and dignitary, counselor and skillful magician and expert enchanter [NIV: the captain of fifty and man of rank, the counselor, skilled craftsman and clever enchanter]. And I will make boys their princes, and babes shall rule over them [NIV: I will make boys their officials; mere children will govern them; NIV in Portuguese, ‘I will put young men in government; the irresponsible will dominate’].”

Because they trusted in their abundance and prosperity, God would bring drought and famine, that is, lack of rain and barrenness in the field, to show His power over nature; also to deprive them of all the support of their lives and their government. It may be possible to think of enemies’ sieges on the cities, but it is not yet possible to locate exactly the historical events to which this prophecy refers. God would place young people in the leadership of the nation, young not only in age, but in experience of government, knowledge and strength. Also the NIV in Portuguese says, ‘irresponsible.’

Great confusion, a land without government and without respect for each other – v. 5-9.

- Isa. 3: 5-9: “The people will be oppressed, everyone by another and everyone by a neighbor; the youth will be insolent to the elder, and the base to the honorable [NIV: People will oppress each other—man against man, neighbor against neighbor. The young will rise up against the old, the base (*meaning the wretched or abject*) against the honorable]. Someone will even seize a relative, a member of the clan, saying, ‘You have a cloak; you shall be our leader, and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule.’ But the other will cry out on that day, saying, ‘I will not be a healer; in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; you shall not make me leader of the people.’ For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence. The look on their faces bears witness against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves.”

There would be great confusion in Judah and Jerusalem for their sin; Judah was a land without government and without respect for one another; and at that moment no one had the courage to volunteer to lead the people or bring them back into communion with God. The sin of all was evident on their faces; it was evident in the eyes of God, especially irreverence: ‘because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence.’

Peace to the righteous, and judgment to the wicked for their bad works – v. 10-11.

- Isa. 3: 10-11: “Tell the innocent how fortunate they are, for they shall eat the fruit of their labors. Woe to the guilty! How unfortunate they are, for what their hands have done shall be done to them.”

There would be a comfort to the righteous, but a judgment to the wicked as a consequence of the bad deeds they practiced.

The oppression and greed of rulers – v. 12-15.

- Isa. 3: 12-15: “My people – children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your leaders mislead you, and confuse the course of your paths. The Lord rises to argue his case [NIV: The Lord takes his place in court]; he stands to judge the peoples [NIV: he rises to judge the people – Syriac and Septuagint]. The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes [NIV: leaders] of his people: It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord God of hosts.”

Jewish kings, princes and religious leaders themselves were weak in matter of authority (‘children’ and ‘women’) or were under the influence of their own wives to rule the nation. These verses also show the covetousness, greed, and power struggle of civil rulers and the very ecclesiastical leaders, who have turned people away from God and from His true ways. They had consumed Israel, more specifically Judah (the ‘vineyard’). They robbed the needy and denied them justice. Therefore, the Lord would enter into judgment against the authorities and against the leaders of His people.

This was the state of Judah and Jerusalem under the calamities they themselves had created; not to mention the great idolatry that existed in that land, beginning with the bad example of kings.

Women’s pride and their judgment – v. 16-26.

- Isa. 3: 16-26: “The Lord said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes [NIV: flirting with their eyes], mincing along as they go [NIV: tripping along with mincing steps], tinkling with their feet [NIV: with ornaments jingling on their ankles]; the Lord will afflict with scabs the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts [NIV: Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the Lord will make their scalps bald]. In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets [NIV: bangles], the headbands, and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarfs [NIV: veils]; the headdresses, the armlets [NIV: ankle chains], the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets [NIV: charms]; the signet rings and nose rings; the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; the garments of gauze [NIV: mirrors], the linen garments, the turbans [NIV: tiaras], and the veils [NIV: shawls]. Instead of perfume there will be a stench; and instead of a sash, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a binding of sackcloth; instead of beauty, shame [NIV: branding]. Your men shall fall by the sword and your warriors in battle. And her gates [NIV: the gates of Zion] shall lament and mourn; ravaged, she shall sit upon the ground.”

Isaiah is hard and ironic with the ladies of the court from the upper class of Jerusalem. The women who had once been vain and secure will be widows and will change their rich clothes for sackcloth and ashes, for they will weep because of mourning. It is not known with certainty when this prophecy was delivered or when it was fulfilled.

Chapter 4

When God executes His vengeance, women will behave differently – v. 1.

- Isa. 4: 1: “Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, ‘We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes [NIV: and provide our own clothes]; just let us be called by your name; take away our disgrace.’”

This first verse of chapter 4 belongs to the third chapter. When problems come to the earth and men are killed, many Jewish women will act contrary to common usage and seek husbands for them, for the state of celibacy and virginity was considered shameful among the Jews, since they would not leave offspring. To have a husband, they would even be willing to work to provide food and clothing for themselves.

In the next verses (verses 2-5), Isaiah foretells the coming of the Messianic kingdom, and the restoration of a remnant, which will be holy. He compares the spiritual purification of this people to the cleansing of a metal like gold and silver that pass through the fire to be cleansed of the slag (‘a spirit of burning’; NIV: ‘a spirit of fire’ or ‘the Spirit of fire’). When the Bible speaks of ‘bloodstains’ [in other versions, ‘the guilt of shedding innocent blood’ (Deut. 19: 13; Deut. 21: 9; 1 Kin. 2: 31); ‘the guilt of their blood’ (1 Kin. 2: 33); ‘your hands are stained with blood’ (Isa. 59: 13); ‘the guilt of innocent blood’ (Jer. 26: 15)], it usually refers to the shedding of innocent blood. The same way the Lord led the people in the time of Moses as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night when the tabernacle was erected, He will be a defense and a shelter for them, just as He will show His glory in an obvious way. When one speaks of the glory of the Lord, it refers to His honor, His dignity and majesty, His reputation and protection; in short, the manifestation of the power of God where it is needed.

Prediction of the Messianic kingdom; the time of God’s restoration over the remnant – The Branch of the Lord – v. 2.

- Isa. 4: 2: “On that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel.”

They will be holy – v. 3.

- Isa. 4: 3: “Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem [NIV: among the living].”

The people will be cleansed through the Spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning – v. 4.

- Isa. 4: 4: “once the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning [NIV: ‘a spirit of fire’ or ‘the Spirit of fire’].”

The Lord will be a glory and a defense over them, as He once was upon the tabernacle of Moses, defending them from afflictions – v. 5-6

- Isa. 4: 5-6: “Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its places of assembly a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Indeed over all the glory there will be a canopy. It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.”

Chapter 5

The song of the vineyard – v. 1-7.

• Isa. 5: 1-7: “Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it [NIV: He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well]; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes [NIV: Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit]. And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed [NIV: I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated], and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry! [NIV: he heard cries of distress].”

Israel is God’s vineyard that was carefully plowed and sown by Him. He hoped to harvest good grapes, but the vineyard produced wild grapes. In other words: God gave everything to His people, but they did not repay Him. On the contrary, they destroyed what they received: the inheritance of the land, the inheritance of the Word and the laws that would lead them along a path of life. They rewarded His mercy and His faithfulness with evil deeds and infidelity (verse 1-4), so the Lord would bring destruction (v. 5-7). The cities would be wasted and would be without walls, they would be burned, and their fields would not bear fruit – see Matt. 21: 33-46, with emphasis on verses 42-43: “Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produce the fruits of the kingdom.’” Here in the book of Isaiah, God would give Israel to the Assyrians and Babylonians to be destroyed for having rejected Him. In the NT, God would give the kingdom of God to the Gentiles, because Israel rejected Him through His Son Jesus.

Woes and judgments – v. 8-30.

• Isa. 5: 8-10: “Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land! The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing: Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres [NIV: ‘a ten-acre’, in Hebrew, ten-yoke, that is, the land plowed by 10 yoke of oxen in one day, about 2,500 square meters] of vineyard shall yield but one bath [NIV: only a bath of wine, that is, probably about 6 gallons, equivalent to 22 liters], and a homer [A measure of capacity for dry, that is, probably about 6 bushels, equivalent to 220 liters] of seed shall yield a mere ephah [NIV: ‘only an ephah of grain’. Ephah is a measure of capacity for dry; that is, probably about 3/5 bushel and equivalent to 22 liters].”

The covetousness and greed of men will be transformed by God into scarcity.

- Isa. 5: 11-12: “Ah, you who [NIV: Woe to those who] rise early in the morning in pursuit of strong drink, who linger in the evening to be inflamed by wine, whose feasts consist of lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine, but who do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands!”

The Lord will bring judgment on those who indulge in drunkenness and revelry and lust.

The punishment of the Jews, the captivity – v. 13-17.

- Isa. 5: 13-17: “Therefore my people go into exile without knowledge [NIV: for the lack of understanding]; their nobles [NIV: their men of rank] are dying of hunger, and their multitude is parched with thirst. Therefore Sheol [NIV: the grave] has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure; the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude go down, her throng and all who exult in her [NIV: into it will descend their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers]. People are bowed down, everyone is brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are humbled. But the Lord of hosts is exalted by justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness. Then the lambs shall graze as in their pasture, fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins [NIV: Then the sheep will graze a sin their own pasture; lambs will feed (in Septuagint; in Masoretic Hebrew is, ‘strangers will eat’) among the ruins of the rich].”

In the same way that Hosea wrote, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4: 6a), Isaiah repeats the same thought in other words, “Therefore my people go into exile without knowledge [NIV: for the lack or understanding].” The people do not understand what God tells them through the prophet. The nobles will feel hunger and the people, thirst. Death is waiting for them, as all the splendor and wealth of the city of Jerusalem, which means their destruction. And those who have fun will also die, and their noise of joy will cease. God will humble the arrogant, but He, the Lord of Hosts, will be exalted by His justice, and the Holy God will be sanctified by His righteousness. When His righteousness and His judgment are done against the wicked, the lambs shall graze in the city as if there were an excellent pasture, and the strangers shall eat of the fields of the rich. There is an interesting verse in Prov. 11: 9: “With their mouths the godless would destroy their neighbors, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.” This verse completes that of Isaiah and that of Hosea, for the lack of understanding of God’s will leads to the enemy’s prisons, and the lack of knowledge of His word and of His person leads to the destruction of a life, because Satan’s deception prevails. But when we know Him and know what His word contains, we are freed from anguish, lying and destructive words. Consequently, we get out of the way of sin. Therefore, Jesus said: “and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free [Jesus is the word and His word is true] ... So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed [free from sin and death].”

- Isa. 5: 18-24: “Ah, you who drag iniquity along with cords of falsehood, who drag sin along as with cart ropes, who say, ‘Let him make haste, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the plan of the Holy One of Israel hasten to fulfillment, that we may know it!’ Ah, you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Ah, you who are wise in your own eyes, and shrewd [NIV: clever] in your own sight! Ah, you who are heroes in drinking wine and valiant at mixing drink, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights! Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will become rotten, and their blossom go

up like dust; for they have rejected the instruction of the Lord of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.”

Those who mock God and think that they deceive Him and that He does not see their iniquities will suffer with His wrath. They will also go through His judgment. Those who provoke Him and do not take His words seriously will suffer for it. All who corrupt the notions of good and evil; those who twist the truth, turning it into a lie in their own favor; the unjust judges and those who consider themselves wise in their own eyes and the drunkards will be consumed as the chaff is consumed by fire.

• Isa. 5: 25-30: “Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them; the mountains quaked, and their corpses were like refuse in the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still. He will raise a signal for a nation far away [NIV: he lifts up a banner for distant nations], and whistle for a people at the ends of the earth; Here they come, swiftly, speedily! None of them is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps, not a loincloth is loose, not a sandal-thong broken; their arrows are sharp, all their bows bent, their horses’ hoofs seem like flint, and their wheels like the whirlwind. Their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar; they growl and seize their prey, they carry it off, and no one can rescue. They will roar over it on that day, like the roaring of the sea. And if one look to the land (*the land of Israel*) – only darkness and distress; and the light grows dark with clouds.”

Isaiah now speaks more clearly of an enemy army that will be an instrument of judgment in the hands of God against His people. The figurative description of this army shows us that it is an army of fierce and agile soldiers, vigilant and war-enabled. Their chariots are fast and they scream while they fight. Judah will suffer anguish, and the smoke of destruction and fire will darken the sky.

Chapter 6

Isaiah's commission – v. 1-13

• Isa. 6: 1-13: “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 [NIV: At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was 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’ [NIV: With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for]. 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!’ And he said, ‘Go and say to this people: Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand. Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed’ [NIV: He said, “Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed”]. Then I said, ‘How long, O Lord?’ And he said: ‘Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; until the Lord sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.’”

The prophecies of Isaiah are not always established in a chronological order. His commission was placed here in chapter 6 after other prophecies were written in the previous chapters and were probably delivered (some of them) in the reign of Jotham the son of Uzziah. Uzziah died in the year 740 BC, and henceforth Isaiah began his prophetic period. According historical sources (The Bible of Jerusalem) Isaiah was born in 765 BC, so he was 25 years old when he was called by the Lord to be His prophet. The biblical passage says that he saw the throne and the glory of God, and where Seraphim proclaimed His holiness. The worship was so strong that the place shook and filled with smoke. Then, Isaiah was confronted with his human frailty and recognized that he was a man with impure lips, among a people also unclean. So he got afraid. He saw an angel coming with an ember (‘a live coal’) and touching his lips, and saying that his sin had been forgiven. Then he heard the voice of the Lord asking if there were any messenger willing to take His word and Isaiah volunteered. He was commissioned to be a watchman, to cry out in the midst of a stubborn and hard-hearted people with no eyes and ears for the voice of God and for His will. Isaiah asked how long it would be, and the Lord replied that this would be until He had exercised His judgment upon them; until He had brought them into captivity in a foreign land (in Assyria); yet the remnant

would also be taken captive (perhaps representing the captivity in Babylon). At last, a remnant would be saved and holy, like a stump of oak or terebinth.



Terebinth (*Pistacia terebinthus* or *Pistacia palaestina*)



Flower of terebinth (*Pistacia terebinthus* or *Pistacia palaestina*)

Here the bible mentions another tree besides the oak, the terebinth. The terebinth (*Pistacia terebinthus* or *Pistacia palaestina*), as described in Hos. 4: 13, is present in the warm and dry hills of Palestine, but is also native to the Mediterranean region such as Morocco, Portugal and the Canary Islands; also present in Turkey and Syria. Terebinth is a deciduous tree, small, up to six meters high, looking like a shrub, and having flowers. Its leaves are ten to twenty centimeters long, and its flowers are reddish-purple in color, blooming in the spring. Its small fruits are pulpy, of five to seven centimeters in length, and whose color varies from red to black when ripe. The resin of the plant has a strong and penetrating odor, from which turpentine is extracted, possibly the oldest source of this compound. Turpentine is a solvent widely used in mixing paints, varnishes and in liniment. The terebinth is an isolated tree, that is, it does not grow in forests. In Ancient times, idolatrous practices were common under terebinths. The terebinth is often called elm, erroneously. In Hebrew, the word used for terebinth may be the same for 'oak', that is, 'allâ, 'allôn (or 'allown) and 'elâ.

Chapter 7

Ahaz is afraid of Rezin and Pekah, and is comforted by Isaiah – v. 1-9.

• Isa. 7: 1-9: “In the days of Ahaz son of Jotham son of Uzziah, king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel went up to attack Jerusalem, but could not mount an attack against it. When the house of David heard that Aram had allied itself with Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind. Then the Lord said to Isaiah, Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub [NIV: Shear-Jashub, meaning, ‘a remnant will return’, in relation to the remnant of God’s people who would return wholeheartedly to Him], at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller’s Field [NIV: the Washerman’s Field], and say to him, Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands [NIV: smoldering stumps of firewood], because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. Because Aram [KJV: Syria] – with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah – has plotted evil against you, saying, Let us go up against Judah and cut off Jerusalem and conquer it for ourselves [NIV: and divide it among ourselves] and make the son of Tabeel king in it; therefore thus says the Lord God: It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. For the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. (Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered, no longer a people). The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all.”

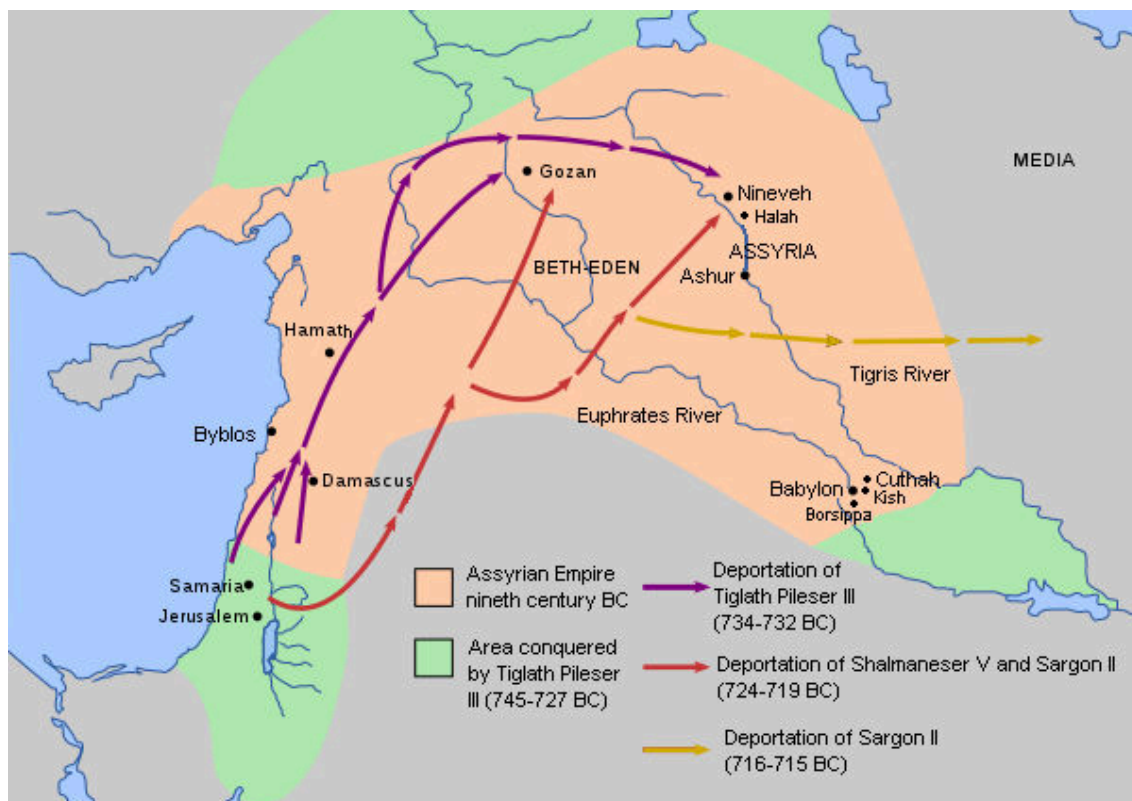
In the reign of Ahaz (2 Chr. 28: 1-6; 2 Kin. 16: 1-4), in fact, since the end of the reign of his father Jotham (2 Kin. 15: 37), God sent Rezin king of Syria (or Aram – 2 Kin. 16: 5; 2 Chr. 28: 5-6) and Pekah the king of Israel, son of Remaliah (2 Chr. 28: 6; 2 Kin. 15: 37; 2 Kin. 16: 5) against the cities of Judah, when the Syrians captured Elath (2 Kin. 16: 5) and took many of his people as prisoners and brought them to Damascus (2 Chr. 28: 5-6); And Pekah (king of Israel) the son of Remaliah, in one day, killed a hundred and twenty thousand soldiers in Judah, and the Israelites took captive from their kinsmen two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters to Samaria (2 Chr. 28: 6; 8), and then returned them to Judah (2 Chr. 28: 11; 14-15).

These verses from Isaiah (Isa. 7: 1-9) relate the meeting of the prophet with Ahaz on the eve of the Syro-Ephraimite war, begun in 734 BC, when the king was superintending the works for the city defense. The Fuller’s Field or the Washerman’s Field (cf. Isa. 36: 2) was a place outside the eastern wall, where the garments were stretched to dry in the sun, according to the custom of the washermen. The washerman was called a fuller because he washed clothes outside the city and near enough water, where cloths could be cleaned by being stepped on a submerged stone. In some places, the washerman was also the dyer, for in addition to wash, he dyed the cloths.

It is believed that the 65 years of prophecy mentioned in Isa. 7: 8 correspond to the same passage written in Isa. 17: 1-3 and the earlier prophecies of Am. 1: 1; 3-5. According to Amos 1: 3-5, the people of Aram [KJV: Syria] went into exile to Kir (unknown location). Kir means ‘city.’ Although some scholars put it on the plain of Mesopotamia, between the cities of Cuthah, Babylon and Borsippa, it is more probable that in this location one is speaking of the city of Kish; in Sumerian: Kiš; transliteration: Kiški; Acadian: kiššatu; modern Tell al-Uhaymir in the province of Babylon in Iraq, about seven miles and a half to the east of the city of Babylon and fifty miles to the south of Baghdad. Tell al-Uhaymir means ‘the red’ according to the color of the red bricks of the ziggurat there. Ziggurat was a type of temple for the gods, created by the

Sumerians, the ancestors of the Babylonians and Assyrians, and built in the shape of a terraced pyramid. The format was that of several floors built on upon another, with oval or rectangular or square platforms that went on diminishing like a pyramid till the top. The number of floors varied from two to seven. There were several Ziggurats in Babylon.

As for the relationship done between these sixty-five years and Jer. 49: 23-27 it does not seem to be correct, for the kingdom of Damascus was destroyed by Assyria, but the city remained, and it is to this city that Jeremiah prophesies (Jer. 49: 27). The fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy occurred, probably in 581 BC, about five years after the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC) by Nebuchadnezzar. However, as for the years prophesied by Isaiah, probably it is about Assyria between the reigns of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) and Sargon II (722-705 BC). Tiglath-Pileser III conquered three regions of Israel between 734-732 BC: Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee (2 Kin. 15: 29). Damascus was captured in 732 BC and reduced to subsidiary town within the Assyrian province of Hamath. Thenceforth it lost its political influence, remaining with only economic influence (Ezek. 27: 18). It was once again capital during the Seleucid rule of Antiochus IX in 111 BC. Aretas (Nabatean) conquered the city in 85 BC, later handing it over to Tigranes II of Armenia (83-69 BC). From 64 BC until 30 AD was Roman domain.



Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) besieged Samaria for three years (2 Kin. 17: 5; 2 Kin. 18: 9-11) while his successor Sargon II (722-705 BC) captured it in the year he ascended the throne (the exile of Israel to Assyria – 722 BC). The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria, settled them in Halah, on the Habor (2 Kin. 17: 6; 2 Kin. 18: 11; 1 Chr. 5: 26), the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. Habor is a river (now Habūr), which flows into the Euphrates. It crossed the Assyrian province of

Gozan (n^ehar gôzân, ‘river of Gozan’). In the place of the Israelite population were brought (2 Kin. 17: 24; 30-31) the inhabitants of Babylon, of Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim.

We only know that after this meeting of Isaiah with Ahaz, when Rezin and Pekah came against Jerusalem, they could not invade it (2 Kin. 16: 5). The two kings mentioned above planned to invade Judah to depose Ahaz and in his place put a king who was not of the lineage of David [The son of Tabeal or Tabeel], who would involve the country in the coalition against the Assyrian Empire. This character (Tabeal or Tabeel) is unknown, although it seems to be an Ephraimite.

The coming of Immanuel (Christ, Messianic prophecy) – v. 10-16

• Isa. 7: 10-16: “Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, ‘Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven’ [NIV: Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depth or in the highest heights]. But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.’ Then Isaiah said: ‘Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? [NIV: Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?] Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman [NIV: the virgin] is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good [NIV: to reject the wrong and choose the right]. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.”

Isaiah proposed to Ahaz that he asked a miraculous sign to the Lord that the prophecy was true, that Judah would not be invaded by Israel or the Syrians of Rezin in the near future (in less than 2 years, as he implies: ‘by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good’ or ‘to reject the wrong and choose the right’, which speaks of a boy’s tender age). It is interesting that the prophet replies not directly to Ahaz, but to the offspring of the kings of David’s lineage (‘Hear then, O house of David ... the Lord himself will give you a sign’ or ‘Hear now, you house of David!’). There is much controversy about this among the theologians because some suggest that the sign would be the birth of Ahaz’s own descendant, Hezekiah, which they call ‘the type of Christ.’ Others say that Isaiah’s anxiety before the calamitous situation that the nation of Judah was going through (not only politically but also in religious ambit, with a high degree of idolatry) made him yearn for the quick coming of the Messiah, projecting Him on Hezekiah. But it is not true, because if Hezekiah began to reign in co-regency with Ahaz in 729 BC and as sole king in 716 BC (25 years old – 2 Kin. 18: 2; 2 Chr. 29: 1) and this situation was occurring in 734 BC, he had already been born (741 BC) and, therefore, he should be about 7 years old at that time. The prophet was referring to the offspring of Ahaz and the Royal House of David; hence, to the Messiah, Jesus.

There arises another question discussed by the theologians that is the Hebrew word used by Isaiah for ‘virgin’, namely, ‘almâ or `almah (Strong #5959), which means, literally, ‘single woman.’ It also means: a girl (as if veiled or private – regarding the custom of hiding the face of the girl with a veil): maiden, damsel, young; virgin at the age of marriage (between 12 and 15 years old). The word ‘almâ is not used in the Near East or in the Bible, for it could imply an immoral woman; or, then, a woman of good behavior and still single; so the birth would have to be supernatural, which speaks to us in favor of a very distant vision, such as the birth of the Messiah.

The other words for ‘virgin’ or ‘young woman’ in Hebrew could be bethûlâ (may be a virgin), but usually comes with the word ‘betrothed’, or the phrase, ‘promised in

marriage' or 'whom no man had known' as in Joel 1: 8 ('the betrothed of her youth' or 'the husband of her youth') or Gen. 24: 16, concerning Rebekah: "The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up", where the Hebrew word for 'girl' is na'arâ or na'arah – Strong #5291: a girl (from childhood to adolescence): maiden, young woman, damsel; and 'virgin' is bethûlâ or bthuwlah – Strong #1330: to separate; a virgin (from her privacy); a bride; young lady, virgin]. Another term for this state of bride or young woman, followed by the word 'betrothed' or 'engaged to be married' or 'pledged to be married', appears in Deut. 22: 23: 'aras (Strong #781): a primitive root meaning to engage by means of marriage: betrothed, spouse. In KJV we can read: "If a **damsel** that is a **virgin** be **betrothed** unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her,..." (Deut. 22: 23), where 'damsel' is written in Hebrew, na'arah – Strong #5291 (see above); 'virgin' is bthuwlah – Strong #1330 (see above), and 'betrothed' is 'aras (Strong #781). When the woman is married, she is called 'ishshâ of the man ('ish = husband). In Isa. 62: 4, the Bible writes Beulah, betrothed, married; and Hephzibah (Chephtsiy bakh – Strong #2657: My delight is in her, my pleasure is in her, a fictional name for Palestine).

The word 'virgin' can be found, for example, in the NT, in Greek, referring to the daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21: 9 – virgins (KJV); unmarried daughters (NRSV; NIV; virgin daughters – ASV), Strong #g3933: parthenos, meaning: a maiden; by implication, an unmarried daughter; virgin. Isaiah could have used another word for the young mother: na'arâ.



In short: in a vision, Isaiah beheld a pregnant virgin, about to give birth to a son, to whom she would give the name Immanuel; and this would show the presence of God at the birth of the child. Thus, the prophecy seems to extrapolate the sign to be given to Ahaz (at most two years) that Judah would not fall into the hands of these two enemies. Therefore, what Isaiah wrote ('a woman of good behavior and still single') would imply in a supernatural birth of the boy, like the birth of the Messiah, a very distant vision.

Immanuel (Isa. 7: 14; Isa. 8: 8), in Hebrew is 'immānū'el or 'immanuw'el (Strong #6005), meaning: With us (is) God. Matthew (Matt. 1: 23) refers to Immanuel and says that Jesus was born to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, so it is also inconceivable the explanation of some about Immanuel be the name of the son of Isaiah. The bible only

mentions the two symbolic names of the two sons of the prophet; and his wife was called ‘the prophetess’ (Isa. 8: 3), probably because she prophesied too. He had two sons (Isa. 8: 18) with symbolic names: Shear-jashub [NIV: Shear-Jashub, meaning, ‘a remnant will return’, in relation to the remnant of God’s people who would return wholeheartedly to Him – Isa. 7: 3] and Maher-shalal-hash-baz [NIV: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, meaning ‘quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil’ – Isa. 8: 1; 3], referring to the invasion of the Assyrians on Syria and Samaria. Matthew (Matt. 1: 23) uses the Greek name ‘Emmanuel’ (Strong g#1694), which means: God with us.

The bible says at the end of the passage above: “For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good [NIV: to reject the wrong and choose the right], the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.” This meant that in less than two years, both Syria and Israel (northern kingdom) would fall, which actually happened: Syria fell in the power of the Assyrians in 732 BC, and Israel was also threatened by them. Ahaz appealed to the Assyrians, and the bible says in 2 Chr. 28: 20-21 that Tiglath-Pileser III came, but oppressed him instead of strengthening him, for Ahaz paid a high tribute to the king of Assyria.

This does not refer to the prophecy about the second son of Isaiah (Isa. 8: 3), for Isaiah’s wife could not be called ‘almâ, that is, ‘virgin’ or ‘single woman.’ Nor does it refer to a third son, by a virgin (perhaps a concubine) as many say, as another sign of God, because the bible makes clear the number and names of his children.

Prophecy against Jerusalem – v. 17-25.

- Isa. 7: 17-25: “The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on your ancestral house [NIV: and on the house of your father] such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah – the king of Assyria [NIV: he will bring the king of Assyria]. On that day the Lord will whistle for the fly that is at the sources of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures [NIV: and at all the water holes]. On that day the Lord will shave with a razor hired beyond the River [*The Euphrates*—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will take off the beard as well [NIV: to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also]. On that day one will keep alive a young cow and two sheep [NIV: two goats], and will eat curds because of the abundance of milk that they give; for everyone that is left in the land shall eat curds and honey. On that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver [*about 25 pounds or 11.5 kilograms*], will become briers and thorns. With bow and arrows one will go there, for all the land will be briers and thorns; and as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe [NIV: as for the hills once cultivated by the hoe], you will not go there for fear of briers and thorns; but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread [NIV: where sheep run].”

The prophecy says that the desolation of the enemy will be visible and, consequently, there will be shortage of supply of the crop and the animals.

- Isa. 7: 17: “The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on your ancestral house [NIV: and on the house of your father] such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah” – it can be said that this verse gives sequence to verse 16 of the previous passage that spoke about Immanuel. Immanuel, or the Messiah, was a plan for the deliverance of His people in the future, but in any case, Ahaz had been warned by the prophet that the threat of Pekah and Rezin was far from him: “the

land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted” (Isa. 7: 16). This meant that in the short term, both Syria and Israel (northern kingdom) would fall, which actually happened (Isa. 17: 1; Am. 1: 4; 5), for Ahaz appealed to the Assyrians (2 Kin. 16: 7). The Assyrians under Tiglath-Pileser III took Damascus in 732 BC and Syria fell into his power, and took the captives from Damascus to Assyria. He also killed Rezin (2 Kin. 16: 9). In exchange for the favors that Tiglath-Pileser III had done him, Ahaz took the silver and gold from the temple, the royal house, and the house of the princes, and gave them to the Assyrian king (2 Kin. 16: 8-9; 2 Chr. 28: 20-21), but later, he was ordered to pay tribute to this one.

What is known from the biblical account is that in the days of Ahaz he made altars everywhere in Jerusalem and Judah (2 Chr. 28: 24-25; 2 Kin. 16: 4) and burned his own sons in sacrifice (2 Kin. 16: 3; 2 Chr. 28: 3). So, not only Pekah and Rezin came against him. The Edomites invaded Judah and carried away captives. And the Philistines also made raids on the cities in the south of Judah and took some villages, because the Lord humbled Ahaz, mainly because of his sins of idolatry (2 Chr. 28: 17-19).

Because of Ahaz’s refusal to ask for a sign from the Lord, as the prophet had suggested (Isa. 7: 11-12), and to have preferred to appeal to the king of Assyria, now the prophecy was that this would have a price: he would know the Assyrian yoke. Tiglath-Pileser III captured three regions of Israel between 734-732 BC: Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee. He also reduced the kingdom of northern Israel to the hill country of Ephraim, and Samaria was its capital. In addition to having killed Rezin, king of Syria, Tiglath-Pileser III confirmed the kingdom to Hoshea, who killed Pekah (2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Kin. 17: 1), and let him rule in Samaria. The Assyrian king intended to come to Judah then invade Jerusalem.

- Isa. 7: 18-19: “On that day the Lord will whistle for the fly that is at the sources of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures [NIV: and at all the water holes].”

The Lord compared the Egyptians to the flies that abounded in that country, because of the multitude of their armies, and the speed of their march. The Assyrians were compared to bees because they were plentiful in that country, and because of the number of their armies, their military order and discipline, and their pernicious and harmful nature. As it is known, there was no coalition between Egypt and Tiglath-Pileser III to enter Judah. Even if they had not entered Jerusalem (Isa. 7: 18) the Assyrians came and destroyed much of the land of Judah.

- Isa. 7: 20: “On that day the Lord will shave with a razor hired beyond the River [*The Euphrates*—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will take off the beard as well [NIV: to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also].”

Because of the sins of Ahaz, the king of Assyria, as an instrument of the Lord, will make him mourn and worried for the desolation of Judah. The razor is also a symbol that the land will be devastated.

The act of shaving his hair and beard was customary in great mourning. But here, the Lord shows a greater mourning to Ahaz: not only the head and the beard; also the hair of the feet [NIV: the hair of your legs], that is, his manhood, his authority and his power to react would also be affected. In the East, in general, and also among the Jews, the beard was of great importance, for it was a sign of civility, manhood, and respectability (Ps. 133: 2). There was no greater offense to man than to let anyone treat

it with indignity. If one's hand touched it with contempt, this was a great insult (1 Chr. 19: 4; 2 Sam. 10: 4-5; 2 Sam. 20: 9). On the other hand, kissing someone's beard was a form of greeting and sympathy for the other person. Shaving it or pulling it out, or marring its edges was a manifestation of mourning and pain (2 Sam. 19: 24; Ezra 9: 3; Isa. 15: 2; Jer. 41: 5; Jer. 48: 37). The Mosaic Law forbade to cut the beard in the manner of the Egyptians (Lev. 19: 27; Lev. 21: 5). Unlike the surrounding nations, the Egyptians shaved, except for the chin, where they allowed themselves to have a bundle of hair, which was kept well-cared. Sometimes, instead of their own hair, they wore a braided false beard with different shapes, depending on the category of the individual; just as they wore their wigs. Lepers, by Jewish law, should shave their beards, hair and eyebrows on the seventh day of their purification (Lev. 14: 9).

In the OT, both for men and women, hair used to be long to a certain length (Absalom had long hair: 2 Sam. 14: 25-26; 2 Sam. 18: 9). Generally the hair was not cut, just trimmed, and should be well treated, for to leave them without care was a sign of lamentation. Long hair was an honor and a sign of beauty to the woman (Song 4: 1b). In the NT it seems that the custom changes in relation to men (1 Cor. 11: 14), however, remained an honor for the woman (1 Cor. 11: 15). Lepers, by Jewish law, should shave their beards, hair and eyebrows on the seventh day of their purification (Lev. 14: 9). When someone made a vow of Nazirite, his hair was shaved and burned at the end of the vow (Num. 6: 5; 9; 19), except Samson, who for being a Nazirite for life could not cut it off (Judg. 13: 5). The law forbade the hair to be cut at the temples (Temple = the flat part of either side of the head between the forehead and the ear – Lev. 19: 27; Jer. 25: 23; Jer. 49: 31-32), for this part of the head was regarded as the source of life for the Jews, and only the heathen shaved the sideburns. In Jer. 49: 32, where it is written 'those who have shaven temples' (NRSV) it may be read, in Hebrew, 'cut off into corners, or, that have the corners of their hair pulled', that is, to have a beard on the cheek narrowed or cut, which was a Canaanite custom, forbidden to the Israelites. Jer. 25: 23-24 concerns the Arabs, for it is written: "Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who have shaven temples; all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed peoples that live in the desert", as well as in Jer. 49: 31-32, for the title of the biblical passage is: 'A message about Kedar and Hazor' (NIV), meaning its invasion by Nebuchadnezzar: "Rise up [*God was saying to the Babylonians*], advance against a nation at ease, that lives secure, says the Lord, that has no gates or bars (*meaning nomadic life, outdoors, in tents*), that lives alone. Their camels shall become booty, their herds of cattle a spoil. I will scatter to every wind those who have shaven temples, and I will bring calamity against them from every side, says the Lord."

A Jew could not cut his hair on his forehead too, for it was characteristic of certain idolatrous cults (Lev. 19: 27; Lev. 21: 5; Deut. 14: 1). Regarding the priests, God speaks to Ezekiel (Ezek. 44: 20): "They shall not shave their heads or let their locks grow long; they shall only trim the hair of their heads."

It was customary to anoint the hair of a guest as a sign of hospitality (Lk. 7: 46); or were anointed at feasts (Ps. 45: 7).

As for the word 'ash' (or 'dust') or 'ashes' (spread on the head as part of the weeping), in Hebrew it is: 'epher (Strong #665) = 'product of burning'; of an unused root meaning 'to spread'; ashes, dust. Ash is a metaphor for what is worthless (Isa. 44: 20) and disgusting (Job 30: 19); misery (Ps. 102: 9; Jer. 6: 26); shame (2 Sam. 13: 19); humiliation before God (Gen. 18: 27; Job 42: 6); contrition (Dan. 9: 3; Matt. 11: 21) and purification (Num. 19: 9; 10; 17; Heb. 9: 13). When the bible talks about spreading 'ashes' on the head or the garments as a sign of mourning or repentance, it is not necessarily speaking of the ashes of resulting from the burning of animals (as it was in

temple sacrifices), but it is referring to dust, the dust of the earth, which was often spread over the head of the repentant or those who were mourning (cf. Neh. 9: 1).

There is another Hebrew word used for ‘ash’, which is: deshen, meaning ‘fat’ or ‘ash’ – the residue of sacrificed animals.

• Isa. 7: 21-25: “On that day one will keep alive a young cow and two sheep [NIV: two goats], and will eat curds because of the abundance of milk that they give; for everyone that is left in the land shall eat curds and honey. On that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver [*about 25 pounds or 11.5 kilograms*], will become briers and thorns. With bow and arrows one will go there, for all the land will be briers and thorns; and as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe [NIV: as for the hills once cultivated by the hoe], you will not go there for fear of briers and thorns; but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread [NIV: where sheep run].”

When the bible speaks of a man having only one young cow and two sheep, this seems to indicate the scarcity of both men and animals after the enemy has withdrawn from the land. Even if with so few animals, like a young cow and two sheep, those who are left will be able to feed themselves and their families: with curds and honey (for there would be bees there). As the plantations were devastated and there were few men and few animals to tend the land, the crop would be occupied by briers and thorns; men would have to go to the field with bow and arrows for fear of hurting themselves in the thorns and for fear of the wild animals, snakes and scorpions that could eventually hide in this type of plant. Because there were no more fences between the properties, the remaining domestic animals (cattle and sheep) would graze loose.

The only time that Egypt, Judah and Assyria were involved at the same time in war was in the time of Josiah (640-609 BC), when Necho II of Egypt (610-595 BC) tried to prevent the advance of Nebuchadnezzar by allying with Assyria. He tried to pass through the land of Judah, but was stopped by King Josiah, who died at the battle of Megiddo (2 Kin. 23: 29). Necho did not invade Judah; his goal was just to pass by there. The decisive battle took place in Carchemish, in the north of Syria, in 605 BC between Necho II and Nebuchadnezzar II. Necho was defeated and Babylon was able to consolidate its dominion over the region; he conquered all that belonged to the King of Egypt, between the River Nile and the Euphrates River. A situation of involvement among the three countries in a war, as mentioned above, could also be in the seventh year of Hoshea (725 BC), when Shalmaneser V of Assyria came up against Israel and defeated the king because he asked for help from Pharaoh So of Egypt (2 Kin. 17: 4, probably an abbreviation of (O)so(rkon), Osorkon IV, of the 22nd dynasty – 730-712 BC, and who reigned in Tanis and Bubastis – or Tefnakht (Tefnakhte) from the 24th dynasty, who reigned at Sais, 732-725 BC). But Tefnakhte (So) could not help him because he had problems in his own country, in war against Pharaohs of Cush, who disputed the throne of Egypt. Hoshea was imprisoned. Samaria was besieged for three years (2 Kin. 17: 5-6; 2 Kin. 18: 9-11). In the ninth year (2 Kin. 18: 9-11), Israel was taken over by Sargon II (722-705 BC) and exiled (722 BC). In the reign of Sargon II, Egypt also fell into the hands of the Assyrians (716 BC) in the year that Hezekiah came to power in Judah. Ashdod (city of Philistia) was sacked in 711 BC by Sargon II (Isa. 20: 1).

Chapter 8

Assyria, the Lord's instrument – v. 1-4.

• Isa. 8: 1-4: “Then the Lord said to me, Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, ‘Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz’, and have it attested for me by reliable witnesses, the priest Uriah and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah [NIV: The Lord said to me: ‘Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. And I will call in Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah as reliable witnesses for me’]. And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; for before the child knows how to call ‘My father’ or ‘My mother’, the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria.”

‘Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz’ means ‘quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil.’ The Lord confirms that Syria (Damascus) and Israel (Samaria) will fall by the hands of the king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser III, in less than a year. And the sign that He gave for this was the name of the newborn son of the prophet Isaiah. The Assyrian king conquered three regions of Israel between 734-732 BC: Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee (2 Kin. 15: 29: “In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria”). Although the greatest destruction of Tiglath-Pileser III was in Damascus (732 BC), deporting its people to Kir in Assyria (2 Kin. 16: 9), some inhabitants of Samaria went along with the Damascenes to Gozan and Nineveh, occurring on a larger scale ten years later, under the rule of Sargon II (2 Kin. 17: 6; 2 Kin. 18: 11; 1 Chr. 5: 26). Tiglath-Pileser III killed Rezin the king of Syria and confirmed the kingdom to Hoshea, who killed Pekah (2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Kin. 17: 1), letting him rule in Samaria as his vassal (2 Kin. 17: 3). Damascus was reduced to subsidiary town within the Assyrian province of Hamath, and thenceforth it lost its political influence, remaining with only economic influence (Ezek. 27: 18).



As for the witnesses of what Isaiah was writing: Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, we can only assert with certainty that Uriah (2 Kin. 16: 10; 11; 15-16) was the priest who built the idolatrous altar (2 Kin. 16: 10-12) in accordance with all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus when he went there to meet Tiglath-Pileser III, being summoned to pay him tribute. This led to the worship of Syrian deities within the temple of Jerusalem (2 Chr. 28: 23). Ahaz gathered together the utensils of the house of God, and cut them in pieces. He shut up the doors of the house of the Lord and made altars in every corner of Jerusalem (2 Chr. 28: 24). The idolatrous altar like that he saw in Damascus was set it in the house of the Lord. The bronze altar that was before the Lord he removed from the front of the house, from the place between his altar and the house of the Lord, and put it on the north side of his altar. He made sacrifices on the new altar (2 Kin. 16: 10-18). In addition, the king made altars in all places of Jerusalem and Judah (2 Chr. 28: 24-25; 2 Kin. 16: 4). So why would Isaiah call Uriah a trustworthy witness? Because, as an accomplice of Ahaz in idolatry, he would not be prone to help Isaiah or twist the truth in his favor; so, seeing Isaiah write the prophecy before it happened, he could not deny it after it was fulfilled. He would have to acknowledge that he was present before, when it was written. As for Zechariah, it is not known whether he was a Levite (2 Chr. 29: 13), or whether he was the father-in-law of Ahaz (2 Kin. 18: 2; 2 Chr. 29: 1).

The kingdom of Judah would also be afflicted by the king of Assyria – v. 5-8.

- Isa. 8: 5-8: “The Lord spoke to me again: Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and melt in fear [NIV: and rejoices over] before Rezin and the son of Remaliah; therefore, the Lord is bringing up against it the mighty flood waters of the River [*Euphrates*], the king of Assyria and all his glory; it will rise above all its channels and overflow all its banks; it will sweep on into Judah as a flood, and, pouring over, it will reach up to the neck; and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.”

As the king and the people had no faith in God or heard the voice of the prophet, the Lord allowed the Assyrian army to come against Judah. It is as if the waters of Siloam [or Shiloah], which flowed slowly through the aqueduct, could be compared with the meek rule of God, seemingly slow, and rejected by His people. They rejected peace, therefore God would bring violence and agitation upon them, as the waters of the Euphrates ran faster. If they did not feel at peace or confident in God, and were intimidated by the threats of Syria and Israel, let alone when it came to the Assyrians? Even though they had not entered Jerusalem, the Assyrians came and destroyed much of the land of Judah (Isa. 7: 18-20; 2 Chr. 28: 20-21). In 2 Chr. 28: 23, it is written ‘who had defeated him’ [NIV] or ‘which smote him’ [KJV; ASV], in regard to the Assyrian gods whom Ahaz thought had defeated him, for his idolatry was so great that did not even let him remember God anymore.

‘Its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel’ – **Immanuel is the name given to the land of Judea**, since Jesus was to be born there. And this shows that the wings of the enemy army would fill every place of that land with its presence, passing through the whole House of Judah like a flood.

Fear God – v. 9-15.

- Isa. 8: 9-15: “Band together, you peoples, and be dismayed; listen, all you far countries; gird yourselves and be dismayed; gird yourselves and be dismayed! [NIV: Raise the war cry (or ‘Do your worst’), you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered!].

Take counsel together, but it shall be brought to naught; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us [NIV: Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us]. For the Lord spoke thus to me while his hand was strong upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread [NIV: the Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread]. He will become a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against; for both houses of Israel he will become a rock one stumbles over – a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem [NIV: and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare]. And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

The Lord says that the plans of the wicked will not succeed. Even if they prepare for war and make great strategies, they will be frustrated because He is with His people. It was Isaiah speaking to these distant peoples through prayer or a cry, perhaps, because God had spoken to him very clearly that he should not walk in the way of the wicked and nor be afraid of what his own people feared. It was Him they should fear, because He was the only Holy, the Holy One of Israel. To the righteous, He was a sanctuary, but to the scoffers and idolaters, He would be a stumbling block. This served both for Israel and Judah and Jerusalem (the descendants of David on the throne). Those who did not give ear would fall into the traps of the enemy.

The prophecy is secure and the people must follow it, instead of consulting mediums and familiar spirits – v. 16-22.

- Isa. 8: 16-22: “Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching [NIV: seal up the law] among my disciples. I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. See, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion [NIV: Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion]. Now if people say to you, ‘Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living, for teaching and for instruction?’ surely, those who speak like this will have no dawn! [NIV: When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn]. They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry; when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will curse their king and their gods [NIV: Their king and their God]. They will turn their faces upward, or they will look to the earth, but will see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness.”

The prophet says to his disciples and to the people to keep the commandment. He has already made his choice: he will wait on the Lord and trust in him. His children are the testimony that what the Lord has spoken is true and will happen. If people do not listen and go after fortunetellers and sorcerers and familiar spirits, they will suffer with the wrath of the Lord, they will suffer misery. They should consult their God, not idolaters. It is no use to look up and curse God, or look to the earth, for they will only see distress, darkness and anxiety. All this because they did not want to hear the voice of the Lord, calling them to holiness and righteousness before the calamity came.

Chapter 9

The birth and the reign of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace – v. 1-7.

- Isa. 9: 1-7: “But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined [NIV: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death (or ‘land of darkness’) a light has dawned]. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian [NIV: the day of Midian’s defeat]. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace [KJV: For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace]. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

- Isa. 9: 1-5: “In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali” – Tiglath-Pileser III conquered three regions of Israel between 734-732 BC: Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee (2 Kin. 15: 29: “In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria”). Therefore, Isaiah mentions all of them at the beginning of the prophecy of chapter 9, renewing their hope of restoration. God, who made people look at the lands of Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee with contempt because of the Assyrian invasion, in the latter time [NIV: ‘in the future’], that is, in the days of the Messiah, will once again give glory to these regions. They will be honored. And the people that walked in darkness and sorrow shall see a great light, and shall live with joy. The joy will be motivated by the end of the war (the boots of the warriors and the garments rolled in blood were burned) and oppression (the yoke, the bar across their shoulders and the rod of their oppressor were broken), and especially by the birth of a boy in Judah, the Messiah. The victory over the oppressor is compared to the victory that Gideon had over the Midianites, killing their kings, Oreb and Zeeb. Oreb was slain at the rock of Oreb; and Zeeb, in his winepress (Judg. 7: 25). Isaiah also says that the nation will grow [‘You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy’]. Like all prophets, he uses the verbal tense in the past tense as if the prophecy had already been fulfilled. Also, like all prophets, he has the vision, but he does not always know when it will be fulfilled, unless God reveals it. That is why every time he speaks about the Messiah, it seems that he speaks of something very close, either because he wanted Him to come soon, or because, in fact, he did not have the notion of the spiritual kingdom brought by the Messiah. In his human mind, as a Jew, he expected a Messiah in human form and bringing a military kingdom, like David or Cyrus. It is not true that he was prophesying about Hezekiah nor that he expected the Messiah personified in him, even

because we saw that Hezekiah had already been born. The description of the ‘child’ (verse 6) given to Israel continues the prophecy about Immanuel (chapter 7). Likewise, it is not true what they preach about Immanuel as a third son of the prophet, and saying that he married another woman, a virgin, in addition to his first wife, who gave him his two sons with symbolic names prophesied in the bible. This confusion was made later with the Hebrew translations of the prophet’s scroll into the Aramaic, and because the Jews did not believe in the possibility of another type of Messiah beyond which their minds conceived.

Isaiah uses qualities for this boy that were very common to expect in relation to a king, according to the mentality of that time: the wisdom of the king in the administration (Counselor), his military capacity (Mighty God), zeal for the prosperity of the people (Everlasting Father) and concern for the happiness of the people (Prince of Peace). Verse 7 makes it clear that the boy belongs to the royal house of David (‘His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom’) and that he will rule with justice and righteousness (‘He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore’). Some bible versions (such as KJV) separate the expression: ‘Wonderful Counselor’ into two: ‘Wonderful’, ‘Counselor.’

Another comment: it would be understandable to call the king ‘god’, when it comes to Egyptians, Persians, Babylonians or Assyrians, but not to Israel, where the king was not considered a ‘god.’ At most, he was called ‘God’s anointed’ or ‘son (with lowercase letter) of God’, but no deity was ever insinuated in the kings of Judah (‘Mighty God’, as written above).

- Isa. 9: 6-7: “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor (Pele Yo-eytz), Mighty God (El Gibbor), Everlasting Father (Aviyad), Prince of Peace (Sar-Shalom). His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

So the ‘child’ or ‘son’ (Immanuel) is undoubtedly a reference to the Messiah, for His qualities as a wise man (Wonderful Counselor – I prefer to keep these two words together to emphasize that He would not be just any counselor, but a Wonderful Counselor) and a man of war (Mighty God). The third quality, in my view, would not be His zeal for the prosperity of the people, but His eternity, the Creator of all things, the beginning and end, the first and the last, the owner of eternity, hence the name ‘Everlasting Father.’ He Himself told His people that He would like to be called their Father.

The word ‘father’, besides its natural (human) significance, in the Scriptures is written in the sense of grandfather, great-grandfather, or founder of a family, even remotely, as in the case of Abraham, the father of the Hebrews, or by the meaning of his name, ‘father of multitudes’, ‘father of many (nations)’, because many peoples had their origin in him (Ishmael and the sons of Keturah, all of them Arab nations). Therefore the Jews at the time of Jesus Christ called Abraham, Isaac and Jacob their fathers. Jesus Christ (in His human incarnation) is called the Son of David, though this king was far from Him many generations. The initiator, the teacher, the first of a certain profession is also called ‘father’ in the bible, as was the case with Jabal, who was ‘the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle.’ And Jubal (his brother) ‘was the father of all who play the harp’ (Gen. 4: 20-21). Father is the one who generates something or someone, in a broad sense, either physically or figuratively. The word is also used in relation to

God in the sense of spiritual kinship; therefore, God is the Father of mankind, while the devil is the father (with lowercase letter) of lies (Jn. 8: 44).

In the OT, the word ‘father’ appears 1044 times, but only 3 times (at least in NIV), the word is written in capital letters, referring to God:

- Isa. 63: 16: “But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name”.

- Isa. 64: 8: “Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand”.

- Jer. 3: 19: “‘I myself said, ‘How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation’. I thought you would call me ‘Father’ and not turn away from following me”’.

In 1 Chr. 29: 10 David called Israel father, with a Jewish vision of him as the initiator of the nation of Israel: “David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, ‘Praise be to you, O Lord, God of **our father** Israel, from everlasting to everlasting” [NIV]; “Then David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly; David said: ‘Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever” [NRSV].

The fourth quality mentioned by Isaiah is the concern for the happiness of the people; hence the title of ‘Prince of Peace’, like Jesus cares about our happiness and emotional and spiritual stability before Him. The Hebrew word for ‘prince’ is: sar (Strong #8269), which means: a principal person of any rank or class; captain (that had rule), chief (captain), general, governor, keeper, lord, master, taskmaster, prince, principal, ruler, steward [as Shebna is called in the bible as the steward of Hezekiah (Isa. 22: 15 – NRSV), meaning that he was a high official of the court]. The word ‘sar’ comes from the verb ‘sasar’ (Strong #8323), which means: to have or exercise or get dominion (altogether), to become a prince, to hold the government; to rule, to reign, to be prince, to control, to dominate.

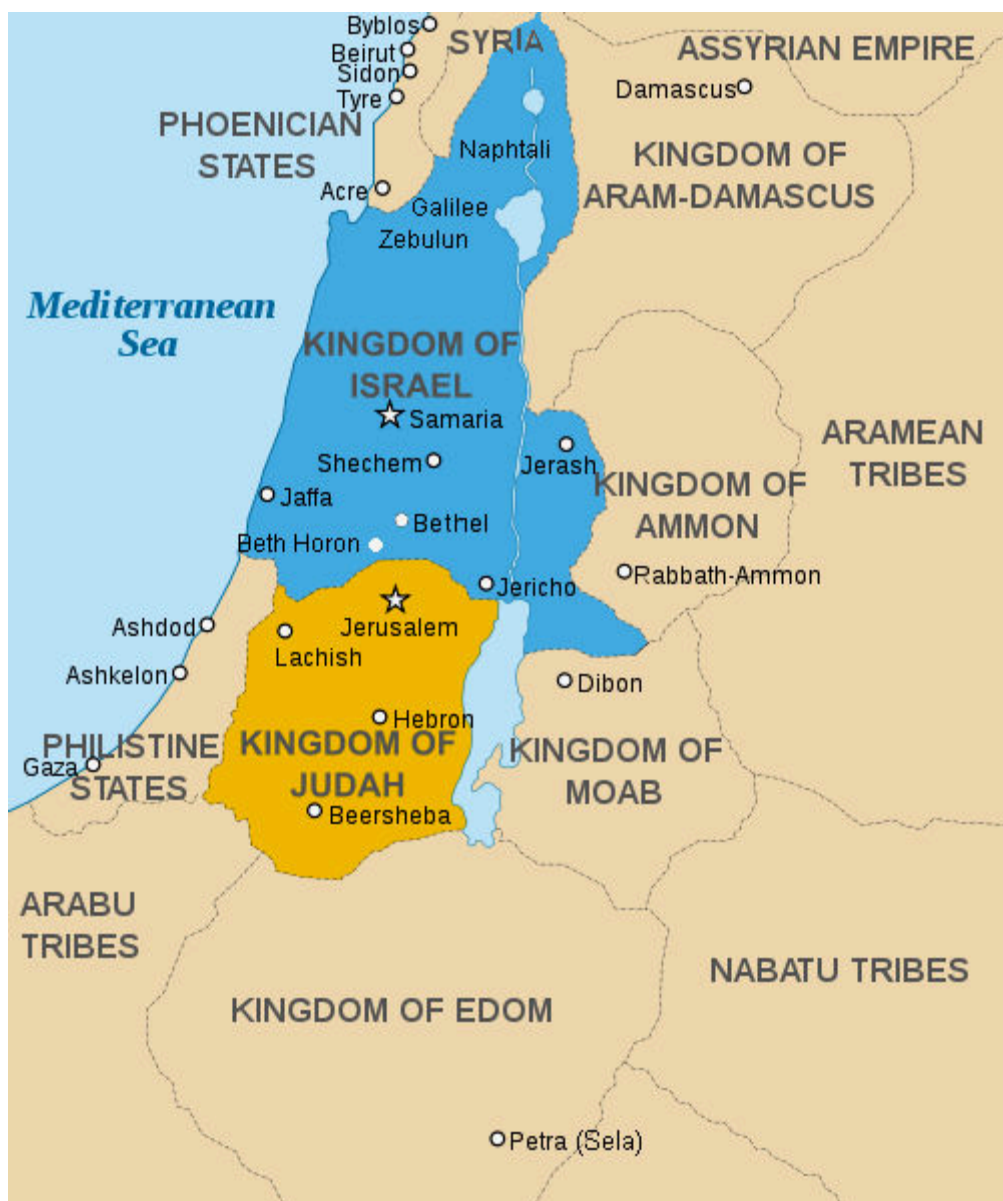
The Lord’s anger against Israel. The Aramaeans and the Philistines will also destroy Samaria – v. 8-12.

- Isa. 9: 8-12: “The Lord sent a word against Jacob, and it fell on Israel; and all the people knew it – Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria – but in pride and arrogance of heart they said: ‘The bricks have fallen, but we will build with dressed stones; the sycamores [NIV: the fig trees] have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place.’ So the Lord raised adversaries against them, and stirred up their enemies [NIV: But the Lord has strengthened Rezin’s foes against them and has spurred their enemies on], the Arameans on the east and the Philistines on the west, and they devoured Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still.”

The prophetic word of God against the ten tribes (Jacob) actually came to Israel by revelation (‘it fell [from heaven] on Israel’). Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom, which was still counting on Syria as its ally against Assyria. However, the Lord says that because of the pride and arrogance of heart of the Israelites, they will be disappointed. Even though the prophet Isaiah spoke of the ruin of Samaria, they told to themselves that if the bricks of their houses have fallen, they would build other with dressed stones, much prettier and stronger. The Israelites were speaking of the cities besieged by the Assyrians and whose houses would be destroyed.

Sycamore (Hebrew, shiqmâ; in Greek sykomōraia) or sycamore-fig (Ficus sycomorus L.), a wild fig tree, is a big and vigorous tree, abundant in Egypt and the

lowlands of Palestine (1 Kin. 10: 27; 2 Chr. 1: 15; 2 Chr. 9: 27). The fruit were edible (a fig flavor mixed with blackberry) and of great value to Israel, like the olive trees, for it was part of the agrarian production of the nation and had antiseptic properties. In Am 7: 14, the translation ‘gatherer of sycamore fruit’ (KJV) is incorrect, since the Hebrew word means ‘cultivator’ of that tree (‘balac’ – Strong #1103: a primitive root, meaning ‘to pinch’ sycamore figs, a process necessary to ripen them), pruning the top of each fruit to ensure that it would ripen; or, according to some scholars, making incisions in its peel for it to ripen; after four days the fruit was harvested. In Judea the sycamores were used for construction, but they were not trees as valuable as cedar whose wood had no knots and had a pleasant smell and was much stronger and more durable, including in the building of palaces. Thus the sycamores which the Assyrians used to make the siege works would be replaced by cedars, tall and large trees, very beautiful to look at, of great value and usefulness in construction, and very durable.



Therefore, the Lord raises against Israel (Ephraim) the adversaries of Rezin, the Aramaeans or Assyrians, and the Philistines. The Assyrians would attack Damascus first, and then advance southward to Ephraim. Tiglath-Pileser III would kill Rezin king of Damascus, and the city would be reduced to a vassal city of the Assyrian province of Hamath, losing its political influence and therefore, no longer being able to continue as Ephraim's ally, even if wanted to; unfortunately, from that moment Damascus would be a servant of Assyria. It fell before Assyria in 732 BC, and its people were deported to Kir (2 Kin. 16: 9), and some inhabitants of Samaria went along with the Damascenes to Gozan and Nineveh. However, Israel's greatest deportation would occur ten years later in the reign of Sargon II (2 Kin. 17: 6; 2 Kin. 18: 11; 1 Chr. 5: 26). Aramaeans is a common name for Syrians and Assyrians, as it refers to the region of Aram in the bible.

Israel will suffer for its impenitence and hypocrisy (of the people and the leaders) – v. 13-21.

- Isa. 9: 13-21: “The people did not turn to him who struck them, or seek the Lord of hosts. So the Lord cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed in one day – elders and dignitaries [NIV: prominent men] are the head, and prophets who teach lies are the tail; for those who led this people led them astray, and those who were led by them were left in confusion [NIV: those who are guided are led astray]. That is why the Lord did not have pity on their young people, or compassion on their orphans and widows; for everyone was godless and an evildoer, and every mouth spoke folly [NIV: therefore the Lord will take no pleasure in the young men, nor will he pity the fatherless and widows, for everyone is ungodly and wicked, every mouth speaks vileness]. For all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still. For wickedness burned like a fire, consuming briars and thorns; it kindled the thickets of the forest, and they swirled upward in a column of smoke. Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts the land was burned, and the people became like fuel for the fire; no one spared another. They gorged on the right, but still were hungry [NIV: On the right they will devour, but still be hungry], and they devoured on the left, but were not satisfied; they devoured the flesh of their own kindred [NIV: Each will feed on the flesh of his own offspring]; Manasseh devoured Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh, and together they were against Judah. For all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still.”

The prophet describes a disunited people, who live in strife, full of violence against each other; a people of evil nature, with leaders who teach lies; and the people receive their lies without questioning. Even those who seem more humble and helpless as orphans and widows displease God, for they do not fear Him. The tribes of the north fight among themselves and attack Judah too.

Chapter 10

Divine judgment against those who practice injustice – v. 1-4.

- Isa. 10: 1-4: “Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! [NIV: Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless]. What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth, so as not to crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain? For all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still.”

These four verses are a continuation of the last verses of chapter 9, where the prophet describes the wickedness of his people and yet they show no repentance or change; therefore, the Lord continues with His hand stretched out in anger against them. Here God asks them what they will do in the day they go to captivity. All it is left to them is to be humiliated among the prisoners of war or lie down among the dead.

God’s judgment on Assyria – v. 5-19.

- Isa. 10: 5-11 (see Zeph. 2: 23-15; Isa. 14: 24-27; Nah. 1: 1): “Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger – the club in their hands is my fury! Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. But this is not what he intends, nor does he have this in mind; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few. For he says: ‘Are not my commanders all kings? Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus? As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols whose images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols what I have done to Samaria and her images?’”

Here the prophet speaks of the pride of the Assyrians, mentioning the names of some of their cities, in which they boasted for having taken them.

Calno was located in Syria, before being captured by the Assyrians. Calno (Isa. 10: 9) can be the same Calneh or Kalneh of Amos 6: 2: “Cross over to Calneh [NIV: Kalneh], and see; from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is your territory greater than their territory?” The city is identified by some archaeologists as Kulnia, Kullani or Kullanh, the modern Kullani-Köy, between Carchemish in river Euphrates and Arpad, near Aleppo, in northern Syria, about nine kilometers and six hundred meters southeast of Arpad. Calno or Calneh was associated with Canneh (Ezek. 27: 23), as one of the cities with which Tyre maintained commercial relations. In Gen. 10: 10 it is written that it was one of the four cities founded by Nimrod: Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh [in NRSV: ‘The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar’]. But it is probably not the same city, since these four cities were located in Chaldea, north of Sumer, and not in the region of Mesopotamia (in the North), where the Assyrian Empire was later established. In the case of Nimrod (Gen. 10: 10), W. F. Albright (1944) says that the word did not refer to a city but was corrupted from an expression meaning ‘all of them.’

Arpad was in Syria and was first captured by the Assyrians in 754 BC, in the reign of Ashur-nirari V (755-745 BC), in his efforts to control the route to Hamath and

Damascus, which were its allies (Jer. 49: 23). Arpad was sacked by Tiglath-Pileser III in 740 BC, after two years of siege, and again by Sargon II, in 720 BC. Its fall symbolized the overpowering power of Assyria (Isa. 10: 9). Today there are ruins of it in Tell Rifa'ad, thirty-two kilometers northwest of Aleppo (Syria).

Damascus was the capital of Syria which was later taken by the Assyrians; Carchemish was in Assyria. In 605 BC the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish, and they fled to Hamath in Syria, where they were utterly destroyed.

Hamath, 'Fortress' or 'sacred enclosure' was a city and kingdom of upper Syria, on the banks of the Orontes River. The entrance to Hamath is an opening that led to the Syrian valley. It was the boundary of that territory, given to the Israelites (Num. 13: 21), but they didn't take possession of that land. Hamath was of great importance and prosperity in the time of David (2 Sam. 8: 9-10) and Solomon, who built storehouses there (2 Chr. 8: 4; 2 Kin. 14: 28). After Solomon's death, Hamath became a free state again, and retained its independence until King Jeroboam II of Israel (782-753 BC) took it from Judah, destroying its fortifications (2 Kin. 14: 28-29). Later, Hamath became part of the Assyrian Empire (2 Kin. 18: 34; Isa. 10: 9), passing to the Chaldeans in the time of Zedekiah (Jer. 39: 5; Jer. 49: 23; Jer. 52: 9; 27). It was not only an important commercial center, but had also become remarkable due to its irrigation system by means of large wheels ('norias'), which brought up the water from the river Orontes to be taken to the upper city. It is now known by the name of Hama.

In the time of the Assyrian splendor, these cities were their pride because they fell into their power. They thought they were invincible and that their commanders were as powerful as kings, that their power would reach all those kingdoms, whose gods were more numerous than those of Samaria. We need to remember that this whole passage in the bible began in Isa. 9: 8, and was prophesied concerning Israel (the northern nation), not against Judah. The plunder of the cities of Samaria and Damascus (Isa. 8: 4), the deportation of the inhabitants of Damascus to Kir (2 Kin. 16: 9) and their destruction were quoted as a lesson to Judah, here in Isa. 10: 9. But just as the king of Assyria boasted of having power to destroy idolatrous kingdoms greater than Samaria, God would also have it to correct His own people and to destroy Assyria.

- Isa. 10: 12-19 (see Zeph. 2: 23-15; Isa. 14: 24-27; Nah. 1: 1): "When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride [NIV: the haughty look in his eyes]. For he says: 'By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones [NIV: like a mighty one I subdued their kings (or 'subdued the mighty')]. My hand has found, like a nest, the wealth of the peoples; and as one gathers eggs that have been forsaken, so I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened its mouth, or chirped.' Shall the ax vaunt itself over the one who wields it, or the saw magnify itself against the one who handles it? As if a rod should raise the one who lifts it up, or as if a staff should lift the one who is not wood! Therefore the Sovereign, the Lord of hosts, will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors, and under his glory a burning will be kindled, like the burning of fire [NIV: therefore, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame; KJV: Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire]. The light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame; and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day. The glory of his forest and his

fruitful land [NIV: his forests and fertile fields] the Lord will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when an invalid wastes away. The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down.”

Just as God sent destruction upon Samaria, because of their gods, He would deal with Israel and Judah for all their sins, including idolatry. However, He had not forgotten the arrogance of the king of Assyria, who thought that it was his own arm that conquered victory to him, unaware that he was only an instrument in the hands of God to punish His people.

The king of Assyria thought his was very wise and describes his victories in such a way as to humiliate the conquered peoples, comparing them with defenseless birds whose eggs were suddenly stolen, just as he plundered the treasures of many nations. As God calls Himself the potter, and we are the clay molded by His hands, He compares Himself now as one who cuts with an ax or as one who handles a saw, the foreign peoples being only instruments in His hands. He still compares the enemies of His people to simple rods or staffs of wood that could not oppose Him. The Lord said He would send upon His stout warriors a wasting, consuming disease. The Hebrew word used is *razown* (Strong #7332), meaning leanness or thinness, a word corresponding to that used by King James (KJV), meaning consumption, a wasting, loss of power and strength, loss of safety, loss of courage: “Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.”

‘Under his glory’ or ‘under his pomp’ – This means that the Lord would consume his pomp as fire consumes weeds. And the bible completes, ‘the light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame; and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day [NIV: in a single day].’ He was not necessarily talking about burning them alive, but to destroy their pomp and vanity in the fire of His wrath, by the way He had in mind, whatever it was.

When the prophet says: ‘The glory of his forest and his fruitful land the Lord will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when an invalid wastes away’ he means that the Assyrian army, composed of strong men (v. 16: ‘his stout warriors’ or ‘his sturdy warriors’ or ‘his fat ones’) and as numerous as trees in a forest, would be destroyed by the Lord. Their glory (their pomp, their vanity, their trust in their own brute force, all that they placed their trust in) was nothing before the power of God.

The Assyrian soldiers were like a fertile field, like ripe ears of corn and ready to be harvested. The Lord would consume not only the body as the soul, that is, not only the physical death of those men, but also their courage, their impetus and motivation, and the sinful tendency within them, in any form, that is, all forms of abomination of their souls in the sight of God.

The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down – very few Assyrian soldiers will survive.

Now, here comes a point of contention on the part of theologians as to the chronological location of this destruction. Most mentions this prophecy as the destruction of Sennacherib’s army (2 Kin. 19: 35-37; 2 Chr. 32: 21; Isa. 37: 36-38) in 701 BC when he came to attack Judah and Jerusalem. The result of this campaign was described in the bible: the destruction of 185,000 soldiers of the Assyrian army during the night by an angel of the Lord, and it is where they are based to affirm the words of Isa. 10: 17: ‘and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day.’ As for Sennacherib’s army, this statement is true, for in one night they were consumed probably because of an unexpected disease, plague, as the bible usually writes (1 Chr. 21: 11-12; 2 Sam. 24: 12-13, in the case of David because of the census).

But I have noticed something that I think is worth remembering: at least in NIV the title of these three passages above about the destruction of the army of Sennacherib are: 'Isaiah prophesies Sennacherib's fall' (2 Kin. 19: 35-37); 'Sennacherib threatens Jerusalem' (2 Chr. 32: 21); 'Sennacherib's fall' (Isa. 37: 36-38), while here in Isa. 10: 5-19 the title is 'God's judgment on Assyria' (NIV). This has a difference: the destruction of an Assyrian army is one thing; the destruction of Assyria (as nation or empire) is another, even because the prophet was here speaking of the Syro-Ephraimite war during the rule of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC).

After him came: Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), who besieged Samaria for three years (2 Kin. 17: 5; 2 Kin. 18: 9-11), while his successor Sargon II (722-705 BC) captured it in the year in which he ascended to the throne (the exile of Israel to Assyria – 722 BC), so Isaiah was warning the Israelites. In the reign of Sargon II Egypt also fell into the hands of the Assyrians (716 BC, the year Hezekiah came to power in Judah) and Ashdod (the city of Philistia) was sacked in 711 BC (Isa. 20: 1). Sennacherib (Sin-ahhe-eriba, 705-681 BC) came after. His death is recorded in History as occurring in 681 BC, when his youngest son Esarhaddon came to power. After the failed campaign against Jerusalem in 701 BC, when his army was struck dead by an angel of the Lord at night (a quick death, and not slow like a wasting disease, which 'as when an invalid wastes away' – Isa. 10: 16; 18), Sennacherib spent the remaining years of his reign in military campaigns against rebels in his empire.

His son Esarhaddon reigned in the period of 681-669 BC and made a great expedition against the Egyptian delta in 672 BC, installing Assyrian governors in Thebes and Memphis to control the tribute (remember that Egypt was already in the hands of the Assyrians since 716 BC). He divided Egypt into about twenty provinces dominated by twenty princes, whose chief was the half-Libyan, Necho of Sais. Some princes of Lower Egypt took advantage of this situation to revolt, but others supported Tirhakah (2 Kin. 19: 9; Isa. 37: 9 – also called Taharqa or Taharka or Taharqo or Khunefertem or Khunefertumre – 690-664 BC) who managed to re-conquer Egypt for a brief time in 669 BC. Esarhaddon sent a force against him, but he died on the way. Tirhakah was defeated at Memphis by Ashurbanipal in 664 BC.

After Esarhaddon, his son Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) came as king of Assyria, while his other son Shamash-shum-ukin remained as crown prince of Babylon. Although Egypt still promoted some revolts against Assyria, Ashurbanipal, at the beginning of his reign, fought against Egypt in three hard campaigns and captured Thebes (Nah. 3: 8, No Amon) in 661 BC, and its inhabitants were taken to Assyria after three years of siege (Nah. 3: 8-10). In his reign, Assyria acquired the greater territorial extension, although in 663 BC it began to show signs of weakness, and has been attacked by the Medes by this time. His brother Shamash-shum-ukin, with the support of Elam revolted against him in 652 BC, but died in his own palace, to which he had set fire. Therefore Ashurbanipal marched to plunder Susa in 639 BC, and thenceforth the city became an Assyrian province. With the deviation of Ashurbanipal's attention to the east and free from the Assyrian army's raids to support his local officials and tax collectors, the western city-states gradually were liberating themselves from Assyria. Egypt, now free, turned its attention again to Palestine.

The descendant of Ashurbanipal was Sinsharishkun (Sin-shar-ishkun; Sîn-šarru-iškun – 628-612 BC), one of his sons. Nineveh, the magnificent city embellished by Sennacherib (700 BC) was attacked again in 625 BC by the Medes, who allied themselves with the Chaldeans. The last king of Assyria (Ashur-uballit II, 612-608 or 605 BC, which no one knows if was the son or brother of Sinsharishkun) was practically a puppet in the hands of the Babylonians, for the fall of Nineveh occurred in

612 BC (prophesied by Nahum), and was destroyed to the dust. This happened due to the alliance between the king of Medes, Cyaxares (Uvaxštra – in old Persian; transliterated as ‘Uvarkhshattra’ or ‘Hovakhshatra’, 625-584 BC, father of Astyages the grandfather of Cyrus II), and Nabopolassar (626-605 BC, father of Nebuchadnezzar II) king of Babylon. There was a serious war, fires in almost every city in the Assyrian Empire, and the inhabitants of Nineveh who could not escape to the last Assyrian fortresses in the west were massacred or deported. Many skeletons not buried were found by archaeologists at that site. Nineveh was completely destroyed. The Assyrian Empire ended, and the Medes and the Babylonians divided its provinces among themselves.

So, going back to our reasoning on Isaiah, we may think that this ‘leanness’ (KJV) or weakening, consumption, a wasting, loss of power and strength, loss of safety and loss of courage, all this, gradually, came to be a decadence of an entire empire, not only the destruction of the army of Sennacherib, for Assyria did not cease to oppress the nations or Israel (here in this case, the kingdom of Judah) only with the escape of this ruler and his death by his two sons. The empire continued for about seventy years after his death, and then it was completely destroyed; battle after battle, defeat after defeat, by the will of God; and this is what I think this prophecy of Isa. 10: 1-19 means. Then the prophet continues to speak about a remnant of Israel (of the Northern Kingdom) that will remain after the invasion of Tiglath-Pileser III.

As I have said before, we must remember that this whole biblical passage began in Isa. 9: 8, and was prophesied against Israel (the northern nation), not against Judah. The plunder of the cities of Samaria and Damascus (Isa. 8: 4), the deportation of the inhabitants of Damascus to Kir (2 Kin. 16: 9) and their destruction were quoted as a lesson to Judah (Isa. 10: 9). The cities of Judah were destroyed by the Assyrians, but Jerusalem was only invaded, burned and plundered by the Babylonians.

The remnant of Israel and Judah will be saved – v. 20-27.

- Isa. 10: 20-27: “On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on the one who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. For the Lord God of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in all the earth. Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts: O my people, who live in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians when they beat you with a rod and lift up their staff against you as the Egyptians did. For in a very little while my indignation will come to an end, and my anger will be directed to their destruction. The Lord of hosts will wield a whip against them, as when he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb (see Judg. 7: 25); his staff will be over the sea, and he will lift it as he did in Egypt. On that day his burden will be removed from your shoulder, and his yoke will be destroyed from your neck [NIV: In that day their burden will be lifted from your shoulders, their yoke from your neck; the yoke will be broken because you have grown so fat; KJV: And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing; ASV: And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall depart from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed by reason of fatness].”

- Isa. 10: 20: “On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on the one who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.”

• Isa. 10: 22: “For though your people Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.” This refers to some Israelites that escaped the Assyrian captivity went to Judah, becoming part of the Southern Kingdom; hence the term ‘remnant.’

The Lord says that a remnant of Israel and Judah will be saved [‘Shear-Jashub’, meaning ‘a remnant will return’ – Isa. 7: 3], the name of the other son of Isaiah]. Now He comforts His people from Zion (Jerusalem), saying that the oppression of Assyria will not last forever, and that Egypt, on whom they leaned on, will not be able to deliver them (The prophet has already passed to the reign of Hezekiah, who tended to trust Egypt when Judah was threatened). They (the remaining Israelites of the Northern Kingdom) will find out that God is their strength.

From verse 21 to verse 27 the prophet continues to speak about God’s intention to destroy Assyria, but His people will be delivered by His power, by the power of His Spirit (‘the anointing’).

• Isa 10: 26: “The Lord of hosts will wield a whip against them, as when he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb; his staff will be over the sea, and he will lift it as he did in Egypt.” Here in verse 26 there is mention to the slaughter of Midian at Oreb, referring to the times of Gideon, where the Midianite kings, Oreb and Zeeb, were killed by the men of Ephraim (Judg. 7: 25; Ps. 83: 11; see Isa. 9: 4) during the night, unexpectedly. Now, yes, He refers to Sennacherib (who will come to Judah in a few years’ time). The same way it happened in Oreb, Sennacherib’s army was killed unexpectedly by the angel of the Lord at night, and he was murdered by his own sons in his land (Isa. 37: 36; 2 Chr. 32: 21-22; 2 Kin. 19: 35-37). God also says that his staff will be over the sea just as the staff of Moses was stretched out over the Red Sea to divide the waters before the crossing of the people, and to make the sea regain its strength and swallow the Egyptians (Ex. 14: 16- 18; 21; 26-28).

The march of Sennacherib to Jerusalem – v. 28-34.

• Isa. 10: 28-32: “He has come to Aiath; he has passed through Migron, at Michmash he stores his baggage [NIV: They enter Aiath; they pass through Migron; they store supplies at Micmash]; they have crossed over the pass, at Geba they lodge for the night; Ramah trembles, Gibeah of Saul has fled. Cry aloud, O daughter Gallim! Listen, O Laishah! Answer her, O Anathoth! [NIV: Poor Anathoth!] Madmenah (cf. Josh. 15: 31) is in flight, the inhabitants of Gebim flee for safety [NIV: the people of Gebim take cover]. This very day he will halt at Nob, he will shake his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.”

The passage above describes the march of Sennacherib to Jerusalem. Sennacherib invaded the Kingdom of Judah, taking forty-six fortified cities in all. Here Isaiah names 12 cities. Micah, his contemporary, describes 11 more cities, Lachish being one of the most important (Mic. 1: 10-15): Gath (a Philistine city in the fertile region of Judah), Beth-leaphrah [or Beth-ophrah], Shaphir, Zaanan, Beth-ezel, Maroth, Lachish, Moresheth-gath, Achzib, Mareshah, and Adullam. And there is also the city of Azekah, usually mentioned together with Lachish, also in the fertile region of Judah (Josh. 10: 10, 11, 35; 1 Sam. 17: 1; 2 Chr. 11: 9; Neh. 11: 30; Jer. 34: 7).

He comes to Aiath, passes through Migron (in the tribe of Benjamin) and arrives at Michmash (in the tribe of Benjamin), where he leaves his heavy artillery and his provisions (‘they store supplies’). Then he crosses over the pass of Michmash (where once was the garrison of the Philistines, in the time of Jonathan the son of Saul – 1 Sam. 14: 4-5) and camps overnight at Geba (a city of Benjamin – Josh. 21: 17; 1 Kin. 15: 22). Ramah (in the tribe of Benjamin – Josh. 18: 25) trembles at his arrival. The inhabitants

of Gibeah of Saul flee (in the tribe of Benjamin; 1 Sam. 10: 26; 1 Sam. 11: 4; 1 Sam. 13: 2). The men of Judah are so afraid that they offer no resistance, because they have no more faith in God and His deliverance. Laishah or Laish is the name of two places in Palestine. One refers to the ancient name of the city of Dan (in the tribe of Dan), in the extreme north of Canaan, an ally of the Sidonians. Laish in Josh. 19: 47 is called Leshem, which means 'jewel.' The other Laish mentioned by Isaiah as among the cities of Judah destroyed by Sennacherib, is written as Laish (Layish) or Laishah, which means 'lioness.' The location is unknown at present, but it is thought to have been two miles northeast from Jerusalem. Even Anathoth, a city of priests, cries out in fear. The inhabitants of Gebim flee (It is unknown where Gebim was located). It is thought that Aiath refers to the city of Ai, east of Bethel (Josh. 7: 2), which was burned and destroyed by Joshua (Josh. 8: 28), but rebuilt later. It was originally a city of Ephraim (1 Chr. 7: 28, 'Ayyah'), but it came to be inhabited by the Benjamites after the exile in the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 11: 31, 'Aija'), together with Geba, Micmash, and Bethel, a few miles from Jericho. Today, the town of Et-Tell (in Arabic: 'the ruin-heap'), three or four kilometers southeast of Bethel (Tell Beitin), is generally identified with Ai. Bethel was a city between the border of Benjamin and Ephraim. Bethel first belonged to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 18: 13) but was later conquered by the tribe of Ephraim (1 Chr. 7: 28). It was called in Hosea 4: 15; Hosea 10: 5; 8 by the pejorative name of Beth-aven (Beth Aven), 'house of iniquity' or 'house of wickedness' because of its sin of idolatry. Gallim, like Anathoth, moans. The two are in the tribe of Benjamin. Gallim was the city of Palti or Paltiel, the man to whom Michal was given as wife after David's flight (1 Sam. 25: 44; 2 Sam. 3: 15). Madmenah (southern part of the tribe of Judah – Josh. 15: 31) is a city in which the inhabitants dispersed when they heard about the coming of Sennacherib, as did those of Gebim. Nob was a city of priests (1 Sam. 22: 19) and was near Jerusalem, and could be seen by it. Therefore, the bible says that Sennacherib shook his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem, as a sign of threat and contempt for being unable to resist him.

Before we go on, let's see what this means for us: Assyria was a great threat to Judah and Jerusalem, just as Satan is an enemy to our soul. When the Jews saw the destroyer approaching, they fled, for they no longer had faith; their communion with God was broken. With us it's the same thing. If we do not have communion with the Lord and do not stand in His strength, any kind of trial or bad news that threatens us will bring us down, move us away from each other, and we lose our strength. But God will never lose His strength. In the case of Sennacherib, even though the inhabitants of Judah did not offer him resistance and ran away from him, God Himself was able to defend His city and His people. He will always defend us, despite our fear and our cowardice, but He will not be pleased with this behavior. He wants to see us fighting His battles and defending His holiness in us and preserving the best He has already given us: salvation, communion with the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts.

God's judgment on the Assyrians – v. 33-34.

- Isa. 10: 33-34: "Look, the Sovereign, the Lord of hosts, will lop the boughs with terrifying power; the tallest trees will be cut down, and the lofty will be brought low. He will hack down the thickets of the forest with an ax, and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall [NIV: Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One; KJV: And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one]."

The Assyrian army was compared to the forest of Lebanon, by the multitude of trees in it, and the height of its cedars, for its soldiers were not ordinary soldiers, but many and great men. The Assyrian king was compared to the cedar of Lebanon, for his

majesty, but they were all defeated ‘by the hand of a mighty one’, as it is in KJV. In NIV it is written: ‘before the Mighty One.’

‘Before the Mighty One’, undoubtedly means by the hand of God Himself making His judgment.

‘Shall fall by a mighty one’ may have some interpretations: it may mean the angel of the Lord who later defeated the enemy army, or may mean by the hands of Nabopolassar (626-605 BC), the Babylonian king who conquered Assyria a few years later.

Sennacherib, however, was unable to enter Jerusalem.

List of Kings of the Neo-Assyrian Period (912-612 BC):

- Adad-nirari II – 912-891 BC
- Tukulti-Ninurta II – 891-884 BC
- Ashurnasirpal – 884-859 BC
- Shalmaneser III (in Akkadian Šulmānu-ašarēdu) – 859-824 BC
- Shamshi-Addad V – 824-811 AC
- Adad-nirari III – 811-783 BC (in the time of Prophet Jonah)
- Shalmaneser IV – 781-773 BC – son of Adad-nirari III (in the time of Jonah)
- Ashur-dan III – 773-755 BC – son of Adad-nirari III (in the time of Jonah)
- Ashur-nirari V - 755-745 BC – son of Adad-nirari III (in the time of Jonah)
- Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC)
- Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC)
- Sargon II (or Sharrukin; in Assyrian, Šarru-ukīn – 722-705 BC)
- Sennacherib (Sin-ahhe-eriba, 705-681 BC). Campaign of Sennacherib against Judea: 701 BC. Sennacherib means: ‘Sîn has replaced the brothers’ or ‘The God of the Moon has multiplied his brothers’, or else, ‘God has multiplied my brothers’ – 2 Kin. 18: 13 et seq.; 2 Chr. 32: 1-8; Isa. 36: 1-3 et seq. It was Sennacherib who made Nineveh a magnificent city (700 BC).
- Esarhaddon (in Latin, Asor Haddan, the younger son of Sennacherib, 681-669 BC)
- Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC)
- Sinsharishkun (Sin-shar-ishkun; Sîn-šarru-iškun, 628-612 BC), one of the sons of Ashurbanipal
- Ashur-uballit II (The last king of Assyria, it is not certain whether he is the son or brother of the penultimate king Sinsharishkun).

In 612 BC, Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, incorporated Assyria into the Babylonian Empire, dividing it with the Medes.

In 732 BC the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) captured Damascus and annexed the territory of Israel from the north of the plain of Jezreel, leaving Hoshea to rule the rest of the northern kingdom as his vassal (2 Kin. 17: 3). When Hoshea rebelled and asked for help to Egypt (2 Kin. 17: 4), Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) besieged Samaria for three years (2 Kin. 17: 5; 2 Kin. 18: 9-11) while his successor Sargon II (722-705 BC) captured it in the year he ascended the throne (The exile of Israel to Assyria – 722 BC). In the place of the Israelite population were brought the inhabitants of Babylon, of Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim.

In 701 BC, Sennacherib marched against Syria, besieged Sidon, and marched south to attack Ashkelon. He invaded the Kingdom of Judah, having taken forty-six fortified cities. He besieged Lachish successfully (2 Kin. 18: 13-14; 17; Mic. 1: 13) and went to Jerusalem to attack Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18: 17-19). Lachish was situated in the most fertile agricultural area of Judah (Shfela or Shephelah, literally, ‘lowlands’); therefore, it was of vital importance to the kingdom’s economy. It was completely destroyed. The king

of Judah (Hezekiah) sent to Sennacherib a message of submission, accompanied by valuable gifts to appease the fury of the enemy: 300 talents of silver and 30 of gold as a tribute, plus the silver found in the House of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and the gold that was removed from the doors and the doorposts of the temple (2 Kin. 18: 14-16). But the Assyrian monarch was not satisfied and sent to Hezekiah his officers: the Tartan (his supreme commander), the Rabсарis (his chief officer) and Rabshakeh (his field commander), demanding the surrender of Jerusalem, which was refused. They returned to Sennacherib, who had already withdrawn from Lachish, and was now at Libnah (2 Kin. 19: 8) and told him the words of Hezekiah. The Assyrian king sent messengers to Hezekiah again with a threatening letter, but was delivered in prayer in the hands of the Lord, who answered through the prophet Isaiah with words of deliverance to Judah and judgment upon the oppressor (2 Kin. 19: 14-34). Eliakim ('the steward' or 'the palace administrator' or 'which was over the household' or 'who was in charge of the palace', depending on the bible version), Shebna ('the secretary' or 'the scribe') and Joah ('the recorder') were Hezekiah's intermediaries in the negotiation (2 Kin. 18: 37; 2 Kin. 19: 2). History says that the Jewish city of Azekah, as well as Lachish, was also attacked, pillaged and then devastated. Besides Lachish, in the valuable agricultural land of Shfela or Shephelah (the coastal plain of Philistia in the land of Judah), there were other cities, which were handed over to the Philistines. Lachish and Azekah were rebuilt. When the Babylonians commanded by Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, they were the last cities that fell before Judah was taken (Jer. 34: 6-7).

The result of this campaign of Sennacherib in 701 BC was described in the bible: the destruction of 185,000 Assyrian army soldiers during the night by an angel of the Lord (2 Kin. 19: 35; 2 Chr. 32: 21-23, Isa. 37: 36). Sennacherib, however, gave up on the siege of the city, withdrawing to his capital, Nineveh (2 Kin. 19: 36; Isa. 37: 37-38), where he was killed by two of his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer. But here it is quite likely that there was a time gap between the two events, for his death is recorded in History as occurring in 681 BC, when his younger son Esarhaddon came to power; even because the NIV says, "One day, while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king" (Isa. 37: 38). This may confirm that there has been an interval of years between events.

It is known that after this campaign against Hezekiah in 701 BC, he spent the remaining years of his reign in military campaigns against rebels in his empire.

It is interesting to comment on Hezekiah's behavior toward Assyria at the beginning of his reign (2 Kin. 18: 7-8) and after about twenty-four years. In the beginning, he rebelled against the king of Assyria and ceased to serve him (probably Sargon II – 722-705 BC, or his predecessor, Shalmaneser V – 727-722 BC), which occurred in the fourth year of Hezekiah described here in bible, during his period of co-regency with Ahaz (729-716 BC), when the Assyrian king came up against Samaria and besieged it (725 BC). After about twenty-four years (around 701 BC), Hezekiah showed fear and concern about the threat of Sennacherib by paying him a high tribute in gold and silver, and still giving him the gold of the temple and the royal house.

Chapter 11

The Branch from Jesse – v. 1-5.

- Isa. 11: 1-5: “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might [NIV: power], the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth [NIV: but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth]; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins [NIV: Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist].”

As discussed in chapter 9, like all other prophets, Isaiah has the vision, but he does not always know when it will be fulfilled, unless God reveals it. That is why every time he speaks about the Messiah, it seems that he speaks of something very close, either because he wanted Him to come soon, or because, in fact, he did not have the notion of the spiritual kingdom brought by the Messiah. In his human mind, as a Jew, he expected a Messiah in human form and bringing a military kingdom, like David or Cyrus. It is not true that he was prophesying about Hezekiah, nor that he expected the Messiah personified in him. In chapter 9, for the ‘child’ or ‘the son’ who would be born of the virgin, Isaiah used the qualities that were very common to expect from a king, according to the mentality of that time: wisdom in administration, military ability, zeal for the prosperity of the people, and the concern for their happiness. Verse 7 (Isa. 9: 7) made it clear that the boy belonged to the royal house of David and he would govern with justice and righteousness, saving the country from the catastrophe.

Here (Isa. 11: 1-5), we see something like that. ‘From the stump of Jesse’, ‘Root of David’, ‘Branch’ and ‘a Righteous Branch’ are all terms used to describe the royal lineage of the Messiah, David’s descendant.

Isaiah prophesies about the qualities of the Messiah, as one would expect of a king, also called ‘God’s anointed.’ Therefore he begins by saying that the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the Messiah, bringing also the gifts of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might [in some bible versions it is written, ‘power’], of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. The word ‘counsel’ in Hebrew is *’etsah* (Strong #6098), meaning advice; by implication, plan; prudence: advice, advisement (deliberation, consideration, weighing or prudence), counsel, counselor, purpose.

Before we proceed, let us understand what each of these gifts means:

- 1) The Spirit of the Lord: is the very Spirit of God within us, keeping His flame of life in our spirit, causing us to exist and do His work on earth. With the Holy Spirit we can do what Jesus did: to preach good news, heal the sick of soul and body, set free the captives of the devil and bring joy. We receive it at the moment of our conversion. It makes us feel courage as well as the strength and the power of God in action of miracles, deliverance and healing.

- 2) The Spirit of Wisdom: wisdom is the art of being successful, to form a correct plan to achieve the desired results. It also means: to have skill, prudence, grace; to learn how to apply knowledge and understanding of the word; full of intelligence, knowledge of different subjects and the act of interpreting dreams. The wisdom in its broadest sense belongs exclusively to God and consists not only in the complete knowledge

about all aspects of life, but also of the irresistible fulfillment of what He has in mind. Wisdom is more related to teaching, while knowledge is more related to the prophetic ministry. Its seat is the heart, the center of intellectual and moral decision. Wisdom puts us in direct contact with the divine mind, making us think as He thinks.

3) The Spirit of Understanding: intelligence, discernment. It is the comprehension that we acquire after having knowledge (revelation) of God's Word. It puts us in contact with the divine truth contained in the Word, bringing us the security about what we believe and giving us the ability to resist evil and everything that tries to prevent His will for our lives, such as the false teachings.

4) The Spirit of Counsel: it means planning and strategy, solution for a purpose. Being on a council table is to be together with authorities who come to discuss something important and to plan strategies and solutions (Isa. 40: 13-14; Jer. 23: 18). Thus, being in a meeting with God in prayer gives us the spiritual insight to receive strategies from Him to overcome any situation. Prudence leads us to plan the right strategy in each situation and to wait for the right moment to make decisions; it also teaches us how everything must be done. Through it we acquire the certainty that everything has a solution.

5) The Spirit of Might [NIV, Power]: it gives us dominion and conviction of victory. Where my strength ends, God's resources are released. The Spirit of Might makes us do things that in our nature we cannot; big and bold things. It involves us like a protective shield and that firms us in 'the Rock' as someone plants firmly on the ground a tree with strong roots. It gives us determination, security and certainty to follow our goals.

6) The Spirit of Knowledge: it means to have the right understanding of things, the revealed information of the word of God, and to know what we have at our disposal through it. It is related to revelation and experience, dreams and visions. The word 'knowledge' has the idea of revealing something hidden so that it can be seen and known as it really is, i.e., it expresses the idea of revelation. Knowledge brings light, clarity, revelation and manifestation of what is hidden, whether good or bad. It makes us know the secrets of God's heart and the mysteries of the spiritual world. It fills us with the truth so we can overcome the false prophecies.

7) The Spirit of Fear of the Lord: it means reverence, priority, respect and devotion to God, acknowledgement for who He is and not to use His name in vain. The fear of the Lord lifts us up to the throne and puts us in contact with His holiness. It puts us in a position of separation from worldly chores in order to give reverence and priority to the person of God. Before Him, all irreverence, idolatry and disturbance of the peace fall down.

Thus, the text speaks of a regal character which will judge with justice and will decide with equity on behalf of the poor, destroying the wicked. 'The rod of his mouth' means: The Messiah will conquer the people through words (Isa. 49: 2; Heb. 4: 12; Rev. 19: 15). Making a comparison with God's armor and the later prophecies in the book of Isaiah, this messianic character will use righteousness like a breastplate [Isa. 11: 5 – 'the belt around his waist'; see Isa. 59: 17], and faithfulness as the belt around his loins [NIV: faithfulness shall be the sash around his waist]. By faithfulness, we can understand here faithfulness to God and His word of truth, like the belt of truth in Eph. 6: 14.

In the reign of the Messiah there will be peace and unity – v. 6-9.

• Isa. 11: 6-9 (cf. Isa. 65: 25): "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child

shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den [NIV: The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest]. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

The Messiah will establish a new reality. Here justice and peace are symbolized by the harmonious coexistence of wild and domestic animals. And even a little child can play with a viper because there will be no danger; the inhabitants of the kingdom of God are harmless. In His kingdom, the poor and the oppressed will be protected against the arrogance of the powerful. In Israel there will be the knowledge of God.

His own people will return from all the lands to which they have been scattered, and the nations will serve them; the Gentiles will seek the Lord – v. 10-16.

• Isa. 11: 10-16: "On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal [NIV: will stand as a banner] to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious. On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros [NIV: from Upper Egypt], from Ethiopia (in Hebrew, Cush), from Elam, from Shinar [NIV: Babylonia], from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea [NIV: the islands of the sea]. He will raise a signal [NIV: will raise a banner] for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel [NIV: gather the exiles of Israel], and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, the hostility of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim. But they shall swoop down on the backs of the Philistines in the west [NIV: They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west], together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put forth their hand against Edom and Moab [NIV: they will lay hands on Edom and Moab], and the Ammonites shall obey them [NIV: will be subject to them]. And the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt [NIV: The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea]; and will wave his hand over the River [NIV: the Euphrates River] with his scorching wind; and will split it into seven channels, and make a way to cross on foot [NIV: He will break it up into seven streams so that men cross over in sandals]; so there shall be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that is left of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt."

Isaiah says that the Messiah will stand as a signal on the earth to the peoples and all nations will inquire of Him. On that day that He comes, there will be a ransom for all of His people that were scattered throughout the nations because of the exile. Judah and Ephraim, that is, the kingdom of the south and the kingdom of the north, will no longer be two divided nations; on the contrary, as in the reign of David they will again be one nation under the Messiah. The nations that have oppressed them shall be subject to the Israelites, like Moab, Edom, and the Ammonites. The Philistines will also submit to Israel.

In Isaiah 11: 11, the prophet mentions some nations as Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Ethiopia, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the coastlands of the sea [NIV: the islands of the sea]. The expression 'the coastlands of the sea' or 'the islands of the sea' refers to countries far from Judea, inhabited by idolatrous Gentiles; the most remote parts of the world, as well as in Arabia, which was near them; or all regions beyond the sea (Jer. 25: 22), sea regions or coastal regions, not merely islands in the strict sense.

Pathros is the Hebrew name for Upper Egypt and Cush or Ethiopia. Elam is the ancient name for the plain of Khuzestan, in lower Mesopotamia, in present-day Iran, watered by the rivers Karkheh (or Karkhen) and Karun (Kārūn), which empty into the Tigris just north of the Persian Gulf. The Karkheh or Karkhen is perhaps the river known in the bible as the Gihon one of the four rivers of Eden. Some scientists think that Gihon is the river Karun itself. Khuzestan (transliterated Arabic, Khūzestān) is now one of the provinces in southwest Iran, bordering southern Iraq. Its capital is Ahvaz. Khuzestan, meaning ‘the Land of the Khuz’ or ‘Kuzi’, refers to the original inhabitants of this province, the ‘Susian’ people (in Old Persian ‘Huza’ or ‘Huja’; Shushan, in Hebrew; In Esther 1: 2, called Susa). Susa is a current archaeological site near Shush, another city in the province of Khuzestan. Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal subdued the Elamites and deported some of them to Samaria, transferring some Israelites to Elam (Isa. 11: 11; Ezra 4: 9). Elam was annexed by an ancestor of Cyrus, and Susa eventually became one of the three main cities of Persian Empire. Shinar is the Hebrew name of the land of Babylon; Hamath is a city of Syria (now known by the name of Hama).

Isa. 11: 15-16: “And the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt [NIV: The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea]; and will wave his hand over the River [NIV: the Euphrates River] with his scorching wind; and will split it into seven channels, and make a way to cross on foot [NIV: He will break it up into seven streams so that men cross over in sandals]; so there shall be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that is left of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt” – Just as the Red Sea was an impediment in the way of the Israelites in the Exodus, the Euphrates was an obstruction in the way of Israel for his return from Assyria. ‘There shall be a highway’ means ‘without obstruction, without future impediments.’ However, by the force of His wind, the Lord would likewise divide the Euphrates where the exiles could cross on foot. He would do the impossible to deliver His people. This can also be seen as a vision of the future restoration of Israel at the end times. A correlation was made with the first Exodus, where the prophet mentions the seven streams by which the Nile empties in the Mediterranean Sea. This was done so that they could remember the deliverance from Babylon would be as majestic as the deliverance from Egypt was; a second Exodus for them (Zech. 10: 11). ‘Will wave his hand over the River [NIV: the Euphrates River] with his scorching wind’ reminds them of the strong east wind that blew and divided the waters of the Red Sea (Ex. 14: 21).

Chapter 12

Songs of praise – v. 1-6.

- Isa. 12: 1-6: “You will say in that day: I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously [NIV: he has done glorious things]; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion [NIV: people of Zion], for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

This is a hymn of praise sung by those who returned from captivity (Isa. 11: 11-16), very similar to the song of Moses (Ex. 15: 2) or to Ps. 118: 14, thanking the Lord for salvation. In verse 3 (“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation”), the Hebrew word for ‘salvation’ is *yshuw`ah* (or *yeshu`âh*), which means ‘something saved’ that is, ‘deliverance’; therefore, aid, victory, prosperity, rescue, health, help, to save, to protect, to guard, to preserve (health), welfare. The word *yshuw`ah* is linked to the word *yasha`*, which is a primitive root whose meaning is: to be open, wide (spacious) or free, and consequently, to be safe, free; or succor (or come to the aid of), to avenge, to defend, to deliver or deliverer, to help, to preserve, to rescue, to bring or to have salvation, to save (or savior), to get victory. It is also a song of praise concerning the kingdom of the Messiah.

- Isa. 12: 3: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”

This not only concerns the restoration of Israel in the near future, when it returned from the captivity. It also concerns the kingdom of the Messiah, the new dispensation in Christ bringing salvation. Water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit:

- Jn 7: 37-39: “On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

In the OT the waters were related to the salvation of a life, for in desert and dry lands the presence of water was a blessing of God, a sign of His favor, preserving life (as was the case with Hagar and Ishmael when they were expelled from Abraham’s camp and were watered by the well that the Lord opened for them – Gen. 21: 19).

In the same way, this refers to the NT church, us, when our salvation is completed at the second coming of Jesus:

- Rev. 21: 6: “Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.’”

- Rev. 22: 1: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

- Isa. 12: 4: “And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted.” This means to proclaim the works of the Lord among all nations, so that all may know what He is able to do, how He is able to save. The captivity was the result of the wrath of God; now, His mercy brought salvation and the gathering of the people that had been scattered.

- Isa. 12: 5: “Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously [NIV: he has done glorious things]; let this be known in all the earth.” ‘Glorious things’ recall His wonders in the Red Sea, as well as the deliverance of the people from the captivity in Assyria and Babylon.

- Isa. 12: 6: “Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion [NIV: people of Zion], for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” ‘People of Zion’ refers to those who have returned from captivity in Babylon and have the approval and protection of the Lord. This term also serves to describe those who live in the kingdom of the Messiah, who can celebrate the salvation they have received from Him. ‘In your midst’ means Jesus in the midst of His people.

Chapter 13

Prophecy against Babylon – v. 1-5.

- Isa. 13: 1-5: “The oracle concerning Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw. On a bare hill raise a signal, cry aloud to them; wave the hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles [NIV: Raise a banner on a bare hilltop, shout to them; beckon to them to enter the gates of the nobles]. I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, have summoned my warriors, my proudly exulting ones, to execute my anger [NIV: I have commanded my holy ones; I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath—those who rejoice in my triumph]. Listen, a tumult on the mountains as of a great multitude! Listen, an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The Lord of hosts is mustering an army for battle. They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the Lord and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole earth [The Lord and the weapons of his wrath—to destroy the whole country].”

Isaiah received from the Lord a vision and a sentence against Babylon, where He commanded people to wave the hand for the Medes and Persians to come upon it, as if calling them to the attack.

- Isa. 13: 3: “I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, have summoned my warriors, my proudly exulting ones, to execute my anger [NIV: I have commanded my holy ones; I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath—those who rejoice in my triumph].”

The armies of the Medes and Persians were chosen by God to destroy Babylon: they are called ‘my consecrated ones’ or ‘my holy ones’ because they had been separated by Him to execute His vengeance against a sinful nation. He gave them the power to do this, though they did not revere the God of Israel.

- Isa 13: 4: ‘An uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together’ means the Medes and Persians and other nations that served under them in this war.

The destruction of Babylon; his great anguish and utter desolation – v. 6-22.

- Isa. 13: 6-9: “Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty! Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt, and they will be dismayed. Pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. See, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation, and to destroy its sinners from it.”

All men will be frightened and astounded when the Medes and Persians come, for God will bring them with violence to ravage the earth and to destroy sinners, the wicked Babylonians. The day of the Lord will be terrible, with wrath and fierce anger. There will be no place for the sinner to flee.

- Isa. 13: 10: “For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light”: this means a situation where everyone will be gloomy and discouraged, where men will not have hope because of the destruction they will experience. When they try to lift the hope of the soul, they will soon be disappointed. Those who are being punished will think that the powers of heaven are against them. Their comfort and hope will fail. ‘For the stars of the heavens will not give their light; the sun will be dark’: such expressions are often employed by the prophets to describe the great changes of governments.

• Isa. 13: 11-19: “I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the insolence of tyrants [NIV: I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless]. I will make mortals more rare than fine gold, and humans than the gold of Ophir [NIV: I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir]. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. Like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep with no one to gather them [NIV: like sheep without a shepherd], all will turn to their own people, and all will flee to their own lands. Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword. Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered, and their wives ravished. See, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. Their bows will slaughter the young men; they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb [NIV: on infants]; their eyes will not pity children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pride of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.”

This passage shows us the violent action of the Medes and Persians, sparing no one or anything, regardless of age, and the despair of the Babylonians wanting to flee somewhere, but to no avail. The Persians would come at the behest of the Lord, which means that they would not invade the city because of money or spoil (silver and gold), but because Cyrus had a different purpose in his heart (obviously placed by the Lord to enforce His justice). The barbarities of the Babylonians (Chaldeans) against other nations would now turn against themselves. Many men will be killed, and few will be left (‘more rare than the gold of Ophir’).

When the bible speaks ‘the world’ here in this text, it is referring to the Babylonian Empire, just as was the Roman Empire afterwards, because it spread over great part of the world. They thought they were very important because of the size of their empire. But they had nothing good, despite their wealth and great commercial power; only iniquity, wickedness, violence, idolatry, daring and pride. God would punish them for all this, just as He will punish the present world at His second coming, this Babylon in which we live, as in exile, until we reach our permanent city in heaven. The same defects seen in that people are present today and there will be no place for the sinner to flee from the punishment of the Lord if there is no repentance and change of attitude. What the Babylonians planted, i.e., the violence they did to the people of God other than He planned for their punishment, they would reap soon, through the Medes and Persians.

• Isa. 13: 20-22: “It will never be inhabited or lived in for all generations; Arabs will not pitch their tents there, shepherds will not make their flocks lie down there. But wild animals will lie down there, and its houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will live, and there goat-demons will dance [NIV: But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about]. Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces; its time is close at hand, and its days will not be prolonged.”

After the destruction decreed by God, Babylon would never rise again. It would be a perpetual ruin. Not even the Arabs who lived in tents and shepherded sheep would live there or take their flocks to that place. On the contrary, it would be inhabited by wild animals that usually live in solitary and desert regions: owls, ostriches, wild goats, hyenas, jackals, etc. Babylon remained in ruins throughout the generations, and forgot

that one day was a noble city. The destruction of this proud city is a symbol of the ruin of Babylon in the New Testament; it is a warning to sinners concerning the future wrath of God, and an encouragement to believers to expect in faith the destruction of the enemy of their souls. The world we see today will no longer exist, only the spiritual kingdom of the Lord. What will remain of corruption will be given to the demons, symbolized in these verses by the wild beasts.

Chapter 14

Israel will be delivered from the Babylonian captivity, his triumph over Babylon – v. 1-23.

- Isa. 14: 1-11: “But the Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land; and aliens will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob. And the nations will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess the nations as male and female slaves [NIV: menservants and maidservants] in the Lord’s land; they will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them. When the Lord has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has ceased! How his insolence has ceased! [NIV: how his fury has ended] The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers, that struck down the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution. The whole earth [NIV: all the lands] is at rest and quiet; they break forth into singing. The cypresses exult over you, the cedars of Lebanon, saying, ‘Since you were laid low, no one comes to cut us down’. Sheol [NIV: the grave] beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come; it rouses the shades to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth [NIV: it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you—all those who were leaders in the world]; it raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations. All of them will speak and say to you: ‘You too have become as weak as we! You have become like us!’ Your pomp is brought down to Sheol [NIV: the grave], and the sound of your harps; maggots are the bed beneath you, and worms are your covering.”

Here is a promise from God to bring back His captive people in Babylon and Assyria, and to reverse the state in which they were, that is, those who took them prisoners would now be dominated by the Israelites, for they would fear them because of their God. On the day of deliverance there would be much joy for God’s vengeance on the oppressors of His people, breaking their wickedness, and the whole land of Israel and the nations subjugated by the Babylonians would also be at peace. The mighty rulers would exult because of the fall of Babylon. Even hell would move to receive its dead, especially its king, and they would mock him because of his arrogance that was broken. The tomb of the Babylonian king would be like that of any mortal, and worms would eat his corpse.

- Isa. 14: 12-19: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star (*), son of Dawn! [NIV: How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn!] How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! [NIV: You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations; KJV: How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!] You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon [NIV: ‘on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain’ or ‘the north’, in Hebrew, Zaphon]; I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit. Those who see you will stare at you, and ponder over you: ‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who would not let his prisoners go home?’ All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own tomb; but you are cast out, away from your grave, like loathsome carrion, clothed with

the dead, those pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of the Pit, like a corpse trampled underfoot [NIV: But you are cast out of your tomb like a rejected branch; you are covered with the slain, with those pierced by the sword, those who descend to the stones of the pit. Like a corpse trampled underfoot].”

Here the king who prefigures Satan is the king of Babylon, to which the prophet referred. The king of Babylon is a symbol of Lucifer, who was cast down from heaven by his arrogance (2 Pet. 2: 4; Jude 6).

(*) The expression ‘Day Star,’ or ‘morning star’ in this text referring to Satan seems to have been used in an ironic way, since Jesus is the bright Morning Star – Rev. 22: 16: “It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

• Isa. 14: 12: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!” or ‘How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn!’ or ‘How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!’ – The Hebrew word used in Isa. 14: 12 for ‘star’ is *heylel* (Strong #1966), from *halal*, meaning: brightness; the morning-star, ‘lucifer’ (here in the sense of ‘brightness’, ‘star’, not as a proper name: Lucifer)

We can also see a biblical concordance in this text with Rev. 18: 1-8; 21 (the fall of Babylon) and Rev. 8: 10-11: “The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter.” But there is a peculiarity here, although theologians do this correlation with Revelation. In fact, the star falls from heaven, however, it is not a bright star that calls attention, but is a symbol of destruction and punishment. Its name is Wormwood, which means ‘bitterness.’ In other words, the star in this last text is not being cast down as a punishment for its haughtiness and pride, but it is an instrument of God to bring the bitterness, the gall of suffering upon iniquity.

Isa. 14: 15: “But you are brought down to Sheol [*the place of the dead, in Ancient times*], to the depths of the Pit.” Here, the Hebrew word for pit is *bowr* (Strong #953), meaning a pit hole (especially one used as a cistern or a prison), cistern, dungeon, fountain, pit, well – cf. Matt. 11: 23; Lk. 10: 15 – ‘pit’ is replaced in these two passages by ‘Hades’ (hell), the equivalent of the Hebrew word Sheol.

• Isa. 14: 20-23: “You will not be joined with them in burial, because you have destroyed your land, you have killed your people. May the descendants of evildoers nevermore be named! Prepare slaughter for his sons because of the guilt of their father. Let them never rise to possess the earth or cover the face of the world with cities. I will rise up against them, says the Lord of hosts, and will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, offspring and posterity, says the Lord. And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog (*an insect-eating mammal with spiny hairs on the back and sides*) [NIV: owls], and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction, says the Lord of hosts.”

The Lord continues to declare His firm purpose of destruction of the king of Babylon and his survivors, as well as the destruction of their land. The descendants of the wicked will not be remembered, for they have followed the steps of the iniquity of their ancestors. The beauty of the ancient city of Babylon will be lost and forgotten by the future generations, and it will be transformed into a wild and uninhabited place; the only inhabitants that will remain in it will be the wild animals.

Prophecy against Assyria – v. 24-27.

• Isa. 14: 24-27 (see Isa. 10: 5-34): “The Lord of hosts has sworn: As I have designed, so shall it be; and as I have planned, so shall it come to pass: I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains trample him under foot; his yoke shall be removed from them, and his burden from their shoulders. This is the plan that is planned concerning the whole earth [NIV: the whole world]; and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?”

It may be a new prophecy, or a return to what is predicted in the tenth chapter (Isa. 10: 5-34) about Sennacherib and his army and the destruction of it, long before the destruction of Babylon. In verse 25 the bible says: “I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains trample him under foot; his yoke shall be removed from them, and his burden from their shoulders.” The hill country of Judea (‘on my mountains’) may refer to the mountains surrounding Jerusalem, where the Assyrian army under Sennacherib was destroyed without the help of men, but at the hands of God Himself or by His angel (2 Kin. 19: 35; Isa. 37: 36; 2 Chr. 32: 21 – ‘The angel of the Lord).’

‘... his yoke shall be removed from them [the Israelites], and his burden from their shoulders’ means that the siege of Jerusalem would be broken and the city would be free from the enemy (Isa. 10: 27), just as the whole nation would benefit, for Sennacherib did not attack any other city of Israel; on the contrary, the bible says that he has returned to his country.

A prophecy against the Philistines – v. 28-32.

• Isa. 14: 28-32: “In the year that King Ahaz died this oracle came: Do not rejoice, all you Philistines, that the rod that struck you is broken, for from the root of the snake will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent [NIV: Do not rejoice, all you Philistines, that the rod that struck you is broken; from the root of that snake will spring up a viper, its fruit will be darting, venomous serpent; KJV: Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent’s root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent]. The firstborn of the poor will graze, and the needy lie down in safety; but I will make your root die of famine, and your remnant I will kill. Wail, O gate; cry, O city; melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you! For smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in its ranks. What will one answer the messengers of the nation? [NIV: What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation?] ‘The Lord has founded Zion, and the needy among his people will find refuge in her.’”

Ahaz died in 716 BC, during the reign of Sargon II of Assyria (722-705 BC). The bible says that in the reign of Ahaz the Edomites invaded Judah and took prisoners in captivity. And the Philistines (2 Chr. 28: 18) also invaded southern Judah and took some villages, because the Lord humbled Ahaz mainly because of his sins of idolatry (2 Chr. 28: 17-19). In turn, Sargon II had already taken Samaria and deported the captives (722 BC). In the year of Ahaz’s death Sargon II took Egypt and in 711 BC he plundered Ashdod, the city of Philistia. In this prophecy the assurance of the destruction of the Philistines and their power, by famine and by war, is given. Probably, Isaiah is speaking with Hezekiah, son and successor of Ahaz.

‘The rod that struck you’ (the Philistines), most likely refers to Assyria, since this passage follows the prophecy against the Assyrians, so they could be glad with their fall (In Isa. 14: 25 the prophet speaks using verb in the past tense as if the fall of an Assyrian ruler who oppressed the Philistines had already occurred); or they could rejoice over the past and distant death of Uzziah, who had fought against them and

almost destroyed them (2 Chr. 26: 6-7). On the other hand, the Philistines had wounded the Jews in the time of Ahaz (2 Chr. 28: 18-19), who had just died, but Hezekiah his son would defeat them (2 Kin. 18: 8).

In Isa. 14: 29 it is written: “Do not rejoice, all you Philistines, that the rod that struck you is broken, for from the root [*lineage*] of the snake will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent” – NRSV.

In NIV it's written: “Do not rejoice, all you Philistines, that the rod that struck you is broken; from the root of that snake will spring up a viper, its fruit will be darting, venomous serpent.”

In KJV it's written: “Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.”

Snake (KJV, ‘serpent’), in Hebrew is: nachash (nâchâsh – Strong #5175), meaning a snake (from its hiss) serpent.

Adder [NIV: a **viper**; KJV: a cockatrice (a mythical animal depicted as a two-legged dragon with a cock's head) – the Hebrew word here for adder is tsepha', Strong #6848, meaning: to extrude; a viper (as thrusting out the tongue, i.e. hissing): adder, cockatrice, yellow viper.

A **flying fiery serpent** [NIV: venomous serpent; KJV: **fiery flying serpent**] – ‘**fiery**’ in Hebrew: ‘sârâph me`ophêph’ – ardent serpent = saraph or sârâph – Strong #8314; ‘**flying**’ = moughph or me`ophêph, from `uwph, Strong #5774; ‘**serpent**’ – in Hebrew, sârâph. Saraph (Strong #8314), used for the two words, fiery and serpent, means: burning, i.e. (figuratively) poisonous (serpent); specifically, a saraph or symbolical creature (from their copper color): fiery (serpent), seraph. And `uwph, Strong #5774, used for the word ‘flying’, means: to cover (with wings or obscurity or dimness); to fly, to fly away; to faint; brandish, flee away, set, shine forth, weary.

The prophecy may be interpreted as follows: ‘the snake’ as being Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), who had already died, and who suppressed many revolts of the Philistines during his reign; but after him his grandson Sargon II came (722-705 BC) and also his great-grandson Sennacherib (705-681 BC), who in 701 BC marched against Syria, besieged Sidon, and marched south to attack Ashkelon, a city of the Philistines. Sargon II would be the ‘adder’ or ‘viper’ or ‘a cockatrice’ (in 711 BC he plundered Ashdod, city of Philistia – Isa. 20: 1). The ‘flying fiery serpent’ or ‘venomous serpent’ or ‘fiery flying serpent’ (KJV) could refer to Sennacherib, by the speed of his army and by the cunning and strategies of war, as well as his fury and violence that brought destruction wherever he went, as well as a land is destroyed by fire.

We can also think in the following way: In this verse above (Isa. 14: 29), he uses words with the same meaning to describe the same type of animal: snake, adder or cockatrice, viper and serpent. The animals, in the bible, are often used to describe kingdoms or empires. In the case of the serpent, it is an animal that curls up around itself and crawls on the earth in undulating movements, instead of walking straight. In the same way it is a sinuous river, which has many meanders until emptying into the sea. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers are like this: with many meanders all the way through the Mesopotamian plain until empty into the Persian Gulf. As Isaiah says that the snake and the adder (viper) are of the same lineage, we can think of direct descendants of people, kings, rulers, of the same family and, extrapolating, of the same region between these two rivers, as was the case with the Assyrians. And the passage goes on saying that the fruit of the adder (viper) will be a flying serpent, which leads us to think that it is the same genealogy. Fruit, root, seed and shoot are common words in the bible to refer to an offspring. Therefore, Sennacherib was the ‘fruit’ planted by the

Assyrian rulers who preceded him. With the violence, greed, and desire for possession of that area and others to expand their empire, they generated many revolts among the nations, ultimately causing their own defeat. Tiglath-Pileser III took many lands and established the Assyrian Empire. His son and grandson followed his example and did everything to expand their empire, as happened with the taking of Palestine, making Jews and Philistines their subjects or slaves.

- Isa. 14: 30: “The firstborn of the poor will graze, and the needy lie down in safety; but I will make your root die of famine, and your remnant I will kill” – the Jewish people, taken to extreme poverty would find pasture and would have provision; they would be restored from all that they had lost.

- Isa. 14: 31: “Wail, O gate; cry, O city; melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you! For smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in its ranks.”

The word ‘gate’ is used as a synonym for ‘city’, for the city gate was not only a point of honor in a fortified city, a symbol of its power, but it was the place where judges and elders sat down; it was the center of commercial and juridical activities. The gates of the Philistine cities, which once closed to the enemy, now would be opened for him to enter and destroy, for God’s design was already determined. The verse goes on saying that from the north, that is, from Assyria, would come destruction, a large army, raising a dust like smoke as they move, and coming with great swiftness and anger (‘smoke’ or ‘a cloud of smoke’ – NIV). So it was the Assyrian army under Sennacherib, especially when he came to destroy the cities of Judah, with the intention to sack Jerusalem (Isa. 10: 28-34) and Ashkelon, a city of the Philistines. Pharaoh of Egypt would come one day to smite the Philistines and enter Gaza (Jer. 47: 1), but Egypt was in the south, not in the north; therefore, this prophecy did not concern Egypt. Later, Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon would also attack the Philistines, but this prophecy concerns the Assyrians.

- Isa. 14: 32: “What will one answer the messengers of the nation? [NIV: What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation?] ‘The Lord has founded Zion, and the needy among his people will find refuge in her.’”

Regarding verse 32, we may ask, “What would a Jew say to the people of other nations, when they asked about the state of Zion, since not only the Philistines, but even the Jews themselves were being threatened by the same enemy?”

The answer would be, “Though Zion (Jerusalem) was very afflicted at that moment, it was upon a firm foundation, and God, who founded it first, will restore it, and its poor, the despised ones, will call upon it, as a strong refuge.”

Thus, God’s Church, which is often called Zion in the Scriptures, is His foundation; He placed Christ as its foundation, and those who are sensitive to their spiritual poverty and misery trust Him.

Chapter 15

Prophecy against Moab – v. 1-9

• Isa. 15: 1-9: “An oracle concerning Moab. Because Ar is laid waste in a night, Moab is undone; because Kir is laid waste in a night, Moab is undone. Dibon has gone up to the temple, to the high places to weep; over Nebo and over Medeba Moab wails. On every head is baldness, every beard is shorn; in the streets they bind on sackcloth; on the housetops and in the squares everyone wails and melts in tears. Heshbon and Elealeh cry out, their voices are heard as far as Jahaz; therefore the loins of Moab quiver; his soul trembles [NIV: Therefore the armed men of Moab cry out, and their hearts are faint]. My heart cries out for Moab; his fugitives flee to Zoar, to Eglath-shelishiyah [NIV: Eglath-Shelishiyah]. For at the ascent of Luhith they go up weeping; on the road to Horonaim they raise a cry of destruction; the waters of Nimrim are a desolation (Jer. 48: 34) [NIV: are dried up]; the grass is withered, the new growth fails, the verdure is no more [NIV: the vegetation is gone and nothing green is left]. Therefore the abundance they have gained and what they have laid up they carry away over the Wadi of the Willows [NIV: So the wealth they have acquired and stored up they carry away over the Ravine of the Poplars]. For a cry has gone around the land of Moab; the wailing reaches to Eglaim, the wailing reaches to Beer-elim [NIV: Beer Elim]. For the waters of Dibon are full of blood; yet I will bring upon Dibon even more – a lion for those of Moab who escape, for the remnant of the land [NIV: Dimon’s waters are full of blood, but I will bring still more upon Dimon – a lion upon the fugitives of Moab and upon those who remain in the land; Note: Masoretic text writes ‘Dimon’; Dead Sea Scrolls, some Septuagint manuscripts and Vulgate write ‘Dibon’].”

This prophecy of Isaiah probably refers to the invasion of Babylon, if we confront the resemblance between it and that of Jeremiah 48 and following the prophecy against the Philistines, alluding to their last destroyer, who would be Nebuchadnezzar.

The prophecy of Isaiah 15 refers to the fall of Moab. Moab was the name of the land of Lot’s descendant (Gen. 19: 37), from his incestuous relationship with the eldest daughter. Moab means ‘desire, family of a father.’ He was the brother of Ammon or Ben-Ami, a descendant of Lot’s incest with his youngest daughter, and means ‘son of my people’ (Ben-Ammi) and ‘craftsman’ (Ammon). Therefore, they were peoples related to Israel. Marriage between Jews and Moabites was not forbidden by the Lord, only the Moabites and Ammonites were forbidden to enter the tabernacle (Deut. 23: 3-4), not exactly by the sin of incest of their ancestors, but because they hired Balaam to curse the Israelites (Num. 22: 1-6).

Geographically speaking, Moab is the historical name for a strip of mountainous land in what is now Jordan, along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. The major rivers of Moab mentioned in the bible are the Arnon, the Dibom or Dimom (‘the waters of Dibon’ (NRSV) or ‘Dimon’s waters’ (NIV) – Isa. 15: 9) and the Ninrim (‘the waters of Nimrim’ – Isa. 15: 6; Jer. 48: 34). Moab was a land of fortified cities with many rivers and streams to water the fields, suitable for grazing and cultivation of grapes and many species of trees, such as balsam.

Therefore, Lot chose that region to dwell in (Gen 13: 10-12); more specifically in a cave near Zoar, formerly called Bela (Gen. 14: 8), on the plain along the Lower Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea Plain. Because of the waters that flow from the mountains of Moab, Zoar was a flourishing oasis. Zoar means ‘small.’ This place probably can be presently identified as Safi (some say it is called Tell Esh-Shaghur), behind which the ground rises for three or five kilometers, and there are many caves there. There is

another city mentioned in this prophecy of Isaiah, called Horonaim (Isa. 15: 5), whose name means, in Hebrew, ‘city of two caves’, which confirms the previous statement. Zoar was one of the five cities described in Gn 14: 8 [Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim [NIV: Zeboyim], Bela (Zoar – Gen. 19: 20; 22)], which was spared in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19: 23- 25; 29; 30; Deut. 29: 23).

During the latter half of the 8th century BC, Moab was subdued by Assyria (Shalmaneser, Sennacherib or Esarhaddon), and compelled to pay tribute, but after the fall of Assyria, Moab was free again. Moab was subdued by Nebuchadnezzar and fell successively under the control of the Persians and various Arab groups in northern Arabia. In post-exile times the Moabites continued to be recognized as a race (Ezra 9: 1; Neh. 13: 1; 23), i.e., the land of Moab continued to be known by its biblical name for a while. Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC), king of Judea of Hasmonean priestly lineage, subdued them at the end of the second century BC, annexing their territory to those of Samaria and Idumea, who were already under the control of Jerusalem. Later, the ancient land of Moab was occupied by the Nabataeans.



The waters of Nimrim are mentioned in Isa. 15: 6 and Jer. 48: 34. The sequence of localities that are quoted by both prophets, especially by Jeremiah suggests that Nimrim was a place south of Moab, now identified as Wadi en-Numeirah, ten miles from the southern end of the Dead Sea. Wadis are beds of streams that only display water in the

rainy season (Arabic: wadi; Hebrew, nahal). Nimrim should not be confused with Nimrah (Num. 32: 3) or Beth Nimrah (Num. 32: 36) about ten miles north of the Dead Sea. This latter city was a fortified city of Transjordan, given to the tribe of Gad by Moses in the distribution of the Promised Land. Nimrim ('Nimriym') means 'clear water', whereas Dibon or Dimon ('Diymown') means 'devastated path.' Other researchers translate as 'blood' (Isa. 15: 9).

Another important city to be mentioned is Heshbon. Heshbon means 'stronghold.' It was located in the territory of the tribe of Reuben, formerly belonging to the Amorites, a land called 'of iron' because it is of basalt, therefore, of black and dark color. The natural pools left water with dark and mysterious look, because one could not see what was in the bottom (Song 7: 4). Heshbon was the main city of Sihon king of the Amorites (Num. 21: 26; Deut. 4: 46). Its ruins can still be seen on a hill on the western edge of a high plain twenty-one miles east of the northern end of the Dead Sea, on the borders of Reuben and Gad. It was conquered by Moses (Num. 21: 21-26), and given to Reuben (Num. 32: 27), who had it rebuilt, after which it was transferred to the sons of Merari (One of the towns of the Levites – Josh. 21: 39). Later the Moabites (Num. 21: 26) took it back (Isa. 15: 4), and also the Ammonites (Jer. 48: 2). There are still reservoirs of water in the ruins of Heshbon. His current name is Hisban or Hesbân, about twelve miles southeast of Amman (in Jordan; the biblical city of Rabbah).



Another important city mentioned by the prophet is Medeba (meydba' or mēdhebhā', 'calm water'). It was a city situated on a plateau in the territory of Reuben (Josh. 13: 9; 16), on the right side of Arnon River. Initially it was a Moabite city, later conquered by the Amorites (Num. 21: 30), and later to the tribe of Reuben, after Moses defeated Sihon, king of Amorites. It became a city of the Ammonites, who allied

themselves with the Syrians (Aramaeans), but David took it (1 Chr. 19: 6-15, especially verse 7). From then on it seems that it changed hands several times. It returned to Moab, but was taken again by Israel in the days of Jeroboam II (782-753 BC). When Isaiah wrote the prophecy, it had once again become the domain of the Moabites. Today, the locality called Madaba is about 6.2 miles south of Heshbon and nineteen miles south-west of Amman, the capital of Jordan.

- In Is 15: 2-3 it is written: “Dibon has gone up to the temple, to the high places to weep; over Nebo and over Medeba Moab wails. On every head is baldness, every beard is shorn; in the streets they bind on sackcloth; on the housetops and in the squares everyone wails and melts in tears [KJV: He (‘He’ may refer to Moab, the king or the people of Moab) is gone up to Bajith, and to Dibon, the high places, to weep: Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba: on all their heads shall be baldness, and every beard cut off].”

The Hebrew word Bajith or Bayith, which means ‘a house’, here refers to a house of idolatry, probably the temple of Chemosh, the same called Beth Baal Meon (Josh. 13: 17), ‘the house of dwelling of Baal’, and is mentioned with Dibon and Bamoth Baal. If we write this word (Bajith) with a capital letter, it may be a place in Palestine. But as in Hebrew capital letters and lowercase letters make no difference, we can see from the Lexicon Strong’s Concordance that ‘Bajith’ or Bayith (Strong #1006) is the same as ‘bayith’ (Strong #1004), also written as ‘bah’-yith’, which means (among other things): a house (in the greatest variation of applications, especially family, etc.): dungeon, family, inside (inside ward), palace, place, prison, temple. This makes us think that it was probably an eminent house or temple of their idols (as explained above), for the verse mentions the word ‘temple’ along with the expression ‘the high places.’ Dibon (or Dimon) should also be on a hill or plateau where there were altars to the Moabite gods, where they should weep and mourn because of their misfortune, and make their supplications with tears to their idols, to help them.

They should also wail and weep over Medeba and over Mount Nebo, the same one which God asked Moses to climb up and thus to have a vision of the Promised Land (Deut. 32: 49; Deut. 34: 1). It is the highest peak of the mountain of Pisgah, in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho. The Moabite city that bore its name was taken by the Amorites, before the Israelites defeated Sihon, their king. When Moses defeated them, Nebo became the inheritance of the tribe of Reuben (Num. 32: 3; 38; 1 Chr. 5: 8). It is not known how the city was re-conquered by the Moabites – Isa. 15: 2; Jer. 48: 1; 22. Nebo (in Hebrew transliterated, nbow) was also the name of a Babylonian deity, also worshiped by the Assyrians. In Babylonian, the name means ‘height’; he was god of scholarship (erudition, knowledge), writing, astronomy and all sciences. Therefore, he could correspond to the Roman god Mercury. His symbol was a wedge on top of a pole, which meant either the cuneiform writing or any viewfinder instrument used in astronomy. He was the main deity of Borsippa, a city seven miles southwest of Babylon, but there was a temple called Ezida, ‘House of Knowledge’, which was dedicated to this god in each of the largest cities of Babylon and Assyria. The name ‘Nebo’ (or ‘Nabu’) is part of the words Nebu-cadenezar (in the Babylonian, Nabu-kudur-uzur, ‘Nebo, protect the crown’ or ‘Nebo, protect the frontiers’, or ‘defender of the boundaries’) and Nebuzaradan (‘Nebo gave generation’). Borsippa was completely rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar.

Still in verses 2-3, Isaiah says: “On every head is baldness, every beard is shorn; in the streets they bind on sackcloth; on the housetops and in the squares everyone wails and melts in tears [KJV: on all their heads shall be baldness, and every beard cut off].” The act of shaving his hair and beard was customary in great mourning. In the East, in

general, and also among the Jews, the beard was of great importance, for it was a sign of civility, manhood, and respectability (Ps. 133: 2). There was no greater offense to man than to let anyone treat it with indignity. If one's hand touched it with contempt, this was a great insult (1 Chr. 19: 4; 2 Sam. 10: 4-5; 2 Sam. 20: 9). On the other hand, kissing someone's beard was a form of greeting and sympathy for the other person. Shaving it or pulling it out, or marring its edges was a manifestation of mourning and pain (2 Sam. 19: 24; Ezra 9: 3; Isa. 15: 2; Jer. 41: 5; Jer. 48: 37). The Mosaic Law forbade to cut the beard in the manner of the Egyptians (Lev. 19: 27; Lev. 21: 5). Unlike the surrounding nations, the Egyptians shaved, except for the chin, where they allowed themselves to have a bundle of hair, which was kept well-cared. Sometimes, instead of their own hair, they wore a braided false beard with different shapes, depending on the category of the individual; just as they wore their wigs. Lepers, by Jewish law, should shave their beards, hair and eyebrows on the seventh day of their purification (Lev. 14: 9).

In OT, both for men and women, hair used to be long to a certain length (Absalom had long hair: 2 Sam. 14: 25-26; 2 Sam. 18: 9). Generally the hair was not cut, just trimmed, and should be well treated, for to leave them without care was a sign of lamentation. Long hair was an honor and a sign of beauty to the woman (Song 4: 1b). In the NT it seems that the custom changes in relation to men (1 Cor. 11: 14), however, remained an honor for the woman (1 Cor. 11: 15). Lepers, by Jewish law, should shave their beards, hair and eyebrows on the seventh day of their purification (Lev. 14: 9). When someone made a vow of Nazirite, his hair was shaved and burned at the end of the vow (Num. 6: 5; 9; 19), except Samson, who for being a Nazirite for life could not cut it off (Judg. 13: 5). The law forbade the hair to be cut at the temples (Temple = the flat part of either side of the head between the forehead and the ear – Lev. 19: 27; Lev. 21: 5; Jer. 25: 23; Jer. 49: 31-32), for this part of the head was regarded as the source of life for the Jews, and only the heathen shaved the sideburns. In Jer. 49: 32, where it is written 'those who have shaven temples' (NRSV) it may be read, in Hebrew, 'cut off into corners, or, that have the corners of their hair pulled', that is, to have a beard on the cheek narrowed or cut, which was a Canaanite custom, forbidden to the Israelites. Jer. 25: 23-24 concerns the Arabs, for it is written: "Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who have shaven temples; all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed peoples that live in the desert", as well as in Jer. 49: 31-32, for the title of the biblical passage is: 'A message about Kedar and Hazor' (NIV), meaning its invasion by Nebuchadnezzar: "Rise up [*God was saying to the Babylonians*], advance against a nation at ease, that lives secure, says the Lord, that has no gates or bars (*meaning nomadic life, outdoors, in tents*), that lives alone. Their camels shall become booty, their herds of cattle a spoil. I will scatter to every wind those who have shaven temples, and I will bring calamity against them from every side, says the Lord."

A Jew could not cut his hair on his forehead too, for it was characteristic of certain idolatrous cults (Lev. 19: 27; Lev. 21: 5; Deut. 14: 1). Regarding the priests, God speaks to Ezekiel (Ezek. 44: 20): "They shall not shave their heads or let their locks grow long; they shall only trim the hair of their heads."

It was customary to anoint the hair of a guest as a sign of hospitality (Lk. 7: 46); or were anointed at feasts (Ps. 45: 7).

As for the word 'ash' (or 'dust') or 'ashes' (spread on the head as part of the weeping), in Hebrew it is: 'epher (Strong #665) = 'product of burning'; of an unused root meaning 'to spread'; ashes, dust. Ash is a metaphor for what is worthless (Isa. 44: 20) and disgusting (Job 30: 19); misery (Ps. 102: 9; Jer. 6: 26); shame (2 Sam. 13: 19); humiliation before God (Gen. 18: 27; Job 42: 6); contrition (Dan. 9: 3; Matt. 11: 21) and

purification (Num. 19: 9; 10; 17; Heb. 9: 13). When the bible talks about spreading ‘ashes’ on the head or the garments as a sign of mourning or repentance, it is not necessarily speaking of the ashes of resulting from the burning of animals (as it was in temple sacrifices), but it is referring to dust, the dust of the earth, which was often spread over the head of the repentant or those who were mourning (cf. Neh. 9: 1).

There is another Hebrew word used for ‘ash’, which is: *deshen*, meaning ‘fat’ or ‘ash’ – the residue of sacrificed animals.

The sackcloth was a coarse loose cloth (Hebrew: *saq* – Strong # 8242: A mesh (such as allowing a liquid to run through), that is, a thick cloth (used in mourning and for bagging); therefore a bag (for grain, etc.): bag (bed linen, clothes); in Greek, *sakkos* (Strong #g4526) – Matt. 11: 21; Lk 10: 13], usually made of goats’ hair or camel’s hair and black in color (Rev. 6: 12). The same Hebrew word sometimes means ‘sack’ (of keeping money or food – Gen. 42: 27), which obviously was made of the same material. The sackcloth was a sign of mourning for the dead (Gen. 37: 34; 2 Sam. 3: 31; Joel 1: 8), or mourning for national or personal disaster (Job 16: 15; Lam. 2: 10; Est. 4: 1), or of penance for sins (1 Kin. 21: 27; Neh. 9: 1; Jon. 3: 5; Matt. 11: 21), or special prayer, asking for deliverance (2 Kin. 19: 1; 2; Dan. 9: 3). The form of the sackcloth, as a symbol of humiliation before God, was often a sash or robe around the waist (1 Kin. 20: 31; 32; Isa. 3: 24; Isa. 20: 2; Ezek. 27: 31). It was usually worn on the skin (2 Kin. 6: 30; Job 16: 15), and sometimes was worn for an entire night (1 Kin. 21: 27; Jl. 1: 13). In some cases it replaced a cloak presumably over other clothes (Jon. 3: 6). Sometimes the sackcloth was stretched out on the floor to lie on (2 Sam. 21: 10; Isa. 58: 5). Palestinian shepherds used sackcloth because it was cheap and durable. Sometimes the prophets used it as a symbol of the repentance they preached (Isa. 20: 2; Rev. 11: 3). According to Jonah 3: 8, even the animals were clothed in sackcloth as a sign of national supplication. The use of sackcloth as lamentation and penance was practiced not only in Israel but also in Damascus (1 Kin. 20: 31), in Moab (Isa. 15: 3), in Ammon (Jer. 49: 3), in Tyre (Ezek. 27: 31) and in Nineveh (Jon. 3: 5).

In Isa. 15: 4-6 we read: “Heshbon and Elealeh cry out, their voices are heard as far as Jahaz; therefore the loins of Moab quiver; his soul trembles [NIV: Therefore the armed men of Moab cry out, and their hearts are faint]. My heart cries out for Moab; his fugitives flee to Zoar, to Eglath-shelishiyah [NIV: Eglath-Shelishiyah; ASV: Eglath-shelishi-yah; KJV: his fugitives shall flee unto Zoar, an heifer of three years old]. For at the ascent of Luhith they go up weeping; on the road to Horonaim they raise a cry of destruction; the waters of Nimrim are a desolation (Jer. 48: 34) [NIV: are dried up]; the grass is withered, the new growth fails, the verdure is no more [NIV: the vegetation is gone and nothing green is left].” In this prophecy of Isaiah, cries of anguish rise up from the cities of Moab, and the waters of Nimrim disappear. The waters of Nimrim disappear or dry up by a great drought that will come upon the land at that time or will be mixed with the blood of the dead, or else, by action of the enemy’s army with their horses trampling them with their hooves and dirtying them. As for the phrase written in KJV, ‘his fugitives shall flee unto Zoar, an heifer of three years old’, we may read: ‘his fugitives shall flee unto Zoar, [as a] heifer of three years old’. NRSV writes the name ‘Eglath-shelishiyah’ [NIV: Eglath-Shelishiyah; ASV: Eglath-shelishi-yah]. The same prophecy is written in Jer. 48: 34 as: “Heshbon and Elealeh cry out; as far as Jahaz they utter their voice, from Zoar to Horonaim and Eglath-shelishiyah. For even the waters of Nimrim have become desolate” (NRSV) or “The sound of their cry rises from Heshbon to Elealeh and Jahaz, from Zoar as far as Horonaim and Eglath Shelishiyah, for even the waters of Nimrim are dried up.” Thus it is understood that ‘Eglath-Shelishiyah’,

translated as ‘heifer of three years old’, is the proper name of a place. In Hebrew transliterated, the word for ‘heifer’ is Eglah (‘eglah). Shelishiyah (shliyshiy – Strong #7992) means: third, the third part, by extension, a third (day, year or time), which confirms the assertion of some Jewish scholars about having two more cities with the name of Shelishiyah; therefore, the translation ‘heifer of three years old’, for this was one of the three cities with this name. Its location is unknown.

Elealeh (in Hebrew, ‘el‘āleh, ‘God is exalted’), it belonged to the tribe of Reuben (Num. 32: 37) and was later taken by the Moabites (Isa. 15: 4; Isa. 16: 9; Jer. 48: 34). Today it corresponds to a small Jordanian town called el-‘Al, located 0.93 miles north of Heshbon. As for Luhith, Eglaim and Beer-elim [NIV: Beer Elim], their location is unknown. Eglaim (‘eghlayim, Isa. 15: 8) is a village in Moab, unlike En Eglaim (‘ên-‘eghlayim, ‘fountain of the two calves’), mentioned in Ezek. 47: 10.

Summarizing Isa. 15: 1-9, the cry of the afflicted in Moab is everywhere, passing through all their cities, because of their rivers and the fertility of their land, which will cease to exist after the Babylonian invasion. They will gird themselves with sackcloth and will manifest their cry openly.

Chapter 16

The Moabites are exhorted to pay the due tribute to the ruler of Judah; and the Jews are exhorted to welcome the outcasts of Moab – v. 1-5.

- Isa. 16: 1-5: “Send lambs to the ruler of the land, from Sela, by way of the desert, to the mount of the daughter of Zion. Like fluttering birds, like scattered nestlings, so are the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon [NIV: Like fluttering birds pushed from the nest, so are the women of Moab at the fords of the Arnon]. Give counsel, grant justice; make your shade like night at the height of noon; hide the outcasts, do not betray the fugitive [NIV: Give us counsel, render a decision. Make the shadow like night – at high noon. Hide the fugitives, do not betray the refugees]; let the outcasts of Moab settle among you; be a refuge to them from the destroyer [NIV: let the Moabite fugitives stay with you; be their shelter from the destroyer]. When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and marauders [NIV: the aggressor] have vanished from the land, then a throne shall be established in steadfast love in the tent of David, and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler who seeks justice and is swift to do what is right [NIV: In love a throne will be established; In faithfulness a man will sit on it – one from the house of David – one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness].”

- Isa. 16: 1: “Send lambs to the ruler of the land, from Sela, by way of the desert, to the mount of the daughter of Zion. Like fluttering birds, like scattered nestlings, so are the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon.”

Isaiah uses the word ‘ruler’ of the land. He speaks to the Moabites how to avoid the disaster that will come upon their land: to pay the tribute that was due to the ruler of Israel of David’s lineage, as it had been agreed when Moab was under David’s rule and paid him tribute (2 Sam. 8: 2). Then the kings of Moab began to pay their tribute to the kings of Israel with a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams until the death of Ahab (2 Kin. 3: 4-5, about 853 BC), when Mesha king of Moab rebelled and failed to pay the tribute. The prophet tells them now, that they should pay this tribute to King Hezekiah again; and they should pay him from all parts of the country, from Sela or Selah (in Edom) till the temple on Mount Zion, the city of David. We can interpret this in a figurative way where ‘the ruler of the land’ would be the figure of God. As it happened with the preaching of Jonah in Nineveh forty days before it was destroyed, but repented and the Lord used mercy upon it, the Moabites were having a chance of repentance and opportunity to make peace with the God of Israel through sacrifices to Him on Mount Zion. Perhaps their destruction could be avoided, even though God had decreed a time for this (Isa. 16: 14).

- Isa. 16: 1: “Send lambs to the ruler of the land, from Sela, by way of the desert, to the mount of the daughter of Zion” – Sela or Selah or Cela’ (Strong #5554) was the main city of the kingdom of Edom, and whose meaning is ‘rock.’ It can be identified with the great rocky plateau now called Umm el-Biyara (or Umm Al-Beyyara), which rises three hundred meters above the level of the ruins of Petra (Greek translation of the Edomite word Sela) and more than eleven hundred meters above sea level. Sela or Selah was the site of an Edomite village since the Iron Age I (1200-970 BC) and that still existed in the Iron Age II (970-580 BC). Sela was near Mount Hor, where Aaron died. It remained under the dominion of Edom until the time of the Persian Empire (Achaemenid Dynasty of Persia). Sela (in Edomite), originally known by the Nabataeans as Raqmu, is called Pétra (πέτρα) by the Greeks, or Petra, in Latin. In

Arabic it is called Al-Bitrā or Al-Batrā. Today, it is an archaeological city to the south of Jordan.



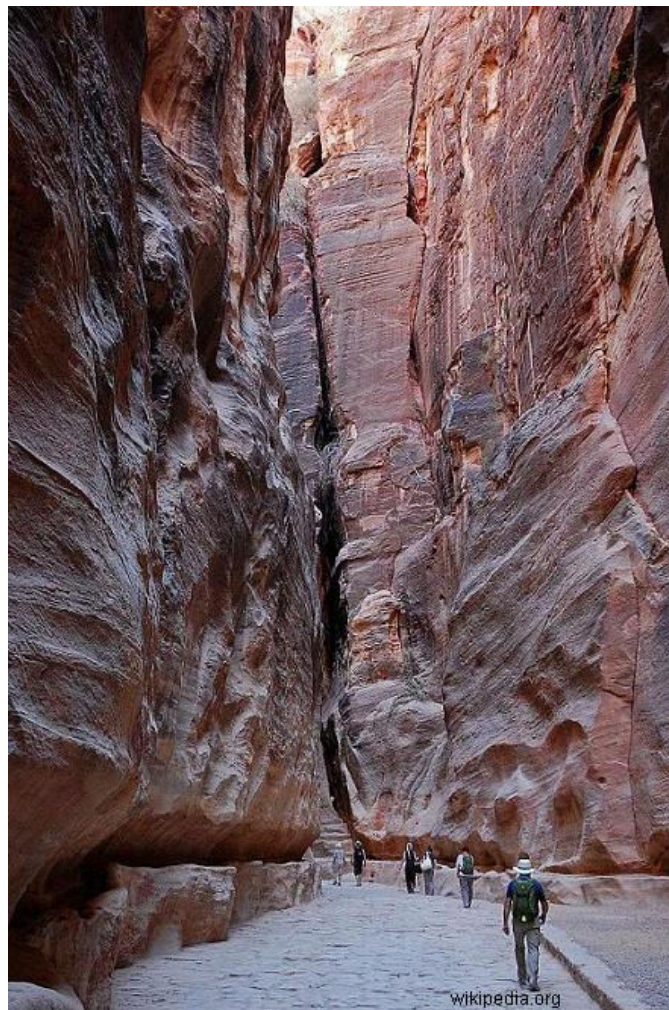
Mount Seir (Edom) and Sela (Selah or Petra)



View of Petra

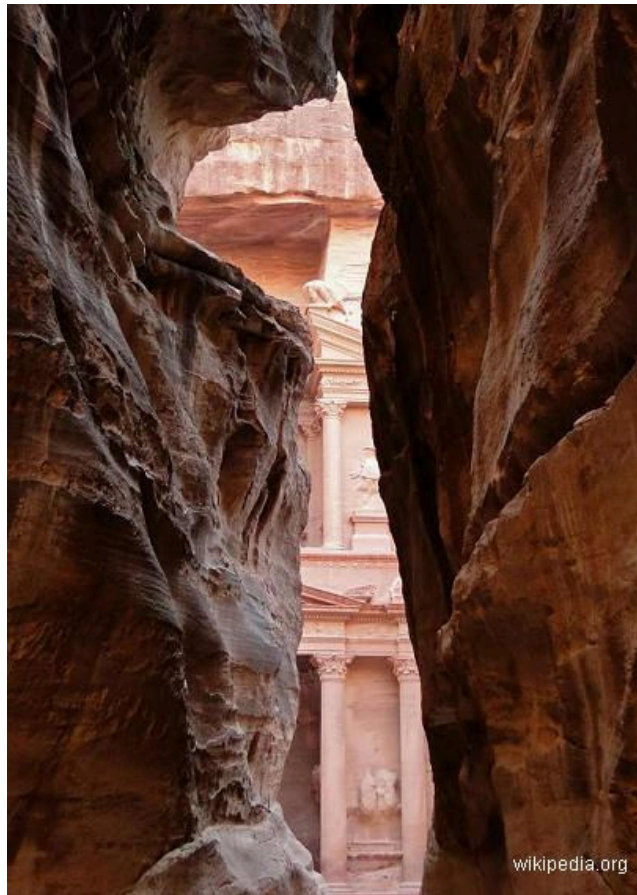
During the sixth century BC, Sela was an important trade route between the Arabian Peninsula and Damascus. The village was conquered by the Nabataeans, one of the Arab tribes, in 312 BC, forcing the Edomites to move to southern Palestine, a region that became known as Idumea, a name derived from the Edomites or Idumeans. Then

Petra passed into Roman rule; and in 106 AD Trajan placed it under direct control of Rome, rather than Nabataean control, when the city became the capital of the region known as Arabia Petra or Arabia Petraea or the Roman Arabian Province, or simply, Arabia. The city suffered a great earthquake (363 AD), and was almost destroyed. In 551 AD it suffered another earthquake, more intense than the first one, and almost it was destroyed completely. The change in the commercial routes diminished the commercial interest by the city, besides the earthquake that it had suffered, and it was not able to recover anymore. Today, the ruins of Petra are considered by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. It is known as Rose City due to the color of the stone out of which it is carved.

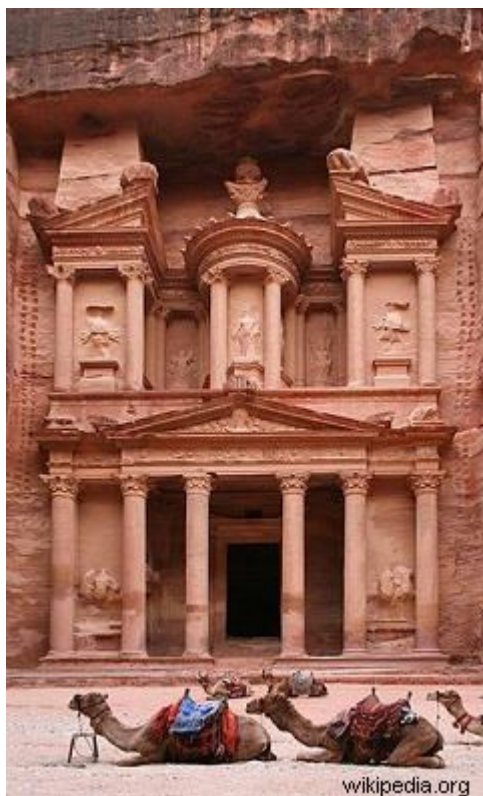


The Siq (al-Sīq)

The Siq (al-Sīq) – literally ‘the shaft’, also known as Siiq or Siqit is the main entrance to Petra; a dim and narrow gorge (in some points has no more than 3 meters or 10 feet wide) with approximately 1.2 kilometers (0.75 mi) long, which ends at Petra’s most elaborate ruin, Al-Khazneh (‘The treasury’). The Siq was used as entrance to the great caravan into Petra.



The end of the Siq, with its view of Al Khazneh ('The Treasury')



'The 'Treasury' (Al Khazneh) is one of the temples in the city of Petra; in fact, a tomb excavated on the face of the cliff and whose facade with pillars was rebuilt according Greek standards.



The temple of the garden



Theatre of Petra



Al Deir ('The Monastery')



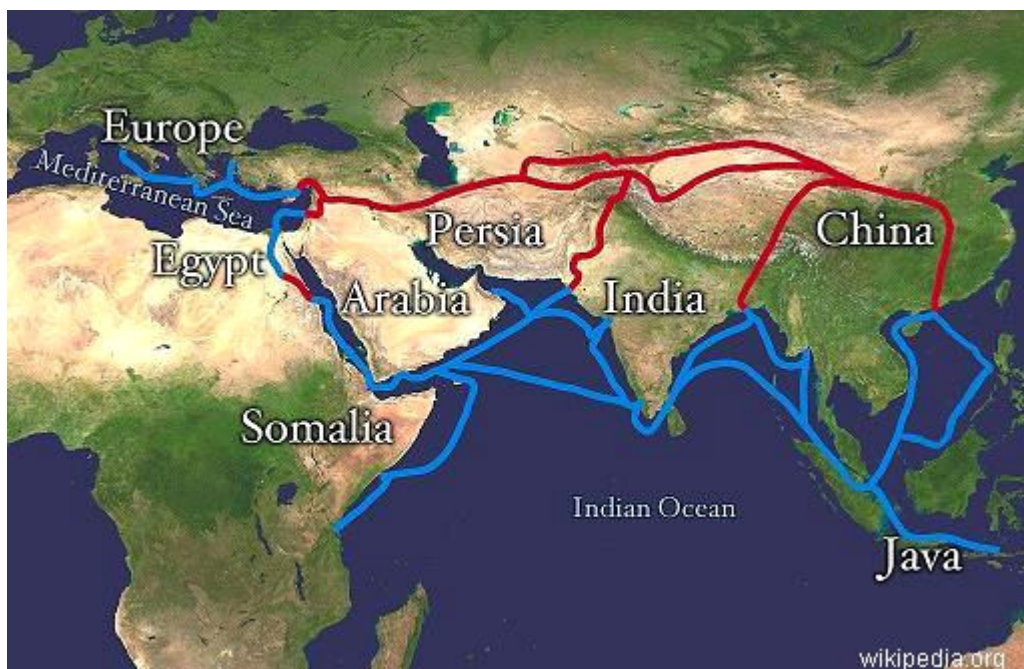
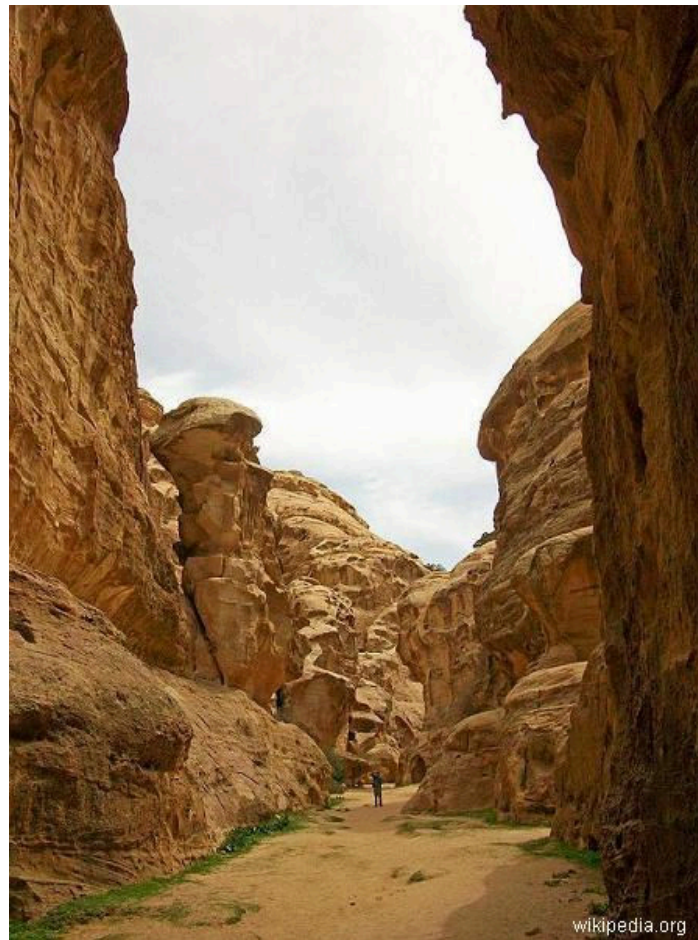
The great temple of Petra



Ancient columns of the great temple

Five kilometers to the north of Petra, in the Ma‘ān Governorate of Jordan, there is another Nabataean archeological site built during the 1st century AD, called ‘Little Petra’ (In Arabic: al-batrā aṢ-Ṣaġīra), also known as Siq al-Barid (or Siiq al-bariid, in Arabic, literally ‘the cold canyon’).

Its name, literally, ‘cold canyon’, comes from its geographic orientation and its high walls, preventing the entry of great part of sunlight. The narrow gorge is similar to the one that leads to the city of Petra, however with small extension (450 meters or 1,476 ft). At the end of it appears a facade of a colossal tomb and a great number of rooms carved in the rocks. The modern name ‘Little Petra’ comes from its similarities to the larger site to the south. The buildings are carved into the walls of the sandstone canyons.

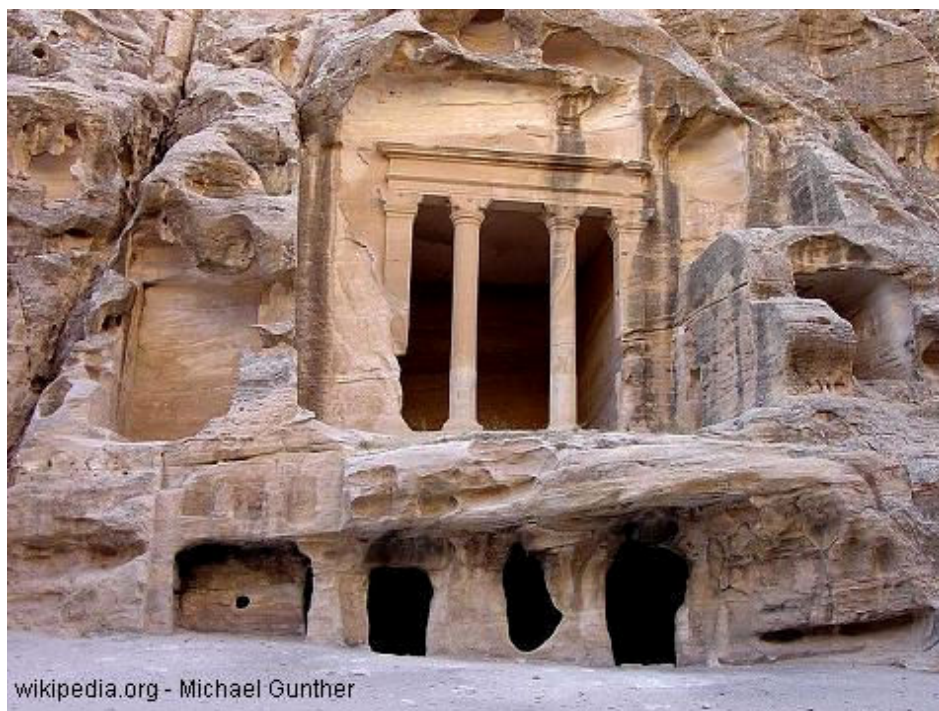


Silk Road

Archaeologists believe that the whole complex was a suburb of Petra, the Nabataean capital, which housed visiting traders on the Silk Road, an ancient network of terrestrial and the maritime trade routes connecting Asia with Africa, the Middle East and southern Europe, from Japan, China and Korea to the Mediterranean Sea. It's called

Silk Road because of the profitable trade of silk, among other goods. Along with its neighboring city Beidha, Little Petra was excavated in the later 20th century by British archaeologists.

One of the most famous buildings in Siq al-Barid ('Little Petra') is a colonnades classically styled temple carved out of rock cliff face and supported by two columns. Inside it there is no decoration or sculpture. Below the chamber there is a kind of cave with three rooms, and in one of them there are recessed shelves in the walls. It is probable that the upper chamber was a kind of chapel for worship, and the house below was a dwelling place for those who ministered the rituals.



Temple of Siq al-Barid

The bible verses that refer to the city of Sela are:

- 2 Kin. 14: 7 – Strong #5554 – Cela', Sela, the rocky city of Idumea (Sela or Petra) – taken by Amaziah king of Judah, when he smote the Edomites in the valley of Salt. He changed the name of the city to Joktheel.

- Isa. 16: 1 – Strong #5554 – Cela', Sela, the rocky city of Idumea (Sela or Petra) – when Isaiah speaks to the Edomites to send tribute to Zion.

Other bible verses, where the word Sela or Selah is mentioned as a simple noun are:

- Isa. 42: 11 – 'Sela.'
- Judg. 1: 36, where Sela is the boundary of the Amorites.
- 2 Chr. 25: 12 – where it's written 'Sela' (NRSV) or 'the top of a cliff' (NIV).
- Obad. 3: 'You that live in the clefts of the rock.'

The word 'rock' or 'Sela' in the verses above, in the original version in Hebrew is Sela' or has-sela' or Cela' (Strong #5553), with the simple meaning of rock, stone, stony, rocky place; a craggy rock; rough rock, stronghold, a fortress (place of defense).

The Moabites looked like birds thrown out of the nest, and seeking advice and refuge from Israel, for the NIV version says: "Like fluttering birds pushed from the nest, so are the women of Moab at the fords of the Arnon. **Give us counsel**, render a

decision. Make the shadow like night – at high noon. Hide the fugitives, do not betray the refugees; let the Moabite fugitives stay with you; be their shelter from the destroyer” Isa. 16: 2-4a). In NRSV it’s written: “Like fluttering birds, like scattered nestlings, so are the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon. ‘**Give counsel**, grant justice; make your shade like night at the height of noon; hide the outcasts, do not betray the fugitive; let the outcasts of Moab settle among you; be a refuge to them from the destroyer” (Isa. 16: 2-4a).

The prophet here expresses the thoughts and the petitions for help from the cities of Moab (‘daughters of Moab’ can be understood as ‘cities’ or ‘the women’ of Moab).

In verses 4b and 5, he says: “When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and marauders have vanished from the land, then a throne shall be established in steadfast love in the tent of David, and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler who seeks justice and is swift to do what is right” (NRSV).

“The oppressor will come to an end, and the destruction will cease; the aggressor will vanish from the land. In love a throne will be established; In faithfulness a man will sit on it – one from the house of David – one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness” (NIV).

‘A throne shall be established in steadfast love’ or ‘In love a throne will be established’ may refer to Hezekiah and his rule over Judah after the withdrawal of Sennacherib. If we take this interpretation to the spiritual field, we can see that Hezekiah prefigures Christ, the Messiah, whose kingdom will have eternal stability. He will do what is right and execute judgment against the enemies of His people. Jesus, of the seed of David, will raise up his fallen tabernacle, for He is the true Tabernacle of God with men, feeding Jews and Gentiles (Am 9: 11). Therefore, verse 5 is a Messianic prophecy.

The Moabites are threatened because of their pride and arrogance – v. 6-8.

- Isa. 16: 6-8: “We have heard of the pride of Moab—how proud he is!—of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence; his boasts are false [NIV: We have heard of Moab’s pride—her overweening pride and conceit, her pride and her insolence – but her boats are empty]. Therefore let Moab wail, let everyone wail for Moab. Mourn, utterly stricken, for the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth [NIV: Therefore the Moabites wail, they wail together for Moab. Lament and grieve for the men of Kir Hareseth]. For the fields of Heshbon languish, and the vines of Sibmah, whose clusters once made drunk the lords of the nations, reached to Jazer and strayed to the desert; their shoots once spread abroad and crossed over the sea [NIV: The fields of Heshbon wither, the vines of Sibmah also. The rulers of the nations have trampled down the choicest vines, which once reached Jazer and spread toward the desert. Their shoots spread out and went as far as the sea].”

The prophet speaks of the arrogance and pride of Moab; therefore, are threatened with destruction. The expression ‘the raisin cakes’ of Kir-hareseth [NIV: Kir Hareseth] is a wordplay in the original scroll in Hebrew for the men of Kir Hareseth – Jer. 48: 36: ‘The men of Kir Hareseth’ (NIV) or ‘the people of Kir-heres’ (NRSV). In KJV, the expression ‘the raisin cakes’ is replaced by the word ‘foundations’ (‘the foundations of Kirhareseth’). Strong’s Concordance (#808) writes: ‘ashiysh, which means a foundation (in the sense of pressing down firmly) or a ruined foundation; derived from the root: ‘ashuwyah (Strong #803), past participle of the verb ‘to found’, or ‘foundation.’ Kir Hareseth (in Hebrew: qīr har^eset) refers to Kir of Moab, also called Kir-Cheres, a fortified city in the south of Moab. Its Hebrew name, qīr hareset (Qiyir Cheres or Qiyir Chareseth – Strong #7025), means ‘fortress of earthenware’, which corroborates the

definition of Strong (#808), a ruined foundation, which could refer to the men of Moab as 'raisin cakes', somewhat pressed, trampled. Qiyr Cheres or Qiyr Chareseth (feminine word) is also written as: Kir-Cheres or Kir-Chareseth, Kir-haraseth, Kir-hareseth, Kir-haresh, Kir-heres.

Also in verse 8 ('the vines of Sibmah, whose clusters once made drunk the lords of the nations' or 'The rulers of the nations have trampled down the choicest vines' of Sibmah) the prophet uses the word 'lords' or 'rulers' of the nations, referring to both Chaldeans and Assyrians, the great rulers of the eastern nations who would come to destroy Moab, each in due time: 'the choicest vines' (or 'the vines of Sibmah, whose clusters once made drunk the lords of the nations'), which relates not only to fruit but also the noblest people. They fled to save their lives ('strayed to the desert' or 'spread toward the desert'), trying to leave their country ('the sea' refers to 'the Dead Sea', the western border of Moab). Sibmah was a city of the Amorites given to the tribe of Reuben by Moses (Sibmā or Sebā, for its name was probably changed when it was rebuilt – Num. 32: 3; 38; Josh. 13: 19; 21). By the time of Isaiah or Jeremiah, it had returned to the hands of the Moabites (Isa. 16: 8-9; Jer. 48: 32). Originally it was land suitable for livestock (Num. 32: 4), but it became famous for its vineyards and summer fruit. It was situated five kilometers (three miles) west-southwest of Heshbon.

The prophet supports them, and weeps for them – v. 9-11.

- Is 16: 9-11: "Therefore I weep with the weeping of Jazer for the vines of Sibmah; I drench you with my tears, O Heshbon and Elealeh; for the shout over your fruit harvest and your grain harvest has ceased [NIV: The shouts of joy over your ripened fruit and over your harvests have been stilled]. Joy and gladness are taken away from the fruitful field; and in the vineyards no songs are sung, no shouts are raised; no treader treads out wine in the presses; the vintage-shout is hushed [NIV: no one treads out wine at the presses, for I have put an end to the shouting]. Therefore my heart throbs like a harp for Moab, and my very soul for Kir-heres [NIV: My heart laments for Moab like a harp, my inmost being for Kir Hareseth]."

The prophet suffers and weeps for them, for he sees that the joyful singing of those who tread the grapes will disappear.

The judgment of God, despite the pleas of the Moabites to their gods – v. 12-14.

- Isa. 16: 12-14: "When Moab presents himself, when he wearies himself upon the high place, when he comes to his sanctuary to pray, he will not prevail [NIV: When Moab appears at her high place, she only wears herself out; when she goes to her shrine to pray, it is to no avail]. This was the word that the Lord spoke concerning Moab in the past. But now the Lord says, In three years, like the years of a hired worker [NIV: a servant bound by contract], the glory of Moab will be brought into contempt, in spite of all its great multitude; and those who survive will be very few and feeble."

Since Moab did not repent before the Lord and continued with vain supplications to its gods, God will then perform His judgment. Three years are foreseen here, that is, Moab will know that his ruin is near. The bible writes, "But now the Lord says, In three years, like the years of a hired worker [NIV: a servant bound by contract], the glory of Moab will be brought into contempt, in spite of all its great multitude; and those who survive will be very few and feeble" (Isa. 16:14).

'In three years, like the years of a hired worker' or 'within three years, as a servant bound by contract', in KJV is: 'Within three years, as the years of a hireling.'

A hireling is a person who works merely for payment, especially for a wage paid to do something unpleasant. In Hebrew, the word is sakiyr (Strong #7916), meaning: a

man at wages by the day or year: hired, hired man, servant, mercenary. This means that within precisely three years, since mercenaries are very punctual in observing the time for which they are hired, the strength and wealth and other things Moab gloated on would become contemptible to those who formerly admired them, as well as its great people, of whom the Moabites boasted. The remnant would be small and weak: 'those who survive will be very few and feeble' (Isa. 16: 14).

At this point in the study it seems there is a distinction between the prophecy of chapter 15, which referred to the Babylonian invasion, and this one of chapter 16, which most likely is related to the Assyrians as something closer to the time when it was prophesied by Isaiah. It is not possible to say with certainty what Assyrian King the prophet was speaking of (Shalmaneser, Sennacherib, or Esarhaddon), even because it is not clear which king of Judah was ruling when the prophecy was released (if it was in the year of Ahaz's death – Isaiah 14: 28, or if it was in the 1st, in the 4th or in the 11th year of Hezekiah).

Chapter 17

Damascus and the rest of Syria; Samaria and its cities will be ruined by the Assyrians. Moab will also suffer – v. 1-5.

- Isa. 17: 1-5: “An oracle concerning Damascus. See, Damascus will cease to be a city, and will become a heap of ruins. Her towns will be deserted forever; they will be places for flocks, which will lie down, and no one will make them afraid [NIV: The cities of Aroer will be deserted and left to the flocks, which will down, with no one to make them afraid]. The fortress will disappear from Ephraim [NIV: The fortified city will disappear from Ephraim], and the kingdom from Damascus; and the remnant of Aram will be like the glory of the children of Israel, says the Lord of hosts. On that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low, and the fat of his flesh will grow lean [NIV: In that day the glory of Jacob will fade; the fat of his body will waste away]. And it shall be as when reapers gather standing grain and their arms harvest the ears, and as when one gleans the ears of grain in the Valley of Rephaim.”

This prophecy was delivered still in the reign of Ahaz. As the book of Isaiah does not always follow a temporal sequence in the narrative, it is thought that the 65 years of the prophecy mentioned in Isa. 7: 8 correspond to the same passage written in Isa. 17: 1-3 and the previous prophecies of Amos 1: 1 ; 3-5.

Both the city of Damascus and the kingdom of Syria (Isa. 17: 3) and Samaria (‘the fortress of Ephraim’ or ‘the fortified city of Ephraim’) would be ruined. This was fulfilled by the kings of Assyria: Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC – 2 Kin. 15: 29) when he captured Damascus in 732 BC, Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC – 2 Kin. 17: 5-6; 2 Kin. 18: 9), who besieged Samaria for three years, and Sargon II (722-705 BC) who captured it definitively in 722 BC (2 Kin. 18: 9-11).

This destruction would be like a harvest of wheat: the reaper will put up a sheaf with many ears, and then with the other arm he harvests them in one blow. So it should be with the people of Israel: they were like a field of wheat, with beauty and glory, planted in a fertile place. Then, like a reaper, the Assyrians would come and reap them; a sheaf as thick as they were also numerous.

Aramaean is a common name for Syrians and Assyrians, for it refers to the region of Aram in the bible.

The bible speaks of the Valley of Rephaim (Isa. 17: 5). Rephaim (repha’im) or Rephaites (Deut. 2: 20) were peoples mentioned together with the Zuzites and Emmites in the time of Abraham (Gen. 14: 5), as well as the inhabitants of the Promised Land at the time of the conquest by Moses and Joshua. The Ammonites called them Zamzummmites (Deut. 2: 20-21), and the Moabites who succeeded them called them Emmites (Deut. 2: 11). The Rephaim, as well as the Anakites were giants (Deut. 2: 21; Josh. 12: 4; Josh. 13: 12; Josh. 15: 8; Josh. 17: 15; Josh. 18: 16; 2 Sam. 5: 18; 2 Sam. 5: 22; 2 Sam. 23: 13; 1 Chr. 11: 15; 1 Chr. 14: 9; 1 Chr. 20: 4; 6: 8). In many texts above, the bible writes ‘Valley of the Giants’ instead of ‘Valley of Rephaim’, depending on the translation (Webster’s Bible, for instance – Josh. 5: 8; Josh. 18: 16). The Valley of Rephaim was an abundant and fertile valley near Jerusalem, where David had many victories against the Philistines. There, the ears of wheat were very large and heavy, and a so great care was taken in the times of harvest that none on them was lost. This would be similar to what would happen with the removal of the people of Israel in large number by the Assyrian kings, or the capture of those who had managed to flee.

Aroer is a place in Transjordan, on the north bank of the Arnon River, facing a deep gorge, the modern ‘Ara’ir, twenty-three kilometers east of the Dead Sea (Deut. 2: 36;

Deut. 3: 12; Deut. 4: 48; Josh. 12: 2). Aroer was given by Moses to the tribe of Gad and Reuben (Num. 32: 33-34, Josh. 13: 9; Josh. 13: 16), but was apparently re-conquered by Jephthah from the hands of the Ammonites (Judg. 11: 26; 33), who had taken it out of the hands of the Israelites. From the time of David, Moab and Edom were submissive to Israel. Around 853 BC, Mesha (9th century BC), king of Moab, built Aroer after Ahab's death, when he revolted and ceased to pay tribute to Israel. In the time of Jehu (841-814 BC), Hazael (843-796 BC) of Damascus conquered this region (2 Kin. 10: 32-33) and the city of Gath in Philistia (2 Kin. 12: 17). Hazael's successor, Ben Hadad III (796-770 BC), most likely lost it to Israel in the time of Jeroboam II (782-753 BC), for the bible says that he re-conquered Damascus and Hamath (2 Kin. 14: 28) and, consequently, Moab regained its independence, when Aroer became a Moabite site until the time of Jeremiah (Jer. 48: 18-20). In this prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 17: 1-3), Aroer was in the hands of Moab. Aroer in Hebrew ('Arow'er or 'Aro'er – Strong #6177) means 'nudity of situation.'

A remnant will repent and turn to God – v. 6-8.

- Isa. 17: 6-8: "Gleanings will be left in it, as when an olive tree is beaten—two or three berries in the top of the highest bough, four or five on the branches of a fruit tree, says the Lord God of Israel. On that day people will regard their Maker, and their eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel; they will not have regard for the altars, the work of their hands, and they will not look to what their own fingers have made, either the sacred poles or the altars of incense [NIV: They will not look to the altars, the work of theirs hands, and they will have no regard for the Asherah poles (*symbols of the goddess Asherah*) and the incense altars their fingers have made]."

The prophet says that despite the destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians, there will be a remnant of Israel (from Ephraim) who will forsake their idols and turn to the Lord. The Samaritans, that is, the Israelites of the northern kingdom had forgotten their God and exchanged Him for graven images and the Syrian idols (Asherah poles; Asherah is the consort of Baal).

The idolaters will be punished for their wickedness – v. 9-11.

- Isa. 17: 9-11: "On that day their strong cities will be like the deserted places of the Hivites and the Amorites, which they deserted because of the children of Israel, and there will be desolation [NIV: In that day their strong cities, which they left because of the Israelites, will be like places abandoned to thickets and undergrowth. And all will be desolation]. For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge; therefore, though you plant pleasant plants and set out slips of an alien god [NIV: Therefore, though you set out the finest plants and plant imported vines], though you make them grow on the day that you plant them, and make them blossom in the morning that you sow; yet the harvest will flee away in a day of grief and incurable pain [NIV: Though on the day you set them out, you make them grow, and on the morning when you plant them, you bring them bud, yet the harvest will be as nothing in the day of disease and incurable pain]."

The Lord is speaking of the cities of Samaria, which formerly belonged to the Amorites, before they were taken by the Israelites and given to Reuben, Gad and a half tribe of Manasseh, and which Damascus also took, would now be desolate and abandoned.

The disaster will also strike the enemies of Israel – v. 12-14.

- Isa. 17: 12-14: “Ah, the thunder of many peoples, they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations, they roar like the roaring of mighty waters! The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm. At evening time, lo, terror! Before morning, they are no more. This is the fate of those who despoil us, and the lot of those who plunder us.”

The Assyrians, who would plunder Israel, would also be punished by God. They, who seemed very strong and terrifying, will flee like straw blown by the wind of the Lord in the day of His wrath. And this will come so fast, overnight, that they will barely notice.

Chapter 18

A prophecy against Cush (Prophecy on the destruction of the Ethiopians) – v. 1-6.

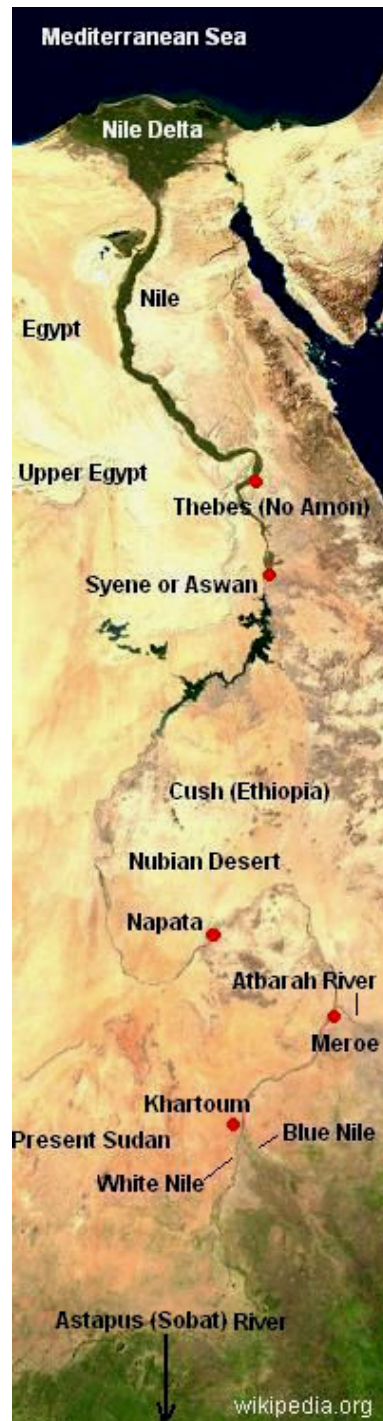
• Isa. 18: 1-6: “Ah, land of whirring wings beyond the rivers of Ethiopia [NIV: Woe to the land of whirring wings (or ‘locusts’) along the rivers of Cush], sending ambassadors by the Nile in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide [NIV: which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water. Go, swift messengers, to a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers]. All you inhabitants of the world, you who live on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, listen! For thus the Lord said to me: I will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest [NIV: This is what the Lord says to me: ‘I will remain quiet and will look on from my dwelling place, like shimmering heat in the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of the harvest’]. For before the harvest, when the blossom is over and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he will cut off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the spreading branches he will hew away. They shall all be left to the birds of prey of the mountains and to the animals of the earth. And the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the animals of the earth will winter on them [NIV: They will all be left to the mountain bird of prey and to the wild animals; the birds will feed on them all summer, the wild animals all winter].”

Ethiopia was populated by descendants of Cush (son of Ham, son of Noah – Gen. 10: 6). In Greek, it is called Aithiōps, ‘burnt face.’ It was part of the kingdom of Nubia, stretching from Aswan (KJV: Syene – cf. Ezek. 29: 10; Ezek. 30: 6) to the south, until the confluence of the Blue Nile, the White Nile and the Astaboras River (Greek: Ασταβόρας) or Astabaras (Greek: Ασταβάρας, today, Atbarah River, in Arabic transliterated, Nahr 'Atbarah) near the modern city of Khartoum (capital of Sudan). In Antiquity and in the bible, Cush was the great region that encompassed the north of present-day Sudan, southern Egypt and parts of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. The present city of Aswan (ʿAswân or Aswān, in Arabic) or Assuan was called in Ancient times the city of Swenett (sʿweneh, in Masoretic; or Swenett or Swn, in Egyptian), and later known as Syene (Σύνη, in Greek) – Ezek. 29: 10; Ezek. 30: 6] and was located in the first cataract of the Nile, on the border between southern Egypt and Ethiopia. The ancient Egyptian name ‘Swenett’ suggests that the city received its name from the Egyptian goddess Swenett, associated with childbirth, and whose meaning is ‘the opener.’ Others say that the ancient name of the city also is said to be derived from the Egyptian symbol for ‘trade’, or ‘market’; therefore, it could mean ‘place of trade’, ‘market’ (source: wikipedia.org). From the 16th to the 9th centuries BC the Ethiopians were dominated by the Egyptians. The kingdom of Ethiopia (in Hebrew: Cush) existed within the kingdom of Nubia since 2000 BC and its rulers adopted the Egyptian culture. By 1150 BC, its capital was Napata, on the western bank of the Nile.

When Shoshenk I or Sheshonk I (or Shishak I – 945-924 BC) invaded the kingdom of Rehoboam (930-913 BC – 2 Chr. 12: 1-12; 1 Kin. 14: 25-28), the Ethiopians were his allies, along with the Libyans and the Sukkites (2 Chr. 12: 6). Shishak I (Shoshenk I or Sheshonk I or Sheshonq I) was the first pharaoh and founder of the 22nd Egyptian dynasty. He belonged to a Libyan family from Bubastis (now Tell Basta), south of Tanis. Bubastis is often identified with the biblical city Pi-Beseth (Ezek. 30: 17). Shishak resumed the relations with Byblos, the traditional Egyptian trading partner on

the Phoenician coast, increasing the prosperity in the beginning of the dynasty. Sukkites (in Egyptian, thktn, tkn), Libyan auxiliaries, were employed as scouts in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BC. It is not known exactly whether Sukkites were residents of Succoth, in Egypt, one of the Hebrews' stops before crossing the Red Sea. Around this time (10th century BC), the Ethiopians attempted an attack on Palestine, but were defeated by Asa, King of Judah (911-870 BC – 2 Chr. 14: 9-15).





Ethiopia was really aggrandized around 720 BC when its king (Piye, once transliterated as Piankhi) took advantage of the internal strife of Egypt and became the first conqueror of that land (he ruled Egypt from 744 to 714 BC). Between 744 BC and 656 BC, Ethiopian kings dominated Egypt, forming the 25th dynasty. One of them, Tirhakah (Taharqa or Taharka or Khunefertumre – 690-664 BC) is quoted in 2 Kin. 19: 9. Then the Cushites were expelled from Egypt by the Assyrians (Esarhaddon – 681-669 BC), where they eventually established their capital in Meroe (Meroë).

Tirhakah managed to re-conquer Egypt for a brief time in 669 BC. Esarhaddon sent a force against him, but died on the way. Tirhakah was defeated at Memphis by Ashurbanipal in 664 BC. There are studies that say that the kingdom of Meroe was

governed by queens that received the title-name of Candace, in which the power would be passed to the female descendants.

Nahum (Nah. 3: 9) alludes to the glory of this period: he says that Ethiopia and Egypt were the strength of No Amon, i.e. Thebes. But Thebes was besieged by Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) for three years and taken captive in 661 BC to Assyria. The destruction of Thebes (Nah. 3: 8-10) caused reflection in Ethiopia, which also came to fall, fulfilling the prophecy of Isa. 20: 2-6 and probably Isa. 18: 1-6. Ashurbanipal placed Necho I on the throne of Egypt (672-664 BC), but after the fall of Thebes, he replaced him by Psamtik I (Wahibre Psamtik I, known by the Greeks as Psammeticus or Psammetichus – 664-610 BC). Psamtik expelled the Cushites from Egypt in 656 BC.

Ethiopian troops fought in vain in the army of Pharaoh Necho II (610-595 BC) in Carchemish (2 Chr. 35: 20; Jer. 46: 9). In May-June 605 BC the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians who fled to Hamath, where they were utterly destroyed, as were the Assyrians (prophecy of Isa. 10: 5-12; Ezek. 30: 4-5). Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt (Jer. 43: 8-13) eighteen years after the fall of Judah, around 568-567 BC. Later, the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses II (son of Cyrus the Great) encompassed Ethiopia (Cush) in the Persian domain: Est. 1: 1; Est. 8: 9 – here the bible mentions Ethiopia as the remotest Persian province to the southwest, while biblical writers sometimes use it to symbolize the unlimited extent of God's sovereignty (Ps. 87: 4; Ezek. 30: 4-5).

'Beyond the rivers of Ethiopia' (Isa. 18: 1; Zeph. 3: 10) is perhaps an expression referring to the north of Abyssinia (as it was known the Ethiopian Empire of the Upper Nile that occupied the present territories of Ethiopia and Eritrea), where Jewish settlers had apparently established along with other Semitic peoples from southern Arabia. The writer of Chronicles recognizes this intimate relationship between Ethiopia and the south of Arabia (2 Chr. 21: 16). The kingdom of Cush with its capital at Meroe persisted until the 4th century AD, when it weakened and disintegrated due to internal rebellion. Meroe was finally captured and totally burned by the Kingdom of Aksum (or Axum), present Eritrea. Being an initially Christian nation, Ethiopia was later dominated by the Mamluk Turks of the Islamic religion, around 1315 AD. The term 'mamluk' or 'mameluk' is most commonly used to refer to Muslim slave soldiers and Muslim rulers of slave origin.

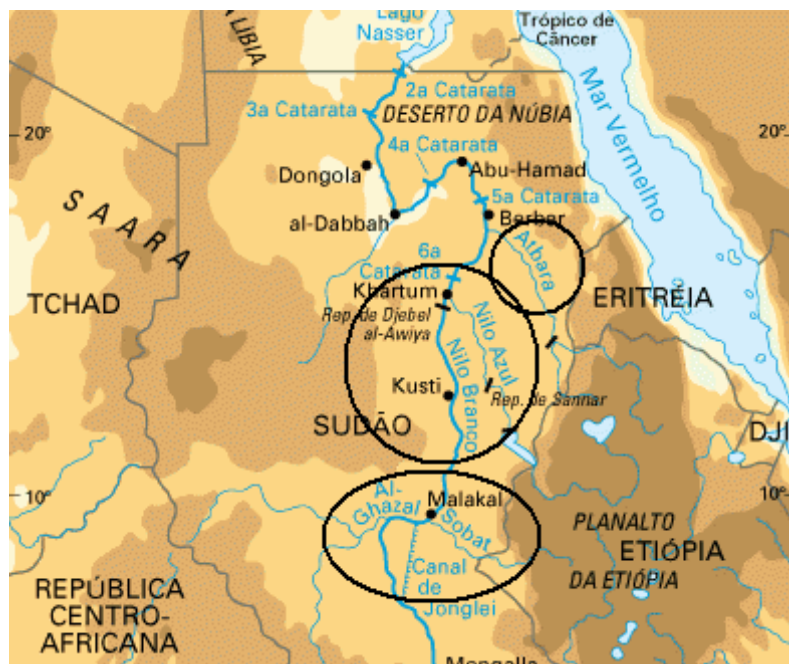
- Isa. 18: 1-2 (NRSV): "Ah, land of whirring wings beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, sending ambassadors by the Nile in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide."

- Isa. 18: 1-2 (NIV): "Woe to the land of whirring wings [Or of locusts] along the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water. Go, swift messengers, to a people tall and smooth-skinned, to a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers."

'Ah, land of whirring wings' or 'Woe to the land of whirring wings (or 'locusts')', as seen in the two bible versions above, refers to Ethiopia, where the insects are the locusts present in that region.

The next definition is 'beyond the rivers of Ethiopia' (NRSV) or 'along the rivers of Cush' (NIV). We have seen above, the expression 'beyond the rivers of Ethiopia' (Isa. 18: 1; Zeph. 3: 10) is perhaps an expression referring to the northern region of the Ethiopian Empire on the Upper Nile, known as Abyssinia, which is now occupied by Ethiopia and Eritrea. Ethiopia was part of Nubia and stretched from Syene (Aswan) to the south until the confluence of the Blue Nile, the White Nile and the Atabaras River, near the modern city of Khartoum (capital of Sudan). Syene or Swenett (s^cweneh, in Masoretic) or Aswan ('Aswân or Aswân, in Arabic) was located in the first cataract of

the Nile, on the border between the south of Egypt and the north of Ethiopia. The major rivers of Ethiopia were the Astaboras River (or Astabaras, now Atbarah River) and the modern Sobat River (its name in Ancient times was Astapus), besides the Nile, more precisely the Blue Nile, which later joins with the White Nile, and flows to Egypt. But at that time, the two branches of the Nile did not join outside the Ethiopian Empire, but within it. It's called Blue Nile because during flood periods, its stream becomes so high that it changes color, almost to black. In the local Sudanese language the word for 'black' is also used for 'blue.'



Main rivers of Ethiopia in Antiquity: The Nile, the Astaboras River (now Atbarah) and the Astapus (modern Sobat River), far to the south. This is the southernmost of the great eastern tributaries of the White Nile, before the confluence with the Blue Nile.

The Astapus River, now known as Sobat, is a river in Upper Nile (Upper Egypt) in Southeastern Sudan, and one of the great eastern tributaries of the White Nile, before the confluence with the Blue Nile. The Sobat River is formed by the confluence of the Baro River flowing to the west, and the Pibor River, flowing to the north, on the border with Ethiopia. The river enters the White Nile at Doleib Hill near the town of Malakal in Upper Nile State.

The Astaboras River, now known as Atbarah River (in Arabic transliterated, Nahr 'Atbarah) goes up from the northwest of Ethiopia and flows about eight hundred and five kilometers to the Nile in central-northern Sudan, joining it in the city of Atbarah. The Atbarah is the last tributary of the Nile before reaching the Mediterranean. Strabo (in Greek, Strabōn, Στράβων; 64 BC-24 AD), a Greek geographer, philosopher and historian who lived in Asia Minor during the transition from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire, was the first to mention the Atbarah (or Astaboras, in Greek, Ασταβόρας).

‘Sending ambassadors by the Nile in vessels of papyrus on the waters’ or ‘which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water’ – probably Ethiopia sent ambassadors by sea to other nations for the purpose of forming alliances and protecting themselves from invasions of enemies. There is no reason to think that the bible is

referring to Egypt here, because both this country and Ethiopia had ships made of papyrus, for in the past Ethiopia had been an Egyptian domain for many centuries. The ships thus constructed were light and moving rapidly, besides being safer, for they did not break into pieces like other ships, on rocks or waterfalls. The words written next are not the words of Ethiopia to their ambassadors to other nations, but are the words of God to His messengers, angels or men, ready to do His will and whom He was sending as an instrument of judgment on this nation (Ezek. 30: 9), a nation of tall and smooth-skinned men (hairless), a people feared far and wide, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide [NIV: an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers]; namely, Nile, Astapus and Astaboras. The Ethiopians were powerful due to the vast armies they brought to the battlefield, like no other people (2 Chr. 14: 9 – Zerah, the Ethiopian against Asa: ‘an army of thousands thousands’ or ‘with an army of thousands upon thousands’ (in Hebrew) and three hundred chariots. In verse 11 Asa says to God that no one else can help the powerless against the mighty).

In verse 3, all inhabitants of the world are called by the prophet to be witnesses of the judgment on the Ethiopian nation. This event should be as manifest as a banner placed on a mountain and spread through the earth as one hears the sound of a trumpet.

- Isa. 18: 4-6: “For thus the Lord said to me: I will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest [NIV: This is what the Lord says to me: ‘I will remain quiet and will look on from my dwelling place, like shimmering heat in the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of the harvest’]. For before the harvest, when the blossom is over and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he will cut off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the spreading branches he will hew away. They shall all be left to the birds of prey of the mountains and to the animals of the earth. And the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the animals of the earth will winter on them [NIV: They will all be left to the mountain bird of prey and to the wild animals; the birds will feed on them all summer, the wild animals all winter].”

The prophet writes what the Lord told him: He (God) would be quietly watching the unfolding of the situation until the time to make the appropriate decision. And then He would act. In metaphor: ‘For before the harvest, when the blossom is over and the flower becomes a ripening grape’, that is, before the designs of men were ripe for execution, He, like a farmer, would prune the vine without much care, not to make it better but worse. He would cut off even the longest branches, with flowers and buds (‘the spreading branches’) and hew away and would leave them to the vultures of the mountains and the wild beasts. That means that their destruction by the enemy (Assyria) would be such a slaughter that they would not even be buried. Vultures and wild animals would eat their flesh during the whole year, on summer and winter.

Gifts will be brought to the Lord to Mount Zion – v. 7.

- Isa. 18: 7: “At that time gifts will be brought to the Lord of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide [NIV: an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers], to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the Lord of hosts.”

In this verse, the prophet says that this same people who were punished for their sins would come to Mount Zion, Jerusalem, to bring their gifts to the Lord. This may mean the times of the Gospel, when a people converted to the Lord would come from many nations to worship Him in the Temple, as did the official of Queen Candace who was baptized by Philip on the road to Gaza on his return from Jerusalem to his land (Acts 8: 27-28; 34-38). Or it may mean that converted sinners, including Ethiopians and Egyptians, will extend their hands to God, submit to Him, and present themselves of

body and soul as an acceptable sacrifice, fulfilling not only the prophecy of Isaiah but also of Ps. 68: 31 and Zeph. 3: 9-10. It also means that God will receive this little remnant as a holy offering acceptable to Him.

For us, the full meaning of this chapter of Isaiah is that the Lord first warns those who walk in error to repent and seek the right way through Him. If they continue on the path of violence or rebellion, He punishes them and leaves them at the mercy of the enemy so they can feel how painful the turning away from the true God is. Regardless of how long it will take for them to convert, sooner or later this will happen and then, yes, the Lord will be pleased with them and their offerings, because now they have the full consciousness of what they are doing. Like all prophecies up to now, this one also points to the coming of the Messiah and to the compassion and mercy of God to all peoples, both Jews and Gentiles alike.

Chapter 19

Prophecy against Egypt –

Probably this prophecy was made in the time of Ahaz (732-716 BC) or Hezekiah (716-687 BC). Thus it may be thought that the people used to oppress Egypt as a punishment of God would be the Assyrians [Sargon II (722-705 BC), Esarhaddon (681-669 BC), or Ashurbanipal (669- 627 BC)], when the fall of Thebes occurred. As for the Babylonian rulers, they are probably mentioned in the prophecy of Jer. 46: 2-26 (it talks about Pharaoh Necho II; in Egyptian, Ni'-k'w; in Greek, Nechao; name chosen by Pharaoh to reign: Wehemib-re – 610-595 AC); Jer. 44: 30 (about Pharaoh Hophra; in Greek: Ουαφρη[ς], that is, Apries, in Greek: Ἀπρίης, name chosen by the pharaoh to reign: Wahibre Haaibre – 589-570 BC, of 26th Dynasty) and Ezek. 29 to 32, which speaks of the attack of Babylon against Egypt. Necho II (610-595 BC) reigned during the period of the Babylonian kings Nabopolassar (632-605 BC) and Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC). Hophra (Apries) reigned during the period of Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC).

- Sargon II (722-705 BC) – during his reign, Egypt fell into the hands of the Assyrians (716 BC). In 711 BC Ashdod (in Philistia) was sacked (Isa. 20: 1; Isa. 14: 29).

- Sennacherib (705-681 BC) marched against Syria (701 BC), besieged Sidon and attacked Ashkelon (in Philistia). He invaded the Kingdom of Judah, having taken forty-six fortified cities, but he did not obtain victory against Jerusalem. It doesn't seem to have been any major incidents involving Egypt during his reign.

- Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) made a great expedition against the Egyptian delta in 672 BC, installing Assyrian governors in Thebes and Memphis to control the tribute. He divided Egypt into about twenty provinces dominated by twenty princes, whose chief was the half-Libyan, Necho of Sais. Some princes of Lower Egypt took advantage of this situation to revolt, but others supported Tirhakah (2 Kin. 19: 9; Isa. 37: 9 – also called Taharqa or Taharka or Taharqo or Khunefertem or Khunefertumre – 690-664 BC) who managed to re-conquer Egypt for a brief time in 669 BC. Esarhaddon sent a force against him, but he died on the way. Tirhakah was defeated at Memphis by Ashurbanipal in 664 BC. Esarhaddon used his forces against Egypt, Ethiopia and Sheba (Strong #5434, in Hebrew, Cba').

- Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), at the beginning of his reign, fought against Egypt in three hard campaigns and captured Thebes (Nah. 3: 8, No Amon) in 661 BC; its inhabitants were taken to Assyria after three years of siege (Nah. 3: 8-10). In his reign, Assyria acquired the greater territorial extension. The destruction of Thebes (Nah. 3: 8-10) caused reflection in Ethiopia, which also came to fall, fulfilling the prophecy of Isa. 20: 2-6 and, probably, Isa. 18: 1-6. Around 652 BC Shamash-shum-ukin (brother of Ashurbanipal, and who reigned in Babylon) revolted against him with the support of Elam, but died in his own palace, to which he had set fire. Therefore Ashurbanipal marched to plunder Susa in 639 BC, and thenceforth the city became an Assyrian province. With the deviation of Assurbanipal's attention to the east and free from the Assyrian army's raids to support his local officials and tax collectors, the city-states of the West gradually freed themselves from Assyria. Egypt, now free, turned its attention again to Palestine, but did not invade Judah until the time of Josiah (640-609 BC), when Necho II of Egypt (610-595 BC) tried to prevent the advance of Nebuchadnezzar by allying with Assyria. He tried to pass through the land of Judah, but was stopped by King Josiah, who died at the battle of Megiddo (2 Kin. 23: 29). Necho did not invade

Judah; his goal was just to pass by there. The decisive battle took place at Carchemish, north of Syria, in 605 BC between Necho II and Nebuchadnezzar II. Necho was defeated and Babylon was able to consolidate its dominion over the region; it conquered all that belonged to the King of Egypt, between the River Nile and the Euphrates River. In 568-567 BC Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt (Jer. 43: 8-13), eighteen years after the fall of Judah.

The confusion of Egypt, their idols deceive them, cruel lords over them, the waters fail, their princes and counselors become fools, their terror before the Lord – v. 1-17.

- Isa. 19: 1: “An oracle concerning Egypt. See, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.”

The judgment must come quickly, unexpectedly and inevitably (‘swift cloud’), which makes us think that in a few years, from the moment the prophecy was delivered; probably in the reign of Ahaz, for Egypt fell under Assyrian rule in 716 BC in the reign of Sargon II (722-705 BC).

- Isa. 19: 2: “I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight, one against the other, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.” This means that the Lord will cause one fight against the other.

From earliest times, such as Abraham’s, for example, Egypt was a kingdom ruled by a single ruler. Over the centuries the country suffered divisions but came to be unified again during the 18th – 20th dynasties.

In the 21st Dynasty (1070-945 BC) in the Third Intermediate Period (1070-664 BC, comprising the dynasties: 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th), Egypt underwent a fragmentation of political power, with the emergence of several centers of power, controlled in some cases by peoples of foreign origin (Libyans and Nubians). This happened in the time of David and Solomon. In particular, in the 21st dynasty Egypt was separated between two rulers: one for the Lower Egypt and one for Upper Egypt, the latter being ruled by powerful priests with the capital at Thebes. Lower Egypt near the Nile delta had its capital at Tanis (or Zoan in this text of Isaiah). Despite the great political changes, the Third Intermediate Period was generally characterized by a climate of peace.

In the 22nd Dynasty (945-712 BC), mainly after the death of the King of Tanis in 945 BC, a tribal chief of Libya (Shoshenq I, Sheshonk or Shishak, in the bible; he reigned c. 943-922 BC) sat on the throne of Egypt and took the whole nation under his power, putting an end to the partial independence of the Priests of Thebes in Upper Egypt. The capital of the 22nd dynasty was in Bubastis, in the Nile delta. This happened in the kingdom of Solomon. In the fifth year of Rehoboam, Shishak invaded Palestine (925 BC – 1 Kin. 14: 25-26; 2 Chr. 12: 2-12). The successors of Shishak I (or Shoshenq I) were: Osorkon I (the son of Shishak. Zerah the Ethiopian was sent by him against Judah, but was eventually defeated by Asa); Takelot I; Osorkon II (son of Takelot I); Takelot II (son of Osorkon II); Pami (or Pimay, ‘the cat’, was a contemporary of King Osorkon III of Leontopolis, since Egypt was no longer a unified territory under a single power), was succeeded by Shoshenq IV and Shoshenq V (son of Pami). Osorkon IV was the last king of this dynasty and was son of Shoshenq V, reigning in Tanis, in the Nile delta. These kings were Libyans. Libya was in the west of Egypt. Another ruler had the capital at Thebes, and in this period there were civil wars in this city.

The 23rd Dynasty (828-725 BC) contains several lineages of pharaohs reigning in Thebes, Hermopolis and Leontopolis, in parallel to the main original dynasty (22nd) in Tanis (Zoan).

In the 24th dynasty, the pharaoh was Tefnakhte (732-725 BC), who reigned in Sais (Sa el-Hagar, in the west of the Delta). His authority was also recognized at Memphis. Thus, Egypt also fell into Assyrian power in 716 BC, the year that Hezekiah came to power in Judah.

From 744 to 656 BC, in Nubia (Cush or Ethiopia) also arose a kingdom ruled by princes who were entirely Egyptian as to their culture and claimed protectorate over Upper Egypt, being worshipers of Amon (in Egyptian, Amun) of Thebes (25th Dynasty, also known as the Nubian Dynasty or the Kushite Empire, whose capital was Napata). Its kings were: Piye (Piankhi or Piankhy; Usimare, 744-714 BC); Shebitku (Djedkare, 714-705 BC; also known as Shabataka or Shebitqo, and anglicized as Sethos); Shabaka (Nefer-ka-re, 705-690 BC); Tirhakah (also called Taharqa or Taharka, Khunefertumre – 690-664 BC) and Tantamani (Bakare, 664-656 BC). The city-state of Napata was the spiritual capital and it was from there that Piye (spelled Piankhi or Piankhy in older works) invaded and took control of Egypt (wikipedia.org).

Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) divided Egypt into about twenty provinces dominated by twenty princes, whose chief was the half-Libyan, Necho of Sais (Necho I). Some princes of Lower Egypt took advantage of this situation to revolt, but others supported Tirhakah (2 Kin. 19: 9; Isa. 37: 9 – also called Taharqa or Taharka – 690-664 BC, of the 25th Dynasty) who managed to re-conquer Egypt for a brief time in 669 BC. Esarhaddon sent a force against him, but he died on the way. Tirhakah was defeated at Memphis by Ashurbanipal in 664 BC.

In other words, while Sargon II and Sennacherib frustrated the expectations of the Nubian pharaohs in relation to the government in Egypt, their successors Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal invaded Nubia and expelled the Nubians completely, putting an end to the Kushite power, declaring the conquest of nation by the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

Then came the 26th dynasty, beginning with Necho I (672-664 BC), being succeeded by Psamtik I (Psammetichus I, throne name: Wahibre, 664-610 BC), who rebelled against Assurbanipal (669-627 BC) and lifted Egypt again. His son Necho II (or Wehemibre) began to reign (610-595 BC), but was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, and his son Psamtik II (Psammetichus II, Neferibre, 595-589 BC) reigned in his stead. The other pharaohs of the 26th Egyptian Dynasty were: Apries (Wahibre Haaibre, Haaibre, 589-570 BC), Amasis II (Ahmose II, Khnem-ib-re, 570-526 BC) and Psamtik III (Psammetichus III, Ankhkaenre, 526-525 BC), at the time of Cambises II (530-522 BC), son of Cyrus II.

In the bible, Egypt is called ‘that broken reed of a staff’ or ‘that splintered reed of staff’ (Isa. 36: 6), precisely because of all these internal quarrels within its territory. Therefore, the prophecy of Isa. 19: 2 says: “I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight, one against the other, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.”

The Lord was in control of everything and allowing these civil wars to the weakening of the Egyptian Empire and hence its punishment. Thus, it was in the reign of Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) that Thebes (No Amon) was sacked in 661 BC, after three years of siege. This completes the destruction begun by Esarhaddon.

- Isa. 19: 3-4: “The spirit of the Egyptians within them will be emptied out, and I will confound their plans; they will consult the idols and the spirits of the dead and the ghosts and the familiar spirits [NIV: The Egyptians will lose heart, and I will bring their

plans to nothing; they will consult the idols and the spirits of the dead, the mediums and the spiritists]; I will deliver the Egyptians into the hand of a hard master; a fierce king will rule over them, says the Sovereign, the Lord of hosts [NIV: I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them, declares the Lord Almighty].”

This means: The Lord will thwart their plans and they will lose their courage (‘the spirit of the Egyptians within them will be emptied out’ or ‘The Egyptians will lose heart’), for their policy and wisdom, based on sorcery and idolatry will come down by the hands of the Lord. Cruel masters would be placed upon them to rule over them, that is, He will also use a stranger to perform His will, ‘a cruel master, and a fierce king.’ It may have been Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) who, around 661 BC, finally plundered Thebes (‘No’ or ‘No Amon’ – Nah. 3: 8); its inhabitants were taken to Assyria after three years of siege (Nah. 3: 8-10). Or ‘a cruel master and a fierce king’ may refer to Cambyses II (530-522 BC) who was quite cruel in his invasion and his control over Egypt, dethroning Psamtik III (Ankhkaen-re – 526-525 BC, in Greek, Psammeticus or Psammetichus; the last king of the 26th Dynasty). With the invasion of Cambyses II in Pelusium the heart of the Egyptians faded, and they lost the courage. The Persian king used an unusual strategy, stripping them of all their force of war: in front of his army he placed cats, dogs, sheep and the ibis bird, considered gods by the Egyptians. Not to injure the animals, the Egyptians did not shoot the Persians, thus facilitating the capture of the city. Other versions say that during the siege, knowing how the cats were sacred there, Cambyses ordered his soldiers to capture them and throw them with the catapults. When the Egyptians saw that the animals were in danger of life, their inhabitants surrendered. Capturing Pelusium, Cambyses II invaded Egypt. He dethroned Psamtik III and humiliated the daughter of Pharaoh and other young women of the nobility, obliging them to bring water from the river. Then he killed the young son of Pharaoh and 2,000 young men in shameful manner for vengeance on the men of Memphis who had assassinated the ambassadors whom Cambyses had sent. Psamtik III was the son of Ahmose II and reigned for only 6 months (526-525 BC). It is not known for sure how he died.

- Isa. 19: 5-7: “The waters of the Nile will be dried up, and the river [NIV: the riverbed] will be parched and dry; its canals will become foul, and the branches of Egypt’s Nile will diminish and dry up, reeds and rushes will rot away [NIV: the canals will stink; the streams of Egypt will dwindle and dry up. The reeds and rushes will wither]. There will be bare places by the Nile, on the brink of the Nile [NIV: at the mouth of the river]; and all that is sown by the Nile will dry up, be driven away, and be no more.”

This can be understood metaphorically as the removal of Egypt’s dominion over nations and its commerce. Concretely speaking, God could refer here to a great period of drought. The Nile River was not only very useful for its commerce and navigation, but the country’s fertility depended on it, because the lack of rain in the land of Egypt was supplied by the overflow of this river at certain moments, which left mud on the earth and made it extremely fertile. Now, God was sending a great drought as His judgment against Egypt. The channels and streams, that is, the smaller tributaries of the Nile, would also suffer from drought; or ‘the canals... and streams of Egypt’ may refer to the way in which this river emptied into the Mediterranean Sea, in the Delta region: in Ancient times it was by seven channels as if they were rivers. Today, due to flood control (with the construction of the Aswan dam), the Nile empties into the sea by only two channels (or streams): Rosetta to the west and Damietta to the east. The Nile Delta

is a plane, triangular-shaped region (hence the name delta), one hundred and sixty kilometers long and two hundred and fifty kilometers wide. The Nile is considered the longest river in the world, with 6,853 kilometers (4,258 miles) in length.

The great Nile, in which the Egyptians felt safe, could no longer defend them. This also means that the large volume of water contained in it was a form of defense, diminishing the access of any enemy; besides, its warships that sailed by it also protected the country from invasions. With reeds and papyrus sprouting on its banks many things were done, among them, writing paper, nets for fishing and the very ships that patrolled the nation and aided in trade (Isa. 18: 2). The grass and grain crops and other seeds that served as food for them would dry up, and this would contribute to the hunger of the inhabitants.

- Isa. 19: 8-9: “Those who fish will mourn; all who cast hooks in the Nile will lament, and those who spread nets on the water will languish. The workers in flax will be in despair, and the carders and those at the loom will grow pale [NIV: Those who work with combed flax will despair, the weavers of fine linen will lose hope].”

It is obvious that with the drought there would be no fish in the river, which would be a cause for lament for the fishermen, because they were not only suffering from the scarcity of vegetables, but also the scarcity of animals such as fish. Not only would they have shortages of what to eat, but nothing to sell, so they would not be able to support their families. We can remember the complaints of the Israelites against Moses because of the food of Egypt. In Num. 11: 5 it is written: “We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.” And there was also the wheat, mentioned at the time of Joseph, and which supplied the whole nation (Gen. 41: 5-7; 34-36; 56-57; Gen. 42: 2-3; 9 – see Gen. 37: 5-7). Not only in the time of Joseph the wheat of Egypt supplied people; also in the time of the Republic and of the Roman Empire Egypt was a great exporter of wheat to Rome and other cities.

‘The workers in flax will be in despair, and the carders and those at the loom will grow pale’ or ‘Those who work with combed flax will despair, the weavers of fine linen will lose hope’ – it means that the people who worked in the weaving trade would also suffer and would lose hope. The fine linen of Egypt was one of its finest goods. The Tabernacle of Moses that was built in the wilderness had its curtains made with the linen of Egypt. Many nations traded this commodity with the Egyptians, such as Tyre, for example; consequently, Israel (Ezek. 27: 7). In verse 7 we read: ‘all that is sown by the Nile will dry up’ or ‘every sown field among the Nile will become parched’ (NIV), that is, linen grew on the banks of the river. With the drought, the plant would also dry up. Linen was manufactured with the fiber whose scientific name is *Linum usitatissimum*. Once appropriately treated, i.e., after the separation of the fiber from the woody part of the stem, the thread produces the linen, and the seed produces linseed oil. Once the fiber was treated, it was woven by women to become cloth (Prov. 31: 24).

The Lord spoke in verse 1 of this chapter 19 of Isaiah that the idols of Egypt would tremble at what would happen. It is interesting that among the numerous Egyptian gods there was a goddess named Neith or Nit, worshiped in Sais, and who was the goddess of war and hunting, but also had weaving attributes (in syncretism with the Greek goddess Athena by the ruling classes, like a goddess who wove the world and brought everything into existence); so she was the patroness of weavers. This judgment of God upon them, diminishing their food supply and affecting their work, would surely shake their faith in their gods.

• Isa. 19: 10: “Its weavers will be dismayed, and all who work for wages will be grieved [NIV: the workers in cloth will be dejected, and all the wage earners will be sick at heart; ASV: And the pillars [of Egypt] shall be broken in pieces; all they that work for hire [shall be] grieved in soul; KJV: And they shall be broken (in Hebrew: crush) in the purposes (in Hebrew: foundations) thereof, all that make (in Hebrew: accomplish, to do or make, in the broadest sense and widest application) sluices (in Hebrew: hired) and ponds (in Hebrew: grieved) for fish (in Hebrew: a living thing, soul, a breathing creature)].” ARA (Portuguese-BR) translates as: “His great ones will be crushed, and all the workers will walk with a sad heart.” NVI (Portuguese-BR) translates as: “The nobles will be depressed, and all the wage earners will be dejected”; not ‘weavers’ or ‘the workers in cloth’, as the English bible writes.

No matter the words are used in this verse by the English versions, we can say: as a consequence of all the events described up to now, the nobles, the rich, would be depressed, for their source of profit would diminish, just as all the futilities to which they were accustomed would disappear; the food they often wasted would be scarce, they would have to save water and even their garments because of the divine punishment that would befall the nation. They would feel like the poor, they would be equal to all subjects and that would shame them before their own eyes and the eyes of the rulers of other nations. Even with their wealth and power they could neither improve the situation nor prevent it from taking its course. If the most privileged would be slaughtered, the more the wage earners, those who worked to live!

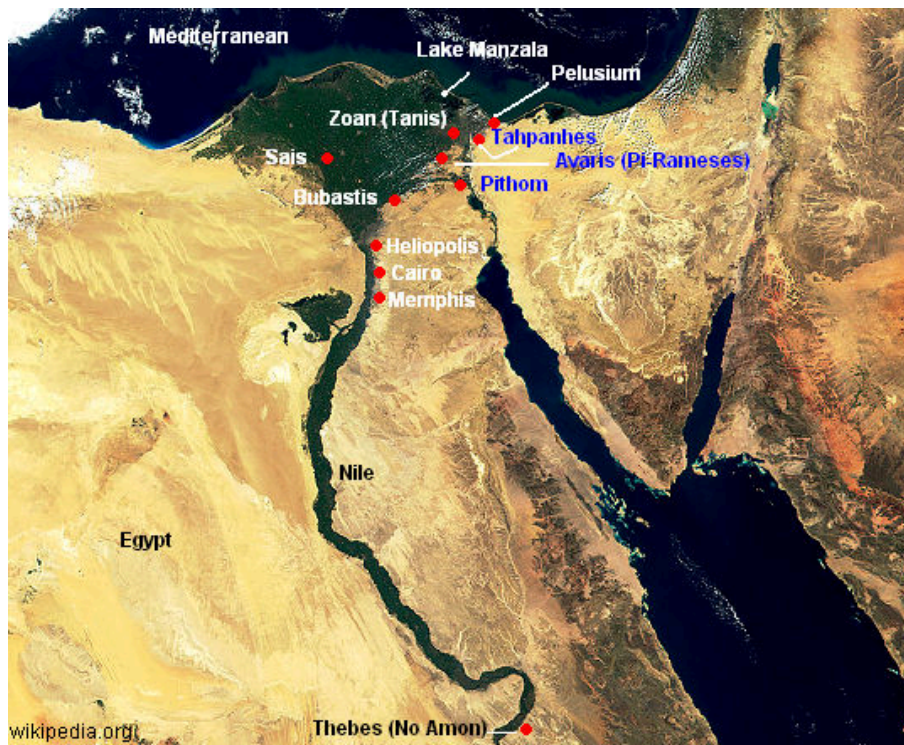
• Isa. 19: 11-14: “The princes of Zoan are utterly foolish; the wise counselors of Pharaoh give stupid counsel. How can you say to Pharaoh, ‘I am one of the sages, a descendant of ancient kings?’ Where now are your sages? Let them tell you and make known what the Lord of hosts has planned against Egypt. The princes of Zoan have become fools, and the princes [NIV: the leaders] of Memphis are deluded; those who are the cornerstones of its tribes have led Egypt astray. The Lord has poured into them a spirit of confusion [NIV: a spirit of dizziness]; and they have made Egypt stagger in all its doings as a drunkard staggers around in vomit.”

Zoan is the same Tanis of the Greeks, the modern town of San El-Hagar, near the south beach of Lake Manzala, in the north-east of the Egyptian delta, which around 1100-660 BC was Egypt’s capital of the 21st to the 23rd Dynasties. Lake Manzala or Manzaleh (Arabic: bahīrat manzala) is a salt lake in the north-east of the Nile Delta in Egypt, near Port Said, a few kilometers from the ancient ruins of Tanis. It is the largest of the northern delta lakes of Egypt. By 2008, its length was forty-seven kilometers, and its breadth was thirty kilometers.

In Zoan (Tanis) were the major advisers and princes of Pharaoh (Isa. 19: 11; 13; Isa. 30: 4), as well as among the great Egyptian cities in the writings of Ezekiel (Ezek. 30: 14: Zoan, Thebes and Pathros – as it was known the Upper Egypt and Cush or Ethiopia) when these two prophets speak about judgment. In Ps. 78: 12; 43-44, the psalmist says that the Lord did miracles in the land of Egypt in the region of Zoan, where its rivers and streams were turned into blood. It was from that region (from Goshen – Gen. 47: 1) that the Hebrews left, where there is the city of Rameses (The ancient Avaris) and Pithom (Ex. 1: 11) during the 18th Egyptian Dynasty (1550–1292 BC). Rameses II (1279-1212 BC) was part of the 19th Egyptian dynasty (1293-1185 BC).

The Exodus took place in 1446 BC (cf. 1 Kin. 6: 1. Solomon’s reign occurred in the period 970-931 BC), during the reign of Thutmose III (the 6th pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, also called Tuthmosis or Thothmes). Officially, Thutmose III ruled Egypt for almost 54 years and his reign is usually dated from 24 April 1479 BC to 11 March 1425

BC, from the age of two and until his death, at 56 years old; however, during the first 22 years of his reign he was co-regent with his stepmother and aunt, Hatshepsut, who was Pharaoh of Egypt after the death of her husband, Thutmose II. In the final two years of his reign, Thutmose III appointed Amenhotep II (1425-1400 BC), his son, as co-regent. The fact that it was written in Gen. 47: 11 that Joseph established his father and brothers in the land of Rameses, and in Ex. 1: 11 it is written that the Jewish slaves built store cities like Pithom and Rameses, even before Pi-Rameses or Per-Rameses exist, for it was rebuilt by Rameses II (1278–1212 BC or 1279–1213 BC) in the 19th Dynasty upon the ancient city of Avaris, it can simply mean that the later biblical writers and translators of the original text of Moses decided to use the name that was best known at the time for this region where the Exodus took place.



Ruins of Tanis (Zoan)

Avaris (Egyptian: Hut-waret; Greek: Auaris, αὐαρίς) was a fortified city, and was built by the invaders, the Hyksos, to serve them as capital. Hyksos, in Greek (Υἱσώς or Ὑξώς), derives from the Egyptian, 'heqa khasewet' or 'hik-khoswet' or else Heqa-kasut', and means 'foreign sovereigns' or 'rulers of foreign countries.' In Arabic it means (wrongly), 'shepherd kings' or 'captive kings.' They were Shepherd peoples of Semitic origin who settled in the Nile Delta region, who started to migrate to Egypt since the reign of Senusret II (1890 BC), of the 12th Dynasty. The tomb paintings of 12th-dynasty official Khnumhotep II show groups of Western Asiatic foreigners visiting the Pharaoh with gifts, possibly Canaanites or nomads, who settled in the Delta region. The Hyksos practiced many Levantine or Canaanite customs, but also many Egyptian customs. They separated from central Egyptian control around 1720 BC, near the end of the 13th Dynasty (1803–1649 BC), establishing the 15th Dynasty (1650–1550 AC), in Avaris, and coexisted with the 16th and 17th Dynasties, based in Thebes. They lasted until 1540 BC, in the reign of Ahmose I. They had as allies, archers and horsemen mercenaries of Canaan, Haran, Kadesh, Sidon and Tyre, all originating from Mesopotamia.

Avaris was destroyed when the Hyksos were defeated by Kamose (the last pharaoh of the 17th Dynasty who reigned in the period 1555-1550 BC; his brother and successor Ahmose I expelled the Hyksos from Egypt in 1540 BC and founded the 18th Dynasty), and rebuilt later by Rameses II, who renamed it Pi-Rameses or Per-Rameses (House of Rameses), and made the city the new capital of his reign. The location of the city of Avaris or Pi-Rameses is assumed to be today in Tell el-Daba, located in the Nile Delta. One of the reasons for this change of capital, apart from the family roots of Rameses' father, Seti I, is its strategic location, closer to Egypt's main enemy at the time, the Hittite kingdom (now Turkey), this way facilitating the watchfulness of the borders and a military intervention.

Memphis (in Egyptian, Mn-nrf; in Hebrew, Noph or Moph; Hos. 9: 6; Jer. 2: 16; Jer. 46: 14; 19; Ezek. 30: 13; 16) was another important city in Egypt, which had been the capital city for many kings of the ancient empire (2400 BC), one of the earliest provinces of Egypt. It was built by its first king, Menes (he gave it the name of 'white wall'). Menes was the Pharaoh who united the High and the Lower Egypt under a single ruler. Memphis stood on the banks of the Nile, twenty-four kilometers from the Egyptian Delta. It has always been a city of much idolatry. The main gods of Memphis were Ptah, Sekhmet, Sokar and Nefertem. The name of its great temple, Hwt-k'-Pth or Hut-ka-Ptah, meaning 'mansion of the Ka of Ptah' (Ka = soul), is the origin of the name 'Egypt', in Greek, Αἴ-γυ-πτος (Ai-gy-ptos). Ptah is the god of craftsmen and architects.

At the site of the ancient Egyptian city of Memphis (close to the current Helwan), about 25 km southwest of Cairo city center, is the province of Giza with its plateau where the pyramids of many pharaohs were built in the city's necropolis, such as the most famous pyramids of Khufu (or Cheops, to the Greeks it is called 'the Great Pyramid of Giza'), Khafre (or Chephren, to the Greeks; he was the son of Cheops) and Menkaure (or Mykerinos, Μυκερίνος, to the Greeks), Pharaohs of the 4th Dynasty, 26th century BC. Rameses II, Merneptah and Psamtik made extensive buildings in this region. Near the pyramid of Khafre (or Chephren) one can see the sphinx with the image of his face, whose construction dates back to 2500 BC, called 'the Great Sphinx.' South of Giza (30 km south of Cairo) there is another necropolis called Sakkara (Saccara or Saqqara, in Arabic), 6 km long and 1.5 km wide, containing funerary structures of pharaohs from 3000 BC to 950 AD. The name Sakkara derives from Sokar, one of the gods of the triad worshiped in Memphis (Ptah, Sokar and Nefertem), or else, from the name of a tribe that lived there in the past, the 'Beni Sokar' ('the sons

of Sokar'). That site was also the center of worship for the goddess Bastet. Thousands of cat mummies have been found there by archaeologists. North of Sakkara there is another extensive necropolis called Abusir, the cemetery of the elite population of Memphis, where one can see 14 pyramids of the pharaohs of the 5th Dynasty.

The ancient writers describe the temple in that place where the bull Apis (the bull of Memphis) was kept alive. During the new empire (1070-657 BC; because from 657 BC to 332 BC it is called the Late Period; and then, the Greek-Roman period: 332-305 BC – Alexander the Great; 305-30 BC – from Ptolemy I Soter to defeat of Cleopatra VII), because of the immigration of Asians, other foreign gods became to be worshiped, as Qetesh (a Canaanite and Egyptian fertility goddess), Astarte and Baal in the city of Memphis.

In Isa. 30: 4 there is mention to other city of Egypt. The text says: "For though his officials are at Zoan and his envoys reach Hanes." There is some controversy about the real location of Hanes. The Jews, according to the writings of the Targum, identify Hanes with **Tahpanhes** (Jer. 2: 16; Jer. 43: 7-9), where Pharaoh had a palace and that was a reason to send ambassadors there. Tahpanhes was also on the lower Nile, northeast of the Delta, near the desert of Shur, more precisely on Lake Manzala, on the Tanitic branch of the Nile (one of the former seven channels at the mouth of the Nile in the Delta), approximately 26 kilometers from Pelusium. The Greek Septuagint translates Tahpanhes (or Taphne) as Táfnas (Taphnas – Τάφνας), and is believed to be the same name as that of an important fortified city on the eastern border of Egypt, called Daphnae Pelusiae by the Greek writers of the Classical Period, and now Tell Defenneh. Classical Greece was a period of around 200 years (5th and 4th centuries BC) in Greek culture. Another explanation (from the Archaeologist Kitchen) finds an even closer parallel in Isa. 30: 4: Hanes may be merely a Hebrew description of the Egyptian name h(wt)-nsw, 'king's mansion', as the name of the palace of Pharaoh in Zoan (Tanis). Any of these interpretations are plausible, but none of them have been proven. What can be deduced with certainty is that Hanes was an eminent city of Egypt.

Other important cities of Egypt were:

- Thebes or No Amon – Nah. 3: 8 (the city of the god Amon – In Egyptian, n'iw(t)-'Imn) was a city of Upper Egypt, east of the Nile, mentioned along with other important cities of Egypt, as in the writings of Ezekiel (Ezek. 30: 14: Zoan, Thebes and Pathros – as was known the Upper Egypt and Cush or Ethiopia). 'No' corresponds to the Egyptian term n'iw(t), 'the city.' Amon (in Egyptian, Amun) means 'the hidden one' or 'invisible', often associated with wind, but most of the time, his nature is unknown. He is often called Amun-Ra or Amun-Re', by his union with the cosmic god Ra-Aton (Re-Aton, the Sun god). During the 18th – 20th dynasties (1570-1085 BC), Amon was the official god, the 'king of the gods.' In this period the treasures of Asia and Africa were poured into the strongboxes of Thebes. It fell into Assyrian power in 661 BC, under Ashurbanipal, after three years of siege, amid fire and slaughter; therefore, in predicting the fall of Nineveh, the comparison with the fall of Thebes could not be better. In the 7th century AD, Thebes was rebuilt by the Arabs and was named Luxor (also known as Karnak).

- On (or 'Heliopolis', in Greek, the 'City of the Sun') – Jeremiah (Jer. 43: 13) refers to it with the name of Beth-shemesh; and Ezekiel (Ezek. 30: 17) makes a wordplay between On ('ôn) and Aven ('awen). On (in biblical Hebrew: Ôṇ (וֹן) and Āwen (אֵוֶן); in Egyptian, Iwnw, whose transcription is Iunu, meaning 'the pillars'; Heliopolis, in Greek) was the great center of sun worship in Egypt, where the sun god Ra-Aton (or Re-Aton) received special honor.

- Pi Beseth (in Hebrew, Ezek. 30: 17) or Bubastis or Per-Bast (in Egyptian, Pr-B'stt), means 'dwelling of the Goddess Bastet.' Bastet or Ailurus (Greek word for 'cat') was the goddess of fertility, protector of women, and also represented the sun (Ra). Bubastis was also in Lower Egypt, near the delta.

All of them were cities of much idolatry.

Returning to **Isa. 19: 11-14**: God mocks those who flattered Pharaoh, who tried to persuade the king that they were wise, sensible and noble, and that their house was as old as the kings of the past. They valued the many generations of kings and priests who had led their empire for thousands of years. In such a situation they could not advise Pharaoh. The most respected counselors gave only foolish advice, with no avail. It is as if God had challenged them and asked if they knew exactly His designs already determined against Egypt. Their astrologers, their magical arts, and their divination could never accurately predict future events; they would never reveal the truth because they did not know God's thoughts. The princes of Zoan were looking foolish. The princes of Memphis were deceiving themselves in the same way as the leaders of the clans, of the most important houses, who led Egypt into error and made the people stagger like drunkards because of their counsels.

They were known by wisdom and by science; yet the Lord would deliver them to their own evil plots (their princes and counselors would be like fools), and they would quarrel among themselves, until their land was shaken by their competitions to become an object of contempt and pity. The princes of the places above, being deceived by the soothsayers and the astrologers deceived the people that inhabited in the provinces where they lived. The Lord poured into them a dizzying spirit, that is, He put into their hearts something that left them confused, the spirit of error. In other words, because of pride and idolatry, God gave them over to blindness, stupidity, and foolishness, causing Egypt to err in all matters: religious and civil ones, and leading the nation to ruin. In fact, this resembles the prophet's call: "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand. Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed'" (Isa. 6: 9-10; Matt. 13: 14-15; Mk. 4: 12; Lk. 8: 10; Jn. 12: 40; Acts 28: 26-27).

- Isa. 19: 15: "Neither head nor tail, palm branch or reed, will be able to do anything for Egypt [NIV: There is nothing Egypt can do—head or tail, palm branch or reed]."

This means that there is nothing that Egypt can do; nothing that people can do; neither the most nor the least important; neither the strong nor the weak. There will be no work to sustain them, for their trade and supply have been affected. Egypt's rivers are dry, there is neither linen nor cotton to weave; no fish to catch, no papyrus to make paper. There would be nothing they could do to avoid the events. The power of getting rid of the Assyrians who would come against them would not be in their hands, for they were deprived of wisdom and counsel; both those at the head of the nation and the less important citizens ('tail'); nor the noble and strong ('palm branch') nor the weak and impotent plebeian class ('reed') – cf. Isa. 9: 14-15.

- Isa. 19: 16-17: "On that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear before the hand that the Lord of hosts raises against them. And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians; everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the plan that the Lord of hosts is planning against them."



River Nile at twilight in Uganda (photo by Rod Waddington)

These two verses mirror the fear that would seize the Egyptians when they saw the hand of the Lord, the God of Israel, raised against them. They would be afraid of Judah, because they would know that their God would be acting, using the Assyrians against Egypt in punishment for what the Egyptians had done with His chosen people. They would feel weak and helpless as women before a stronger enemy like the Assyrians. Moreover, they would realize that they were not fighting only against men, but against the Lord of Hosts, who was now raising a hand against them as He had done with their ancestors. This also means that what Sennacherib had done in Judea infused fear into the Egyptians, knowing that through Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal the same thing could happen to them, and even worse. Between Egypt and Judea the distance was small. There was only the land of the Philistines between them. All that has been said above shows us that the Lord causes the sinners to fear those whom they have despised and oppressed.

Let's remember what we've read:

The Nile is considered the longest river in the world, with 6,853 kilometers (4,258 miles) in length. It is the main source of water in Egypt and Sudan. As previously stated, the Nile Delta is a region one hundred and sixty kilometers long and two hundred and fifty kilometers wide. To the northeast of the Nile Delta, near Port Said, is Lake Manzala or Manzaleh (Arabic: bahīrat manzala), which is the largest salt lake in that region, forty-seven kilometers long, and thirty kilometers wide. Because of such large expanses of water, in rivers and lakes, allied with the fertility of the country in agriculture, we can understand much of the pride of the Egyptians, for there were few nations with such natural blessings. Furthermore, their remote origin, their knowledge, their strong dynasties, and such great armies with so many victories over the centuries gave them the sense of power. But they credited all this to their idols and their own strength. Therefore the Lord was not pleased with them.

A promise of salvation for Egypt – v. 18-22.

- Isa. 19: 18-22: “On that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts. One of these will be

called the City of the Sun. On that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the center of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the Lord because of oppressors, he will send them a savior, and will defend and deliver them. The Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians; and the Egyptians will know the Lord on that day, and will worship with sacrifice and burnt offering [NIV: sacrifices and grain offerings], and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them. The Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing; they will return to the Lord, and he will listen to their supplications and heal them.”

The words ‘on that day’ not always refer to the previous passage. They may mean that, in a time to come, the Egyptians would speak the sacred language, the language of the Scriptures, and not only would they understand it but put it into practice. ‘On that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan’, that is, the Hebrew. ‘One of these will be called the City of the Sun’, which may be Heliopolis, in Greek; or *Ôn* (אֵן), in Hebrew. Some manuscripts and bible versions write as: ‘City of Destruction’ (KJV; ASV), since this biblical reference of Isaiah can be compared to the same prophecy of Jeremiah and Ezekiel concerning God’s judgment against the cities of Egypt: Ezek. 30: 17; Jer. 43: 13. Ezekiel makes a wordplay between *On* (’ôn or *Ôn*, אֵן) and *Aven* (’awen, אָוֵן) – Ezek. 30: 17. The ancient city is currently located about 15–20 meters (49–66 ft) below the streets of the middle and lower-class suburbs of Al-Matariyyah or El Matareya, Ain Shams (Ain, Ayn, or Ein Shams. Ain Shams means ‘Eye of the Sun’) and Tel Al-Hisn to the north of Cairo. There is a remaining monument of Heliopolis, which is the obelisk of the temple of Ra-Aton, still in its original place, in the modern suburb of Cairo, Al-Matariyyah. Perhaps, because of this, by the great number of obelisks in the city, the Egyptians called it *Iwnw*, whose transcription is *Iunu*, meaning ‘the pillars.’

From Ancient times Heliopolis was the great center of worship to the sun in Egypt, where the sun god Ra or Atom received special honor. *On* (’ôn or *Ôn*, אֵן) was the seat of one of the theological lines of Egypt. The Pharaohs embellished the temple of Ra with many obelisks. Obelisk is a tall, conical rock with a single block of stone placed upright, with its square or rectangular base, ending with a pyramidal shape. It is a commemorative monument, typical of the Ancient Egypt. ‘Obelisk’, in Latin ‘obeliscus’; in Greek, ‘obeliskos’, οβελίσκος, which means ‘pillar’ or ‘to point’, is the diminutive of οβελός, ‘spit.’ The priestly corporations of *On* could only be matched in wealth to those of the god Ptah of Memphis, and were only surpassed by the corporations of the god Amun or Amon of Thebes during the years 1600-1100 BC.

As an example of the prominence of *On* we can see in the bible the story of Joseph (Gen. 41: 45; 50; Gen. 46: 20) as the chancellor of Pharaoh and who married Asenath daughter of Potiphera, ‘priest of *On*.’ It may be that the title is a designation of Potiphera as high priest in *On*. In the Hebrew history ‘*On*’ reappears with the name ‘Bethshemesh’ (KJV; or Beth-shemesh, ASV; or Beth Shemesh, NIV; Heliopolis, NRSV), meaning ‘The House of the Sun’ (or ‘the temple of the Sun’ – NIV), when Jeremiah (Jer. 43: 13) says that Nebuchadnezzar will demolish the pillars of Bethshemesh, that is, the obelisks of *On* (Heliopolis). It may be Isaiah’s ‘City of the Sun’ (Isa. 19: 18), *On*, but to which Jeremiah used the name of a Hebrew city with the same meaning, and where the same idolatry of *On* was practiced: the worship of the sun god. Beth-shemesh (in Hebrew) means ‘The House of the Sun’, for in it there was a great worship of the Sun, which can be proven by the ruins that still exist. In the Middle Ages this village was called Ain-Shemesh. Beth Shemesh was a frontier town on rough terrain northeast of the mountains of Judah, though it was a possession of the tribe of

Dan (Josh. 15: 10). It was situated in a low site (1 Sam. 6: 13); therefore, the request that was made to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim to go down to Beth Shemesh and carried the ark to their land (1 Sam. 6: 21). The city is also mentioned in 2 Kin. 14: 11-13 (battle between Jehoash king of Israel and Amaziah king of Judah) and 2 Chr. 28: 18 (when it was also taken by the Philistines in the reign of Ahaz). In Solomon's time it was one of the cities supplying the court (1 Kin. 4: 9).

Another important city of Egypt was Bubastis.

In Ezek. 30: 17, when the prophet speaks of the conquest of Egypt by Babylon, it is written, "The young men of Aven [NRSV: On; NIV: Heliopolis] and of Pibeseth [NRSV: Pi-beseth; NIV: Bubastis] shall fall by the sword: and these cities shall go into captivity." Pi-Beseth (in Hebrew) or Bubastis (in Egyptian, Pr-B'stt), means 'dwelling of the Goddess Bastet.' The ruins are known as Tell Basta, on the banks of the Nile, in the region of Delta, close to the modern Zagazig. Bastet or Ailurus (Greek word for 'cat') was the goddess of fertility, protector of women, and also represented the sun (Ra).

In Ezekiel, the word Beth-Aven (Hebrew, 'awen or 'âven) is a different punctuation from 'ôn (On); perhaps a wordplay with 'awen, 'tribulation, wickedness', in the judgment of Ezekiel against the cities of Egypt. Lexicon Strong's Concordance says that Aven (Strong #206, the same as #205) means idolatry; and that Aven was the name of three places: one in Cele-Syria, one in Egypt (On) and one in Palestine (Beth-Aven). Strong #205 – 'âven means: nothing, trouble, vanity, wickedness; more specifically, an idol; false idol, affliction, evil, iniquity, lamentations, mourners, sadness, unjust, sinful, vain. Strong #204 – 'own, is a word of Egyptian derivation: 'ôn, a city of Egypt: On. Strong #1007 – Beyth 'Aven means: 'House of vanity' or 'house of iniquity', 'house of wickedness.'

- Isa. 19: 18: "On that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts. One of these will be called the City of the Sun."

'On that day' refers to the times of the gospel, times more distant than those that have been mentioned so far.

If we think from the spiritual point of view, we can understand that this part of the prophecy fits perfectly in our days for all who are still in the world (Egypt), at the hands of Satan (Pharaoh) and being deceived by false teaching, by idolatry and other things in the world that lead them to error and separation from God. The Lord then allows them to go through hard trials and even devastation so that they may come to miss Him and begin to cry out by themselves for deliverance. When the person is ready to leave what was previously known and is ready to overthrow the false gods, the idols of his life, the Lord shows Himself to her (him) and the process of conversion is actually done, with the change of her (his) way of being, her (his) way of speech, and her (his) vision of herself (himself) and of the spiritual things. The altar that now rises within her (his) heart is to the living God who came to live in her (his) soul and spirit. This fidelity, this covenant, is a monument, a memorial of the presence of God and His power of transformation in one's soul. Where 'the sun' was worshiped, that is, the darkness with the appearance of light and truth, the false light that guided that person is now a place of worship to the 'Sun of righteousness', Jesus, the Messiah she needed and was waiting for. The altar will be the very throne of God, where the person gives himself (herself) every day as a holy and pleasing sacrifice to Him, where praise and sincere prayer comes to be offered, along with gratitude for His help and deliverance, a grain offering, which was made with grain, that is, with the fruit of a clean and grateful heart. The Lord

made the wound and He Himself healed. A pillar represents the fortitude of the word of God being erected in the heart of a convert as a symbol of unshakable faith, for what this person does from then on will be by faith in God, and this is pleasing to Him, for shows that he (she) honors Him as his (her) only God, his (her) only object of worship. Likewise, in Ancient times the pillars, columns, sacred poles or Asherah poles were erected to the false gods (Asherah, Astarte or Ashtoreth, for example); or else, as a covenant between two people (Jacob and Laban – Gen. 31: 44-47) or as Jacob and other Israelites erected a pillar, a monument to the Lord, and poured oil on it as a covenant between them and God (Gen. 28: 18-22; Josh. 4: 9). The biblical text (Isa. 19: 20b) also says, “when they cry to the Lord because of oppressors, he will send them a savior, and will defend and deliver them.” The bible makes a point of saying that all those who have the seal of the Lamb in their foreheads are children of God; and if we are children, we are no longer slaves; we have a Father who hears us when we cry out and who comes to our rescue to deliver us from our oppressors (Rom. 8: 14-17). Jesus is our Savior and Defender. Only He truly sets us free.

If we analyze the text from the historical point of view, that is, as referring to the times of the gospel at the first coming of Christ, we may think that the apostles of Jesus preached in several places in the ancient world, including Egypt, and the prophecy could have been fulfilled at this time. The Jewish community settled in Egypt after the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. Some Jews had already fled to Egypt when Judea was invaded and Jerusalem besieged by Sennacherib long before the Babylonian dominion.

John Mark (author of the second gospel) died dragged by horses in Alexandria (Egypt) in 70-80 AD, in the times of the Roman Empire. Bartholomew (also known as Nathanael) preached in India with Thomas, returning to Armenia, Ethiopia and southern Arabia. According to reports, he was skinned alive and died in Albanopolis (modern Derbent, north of Azerbaijan), in Caucasus Mountains (between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea), at the behest of the governor. Ethiopia is close to Egypt. Matthew ministered in Persia (now Iran) and Ethiopia. It is not known whether he was martyred in Ethiopia (stabbed to death). Through these men the gospel came to Egypt and other Gentile nations. The gospel was probably preached to the Gentiles in Greek, not in Hebrew or Aramaic, but certainly the apostles who went there converted people, and their conversion may be the interpretation to ‘speak the language of Canaan’; or else they came in contact with Jews from the Jewish community living there, and even taught the Hebrew to the natives. Even with the rejections they suffered, for they were all martyred by ungodly people, some seed remained. Even with the spreading of the gospel in Greek, the altar to the true God found a place in the land of Egypt, just see the first century of Christianity, where the Early Church settled in some cities like Alexandria, for example, and made followers. According to reports, the first Christian convert in Alexandria was Anianus, a cobbler, through John Mark. Since then, the Christians of Alexandria and the rest of Egypt have maintained a great evangelical tradition. From the death of John Mark to the rule of the emperor Trajan (beginning of the second century), Christians had to hide their beliefs, threatened by persecution. From this moment Christianity was allowed to extend throughout the city of Alexandria and little by little, along the entire valley of the Nile.

The book of the Acts of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost shows us that there were already Jews everywhere (Acts 2: 9-11), who had come to Jerusalem for the feast. Although they were speaking a language other than Hebrew, they spoke the same spiritual language, that is, they believed in the God of Israel. At that time, when Peter addressed them in their own native tongue, they were baptized with the Holy Spirit,

who might enable them to speak the Hebrew long forgotten by them, so that they could better understand the Scriptures, even though they already knew the biblical Aramaic scriptures after the Babylonian captivity.

If in the time of Sennacherib there was a dialogue in Hebrew, between the servants of Hezekiah and the envoys of the Assyrian king (2 Kin. 18: 26; 2 Chr. 32: 18; Isa. 36: 11), why it would be so amazing that someone spoke Hebrew in other lands?

As for the fact the bible mentions that ‘On that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts’, we may think that in the cities where there was more idolatry in Egypt, it would be right there that the grace of the gospel would come to the conversion of many. It is not known for certain which were they, but we can think that it should be the five most important of Egypt: Heliopolis (On), where the sun-god Ra or Aton was worshiped; Bubastis, where the goddess Bastet was worshiped; Memphis, where the gods Ptah, Sekmet, Sokar, Nefertem and Apis (the bull of Memphis) were worshiped; Thebes, where the god Amon was worshiped; and Tanis (Zoan), which was the Egyptian capital of the 21st Dynasty, and where the gods Amon, Ra and Ptah were worshiped.

The covenant of Egypt, Assyria and Israel in the gospel and the full knowledge of God – v. 23-25

- Isa. 19: 23-25: “On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.’”

The three nations that were enemies at that time would be reconciled by the presence of Christ and His gospel. He would feed them like the Good Shepherd, and they would be united in one faith. “They shall be my people, and I will be their God.” How many times have the prophets used this phrase? It is the divine promise to all who receive Jesus, whose hearts are already broken. When He came to earth as a man and preached the gospel, Jews, Greeks, Romans, etc. ceased to exist, but all those who accepted Him came to be called Christians. He was the fulfillment of all Scripture; and fulfilling the law, He made a new covenant between God and men, bringing to mankind a new dispensation, the dispensation of grace. What is dispensation? It is a period of time (historical / spiritual) in which God deals with humanity, or with a people, in a certain way. Jesus came bringing a new dispensation, that of grace (undeserved favor, that is, it is not by our works that we are saved), for by faith in Him we attain Salvation and no longer have to fulfill the endless precepts of the Law, but two: “You shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your understanding and with all your strength” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

In the next chapter, we’ll talk a little about the gods of Ancient Egypt.

The gods of Ancient Egypt

One thing that draws a lot of attention in the prophecies in the book of Isaiah is the repetition of God's warnings about idolatry and His wrath because of it, making Him to punish powerful pagan nations so that His people were not defiled by their idols. In Isaiah 19 (which inspired this text) we saw the cities of Ancient Egypt: Zoan (or Tanis), Avaris (Pi-Rameses or Per-Rameses), Memphis, On (or Heliopolis), Bubastis (in Hebrew, Pibeseth), Thebes ('No' or 'No Amon' – Nah. 3: 8) and others. How many gods were worshiped there!

And in Isa. 44: 6-7 it is written: "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be." Despite the infidelity of His own people or the idolatry and arrogance of the Gentiles, believing in their gods to deliver them from the wrath of the God of Israel, He continued to say that besides Him there is no other God. He was the one they should turn to.

The same happens today, when unbelief or disbelief, rebellion, pride and blindness of human beings make him believe in the lies of darkness, in vain things, and use amulets to achieve security and well-being. Who can still believe that today? False knowledge stimulates fantasy, and the fantasy of the human mind gives the devil a gap, distorts reality and brings anxiety, fear and threats. No doctrine, sect, philosophy, myth or amulet can bring the salvation, protection and freedom that human being so longs for. All of this has already been achieved by Jesus through His sacrifice. His blood and His forgiveness remove all the weight brought by this 'spiritual garbage' accumulated over so many millennia. Egypt prefigures the world, where lives are under the enemy's captivity, worshiping false gods and wasting their precious time on something futile.

We don't need symbols or amulets. God's word is enough for us; it is the only thing that shows us the truth and leads us on the right paths of His justice.

Egyptian gods

- Aton or Atum (also Aten or Tem) – the primordial god and creator of heaven and earth. He joined with Ra, and became a single being, called Atum-Ra. He was worshiped in Heliopolis (On) and represented as a sun disk, the energy source of earthly life, and his hands held the key of the Ankh. His name seems to be derived from the verb *tm*, which means 'to complete', 'to finish.' For this reason, he is considered as 'the complete one' and also the finisher of the world. Pharaoh Amenophis IV or Amenhotep IV (in ancient Egyptian) reigned in the period 1352-1336 BC and was a pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty. From the 5th year of his reign, he introduced the cult centered on Aton and changed his own name to Akhenaten or Akhenaton, which means 'pleasant to Aton' or 'effective for Aten' to show his close relationship with this deity.

- Ra or Re – the Sun god, worshiped in Heliopolis (On) and Tanis (Zoan). He joined Aton, and became the only being, Aton-Ra (Atum-Ra). His daughter was Maat (or Ma'at), and personified truth, justice, balance, harmony, law, morality and cosmic order. Ra or Aton (the sun-king) was also called Amun-Ra, perhaps a little confusion with Amun of Thebes, the 'hidden' god, the warrior god, substitute for Montu, whom Amun defeated. Another god connected with Ra was Osiris, who ruled the kingdom of the dead and whose son was Horus (represented by a hawk) and his wife, Isis.

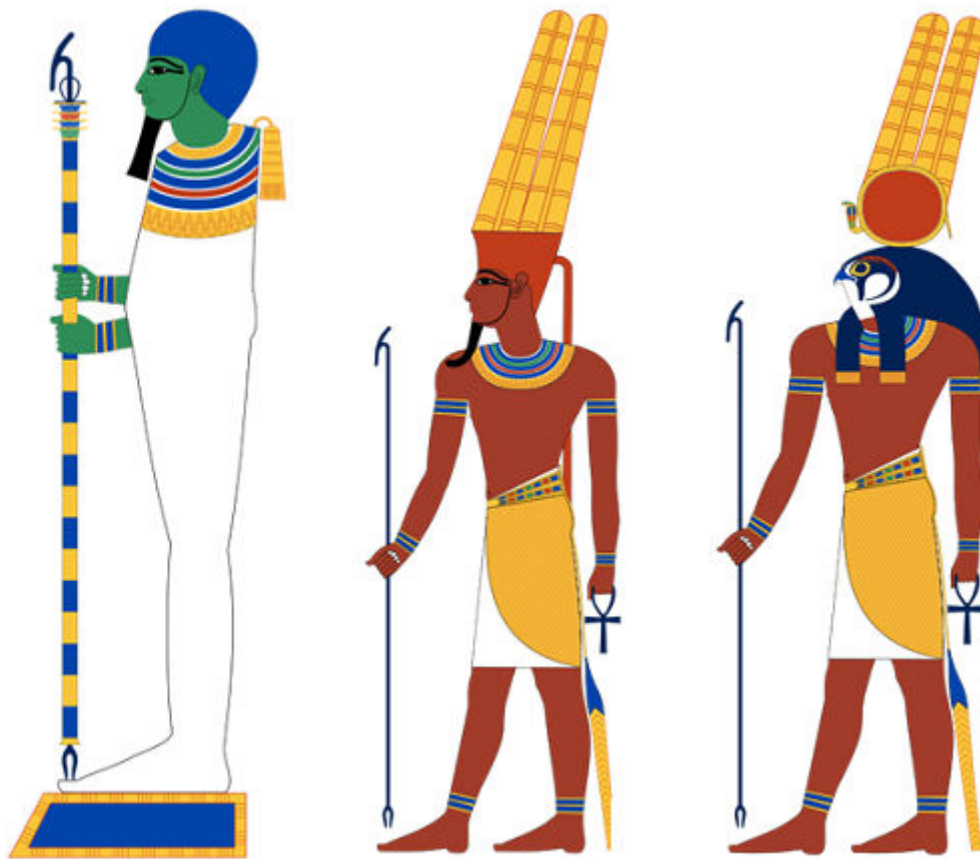


Aton and Ra (photo: Jeff Dahl – Wikipedia)

- Ptah (Egyptian: pth) is the god of craftsmen and architects; he is connected with stone works. In the Memphis triad he is Sekhmet's husband. He is associated with Sokar. The Greeks knew him as the god Hephaestus. In the arts, he is represented as a mummified man with his hands holding a scepter adorned with Ankh, Was and Djed (symbols of life, strength and stability, respectively). He was also worshiped in Tanis (Zoan).

- Amun (also Amon, Ammon, Amen; in Ancient Egyptian: imn; Greek: Ἄμμων Ámmōn or Ἀμμων Hámmōn), worshiped in Thebes and Tanis (Zoan). His name means 'the hidden one' or 'invisible', since it was originally the personification of the winds. From the 18th Dynasty (with Pharaoh Tutankhamon – 1336-1327 BC) he became the god of the Empire, being called Amun-Ra or Amun-Re, and revered under creative and solar aspects. He defeated Montu, the solar god regarded as the destructive manifestation of the sun's heat. The cult of Amun ended with the destruction of Thebes in 661 BC by the Assyrians.

- Montu (Mont, Monthu, Montju, Ment or Menthu) is a god of the ancient Egyptian religion worshiped in the province of Thebes (in the cities of Thebes and Hermonthis, current Armant, 5.59 miles south of Thebes); therefore, known as known as the 'lord of Thebes.' Initially he was a solar god considered as the destructive manifestation of the sun's heat and, therefore, associated with Ra or Re (Montu-Re). He was defeated by Amun. He was represented as a falcon-headed man, with two tall plumes on his head and a sun disk with double uraeus (the Egyptian cobra), holding an ax, or arrows and bows. In the Late Period (664–332 BC) he was represented with the head of a bull. It became associated with victory and war in the time of the 11th Dynasty.



Ptah, Amun, Montu (photo: Jeff Dahl – Wikipedia)

- Bastet [Bast, Ubaste, B'sst, Baast, Ubaste, and Baset or Ailuros (Greek for 'cat')] is a solar deity, adored since the 2nd Dynasty; the goddess of fertility, protector of pregnant women. She also had power over solar eclipses. She was represented as a woman with the head of a cat, who held a musical percussion instrument (the sistrum; plural: sistra), considered sacred. She could also be simply represented as a cat. Worshipped in Bubastis (in Egyptian, Pr-B'stt), which means 'dwelling of the Goddess Bastet' or 'house of Bast.'

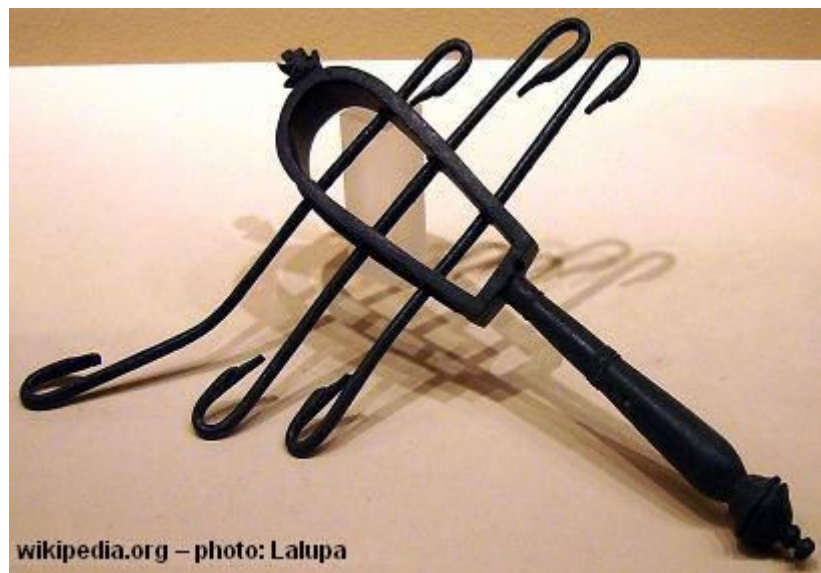
'Sistrum' comes from the Greek σείστρον 'seistron'; literally: 'that which is being shaken', from the verb σείειν seiein, 'to shake.'

- Sokar (in classical Greek: Σοκαρης Sokaris) or Seker was the falcon god of the necropolis of Memphis. He was generally represented as a mummified hawk, a conical crown with the sun disk, horns and snakes. He was another builder god (a maker of bones and a mixture of aromatic substances for important ointments in Egyptian funerary ritual). Then he joined the region's necropolises and started to be considered as a deity of the after-death condition, of the underworld. He is associated with Osiris and Ptah, from whom he took his wife Sekhmet (or Sachmis) for himself.

- Sekhmet (Sachmis, Sakhmet, Sekhet, Sakhmet or Scheme) is the goddess of vengeance, war and medicine in Ancient Egypt (goddess of healing), and worshiped in Memphis. The Egyptian goddess is represented with the head of a lioness and has the heat of the sun as her main power.



Bastet, Sokar and Sekhmet (photo: Jeff Dahl – Wikipedia)



wikipedia.org – photo: Lalupa

Sistrum

- Nefertem or Nefertum or Nefer-temu was the god of the sun and perfumes, whose symbol was the lotus flower (according to some authors, his name means ‘Lotus’ or ‘he who is beautiful’; or possibly, ‘beautiful one who closes’ or ‘the one that doesn’t close’), and known since the 24th century BC. He was revered in Memphis and Heliopolis (associated with Aton). The triad is composed of Ptah, Sekhmet and

Nefertem, who also joined Horus, son of the Sun, to form a single entity. Sometimes he is represented with a lion's head or as a young man sitting on a flower that blooms.

- Apis (Hapi-anku), the bull of Memphis, personification of the earth and reincarnation of Osiris. He was associated with the god Ptah, the god who built the city; he symbolized the power of the king (Pharaoh).

- The goddess Hathor, goddess of women, of heaven, love, joy, wine, dance, fertility and of the Necropolis of Thebes, for she welcomed the dead and watched over the tombs. As a sky goddess, she was the mother or consort of the sky god Horus and the sun god Ra, both of whom were connected with royalty, so she was the symbolic mother of their earthly representatives, the pharaohs. She was represented as a cow with the sun disk between the horns or as a woman with the head or ears of a cow, or else, as a woman of ancient Egyptian clothing, who has yellow skin and bears on her head a pair of cow horns, between which is a red disk encircled by a cobra. She holds a forked staff (the Was-scepter) in one hand and the Ankh sign in the other.



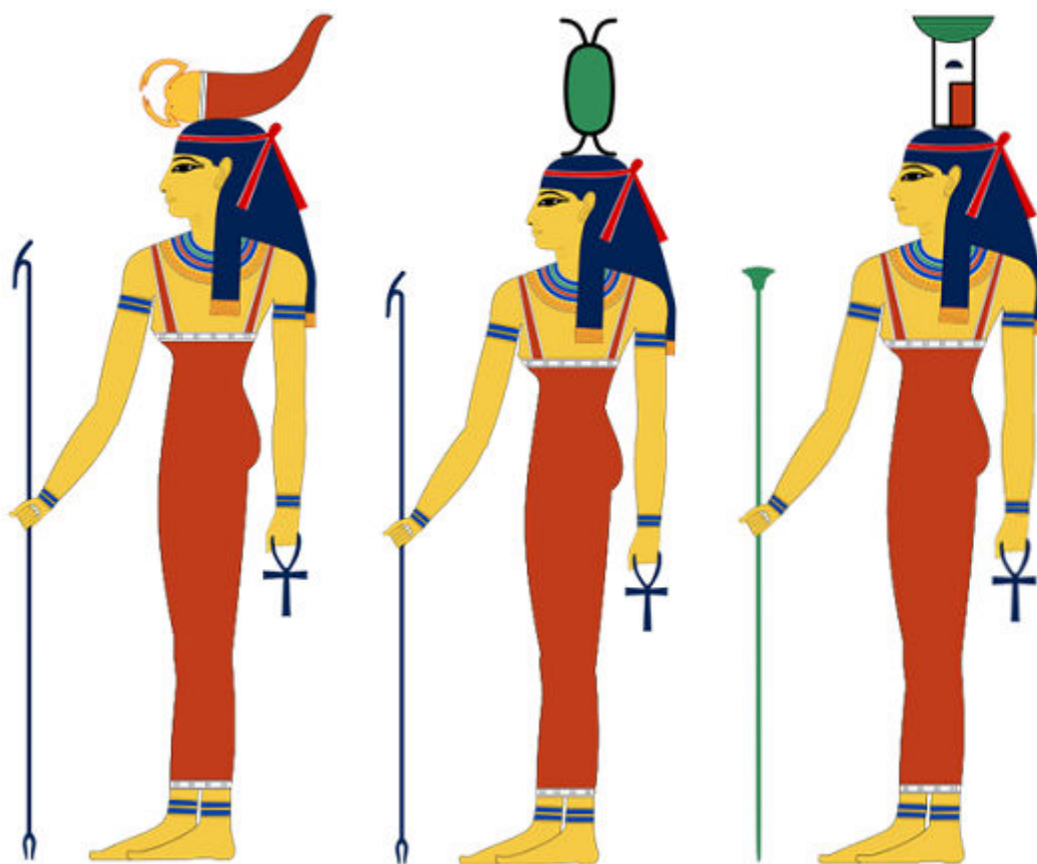
Nefertem, Hathor and Apis (photo: Jeff Dahl – Wikipedia)

- Serket (Serqet, Selket, Selqet, or Selcis) was the goddess worshiped since 3100 BC. She was guardian of the deceased king (During the Ancient Kingdom – 2686–2160 BC). Beside Neith (Nit), Isis and Nephthys, she became one of the four deities who guarded the sarcophagi. Serket also had the function of protecting the reigning pharaoh. She is often described as a woman with a scorpion adorning her crown. She holds the ankh, the symbol of life, in one hand and a Was-scepter, representing power, in the other. She was also the goddess of fertility, nature, animals, medicine, magic and healing from poisonous bites. Scorpion bites lead to paralysis, so the meaning of her

name is ‘(she who) tightens the throat’ or ‘(she who) causes the throat to breathe;’ thus, she had the power to cure scorpion bites and the effects of other poisons, such as snakebite. She had no temple for worship.

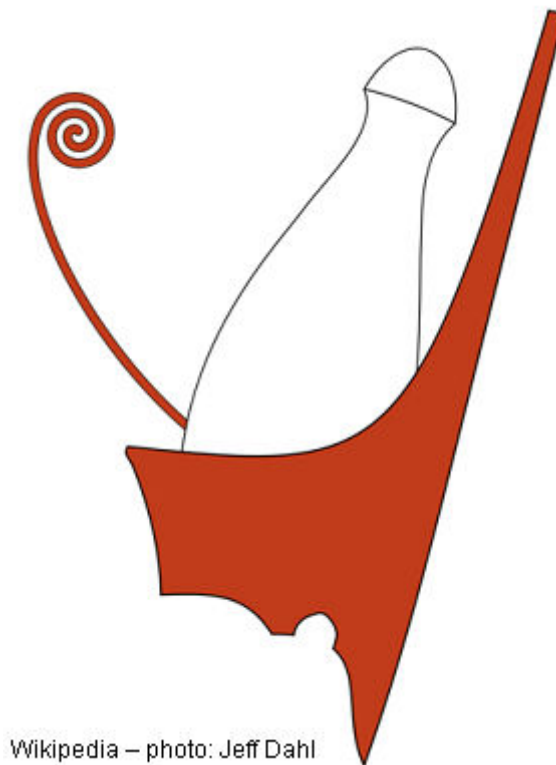
- Neith (Koinē Greek: Νηϊθ, a borrowing of the form of Ancient Egyptian writing: ‘nt’, likely originally ‘nrt’ and means ‘she is the most terrifying’, for being a warlike goddess. The name is also written as: Nit, Net or Neit. It was said that she was the creator of the universe and all that it contains, and she is who governed its functioning. She was the goddess of wisdom, the cosmos, mothers and childbirth, rivers, water, hunting, war and fate, but she also had attributes of weaving (in syncretism with the Greek goddess Athena by the ruling classes, as a goddess who wove the world and brought everything into existence); therefore, she was the patroness of the weavers. The Egyptian goddess Neith carried her symbols of the goddess of war, the crossed arrows and the shield on her head, the ankh and the was-scepter. She sometimes wears the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. Neith was adored in Sais.

- Nephthys (in Greek: Νέφθυς, Nephthys) or Nebthet (in Arabic: Nyftys) is mentioned as Set’s wife. Her name means: ‘lady of the house’, understood as the house to which the Sun returns at the end of its course, that is, the night skies. While Set was the god of death, Nephthys and his sister Isis are called ‘Mother Goddess’ and ‘goddess of the heavens’, and both are the ones who distribute full life and happiness. Nephthys was usually portrayed as a young woman, wearing a headdress in the shape of a house and basket. She is also called guardian of the dead, leading them to victory, and is also a goddess of nature, from the edge of the sky, east and west or north and south (it is not known which is one or the other, Nephthys or Isis).



Serket, Neith and Nephthys (photo: Jeff Dahl – Wikipedia)

- Mut (Maut or Mout) – very powerful goddess, initially just a falcon-goddess from the city of Thebes (present Luxor). From the 18th Dynasty, Mut was seen as Amun's wife. She was represented as a simple woman in a red or blue dress wearing a vulture headdress and the double crown ('pschent', Greek ψχέντ) of Upper and Lower Egypt (the white crown of Upper Egypt, and the red, of the Lower Egypt). This crown had the emblem of two animals: the Egyptian cobra (uraeus, a stylized cobra placed in the crown of the pharaohs), ready to strike and representing the goddess Wadjet of the Lower Egypt; and an Egyptian vulture representing the goddess Nekhbet of the Upper Egypt. Sometimes it was also represented with a lioness head. She has a room in the Temple of Karnak, a temple dedicated to Amun-Ra. Mut is the mother of Khonsu (Chonsu, Khensu, Khons, Chons or Khonshu), the moon-god worshiped in Thebes.



Wikipedia – photo: Jeff Dahl

Pschent – the double crown of the Lower Egypt (red) and Upper Egypt (white)

- Thoth (in classical Greek: Θóθ - Thóth; also known as Djehuti in Egyptian: Dhwtj) was the Egyptian god of speech and scholarship (Mercury, for the Romans, and Hermes, for the Greeks); knowledge, wisdom, writing, music, moon and magic, usually depicted with the head of an ibis or baboon, animals consecrated to him. He was called by the Greeks Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes Thrice Great) and revered in Hermopolis Magna. Together with Khonsu (the moon-god described above), he represents the passage of time. His wife was Ma'ete (Maat), daughter of Aton-Ra. In the first century in Egypt, a doctrine attributed to the god Thoth, called Hermeticism, also called Hermetism, appeared. It is a secret teaching that mixes philosophy and alchemy (a chemistry sought through a secret formula to turn metals into gold). It is linked to Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a philosophical-religious doctrine which arose at the beginning of our era and diversified into many sects, seeking to reconcile all religions and explain to them their deepest meaning through gnosis (Greek: knowledge). Gnosticism is related to Kabbalah, Neoplatonism and Eastern religions. Gnosis teaches

esoteric and perfect knowledge of deity and that is transmitted by tradition and through rites of initiation. Neoplatonism is the set of doctrines and schools of Platonic inspiration (Plato was a Greek philosopher from the 5th century BC – 429-347 BC) that developed from the 3rd to the 6th century (232-529). It addresses the spiritual and cosmological aspects of Platonic thought, synthesizing Platonism with Egyptian and Jewish theology, including influencing some Christians, such as Augustine of Hippo, and Jews in medieval times, such as Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides or Rambam, the most influential Jewish scholar of the Middle Ages (12th century) who organized the 613 Jewish ordinances (Mitzvot).

- Ma'at or Maat personified truth, justice, equity and cosmic and social order. She was Thoth's wife. She is depicted as a young woman with an ostrich feather on her head, for the feather was the measure that determined if the soul of the deceased (which dwelt in his heart) would reach the paradise of the after-life successfully at the trial of Osiris.



Mut, Thoth and Maat (photo: Jeff Dahl – Wikipedia)



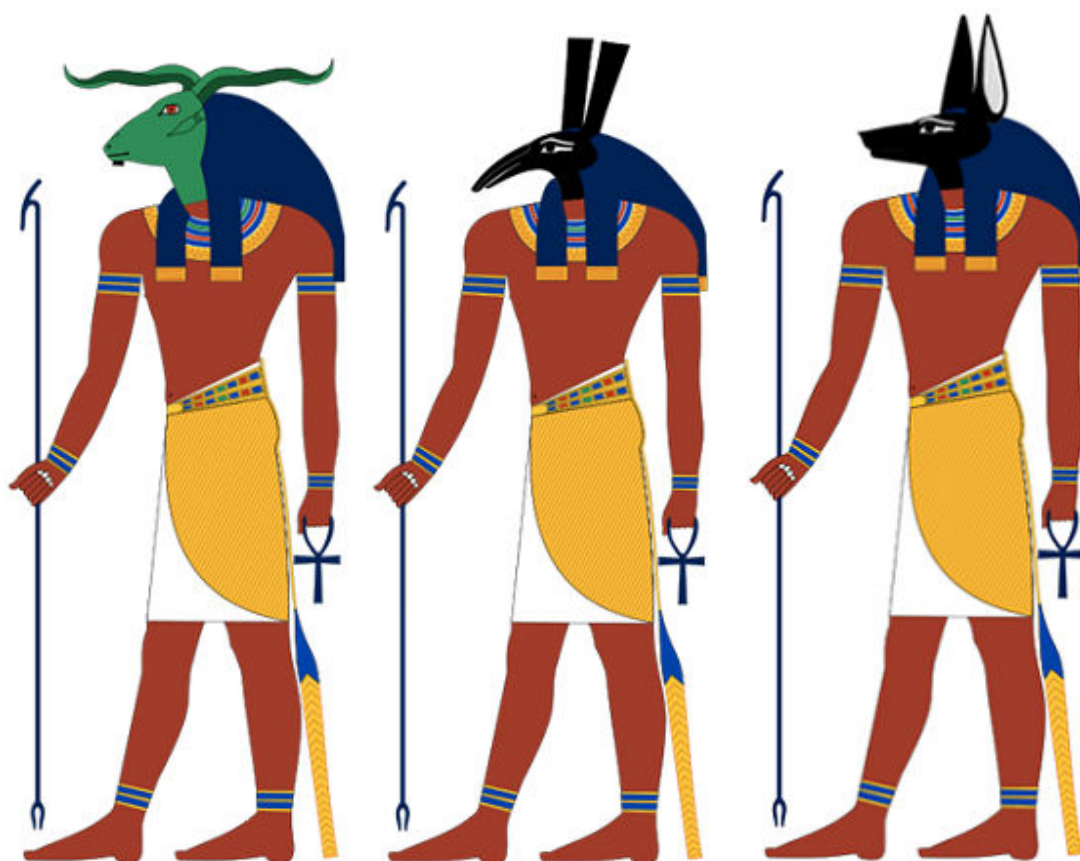
Ibis (the bird linked to Thoth)

- Banebdjedet (literally: ‘Ba of the Lord of Djedet’), the god of Mendes – the Greek name for the Egyptian city of Djedet – was depicted with the head and fleece of a goat. ‘Ba’ means the personality, while ‘ka’ means the vital essence, that is, what makes difference between a living being and a dead one. Thus, the oldest name for this city was Per-Banebdjedet (‘The Domain of the Ram Lord of Djedet’), because the ram-god Banebdjedet was worshiped there. It is known today as Tell El-Ruba. Djedet was the god of Egyptian mythology that represented nature. Khnum was the equivalent god in Upper Egypt. Khnum (or Khnemu; in Greek, Hnoubis, Χνοῦβις, ‘the shaper’) was the god of the source of the Nile. Since the annual flooding of the Nile brought with it silt and clay, and its water brought life to its surroundings, he was thought to be the creator of the bodies of human children, which he made at a potter’s wheel, from clay, and placed in their mothers’ wombs. He was later described as having molded the other deities. Khnum’s imagery also includes the crocodile head, denoting his dominion over the Nile. The hieroglyphic symbol ‘hnm’ often appearing in Khnum’s name is derived from the word hnmṯ, signifying ‘well’, or ‘spring.’ His name can also be connected to a Semitic root meaning ‘sheep.’ Khnum is also often described with the term ‘iw m hapy’, meaning ‘the coming of the Nile.’ Khnum has various titles such as, the ‘Creator god’, ‘Potter god’ or ‘Divine Potter’, ‘Lord of Life’, ‘Lord of the Field’, ‘Lord of Esna’ (a city on the west bank of the Nile, 34 miles south of Luxor, that is, Thebes), ‘the good protector’, ‘Lord of the crocodiles’ and ‘the lord of the things created by himself.’

- Set or Seth (Setesh, Sutekh, Setekh or Suty; in ancient Egyptian: sth; in classical Greek: Σήθ: Séth; has other names: Tem, Temu, Tum and Atem) was the Egyptian god of confusion, of disorder and disturbance, chaos, drought and war, the lord of the red land (desert), in contrast to Horus, the lord of the black land (soil). Set’s animal serves as a determinant for negative concepts (authoritarianism, fury, cruelty, crisis, turmoil, disaster, suffering, illness and storm). Master of thunder and lightning, he exercised his power in desert lands, arid areas and countries outside the Nile plain. His disordered power, however, contributed to the cosmic balance. In this sense, Set opposes his brother Osiris, a symbol of fertile and nutritious land. The antagonism of the two gods illustrates the dual nature of the pharaoh that unites these two opposing but

complementary forces. His wife was Nephthys, his sister. Set was worshiped in Naqada, west of the Nile. He was Anubis's father.

- Anubis (in ancient Greek: Ἄνουβις), Inpu or Anpu was known by the Greeks as the Egyptian god of the dead and dying. He guided the souls of the dead in the underworld. He was connected with mummification and the after-life. He was also the protector of the pyramids. He was always represented with a jackal's head. In the Egyptian language, Anubis was known as Inpu (also spelled Anup, Anpu and Ienpw). At the time of the Middle Kingdom, from 2055 to 1650 BC, Osiris was considered the primordial god of the dead, while Anubis had the function of preparing the body and embalming the dead. He was the protector of the mummification process. He was worshiped in Asyut (in Arabic; Zawty, in early Egyptian; Səyáwt in late Egyptian), the capital of the Egyptian province of Asyut, in the Nile River valley, halfway between Cairo and Luxor. In Greco-Roman Egypt, Asyut was called Lycopolites or Lycopolis (in Greek: ἡ Λύκων πόλις – transliterated: i lýkon polis: 'the city of wolves', or πόλη των λύκων transliterated: poli ton lýkon, 'city of wolves').



Khnum and Set and Anubis (photo: Jeff Dahl – Wikipedia)

- Osiris (in Egyptian: wsjr) was worshiped in Busiris and Abydos, in Lower Egypt (near the Delta). He ruled the kingdom of the dead and was linked to Ra. It was he who ruled the kingdom of the dead and judged them in the 'Room of the Two Truths', where the weighing of the heart occurred. According to legend, Osiris was murdered by his brother Set and triumphed in the person of his son Horus, his avenger. Osiris was also identified as the god of vegetation, who made vegetation grow, also related to the

annual rise of the Nile and the consequent rebirth of life; therefore, he was extolled as the inventor of agriculture and patron of civilization. Overcoming death, Osiris is reborn in the after-life, becoming the Lord of it and judge of the spirits that arrive there. His wife was Isis and his son was Horus (represented by a hawk). Isis the same spiritual entity called 'Queen of Heaven' (Jer. 7: 18; Jer. 44: 17; 19; 25) or 'Mother Goddess' for Egyptians; 'Mary' for Catholics (the name of Jesus' carnal mother was used to bring Egyptians into Christianity).

- Isis was one of the main deities in the religion of Ancient Egypt whose veneration also spread to the Greco-Roman world. She resurrects her husband, King Osiris, and produces and protects her heir, Horus (represented by a hawk). It was believed that she was the divine mother of Pharaoh, who in turn was linked to Horus. Her maternal assistance was invoked in healing spells to benefit the common people. She was more prominent in funerary practices and magical texts. Isis was portrayed artistically as a woman wearing a throne-shaped hieroglyph on her head or a bird (parrot). She assumed in the New Empire (18th – 20th Dynasty; 16th – 11th century BC) the traces that originally belonged to Hathor, the most important goddess during the Ancient Period, thus being portrayed using Hathor's headdress: a sun disk between the horns of a cow. This image is partially based on images of Isis from the tomb of Nefertari (1290-1254 BC), a great Egyptian queen, wife of Rameses II Pharaoh of Egypt, whose name means 'the most beautiful', 'the most perfect' and is many times followed by the epithet 'beloved of Mut.' The symbol of Isis was the Tyet, which resembles an Ankh, except that its arms are curved downwards. Ankh (the thoracic vertebra of a bull, seen in cross section) was for Egyptians the symbol of life and well-being, also as a symbol of eternal life, the life after death. It is very difficult to differentiate Nephthys from his sister Isis: both are called 'Mother Goddess' and 'goddess of the heavens.' Isis was also the same spiritual entity called 'Queen of Heaven' in the book of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 7: 18; Jer. 44: 17; 19; 25), in relation to Asherah, goddess of the Canaanites. Asherah, the wife of Baal and goddess of fertility for the Canaanites, goddess of love and war, was also known by the Canaanites and Phoenicians as Astarte or Ashtoreth. His image was generally made and adored as 'Asherah Pole', also having a wedge shape, like the head of a snake. She took on other names in other nations: Isis or Queen of Heaven (Egyptians), Diana (Romans), Artemis (Greeks), Ishtar (Assyrians and Babylonians) and Nina. The Hebrew term for Nineveh (nīnēweh), in Greek, nineue, is a translation of the Assyrian ninua, in ancient Babylonian ninuwa, which in turn is transliteration of the oldest Sumerian name, Nina, name of the goddess Ishtar, the protective deity of that city and whose name was written with a sign representing a fish inside a womb. Eostre, Germanic goddess of Ancient times, is related to spring; Ostera, Eostre's oldest name, was symbolized by a woman who held an egg in her hand and watched a rabbit, representative of fertility, jumping happily around her feet. Eostre and Ostera are the same entity: the Queen of Heaven. The cult of Isis, mother goddess of Egypt, was absorbed in Christianity, replacing Isis by Mary (the name of the carnal mother of Jesus was used to bring Egyptians into Christianity).

- Horus (Her, Heru, Hor, Har in Ancient Egyptian; in Ancient Greek, Hōros) is the god of the heavens and the living. Horus was the son of Osiris and Isis. He had a falcon's head and the eyes represented the Sun and the Moon. He lost an eye fighting Set, which was replaced by an amulet, the eye of Horus. As the amulet did not give him full vision, a snake was also placed on his head; therefore, the pharaohs began to use it in front of the crowns. In the Egyptian language, the word for this symbol was 'wedjat', being linked to the solar goddess Wadjet, and this symbol started with her all-seeing eye. The amulet then came to represent the union of the human eye with the view of the

falcon, a symbolic animal of Horus. The eye of Horus symbolized protection, royal power and good health and was one of the most used amulets in Egypt in all ages. After his recovery, Horus was able to organize new fights that led him to the decisive victory over Set. He killed him, both for revenge for the death of his father Osiris, and for the dispute over the command of Egypt. He was worshiped in Hierakonpolis (also known as Nekhen), 50 miles south of Luxor (founded in the old town of Thebes). In that city there is the temple of Karnak, dedicated to Amun-Ra, started by Rameses II, and also the temple of Luxor, started by Amenhotep III and completed by Muslims. Thebes was the capital of the kingdom during the New Empire (1550 BC – 1070 BC). In 661 BC, the city was sacked by the Assyrians. Repopulated by the Greeks under Alexander the Great, it was again destroyed by the Romans in 29 BC. It was only in the 7th century, with the Arab occupation, that the region returned to have some prominence, with the construction of modern Luxor.



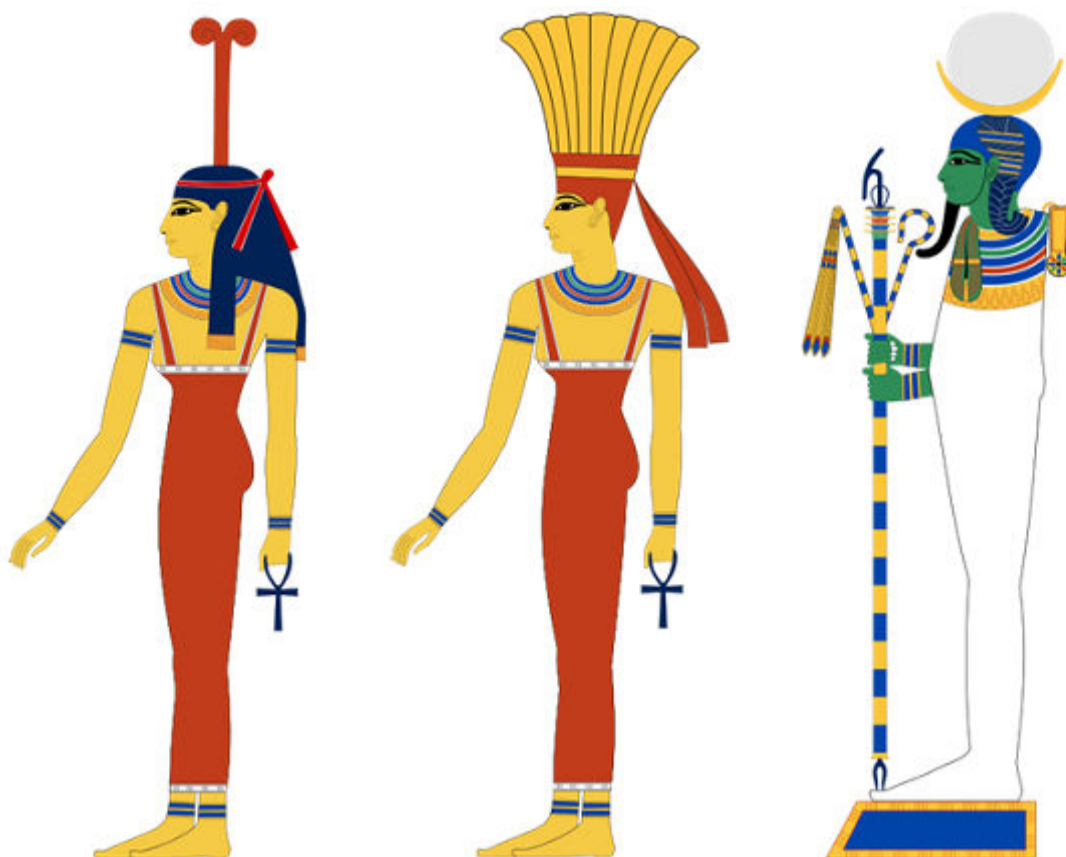
Osiris, Isis and Horus (photo: Jeff Dahl – Wikipedia)

- Meshkenet (Mesenet, Meskhent, and Meshkent) was a very ancient Egyptian goddess (from the first dynasties) associated with childbirth. Her name means ‘the place where the person crouches’, since Egyptian women gave birth in a squatting position with their feet positioned on bricks. It was represented as a birth brick with a woman’s head or as a woman with a symbolic uterus on her headdress (a cow’s uterus). She could also show herself with the uraeus on her forehead (uraeus is an adornment in the form of a serpent placed on the crown of the pharaohs). She was responsible for creating the ka (soul) of beings, ensuring the child’s birth (putting her breath of life in them) and deciding the fate of each one, as well as being present in their judgment after death, in

the so-called ‘the room of two truths’, where the heart was weighed and, thus, she symbolically attended to the new birth of the person, in case it was attributed an existence in paradise. Meshkenet was worshiped in Memphis and Heracleopolis Magna, known in Egyptian as Het-Nesut; in this latter city, it took the form of Isis.

- Anuket (in classical Greek: Anoukis – Ἀνουκίς) or Anukis (or Anaka, Anqet) means ‘to embrace’, ‘to tighten.’ She was a goddess initially linked to water who would eventually become a goddess associated with sexuality. The Greeks associated her with the goddess Hestia; the Romans with goddess Vesta. She was worshiped in the region of the First Cataract of the Nile, more specifically in Elephantine, where the city of Aswan was located. She was represented as a woman with a headdress made of reed or ostrich feathers. In some cases she appears as a gazelle, a sacred animal associated with the goddess. She also held a scepter topped with an ankh.

- Khonsu (Chonsu, Khensu, Khons, Chons or Khonshu) is the moon-god worshiped in Thebes. His name means ‘traveler’, which can refer to night trips of the moon in the sky. Khonsu, an ancient Egyptian god depicted as a child in form of mummy with a moon disk on his head. Thus, he is distinguished from Ptah by presence of a necklace and the shape of its keyhole-shaped pendent, the curved false beard rather than a square one, the presence of the moon-disk on his head, the side lock of youth, and the crook and flail he holds. Khonsu could also be depicted as a hawk headed man wearing the same moon disk. His mother was Mut.



Meshkenet, Anuket and Khonsu (photo: Jeff Dahl – Wikipedia)

The crook and flail used by the pharaohs

Both gods and pharaohs used to carry two objects: the staff or crook (heka) and the flail (nekhakha), symbols that in Ancient Egypt were attributes of Osiris, but that came to become symbols of pharaoh's authority. They were found in Tutankhamon's tomb. The shepherd's staff (heka) means royalty, representing the ruler as a shepherd of his people. According to some researchers, the other object, the flail, symbolizes the fertility of the land. Toby Wilkinson (Egyptologist), however, thinks that the flail (used to incite cattle) symbolizes the coercive power of the ruler, that is, as a shepherd of his flock he both encouraged and restricted his subjects. The staffs are made of bronze and covered with alternating stripes of blue glass, obsidian (a type of volcanic glass) and gold, while the flail beads are made of gold-plated wood. The crook and flail were held by the pharaoh on his chest, thus representing the ruler as a shepherd whose power and authority are tempered with benevolence.

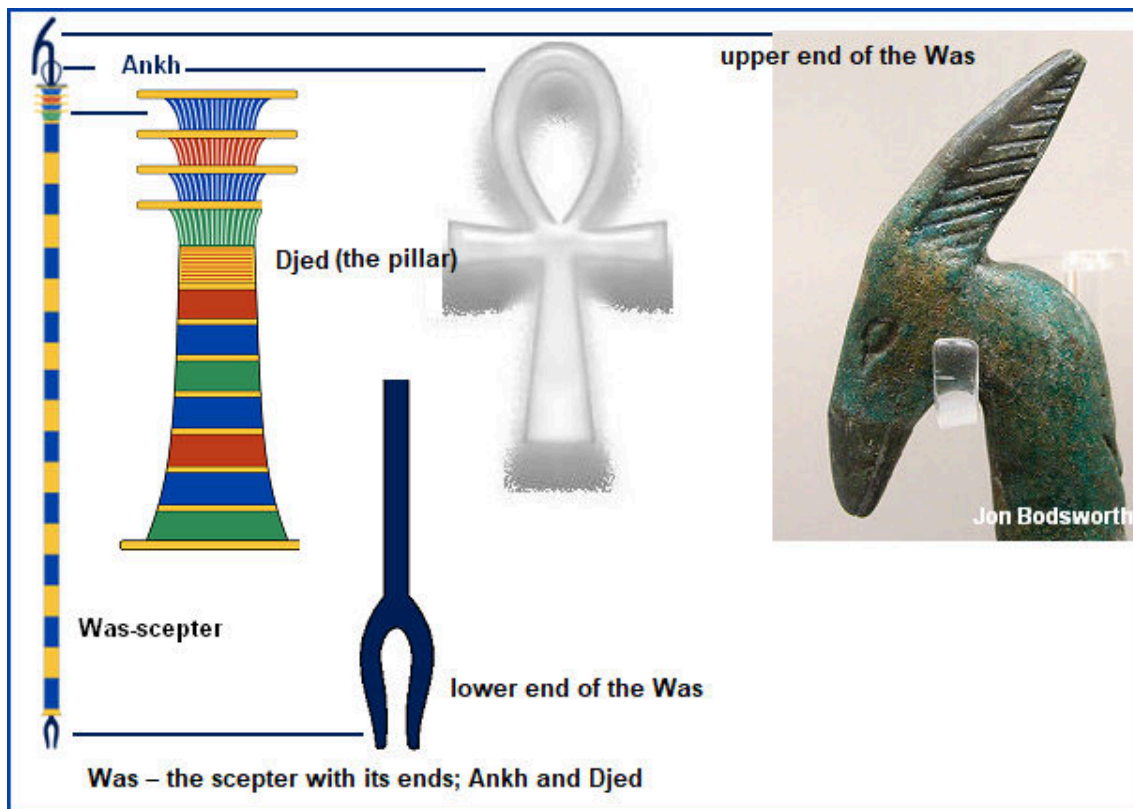


The crook and flail found in Tutankhamun's tomb

Symbols:

Three symbols appear together in the image of almost all Egyptian gods: Ankh, Djed and Was.

Andrew Hunt Gordon (Egyptologist) and Calvin W. Schwabe (veterinarian) think that the three symbols have a biological basis derived from the cattle-raising culture in ancient Egypt, so the comparison with the vertebra or spine of the bull. The Egyptians thought that the semen originated in the spine. Thus, the dry penis of a bull always appeared next to the was-scepter, representing power or dominion, and Djed (the pillar), representing stability.



Montage made with images from wikipedia.org

- Ankh (pronounced 'Anak' in Egyptian, and 'anrr' in Semitic languages like Hebrew and Arabic) was an ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol used in writing for the word 'life', and consequently, the symbol of life itself and of eternal life. It represents a bull's thoracic vertebra (seen in cross section). It probably arose in the 5th Dynasty (the Old Kingdom – 2686-2181 BC). The Egyptians used it to indicate the afterlife. Despite its Egyptian origin, throughout history Ankh has been adopted by different cultures. For example, it was maintained even after the Christianization of the Egyptian people from the third century onwards, when converted Christians came to be called Copts. Coptic means 'Egyptian' and refers to Egyptians whose ancestors embraced Christianity in the first century. Because of its similarity to the Christian cross, the Ankh has remained one of the main Coptic symbols, being called the Coptic Cross or 'crux ansata', where the upper part was adapted to a circular shape instead of the original oval shape of ancient Egypt (a pagan syncretism with the cross of Christ). At the end of the 19th century, the Ankh was adopted by the occult movements that started to spread. And in the 20th century it was adopted by some esoteric groups and hippie tribes of the late sixties. It is used by contemporary wizards in rituals involving health, fertility and divination; or as a protective amulet for those who carry it. The Ankh was also included in the symbolism of the Rose Cross (also called Rose Croix and Rosy Cross), the seventh and last grade of French Freemasonry and which has for main symbols the pelican, the cross and the rose, representing the union between the kingdom of heaven and earth. In other situations, it is associated with vampires, in yet another attribution to longevity and immortality. It was first associated with vampirism and gothic occultism (the Goth subculture or 'dark'). In this way, it was attributed a negativistic character, associating this symbol with satanic or black magic groups and sects, as well as Neo-pagan beliefs (influenced by Europe's pre-Christian pagan beliefs)

and Kemetism (also Kemeticism), which means the contemporary revival of religion from ancient Egypt, which emerged in the seventies (source: Wikipedia).

- Djed is a pillar-shaped symbol, commonly interpreted as representing a bull's spine, or Osiris' symbolic backbone, and representing stability. Djed pillar was also used as an amulet for the living and the dead (the mummified bodies), which would ensure the resurrection of the deceased, allowing him to live forever.

- The Was-scepter was a symbol of strength, power and dominion. Its use can be attributed to the pre-dynastic period of Egypt, as a stick to lead cattle and that, for some reason, came to symbolize an element linked to power and strength. It was shaped like a long, straight rod with the head of a stylized animal at the top, the lower end being forked. It also represents Set's animal. Later, it came to symbolize control over the forces of chaos that Set represented. The scepter may be accompanied by other symbols, such as Ankh and Djed. Although it is a typical attribute of male gods, sometimes it was carried by goddesses. Andrew Hunt Gordon and Calvin W. Schwabe think it was a bull's dry penis.



Tutankhamun mask (1336-1327; 18th Dynasty pharaoh) with uraeus

- The eye of Horus or Udjat (in the Egyptian language, 'wedjat' or 'wadjet') was linked to the solar goddess Wadjet and started with her all-seeing eye. It is related to Horus, the god of the pharaohs and his mythological history linked to Set and Osiris. In the fight with Set, to avenge his father Osiris, Horus lost his left eye, corresponding to the moon (his right eye corresponded to the sun) and received this amulet to replace it. But as it did not give him full vision, a cobra was placed on his head, as seen in the crowns of the pharaohs (In Latin: Uraeus, pl. Uraei or Uraeuses; in Greek: οὐραῖος Oûraios; in Egyptian language jrt). Uraeus is a symbol of sovereignty.

Thus, the amulet came to represent the union of the human eye with the view of the falcon, a symbolic animal of Horus. The eye of Horus symbolized protection (it was used to ward off the evil eye), royal power and good health and was one of the most used amulets in Egypt in all ages. The eye of Horus is used by Freemasonry, the Illuminati and even seen on US dollar bank notes ('the omnipotent eye' or 'the eye of providence' as the representation of the eye of God watching humanity; the omniscience and omnipresence of Divinity as conceived by each initiate). Spiritualists relate the 'eye of Horus' to the pineal gland of the brain, which, according to them, links the soul to the body. They see a similarity with various structures of the human brain in a cross-section. The eye of Horus remains a protective amulet against evils for various religions and sects of Gnostic, magical and esoteric content. Gnosticism is a philosophical-religious doctrine that emerged at the beginning of our era and diversified into many sects, aiming to reconcile all religions and explain their deepest meaning to them through gnosis (in Greek, 'knowledge').



The eye of Horus and Hamsa

- Hamsa – although its presence in Ancient Egypt is not sure, today it is very popular in the Middle East, especially in Egypt and can be found in the form of jewelry, tiles and key chains. The Hamsa (in Hebrew: חמסה, which means 'five', referring to the five fingers of the hand) is an amulet against the evil eye, to ward off negative energies and bring happiness, luck and fortune. It is a symbol of the Jewish and Islamic faith. The Qur'an vetoes the use of amulets, but the Hamsa or Chamsa (in Arabic) is easily found among Muslims, who also call it the hand of God, the hand of Fatima, the eye of Fatima or the hand of Hamesh. Fatima (Fātimah: 605–632) was Muhammad's favorite daughter (Fātimah bint Muhammad). The Hamsa is also popular with Jews, especially Sephardic (from the Iberian Peninsula) and is linked to Kabbalah (Jewish mystical and esoteric doctrine). They write texts like the Shema Israel (Deut. 6: 4-9; Deut. 11: 13-21; Num. 15: 37-41) in the Hamsas and also call them the hand of Miriam (the sister of Moses and Aaron). Among the Christians of the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan,

Palestine and part of Turkey) it is also known as the hand of the Virgin Mary. Hamesh (חמש – means ‘five’) refers to the Hebrew term ‘Hamesh Megillot or Chomeish Megillos’ (the five scrolls of the Torah or Pentateuch).

A word about the Illuminati

Illuminati (plural of the Latin word ‘illuminatus’, ‘illuminated’) is the name given to members of a secret society founded in 1776 in Bavaria by the German Adam Weishaupt (1748-1830), a professor of canon law and philosophy. In his view, ‘rational enlightenment’ was above faith, and being accessible to anyone, led to greater perfection. It was also known as the ‘Order of the Perfect’ because it aims to promote perfectionism, through mystery schools. These concepts were based on the Enlightenment, an intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated Europe during the 18th century, ‘The age of Enlightenment’ or ‘the Enlightenment’ or ‘The Age of Reason.’ Such a society was opposed to superstition (beliefs), obscurantism (preventing facts or details of any subject from becoming known, including knowledge, literature and art), opposed to religious influence on public life and abuses of state power. It had the support of influential intellectuals and progressive politicians. Both Illuminati society and Freemasonry were banned by the Bavarian Prince Charles Theodore (1777-1799) and the Catholic Church in 1784, 1785, 1787 and 1790. Many think the movement did not survive till the 19th century, but even today the Illuminati exist. The Illuminati joined the Freemasons a few times. Like Freemasonry, the sect also has three grades of initiation.

Some groups opposed the Illuminati philosophy (with ‘conspiracy theories’), attributing to the Illuminati the secret plan to take over the world. According to these theories, the sect was created with the purpose of defeating the governments and kingdoms of the world and eradicating all religions and beliefs to govern the nations under a New World Order, based on an internationalist system, with a single currency and a universal religion, where each person could reach perfection. An English historian named Nesta Helen Webster (1876–1960) argued that the members of this secret society were occultists, planning communist world domination, using the idea of the Jewish Kabbalah. She not only mentioned the communist tendency, but also the capitalist prosperity of the Illuminati. She describes the Illuminati’s six long-term goals:

- Abolition of the monarchy and all governments organized under the Old Regime (French society, especially the monarchical despotism before the French Revolution).
- Abolition of private ownership of the means of production for individuals and societies, with the consequent abolition of social classes.
- Abolition of inheritance rights in any case.
- Destruction of the concept of patriotism and nationalism and its replacement by a world government with international control.
- Abolition of the concept of the traditional and classic family.
- Prohibition of any religion (especially the destruction of the Roman Catholic Church), establishing official atheism.

But the real purposes of this society were known only to Weishaupt and his closest followers.

The Great Seal of the United States of America visible on the dollar bank note represents a pyramid whose top is illuminated by the Eye of Providence and is considered a symbol of the Illuminati, the eye symbolizing the omniscient elite controlling the people. At the top of the symbol is written ‘Annuet Coeptis’ (‘He has helped what we started’), and underneath it, the words ‘Novus Ordo Seclorum’ (‘New

Secular Order'), indicating that the new regime is independent of the church. On the base, the year of the founding of the Illuminati, 1776, is written in Roman numerals. The Illuminati infiltrated Freemasonry, whose first lodge was opened in London in 1717; so some of their symbols are confused, as is the case of the all-seeing eye.

Conclusion

As I said at the beginning, Egypt prefigures the world, where lives are under the enemy's captivity, worshiping false gods and wasting their precious time on something futile. We don't need symbols or amulets to protect us from evil. It is not by our strength or by human rationality developed by esoteric doctrines that we reach perfection but by unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ. His Spirit is the one who perfects us and sanctifies us. God's word is enough for us; it is the only thing that shows us the truth and leads us on the right paths of His justice.

Chapter 20

A prophecy against Egypt and Cush – v. 1-6

- Isa. 20: 1-6: “In the year that the commander-in-chief [*Tartan*], who was sent by King Sargon of Assyria [*Sargon II*], came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it—at that time the Lord had spoken to Isaiah son of Amoz, saying, ‘Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take your sandals off your feet’, and he had done so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the Lord said, ‘Just as my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians as exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. And they shall be dismayed and confounded because of Ethiopia their hope and of Egypt their boast. In that day the inhabitants of this coastland will say, ‘See, this is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?’”

In 711 BC, the Assyrians under Sargon II came to suppress a revolt in the Philistine city of Ashdod (Isa. 20: 1). It was when the prophecy against Egypt and Ethiopia was delivered. Therefore, in the reign of Sargon II (722-705 BC) king of Assyria, Isaiah (Isa. 20: 2-3) spent three years naked (barefoot and with the buttocks uncovered) as a sign against Egypt and to Ethiopia concerning the desolation coming out of Assyria, which would take them captives and exiles; this would bring shame on Israel, for it also sought help in these nations against Assyria. Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) made a great expedition against the Egyptian delta in 672 BC, installing Assyrian governors in Thebes and Memphis to control the tribute. He applied all his forces against Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sheba. He divided Egypt into about twenty provinces dominated by twenty princes. Esarhaddon sent a force against Tirhakah, but died on the way. Tirhakah was defeated at Memphis by Ashurbanipal in 664 BC. Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), at the beginning of his reign, fought against Egypt in three hard campaigns and captured Thebes (Nah. 3: 8: No Amon) in 661 BC; its inhabitants were taken to Assyria after three years of siege (Nah. 3: 8-10). In his reign, Assyria acquired the greater territorial extension. The destruction of Thebes (Nah. 3: 8-10) caused reflection in Ethiopia, which also came to fall, fulfilling the prophecy of Isa. 20: 2-6 and, probably, Isa. 18: 1-6.

Chapter 21

A prophecy against Babylon – v. 1-10.

• Isa. 21: 1-10: “The oracle concerning the wilderness of the sea. As whirlwinds in the Negeb sweep on, it comes from the desert, from a terrible land [NIV: An oracle concerning the Desert by the Sea: Like whirlwinds. Sweeping through the southland, an invader comes from the desert, from a land of terror]. A stern vision is told to me; the betrayer betrays, and the destroyer destroys. Go up, O Elam, lay siege, O Media; all the sighing she has caused I bring to an end [A dire vision has been shown to me: The traitor betrays, the looter takes loot. Elam, attack! Media, lay siege! I will bring to an end all the groaning she caused]. Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have seized me, like the pangs of a woman in labor; I am bowed down so that I cannot hear, I am dismayed so that I cannot see [NIV: I am bewildered by what I see]. My mind reels, horror has appalled me; the twilight I longed for has been turned for me into trembling [NIV: My heart falters, fear makes me tremble; the twilight I longed for has become a horror to me]. They prepare the table, they spread the rugs, they eat, they drink. Rise up, commanders [NIV: officers], oil the shield! For thus the Lord said to me: ‘Go, post a lookout, let him announce what he sees. When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, riders on donkeys, riders on camels, let him listen diligently, very diligently.’ Then the watcher called out: ‘Upon a watchtower I stand, O Lord, continually by day, and at my post I am stationed throughout the night. Look, there they come, riders, horsemen in pairs!’ Then he responded, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods lie shattered on the ground.’ O my threshed and winnowed one, what I have heard from the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you [NIV: O my people, crushed on the threshing floor, I tell you what I have heard from the Lord Almighty, from the God of Israel].”

Babylon was situated on a plain (Gen. 11: 2) and was a very fruitful land. The word ‘sea’ refers to the waters of Babylon, because of the great abundance of water from its rivers and lakes. The city of Babylon was located by the river Euphrates, which ran through it, and therefore it was said that it lived by many waters (Jer. 51: 13). The term ‘the wilderness of the sea’ or ‘the desert by the Sea’ may refer to the fate of Babylon, for even being a fertile and watered place, it would become a desert because of the desolation of the war that would come against it.

‘As whirlwinds in the Negeb sweep on’ or ‘sweeping through the southland’ – the southland here refers to the southern part of Judea, where there were many and great deserts, like the Negeb, for example. Negeb (or Negev, meaning ‘dry’) is a desert just south of Israel, near the Sinai Peninsula and the Mediterranean Sea, and only experiences life when rains fill the beds of its dry streams. Rivers are filled with water and plants are watered and animals quench their thirst.

The whirlwinds of the south come suddenly, blow violently, carry everything before them and there is nothing that can resist them. The bible says that in this way, that is, with irresistible strength and power as the whirlwinds of the south, ‘it comes from the desert’ or ‘an invader comes from the desert’ (referring to Cyrus and his army) would come from the wilderness of Media and Persia to Babylon. There was a great desert between them and Chaldea.

‘From a terrible land’ or ‘from a land of terror’ refers to the kingdom of Media and Persia, a land far away, whose power and customs were not known to many peoples; the Medes and Persians were much feared by all.

Elam is summoned, together with Media, to crush Babylon (Isa. 21: 2), but Elam, in turn, would be crushed (Jer. 25: 25; Jer. 49: 34-39; Ezek. 32: 24). Elam is the ancient name for the plain of Khuzestan, in lower Mesopotamia, in present-day Iran, watered by the rivers Karkheh (or Karkhen) and Karun (Kārūn), which empty into the Tigris just north of the Persian Gulf. The Karkheh or Karkhen is perhaps the river known in the bible as the Gihon one of the four rivers of Eden. Some scientists think that Gihon is the river Karun itself. Khuzestan (transliterated Arabic, Khūzestān) is now one of the provinces in southwest Iran, bordering southern Iraq. Its capital is Ahvaz. Khuzestan, meaning ‘the Land of the Khuz’ or ‘Kuzi’, refers to the original inhabitants of this province, the ‘Susian’ people (in Old Persian ‘Huza’ or ‘Huja’; Shushan, in Hebrew). Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal subdued the Elamites and deported some of them to Samaria, transferring some Israelites to the Elam (Isa. 11: 11; Ezr. 4: 9). Elam was annexed by an ancestor of Cyrus, and Susa eventually became one of the three main cities of Medo-Persian Empire.

The prophet fears and is disturbed at the sight of the ruin of Babylon by the Medes and Persians. He cannot even sleep. Then he urges the commanders and soldiers to anoint their shield, that is, to prepare for war. He also says that a sentinel must be posted to give news of what is happening. Then he hears the watchman cry out that Babylon has fallen and all the carved images of their gods have been shattered. The prophet speaks to himself, suffering for his people to hear him: “O my threshed and winnowed one, what I have heard from the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you [NIV: O my people, crushed on the threshing floor, I tell you what I have heard from the Lord Almighty, from the God of Israel].”



A prophecy against Edom (Oracle regarding Dumah; Lexham English Bible) – v. 11-12.

• Isa. 21: 11-12: “The oracle concerning Dumah. One is calling to me from Seir, ‘Sentinel, what of the night? Sentinel, what of the night?’ [NIV: An oracle concerning Dumah: Someone calls to me from Seir, ‘Watchman, what is left of the night? Watchman, what is left of the night?'] The sentinel says: ‘Morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; come back again’ [NIV: The watchman replies, ‘Morning is coming, but also the night. If you would ask, then ask; and come back yet again’].”

The prophet delivers his prophecy in the form of a dialogue between the people and the watchman. People came to him very early in the morning to find out what happened at night; and before the end of the day they would come again to know if there was anything new, which shows a state of great perplexity and fear, restlessness because of their enemies; they worried and ran to and fro to know the news. Seir is a mountain inhabited by the Edomites (Gen. 36: 8-9; Gen. 36: 20 – Seir the Horite dwelt in that land before the arrival of Esau or Edom); therefore, Edom is often called Seir.

Dumah (Hebrew transliterated: ‘Duwmah’) is the name used figuratively for a nearer semi-arid land (Edom or Seir). Dumah is in the north of Arabia, between Palestine and southern Babylon. Dumah is a descendant of Ishmael (Gen. 25: 14; 1 Chr. 1: 30), while Esau (or Edom) is a descendant of Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah. Note from NIV – Dumah means ‘silence, stillness’; in Hebrew, it is a wordplay on Edom.

If the prophecy is indeed about Edom, we need to think in what year it was delivered and what oppressor the prophet referred to, for Edom was conquered in 736 BC by Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), according to the Assyrian inscriptions of this king, found by archaeologists. If we take into account the prophecy of Malachi (Mal. 1: 2), Edom was destroyed five years after the captivity of Judah by Babylon, that is, in 581 BC. It is a little difficult to locate temporarily the prophecy in this bible passage.



A prophecy against Arabia – v. 13-17

- Isa. 21: 13-15: “The oracle concerning the desert plain. In the scrub of the desert plain you will lodge, O caravans of Dedanites [NIV: An oracle concerning Arabia: You caravans of Dedanites, who camp in the thickets of Arabia]. Bring water to the thirsty, meet the fugitive with bread, O inhabitants of the land of Tema [NIV: bring water for the thirsty; you who live in Tema, bring food for the fugitives]. For they have fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow, and from the stress of battle.”

Dedanites (Hebrew transliterated: dedhâniym) refers to Dedan, the grandson of Abraham and Keturah (Gen. 25: 1-3: “Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim.” The Dedanites dwelt in the wilderness; were merchants moving in caravans with their merchandise from one country to another (Ezek. 27: 15; 20), but because of the enemies who were approaching, it would be better for them to shelter in the woods for the night. They would be fugitives.

So the prophet calls the inhabitants of Tema, their countrymen, to help them, to bring water and bread to them in their affliction. Tema (Hebrew transliterated: tēmā’ or tēymā’) is the name of the ninth son of Ishmael (Gen. 25: 15; 1 Chr. 1: 30) as well as the district where his descendants lived (Job 6: 19). He is mentioned, together with Dedan and Buz, as a people of different customs from those of the Jews (Jer. 25: 23: ‘all who have shaven temples’ – NRSV; this means that they cut off the hair on both sides of the head, on the temples), and as an oasis in the desert that was within the trade route that crossed Arabia (Isa. 21: 14).

- Isa. 21: 16-17: “For thus the Lord said to me: Within a year, according to the years of a hired worker [NIV: as a servant bound by contract; KJV: according to the years of an hireling], all the glory [NIV: pomp] of Kedar will come to an end; and the remaining bows of Kedar’s warriors will be few; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has spoken [NIV: The survivor of the bowmen, the warriors of Kedar, will be few. The Lord, the God of Israel, has spoken].”

‘According to the years of a hired worker’ or ‘as a servant bound by contract’ or ‘according to the years of an hireling’ (cf. Isa. 16: 14) means a determined time, as the time of a contract with a worker, more specifically with a mercenary, who is aware of the time for which he is being paid for that service. When his time is over, he demands his salary or his dismissal, or both. Time must be counted from the delivery of this prophecy. What we know from the historical data in the Assyrian inscriptions is that during the reign of Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) there were many conflicts with the Arabs, including those of Kedar. Jeremiah (Jer. 49: 28-33) prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would come against the Arabs (he speaks of Kedar), which occurred around 599-598 BC. When Isaiah speaks of a precise time of 1 year, he could not be speaking of Nebuchadnezzar, who was not yet born (645 BC) when Isaiah died (681 BC). He also could not be speaking of Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), because in his reign Isaiah had already died; therefore, the period of one year can be discarded. If, by any chance, Kedar (in Arabia) has fallen into the hands of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) as was Edom (736 BC), the prophecy could have been delivered at the beginning of Isaiah’s prophetic period, which began in 740 BC, at the end of the reign of Uzziah or, then, delivered to Jotham (740-732 BC), but not Ahaz (732-716 BC). The last remaining possibility is to think of Sennacherib, when he invaded the cities of Judah (701 BC), and could take Arabia on his way. Thinking this way, the prophecy would have been delivered in the reign of Hezekiah.

The prophecy also says that all the glory of Kedar will disappear. Kedar, in Hebrew, means 'obscure' or 'black' (related to the skin or tent). Kedar was one of the sons of Ishmael (Gen. 25: 13; 1 Chr. 1: 29). This tribe was composed of other kind of Arabs, that is, they were Bedouins who lived in tents and tended their flocks; because of the animals they moved from place to place for pasture and camped where it was most convenient for them. Their 'glory' [NIV: pomp] was their flocks of sheep (Isa. 60: 7), goats and she-goats. In Song 1: 5 there is a reference to the tents of Kedar, whose tents were generally made of black goat skins. Ps. 120: 5 also mentions this tribe. In addition to their flocks, this nomadic tribe was endowed with skillful archers, so verse 17 says, "and the remaining bows of Kedar's warriors will be few; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has spoken [NIV: The survivor of the bowmen, the warriors of Kedar, will be few. The Lord, the God of Israel, has spoken]." A destroying army would be brought upon them, and would make them an easy prey. Neither the skill of the archers nor the courage of their warriors could protect them from God's judgment.

Chapter 22

This prophecy talks about the invasion of Judah by the Assyrians under Sennacherib in the time of Hezekiah, and Jerusalem was threatened with siege. As it was described in Isa. 10: 28-32, Sennacherib marched against Judah and took forty-six fortified cities in all (Isa. 10: 28-32; Isa. 36: 1; 2 Kin. 18: 13-14; 17; Mic. 1: 10-15). The prophet says what they will do to defend themselves and what God proposes for their deliverance. Then the prophecy is addressed to Shebna, the scribe of King Hezekiah, who is deposed by God Himself and replaced by someone more worthy than him.

A prophecy about Jerusalem – v. 1-14.

- Isa. 22: 1: “The oracle concerning the valley of vision. What do you mean that you have gone up, all of you, to the housetops,... [NIV: An oracle concerning the Valley of Vision: What troubles you now, that you have all gone up on the roofs...?]”

‘Valley of vision’ refers to Judea, surrounded by mountains, as well as Jerusalem, which is situated in the middle of the surrounding hills. It is called ‘the Valley of Vision’ because of the many and clear visions or revelations from God in that place. He speaks to Jerusalem, whose inhabitants fled to the rooftops for fear of their enemies. As they used to do in times of great consternation, they fled to the roofs of the houses so that they could cry out to heaven and ask for the Lord’s help or to observe their enemies and their movements and to throw their arrows at them. Little was seen from the streets or the lower parts of their houses, but they all went up to the top of them, which were built with flat roofs and a terrace (Deut. 22: 8). All the people rushing to the roof of their houses gives the idea of a sudden general alarm.



The desert of Judea with its hills

The houses were usually made of stone. The roof was commonly made of a thick layer of clay spread over a reed cover supported by heavy wooden beams. The wealthier families placed tiles on the clay layer to make it more resistant. People put a parapet around the roof so that no one would fall from there, as God said in Deut. 22: 8 (“When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof; otherwise you might

have bloodguilt on your house, if anyone should fall from it.”) Some even planted grass on the roofs to cool the temperature during the summer, or it grew spontaneously on wet clay, smoothed and pressed, but because it was on the top of the house and exposed to the scorching sun, it soon dried up. Therefore, we can see written in Psalm 129: 5-7: “May all who hate Zion be turned back in shame. May they be like grass on the roof, which withers before it can grow; with it the reaper cannot fill his hands, nor the one who gathers fill his arms. (NIV)”



As I said at the beginning, little was seen from the streets or the lower parts of their houses because the houses had a high wall and few windows faced the street; most of them opened onto the house's inner courtyard. Inside the wall, at the entrance door, there was an internal courtyard, where there was the kitchen, the cistern that stored rainwater and the animals (sheep and donkeys). Inside, there was the place (living room or bedroom) where the family lived, and which was usually made up of a single beaten-floor room, with small windows next to the ceiling. On the wall there was a small

excavation where the lamp was placed to illuminate the house; hence, Jesus talked about not hiding the lamp under the bowl, but to put it over the lampstand so that those who entered might see the light. People dried clothes on the roofs and weaved and ate their meals there. The roof was practically the living room where guests were received, as Jesus did with Nicodemus. A few houses had an extra room on the upper floor that was called “the prophet’s room”, in reference to the Shunammite woman, who built a room for the prophet Elisha in her house, and which in Jesus’ time was called an ‘inn’ (in Greek: κατάλυμα katalymati or kataluma, Strong #g2646, meaning a lodging-place, guest chamber), because there the Jews received and housed a guest. The ‘inn’ was a room for guests in a family home or a public shelter, and not a large building with several individual rooms as it is today, so it is said that Jesus was born in a stable (or grotto), for there was no place for them in the inn; no acquaintance of them or any family in Bethlehem at that time welcomed Joseph, Mary and Jesus. At that time, the inn or stable was, in general, a part attached to the house.



• Isa. 22: 2: “... you that are full of shoutings, tumultuous city, exultant town? Your slain are not slain by the sword, nor are they dead in battle [NIV: O town full of commotion, O city of tumult and revelry]”.

‘City that was full of shoutings, tumultuous city, exultant town’ means shouts and acclamations at joyful times (Zech. 4: 7) and may be a reflection of how their religious festivals once were. If we read the NIV [‘town full of commotion, city of tumult and revelry’], the phrase can be understood as sadness, agitation, tumult, and uproar because of the probable invasion and siege; a crowd of people rushing from one place to another.

‘Your slain are not slain by the sword, nor are they dead in battle’ because Sennacherib never entered it, nor put to the sword any of its inhabitants; and there was no battle between them, nor did they shoot arrows from either side (Isa. 37: 33). Therefore, those who died in it died of other causes, perhaps of the famine that the Assyrian army had caused, by placing the agricultural cities around them in desolation, as happened with the siege of Lachish, a fortified city of Judah (2 Kin. 18: 13-14; 17; Mic. 1: 13).

- Isa. 22: 3: “Your rulers [NIV: leaders] have all fled together; they were captured without the use of a bow. All of you who were found were captured, though they had fled far away [NIV: All you who were caught were taken prisoner together, having fled while the enemy was still far away]”.

‘Your rulers have all fled together’ means: the civil and ecclesiastical rulers of Jerusalem, who should be at the head of the people encouraging them, fled together to the rooftops, to the temple and to the fortresses; the generals and officers of his army fled as if they had thought of this solution by mutual agreement. They were in such consternation and under such panic that they had neither the strength nor the courage to use the bow. For fear of using the bow or for fear of the archers of the Assyrian army, they fled or surrendered without resistance and were imprisoned.

- Isa. 22: 4: “Therefore I said: Look away from me, let me weep bitter tears; do not try to comfort me for the destruction of my beloved people [KJV: because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people].”

The prophet said to those around him, his relatives, friends and acquaintances: turn away from me, look to the other side; leave me alone; leave me alone so that I may cry in secret and give full expression to my sadness. I’m going to cry bitterly. This shows how great was his sadness and the strength of his love for his people. He did not take comfort or arguments that would convince him to let go of his mourning. ‘my beloved people’ or ‘the daughter of my people’ means the Jerusalem of his fellow citizens, its inhabitants, who were so dear to him; now they would be plundered and dispossessed by the devastation of the enemy in many cities of Judea.

- Isa. 22: 5: “For the Lord God of hosts has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion in the valley of vision, a battering down of walls and a cry for help to the mountains.”

The coming of Sennacherib placed the people into a state of confusion, running and trampling one another because of despair and fear of invasion; there was crying on every side, perplexity and anguish, both the nobles and King Hezekiah himself, when he heard the news about the destruction of the other cities of the kingdom of Judah, like Lachish and all the others (2 Kin. 18: 13-14; 2 Kin. 19: 8; Isa. 10: 28-32), and thinking that the same thing could happen to Jerusalem if the enemy succeeded. And all this was not merely by the will of men, nor by chance, but by the permission and design of God to humble His people for their sins, and lead them to the knowledge of Him. When the walls of the fortified cities were overthrown, their inhabitants cried so loudly that their weeping reached the distant mountains and the sound of their voice echoed through them.

- Isa. 22: 6-7: “Elam bore the quiver with chariots and cavalry, and Kir uncovered the shield. Your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the cavalry took their stand at the gates.”

In Isa. 21: 2 Elam is summoned by the prophet to crush Babylon, but Elam in turn would be crushed (Jer. 25: 25; 49: 34-39; Ezek. 32: 24). In 596 BC, Nebuchadnezzar marched against Elam. The multitude on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 9) were composed by individuals coming from far places such as Elam, presumably members of Aramaic-speaking Jewish communities who had remained in exile.

Elam at this time (Isa. 22: 6) was subjected to the Assyrians, just as Kir. Elam had archers (Jer. 49: 35) and experienced horsemen, and many war chariots (Isa. 22: 7), which would fill the valleys of Judea and stand at the gates of the cities. Kir means

‘city’, and is quoted as the city for where the Syrians were deported (2 Kin. 16: 9). Its name is mentioned in Am. 1: 5; 9: 7, besides this text of Isaiah. Archaeologists don’t know any ancient place called by this name.

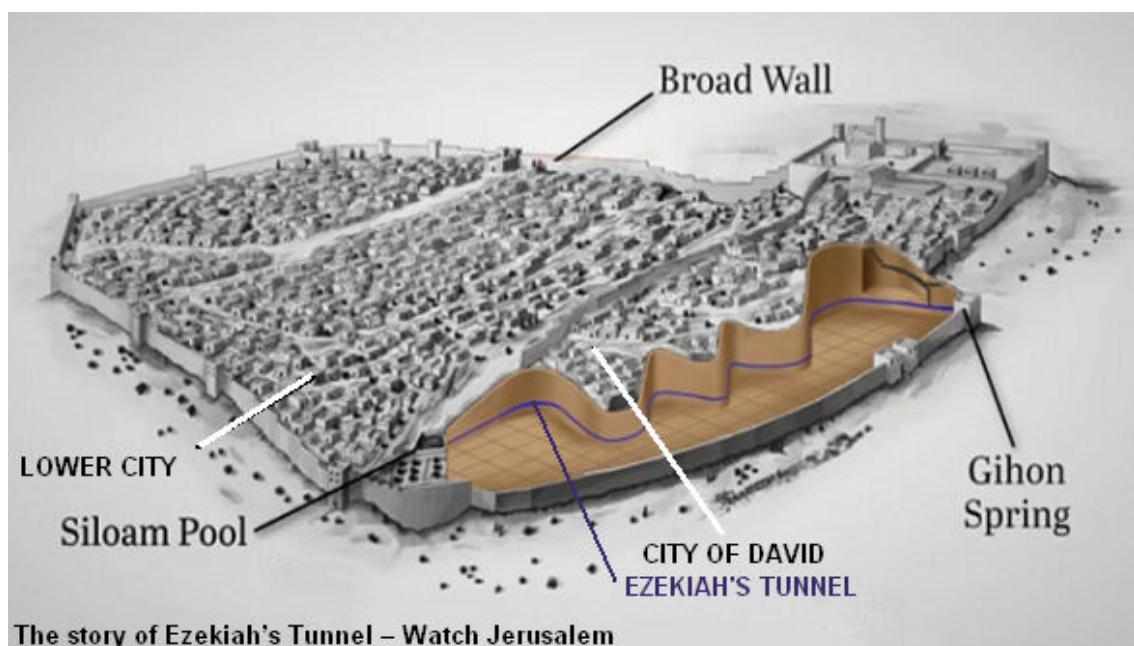
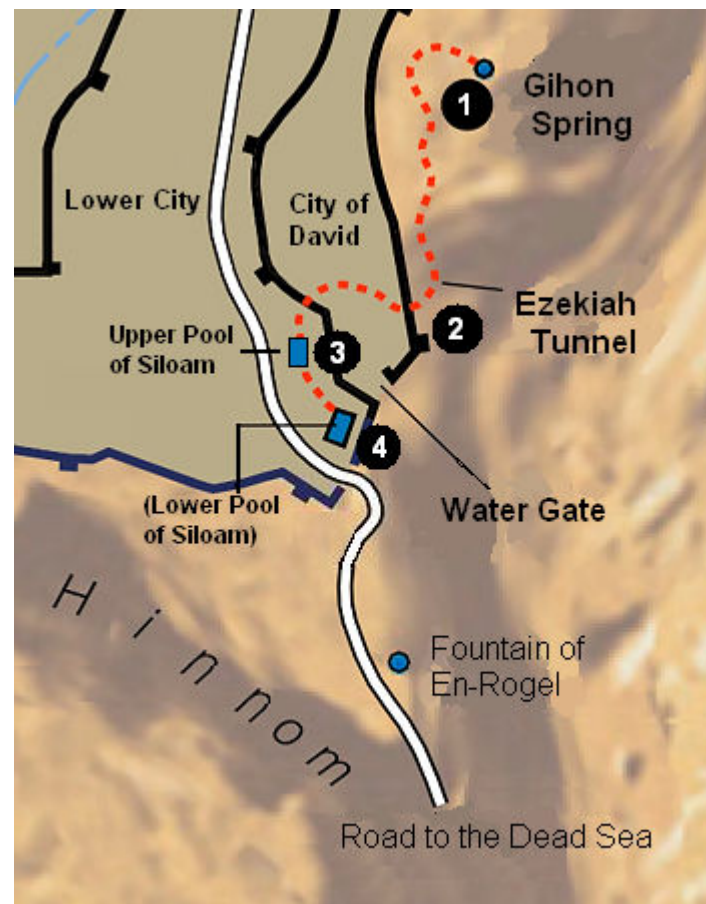
‘Kir uncovered the shield’ means that its warriors were prepared for battle. Probably Sennacherib was bringing the Medes and Persians with him, for they served in his army.

• Isa. 22: 8-11: “He has taken away the covering of Judah. On that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest [NIV: the defenses of Judah are stripped away. And you looked in that day to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest], and you saw that there were many breaches in the city of David, and you collected the waters of the lower pool. You counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. You made a reservoir between the two walls [*between the outer wall of the city of Jerusalem and the inner wall that separated the city of David from the lower city of Jerusalem, that is what it means*] for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or have regard for him who planned it long ago [NIV: But you did not look to the One who made it, or have regard for the One who planned it long ago].”

The fortified cities of Judah (which were the strength and protection of the land) would feel unprotected and see their weakness before the enemy forces, and when this happened, it was time for the Jews of Jerusalem to look around them and check their defense and security, that is, the weapons of the House of the Forest of Lebanon (or in NIV, ‘the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon’, 1 Kin. 10: 17; 2 Chr. 9: 16; 20), the royal house that Solomon had built for himself with the wood of Lebanon (1 Kin. 7: 2) and where the shields of war and other armaments were kept. There was an armory inside it (1 Kin. 10: 16-17; 2 Chr. 9: 15-16; 25; 2 Chr. 1: 14-17). In times of peace they neglected the ruined places of the city of David (called the fortress of Zion) and did not restore the walls. Now they would have to do it. They would demolish some houses to have the necessary materials to repair the city wall. The prophet describes what God would put in Hezekiah’s mind to defend himself from Sennacherib (2 Chr. 32: 1-5; 30), which he did through the reformations in the aqueducts that brought water to the city, laying a subterranean channel for the enemy had no access to water. In this way he built the tunnel of Siloam (2 Kin. 20: 22; Isa. 22: 9). Siloam (Shilôah, ‘sent’, in Hebrew) was one of the major sources of water supply of Jerusalem, linked to the Gihon Spring (גִּיחֹן ‘Gichon’ – Strong #1521), derived from ‘giyach’ – Strong #1518 – meaning ‘stream’ (of water), ‘burst forth’, ‘to gush forth’ (as water), to southeast of the city, which, in turn, poured water in it through an open channel. From Siloam, the canal flowed into the old pool or lower pool (Birket el-Hamra). When Hezekiah was faced with the threat of Sennacherib, he stopped all the fountains, streams and all subsidiary channels that led to the river that flowed through the land (2 Chr. 32: 3-4). The king then sent the waters of the upper Gihon through an aqueduct or tunnel two meters high to a cistern or upper pool or pool of Siloam (Birket Silwān) at the west side of the city of David (2 Chr. 32: 30). He defended the new source of supply with a ramp (2 Chr. 32: 30).

The Lord was not content with one thing: His people were so worried with making all these constructions to defend themselves, but they had forgotten to look at Him, to heaven, and to think why He had allowed this calamity to reach them; they would need to look within themselves and think about their sins. Although Hezekiah did this, many of his people did not do so, as probably some of his principal (main) courtiers and officers, concerned about the preparations for defense (2 Chr. 32: 6-8; 2 Kin. 19: 4; 19; Isa. 22: 13).

Siloam map: we can see the tunnel that King Hezekiah built to divert water outside of Jerusalem into it, so that Sennacherib could not use it (picture below).



Below: Pool of Siloam (Rebuilt in the Byzantine Era).



The construction of Hezekiah's tunnel was amazing in terms of engineering, for it was quite advanced for that time, and we can say that the hand of God in the entire project is undeniable. Although the prophet did not leave the details given by the Lord to Hezekiah, we can see from the archaeological evidence found today that the miners hewed a narrow tunnel (only for one man to pass) two meters high in solid rock over a distance of 591 yards (or 1,200 cubits), which is its length, the height of the rock above the stonecutters was 100 cubits. Two teams dug toward each other, based on the sound of the pickaxes until they meet in the center. 'And while there were still three cubits to [cut], the voice of a man was heard calling to his counterpart', as shown in the tunneling records found on a stone with an inscription where Hezekiah's name can be read, and which today is possession of Muslims.



The story of Ezeḱiah's Tunnel – by Watch Jerusalem



- Isa. 22: 12-13: “In that day the Lord God of hosts called to weeping and mourning, to baldness [NIV: to tear out your hair] and putting on sackcloth; but instead there was joy and festivity, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating meat and drinking wine. ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”

God calls them to repentance. They should manifest their inner sorrow and their mourning: with prayer and supplication, with tears, putting on sackcloth, spreading ashes upon themselves, and shaving their heads, as was customary in public mourning (Mic. 1: 16; Jer. 16: 6). But instead of mourning, they continued to demonstrate a profane joy as if it were a time of rejoicing, as if nothing was happening. They continued to kill oxen and sheep, not to make atonement for sin, but to eat as at feasts, not believing that their case was serious and hopeless. Mocking the prophet and the word of the Lord through him, they said, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” In Isa. 15: 2 it is written: “on every head is baldness, every beard is shorn.” The act of shaving his hair and beard was customary in great mourning. In the East, in general, and also among the Jews, the beard was of great importance, for it was a sign of civility, manhood, and respectability (Ps. 133: 2). There was no greater offense to man than to let anyone treat it with indignity. If one’s hand touched it with contempt, this was a great insult (1 Chr. 19: 4; 2 Sam. 10: 4-5; 2 Sam. 20: 9). On the other hand, kissing someone’s beard was a form of greeting and sympathy for the other person. Shaving it or pulling it out, or marring its edges was a manifestation of mourning and pain (2 Sam. 19: 24; Ezra 9: 3; Isa. 15: 2; Jer. 41: 5; Jer. 48: 37). The Mosaic Law forbade to cut the beard in the manner of the Egyptians (Lev. 19: 27; Lev. 21: 5). Unlike the surrounding nations, the Egyptians shaved, except for the chin, where they allowed themselves to have a bundle of hair, which was kept well-cared. Sometimes, instead of their own hair, they wore a braided false beard with different shapes, depending on the category of the individual; just as they wore their wigs. Lepers, by Jewish law, should shave their beards, hair and eyebrows on the seventh day of their purification (Lev. 14: 9).

In the OT, both for men and women, hair used to be long to a certain length (Absalom had long hair: 2 Sam. 14: 25-26; 2 Sam. 18: 9). Generally the hair was not cut, just trimmed, and should be well treated, for to leave them without care was a sign of lamentation. Long hair was an honor and a sign of beauty to the woman (Song 4: 1b). In the NT it seems that the custom changes in relation to men (1 Cor. 11: 14), however,

remained an honor for the woman (1 Cor. 11: 15). Lepers, by Jewish law, should shave their beards, hair and eyebrows on the seventh day of their purification (Lev. 14: 9). When someone made a vow of Nazirite, his hair was shaved and burned at the end of the vow (Num. 6: 5; 9; 19), except Samson, who for being a Nazirite for life could not cut it off (Judg. 13: 5). The law forbade the hair to be cut at the temples (Temple = the flat part of either side of the head between the forehead and the ear – Lev. 19: 27; Jer. 25: 23; Jer. 49: 31-32), for this part of the head was regarded as the source of life for the Jews, and only the heathen shaved the sideburns. In Jer. 49: 32, where it is written “those who have shaven temples” (NRSV) it may be read, in Hebrew, “cut off into corners, or, that have the corners of their hair pulled”, that is, to have a beard on the cheek narrowed or cut, which was a Canaanite custom, forbidden to the Israelites. Jer. 25: 23-24 concerns the Arabs, for it is written: “Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who have shaven temples; all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed peoples that live in the desert”, as well as in Jer. 49: 31-32, for the title of the biblical passage is “A message about Kedar and Hazor” (NIV), meaning its invasion by Nebuchadnezzar: “Rise up [*God was saying to the Babylonians*], advance against a nation at ease, that lives secure, says the Lord, that has no gates or bars (*meaning nomadic life, outdoors, in tents*), that lives alone. Their camels shall become booty, their herds of cattle a spoil. I will scatter to every wind those who have shaven temples, and I will bring calamity against them from every side, says the Lord.”

A Jew could not cut his hair on his forehead too, for it was characteristic of certain idolatrous cults (Lev. 19: 27; Lev. 21: 5; Deut. 14: 1). Regarding the priests, God speaks to Ezekiel (Ezek. 44: 20): “They shall not shave their heads or let their locks grow long; they shall only trim the hair of their heads.”

It was customary to anoint the hair of a guest as a sign of hospitality (Lk. 7: 46); or were anointed at feasts (Ps. 45: 7).

The sackcloth was a coarse loose cloth (Hebrew: saq – Strong # 8242: A mesh (such as allowing a liquid to run through), that is, a thick cloth (used in mourning and for bagging); therefore a bag (for grain, etc.): bag (bed linen, clothes); in Greek, sakkos (Strong #g4526) – Matt. 11: 21; Lk 10: 13], usually made of goats’ hair or camel’s hair and black in color (Rev. 6: 12). The same Hebrew word sometimes means ‘sack’ (of keeping money or food – Gen. 42: 27), which obviously was made of the same material. The sackcloth was a sign of mourning for the dead (Gen. 37: 34; 2 Sam. 3: 31; Joel 1: 8), or mourning for national or personal disaster (Job 16: 15; Lam. 2: 10; Est. 4: 1), or of penance for sins (1 Kin. 21: 27; Neh. 9: 1; Jon. 3: 5; Matt. 11: 21), or special prayer, asking for deliverance (2 Kin. 19: 1; 2; Dan. 9: 3). The form of the sackcloth, as a symbol of humiliation before God, was often a sash or robe around the waist (1 Kin. 20: 31; 32; Isa. 3: 24; Isa. 20: 2; Ezek. 27: 31). It was usually worn on the skin (2 Kin. 6: 30; Job 16: 15), and sometimes was worn for an entire night (1 Kin. 21: 27; Jl. 1: 13). In some cases it replaced a cloak presumably over other clothes (Jon. 3: 6). Sometimes the sackcloth was stretched out on the floor to lie on (2 Sam. 21: 10; Isa. 58: 5). Palestinian shepherds used sackcloth because it was cheap and durable. Sometimes the prophets used it as a symbol of the repentance they preached (Isa. 20: 2; Rev. 11: 3). According to Jonah 3: 8, even the animals were clothed in sackcloth as a sign of national supplication. The use of sackcloth as lamentation and penance was practiced not only in Israel but also in Damascus (1 Kin. 20: 31), in Moab (Isa. 15: 3), in Ammon (Jer. 49: 3), in Tyre (Ezek. 27: 31) and in Nineveh (Jon. 3: 5).

As for the word ‘ash’ (or ‘dust’) or ‘ashes’ (spread on the head as part of the weeping), in Hebrew it is: ’epher (Strong #665) = ‘product of burning’; of an unused root meaning ‘to spread’; ashes, dust. Ash is a metaphor for what is worthless (Isa. 44:

20) and disgusting (Job 30: 19); misery (Ps. 102: 9; Jer. 6: 26); shame (2 Sam. 13: 19); humiliation before God (Gen. 18: 27; Job 42: 6); contrition (Dan. 9: 3; Matt. 11: 21) and purification (Num. 19: 9; 10; 17; Heb. 9: 13). When the bible talks about spreading 'ashes' on the head or the garments as a sign of mourning or repentance, it is not necessarily speaking of the ashes of resulting from the burning of animals (as it was in temple sacrifices), but it is referring to dust, the dust of the earth, which was often spread over the head of the repentant or those who were mourning (cf. Neh. 9: 1).

There is another Hebrew word used for 'ash', which is: deshen, meaning 'fat' or 'ash' – the residue of sacrificed animals.

- Isa. 22: 14: "The Lord of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you until you die, says the Lord God of hosts [NIV: 'Till your dying day this sin will not be atoned for', says the Lord, the Lord Almighty]."

The Lord comforts the prophet, saying that the sinful attitude of His people will not go unnoticed. In due time, His revenge will come.

Prophecy against Shebna – v. 15-19.

- Isa. 22: 15-19 (NRSV): "Thus says the Lord God of hosts: Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is master of the household, and say to him: What right do you have here? Who are your relatives here, that you have cut out a tomb here for yourself, cutting a tomb on the height, and carving a habitation for yourself in the rock? The Lord is about to hurl you away violently, my fellow. He will seize firm hold on you, whirl you round and round, and throw you like a ball into a wide land; there you shall die, and there your splendid chariots shall lie, O you disgrace to your master's house! I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your post."

(NIV): "This is what the Lord, the LORD Almighty, says: "Go, say to this steward, to Shebna, who is in charge of the palace: What are you doing here and who gave you permission to cut out a grave for yourself here, hewing your grave on the height and chiseling your resting place in the rock? 'Beware, the LORD is about to take firm hold of you and hurl you away, you mighty man. He will roll you up tightly like a ball and throw you into a large country. There you will die and there your splendid chariots will remain—you disgrace to your master's house! I will depose you from your office, and you will be ousted from your position.'"

Shebna was a high official under Hezekiah's command. When the Assyrian King sent messengers to Hezekiah with a threatening letter, Eliakim ('the steward' or 'the palace administrator' or 'which was over the household' or 'who was in charge of the palace', depending on the bible version), Shebna ('the secretary' or 'the scribe' or 'the steward') and Joah ('the recorder') were Hezekiah's intermediaries in the negotiation (2 Kin. 18: 37; 2 Kin. 19: 2; Isa. 36: 3). Being a man of high position, Shebna was rebuked by Isaiah for having built a monumental tomb, and his fall was predicted by the prophet (Isa. 22: 15-19). He rebuked him for his pride and vanity. The Jewish writings say that he was a foreigner and was not of the lineage of Israel, for his genealogy was not quoted along with that of the other two (2 Kin. 18: 18; Isa. 36: 3). It seems that the tomb he built was among the tombs of the kings of the house of David.

The sentence of the Lord was given: he would be dismissed from his post, and taken into captivity, and there he would die (Isa. 22: 17-19): "The Lord is about to hurl you away violently, my fellow. He will seize firm hold on you, whirl you round and round, and throw you like a ball into a wide land; there you shall die, and there your splendid chariots shall lie, O you disgrace to your master's house! I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your post."

‘He will whirl you round and round’ or ‘He will roll you up tightly’ – This suggests a condemnation, for the verbs ‘to whirl’ and ‘to roll up’ may be an allusion to the ancient custom of covering the faces of those condemned to death.



Photo: The Tomb of Absalom in the Kidron Valley (left). In the upper right corner of the photo you can see the Ophel road going up the wall of the Old City, for those going to the village of Silwan (or Sulwan, in Arabic; in Hebrew is Shilôah), south of Jerusalem. In the background, the neighborhood of Abu Tor, above which is the forest of Peace.

The Lord will put Eliakim the steward in the place of Shebna – v. 20-25.

• Isa. 22: 20-24: “On that day I will call my servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and will clothe him with your robe and bind your sash on him. I will commit your authority to his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his ancestral house [NIV: a seat of honor for the house of his father]. And they will hang on him the whole weight of his ancestral house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons [NIV: all the glory of his family will hang on him: its offspring and offshoots—all its lesser vessels, from the bowls to all the jars].”

The prophet says that the Lord will put Eliakim, the steward, in the place of Shebna (2 Kin. 18: 18; Isa. 36: 3).

‘On that day I will call my servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and will clothe him with your robe [*Shebna’s*] and bind your sash on him. I will commit your authority to his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah’

– This means that because he is a man loyal and submissive to the will of God ('I will call my servant Eliakim'), he would place him in the position of honor in the government of Judah beside the king. Hezekiah would put him in the post of official of state or treasurer, as some versions suggest. Eliakim means: 'God established, God establishes' (in Greek, Eliakeim) and prefigures Jesus, when we analyze the intentions of God when He put him in the place of Shebna: he would be clothed with the robe and the belt of Shebna and would receive the authority that this one had in the past. The robe, the belt and the ring were the emblem of his office, a sign of the governmental authority he had beside the king, as we see in Mordecai, also a figure of Jesus: "Then the king [*Ahasuerus*] took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. So Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman... Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king, wearing royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a mantle of fine linen and purple, while the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced... For Mordecai was powerful in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces as the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful... For Mordecai the Jew was next in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was powerful among the Jews and popular with his many kindred, for he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his descendants" (Est. 8: 2; 15; Est. 9: 4; Est. 10: 3).

'And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah' (Is 22: 21 b) means to be a leader, a protector, governing them with paternal care and affection.

The bible says that the Lord will put the key of the house of David on the shoulders of Eliakim; he will open, and no one will shut; he will shut, and no one will open (cf. Rev. 3: 7: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens").

The key symbolizes the authority of his government, the power to open and shut, to let enter or go out. What he said would be done: 'yes or no, inside or outside, open or shut.' This is the power of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords, before whom every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord, and has received from the Father all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28: 18) and all the power of judgment (Jn. 5: 22-23: "The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him").

As a state official he carried the key on his shoulder (in the old ceremonies of the nobility), symbolizing the responsibility of his office and his duty to fulfill. Jesus carried the cross over His shoulders, not with His hands, symbolizing that He had this responsibility upon Himself, this burden, this responsibility of carrying on His shoulders the sin of the world and thus to die for mankind in order to free it spiritually from the eternal death. When He rose up from the dead, He brought with them the keys of death and hell: "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 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" (Rev 1: 17b-18); "Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death" (Heb 2: 14-15); "The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15: 26).

In Isa. 22: 23-24 it is written: "I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his ancestral house [NIV: a seat of honor for the house of his father]. And they will hang on him the whole weight of his ancestral house, the

offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons [NIV: all the glory of his family will hang on him: its offspring and offshoots—all its lesser vessels, from the bowls to all the jars].”

The word ‘peg’ is used here as a comparison with the house in Ancient times. In the ancient oriental houses, pegs, nails or hooks were fixed on the walls, and on them people hung the household utensils, both large and small.

This means that the Lord would fasten Eliakim like a peg on the wall of a well-built house (the stability and continuation of the government of Judah), signifying his authority and power, not only over the House of David as also over his family and his descendants, from the greatest to the smallest. Their stability would depend on Eliakim. Governing prudently and fairly, he would gain great glory. In other words, he would sit in the prominent place in the eyes of God and men; would be honored and respected. Since he was also of royal blood (according to some Jewish historians), the House of David also related to his own lineage. Everyone would feel safe near him and, like utensils of a house, they would ‘hang’ themselves on him, that is, he would be their support and sustenance, as Jesus is our support and sustenance. Being hung on Him through our faith makes us sure that we have someone who defends us, supports and sustains us in all our needs. All the holy offspring of the Lord Jesus on earth, through sincere conversion to Him, can feel secure of its salvation and of its own authority over the things of evil and of the darkness, for it was Jesus Himself who left it for us, His children.

• Isa. 22: 25: “On that day, says the Lord of hosts, the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way; it will be cut down and fall, and the load that was on it will perish, for the Lord has spoken.”

‘On that day’ refers to the day that Shebna was deposed, and Eliakim put in his place. Shebna, who thought himself to be a peg in a secure place, for he had been put in that post by King Hezekiah Himself and admired by his friends and flatterers, would be degraded before all, removed from his place of honor, and would fall, taking along with him all who he had risen to considerable positions by his authority and political influence. Those who leaned on him would lose everything they conquered. They were a burden, a load, a weight, to him and probably to the nation, for when government leaders are dishonest those who stand by them to advise them also follow their example and end up being a nasty yoke to all who are governed by them. This is a curse. And what the bible may mean by this is that the curse which was upon Judah because of their sin and the sin of kings and princes would be lessened by the removal of a dishonest member like Shebna; therefore, the heavy prophetic sentence coming out of God’s mouth. A nation less sinful could enjoy more of His blessing. A ruler blessed and anointed by the Lord could bring more blessing and less weight to the people. If we extrapolate this to Christ and His redeeming mission on that day He was crucified because of the sin of men and carrying the weight of the wrath of God the Father upon His shoulders, He made the propitiation for our sins and the weight of God’s wrath upon us was removed because His blood justified us. The reconciliation was done and our transgressions in the eyes of God were removed. ‘the peg that was fastened in a firm place’ which was the dominion of Satan because of the sin of mankind, which brought the curse of the law, was cut down and fell; and the load that was in it fell away, that is, we, who were hanging on it, were freed by the blood of Jesus.

Chapter 23

Tyre is an ancient Phoenician town in Lebanon on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It was the main seaport on the coast of Phoenicia, almost twenty-five miles south of Sidon and thirty miles north of Mount Carmel. Tyre (in Hebrew, *çôr*; in Greek, 'tyros') means 'rock' or 'fortress.' In the times of the Old Testament, Phoenicia was called Canaan, and its inhabitants, Canaanites, which means 'traders.' In Greek, Phoenicia is called *Phoinikē*, Φοινίκη, 'land of the palm trees.' Some historians give it the meaning of 'land of purple', for it produced purple paint extracted from the shell of a shellfish called Murex, to dye the robes of kings and nobles. Tyre was founded around 2750 BC according to Herodotus, and was originally built as a walled city in the mainland. In Ancient times, Tyre was divided into two parts: one, called 'Old Tyre', which lay on the mainland (where the 'old' harbor was), and the city built on a small rocky island about seven hundred and sixty-five yards off shore (The 'New Tyre'). The city was watered by the Litani River and dominated the surrounding plain, to the north of which was Zarephath (present Sarafand). Today the ancient ruins of the old city of Tyre remain, next to the new city, called Sour (which means 'rock'). By 1485 BC, Tyre marketed luxury goods with Egypt as well as wheat; therefore, it has undergone several attempts of attack by the Egyptians.



Around 1200 BC, the Philistines besieged Sidon, and its inhabitants fled to Tyre, which became known as 'daughter of Sidon' (Isa. 23: 12). With the decline of Egypt, the city became independent, and its rulers began to dominate most of the coastal cities of Phoenicia, including the interior of Lebanon. The commerce of the whole world was gathered in the storehouses of Tyre. Its merchants were the first to sail through the Mediterranean, founding colonies on the coast and neighboring islands of the Aegean Sea (Greece), on the North of Africa coast (in Carthage), Sicily, Corsica and the Iberian peninsula. In the time of David and Solomon, Israel kept good commercial relations with Tyre (2 Sam. 5: 11; 1 Kin. 5: 1-12; 1 Chr. 14: 1), whose people was ruled a long time by their native kings.

It was Hiram I (979-945 AC) that built a land bridge (an artificial isthmus) connecting the island to the mainland, where the principal port was. The Assyrians destroyed this land bridge, probably in 719 BC, when the New Tyre of the island was looted. On the island, Hiram I built a temple to Astarte and Baal-Melcart. He assisted Solomon in building the port of Ezion Geber in the Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba) to facilitate trade to the south. From this time forward the Tyrians became the great merchants of the eastern Mediterranean (Isa. 23: 8), with great maritime skills (Ezek. 26: 17; Ezek 27: 32). The Tyrians made glass and purple dye, as was said above. One of the successors of Hiram I, nearly a century later, was Ethbaal I (or Ithobaal I – 915-856 BC), whose daughter Jezebel married Ahab (874-853 BC), king of Israel (1 Kin. 16: 31). At the time, it was common for the inhabitants of Tyre to be called Sidonians; but the Sidonians are not called Tyrians. Therefore it is written in the bible that Ethbaal was king of the Sidonians, but in fact he was king of Tyre and had usurped the throne of his predecessor.

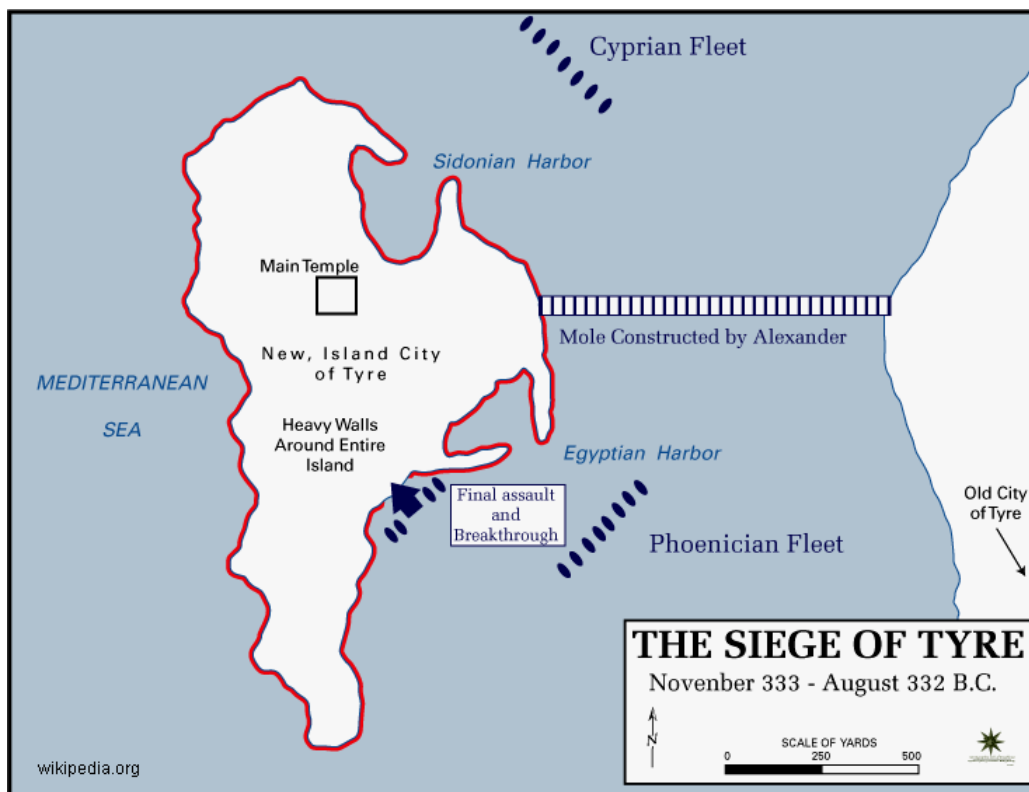
During two centuries the Assyrians subjugated Tyre. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC) besieged the port of Tyre (841 BC), which began to pay tribute to the Assyrians. The New Tyre was besieged by Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), beginning in 724 BC, more or less by the same time of the fall of Samaria; and in 720 BC the city fell in the hands of Sargon II (722-705 BC). It began to pay tribute to Nineveh through Assyrian officials placed there for this purpose. Sidon and the Old Tyre, in the mainland, were soon plundered in 720 BC; but the New Tyre, in the island, only fell in 719 BC. Despite all this, Tyre turned to Egypt seeking help. The Hebrew prophets rebuked Tyre. Amos rebuked them for having given Hebrew prisoners to the Edomites (Am. 1: 9-10); and Joel (Jl. 3: 4-8), for selling Hebrew prisoners as slaves to the Greeks. Isaiah, like Ezekiel, prophesied its fall. Tyre fell under the dominion of Sidon, and when Sennacherib (705-681 BC) came in 701 BC its ruler ran away and died in exile. The escape freed the city from being devastated, and an Assyrian ruler was placed there. The years that followed with Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) were of great competition for the mastery of the city, which came to fall in 664 BC by the hand of Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), taking many people into captivity. With the downfall of Assyria, Tyre regained its autonomy for some time but Jeremiah prophesied its fall before the Babylonians, just as Ezekiel.

The Babylonians destroyed many of the coastal cities of Phoenicia, and Tyre weakened. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre for thirteen years (582-569 BC), and when the city surrendered he appointed judges to govern it; but was unable to capture the Island of Tyre (the New Tyre). For almost a decade, Tyre paid tribute to him.

In 539 BC Cyrus conquered the city for the Persian Empire and it remained under its dominion. The inhabitants of Tyre supplied Israel with cedar wood for the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezr. 3: 7). At this point in History, Tyre was

an arrogant and proud city that relied on itself, thinking it was unassailable because of its fortresses; also boasted in its riches and in the power of its commerce (Zech. 9: 3).

It closed the gates to the Greeks, under the command of Alexander the Great, but after the seven-month siege (333-332 BC) and the construction of a new mole (a causeway on a natural land bridge) to the island's fortress (New Tyre), Alexander conquered it in 332 BC. This mole, made of stone, exists until today and connects the mainland to the island where the city of Tyre was located. It is one kilometer long and two meters deep. Thus the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezek. 26-28) was fulfilled fully. The great and arrogant Tyre has finally become a place for fishermen to dry their nets.



The siege of Tyre by Alexander the Great – Wikipedia.org

Antigonus I Monophthalmus, one of Alexander's successors came back to besiege it in 315-314 BC. The Diadochi (Greek Διάδοχοι, Diadokhoi, 'successors') also called epigones (Greek: Επίγονοι, transliterated as Epígonoi, 'children') were the successors of Alexander the Great.

The Seleucids rebuilt the city and then the area became a Roman province (64 BC). Herod the Great rebuilt its main temple. Acts 21: 3-6 shows that there were Christians there in the first century AD, for in Tyre a Christian church was founded after the death of Stephen (this is reported in the Apocryphal Books); and the apostle Paul stayed there for seven days when he returned from his third missionary journey to spend Pentecost at Jerusalem (Acts 21: 3-6).

Then, in the tenth century, Tyre was besieged by the Fatimid Caliphate – besieged Tyre in 996-998 AD. The Fatimid Caliphate was a Shia Ismaili Islamic Dynasty, composed of fourteen caliphs, which reigned in North Africa (909-1048 AD) and Egypt (969-1171 AD).

The ruins we see today date back to the time of the Crusades (The Crusades in the Holy Land – 1095-1272, are traditionally counted as nine; the 1st from 1095-1099 and

the 9th from 1271-1272). Next to the ruins of Tyre, there is a small colony of almost fourteen thousand people, and these old ruins are used by the fishermen to dry the nets.

The Crusaders under Baldwin I of Jerusalem besieged Tyre in 1111-1112 AD. Baldwin I of Jerusalem (or Baldwin of Bologna, 1058-1118 AD) was one of the leaders of the 1st Crusade, the 1st count of Edessa (1098-1100. Edessa is modern-day Şanlıurfa, Xanleurfa or Urfa, a province in southeastern Turkey, near the border with Syria) and the 2nd ruler of Jerusalem (1100-1118); in fact, the 1st king of the Holy City.

Then the Venetian Crusaders besieged Tyre in 1124 AD. Thus, Tyre was an important city for Christianity until the invasion of Jerusalem by the Muslim Turks, the Ayyubids, under Saladin, that besieged the city in 1187 AD. The Ayyubids are a Muslim dynasty of the 12th – 13th centuries in Syria and Egypt. They created the Mamluk army, an Egyptian army made up of Kurdish slaves (Turks), bought between 14 and 18 years of age and trained for military service. Saladin (1138-1193) was a Muslim-Kurdish military chief (religion: Sunni Islam, namely, the traditional Islam), Sultan of Egypt and Syria, who opposed the European Crusaders in the Levant (a geographical term to Syria, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Cyprus). He reconquered Jerusalem from the hands of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, founded by Godfrey of Bouillon, the predecessor and brother of Baldwin I of Jerusalem.

Summary of the sieges of Tyre [Rulers / period of reign / period of siege]:

- Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC) – he besieged Tyre in 841 BC
- Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) + Sargon II (722-705 BC) – siege: 724-720 BC
- Sennacherib (705-681 BC) – 701 BC
- Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) – 671 BC,
- Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) – but the city fell in 664 BC
- Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC) – laid siege to Tyre for thirteen years (582-569 BC), but was unable to capture the Island of Tyre (the New Tyre).
- Alexander the Great destroyed the New Tyre – 332 BC
- Antigonos I Monophthalmus, successor of Alexander – 315-314 BC
- Fatimid Caliphate – 996-998 AD
- The Crusaders (Baldwin I of Jerusalem) – 1111-1112 AD
- Venetian Crusaders – 1124 AD
- Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1246 AD), under Saladin – 1187 AD

Sidon: In the bible, the word ‘Sidonians’ is used as a generic name, meaning both the Phoenicians and the Canaanites (Josh. 13: 6; Judg. 18: 7). Sidon was in the tribe of Asher (Josh. 19: 28) but their inhabitants were not expelled, and their idolatry was a snare to the Israelites (Josh. 13: 6; Josh. 19: 28; Judg. 1: 31; Judg. 10: 6; 2 Sam. 24: 6; 1 Kin. 16: 31-32). The city of Sidon was denounced by the prophets along with Tyre (Isa. 23: 1-18; Jer. 25: 22; Jer. 27: 3; Jer. 47: 4; Ezek. 28: 21-22; Jl. 3: 4; Zech. 9: 2-4). Jesus visited the places near Sidon, north of Nazareth (Matt. 15: 21; Mk. 7: 24-30); its inhabitants resorted to Him (Mk. 3: 8; Lk. 6: 17). Sidon was supplied by Israel (Acts 12: 20) and was the residence of Christians (Acts 27: 3).

Some archaeological excavations were made in the southern part of the island at the site called al-Mina (or Al Mina, in Arabic, meaning ‘the port’), and in the part where the isthmus connects it to the mainland, which is called al-Bass (The Al-Bass, Tyre necropolis). The images from the site of excavation Al Mina placed below show us: Roman Hippodrome in Tyre (1), Rectangular Theater (2), remains of ancient columns of the supposed ‘palaestra’ or ‘palestra’, in Greek: παλαίστρα, the Ancient Greek wrestling school (3), where boxing and wrestling were practiced, and served also as public gymnasium; In (4) we see the details of the columns – source: wikipedia.org.





The destruction of Tyre for its pride – v. 1-14.

- Isa. 23: 1: “The oracle concerning Tyre. Wail, O ships of Tarshish, for your fortress is destroyed. When they came in from Cyprus [in Hebrew: Kittim] they learned of it [NIV: Wail, O ships of Tarshish! For Tyre is destroyed and left without house or harbor].”

The city of Tyre would be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (569 BC) and then by Alexander the Great (332 BC). This prophecy seems to refer to the destruction by the Babylonians, for it implies that, after seventy years (Isa. 23: 12), Tyre was to regain some earlier power and glory before its destruction by Alexander.

Cyprus (Kittim) – this was an eminent place for transport and trade, and had great relations with Tyre. It can be placed here for all the other countries that have negotiated with the city of Tyre.

The correct location of Tarshish, where there was a colony of Tyre, is still unknown, and may refer to a port from the Indian Ocean to Carthage (in Africa) or a Phoenician port in Spain.

According to the Easton’s Bible Dictionary, the word, anglicized as ‘tarshish’, is of Sanskrit origin (Sanskrit is the ancestral language of India) or Aryan origin (relative to the ancient Iranian peoples), and means ‘the coast of the sea.’ According to the Lexicon Strong’s Concordance (tarshiysh – Strong #8659; #8658) may refer to the region of topaz or beryllium; or Tarshish, a place in the Mediterranean, hence the epithet of a merchant vessel (as if ‘to’ or ‘from’ that port). The location of Tarshish could be: an eastern city on the Indian Ocean coast based on the statement that ‘ships of Tarshish’ left Ezion Geber in the Red Sea, or could refer to a Phoenician port in Spain, located between the two mouths of the river Guadalquivir. The term ‘ships of Tarshish’ possibly referred to a class of ships: 1) Ships intended for long voyages. 2) Large ships prepared to sail in the sea, carrying ore; so were called the ships of King Solomon. In Greek, Tarshish is called Tartessus or Tartessos. Tartessos (Greek: Τάρτησος) was the name by which the Greeks knew the first civilization of the West. It was heir of the culture of Andalusia, and developed in the triangle formed by the present cities of Huelva, Seville and San Fernando (Cádiz), on the southwest coast of the Iberian Peninsula. Tartessos had the Tartessos River as a central river that divided the country in half; the Romans called it Baetis, and the Arabs, Guadalquivir. The Tartessians

developed a language and writing distinct from that of neighboring peoples, with cultural influences of Egyptians and Phoenicians.

In 1 Kin. 9: 26 the bible says, “King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion Geber, which is near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom.” The bible also talks about the alliance between Solomon and the kingdom of Tyre, using these ships for trade: “For the king’s ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks [that is, baboons]” (2 Chr. 9: 21). These same ships were used by Jehoshaphat, but they were broken: “Now Jehoshaphat built a fleet of trading ships (Hebrew, ‘of ships of Tarshish’) to go to Ophir for gold, but they never sail – they were wrecked at Ezion Geber” (1 Kin. 22: 48 – NIV; KJV; ASV; NRSV; in the bible of Jerusalem this phrase corresponds to verse 49, like in ARA-PT-BR) and “Then Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, ‘Because you have joined with Ahaziah, the Lord will destroy what you have made.’ And the ships were wrecked and were not able to go to Tarshish” (2 Chr. 20: 37). Ezion Geber (1 Kin. 9: 26) most likely refers to the current Aqaba, a coastal town in the southernmost of Jordan, the capital of the province of the same name. This is the only seaport in the country, so the city is of strategic importance to Jordan. The city borders Elath or Eilat (1 Kin. 9: 26), located in Israel. Both Aqaba (Ayla) and Elath (Eilat) are at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba. The city of Aqaba was called Ayla in Ancient times (it was a medieval Islamic city, in proximity to copper mines), which is a Semitic name written in historical sources in several different ways; Ayla, Ailana, Elana, Haila, Ailath, Elath and Wayla.

- Isa. 23: 2-3: “Be still, O inhabitants of the coast, O merchants of Sidon, your messengers crossed over the sea and were on the mighty waters; your revenue was the grain of Shihor, the harvest of the Nile; you were the merchant of the nations [NIV: Be silent, you people of the island and you merchants of Sidon; whom the seafarers have enriched. On the great waters came the grain of the Shihor; the harvest of the Nile was the revenue of Tyre, and she became the marketplace of the nations]” – Shihor (Strong #7883 means ‘dark, turbid’; Shichor was a stream of Egypt; Shihor, Sihor).

‘Be still, O inhabitants of the coast’ or ‘be silent, you people of the island’ – be silent, do not boast over your wealth and power, that is what he means. In the bible, the word ‘Sidonians’ is used as a generic name, meaning both the Phoenicians and the Canaanites (Josh. 13: 6; Judg. 18: 7).

By 1485 BC, Tyre marketed luxury goods with Egypt as well as wheat; therefore, it has undergone several attempts of attack by the Egyptians. Around 1200 BC, the Philistines surrounded Sidon, and its inhabitants fled to Tyre, which became known as ‘daughter of Sidon’ (Isa. 23: 12). With the decline of Egypt, the city became independent, and its rulers began to dominate most of the coastal cities of Phoenicia, including the interior of Lebanon. It was called the ‘the marketplace of nations’ or ‘the merchant of the nations’ because of its great trade with countless nations (Isa. 23: 2-3). The commerce of the whole world was gathered in the storehouses of Tyre.

- Isa. 23: 4: “Be ashamed, O Sidon, for the sea has spoken, the fortress of the sea, saying: ‘I have neither labored nor given birth, I have neither reared young men nor brought up young women’ [NIV: Be ashamed, O Sidon, and you, O fortress of the sea, for the sea has spoken: ‘I have neither been in labor nor given birth; I have neither reared sons nor brought up daughters’].”

Sidon was a great city near Tyre, strongly linked to it by trade, and called by some the mother of Tyre, for it is supposed that it was built and inhabited for the first time by a colony of the Sidonians. ‘The sea’ was that part of the sea where Tyre was, and that ships and men were sent to all countries. Tyre was known as ‘the fortress of the sea’ not only because of its strength and commercial power, but because it defended that part of the sea of pirates and invaders who tried to dominate the continent. As it was written above, the commerce of the whole world was gathered in the storehouses of Tyre. Its merchants were the first to sail through the Mediterranean, founding colonies on the coast and neighboring islands of the Aegean Sea (Greece), on the North of Africa coast (in Carthage), Sicily, Corsica and the Iberian peninsula.

‘I have neither labored nor given birth, I have neither reared young men nor brought up young women’ or ‘I have neither been in labor nor given birth; I have neither reared sons nor brought up daughters’ – this means that Tyre was not as fruitful as before, it could no longer found colonies and felt barren and desolate.

- Isa. 23: 5-7: “When the report comes to Egypt, they will be in anguish over the report about Tyre. Cross over to Tarshish – wail, O inhabitants of the coast [NIV: of the island]! Is this your exultant city whose origin is from days of old, whose feet carried her to settle far away? [NIV: to settle in far-off lands].”

The corn and wheat of Egypt that were abundant in this nation supplied others through the trade of Tyre; therefore, they would cease to be commercialized. And Egypt would also suffer with the fall of Tyre. So they would feel anguish.

- Isa. 23: 8-12: “Who has planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth? [NIV: whose traders are renowned in the earth?] The Lord of hosts has planned it – to defile the pride of all glory, to shame all the honored of the earth [NIV: the Lord Almighty planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth]. Cross over to your own land, O ships of Tarshish; this is a harbor no more [NIV: Till (or ‘go through’) your land as along the Nile, O Daughter of Tarshish, for you no longer have a harbor]. He has stretched out his hand over the sea, he has shaken the kingdoms; the Lord has given command concerning Canaan [*as the Hebrews called Phoenicia*] to destroy its fortresses. He said: You will exult no longer, O oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon; rise, cross over to Cyprus (*in Hebrew Kittim*)—even there you will have no rest.”

It is said that Tyre was a bestower of crowns because there has been always a great succession of kings in this city; or, because, serving many nations, the city honored many kings of many nations. Its merchants (traders) were so respectable and renowned as if they were princes and nobles. But the Lord planned its fall to destroy the pride and beauty of Tyre, and to humiliate its ‘princes’, its merchants.

Then the bible says: “Till (or ‘go through’) your land as along the Nile, O Daughter of Tarshish, for you no longer have a harbor.”

As it was said in verse 1, Tarshish or Tartessos developed on the southwest coast of the Iberian Peninsula and had the Tartessos River as a central river that divided the country in half. Here in verse 10 the prophet was addressing Tarshish, talking to them to go through their river as the Egyptians sailed along the Nile, and cultivated their grain, for the inhabitants of Tarshish no longer had the harbor of Tyre to lean on. Other nations could help them in the sea trade. The Lord shook the neighboring kingdoms and they could tremble with the fall of Tyre by the astonishment and unforeseen situation, and because this city was a refuge for them. He had already raised enemies to destroy its fortresses.

‘You will exult no longer, O oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon’ or ‘No more your reveling, O Virgin Daughter of Sidon, now crushed!’ – It means that the city would not rejoice for long. When the calamity came upon it, its time of joy would be over for a while.

One of the words for ‘virgin’ in Hebrew is *bethülâ*, but usually comes with the word ‘betrothed’, or the phrase, ‘promised in marriage’ or ‘whom no man had known’ (as in J1. 1: 8 or Gen. 24: 16, concerning Rebekah). Here in this text of Isaiah (Isa. 23: 12), the Hebrew word used is *bethülâ* or *bthuwlah* – Strong #1330, which means: to separate; a virgin (from her privacy); a bride; young lady, virgin. According to the Law, the virgin was the property of her father, and when she got married, he received a dowry (Ex 22: 16; fifty shekels of silver – Deut. 22: 28-29; Gen. 29: 15-18). The virgin’s honor was protected against evil-speaking, but her deviation from virtue was severely punished (Deut. 22: 13-21). The word ‘daughter’, used in the Scriptures, may refer to a granddaughter or descendant; or is used when referring to cities.

Tyre is called a ‘virgin’ not because it had not yet been looted or destroyed, that is, in the sense of being raped or losing its virginity; on the contrary, it was besieged and sacked from the time of Sargon II until Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 26: 7-14), who besieged the city of the continent for thirteen years (582-569 BC), and when its citizens surrendered he placed judges to govern there; but he was unable to capture the Island of Tyre (the New Tyre). But Tyre was called a ‘virgin’ because it lost its strength as an independent trading city, and was placed under guardianship of ‘fathers’, like the Assyrians and Babylonians, as if they watched it all the time with the excuse of keeping it ‘pure’, ‘holy’, ‘innocent’, that is, to protect it from the attacks of other peoples, or to prevent it, by itself, from rebelling and seeking its independence and strength again.

‘Rise, cross over to Cyprus—even there you will have no rest’ – it means that even its colonies would be affected, that is, they would be treated harshly, for the calamities would reach them: Sicily, Corsica, Carthage and Spain.

- Isa. 23: 13-14: “Look at the land of the Chaldeans! This is the people; it was not Assyria. They destined Tyre for wild animals. They erected their siege towers, they tore down her palaces, they made her a ruin [NIV: Look at the land of the Babylonians, this people that now is of no account! The Assyrians have made it a place for desert creatures; they raised up their siege towers, they stripped its fortresses bare and turned it into a ruin]. Wail, O ships of Tarshish, for your fortress is destroyed.”

The prophet tells the inhabitants of Tyre to look at the Chaldeans, for example. They had never been a great nation; they lived in tents before, and they had been subjugated by the Assyrians for many centuries, gathered in cities, and even despised by them as if they were wild goats in the desert, but assimilated their culture and grew; suddenly became greater than Assyria, they were conquering the world, and now besieged Tyre and built their siege towers against this city so famous and perhaps even older than Babylon. If the Babylonians overthrew the strong Assyrians, could they not overthrow Tyre?

Tyre will also be forgotten for seventy years – v. 15-17.

- Isa. 23: 15-17: “From that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, the lifetime of one king [NIV: The span of a king’s life]. At the end of seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song about the prostitute: Take a harp, go about the city, you forgotten prostitute! Make sweet melody, sing many songs, that you may be remembered. At the end of seventy years, the Lord will visit Tyre, and she will return to

her trade, and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.”

The Lord will ruin Tyre, infallibly. ‘From that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years’, that is, during the time of the captivity of the Jews in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar set up siege in Tyre (on the mainland) for thirteen years (582-569 BC), and when its citizens surrendered he placed judges to govern it. For almost a decade, Tyre paid tribute to him. Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon (Jer. 27: 3; 8; Ezek. 26: 7-14) would be subjects of Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, without many nations to perform independently its trade, that is, as many nations became subjects of Babylon, Tyre would be put into forgetfulness.

‘The lifetime of one king’ or ‘the span of a king’s life’ may relate to David, for example, who has always been an example to Israel, and who lived seventy years. That is why Isaiah used this expression; even because the bible speaks: ‘the lifetime of one king’ or ‘the span of a king’s life’, not ‘of a dynasty’.

After the seventy years, Tyre will return to prostitute itself with its idols and resume its trade. It will gradually return to its former office, by which it will easily draw the merchants of the world to negotiate with it, as the harlots do to seduce men with lewd songs. Tyre was restored by the favor of the Persian monarchs after the return of the Jews and returned to prostitute itself with its idols and resumed its commerce.

Tyre will know the word of God – v. 18.

- Isa. 23: 18: “Her merchandise and her wages will be dedicated to the Lord [NIV: Yet her profit and her earnings will be set apart for the Lord]; her profits will not be stored or hoarded, but her merchandise will supply abundant food and fine clothing for those who live in the presence of the Lord [NIV: Her profits will go to those who live before the Lord, for abundant food and fine clothes] – see Mic. 4: 13b.”

This prophecy says that Tyre will know the word of God. This refers to the times of the gospel in the early ages of Christianity (Ps. 45: 12 may refer to this: “The Daughter of Tyre will come with a gift, men of wealth will seek your favor”), when Tyre heard God’s word not only by Jesus (as was the case with the Syro-Phoenician woman), but also by His disciples and followers. It is the case of Stephen, for a Christian church was founded in Tyre after his death (according to apocryphal books), and Paul (Acts 21: 3-6; Acts 27: 3), who stayed there for seven days when he returned from his third missionary journey to spend Pentecost in Jerusalem. Jesus visited the places near Sidon, north of Nazareth (Matt. 15: 21; Mk. 7: 24-30); its inhabitants resorted to Him (Mk. 3: 8; Lk. 6: 17). Through the preaching of the gospel, God would still call Tyre to repentance, and its evil and unclean gains would be to help His messengers with liberality, his preachers, the ministers of the Gospel. What they earned through trade would be dedicated to the Lord. The complete evangelization of the Tyrians, as well as the Ethiopians (Isa. 18: 7), the Egyptians and Assyrians (Isa. 19: 21-25) is yet to come (Isa. 60: 5).

Chapter 24

In the sequence of the previous prophecies of Isaiah it is not known for sure if the 'land' which he speaks of is the land of Judah or the other nations that were also punished for their sins. According to the commentary of Wesley (Isa. 24: 1-12), it is about the land of Judah that was punished for its sin (the title of this excerpt is given by him as 'Judgments on Judah for their defilements and transgression'). What is understood is that there will be a remnant, which will be delivered by God and will sing to His glory. The transgressors will find their ruin and the power of the Messiah will be established on Mount Zion, that is, God's judgment given previously over specific nations presents now in a greater context and ends with the Lord's triumph over all the earth through His chosen nation. Isaiah is not classified as an apocalyptic prophet but Messianic, but in this passage, in particular, perhaps the main teaching can be extrapolated to the end of time: the world in general; Judah and the Church of Christ. In other words, after having prophesied about several nations (Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Israel, Egypt, Edom and Tyre), Isaiah speaks about the end times for the world, for Judah and for the Church. We can say that from the 24th to the 27th chapter it is a single prophecy.

The Lord's devastation of the earth ('Judgments on Judah for their defilements and transgression' – Wesley) – v. 1-12.

- Isa. 24: 1-12: "Now the Lord is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants [NIV: he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants]. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the Lord has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants [NIV: The earth is defiled by its people]; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left [NIV: Therefore, the earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left]. The wine dries up, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh [NIV: The new wine dries up and the vine withers; all the merrymakers groan]. The mirth of the timbrels is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled [NIV: The gaiety of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the revelers has stopped, the joyful harp is silent]. No longer do they drink wine with singing; strong drink [NIV: beer] is bitter to those who drink it. The city of chaos is broken down, every house is shut up so that no one can enter [NIV: The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred]. There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has reached its eventide; the gladness of the earth is banished. Desolation is left in the city, the gates are battered into ruins [NIV: The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces]."

Here the prophet describes the judgments over Judah and Israel because of their impurities and transgressions. The inhabitants are either dead or gone into captivity or have been scattered. Sin brings these calamities upon the earth; they are the judgment and punishment of God. There will be no distinction between them; great and small, men and women, citizens and priests, slaves and freemen. Isaiah describes something

very similar to Jeremiah in the book of lamentations: there is no more laughter, music, joy, sense of blessing, sincerity, righteousness, holiness, abundance, prosperity or hope. The people find themselves depressed, hopeless and spiritually and emotionally dead.

There will be a remnant; the joy of the righteous – v. 13-16a.

- Isa. 24: 13-16a: “For thus it shall be on the earth and among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is ended. They lift up their voices, they sing for joy; they shout from the west over the majesty of the Lord. Therefore in the east give glory to the Lord; in the coastlands of the sea glorify the name of the Lord, the God of Israel [NIV: Therefore, in the east give glory to the Lord; exalt the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea]. From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One.”

There will be a remnant preserved from the general ruin, and it will be a devout and pious remnant, who will praise God. These few are scattered, but rejoice in the Lord for their victory and triumph over evil. The remnant will sing to the Lord, by His goodness and power manifested in their deliverance, bringing them from the places where they were taken captive. The expression ‘the coastlands of the sea’ or ‘the islands of the sea’ refers to countries far from Judea, inhabited by idolatrous Gentiles; the most remote parts of the world, as well as in Arabia, which was near them; or all regions beyond the sea (Jer. 25: 22), sea regions or coastal regions, not merely islands in the strict sense. As we read these verses, we have the feeling that the righteousness of God was made.

The ruin of the transgressors – v. 16b-23.

- Isa. 24: 16b-23: “Woe is me! For the treacherous deal treacherously, the treacherous deal very treacherously. Terror, and the pit, and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth! Whoever flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit; and whoever climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven [NIV: the floodgates of the heaven] are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble. The earth is utterly broken, the earth is torn asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunkard, it sways like a hut [NIV: it sways like a hut in the wind]; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again. On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven in heaven, and on earth the kings of the earth [NIV: In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heaven above and the kings on the earth below]. They will be gathered together like prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be abashed, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his elders he will manifest his glory.”

The prophet mourns the miseries he has seen. There is terror for sinners. He predicts that sin will abound. The powers of heaven and earth will be shaken. Evil shall be removed, and there shall be new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness shall dwell. God will be glorified in all this. Isaiah uses metaphors when he speaks of the last days, but which may fit perfectly into the first coming of the Messiah, not only in the apocalyptic times that will come to us, for, as we will see later in his prophecies, the new dispensation brought by Jesus may be compared to the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. The spiritual powers involved at that time and in the Intertestamental Period following the return of the exiles to the birth of Jesus had to be greatly overcome by God Himself so that humanity continued to exist, for the dispensation of the Law could no longer save man.

Chapter 25

A song of praise for the deliverance from Babylon – v. 1-5.

• Isa. 25: 1-5: “O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure [NIV: O lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago]. For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm [NIV: For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall], the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled [NIV: and like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of the foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled].”

These verses express the deliverance of the Jews from captivity and show the destruction of the city of Babylon after the Lord sent invaders against it. Babylon, which was a fortified city, became a city without walls and full of ruins and would never be rebuilt. Seeing this, the other peoples feared the God of Israel. The Lord is always a refuge for the poor and the needy in their affliction, for the breath of the mouth of the ruthless is as impotent as the heat of the desert that strikes a wall without being able to overthrow it. God silences the triumphant cry of tyrants as one who lowers the heat with the shadow of a cloud. So the noise they make is muffled; the anger and the furious attempts of the pagan nations that fight against the people of God cease to exist. Likewise, these verses are the praise we offer to God for the victories He gives us over our spiritual enemies.

The salvation of the peoples is compared to a great feast – v. 6-12.

• Isa. 25: 6-12: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear [NIV: On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines]. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation [NIV: In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation’]. For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain. The Moabites shall be trodden down in their place as straw is trodden down in a dung-pit. Though they [*the Moabites*] spread out their hands in the midst of it, as swimmers spread out their hands to swim, their pride will be laid low despite the struggle of their hands. The high fortifications of his walls will be brought down, laid low, cast to the ground, even to the dust.”

The reception of repentant sinners is often in the bible compared to a feast with aged wines and succulent meats and the best wine. ‘Well-aged wines strained clear’ means, the wine without the lees, so they taste better. During the aging of the wine it

was kept in wineskins or bottles, which had a kind of vent to eliminate carbon dioxide (resulting from the unfolding of sugars in alcohol through fermentation) and prevent the entry of oxygen, lest they turned into vinegar. The longer the wines rested, the more the lees rushed to the bottom of the container and they were clarified, improving their bouquet and flavor. Then the wines were transported to other receptacles, and the process was done again until they had the ideal flavor. The bible refers to this in many ways: Job 32: 19 ('vent'); Isa. 25: 6 ('well-aged wines strained clear'); Jer. 13: 12 ('wine-jar'); Jer. 48: 11 ('like wine on its dregs' = lees); Zeph. 1: 12 ('dregs'); Lk 5: 39 ("And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good'").

The prophet says that 'And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations', that is, all the darkness of ignorance and religiosity that prevents them from seeing the light of God and His truth. He will destroy death forever and wipe away tears from every face and remove from the earth the mockery and shame of His people. On that day, they will recognize their God and affirm their trust in him. They will exult because He has saved them. With joy and praise, they amuse themselves with the good news of the Redeemer they sought. The hand of the Lord will rest on Jerusalem and on Mount Zion, where the temple is (for us, the symbol of the church of God), while Moab (who mocked the Jews in their misfortune) will be like straw to be trodden together with manure. Even if they reach out for help, God will bring down their pride and destroy their land. Moab stands here as a symbol of all the adversaries of God's people.

The guests are all: Gentiles and Jews. This refers to the times of the gospel and the first coming of Christ, when His light and His preaching would draw many people into Judea and Galilee, even foreigners, to hear His teaching. He would open their eyes so that the darkness that was in their minds and hearts would be removed by true knowledge; the darkness of idolatry and the lie in which they once walked. Jesus would open the spiritual life before them, teach them the secrets and mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, removing from them the spiritual death they were in because of their trespasses and sins, just as it was also a comfort to the Jews of the Old Testament, those who had suffered so much death and desolation at the hands of Assyrians and Babylonians, and who could now enjoy a time of peace when Cyrus II, the Persian, would allow them to return to their land and rebuild. They could dream again of the coming of the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. On the cross and in His resurrection from the dead, Jesus overcame the power of death. He destroyed the sting of the first death and prevented the second (the lake of fire – Rev. 20: 14).

This also refers to the second coming of Christ, when everything will be resolved once and for all. Evil will cease to exist and He will destroy death forever and wipe away the tears from all faces (Rev. 7: 17; Rev. 21: 4). Today, those who suffer for Christ will have a consolation. The hope in this promise must end the sadness and all the weeping that hinders the sowing in His kingdom. In this world, God repeatedly removed the reproach of His people before all men. However, this will be done fully on the 'Great Day.' The mercy of God will finally come, with abundant reward for the seeming delay of His righteousness. Moab stands here as a symbol of all the adversaries of God's people. All will be threshed or trodden down. God will overthrow the pride of enemies with a humiliating judgment after another. This destruction of Moab is typical of the victory of Christ, and of the overthrow of the strongholds of Satan. "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15: 58).

Chapter 26

A song of praise – v. 1-21.

• Isa. 26: 1-6: “On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; he sets up victory like walls and bulwarks [NIV: In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts]. Open the gates, so that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace – in peace because they trust in you [NIV: You will keep in perfect peace those whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you]. Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock [NIV: Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal]. For he has brought low the inhabitants of the height; the lofty city he lays low. He lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust. The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy.”

Here the prophet makes a song of praise and trust in God, for the blessings of righteousness, for the judgments over his enemies, and favor with His people; also shows the punishment of the wicked, repentance and hope.

• Isa. 26: 1: ‘On that day’ seems to mean the time of the gospel, and Jerusalem will be a strong city, for God makes salvation its walls and ramparts (NRSV: he sets up victory like walls and bulwarks). Bulwark means: impregnable fortress, safe place, support. The Messiah is a figure of Salvation for Israel. The word ‘salvation’ (in Hebrew, ישועה, yeshu`âh) appears 146 times in the bible – 103 times in the OT and 43 times in the NT. In the OT it is transliterated as yeshu`âh, just as Jesus (Yeshua – ישוע) is commonly called (yshuw`ah or yeshu`âh – Strong #3444), and means: something saved, deliverance; aid, victory, prosperity: health, help, salvation, save, saving (health), welfare. In the NT the word ‘salvation’ (σωτηρία) is written in Greek as: sôtêrias (σωτηρίας – Lk. 1: 69; 77), sôtêria (σωτηρία – Acts 4: 12), sôtêrion or sôtêrian (σωτηριον – Lk. 3: 6; Acts 28: 28), for example. The word ‘Savior’ is written as Sôtêr (Σωτήρ = a liberator, i.e., God or Christ), and which can correspond to the Hebrew words mattan and mattnay, meaning ‘to give’ or ‘reward.’ The Greek words sôtêrias, sôtêria or sôtêrion mean: ‘ransom, safety, liberation, health, salvation, salved, to salve, defense, and defender.’ The Hebrew word yeshu`âh (salvation) is clearly seen in 3 verses from Isaiah:

• Isa. 26: 1: “In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes **salvation** (yeshu`âh) its walls and ramparts.”

• Isa. 49: 8: “Thus says the Lord: In a time of favor I have answered you, on a day of **salvation** (yeshu`âh) I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages.”

• Isa. 60: 18: “Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls **Salvation** (yeshu`âh), and your gates Praise.” Here, the word ‘Salvation’ is written with capital letters.

Yshuw`ah (or yeshu`âh) is word derived from Yhowshuwa` (Jehoshua; Joshua; Yehôshua, יהושע, Strong #3091, YHWH saved), transliterated into Greek as Iēsoûs (Ἰησοῦς), Jesus (Strong # g2424) – Matt. 1: 21.

Therefore, this verse may be not only a song of gratitude to God for the deliverance of His people from the Babylonian yoke, but also a prophecy about Jesus, placed in Jerusalem as a strong wall against every enemy of the church of Christ, all religiosity and hypocrisy, all idolatry and false teaching, all false prophecy and darkness with the appearance of light. His presence makes the city impregnable as a fortress. The word of Salvation of God was already a shield to protect His people. Solomon’s temple lasted

380 years. The second temple, which was completed in 516 BC (it began in 536 BC, but was stopped until 520 BC) and was built by Zerubbabel and led by the priest Ezra (480 BC) after the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem, lasted for 517 years (536-19 BC with the Herodian reform). Although smaller and less opulent than the first, the second temple lasted longer and, although it was invaded by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes around 168-166 BC (period of Seleucid rule over Israel), under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus the temple was purified and, at the end of 164 BC, its furniture was replaced. The Jews turned it into a fortress so powerful that it resisted the siege of Pompey for three months (63 BC). Pompey invaded the temple built by Zerubbabel, but did not destroy it.

In short: The Lord's unchanging promise and covenant are the walls of the church of God.

- Isa. 26: 2-3: "Open the gates, so that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace – in peace because they trust in you [NIV: You will keep in perfect peace those whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you]."

The prophet says that the gates of the city will remain open to receive a just and faithful nation. May sinners be encouraged to join the Lord. And in verse 3 he says that the Lord will keep in peace everyone whose purpose is steadfast and confident in Him; that is, in perfect peace, inner peace, outer peace, peace with God, peace of conscience, peace at all times, in all events. Those who trust in God will not only find peace in Him, but will receive the strength that will lead them to overcome all obstacles in life.

- Isa. 26: 4-6: "Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock [NIV: Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal]. For he has brought low the inhabitants of the height; the lofty city he lays low. He lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust. The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy."

The prophet again exhorts to trust in the Lord, for He is an everlasting rock and brings low the proud and haughty as He did with the sumptuous city of Babylon, with its buildings lofty like mountains wanting to reach the sky, and with wide walls that made it feel impregnable. He humbled it and destined it to ruin. So even the poor and humble could tread on what was left of it.

- Isa. 26: 7-11: "The way of the righteous is level; O Just One, you make smooth the path of the righteous. In the path of your judgments, O Lord, we wait for you; your name and your renown are the soul's desire. My soul yearns for you in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness [NIV: My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness]. If favor is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness they deal perversely and do not see the majesty of the Lord. O Lord, your hand is lifted up, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed. Let the fire for your adversaries consume them."

The prophet affirms the righteousness of God that makes smooth the paths of the righteous, without stumbling blocks in them. Walking in accordance with the Lord's plan frees us from putting our feet in tortuous ways that can lead us to evil. Walking in the ways of His judgments, the people wait on the Lord so that He will defend them in

the hours of trouble. The desire of the prophet was the desire of the people: to be able to remember the name of their God and to have it always in their memory. He also says that his soul yearned for the Lord in the day and at night, for when His judgments and commandments were seen on earth, the righteous men understood what divine justice meant. But the wicked, even seeing the hand of God lifted up in judgment, did not learn to do good; on the contrary, they continued to do evil. Though they did not pay attention the mighty hand of God, they would be forced to see His care for the Jews, and the deliverance He would bring them. With this, the wicked would be ashamed and consumed by the fire of God's wrath. It is written in Heb. 10: 31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

• Isa. 26: 12-15: "O Lord, you will ordain peace for us, for indeed, all that we have done, you have done for us [NIV: Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us]. O Lord our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but we acknowledge your name alone. The dead do not live; shades do not rise – because you have punished and destroyed them, and wiped out all memory of them [NIV: They are now dead, they live no more; those departed spirits do not rise. You punished them and brought them to ruin; you wiped out all memory of them]. But you have increased the nation, O Lord, you have increased the nation; you are glorified; you have enlarged all the borders of the land [NIV: You have enlarged the nation, O Lord; you have enlarged the nation. You have gained glory for yourself; you have extended all the borders of the land]."

The prophet asks the Lord for peace, and recognizes that all that they had accomplished and conquered until that moment had been made by God; all the works that brought them victory were by the power of God in them; everything was done by the Lord and came from His hands because of His goodness, grace and power. No glory could be attributed to them. The Lord makes everything work for our good, even if we do not understand His ways. So the prophet still had reason to believe that the peace and prosperity that had been promised to them would come into their hands. God's work on His people is precisely the working of His grace in the heart of man, granting them the gifts of His Spirit so that whatever the human being wishes to do, he can do successfully and in conformity with the divine will. They had been slaves of sin, and Satan did with them what he wanted. But by divine grace they were able to be delivered when they remembered their God. The ancient lords had no more power over them, signifying both mighty men (kings of great nations) and the false gods whom they worshiped.

Then the prophet says that the enemies were now dead and would not live again; they were shadows, they would not rise. God has wiped out all memory of them. No one else would remember them.

In KJV (Isa. 26: 14) it is written: "They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish."

'They are **dead**, they shall not live', in Hebrew transliterated is: muwth (תים – dead – Strong #4191), a primitive root meaning: to die (literally or figuratively); to kill, to weep, to be dead, the dead body of man, of someone; lead to death, worthy of death, put to death, to destroy, to cause to die, to die.

'They are **deceased**, they shall not rise' (translated as '**Shades** do not rise', in NRSV; 'those **departed** spirits do not rise', in NIV), in Hebrew transliterated is: rapha' (רפאים – ghost – Strong #7496), in the plural, repha'im, and has the meaning of 'souls of the dead.' rapha' (Strong #7496) means: loose; (figuratively): a ghost (as dead, only in the plural); dead, deceased.

In short, he says that the enemies were now dead (in the body) and could no longer live. Nor would their souls be resurrected. But the nation had been freed and increased, and the Lord was glorified by this; the borders of the land of the Jews had been enlarged. This meant that they went into captivity and multiplied there; but even returning to their land, a remnant had remained in the place where they had been deported and settled there. The presence of Jews in a foreign land was as if Israel were there as a nation, as if they had taken that land and extended its borders, possessing the land of their enemies.

- Isa. 26: 16-18: “O Lord, in distress they sought you, they poured out a prayer when your chastening was on them [NIV: Lord, They came to you in their distress; when you disciplined them, they could barely whisper a prayer]. Like a woman with child, who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near her time, so were we because of you, O Lord; [NIV: As a woman with child and about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain, so were we in your presence, O Lord] we were with child, we writhed, but we gave birth only to wind. We have won no victories on earth, and no one is born to inhabit the world [NIV: We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world].”

In verse 16, he says that the people sought the Lord from the place of their captivity. The prophet reports his repentance on behalf of all of them. After correction (‘you disciplined them’) they suffered, their prayers were like water from a fountain, and quickly heard by the Lord. He compares the pain of the Jews to that of a pregnant woman about to give birth. They had made the desire of their heart, they writhed in pains fighting against the will of the Lord, but all that they produced was nothing, it was like wind; they did not enjoy the consolation they sought, nor did they bring deliverance to their former afflictions under the oppression of other peoples. The wicked and unbelievers were not destroyed by the force of the groans of the Jews.

- Isa. 26: 19-21: “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead [NIV: But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead]. Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past. For the Lord comes out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no longer cover its slain.”

The prophet now addresses his speech to the people of God and gives them hope. The dead among them were different from the dead of the wicked (v. 14). These ones would not live. But the dead of the Lord’s people, like the corpse of the prophet himself, would be resurrected. They have the promise of deliverance from all their fears and dangers. Even those who were already dead, asleep in the dust, would have the hope of resurrection. The dew signified the favor and blessing of God upon them, the answer to their prayers calling for their dead. Just as dead herbs bloom again in the spring rain, God’s favor and grace would revive them, and the dead would rise to everlasting joy.

- Isa. 26: 19: “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead [NIV: But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead].”

KJV says: “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”

‘Thy **dead** men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise’ – The word ‘dead’ here in transliterated Hebrew is: muwth (תים – dead – Strong #4191), a primitive root meaning: to die (literally or figuratively); to kill, to weep, to be dead, the dead body of man, of someone; lead to death, worthy of death, put to death, to destroy, to cause to die, to die, must die.

‘The earth shall cast out the **dead**’ (KJV) or ‘The earth will give birth to those long dead’ (NRSV) or ‘the earth will give birth to her dead’ (NIV) – The word ‘dead’ here in Hebrew transliterated is: rapha’ (רפאים – ghost – Strong #7496), in the plural, repha’im, and has the meaning of ‘souls of the dead.’ rapha’ (Strong #7496) means: loose; (figuratively): a ghost (as dead, only in the plural); dead, deceased.

It is in this verse of Isaiah (Isa. 26: 19) that the Jewish Pharisees and scribes based their belief in the resurrection of the dead, while the Sadducees denied the resurrection, angels and spirits (Acts 23: 8; Lk. 20: 27; Mk. 12: 18; Matt. 22: 23).

Following this comfort and confidence in the resurrection in Christ, which is the resurrection and the life, the prophet continues to tell his people to enter their rooms, close the doors and hide for a moment until the wrath of God passes, that is, to withdraw from the world and to pray to God in secret until His wrath ends over the unfaithful and wicked, whose sins are so many that they provoked His fury. In other words, he exhorts the faithful Jews to be patient in tribulation and to wait on God’s work. The Lord comes out of His place to punish all the enemies of His people. All innocent blood that has been shed on the earth will be avenged.

Chapter 27

God loves His people and saves them from the enemy nations; the care of God with His vineyard – v. 1-6.

• Isa. 27: 1: “On that day the Lord with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the **fleeing serpent** [NIV: the gliding serpent], Leviathan the **twisting serpent** [NVI: coiling serpent], and he will kill the **dragon** that is in the sea [NIV: the monster of the sea] – KJV: In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, **even** leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.”

Pay attention to the words in **bold** and their Hebrew meaning: “On that day the Lord with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish **Leviathan** [Strong #3882 – Livyathan, Liwyâtân], the **fleeing** [Strong #1281 – bariyach or bâriach] **serpent** [Strong #5175 – nachash], Leviathan [Strong #3882 – Livyathan, Liwyâtân] the **twisting** [Strong #6129 – ‘aqallathown: tortuous, crooked] serpent, and he will kill the **dragon** [Strong #8577 – tanniyn or tanniym] that is in the **sea** [Strong #3220 – Yam].”

• KJV: “In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, **even** [*this means that they are two different meanings: the piercing serpent or fleeing serpent and the crooked serpent or twisting serpent*] leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.”

The word **Leviathan** (Livyathan or Liwyâtân) comes from ‘lavah’ and means ‘a wreathed animal, i.e. a serpent (especially the crocodile or some other large sea monster); also as a symbol of Babylon: leviathan, mourning.’ Leviathan (in Hebrew) is a word that has the same common root of the Ugaritic term ‘lotan’, the seven-headed monster whose description is that of ‘a fugitive serpent, the tortuous serpent.’ Ugaritic was the language spoken in the ancient city of Ugarit (Arabic: Ūġārīt), an ancient port city in northern Syria, whose ruins are called Ras Shamra. Leviathan is also a word of Babylonian origin that may correspond ‘any large sea animal, sometimes represented as a crocodile (by the Phoenicians), snake, octopus or a huge fish or whale.’ The Leviathan may be associated with the Tiamat, the Babylonian ‘chaos-monster’ or ‘dragon-chaos’, a primitive ocean goddess in the Sumerian and Babylonian mythologies associated with the ocean, with its male counterpart in Apsu associated with freshwater. Animals, in the bible, are often used to describe kingdoms or empires, and the bible frequently refers to Euphrates as ‘twisting serpent’ [NVI: coiling serpent]. In the case of the serpent, it is an animal that curls up around itself and crawls on the earth in undulating movements, instead of walking straight. In the same way it is a sinuous river, which has many meanders until emptying into the sea. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers are like this: with many meanders all the way through the Mesopotamian plain until empty into the Persian Gulf. So, this kind of animal may refer to the region of Chaldea and Mesopotamia.

Continuing in the verse above, the word ‘**serpent**’ in Hebrew is nachash, meaning ‘a snake (from its hiss): serpent’ – Strong #5172. And the word ‘**dragon**’ in Hebrew is tanniyn or tanniym (as in Ezek. 29: 3), which means: ‘a marine or land monster, that is, a sea serpent or a jackal; dragon, sea monster, snake, whale.’ We can see the word Leviathan (Livyathan or Liwyâtân) in other passages of the bible as:

- Ps. 104: 26, Leviathan (NRSV, NIV, KJV) referring to a marine animal.
- Ps. 74: 14, Leviathan (NRSV, NIV, KJV), referring to Pharaoh and the Exodus.
- Job 3: 8, Leviathan (NRSV, NIV); KJV (‘their mourning’, i.e. Leviathan)

- Job 41: 1, Leviathan (NRSV, NIV, KJV), possibly a ‘crocodile.’ The crocodile of Job 41: 1-34 is what is found on the Nile of Upper Egypt. The crocodile attacks mainly the fish, chasing it with great speed, but also feeds of any animal that it can catch. It was a sacred animal among the Egyptians. Leviathan can also be identified with the Tiamat, the Babylonian ‘chaos-monster’, a primordial goddess of the ocean.

- Ezek 29: 3: here, the word is ‘tanniyn’ or ‘tanniyim’ (‘monster’, ‘dragon’), referring to pharaoh and the Egyptians, where our bible translates as ‘great monster’ (NIV) or ‘the great dragon’ (KJV, NRSV).

As we have seen above, the bible frequently refers to the Euphrates as ‘sinuous serpent’ (‘twisting serpent’ or ‘coiling serpent’), that is, to Assyria or the region of Mesopotamia. When we studied Isa. 14: 29 (prophecy against the Philistines), we saw that ‘the snake’ was the symbol of Tiglath-Pileser III; his grandson Sargon II was the ‘adder’ or ‘viper’ or ‘a cockatrice’; and his great-grandson Sennacherib, the ‘flying fiery serpent’ (NRSV) or ‘venomous serpent’ (NIV) or ‘fiery flying serpent’ (KJV); in Hebrew: ‘sârâph me’ophêph’ [ardent serpent = saraph or sârâph – Strong #8314; ‘flying’ = moughph or me’ophêph, from `uwph, Strong #5774]. The ‘flying fiery serpent’ or ‘venomous serpent’ or ‘fiery flying serpent’ (Isa. 14: 29), or in this present verse (Isa. 27: 1), **the fleeing serpent** (NRSV) or **gliding serpent** (NIV) or **the piercing serpent** (KJV) could refer to Sennacherib, by the speed of his army and by the cunning and strategies of war, as well as his fury and violence that brought destruction wherever he went, as well as a land is destroyed by fire [fiery or ardent serpent = saraph].

In KJV, in this verse of Isaiah (Isa. 27: 1), the bible adds the adverb ‘**even**.’ This means that God would punish not only ‘the fleeing serpent’ (Assyria), but even the twisting serpent [NVI: coiling serpent; KJV: crooked serpent], which was the Babylonian Empire, also situated between the Tigris and the Euphrates.

And ‘the dragon [tanniyn’ or ‘tanniyim’] that is in the sea’ or ‘the monster of the sea’ concerns Egypt, whom the kings of Israel and Judah asked for help several times to get rid of the Babylonian or Assyrian yoke. The word ‘sea’ (in Hebrew, ‘yam’) can mean: a large amount of water; specifically (with the article ‘the’): the Mediterranean Sea; sometimes a large river like the Nile, or an artificial basin.

For us Christians, all of this is the symbol of Satan, which will be destroyed on the Last Day along with his entire kingdom. In the OT he was represented, materially speaking, in the form of great forces or empires, always trying to oppress the people of God. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Tyre, Persia, Greece and Rome were examples of this. As a spiritual interpretation for this verse, we can say that the Lord will always unsheathe His cruel and great and strong sword to deliver His people from the power of darkness (the dragon and the serpent).

- Isa. 27: 2-6: “On that day: A pleasant vineyard, sing about it! I, the Lord, am its keeper; every moment I water it. I guard it night and day so that no one can harm it; I have no wrath. If it gives me thorns and briers, I will march to battle against it. I will burn it up. Or else let it cling to me for protection, let it make peace with me, let it make peace with me. In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit.”

The prophet speaks of God’s care for Israel, which is His vineyard. When He destroys those who have taken them captive and mistreated them, His vineyard may sing again with joy. The Lord will guard it night and day so that no one can harm it. There is no more indignation in Him, but the desire for men to make peace with Him. The day will come when His people will take root, bud and blossom; they will fill the

world with good fruit, like those of a good vine. Their wicked enemies are represented by thorns and briers. To take root means to be firmly established in their possessions. Fruit mean their descendants spreading throughout the world, and taking His word and His true teachings. This can be best understood as the spiritual seed of Jacob, that is, the spiritual Israel of God, in the times of the gospel.



The punishments He brought on them – v. 7-9.

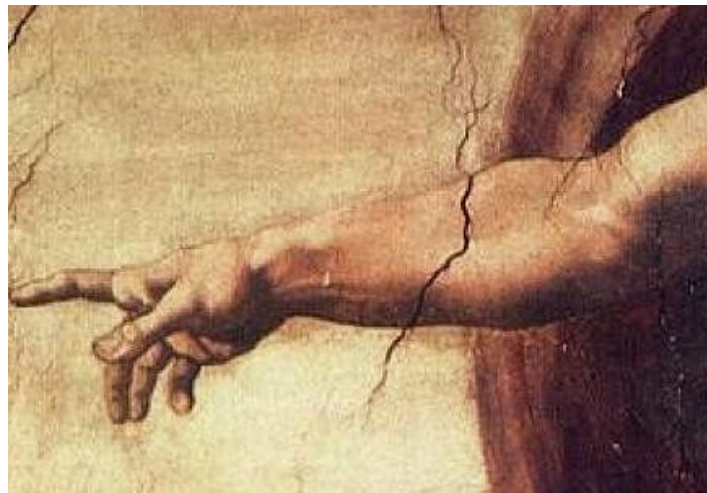
- Isa. 27: 7-9: “Has he struck them down as he struck down those who struck them? Or have they been killed as their killers were killed? By expulsion, by exile you struggled against them; with his fierce blast he removed them in the day of the east wind [NIV: as on a day the east wind blows]. Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be expiated, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altars like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no sacred poles or incense altars will remain standing [NIV: By this, then, will Jacob’s guilt be atoned for, and this will be the fruitage of the removal of this sin; When he makes all the altar stones to be like chalk stones crushed to pieces, no Asherah poles (symbols of goddess Asherah or Astarte or Ashtoreth) or incense altars will be left standing].”

He prophesies here what is to come, but speaks as if it were past. Isaiah says that the Lord did not deal so severely with His people as He dealt with His enemies, whom He utterly destroyed. God dealt them by expulsion and by exile, not forgetting His mercy. The bible talks about the eastern wind. The eastern wind coming out of the desert is very dry and wrinkles and withers the herbs. Job (Job 1: 19) and Jeremiah (Jer. 4: 11-12) describe the violence of the eastern wind. This means that He dealt roughly with His people on the day of His punishment. Jacob’s sin must be purged when he truly repents of all his sins, and especially of his idolatry. The Lord will destroy the idolatrous altars, and this will be a sign that His people have been forgiven. He will make the stones of the altars into pieces as if they were chalk dust. The incense altars and sacred poles would no longer exist. The Asherah poles refer to idolatry to Asherah (Astarte or Ashtoreth, of the Canaanites or Phoenicians). Asherah, consort of Baal, was the goddess of fertility, love and war. It was usually made its image and worshiped as an ‘Asherah Pole’, also having a wedge shape, like the head of a serpent. They burned incense there. He shows that there will be no true repentance or full reconciliation with God until the heart is cleansed from all idolatry and the monuments to the false gods are destroyed.

His severe judgments against them; the abandonment of Jerusalem – v. 10-11.

- Isa. 27: 10-11: “For the fortified city is solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness; the calves graze there, there they lie down, and strip its branches. When its boughs are dry, they are broken; women come and make a fire of them. For this is a people without understanding; therefore he that made them [NIV: their Maker] will not have compassion on them, he that formed them [NIV: their Creator] will show them no favor.”

However, before this glorious promise is fulfilled, a terrible and bleak judgment will come. The city of Jerusalem and the rest of the fortified cities of Judah will be destroyed and abandoned. This is because His people have no understanding of what peace in God is, for they willingly surrendered to sin. Very few men will remain on earth; therefore, the animals like the calves will graze free there, and grass will grow to feed them. The Lord will leave the women and the few remaining inhabitants in a state of humiliation. The description of branches of herbs that break by the drought (‘its boughs are dry, they are broken’) and are burned by women as the sole source of fuel for cooking some food reflect the state of desolation of that land.



God will provide for the return of His people – v. 12-13.

- Isa. 27: 12-13: “On that day the Lord will thresh from the channel of the Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you will be gathered one by one, O people of Israel. And on that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem [NIV: And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem].”

On the day that the Lord determines the end of the captivity of His people, they will be gathered together like one harvests a bundle of grain, all together. This will happen from the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, that is, from all the lands to which they were scattered. The Jewish community settled in Egypt after the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. Some Jews had already fled to Egypt when Judea was invaded and Jerusalem surrounded by Sennacherib long before the Babylonian rule (Jer. 24: 8b). Although the Jewish people were not deported to Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar or the Assyrians, many fled and moved there, as was the case with the Jews at the time of Jeremiah, who forced the prophet to go with them to Tahpanhes (Jer. 42: 10-12; 17; Jer.

43: 6-7), where there was a Jewish colony. It's a bit difficult to say accurately the location of Tahpanhes. It was probably situated northeast of the Nile delta, near the desert of Shur. The Greek Septuagint translates Tahpanhes (or Taphne) as Táfnas (Taphnas – Ταφνας), and is believed to be the same name as that of an important fortified city on the eastern border of Egypt called Daphnae by the Greek writers of the classical period, and now Tell Defenneh. It was located on Lake Manzala on the Tanitic branch of the Nile (one of the ancient seven channels of the Nile's mouth in the Delta), about sixteen miles from Pelusium.

In Ancient times the Nile emptied in the Mediterranean Sea in the region of the Delta through seven streams: Canopic; Bolbitine (current Rosetta); Sebennytic; Phatnitic (current Damietta); Mendesian; Tanitic; Pelusiac. There are now only two main branches, due to flood control, silting and changing relief: the Damietta (corresponding to the Phatnitic) to the east and the Rosetta (corresponding to the Bolbitine) in the western part of the Delta (source: Wikipedia.org).



The trumpets are a symbol of convocation. God will summon them, as if he blew a trumpet, and will bring them back to the land of Israel. 'On that day' refers not only to the time of Cyrus, but also to the time of Christ.

Chapter 28

The drunkenness of Ephraim will bring destruction upon them – v. 1-4.

- Isa. 28: 1: “Ah, the proud garland of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of those bloated with rich food, of those overcome with wine!” (NRSV).

“Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim’s drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley – to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine!” (NIV).

This verse speaks of the city of Samaria, which was built by Omri, the seventh king of Israel after the division of the country into two kingdoms, which happened after Solomon’s death. It was built on a hill in the middle of a fertile plain of the territory of Samaria seven miles northwest of Shechem and dominated the major trade routes that crossed the plain of Esdrelon. The hill was one hundred and nine yards high and it dominated a wide landscape over the plain. It was unassailable, except by the siege. Its Hebrew name, Shōmrôn, can be connected with the word that means ‘lookout post.’ Many fine vineyards were planted there, as well as cereals and other crops; therefore, its inhabitants were exposed to the temptation of drunkenness. Some scholars give two explanations for this state of drunkenness: the inhabitants were drunk with wine or drunk with the idolatry of the place, for Jeroboam I made two calves in the territory of Samaria; he put one in Dan and the other in Bethel. The Samaritans were proud of their golden calves as they boasted on the fecundity and riches of their land. Samaria was the metropolis of the ten tribes and the royal city. The beauty of the city would come to an end when it was destroyed by enemies sent by God. It was dominated by the Syrians, then by the Assyrians, falling into their power in 722 BC. Its inhabitants were deported, while others exiles from other parts of the Assyrian Empire were transferred to there (later it fell in hands of the Babylonians). After the exile, it was re-colonized by the Greeks in 331 BC and later the Romans took it.

- Isa. 28: 2-4: “See, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters; with his hand he will hurl them down to the earth. Trampled under foot will be the proud garland of the drunkards of Ephraim. And the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of those bloated with rich food, will be like a first-ripe fig before the summer; whoever sees it, eats it up as soon as it comes to hand [NIV: as soon as someone sees it and takes it in his hand, he swallows it].”

The bible goes on saying that the Lord is going to send a mighty and strong man, and the destruction he will bring seems like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of overflowing waters, which pulls down the herbs and plants, and branches of trees, and men and animals and blows on the houses, for he will destroy them with violence and nothing can stop him.

The character in question is the king of Assyria, most likely Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), who besieged the city for three years (2 Kin. 17: 5; 2 Kin. 18: 9-11), or his son Sargon II (722-705 BC), who captured it in the year he ascended the throne (722 BC). The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria, settled them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes (2 Kin. 17: 6; 2 Kin. 18: 11; 1 Chr. 5: 26). In the place of the Israelite population were brought (2 Kin. 17: 24; 30-31) the inhabitants of Babylon, of Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim (2 Kin. 17: 24).

The city will lose its beauty and strength, and will be as unprotected as a first-ripe fig before harvest; whoever sees it, soon picks it up and eats it; or, being attractive in the eyes of the invader, Samaria will seem like an irresistible fruit that grows before time; when someone sees it, hurries to eat it, before someone else catches it.

In short, their enemies will eagerly devour it.

A remnant will be honored – v. 5-6.

- Isa. 28: 5-6: “In that day the Lord of hosts will be a garland of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people; and a spirit of justice to the one who sits in judgment, and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.”

This remnant refers to Judah who still remained faithful to God, at least during the reign of Hezekiah. ‘In that day’ may refer on the day that Samaria was destroyed, for the Lord would be a crown of glory and a beautiful diadem for Judah. He would be a spirit of justice to those who judged the people (such as the king, the governor, the judges and magistrates) and strength for those who guarded the city gate from the attacks (the captain and his army).

Their inaccessibility – v. 7-9.

- Isa. 28: 7-9: “These (*the remnant*) also reel with wine (*In Hebrew, yayin – indicates several types of fermented wine; it is the wine usually drank*) and stagger with strong drink (*In Hebrew, shekhār, that is, fermented drink; NIV ‘beer’*); the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine, they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in giving judgment [NIV: Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions]. All tables are covered with filthy vomit; no place is clean. Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from milk, those taken from the breast?”

Judah fell into the same sins of Israel (2 Kin. 17: 19; 2 Chr. 36: 14-16; Am. 2: 11-12), therefore, they were subject to the same punishment by the hand of the Lord. The priest and the prophet also drank. The bible speaks of shekhār, that is, strong drink, the drink of high alcohol content forbidden to the priests in the Old Testament (Lev. 10: 9 – NRSV: wine or strong drink; NIV: wine and other fermented drink) and Nazirites, and often used by the wicked to get drunk, referring, more commonly, to other fermented beverages, perhaps made from palm fruit juice, pomegranate, apple, or date, or fermented barley drink. However, wine of high alcohol content is not excluded.

They were also drunk with pride, with power, with bribe money, and with idolatry, which took them from the center of God’s will. In other words, they were completely corrupt in their private life and religious doctrine. ‘Drunkenness and vomit’ can be understood in two ways: in drunken acts and in the disorderly lives of the rebels.

‘Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from milk, those taken from the breast?’ – this speech can be understood as God asking the prophet if there was anyone willing to be taught, for it seemed easier to teach His precepts to a baby newly weaned. This also seems to be addressed to the prophet by those who are mocking him and do not want to hear the words of the Lord.

This verse may also mean that the only human beings appropriate to learn what was right were the true prophets and priests of God; only they could hold the true knowledge and prevent the situation of the people from getting worse. But where were they? This implies that the minds of the Jews were so impaired by the excess of drink that they were not able to take knowledge of the spiritual things.

Their mockery over God's threat – v. 10-15.

• Isa. 28: 10-15: “For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little [NIV: For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there]. Truly, with stammering lip and with alien tongue he will speak to this people [NIV: Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people], to whom he has said, ‘This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose’; yet they would not hear. Therefore the word of the Lord will be to them, ‘Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little’ [NIV: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little]; in order that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. Because you have said, ‘We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through it will not come to us; for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood (or ‘false gods’) we have taken shelter.’”



• Isa. 28: 10: “For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little [NIV: For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there].”

It means that they should be treated like children, instructed in the rudiments of a language; first, they had a given rule, then another, and so one after another until they had gone through the whole. A little one day, and a little the next day, and so on, because his memories could not be overburdened.

Another explanation for this is: “precept (*Hebrew: tsav or sav*) upon precept, precept upon precept, line (*Hebrew: qav or kav*) upon line, line upon line” in Hebrew is: Sav lasav sav lasav kav lakav kav lakav, which would possibly be meaningless sounds; perhaps a mimicking of the prophet's words (footnote of the NIV). It's as if it's just a boring blah, blah, blah, that no one would like to hear.

• tsav or sav (Strong #6673) = an order: command, precept.

• qav or kav (Strong #6957) = a cord (as connecting), especially for measuring; figuratively, a rule; also a rim, a musical string or accord: line.

Therefore, the Lord said that He would speak to this people by peoples of other languages, by foreigners of strange tongues. He would continue to give them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a

little, so that they might go and fall backward; be injured and snared and captured. That would be the effect of sin. That is, they would continue to hear the ‘boring blah, blah, blah’ but by the mouth of foreign people; and they would not understand, for their prophets would no longer speak or understand the strange words in order to translate them.

The Lord tried to tell them that His doctrine would bring them rest, the refreshment they needed, but they did not listen.

The scoffers, the people’s own leaders, boasted, saying, ‘We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through it will not come to us; for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood (or ‘false gods’) we have taken shelter.’ This means that they deceived themselves, thinking that the gods they were serving would deliver them, because they had already conformed with death; every man was expected to die one way or another. It was better to have a false comfort than to look at the sad truth of God.

The righteousness and judgment of God; scoffers are exhorted to correct their ways – v. 16-22.

• Isa. 28: 16-22: ¹⁶ “Therefore thus says the Lord God, See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: ‘One who trusts will not panic’ [NIV: the one who trusts will never be dismayed – Rom. 9: 33; Psalm 118: 22-23; Matt. 21: 42; Acts 4: 11; 1 Pet. 2: 6]. ¹⁷ And I will make justice the line [NIV: the measuring line], and righteousness the plummet [NIV: the plumb line]; hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter. Then your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through you will be beaten down by it. As often as it passes through, it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass through, by day and by night; and it will be sheer terror to understand the message. For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on it, and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in it. For the Lord will rise up as on Mount Perazim, he will rage as in the valley of Gibeon to do his deed – strange is his deed! – and to work his work – alien is his work! Now therefore do not scoff, or your bonds will be made stronger; for I have heard a decree of destruction from the Lord God of hosts upon the whole land.”

In verse 16, we have a messianic prophecy where the ‘stone’ is Jesus.

They believed that lying and false gods were a great refuge, but God showed them a safer, true and unchanging refuge, which He had placed in Zion. If they despised Him, then He would put a plumb line and a measuring line in their midst, that is, He would straighten up their ways through His judgment. Our cornerstone, our refuge will be always the Lord, in all circumstances, even amid struggle. He who believes in Him does not run away from the fight nor is confused about which is the right path to follow.



The plumb line means God’s judgment

In verse 17 it is written: “And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet; hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter” (NRSV). In NIV is: “I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place.” In KJV is: “Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.”

Usually, plumb line is a symbol of God’s judgment, and ruler (or measuring line), His righteousness. But in this verse (verse 17) it seems that He changes the position of the two words, which means that with accuracy and care (of a measuring line or ruler) He would make His judgment; and with the plumb of His judgment (punishment), that is, through His severe judgment upon that people, He would bring the true justice, which was the reconciliation of His people with Him. They would be cleansed of their sin. The lie and the false refuge would be destroyed and they would have their eyes open to the truth. He would bring a great ordeal and material, emotional and spiritual shortage to them, but with the intention of giving them life. God is the God of the living, not of the dead, as His word says. He makes no covenant with death, for He is the resurrection and the life.

‘For the Lord will rise up as on Mount Perazim, he will rage as in the valley of Gibeon to do his deed – strange is his deed! – and to work his work – alien is his work!’ – Mount Perazim was where David destroyed the Philistines (2 Sam. 5: 20; 1 Chr. 14: 11). Perazim means ‘to break forth’, so David gave the name of Baal-Perazim to that place, i.e., ‘Lord of breakings’ or ‘the lord who breaks out’, because the Lord burst forth against the ranks of the enemies before him, like a bursting flood. In Hebrew, the word ‘Baalperazim’ (Strong #1188 – Ba’al P’ratsiyim) means ‘Possessor of breaches.’ And it was in the valley of Gibeon that Joshua fought a great battle against the five Amorite kings and stopped the sun and the moon until the battle was won. Then he killed the five kings who were hidden in the cave at Makkedah (Josh. 10: 12-13). The Lord would do something that no one had ever seen and it might even seem strange, but it was better not to mock His words, for that would only make the yoke weightier for them. No one in Israel would be free from His judgment.

God is great in wisdom – v. 23-29

- Isa. 28: 23-29: “Listen, and hear my voice; Pay attention, and hear my speech. Do those who plow for sowing plow continually? Do they continually open and harrow their ground? When they have leveled its surface, do they not scatter dill [NIV: caraway], sow cummin, and plant wheat in rows and barley in its proper place, and spelt as the border? For they are well instructed; their God teaches them. Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cart wheel rolled over cummin; but dill is beaten out with a stick, and cummin with a rod. Grain is crushed for bread, but one does not thresh it forever; one drives the cart wheel and horses over it, but does not pulverize it [NIV: Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it]. This also comes from the Lord of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom.”

The farmer does not spend all his time plowing the land. He does other work besides plowing. He sows when the furrows are already open, he levels the earth, spread the seeds in certain places, and then, at harvest time, he proceeds differently with each seed, for one is shaken; another is ground with stone; another is threshed otherwise. And he does this because the Lord teaches him how to do everything. And so God has His times and seasons for various works, and His providence is different for many

people. Therefore, those scoffers Israelites were guilty of their great folly, flattering themselves because of God's long patience toward them. He would bring the time to test them and distress them and thus make them ready for Him. The seed is beaten and tested, but not broken as are the wicked. God is wonderful in counsel and great in wisdom.

Chapter 29

The temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed – v. 1-4.

- Isa. 29: 1-4: “Ah, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped! Add year to year; let the festivals run their round [KJV: Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices – Note: ‘Woe to Ariel’ or, ‘O Ariel’, that is, the lion of God]. Yet I will distress Ariel [NIV: I will besiege Ariel], and there shall be moaning and lamentation, and Jerusalem shall be to me like an Ariel [NIV: ‘she will be to me like an altar hearth’; note: the Hebrew word for ‘altar hearth’ sounds like the Hebrew for ‘Ariel’]. And like David I will encamp against you; I will besiege you with towers and raise siege works against you. Then deep from the earth you shall speak, from low in the dust your words shall come; your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and your speech shall whisper out of the dust.”

Here the prophet mourns over Jerusalem, for destruction will also come upon it. He calls it Ariel, that is, God’s hearth [NIV: an ‘altar hearth’], for it was there that the sacrifices to the Lord were done in a holy way in the temple as a genuine devotion to Him, beginning with David, who brought the ark and, consequently, God’s presence into the city and honored Him with his obedience and faith. Let the annual feasts continue until the time decreed by the Lord for them to cease. Then God says that the day will come when He will put it in distress and it will be a true God’s hearth [NIV: an ‘altar hearth’] because it will be burned, and those who die in it will be a living sacrifice for Him.

Although some scholars think of Assyria as an agent of God’s wrath, none of its kings have destroyed Jerusalem. On the contrary, here we can clearly see the siege and invasion of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar who, in the third campaign against it in the time of Zedekiah, put its walls down, invaded the temple and burned it; He also burned the city and took its prisoners with him to Riblah (in Syria, south of Hamath). Its inhabitants were barely able to cry out to God for help after the two years siege (from the 9th to the 11th year of the reign of Zedekiah – 2 Kin. 25: 1-2). Unfortunately, much innocent blood had already been shed in that city because of non-God-fearing kings. That’s why Jesus made His lament over her: “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, desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matt. 23: 37-39). As it was in the Old Testament, the situation was repeated in the NT when Titus did the same thing and when Jerusalem will only see the Messiah again when it cries out for Him in the hour of distress. It was also already foretold that the feasts of the Lord and the sacrifices would cease. This was fulfilled with the coming of Jesus, who gave Himself as the only and definitive sacrifice to make the new covenant with God; more specifically, in 70 AD, with the destruction of the temple by Titus, for the traditional Jews who did not accept the sacrifice of Jesus and continued to practice the rituals even after His resurrection.

The Lord continues to speak of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple; its enemies are insatiable – v. 5-8.

- Isa. 29: 5-8: “But the multitude of your foes shall be like small dust, and the multitude of tyrants like flying chaff. And in an instant, suddenly, you will be visited by the Lord of hosts with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and

tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire. And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, all that fight against her and her stronghold, and who distress her, shall be like a dream, a vision of the night [NIV: Then the hordes of all the nations that fight against Ariel, that attack her and her fortress and besiege her, will be as it is with a dream, with a vision in the night]. Just as when a hungry person dreams of eating and wakes up still hungry, or a thirsty person dreams of drinking and wakes up faint, still thirsty, so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion.”

The Lord continues to speak of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and of how their enemies are insatiable. The Chaldean soldiers will come in a great multitude like fine dust, and suddenly, as in a dream at night, and as fast as straw that flies in the wind. Terrible metaphors express the judgments of God.

Spiritual Blindness – v. 9-10.

- Isa. 29: 9-10: “Stupefy yourselves and be in a stupor, blind yourselves and be blind! Be drunk, but not from wine; stagger, but not from strong drink! For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep; he has closed your eyes, you prophets, and covered your heads, you seers.”

Here the Lord describes the lack of sensibility and perception of that people to spiritual things, like drunkards; even because by the hardness of their heart God blinded their own prophets and seers that they might not understand His plans.

One cannot understand the word – v. 11-12.

- Isa. 29: 11-12: “The vision of all this has become for you like the words of a sealed document. If it is given to those who can read, with the command, ‘Read this,’ they say, ‘We cannot, for it is sealed.’ And if it is given to those who cannot read, saying, ‘Read this,’ they say, ‘We cannot read.’”

This is a sad description of the lack of revelation and understanding of the word of God, even by those who understood it before. Much more desperate still was for those who never understood it and now had no one to help them understand and give them the answer they needed. Only God could open their hearts to understand. The lack of understanding was so great that the words written on that scroll of the Law seemed to be inside a sealed scroll and unable to unfold and be opened and read publicly.

The deep hypocrisy – v. 13-16.

- Isa. 29: 13-16: “The Lord said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote [NIV: Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men]; so I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden [NIV: Therefore once more I will astound you these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish]. Ha! You who hide a plan too deep for the Lord, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, ‘Who sees us? Who knows us?’ You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay? Shall the thing made say of its maker, ‘He did not make me’; or the thing formed say of the one who formed it, ‘He has no understanding?’”

The worship of this people was vain before the Lord because it had become a monotonous ritual, for the heart no longer took part in the worship. They had lost the fear of God and the will to obey Him. They worshiped Him according to the traditions created by men, by false prophets, by priests corrupted by sin, but not according to what

they had learned through their personal experience with God. It lacked the spirit of the letter because there was not love anymore. What the people did outwardly, especially the kings and princes, were to show their deeds to one another, but with hypocrisy. What they did in secret was seen by God, even though they pretended or thought that no one was watching them. They were the clay in the hands of the potter; however, they did not allow themselves to be molded by their Maker. Because of their haughtiness and pride, the Lord had blinded them to spiritual things; and would continue to do great things, indeed astonishing, so that they knew that He was still in control. The intelligence and wisdom of their wise men, counselors, judges, prophets and seers were nothing, they had no use. They were only fruit of the flesh itself, not of the divine gifts.

These scoffers and oppressors will be eliminated, the rest will be converted. There will be redemption – v. 17-24.

- Isa. 29: 17-24: “Shall not Lebanon in a very little while become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be regarded as a forest? On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. For the tyrant shall be no more, and the scoffer shall cease to be; all those alert to do evil shall be cut off—those who cause a person to lose a lawsuit, who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate, and without grounds deny justice to the one in the right [NIV: those who with a word make a man out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in the court and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice]. Therefore thus says the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: No longer shall Jacob be ashamed, no longer shall his face grow pale. For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. And those who err in spirit [NIV: Those who are wayward in spirit] will come to understanding, and those who grumble will accept instruction.”

The scoffers and oppressors who have gone in error will be cut off, they will die in captivity; and this bad tendency in the hearts of the people will disappear when their descendants, already purified, return from exile and receive from God the ability to see again, to understand spiritual things in order to discern the right path; the ability to listen to His Word willingly. What was barren and devastated, as Lebanon was after the destruction of the foreign invaders, would again be like a fertile field and prepared for planting. The hearts of that people would no longer refuse the prophetic exhortations, and they would truly turn to their God. They would cease to be ashamed of their reprehensible behavior before the other nations to which they were scattered in the day of the Lord's wrath. The lowly in spirit would have joy in the Lord, for they would be able to perceive His righteousness. Those who did not understand His word would understand now and those who had previously grumble would receive the true instruction and glorify God. Much more than what would happen after the return of the captivity, this prophecy would be fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah because in Jesus God manifested Himself to His people. He is the light of the world and He Himself said that He came to judgment, that those who did not see could see, and those who saw, would become blind (Jn. 9: 39). Jesus meant that He came for those who are aware of their sin and repent of it; then, under His blood, forgiven and justified, they no longer suffer charges. However, for those who are blinded by pride, arrogance and rebellion, the Lord makes His light shine and their sins become evident before their eyes. We can also give another interpretation: to those who are blind to the truth, but seek it with a pure heart, the Lord opens their eyes so that they can see it; those who

know everything, see everything and can do everything, trying arrogantly to know His mysteries, the Lord blinds them, because the bible itself says that the Father reveals His secrets to the poor in spirit and covers them from the wise and knowledgeable. It also says: "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven'... For this people's heart has grown dull" (Mk. 4: 11-12; Matt. 13: 15a).

There is another promise in this text of Isaiah that was fulfilled through Jesus: "For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel" (Isa. 29: 23). How many miracles did Jesus perform in the midst of His people so they could see what the Father was capable of doing (Jn. 20: 30; Jn. 21: 25)! Jesus was the greatest proof of God's existence and good intentions toward men. That is why He replied to Philip at the Last Supper: "Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves'" (Jn. 14: 9-11).

Chapter 30

The prophet threatens the people for their trust in Egypt – v. 1-7.

• Isa. 30: 1-7: “Oh, rebellious children, says the Lord, who carry out a plan, but not mine; who make an alliance, but against my will, adding sin to sin [NIV: Woe to the obstinate children, declares the Lord, to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin]; who set out to go down to Egypt without asking for my counsel, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh, and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt. Therefore the protection of Pharaoh shall become your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt your humiliation. For though his officials are at Zoan and his envoys reach Hanes, everyone comes to shame through a people that cannot profit them, that brings neither help nor profit, but shame and disgrace. An oracle concerning the animals of the Negeb. Through a land of trouble and distress, of lioness and roaring lion, of viper and flying serpent, they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to a people that cannot profit them [NIV: An oracle concerning the animals of the Negev: Through a land of hardship and distress, of lions and lionesses, of adders and darting snakes, the envoys carry their riches on donkey’s backs, their treasures on the humps of camels, to that unprofitable nation]. For Egypt’s help is worthless and empty, therefore I have called her, ‘Rahab who sits still’ [NIV: to Egypt, whose help is utterly useless. Therefore I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing].”

Probably this prophecy was made during the reign of Hezekiah, referring to the invasion of Judah in 701 BC by Sennacherib, when many Jews sought refuge in Egypt. Hezekiah himself seemed to be very prone to trust in the people of Egypt, although the bible did not make very clear any situation such as that of sending emissaries to Egypt for the purpose of an alliance. Or, then, the prophecy is referring to a later time, for example, to Zedekiah’s request to Egypt to deliver him from the king of Babylon. Since Uzziah, going through Jotham and Ahaz, the ancestors of Hezekiah, no help was sought from Egypt. Here, God calls the Jews rebellious [NIV: obstinate] because they went to seek help in Egypt and make political alliances without His approval. This would only be added as one more sin upon the ones they already had. And in the end, Egypt would only bring shame and confusion to them. The princes of Judah were already in Zoan, which is the same Tanis of the Greeks, the modern town of San El-Hagar, near the south shore of Lake Manzala in the north-east of the Egyptian delta, and which was the capital of Egypt from the 21st to the 24th Dynasty (1070-725 BC). In Zoan were the chief advisers and princes of Pharaoh (Isa. 19: 11; 13; Isa. 30: 4), as well as among the great Egyptian cities in the writings of Ezekiel (Ezek. 30: 14: Zoan, Thebes and Pathros – as the Upper Egypt and Cush or Ethiopia were known) when speaking about judgment. In the 24th Dynasty, the pharaoh was Tefnakhte or Tefnakht (732-725 BC), who reigned in Sais. Thus, Egypt also fell into Assyrian power in 716 BC, the year that Hezekiah rose to power in Judah.

Continuing the biblical text: ‘For though his officials are at Zoan and his envoys reach Hanes.’ As for Hanes there is some controversy about its real location. The Jews, according to the writings of the Targum, identify Hanes with Tahpanhes (Jer. 2: 16; Jer. 43: 7-9), where Pharaoh had a palace, and that was a reason to send ambassadors there. Tahpanhes was also on the lower Nile, northeast of the delta, near the desert of Shur. The Greek Septuagint translates Tahpanhes (or Taphne) as Táφ·nas (Taphnas – Ταφνας), and is believed to be the same name as that of an important fortified city on the eastern border of Egypt called Daphnae Pelusiae by the Greek writers of the Classical Period,

and now Tell Defenneh. Classical Greece was a period of around 200 years (5th and 4th centuries BC) in Greek culture. Another explanation (from the Archaeologist Kitchen) finds an even closer parallel in Isa. 30: 4: Hanes may be merely a Hebrew description of the Egyptian name h(wt)-nsw, 'king's mansion', as the name of the palace of Pharaoh in Zoan (Tanis). Any of these interpretations are plausible, but none of them have been proven. What can be deduced with certainty is that Hanes was an eminent city of Egypt.

In the following verses, the bible utters a sentence against 'the animals of the Negeb' (or Negev). The use of the word 'animals' is clearly an allusion to Egypt itself, for the animals in the bible were often used to refer to empires. 'Negeb or Negev', in the Hebrew original, is the same term used in Isa. 21: 1 ('As whirlwinds in the Negeb', or 'whirlwinds sweeping through the southland'). The southland refers to the southern part of Judea, where there were many and great deserts, like the Negeb (Negev), for example. The 'south' [in Hebrew: 'Negeb' or 'Negev'— Strong #5045] means: Negeb or southern district of Judah, occasionally, Egypt (as south of Palestine): south side, country to the south or towards South. Negeb (or Negev, meaning 'dry') is a desert just south of Israel, near the Sinai Peninsula and the Mediterranean Sea, and only experiences life when rains fill the beds of its dry streams. Rivers are filled with water and plants are watered and animals quench their thirst.

Then the bible says, 'Through a land of hardship and distress, of lions and lionesses, of adders and darting snakes, the envoys carry their riches on donkey's backs, their treasures on the humps of camels, to that unprofitable nation]'

As for the expression 'a land of hardship and distress', we may say that it may be the very meaning of the name Egypt in Hebrew: 'Mizraim' (Mitsrayim), namely, 'land of slavery, dilemma, conflict, confusion, affliction, trouble, disturbance.' As it had been a land of anguish and affliction to the ancestors of the Jews, it would be again to those who sought shelter in it. Then the prophet describes the animals most frequently found in Egypt: the lioness, the lion, the viper (or adder) and the darting snakes (or flying serpent), that is, the poisonous serpent; the donkey and the camel, as well as the crocodile, as we see in other passages of the prophets, and of cats and certain birds. Many of them were worshiped by the Egyptians. In the time of Solomon, Israel imported horses from Egypt. "Carry their riches on donkey's backs, their treasures on the humps of camels, to that unprofitable nation" can express how much wealth of the land of Israel had already been carried on these animals as a tribute to Egypt or as gifts to get its friendship and political help. During the invasion of Sennacherib king of Assyria many of Judea and Jerusalem fled to Egypt with all that they had, with their riches on young donkeys and camels, seeking shelter; for a people also powerless, who would not help them, for they themselves were subjects of Assyria at that time.

Verse 7 also says: "For Egypt's help is worthless and empty, therefore I have called her, 'Rahab who sits still' [NIV: to Egypt, whose help is utterly useless. Therefore I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing]." 'Rahab who sits still' means that even if the Egyptians wanted to do something, they could not do it. Their strength was just to remain still, just as their ambassadors would gain more by staying still and quiet in their land. Rahab (in Hebrew rāhābh, 'insolence, haughtiness, large, ferocity'; Strong #7294: 'boaster') is an epithet of Egypt (Ps. 87: 4; Isa. 51: 9). Some scholars translate as 'strength.'

For us, there is always the teaching of not placing our trust in the world and its resources to supply us in times of need. It is the Lord who can provide us in a proper way in what we need. When we are at war for some goal that we are trying to win, and we know that we have to fight spiritual barriers first, how to seek help in the world? How can carnal people help us? What does the world understand about spiritual war? David refused the offer of help from Ornan or Araunah when he erected the altar to the

Lord in that place for the forgiveness received because of the census he had conducted in a wrong way (1 Chr. 21: 23-25; 2 Sam. 24: 22-24); he paid for the piece of land, for it was in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite that the temple was later built (2 Chron. 3: 1). Jesus sent His twelve disciples and ordered them to take nothing with them, except a staff, for they would not need to worry about the material resources to carry out their mission; God would care for them (Mk. 6: 7-13; Matt. 10: 5-15; Lk. 9: 1-6). Jeremiah exhorted the people not to go to Egypt when Nebuchadnezzar left Jerusalem, after invading it (Jer. 42: 9-12; 19), but it was no use. They rebelled and went there, taking the prophet along with them.

The contempt for the word of God – v. 8-11.

- Isa. 30: 8-11: “Go now, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, so that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever. For they are a rebellious people, faithless children, children who will not hear the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, ‘Do not see’; and to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel’ [NIV: Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel].”

God spoke to His prophet to write this on a tablet, in a book or scroll, as a testimony to the people’s rebellion and contempt for prophetic warnings. The tablet was possibly hung in a public place where everyone could read. And the roll would be saved for future generations. This is more or less what God said to Ezekiel: “They shall know that there has been a prophet among them” (Ezek. 2: 5; Ezek. 33: 33). What a sad thing! Jeremiah was also threatened with death for prophesying the truth (Jer. 11: 21). In all ages, humankind has always wanted to hear good and pleasant things from the mouths of its prophets, but refused to listen to God’s aching truth for its correction. One day all this will be charged, because the prophet’s mission as the watchman of the Lord was fulfilled (Ezek. 2: 7; Ezek. 3: 4; 17; 27; Ezek. 33: 33).

They will be destroyed because of their disobedience and contempt for God – v. 12-17.

- Isa. 30: 12-17: “Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel: Because you reject this word, and put your trust in oppression and deceit, and rely on them; therefore this iniquity shall become for you like a break in a high wall, bulging out, and about to collapse, whose crash comes suddenly, in an instant; its breaking is like that of a potter’s vessel that is smashed so ruthlessly that among its fragments not a sherd is found for taking fire from the hearth, or dipping water out of the cistern. For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning [NIV: repentance] and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. But you refused (cf. Isa. 28: 12) and said, ‘No! We will flee upon horses’—therefore you shall flee! and, ‘We will ride upon swift steeds’—therefore your pursuers shall be swift! A thousand shall flee at the threat of one, at the threat of five you shall flee, until you are left like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill [NIV: like a banner on a hill].”

The Egyptians always had an oppressive nature and were based on their perversity; and the Jews were leaning precisely to this side. The Lord rebuked them for this, but told them what would happen if they put their desire into practice. He had already spoken before by the same prophet that the victory of His people consisted in resting and trusting in Him, but they did not accept it (Isa. 28: 12). They wanted to act, and that would bring a worse punishment.

‘Its breaking is like that of a potter’s vessel that is smashed so ruthlessly that among its fragments not a sherd is found for taking fire from the hearth, or dipping water out of the cistern’ – It means that the destruction of the wicked would be irreversible.

They said, ‘We will flee upon horses’, that is, nothing bad will reach us. But the Lord says that the enemy is even faster than they and that he would overtake them and would defeat them. The remnants are compared to not very useful trees for large projects, but are only used for making a flagstaff, for they are probably thinner and more fragile than the others. They would be placed in a position of visible shame, as if the flagstaff were on the top of a mountain and like a banner on a hill. Everyone would be able to see.

God’s mercies – v. 18-26.

• Isa. 30: 18-26: “Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. Truly, O people in Zion, inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you. Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher [NIV: your teachers will be hidden no more. With your eyes you will see them]. And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’. Then you will defile your silver-covered idols and your gold-plated images. You will scatter them like filthy rags; you will say to them, ‘Away with you!’ He will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground, and grain, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous [NIV: plentiful]. On that day your cattle will graze in broad pastures; and the oxen and donkeys that till the ground will eat silage, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork [NIV: The oxen and donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel]. On every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water—on a day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. Moreover the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, like the light of seven days, on the day when the Lord binds up the injuries of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.”

God told this people that, in spite of their sins, He would wait for their repentance. He is a God of justice and those who wait on Him are happy. They would repent and He would have compassion on them. But they would have to throw away the idols, the false gods, and have a sincere repentance; so He would turn to them with mercy and blessings. Even their animals would benefit from them, for even their food would be pure and abundant. Their idols would be despised at all, even if they were made of silver and gold, for they had no life. Their punishment was being made with His moderation, though it seemed to them as a bread of adversity and a water of affliction. Bread has broad meaning here, among them, the livelihood resulting from a job. In sin and without the blessing of God even bread and water seemed to be bitter. They would return to Jerusalem after a while and would dwell safely; and no one would drive them out again. This was fulfilled for those who returned from Babylon and much more in the times of the Gospel, when the word of Jesus ran the world, herding the scattered Jews. He was the safe abode where they could take shelter forever.



“And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’” This means sensitivity to the voice of the Spirit of God, who teaches us all things and reminds us of everything Jesus said (Jn. 14: 26). Until it happened, that is, until the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they would hear His voice, not only by a good feeling placed in their hearts by God Himself, but also by true prophets and priests like Ezra, for example, who would teach them His word again. These ones would be like shepherds leading their flocks and putting each sheep on the correct track. They would be their teachers, whom they would see and recognize readily. Much more the Messiah, the true teacher and guide (Matt. 23: 8-10), since in the NRSV the word is written in the singular: ‘your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.’ God showed Himself to His people through Jesus.

“On every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water—on a day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall” – it means the day that God destroys the enemies of His people. In reference to the OT, it concerned the immediate physical enemies: Assyria and Babylon, among others. Concerning the NT, it refers to the end times, when the Lord will destroy all Ruler of the darkness. The following phrase can be a metaphor of joy for the liberation conquered, a joy difficult to express in the correct and complete way, “Moreover the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, like the light of seven days, on the day when the Lord binds up the injuries of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.” Seven is the perfect number of God, something complete; something in which one can rest by being totally fulfilled. The brightness of the sun and the moon reflect the brightness of the glory of the Lord, and it will be a greater brilliance than the natural stars can emanate, or much greater than we can imagine.

The wrath of God and the joy of the peoples in the destruction of Assyria – v. 27-33.

• Isa. 30: 27-33: “See, the name of the Lord comes from far away, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue is like a devouring fire; his breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck – to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction, and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads them astray [NIV: ‘He places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray’]. You shall have a song as in the night when a holy festival is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel. And the Lord will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and tempest (NIV: thunderstorm) and hailstones. The Assyrian will be terror-stricken at the voice of the Lord, when he strikes with his rod [NIV: The voice of the Lord will shatter Assyria; with his scepter he will strike them down]. And every stroke of the staff of punishment that the Lord lays upon him will be to the sound of timbrels and lyres; battling with brandished arm he will fight with him [NIV: Every stroke the Lord lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm]. For his burning place [NIV: Topheth] has long been prepared; truly it is made ready for the king, its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of sulfur, kindles it.”

The Lord gives a clear warning about the destruction of Assyria, and His presence will manifest itself in an astonishing way. He is angry with the Assyrians and manifests this anger in metaphors about the disasters of nature and the human reactions that anyone would have if provoked or if was very angry (fast breathing, for example, as a sign of anger).

‘Place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads them astray’ [NIV: ‘He places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray’] may mean that He would bring disagreement among the Assyrian Empire itself, so that they would make war against each other and destroy themselves by wrong advices (‘a bridle that leads them astray’). Just as the bridle is used to control animals, the parallel here would be that God was in control of the peoples, and could direct them to the right path or to perdition. In this verse, the focus seems to be greater than just the Assyrian army of Sennacherib, who affronted Judah. It really seems to extend to the entire Assyrian Empire, especially after Sennacherib, until the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC.

When the bible says, ‘and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads them astray’, the word ‘peoples’ in Hebrew, used in this verse, is *gowy* (Strong #1471), abbreviated, *goy* (Gentiles, גויים; or Gentile, גוי, respectively), which means a foreign nation; therefore, a Gentile nation; figuratively: a troop of animals or a flight of locusts. The word refers to Gentiles, heathen, nations, countries, people, and generally used by the Jewish community referring to non-Israelites. Because the word is written in the plural (‘peoples’, ‘gowy’), this leads us to think that it refers not only to the army of Sennacherib, but also to the whole Assyrian Empire and to the Gentile nations involved with them.

Thus they would cease to be concerned with the Jews, and this was also a way for God to execute His judgment against their sins. But for the Lord’s people this day of destruction of the enemies would be a day of joy and singing as if it were a feast day in the temple in Zion. The Lord will stretch out His arm in vengeance, and His mighty voice will be heard as a strong thunder and a great storm and hail (vs. 30-31). His voice, or His thunder, is a metaphor for some terrible judgment. At the sound of His voice the earth and the sky tremble. When Assyria hears certain rumors (2 Kin. 19: 7, Isa. 37: 7, for example: that the God of Israel was fighting for His people, or the rise of the

Babylonians) it will be frightened, for it will know that its destruction is near. The rod or scepter of God concerns the use of His authority to punish, discipline, and rule as the only king. The destruction of the enemy will be celebrated by the people of God with joy, music and songs of praise.

Verse 32 ('Every stroke the Lord lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm') makes us think not only of the transient defeat of Sennacherib's army, but also in the fall of Assyria over the years ('every stroke of the staff of punishment') through the revolts that their kings had to stifle in other nations and even within the empire itself. After the campaign against Hezekiah in 701 BC, Sennacherib spent the remaining days of his reign in military campaigns against rebels in his kingdom, such as controlling the action of Merodach-Baladan (Marduk-apla-iddina II – Isa. 39: 1; 2 Kin. 20: 12), who, after taking the throne of Babylon, fought to seize the power of the Assyrian throne in the time of Sargon II (father of Sennacherib), and of Sennacherib himself, fighting against him until 689 BC. His son, Esarhaddon, suffered with the attempts at Egyptian independence by Tirhakah; and the son of Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal, in spite of the victory against Thebes (661 BC), also suffered with the revolt on the part of his brother that reigned in Babylon. His son, reigning in an already decaying empire, faced attacks from the Medes and Babylonians under Nabopolassar (father of Nebuchadnezzar) until Nineveh fell a few years later (612 BC).

- Isa. 30: 33 says that just as the Lord already has the lake of fire and sulfur prepared for Satan and his angels, He also had a burning fire for the king of Assyria.



Valley of Hinnom

'For his burning place has long been prepared; truly it is made ready for the king' – refers to Topheth, a place in the valley of Hinnom. The Valley of Hinnom was south of Jerusalem where people burned the corpses of criminals. Josiah, for example, burned the bones of the idolatrous priests of the time of Jeroboam I (2 Kin. 23: 15-20; 1 Kin. 12: 28-32; 1 Kin. 13: 2), because in the same valley were also offered human sacrifices to Molech, the god of the Ammonites (2 Kin. 17: 17; 31 – Adrammelech and Anammelech – Assyrian gods similar to Molech; 2 Kin. 23: 10; 2 Chr. 28: 2-3; 2 Chr. 33: 6-7; Jer. 19: 1-6). The meaning of 'Hinnom' is unknown; some scholars suggest 'Ben Hinnom', son of Hinnom [because of the Greek term for the Valley: Geenna – ge

(valley of) hinnōm (Hinnom)], hinting that it is a proper name (2 Chr. 28: 3; 2 Kin. 23: 10 – ‘the valley of Ben-hinnom’, that is, the ‘Valley of the sons of Hinnom’). The word ‘Topheth’ can be seen in 2 Kin. 23: 10; Jer. 7: 30-32; Jer. 19: 6; 12; Jer. 32: 34-35. In Jer. 7: 32; Jer. 19: 6 the name is altered by the prophet to ‘valley of slaughter.’ It’s also called ‘Valley of Topheth or Tophet (‘place of fire, burning place’ (Isa. 30: 33) or ‘roasting place’) by the Canaanites (Jer. 7: 31-32; Jer. 19: 12). It also has the meaning of ‘furnace’, ‘bonfire’, ‘burning place’ (Isa. 30: 33), ‘place of flame or annoyance.’

We know that Sennacherib was slain by his own children while he worshiped his god Nisroch (2 Kin. 19: 7; 37; 2 Chr. 32: 21; Isa. 37: 7; 38). But as the bible describes (‘its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of sulfur, kindles it’) is very likely to be referring to the spiritual death of the Assyrian king and his princes. That’s what the bible calls the second death (Rev. 14: 10; Rev. 19: 20; Rev. 20: 10; Rev. 21: 8), the lake of fire and brimstone [NIV: Burning sulfur].

As we saw previously, the destruction of the Assyrians is not limited to the destruction of Sennacherib’s army alone, but also to the destruction of Nineveh and his empire by the Babylonians.

Chapter 31

Woe to those who rely on Egypt – v. 1-3.

- Isa. 31: 1-3: “Alas for those who go down to Egypt for help and who rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord! Yet he too is wise and brings disaster; he does not call back his words, but will rise against the house of the evildoers, and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. The Egyptians are human, and not God; their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and the one helped will fall, and they will all perish together.”

This warning from God gives continuity to that of chapter 30: 1-17, where the Lord speaks to His people not to seek help in Egypt. In these verses above He laments for those who put their trust in horses, in the chariots of war that were many in Egypt, and in the strength of their horsemen. In the book of Deut. 17: 14-28, we can perceive the divine orders as to the choice of a king. This one was to be chosen by God, he should not multiply horses for himself (to cause the people to err and return to Egypt, for the Lord said they would never go back that way), nor women, nor silver nor gold. The word ‘horses’ means that a king should not stand on human strength. At the time, Israel had no horses, only mules, and Egypt was their largest exporter of horses. God did not want Israel to make an alliance again with Egypt, from which He had rescued them, but He wanted His people to trust Him alone, not in their own strength. Horse is symbol of war, haste, attitudes toward our neighbor. The kings of Israel and Judah after David did not follow in part these guidelines, for they relied on political coalitions with foreign nations to help them against the attacks of invaders; they did not keep their allegiance to God as they should, and thereby made the people to sin even more and fall into idolatry (returning to Egypt). They did not trust Him to solve their particular problems, they let their own interests for power overtook His choice and His design, which often deserved prophetic reprimand. They let themselves be carried away by the many influences around them (‘women’, symbol of influence), rather than just looking to the Lord and following only His guidelines. And they also placed wealth above the strategies and direction of God to carry their reign forward.

But the Lord also says that wisdom in all things is in Him, and that He Himself will rise up against the sinners, rebellious and evildoers, who help the wicked. He goes on saying that the Egyptians are men and not God. Their men and horses were flesh, not spirit. God is spirit, not flesh, so He had a greater force against the mighty enemies of Israel, for they too were manipulated by the spiritual forces of darkness; and only the Lord knew the right way to deal with them. Believing in the strength of men and empires, both Israel and these ones would be destroyed by God.

God will fight for Jerusalem – v. 4-5.

- Isa. 31: 4-5: “For thus the Lord said to me, ‘As a lion or a young lion growls over its prey [NIV: As a lion growls, a great lion over his prey], and—when a band of shepherds is called out against it—is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise, so the Lord of hosts will come down to fight upon Mount Zion and upon its hill. Like birds hovering overhead, so the Lord of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it, he will spare [NIV: he will ‘pass over’ it] and rescue it.’”

‘As a lion or a young lion’ – The Hebrew word for ‘lion’ is ‘ariy (Strong #738) or, prolonged, earyeh, which means: a lion (in the sense of violence), a lion or young lion

(animal), or pierce. The Hebrew word for ‘young lion’ is *kphiyr* (Strong #3715), which means a village (as if covered in by walls); also a young lion, perhaps covered with a mane.

Thus, just as the lion and the young lion fight for the prey that is already between their teeth, regardless of the number of shepherds around them and without being frightened by their cries, the Lord would defend Jerusalem alone because in Him was the strength of a lion. He would ‘come down’ to fight upon Mount Zion and upon its hill, that is, from His abode in heaven He would descend upon His city, as in the past He had come down with all His glory on Mount Sinai to reveal Himself to His people. This reminds us of how the Lord sent His angel from heaven over the Assyrian army and killed them all. Sennacherib was frightened and fled. Jerusalem was saved by the Lord of hosts from an invasion and desolation. And just as the birds give protection to their brood with their wings, the Lord would shelter Jerusalem, and protect it under His wings, His robe. He would protect it and save it; more than this, He would spare it of many afflictions and would free it of destruction. ‘He will spare it’, [in Hebrew: he will ‘pass over’ it] is the same Hebrew word for ‘*pesach*’, ‘to pass over’, as He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt on the night of the death of all the firstborn, while His people ate the Passover lamb (Ex. 12: 11; 13). In Ex. 12: 13, in KJV it is written ‘passing over’, in Hebrew ‘*pacach*’ (Strong #6452), which means to hop, skip over or spare; to hesitate, to limp (to hop on one leg only, as in the jump of a dance). The word ‘*pacach*’ is similar to ‘*pecach*’ (Strong #6453), *pesach*: a pretermission, i.e., exemption; used only for Jewish Passover (the festival or the victim): to pass over, Passover (offering).

‘For thus the Lord said to me’ – the prophet Isaiah had heard and received this consolation from the Lord, so he could trust in Him. They are words of grace and mercy, which promise preservation and liberation. So it was foolishness to ask for help in Egypt.

The Israelites are called again to turn back to God – v. 6-7.

- Isa. 31: 6-7: “Turn back to him whom you have deeply betrayed, O people of Israel. For on that day all of you shall throw away your idols of silver and idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.”

The people are called again to turn back to God, from whom they had already moved away. And the prophet continues to say in the name of the Lord that when all this happens, they will throw away their idols of gold and silver, and they will be ashamed of themselves because they will recognize their sin. The Lord waits for them; and knows that they will return, but only after being disciplined by Him. They were stiff-necked people, who had not heard the words of the prophets until then. They always refused to listen to them.

The fall of Assyria – v. 8-9.

- Isa. 31: 8-9: “Then the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of mortals; and a sword, not of humans, shall devour him; he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labor [NIV: Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man; a sword, not of mortals, will devour them. They will flee before the sword and their young men will be put to forced labor]. His rock shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard in panic’, says the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem [NIV: Their stronghold will fall because of terror; at sight of battle standard their commanders will panic’, declares the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem].”

• KJV: “Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited.”

These two verses reinforce what was said in the previous chapter, verse 33, about the destruction of the Assyrians and the fireplace (NRSV: burning place; NIV: Topheth) that the Lord had already prepared for his king.

‘Then the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of mortals; and a sword, not of humans, shall devour him’ or ‘Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man; a sword, not of mortals, will devour them’ – it means that the Assyrians fell by the hand of God Himself, not by the army of Israel under Hezekiah, nor by the troops of Egypt. This was what happened to the army of Sennacherib, slain by the angel of the Lord, when they besieged Jerusalem. When Sennacherib saw 185,000 soldiers killed, dread gripped him. He gave up the siege and fled to his land.

‘His young men shall be put to forced labor [NIV: their young men will be put to forced labor]’ – this may refer to their servants, the bearers of arms, the servants of the soldiers who took care of their animals. Concordant Hebrew English Sublinear Text (CHES), based on Concordant Version of the Old Testament (CVOT) writes something like this: ‘And choice young men of him for tributary service they shall be.’ In the bible of Jerusalem is written: ‘his best warriors will be destined to labor [forced labor – my note].’ KJV writes: ‘his young men shall be discomfited.’ The Hebrew word for ‘confused’ or ‘discomfited’ here (Strong #4522) may mean melting, fading, fainting or disappearing; or, another translation: a tax in the form of forced labor, levy, task, taskmaster, tribute, tributary. As the bible does not speak of any Assyrian tribute paid to Hezekiah, and no captivity of Assyrian youths being subjected to forced labor by the Israelites, the best translation for ‘his young men shall be put to forced labor’ would be: they would faint from fear and disappeared, they would run away leaving the Assyrian army alone there.

‘His rock shall pass away in terror’ or ‘their stronghold will fall because of terror’ – It means that Assyria would not even realize its strength (Nineveh) falling under the orders of destruction of the God of Israel; or else, Sennacherib fled to Nineveh upon seeing the mysterious destruction of his army, and probably felt only secure when he got there. But his inner confidence, his inner ‘stronghold’ was in tatters, totally shattered. His trustworthy men who were his strength also fled or were dead now.

‘His officers desert the standard in panic, says the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem’ or ‘at sight of battle standard their commanders will panic, declares the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem’ – it means: his soldiers and the commanders of his army would be afraid too, and would not even care for their standards. They would try to escape. ‘Whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem’ is a metaphor for the strong presence of the God of Israel in Jerusalem, with the fire of His wrath to defend His people, as well as being a metaphor for the presence of the Lord in the temple, where the sacrifices were made, and as He Himself said in Leviticus to the sons of Aaron (Lev. 6: 9; 13): “Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the ritual of the burnt offering. The burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth upon the altar all night until the morning, while the fire on the altar shall be kept burning... A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar [*of burnt offerings*]; it shall not go out.” As we saw in Isa. 29: 1-2; 7 Jerusalem was called ‘Ariel’, ‘God’s hearth.’

Chapter 32

The kingdom of righteousness – v. 1-8.

- Isa. 32: 1-8: “See, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes [NIV: rulers] will rule with justice. Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land. Then the eyes of those who have sight will not be closed, and the ears of those who have hearing will listen. The minds of the rash will have good judgment, and the tongues of stammerers will speak readily and distinctly. A fool will no longer be called noble, nor a villain said to be honorable. For fools speak folly, and their minds plot iniquity: to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning the Lord, to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied, and to deprive the thirsty of drink. The villainies of villains are evil; they devise wicked devices to ruin the poor with lying words, even when the plea of the needy is right. But those who are noble plan noble things, and by noble things they stand.”

Although some say that the prophecy of this chapter of Is 32: 1-8 was given in the time of Ahaz, long before the previous one, which was given in the time of Hezekiah, now referring to him, a type of Christ, these words most resemble a project of God for His people; a project of a great reformation among them in the civil and religious spheres and the desire of His heart for the righteousness and justice that men should follow so that the less privileged could find security, shelter, correct direction and understand the plan of God for their lives. By judgment, righteousness and justice, we understand a just government both in politics and in religion. It does not seem to be said to any king or about any king in particular, but something timeless, which would serve all believers in all ages. Nor does it seem to apply to the rulers of the time of the Messiah, for no king or prince ruled in this wise and right way in the time that He came to earth. On the contrary, Judea and most of the world were under the oppressive and blind government of Rome. Even thinking like a Jew of the time of Isaiah, waiting for a material Messiah, who would bring the deliverance of His people from the yoke of idolatrous peoples, the Gentiles, and doing justice as a king or the commander of a great army, not even this way one could get this kind of human attitude on the part of any ruler on earth. It gives the impression of something very spiritual from God, timeless, a message to be placed as a ‘guideline’ in the hearts of all His children to know His perfection and the perfection of His kingdom (Isa. 32: 1-4). Only Jesus achieved this, and showed it in His person when He lived in the flesh among us, but transposing that justice to the kingdom of God where it is perfect, and where the gifts of the Holy Spirit help men to plan noble things. Jesus came to bring a spiritual kingdom, and the word ‘princes’ or ‘rulers’ could refer to the ministers of the gospel, placed by God over the government of His sheep, leading them according to His Word. Therefore, this prophecy is Messianic. The king refers to Jesus, even because the title in this passage in the NIV is: “The kingdom of righteousness.”

The women of Jerusalem – v. 9-14.

- Isa. 32: 9-14: “Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear my voice; you complacent daughters, listen to my speech. In little more than a year you will shudder, you complacent ones; for the vintage will fail, the fruit harvest will not come. Tremble, you women who are at ease, shudder, you complacent ones; strip, and make yourselves bare, and put sackcloth on your loins. Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine, for the soil of my people growing up in thorns and briers; yes, for all the

joyous houses in the jubilant city. For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower [KJV: the forts and towers; ASV: the hill and the watch-tower] will become dens forever, the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks; [NIV: The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks].”

This part of the prophecy, among all the other prophecies of Isaiah, is very difficult to locate temporarily from the moment it was delivered and to which historical event it refers. At the same time as it reminds us of chapter 3: 16-26, about women’s pride and their judgments, including Isa. 4: 1, it makes us think about another time when it may have been fulfilled. Here does not seem to be the case of calling the cities of Judea ‘women’ or ‘daughters.’ It seems indeed to be addressed to the women of Jerusalem about a time of difficulty to which they are oblivious, for example, a time of drought or invasion of enemy armies and even deportation of its citizens. When the bible says ‘in little more than a year’, it is very different from other verses where it is written ‘as the years of a hireling’, or something like that, and implies that it is a time appointed by God, an exact time that only He knows the duration. What we can realize here is that it would take more than a year for the disaster to happen. A drought could affect the crop and there would be no grapes harvesting, for example. The women are called to take away their customary garments, put sackcloth on themselves and beat on their breasts, which means mourning for something, for example, the scarcity of food, such as the lack of grapes and other crops, because in their place thorns and thistles will grow. The ‘jubilant city’ implies that it is about Jerusalem, which always had reason to rejoice in its religious festivals, and in various civil events that took place there during the reign of several kings (David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, for example).

Then comes the following verse: ‘For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks; [NIV: The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks]’ (Isa. 32: 14).

Some scholars think that the word ‘women’ refers to others cities of Judea, which were destroyed by the Assyrians, but this text refers to Jerusalem. ‘The hill and the watchtower will become dens forever’ (NRSV) or ‘the citadel and watchtower’ (NIV), ‘the forts and towers’ (KJV) or else ‘the hill and the watch-tower’ (ASV) – this refers to the high towers and strong fortifications of Jerusalem, which being cut out of rocks, when demolished served as dens for thieves and wild creatures. The Hebrew term for ‘towers’ or ‘watchtower’ is *bachan* (Strong #975); and for ‘hill’ or ‘citadel’ or ‘forts’ is *Ophel* (‘*ophel* – *העופל* – Strong #6076), meaning ‘elevation, a mound, fortress, fort, stronghold, tower’). *Ophel* is proper name of a hill east of Jerusalem near the Mount of the Temple and the old city of Jerusalem, where there was also a wall and a tower (2 Chr. 27: 3; 2 Chr. 33: 14; Neh. 3: 26-27 – Strong #6077 – ‘*ophel* – *העופל*). The word ‘watchtower’ (NRSV, NIV, ASV) or ‘towers’ (KJV) may refer to one of the important towers of the city, such as the Tower of the Hundred (Neh. 3: 1), in Hebrew, *meah* (me’â), meaning ‘hundred’, which was located northeast of the city, to the north of the wall of *Ophel*. It is not known exactly why it was called the Tower of the Hundred; if it is because it had a height of a hundred cubits (a hundred and forty-eight feet), or if it was by the number of soldiers that were in it, watching. In addition, no other smaller city in Judea needed a hundred soldiers in a single watchtower; Jerusalem, yes, for being a royal city.

The bible also says that ‘the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted’ [The fortress will be abandoned (NIV), the palaces shall be forsaken (KJV)]. The palace

can mean the royal house or the temple, an important dwelling place that God delivered into the hands of the enemy. The city will be deserted, without people, which suggests an escape of its inhabitants or an exile of them. Even the towers and fortresses will be without soldiers, and they will become dens or caves for the wild donkeys.

Let us think of the Assyrian kings who invaded Israel:

In 732 BC the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) captured Damascus and annexed the territory of Israel from the northern plain of Jezreel, leaving Hoshea to rule the remainder of the northern kingdom as his vassal (2 Kin. 17: 3). When Hoshea rebelled and asked for help from Egypt (2 Kin. 17: 4), Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) besieged Samaria for three years (2 Kin. 17: 5; 2 Kin. 18: 9-11 – in the 4th year of Hezekiah, and the 7th of Hoshea), while his successor Sargon II (722-705 BC) captured it in the year he ascended the throne – the exile of Israel to Assyria in 722 BC (2 Kin. 18: 10 – In the 6th year of Hezekiah, and the 9th of Hoshea). The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria, settled them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. In the place of the Israelite population were brought the inhabitants of Babylon, of Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim.

In 701 BC, Sennacherib (705-681 BC) marched against Syria, besieged Sidon, and marched south to attack Ashkelon. He invaded the Kingdom of Judah, having taken forty-six fortified cities. He besieged Lachish successfully (2 Kin. 18: 13-14; 17; Mic. 1: 13) and went to Jerusalem to attack Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18: 17-19). That's when he sent Tartan (his supreme commander), Rabsharis (his chief officer) and Rabshakeh (his field commander), demanding the surrender of Hezekiah and Jerusalem. But by the intervention of God, killing the Assyrian soldiers, the king fled and Jerusalem was not invaded. Therefore, this prophecy would not fit into this historical period. His successor, Esarhaddon (681-669 BC), made a great expedition against the Egyptian delta in 672 BC, installing Assyrian governors at Thebes and Memphis, and Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) after him, fought against Egypt in three arduous campaigns and captured Thebes (Nah. 3: 8, 'No Amon') in 661 BC. None of them were worried about Jerusalem at that time. Not many years later, Nineveh fell (612 BC), and the Assyrian Empire along with it. The next enemy of Israel and that actually destroyed the city was Nebuchadnezzar, and the overview described above could fit into this historical moment.

This passage from Isa. 32: 9-14 (as well as Isa. 3: 16-26; Isa. 4: 1) could refer to the king of Israel, Pekah (740-732 BC), who invaded the cities of Judah and killed hundred and twenty thousand men in one day, while two hundred thousand Jews, with women, sons and daughters were taken captive by the Israelites (2 Chr. 28: 6; 8); then they were returned to Judah. But there was no attack on the city of Jerusalem.

The only more acceptable situation for this passage would be the destruction of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, but the expression 'in little more than a year' could not designate an exact time; it would be 'a certain time' set by God.

What matters most to us here is God's message about leaving futility, sin and spiritual sleep and being aware of reality, for when He determines a time of test or judgment, one must be prepared for it, and more than this, to be willing to understand the reason of this affliction and ask the Lord's forgiveness for captivity to cease.

Outpouring of the Spirit for restoration – v. 15-20.

- Isa. 32: 15-20: "... until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest [NIV: till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest]. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and

righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. The forest will disappear completely, and the city will be utterly laid low [NIV: Though hail flattens the forest and the city is leveled completely...]. Happy will you be who sow beside every stream, who let the ox and the donkey range freely [NIV: ... how blessed you will be, sowing your seed by every stream, and letting your cattle and donkeys range free].”

These verses follow the warning of destruction described above and promise a restoration through the outpouring of the Spirit. In Hebrew, the verb ‘to pour out’ means ‘to reveal plainly and in abundance’, that is, to pour out His Spirit from heaven upon His people, which was fully accomplished in the days of the Messiah. The fertile field or orchard can be equated with the metaphor of the vineyard, as being the people of God. This means that what was deserted and desolate by sin will be reborn and flourish. And what only looked like a field will be a forest. This reminds us of what is written in Job 14: 7-9: “For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant.”



God’s mercy and goodness, finishing His judgment and doing righteousness, will bring forth peace, rest and security as fruit, because there will be no more fear of punishment. The covenant with God was redone. This was accomplished through Jesus on the cross, bringing the reconciliation of the children with the Father, for sin was definitely propitiated, and forgiveness, broadly and definitely released. The fact that the Jews do not accept this sacrifice or do not see Jesus more than just a prophet is another matter. What God had planned for His people, but received by the Gentiles, was to make them ‘abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. The forest will disappear completely, and the city will be utterly laid low.’ We

can interpret this as: to be aware that we are the temple, the spiritual house of the Spirit of God, where there is peace, rest and security, despite what is happening outside of us, in the world, in the life of unbelievers and in the spiritual world.

• Isa. 32: 20: “Happy will you be who sow beside every stream, who let the ox and the donkey range freely [NIV: ... how blessed you will be, sowing your seed by every stream, and letting your cattle and donkeys range free].”

KJV: “Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.”

A Comment on the Ox and the Donkey:

The ox was used for food (Deut. 14: 4; 1 Kin. 1: 25; 1 Kin. 19: 21; Neh. 5: 18; Isa. 22: 13; Matt. 22: 4), as a sacrifice in the temple (Ex. 20: 24; Lev. 7: 4; 23; Lev. 9: 4; 18; Num. 7: 3; 17; 53; Judg. 3: 26), as a carrier of loads and carts (2 Sam. 6: 6; 1 Chr. 12: 40; 1 Chr. 13: 9), to plow the land (Deut. 22: 10; Deut. 14: 10; Isa. 30: 24), or to thresh and grind (grain and even oil – Deut. 25: 4; 1 Co 9: 9; 1 Tim 5: 18).

The ox symbolizes physical strength, supply, provision, wealth, and abundance, and was also an animal used in the worship of God. Hence the oxen that supported Solomon’s molten sea (1 Kin. 7: 25; 2 Chr. 4: 4).

The donkey is the symbol of docility, humility, bondage, or service (Gen. 22: 3; 5; Gen. 42: 26-27; Gen. 44: 13; Gen. 49: 14; Ex. 23: 5; Num. 22: 27; 32; Deut. 22: 10; Josh. 9: 4; 1 Sam. 16: 20; 1 Sam. 25: 18; 2 Sam. 16: 1-2; 1 Kin. 13: 29; 1 Chr. 12: 40; 2 Chr. 28: 15; Prov. 26: 3; Isa. 1: 3; Isa. 30: 6; Isa. 30: 24; Isa. 32: 20). It was the most common means of transport (Ex. 4: 20; Num. 22: 21-23; 25; Josh. 15: 18; Judg. 1: 14; Judg. 19: 3; Judg. 19: 10; 19; 21; 28; 1 Sam. 25: 20; 23; 42; 2 Sam. 17: 23; 2 Sam. 19: 26; 1 Kin. 2: 40; 1 Kin. 13: 13; 23; 24; 27; 28; 2 Kin. 4: 22; 24; Zech. 9: 9); as well as they carried loads and helped with lifting water and other work (Gen. 45: 23; Ex. 23: 5; 1 Sam. 25: 18; 2 Sam. 16: 1; 1 Chr. 12: 40; Neh. 13: 15; Isa. 30: 6). It was also an animal used for housework (Gen. 22: 3; 5; Gen. 36: 24; 1 Sam. 10: 2; 14; 16; Job 1: 14).

The ox and donkey rested on the 7th day, according to the Law (Ex. 23: 12; Deut. 5: 14).

The ox and donkey were used to plow and cultivate the land (Isa. 30: 24) and to make it suitable for sowing seed. They could not work together under the same yoke (“You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together” – Deut. 22: 10; Deut. 14: 10).

Most often, the ox was used for plowing (opening the furrows and pulling the threshing sledge to break up the clods of earth after the plow had passed, before sowing); this was because of its strength (1 Kin. 19: 19; Job 1: 14; Prov. 14: 4; Jer. 51: 23; Amos 6: 12; Lk. 14: 19). But they also did the threshing work (Deut. 25: 4; 1 Cor. 9: 9; 1 Tim. 5: 18). Donkeys were more commonly used later, in the harvest, in threshing and grinding of cereals (grain and even olive oil).

The prophet concludes by saying that happy (“Blessed”) are those who can sow beside every stream, who let the ox and the donkey range freely. Materially speaking, this concerned a life of peace, without oppression or fear of attacks.

‘Sow beside every stream’ or ‘sow beside all waters’ – so that the cereal crop is well watered, for example, wheat or rice.

‘Let the ox and the donkey range freely’ – to graze and rest, as prescribed in the Law on the day of rest (7th day – Ex 23: 12; Dt 5: 14).

The spiritual meaning of this is: to have the joy of sowing the gospel of Christ where hearts are softened and receptive to the word of salvation that comes from the

Spirit of God, for their hearts are good soil and the seed sown grows, producing much fruit, which amply rewards the pains of the sower.

‘Sowing beside every stream’ or ‘sow beside all waters’ indicates the complete freedom to sow and teach the Word of God throughout the world (‘stream’ or ‘waters’ = ‘nations’; hence, ‘people who accept the Gospel and come to repentance, are baptized in water and are born again’, both Jews and Gentiles).

It also encompasses God’s great power, His anointing, and the several gifts poured out by the Holy Spirit, the source of living and inexhaustible waters for us.

Looking at the commentary above, we can see that the ox and the donkey are symbols of being busy in the service of the Lord, both in preaching the gospel and in teaching the church of God (1 Cor. 9: 9-10; 1 Tim. 5: 17-18). Thus, ministers of the gospel (evangelists, preachers, pastors, and teachers) are the patient workers in God’s harvest who are cared for by Him and wisely manage their gifts.

In Deut. 25: 4 it is written: ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain’; a word repeated in 1 Cor. 9: 9 (‘for it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain. Is it for oxen that God is concerned?’), and 1 Tim. 5: 18 (‘for the scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain’, and, ‘the laborer deserves to be paid’’).

In 1 Corinthians, Paul completes in the following verses: ‘Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?’ (1 Cor. 9: 10-11). This leads us to understand that in both Deuteronomy and Isaiah and in the NT, the sowing in the kingdom of God aiming salvation of lives brings with it a promise of sustenance and provision of God Himself for doing this work and magnifying His name.

Chapter 33

The destroyer will be destroyed / the prophet's prayer – v. 1-5.

- Isa. 33: 1-5: “Ah, you destroyer, who yourself have not been destroyed; you treacherous one, with whom no one has dealt treacherously! When you have ceased to destroy, you will be destroyed; and when you have stopped dealing treacherously, you will be dealt with treacherously. O Lord, be gracious to us; we wait for you. Be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble [NIV: O Lord, be gracious to us; we long for you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress]. At the sound of tumult, peoples fled; before your majesty, nations scattered [NIV: At the thunder of your voice, the peoples flee; when you rise up, the nations scatter]. Spoil was gathered as the caterpillar gathers; as locusts leap, they leaped upon it [NIV: Your plunder, O nations, is harvested as by young locusts; like a swarm of locusts men pounce on it]. The Lord is exalted, he dwells on high; he filled Zion with justice and righteousness.”

Verse 1 refers to the king of Assyria, Sennacherib, who destroyed the land of Judah. When His appointed time comes, God will take away his power which he used unjustly. The Chaldeans shall do likewise with the Assyrians, as the Assyrians have done to Israel; and the Medes and Persians will do the same with the Chaldeans. In the same treacherous way that Sennacherib acted, his sons would act against him.

‘O Lord, be gracious to us’ – The prophet beholds the judgment that was now coming upon the people and addresses his prayer to God for them. His arm is the strength and salvation of His people. The bible says that the Lord’s mercies are new every morning. And this was what the prophet was feeling in need, and at that moment he begged God: that He remembered them in their prayers, begging for relief from their anguish. He believed in the power and authority of God to destroy any enemy force. At the thunder of God’s voice the Assyrians would feel terror and astonishment, as well as the soldiers of many nations that composed their army. God had done this in the past with all the enemies of Israel and would do it again. This was the prophet’s faith in addressing this prayer to Him. Everything could be reversed, that is, the spoils that the Assyrians had taken from the Jews, with the help of God they could take back from their enemies. In his vision, the prophet sees the victory of the people of Israel and exalts the name of the Lord, who dwells on high and exercises His justice over all peoples.

A promise of salvation – v. 6.

- Isa. 33: 6: “He will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is Zion’s treasure [NIV: ‘He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure’ or ‘is a treasure from him’].”

Here the prophet seems to address Hezekiah, confirming the stability of his reign by receiving from God forgiveness and, consequently, salvation, wisdom and knowledge from the Lord. The fear of the Lord would be a great treasure that he would gain, for in fearing Him and following His ways and obeying His will, Hezekiah and the whole nation would be benefited and blessed. When it’s spoken of this verse, many people transpose it to the time of the Messiah, but it is obvious that all these verses can fit into all the situations that God’s people have to go through in all ages. However, the verse in question concerned that particular moment when God was giving His people not just

deliverance but a new chance to resume their communion with Him so that many other future judgments could be avoided.

The anguish and the state of Israel – v. 7-9.

- Isa. 33: 7-9: “Listen! The valiant cry in the streets; the envoys of peace weep bitterly. The highways are deserted, travelers have quit the road. The treaty is broken, its oaths are despised, its obligation is disregarded [NIV: The highways are deserted, no travelers are on the roads. The treaty is broken, its witnesses are despised, no one is respected; Note: In Dead Sea Scrolls it’s written ‘the witnesses.’ In Masoretic Text it’s written ‘the cities’]. The land mourns and languishes; Lebanon is confounded and withers away; Sharon is like a desert; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves [NIV: The land mourns (or ‘dries up’) and wastes away, Lebanon is ashamed and withers; Sharon is like the Arabah, and Bashan and Carmel drop their leaves].”

The prophet describes the extent of the anguish and situation of all Israel: the mighty men were weeping in the streets of all cities, not only in Jerusalem, for they feared the enemy and felt that God was not supporting them as before because of their sin. They felt powerless in face of a dangerous situation, of an invasion about to happen. Even Hezekiah was puzzled and distressed.

‘The envoys of peace weep bitterly. The highways are deserted, travelers have quit the road. The treaty is broken, its oaths are despised, its obligation is disregarded’: these two verses can mean different things because the various biblical versions cause confusion.

Let us explain better:

- KJV: “Behold, their valiant ones shall cry without: the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly. The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man.”

- ASV: “Behold, their valiant ones cry without; the ambassadors of peace weep bitterly. The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: [the enemy] hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth not man.”

- In KJV, the pronoun ‘he’ is used for the phrase ‘he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man’; ‘He’ refers to an animate being, a man, for example.

In the other English versions (NRSV and NIV) the impersonal pronoun ‘its’ (referring not to a human being but something inanimate) is used for the sentence: ‘The treaty is broken, its oaths are despised, its obligation is disregarded’ (NRSV) or ‘The treaty is broken, its witnesses (in Masoretic Text: ‘the cities’) are despised, no one is respected’.

The Portuguese bible (ARA) uses the impersonal pronoun too.

Therefore, considering the last three versions (NRSV, ASV, ARA) which uses the impersonal pronoun ‘its’, it was not Sennacherib who broke the covenant of peace with Hezekiah, as some scholars suggest, based on 2 Kin. 18: 14-18: “King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, ‘I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear.’ The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king’s house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the doorposts that King Hezekiah of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. They went

up and came to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the Fuller's Field."

It was not Sennacherib who broke the covenant with Hezekiah, but the covenants among the people were broken because of the situation they were going through.

'The envoys of peace weep bitterly' may refer to anyone the king could send to the Assyrians requesting a truce or, if we think in a spiritual way about what was happening at that time with the people and also in previous chapters when the prophet himself said that no one respected the old man or the orphan anymore, we may come to the conclusion that an oppressed people, desperate, sinful and wicked, as the bible has described until now, and who, precisely for this very reason, was suffering the punishment of God was no longer sensitive to reconciliation with anyone; anyone who tried to calm the moods at that moment, be a messenger of peace, or who could still believe the words of the prophet, would weep bitterly because he would be frustrated in his good intentions; could not get his wishes.

'The highways are deserted, travelers have quit the road. The treaty is broken, **its** oaths are despised, **its** obligation is disregarded' (NRSV) or 'The highways are deserted, no travelers are on the roads. The treaty is broken, **its** witnesses are despised, no one is respected' (NIV) means that everyone was in expectation, they had neither the will nor the courage to leave the house or travel because of the destruction that the Assyrians caused in the other cities of Judah; no one trusted anyone and no covenants or treaties of peace or of any other kind were made, whether Hezekiah with the ambassadors of Sennacherib, or whether a citizen with another, for mutual respect had already disappeared.

In short: lack of God. The bible is very clear on this. God is love, and everyone who loves knows him. Whoever does not love does not know God. Who loves God is able to love his neighbor; whoever does not love God and does not know Him cannot give love to anyone. And the bible also says that perfect love drives out fear, and the one who fears is not made perfect in love. If the spiritual and emotional conditions of those people were so deplorable that the Lord was unable to contain His wrath any longer, it was obvious that they were left to themselves for their own destruction, not to speak in the hands of Satan.

When we begin to study General History a bit in order to better understand certain biblical passages, we began to realize how much wickedness there was in those wars and how absolutely deplorable were the acts of those warriors, and this gives us an idea of what became the land, vegetation, animals, crops and every kind of area that was once fertile. After a burning or after the destruction of water channels or contamination of drinking water wells, what to expect from a forest like Lebanon's or from a fertile plain of Judah with vines, wheat, fig trees, olive trees, and so forth?

'Lebanon is confounded and withers away [NIV: Lebanon is ashamed and withers]; Sharon is like a desert; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves.'

Lebanon is famous because of its dense forest. Ample rainfall from November to March and the mountains of limestone give rise to many wellsprings and streams. To the south of the mountains there are cultivation of gardens, olive groves, vineyards and orchards of fruit (mulberries, figs, apples, apricots, walnuts) and small fields of wheat. The forest vegetation is of myrtle, conifers and huge cedars; therefore, Lebanon is a symbol of fertility and of taking benefit and enjoyment of life and of a plantation, of taking advantage of the fruit.



Cedars of Lebanon



Plain of Sharon

Sharon is the largest coastal plain in the northern part of Palestine at the edge of the Mediterranean, south of Mount Carmel. It lies between the extensive swamps of the lower course of River Zarqa (Nahr az-Zarqa or Nahal Taninim) to the north (it marks the southern edge of Mount Carmel), and the valley of Aijalon and Joppa in the south, that is, till Yarkon River, the northern limit of Tel Aviv. Zarqa river (in Arabic: Nahr az-Zarqā, ‘the blue river’, where nahr means ‘river’ and zarqa means ‘blue’); is commonly identified with the biblical Jabbok River (Nahal Yabok; today it’s highly polluted). The Yarkon River is the natural limit between Sharon and Philistia. The length of the Plain of Sharon is fifty miles from north to south, and its breadth is nine or ten miles from east to west. Thousands of years ago, the streams partially excavated a longitudinal ditch on the east side toward the Jordan River, and the valleys of that ditch tended to be marshy. So, as for human occupation, it is only on the southern border of

Sharon that the land was more suitable for settlement, being clear that most of Sharon was never colonized by the Israelites. For a long time it remained a desert (Isa. 33: 9) and only used as pasture (1 Chr. 5: 16; Isa. 65: 10). In biblical times the northern area was densely covered with oak trees (*Quercus infectoria*), being today one of the richest agricultural districts of Israel planted with orange groves. There was no fertility in the swampy region.



Mount Carmel



Mount Carmel

Mount Carmel (karmel, ‘planted’, ‘fruitful land’ or ‘vineyard’) lies near the Plain of Sharon and is a region densely covered with vegetation and luxuriant woods. The word ‘karmel’ in Hebrew can be used as a common noun in this sense (2 Kin. 19: 23: ‘densest forest’). It can be used to indicate fresh grains of cereals (Lev. 23: 14: ‘new grain’ or ‘fresh ears’). Carmel is a mountain range of forty-eight kilometers long, North-West to South-East of the Mediterranean (south beach of Acre Bay) to the plain of Dotan.

Mount Carmel is the main mountain range (maximum height of five hundred and twenty-three meters), at the extreme Northwest. Although it is a region densely covered with vegetation, it was very sparsely inhabited. The luxuriant vegetation of Carmel is reflected in Am. 1: 2; Am. 9: 3; Mic. 7: 14; Nah. 1: 4; Song 7: 5.

Bashan is the land east of the Jordan River, which before the entry of the people in Canaan belonged to the Amorites. When Moses overcame their kings (Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan – Josh. 12: 1-6; Num. 21: 21-35; Deut. 2: 26-37; Deut. 3: 1-13), the land was given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and a half tribe of Manasseh, for it was a land rich in pasture and very favorable to cattle.

Now, think of the verse: ‘Lebanon is confounded and withers away; Sharon is like a desert; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves [NIV: Lebanon is ashamed and withers; Sharon is like the Arabah, and Bashan and Carmel drop their leaves].’

Lebanon lost some of its vegetation, for it is very likely that the ancestors of Sennacherib [his father and grandfather, Sargon II (722-705 BC) and Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), respectively], when invaded Tyre (in Phoenicia), Ashdod in Philistia and Samaria north of Judah, left their trail of destruction, cutting down trees to carry out their siege on these cities. Poetically, the prophet Isaiah describes this by saying that Lebanon was ashamed and withered because of its lack of beauty and exuberance.

Sharon had become a desert, that is, what once had been a swamp, and obviously a damp place, now it looked like a desert. Whether the reason, whether wars or a real catastrophe of nature or just a figurative language to describe its desolation, this shows us a deplorable situation of Israel. NIV uses the word Arabah, instead of desert. Arabah (Deut. 1: 1) is a word that comes from a Hebrew root meaning ‘desert, dry, desolate land, plain’ and is used to describe the desert steppes. The Arabah (‘arabah – Strong #6160) is a valley full of clefts that runs from the Sea of Galilee to the Gulf of Aqaba. The Dead Sea is also called the Sea of Arabah. It is a really dry and desert region.

Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves, that is, they lose their foliage. Whether because of wars or because God brought a great drought on the region, it was heartbreaking for anyone.

God will act and will be exalted – v. 10-13.

• Isa. 33: 10-13: “‘Now I will arise’, says the Lord, ‘now I will lift myself up; now I will be exalted. You conceive chaff, you bring forth stubble; your breath is a fire that will consume you. And the peoples will be as if burned to lime, like thorns cut down, that are burned in the fire’. Hear, you who are far away, what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge my might.”

At that moment, God would be rising from His throne, from His position of observer of the situation, to a real action, in order to free His people and show His glory to the nations, from near and far, who heard the news of what He had done in Israel. When He says, “you conceive chaff, you bring forth stubble; your breath is a fire that will consume you,” He was speaking to the Assyrians. The wrath with which they invested against Judah and Jerusalem would turn against them. Their expectations would be thwarted. They would be burned by the fire of God’s wrath like thorns. All other peoples, near and far away, those of that time and those who would come later (to whom these writings would be left) would see what the Lord was able to do, and acknowledge His power: “Hear, you who are far away, what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge my might.” In Jam. 1: 20 there is a word, more or less like this: “for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.”

The sinners in Zion will have much to answer, above many other sinners – v. 14.

- Isa. 33: 14: “The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: ‘Who among us can live with the devouring fire? Who among us can live with everlasting flames?’”

The sinners in Zion, who did not believe the prophet’s words and behaved like wicked, were now in terror, for they saw what God was able to do with the Assyrians in the fire of His zeal. And this same fire could consume them also for their sins, which were like sticks laid into the bonfire of God’s wrath, that is, their unbelieving and malicious behavior nourished the feeling of divine wrath, which caused God to judge them in that way. As they felt within themselves the trembling of God’s judgment, they asked one another, “Who among us can live with the devouring fire? Who among us can live with everlasting flames?” This is a word more or less like that of Jer. 30: 21b: “for who would otherwise dare to approach me? says the Lord.” Their desire was to flee to another place, to Egypt, for example, to get rid of staying there and see and feel the action of God in such a situation. In Heb. 12: 29 it is written: “for indeed our God is a consuming fire” (Deut. 4: 24: “For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God”). It seems that the first manifestation of God to His people on Mount Sinai was still vivid in their memory, even though it happened many centuries ago, and that it had been transmitted from generation to generation as a way to make them respect and honor Him as the only God, a living God. Precisely by having their eyes and ears closed by God Himself to the prophetic words (remember the call of Isaiah – Isa. 6: 9-10), they did not assimilate the way of walking in righteousness, and that was the only way to approach Him, without fear of being destroyed.

Who can stand in God’s presence and not to be consumed by His flames – v. 15-16.

- Isa. 33: 15-16: “Those who walk righteously and speak uprightly, who despise the gain of oppression, who wave away a bribe instead of accepting it, who stop their ears from hearing of bloodshed and shut their eyes from looking on evil, they will live on the heights; their refuge will be the fortresses of rocks; their food will be supplied, their water assured.”

Here the Lord showed them a safe and simple way to be accepted by Him, to feel His presence and to be protected and supplied; it was the same thing that had been said since Moses, but that the people seemed to always forget: to walk in righteousness in speaking and acting; to earn their money fairly, without unfair profit; to refuse bribes not to misjudge a cause; to cover their ears not to speak of murders or anything that tends to cruelty or self-revenge; to close their eyes to evil, just as the Lord has an aversion to sin and its consequences (Hab. 1: 3). Prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, said the same thing, but in other words: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6: 8). This means that whoever knows how to resist temptations and can maintain the purity of his soul will be able to dwell with ‘the everlasting flames’, for he will discover another kind of flame; not the flame of the wrath of God, but the flame of the revival of His Spirit, which protects this son or daughter of God at all times, even in times of tribulation, when the world around feels His judgment. The Lord will keep him (her) in a high place, safe and protected, where evil cannot touch him (her), and where there will be provision always: the bread of heaven, the word of God, to keep his (her) spirit strengthened and in the right way; and the waters of His Spirit, which bring consolation to his (her) soul and do not allow him (her) to faint or lose faith and hope in the promise that was given.

The safety of God and a future of hope, the happiness of His people – v. 17-24.

• Isa. 33: 17-18: “Your eyes will see the king in his beauty; they will behold a land that stretches far away. Your mind will muse on the terror: ‘Where is the one who counted? Where is the one who weighed the tribute? Where is the one who counted the towers?’ [NIV: In your thoughts you will ponder the former terror: Where is that chief officer? Where is the one who took the revenue? Where is the officer in charge of the towers?]”

In first instance, it is about Hezekiah, after having received from God the deliverance from the threat of the Assyrian yoke. The people could see him in their royal robes, and his face clear of problems, resuming his just form of government. And they too would again see their territory in all its extent, without occupants of other ungodly lands in it. They would only remember the Assyrians as waters gone by; they would remember their officers who had been placed in Judah to oversee the land: the scribes who kept records of all events, and then send the report to the enemy king, together with the officers who had been appointed to collect the taxes; and the secretaries of war to take charge of the soldiers in the watchtowers, or to decide which towers or fortifications should be made or repaired. The Jews would no longer be locked inside the cities because of the siege, but would have the freedom to come and go as it was before. They could see other countries around when they approached their borders. The memory of the scare would no longer bring fear into their hearts.

In a second interpretation, it is about a messianic vision for the descendants of those who lived in that time of the OT, who would one day see in that same city and with their own eyes the Messiah, Jesus, in His glorious robes, with His presence filling all the land of Israel and showing the Jewish people that this nation was chosen to be light to other nations, for it was the first to hear the word of truth from the mouth of the Son of God Himself. Perhaps it was also a way of beginning to instill in them a spiritual vision of future events, teaching them to visualize by faith something that at that moment was invisible and distant in time, but a seed of hope for their spirit.

For us, this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus and encourages us to see and believe by faith in the future defeat of our enemies when He comes to earth a second time, and our eyes can see Him for real, just as we are seen by Him, as the apostle Paul wrote (1 Cor. 13: 12). And more than that, it encourages us to believe that we will not remember the bad experiences that we lived, because everything will become new, for the first things have passed away (Rev. 21: 4).

• Isa. 33: 19-22: “No longer will you see the insolent people, the people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend, stammering in a language that you cannot understand. Look on Zion, the city of our appointed festivals! Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be pulled up, and none of whose ropes will be broken. But there the Lord in majesty will be for us a place of broad rivers and streams, where no galley with oars can go, nor stately ship can pass [NIV: There the Lord will be our Mighty One. It will be like a place of broad rivers and stream. No galley with oars will ride them, no mighty ship will sail them]. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our ruler, the Lord is our king; he will save us.”

The prophet continues to speak in the name of God to them, strengthening their hope that they will no longer see those people with fierce and furious face, of cruel and bloodthirsty temper, and speaking a language strange and incomprehensible to them.

Let's stop a bit in this verse to understand the language spoken by those peoples of Ancient History. One of the earliest forms of writing appeared about 3,500 years ago and was called cuneiform writing, because it was written with the aid of wedge-shaped objects. The cuneiform documents were written on clay tablets. It was developed by the

Sumerians, and together with the Egyptian hieroglyphs, is the oldest type of writing known. Sumer was one of the designations given to the southern half of Iraq, more or less from Baghdad to the south, in contrast to the north, which was known as Akkad. In Sumer was the city of Ur of the Chaldeans, from where Abram went out to dwell in Haran, many miles to the north. Later, the southern part of Mesopotamia went diminishing in importance in relation to the northern part, Akkad, but the cuneiform language was adopted by Akkadians, Babylonians, Elamites (in lower Mesopotamia, today Iran), Hittites (north of Assyria) and the Assyrians, and it was adapted to be written in the very language of these peoples (dialects, it may be said). For 3,000 years, it has been widely used in Mesopotamia, although the syllables (as established by the Sumerians) were not intuitive to those of Semitic languages. Cuneiform language was created, so to speak, to meet the administrative needs of palaces and temples, such as tax collection, livestock records, grain measurements, etc.

Cuneiform writing was gradually replaced by the Phoenician alphabet during the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911-612 BC), and was extinguished in the second century AD. Cuneiform language also inspired the ancient Persian and the Ugaritic alphabet. Ugaritic was the language spoken in the ancient city of Ugarit (Arabic: Ūḡārīt, whose ruins are called Ras Shamra) in Syria.



Aramaic is the designation given to the different dialects of a language used by people living in the Middle East (Actually, all descendants of Noah's sons). It was the religious and administrative language of several empires of the Ancient times. Belonging to the family of African-Asiatic languages it is classified in the subgroup of Semitic languages to which also belong Arabic and Hebrew. The formal language of the Babylonian Empire was Aramaic [whose name derives from Aram Naharayim, 'Mesopotamia' (more precisely a northern region within Mesopotamia), or Aram, 'highlands' in Canaanite, and ancient name of Syria]. The Persian Empire, which conquered the Babylonian Empire a few decades after the beginning of the Jewish exile, adopted Aramaic as an official language. Aramaic is also a Semitic language North-

Western, quite similar to Hebrew. Aramaic lent many words and expressions to Hebrew, mainly due to be the language used in the Talmud and other religious writings. Aramaic was possibly the language spoken by Jesus. From the 7th century AD the Aramaic which was used as an official language in the Middle East was replaced by Arabic. However, Aramaic is still used in liturgy and literature among the Jews and some Christians.

The Assyrians had as their official language, the Akkadian, the Sumerian (or ancient cuneiform language) and Aramaic.

Thus we can understand that the prophet Isaiah was referring to the Assyrian language, a kind of ‘adaptation’ of cuneiform language, or to the Akkadian, since Aramaic was understood and spoken by many peoples, including the Jews, mainly by the people connected to the court, who needed that commercial and administrative language to make their political agreements and commercialize their products with other nations. So when Sennacherib sent his officers to confront Hezekiah, the ambassadors of Judah (Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah) told him to speak with them in Aramaic because they understood but not Hebrew, that is, the language of Canaan, because the humble people spoke it, and they did not want the Jews of the city to understand what they were talking about and be discouraged by their affronts, losing faith in God and the words of King Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18: 26).

In verses 20-21, the prophet continues to give encouragement to the people, saying: “Look on Zion, the city of our appointed festivals! Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be pulled up, and none of whose ropes will be broken. But there the Lord in majesty will be for us a place of broad rivers and streams, where no galley with oars can go, nor stately ship can pass [NIV: There the Lord will be our Mighty One. It will be like a place of broad rivers and stream. No galley with oars will ride them, no mighty ship will sail them].” This means that He was asking the people not to look at the threats and the rumors and pessimism of the whole situation, but to the deliverance the Lord would give them, and to make an effort with their mind, if necessary, and look to a rebuilt city, to Mount Zion and see the temple of the Lord, where there was always much joy in its festivities. The city will be quiet and at peace after God drives out the enemy from there; the city will feel more strengthened by this victory and, as always happened be after a period of hardship, the people emerged stronger and the national power was established in a more steady way.

He goes on saying that there, in that place, the Lord will be powerful to them and will be like broad rivers and streams; no galley with oars shall pass through them, no mighty ship will sail them. If we look at the Nile and the Euphrates, we can understand that the great rivers of Egypt and Assyria (later Babylon) were not only a way of showing importance in the area of commerce but also the military might of such nations, since large ships protected them from invaders, patrolling them daily. Jerusalem was not Nineveh or Babylon, which was said to lie on many waters because of the abundance of the waters of the Euphrates that passed through those cities.

In Jerusalem, the most well-known stream of water that supplied the city was the brook Kidron to the east (brook Kidron – KJV – 2 Sam. 15: 23; 1 Kin. 2: 37; 2 Kin. 23: 12; 2 Chr. 29: 16). Gihon Spring [גיחון ‘Gichon’ – Strong #1521, derived from ‘giyach’ – Strong #1518 – meaning ‘stream’ (of water), ‘burst forth’, ‘to gush forth’ (as water)] was located southeast of the city, on the western side of Kidron Valley, in a natural cave of this valley. In the time of Hezekiah, Gihon Spring poured water into the city through an open channel. When Hezekiah was faced with the threat of Sennacherib, he stopped all the fountains, streams and all subsidiary channels that led to the river that flowed through the land (2 Chr. 32: 3-4). He built the tunnel of Siloam (2 Kin. 20: 20; Isa. 22:

9: 'the lower pool'). From the fountain of Siloam (Shilôah, 'sent'), the channel flowed into the old pool or lower pool (Birket el-Hamra). Then, the king sent the waters of the upper Gihon through an aqueduct or tunnel two meters high to a cistern or upper pool (Birket Silwân) at the west side of the city of David (2 Chr. 32: 30). He defended the new source of supply with a ramp (2 Chr. 32: 30). The Brook Kidron, now called Wadi en-Nar, begins north of Jerusalem, passes between the temple hill and the Mount of Olives towards the Dead Sea, which it reaches after crossing the wilderness of Judea. Its modern name means 'Wadi of fire' and this is because it gets dry and scorched by the sun for most of the year, for it does not flow permanently. Only for brief periods, in the winter during the rainy season, it is filled with water. The Kidron Valley was also called the valley of Jehoshaphat.



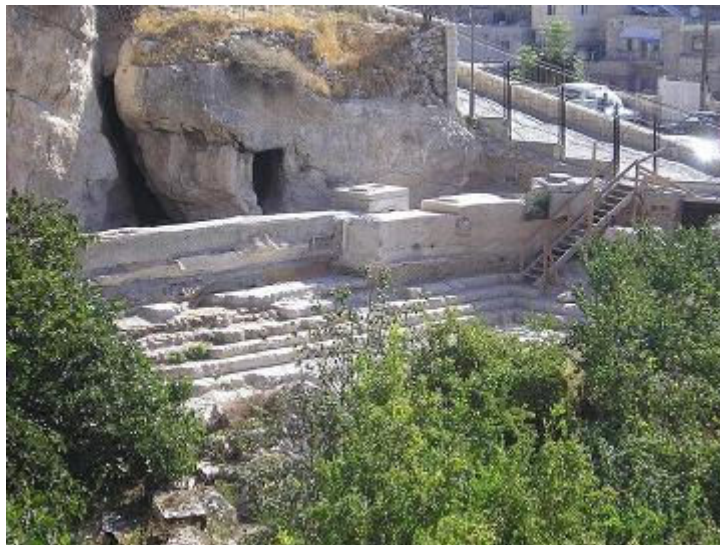
Euphrates, south of Turkey – photo: Valen (1988) – wikipedia.org

Although Jerusalem did not have large rivers and, consequently, large ships passing through the city, it was not at a disadvantage; on the contrary, this fact came to be a good thing, since the lack of a great river also made difficult the access by the enemy. Therefore, the prophet says that the presence of the Lord with them would replace the lack of a river, because He would be a better river, with different waters, which would supply them and protect them in another way, that is, a natural river with ships and soldiers to defend a city or nation could never be greater than God's protective spiritual presence with His people. 'Broad rivers and streams' is a symbol of the abundance of His grace and His freedom, the power of His Spirit. With Him there would be peace and no ships, soldiers, or armies would be necessary to defend them.

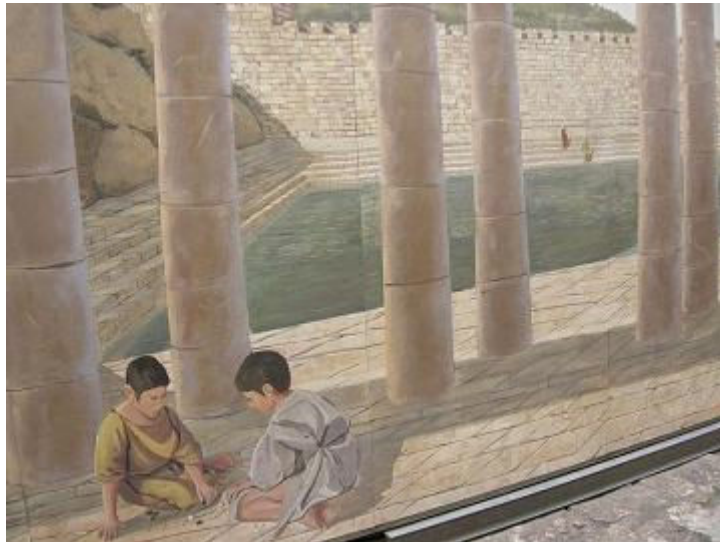


Silwan in the 19th century – wikipedia.org

Photo above: Siloam (Hebrew: Shiloah; Arabic: Silwan) at the end of the 19th century – Silwan is an ancient neighborhood southeast of Jerusalem, south of the Old City. In this place there was the pool of Siloam and the tower of Siloam mentioned in Lk. 13: 4.



Ruins of the Pool of Siloam from the Second Temple
(Photo: Abraham, September, 2005 – wikipedia.org)



Artistic reconstruction of the Pool of Siloam (Yoav Dothan – wikipedia.org)



Image above: Kidron Valley seen from the Old City of Jerusalem (Photo of Mark Wilson – wikipedia.org)

In verse 22 it is written: “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our ruler, the Lord is our king; he will save us.” In other words, it is He who will save us, with His laws and His righteous way of judging all things.

There was a short period of rest for Israel between the fall of Assyria (the taking of Nineveh was in 612 BC) and the Babylonian rule through Nebuchadnezzar (605 BC), for his father, Nabopolassar (626-605 BC), was involved in conquest of other nations at that time and concerned to establish a steady empire to be left to his heir.

This reference (verse 22) is also about a messianic vision when Jesus would show the spiritual peace that Jerusalem could experience, despite the worldly tribulations that existed in His time in a land occupied by Romans, who did the same and even worse than other invaders in the past. His abundant grace with them would bring the comfort that God had a greater liberation than they had ever thought and far more effective than

their zealots revolting against the dominion of Rome constantly. Jesus showed them the door to the kingdom of God and to complete freedom through the power of His Spirit, which He would give as a living water of solace, peace and hope to all who understood His mission on earth and His true identity. The Father expressed love for His people through Jesus.

For us, this prophecy shows that in Jesus there is peace, strength and rest from the enemies who try to reach us in all ways. The one who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world. It is our faith in His protection, supply and care that makes us overcome bad experiences and leads us to see our heavenly abode, where all victories will be definite, and our joy will be complete as we see the full fulfillment of His righteousness.

- Isa. 33: 23-24: “Your rigging hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out. Then prey and spoil in abundance will be divided; even the lame will fall to plundering. And no inhabitant will say, ‘I am sick’; the people who live there will be forgiven their iniquity.”

The prophet addresses his speech to the Assyrians, whom he compares to a large ship that is no longer in good condition, but with the sails torn, with the mast unsteadily and with ropes somewhat loose, as if facing a great storm at sea. In such a state it is almost on the verge of being shipwrecked and swallowed up by the waters. When they are driven out of Israel, they will leave their spoil behind, and the lame will have their share. When God’s forgiveness comes to His people, no one can say that is sick; neither of the body, nor of the soul, nor of the spirit. This prophecy was fully fulfilled with the first coming of Jesus, giving His blood as the propitiation for our sins.

With His forgiveness, we can say that we are no longer sick, but that His life dwells in us.

Chapter 34

God's indignation against the nations – v. 1-10.

• Isa. 34: 1-10 (see Isa. 63: 1-6; Jer. 49: 7-22; Ezek. 25: 12-14; Ezek. 35: 1-15; Am. 1: 11-12; Obad. 1-14; Mal. 1: 2-5): “Draw near, O nations, to hear; O peoples, give heed! Let the earth hear, and all that fills it; the world, and all that comes from it. For the Lord is enraged against all the nations, and furious against all their hordes; he has doomed them, has given them over for slaughter. Their slain shall be cast out, and the stench of their corpses shall rise; the mountains shall flow with their blood [NIV: the mountains will be soaked with their blood]. All the host of heaven shall rot away [NIV: All the stars of heavens will be dissolved], and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall wither like a leaf withering on a vine, or fruit withering on a fig tree. When my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens, lo, it will descend upon Edom, upon the people I have doomed to judgment [NIV: the people I have totally destroyed]. The Lord has a sword; it is sated with blood, it is gorged with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the Lord has a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom. Wild oxen shall fall with them, and young steers with the mighty bulls. Their land shall be soaked with blood, and their soil made rich with fat [NIV: And the wild oxen will fall with them, the bull calves and the great bulls. Their land will be drenched with blood, and the dust will be soaked with fat]. For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of vindication by Zion's cause. And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into sulfur; her land shall become burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it forever and ever.”

This prophecy of Isaiah 34 seems to complement that which was spoken of in Isa. 21: 11-12 about Dumah, and which in fact referred to Edom. Dumah (Hebrew transliterated: ‘Duwmah’) is the name used figuratively for a nearer semi-arid land (Edom or Seir). Dumah is in the north of Arabia, between Palestine and southern Babylon. Its inhabitants are descendants of Ishmael (Gen. 25: 14; 1 Chr. 1: 30). Note from NIV – Dumah means ‘silence, stillness’; in Hebrew, it is a wordplay with Edom.

Assyrian inscriptions show that Edom became the vassal state of Assyria in 736 BC in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC). Babylon conquered it later, and the other prophets also prophesied about it. Edom was destroyed five years after the captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, that is, in 581 BC. Afterwards, it fell into the hands of the Persians (539 BC), and in the 3rd century BC was dominated by the Nabataeans (Arabs), who ended up pushing the inhabitants of Edom to the south of Judea, later called Idumea. Judas Maccabeus subdued the Edomites (2nd century BC), and John Hyrcanus I (2nd – 1st century BC) forced them to be circumcised in order to be incorporated by the Jewish people. Herod the Great descended from the Edomites. It is a little difficult to make a temporal correlation between this prophecy and the events of that time. As in chapter 21, it is not known what oppressor the prophet referred to, whether Assyria or Babylon.

Bozrah or Botsra or Botzrah (Hebrew: בֹּצְרָה, botsrâh) was the capital of the people of Edom, and whose king was Jobab (Gen. 36: 33; 1 Chr. 1: 44). Esau or Edom (Gen. 36: 19) was Jacob's brother, and lived in Seir, a mountain previously belonging to Seir the Horite (Gen. 36: 8-9; Gen. 36: 20); therefore, Edom is often called Seir. Bozra means ‘sheepfold’, indicating that it was a city of shepherds in the southeast of the Dead Sea in the land of Edom. Today it is a small city in Jordan in the state of Tafilah, called Buseirah. Jehoshaphat king of Judah, in the land of Edom, defeated the inhabitants of

Mount Seir, Moab and the Ammonites (2 Chr. 20: 22) with the help of the Lord, because by putting the Levites before the army, these people ended up fighting against themselves and they slew each other. The prophets Amos and Jeremiah predicted the destruction of Bozrah (capital of Edom) by Nebuchadnezzar in 581 BC or by the Persians in 539 BC. The people of Edom were definitely destroyed by Titus in 70 AD.



Ruins of Bozrah

Edom is here set forth in Isaiah 34 as the symbol of all the enemies of God, as the symbol of all nations that have sinned against Him, but is also related to the destruction of his own land, if we compare with the prophecy of Obadiah (Obad. 1-14).

Therefore, Isa. 34: 1-10 portrays the planned destruction of God against the land of Edom and against the enemies of Israel, here represented by it: “All the host of heaven shall rot away [NIV: All the stars of heavens will be dissolved], and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall wither like a leaf withering on a vine, or fruit withering

on a fig tree. When my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens, lo, it will descend upon Edom, upon the people I have doomed to judgment [NIV: the people I have totally destroyed]” (Isa. 34: 4-5).

This figure of speech is used to express the horror of this calamity, as if the heavens, the sun, the moon, and the stars were affected by it (see Isa. 13: 10). The heavens will be rolled up like a scroll. When a roll (book) was rolled up, no one could read anything of it, that is, God had nothing more to say or reveal about that subject. The description above may signify the total removal and abolition of all dignities and offices, chiefs and subordinates, civil and ecclesiastical, throughout the jurisdiction of a nation. The stars represent the princes and judges, counselors and important representatives of the government. The expression ‘the stars of heavens’ or ‘starry hosts’ not only represents the heavenly hosts of God, but the armies of nations to which He directs this word of judgment. ‘My sword has drunk’ means the word decreed by He Himself, ready to act in anger (drunk with His wrath). The same metaphor is used in Revelation when it comes to describing the calamities of God against the forces of darkness and the arrogance and pride of men. This was a type of language much understood by the Jews; therefore, the apostle John (1st century AD) made use of it to describe the apocalyptic events. It does not mean any apocalyptic prophecy on the part of Isaiah, for he is considered a messianic prophet, not apocalyptic. Subsequent prophets used his quotes in their own prophecies about the end times to describe God’s will more accurately.

- Isa. 34: 6-7: “The Lord has a sword; it is sated with blood, it is gorged with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the Lord has a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom. Wild oxen shall fall with them, and young steers with the mighty bulls. Their land shall be soaked with blood, and their soil made rich with fat [NIV: the dust will be soaked with fat].”

By lambs, goats and rams, oxen, bull calves (or young steers) and bulls he means people of all classes and conditions, high and low, rich and poor, young and old, who will be destroyed as a sacrifice to God and turned into ashes.

If we remember the sacrifices in the OT, we can see that (except the peace offerings and grain offerings), the burnt offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering were made with the animals mentioned above. Let’s summarize:

- Burnt Offering (Lev. 1: 1-17) – used a male animal: bull, lamb or bird (turtledove or pigeon, in the case of poor person). It was totally consumed and the animal should be without blemish. Its purpose was a voluntary act of worship and atonement for unintentional sin (of ignorance), or an expression of devotion, commitment and complete submission to God.

- Sin Offering (Lev. 4; Lev. 5; Lev. 6; Lev. 16: 1-34) – it was used a young bull (in the case of the high priest and the congregation). The goat (in the case of the prince, that is, of the ruler); female goat or lamb (in the case of ordinary people), and the turtledove or pigeon (in the case of the poor). It was also used a tenth of an ephah of fine flour: the case of the very poor (Ephah: measure of capacity, a basic unit equal to 17.62 liters; 3/5 bushels). Its purpose was the obligatory atonement for certain unintentional sins (also known as sins of ignorance), the confession of sin and its forgiveness and the purification of the taints.

- Guilt Offering (Lev. 7: 1-10) – it was used the ram or lamb. Its purpose was an obligatory atonement for sins of ignorance requiring restitution (Restitution in full, adding a fifth of the value of what made the person guilty), and the purification of taints.

- Unintentional sins are also known as sins of ignorance. The original word translated as ignorance means: to wander, like a sheep that strays from the flock. It refers to the sin originated from the weakness of human character, not an ill-disguised rebellion or a premeditated evil. We associate guilt with intention, but the ancients associated it with its effects.

- Lev. 3: 14-16; Lev. 4: 8-9; Lev. 7: 3-5; Lev. 9: 10: The Lord commanded that the fat, the kidneys and the lobe of the liver were separated to be burned on the altar. They were not burned along with the rest of the animal. The fat of the animal in the guilt offering were burned separately upon the altar for atonement.

- In Lev. 22: 17-33 the bible says that the offering should be without blemish. Defective animals were not accepted; therefore, the offering before the Lord should be with the best they have, with the firstfruits, not with what was left. Verse 19 says: “to be acceptable in your behalf it shall be a male without blemish, of the cattle or the sheep or the goats.”

This makes us understand what we have said about all the people above: from all classes and conditions, high and low, rich and poor, young and old, kings, princes, priests and subjects. And the prophet continues to explain this in the following verse:

- Isa. 34: 8: “For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of vindication by Zion’s cause [NIV: ‘a year of retribution, to uphold Zion’s cause’].” This means divine treatment with Edom because of its pride, arrogance, and other wrong behaviors in relation to the people of Israel despite being related peoples, but which would continue even after this event as a feud that could only be undone by God Himself (in relation to the invasion of Israel by Babylon, for example).

- Isa. 34: 9-10: “And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into sulfur; her land shall become burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it forever and ever.”

Edom would be treated as Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19: 24), and this would be remembered for generations to come. Dan. 11: 41, in relation to Antiochus IV Epiphanes (“He shall come into the beautiful land, and tens of thousands shall fall victim, but Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites shall escape from his power”), what happened is that he entered Israel, but he did not care about Edom, Moab and Ammon because they were his allies, helping him invade the Holy Land. But each empire that followed fulfilled God’s vengeance on Edom till purify that land. Judas Maccabeus subdued them (2nd century BC), and John Hyrcanus I (2nd – 1st century BC) forced them to be circumcised in order to be incorporated by the Jewish people. The people of Edom were definitely destroyed by Titus in 70 AD. Today, the region of Edom, Moab and Ammon are part of Jordan. Thinking from a spiritual point of view, where Edom refers to God’s enemies, then, on the Day of the Lord, that is, on the Day of Judgment, His people, His church, will judge their enemies.

The land of Edom is completely devastated – v. 11-15.

- Isa. 34: 11-15: “But the hawk and the hedgehog (*an insect-eating mammal with spiny hairs on the back and sides*) [NIV: the desert owl and screech owl] shall possess it; the owl and the raven [NIV: the great owl and the raven] shall live in it. He (*God*) shall stretch the line of confusion over it, and the plummet of chaos over its nobles [NIV: God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation]. They shall name it No Kingdom There, and all its princes shall be nothing

[NIV: Her nobles will have nothing there to be called a kingdom, all her princes will vanish away]. Thorns shall grow over its strongholds, nettles and thistles in its fortresses. It shall be the haunt of jackals, an abode for ostriches [NIV: owls]. Wildcats shall meet with hyenas, goat-demons shall call to each other; there too Lilith [Hebrew: liyliyth – Strong #3917, meaning: a night specter: screech owl; night monster] shall repose, and find a place to rest [NIV: desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; there the night creatures will also repose and find for themselves places of rest; KJV: The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest]. There shall the owl nest and lay and hatch and brood in its shadow; there too the buzzards shall gather, each one with its mate [NIV: The owl will nest there and lay eggs, she will hatch them, and care for her young under the shadow of her wings; there also the falcons will gather, each with its mate].”

These verses describe creatures that generally dwell in desolate places. By Lilith (KJV: ‘screech owl’; in Hebrew, ‘a night specter’ or ‘night monster’), which the NIV translates as ‘night creatures’, we mean bats and owls, nocturnal animals. Despite the different biblical translation to the animals, this is a picture of the state of desolation of the land of Edom after the invasion of the enemy as an instrument of God’s punishment for a sinful, irreverent and hard-hearted people, who delighted in idolatry. If there were still some nobles left, they would have nothing to call a ‘kingdom.’ Their nearest leaders and subordinates would disappear, they would be no more. The measuring line (‘the measuring line of chaos’ or ‘the line of confusion’) and the plumb line, much used in other prophetic writings, symbolize God’s judgment and sometimes His willingness to rebuild (Zech. 1: 16). Here, most likely, it would be to mark the destruction of Edom; to mark what would be overthrown.

As for the v. 13 (NIV), “Thorns will overrun her citadels, nettles and brambles her strongholds. She will become a haunt for jackals, a home for owls.” or “And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be a habitation of dragons, and a court for owls.” (KJV), there was a probable error in the translation of the botanical species. ‘Nettle’, in Hebrew, is קמיוש, qimmos, Strong #7057, from an unused root meaning ‘to sting’; a prickly plant. However, much probably, it was about *Acanthus* (*Acanthus spinosus*), other thorny or flowering plants in the family *Acanthaceae*, genus *Acanthus*, but with flowers, native to tropical and warm temperate regions, with the highest species diversity in the Mediterranean Basin and Asia (from Italy to western Turkey).

God’s word will not return empty but will be fulfilled – v. 16-17.

- Isa. 34: 16-17: “Seek and read from the book of the Lord: Not one of these shall be missing; none shall be without its mate. For the mouth of the Lord has commanded, and his spirit has gathered them [NIV: his Spirit will gather them together]. He has cast the lot for them, his hand has portioned it out to them with the line; they shall possess it forever, from generation to generation they shall live in it.”

People would see that the word of God will not return empty, but it will be fulfilled in full, just as He said. ‘His spirit has gathered them’ [NIV: his Spirit will gather them together] – the Holy Spirit is the force that carries out the desires of God the Father on earth. Both the animals and the souls of men belong to God, and He rules them (Job 12: 10). The mention of casting lots refers to allot the portion of the land to each of them like the Promised Land was divided among the tribes by Moses and Joshua, by lots.

Chapter 35

Joy of the redeemed – v. 1-10.

• Isa. 35: 1-10: “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing [KJV: The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose]. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense [NIV: with divine retribution]. He will come and save you’. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped (cf. Lk. 7: 22-23); then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy [NIV: and the mute tongue shout for joy]. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray [NIV: And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it – or ‘the simple will not stray from it’]. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there [NIV: But only the redeemed will walk there]. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

Giving sequence or not to the destruction of Edom, this chapter of Isaiah is a promise of comfort to the people of God after the exile, for they would return to their land and rebuild the destroyed Jerusalem. More than the return from exile, it is the promise of the Messianic kingdom of Jesus, avenging them of their enemies and bringing comfort and peace to those who need it. It is a promise of salvation. Because of the noun ‘the redeemed’ or ‘the ransomed’ of the Lord (verses 9-10), we can extrapolate this prophecy also to the end times, when Jesus will return to punish those who have bothered His saved people; He will deliver them from the power of darkness.

The joyful flourishing of the kingdom of Christ – v. 1-2.

In verse 1, the prophet says: “**The wilderness and the dry land** shall be glad, **the desert** shall rejoice and blossom; like the **crocus** it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing [KJV: The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the **rose**; NIV: The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the **crocus**,...].”

The word ‘wilderness’, in Hebrew, midbar or midhbâr (Strong #4057), means: a pasture (i.e. open field, whither cattle are driven); a desert, south, wilderness.

‘The dry land’ or ‘the parched land’, in the original Hebrew is tsiyah or tsiyyâh (Strong #6723); in KJV, ‘the solitary place’, and means: to parch, aridity, a desert, barren, drought, dry (land, place), solitary place, wilderness.

The ‘desert’, in Hebrew, is ‘arabah (Strong #6160) and means: ‘desert, dry, desolate land, plain.’ Arabah (Deut. 1: 1; Isa. 33: 9; Isa. 35: 1) is used to describe the desert

steppes, especially with article ‘the’: a valley full of clefts that runs from the Sea of Galilee to the Gulf of Aqaba. The Dead Sea is also called the Sea of Arabah. It is a really dry and desert region.

The Messiah would bring joy to hardened, dry and lifeless hearts; and a flourishing to solitary and arid places, referring not only to the cities of Israel where there was not much knowledge of the word, but also to the inner solitude and to the thirst of the soul of His people. The bible says that in this sterile condition, Jesus would bring fertility and exultation. Israel would flourish like the crocus (KJV: rose).

Here in Isa. 35: 1, the crocus or rose also may refer to some other bulbous plant, for in Hebrew it's written the word h^abhaseleth or chabhatsâleth (Strong #2261: crocus, of uncertain derivation; probably, saffron or rose, translated as krinon (κρινον) in the Septuagint, that is, ‘lily’ (krinós κρίνος). Crocus (in Greek, krokos, κρόκος) is derived from the Hebrew, karkōm (כרכום, crocus); in Aramaic kurkama, and Arabic kurkum, which means saffron (*Crocus sativus*). Crocus is a small, spring-flowering plant of the Iridaceae family, which grows from a corm and bears bright yellow, purple, or white flowers. It's the source of the spice ‘saffron.’ It should not be confused with the meadow-saffron, which is poisonous, and not used for cooking.

D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2nd edition 1995 – says that the word ‘habhaseleth’ or ‘chabhatsâleth’ can be identified with many other bulbous plants (narcissus, lily, tulip and hyacinth) and that multiplies abundantly in the Plain of Sharon. In the case of lily in Palestine, it is related to several varieties not specified in the translations. Most of the references in the Book of Songs, probably relates to the hyacinth, while the ‘lips like lilies’ (Song of Songs 5: 13) may allude to the red anemone or the Madonna lily (Song of Songs 6: 2), which is native to Palestine.

It also says that here in Isa. 35: 1 it can refer to *Narcissus polyanthus* (*Narcissus tazetta* L.). Narcissus is a flower of various species, very fragrant and solitary, although they grow side by side, but not on the same trunk. Like the rose, it grows abundantly in the Plain of Sharon. The Narcissus is a flower native to the Mediterranean, parts of central Asia and mainland China. Its color varies between white and yellow. It likes moist soils, near lakes, and blooms in spring. The flower usually faces downwards.



Narcissus polyanthus (*Narcissus tazetta* L.).
Park of the Forest of Shoam, Israel



Yellow narcissus



Narcissus – pseudonarcissus



Crocus sativus – Wikipedia.org (photo: Arghiyan)

• Isa. 35: 2: “It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.”

The people who had suffered so much, and whose heart was dry for love, will flourish with the rise of the kingdom of Christ. The Jews will learn to rejoice in the Lord and His teachings, for they will receive a special honor from Him, just as Lebanon rejoices in its abundance.

Jesus would not only give them the glory of Lebanon, that is, He would not only make them fertile but also make them shine like Carmel (karmel, ‘planted’, ‘fruitful land’ or ‘vineyard’). Mount Carmel is the main mountain Northwest of Israel beside the Mediterranean, near the Plain of Sharon and is a region densely covered with vegetation and luxuriant woods. It is formed of hard limestone, abundant in caves, and reaches the altitude of five hundred and twenty-three meters. At the base of the mountain flows the Kishon River. It was a very sparsely inhabited region. There, the glory of the Lord shone for His people, for it was there that in the person of Elijah God manifested His power against the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, consuming with fire the sacrifice that the prophet had placed upon the altar. In the same way, Jesus would manifest the splendor of the Father through His miracles. And those people, once unbelieving, could see in person what He was able to do. Those who believed in Him and accepted Him in their hearts would experience for themselves the anointing that Elijah had (‘They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God’ or ‘They will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God’).

Sharon is the largest coastal plain in the northern part of Palestine at the edge of the Mediterranean, south of Mount Carmel. Thousands of years ago, the streams partially excavated a longitudinal ditch on the east side toward the Jordan River, and the valleys of that ditch tended to be marshy. So, as for human occupation, it is only on the southern border of Sharon that the land was more suitable for settlement, being clear that most of Sharon was never colonized by the Israelites. For a long time it remained a desert (Isa. 33: 9) and only used as pasture (1 Chr. 5: 16; Isa. 65: 10). It was there that Shitrai took care of David’s flocks (1 Chr. 27: 29). In biblical times the northern area was densely covered with oak trees (*Quercus infectoria*), being today one of the richest agricultural districts of Israel planted with orange groves. ‘The majesty of Sharon’ or ‘the splendor of Sharon’ (Isa. 35: 2), like the ‘thickets of the Jordan’ (Jer. 12: 5; Jer. 49: 19), seems to suggest the dense oak vegetation that covered the valley in biblical times, not the fertility of the marshy region.

In a place like this springs up the rose, whose word in Hebrew (*chabhatsâleth*) is identified with many other bulbous plants (narcissus, lily, tulip, hyacinth and crocus) and multiplies abundantly in the plain of Sharon. This tells us of a green and flowery place, rather than a barren desert and without the color of life.

He will strengthen and comfort His people – v. 3-4.

• Isa. 35: 3-4 (NRSV): “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.’”

NIV: “Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.’”

This was the incentive for those who were tired, dismayed and hopeless. God would do justice to His people and bring revenge, destroying the works of darkness that until then had imprisoned them in sin and lack of understanding of the word of God.

Their spiritual guides until the coming of Jesus only served to mislead them from the truth, for they created false doctrines of men, forgetting the true word they had received at the beginning when the Lord chose them to be His people.

He will perform miracles among them and will bring them prosperity – v. 5-7.

- Isa. 35: 5-7: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy [NIV: and the mute tongue shout for joy]. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes [NIV: reeds and papyrus].”

These verses also point to the miracles of Jesus to be done in Israel: the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will walk, grumbles will give way to praise and much more than these, for this prophecy promises spiritually the full and abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the chosen of the Lord: ‘springs of water’ [NIV: ‘bubbling springs’], that is, the fountains of life, upon both Jews and Gentiles; to all who accept to walk on the Holy Way. The thirsty and barren hearts will receive a new strength, a new incentive to live; the light of the knowledge of God and will learn to live under His love. This is what Jesus told the envoys of John the Baptist, when they asked Him if He was the Messiah or if they should expect someone else. Jesus said to them, “And he answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me’” (Lk. 7: 22-23).

The redeemed of the Lord will come back to Zion – v. 8-10.

- Isa. 35: 8-10: “A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way [NIV: the Way of Holiness]; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people [NIV: it will be for those who walk in that Way]; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray [NIV: wicked fools will not go about on it – or ‘the simple will not stray from it’]. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there [NIV: But only the redeemed will walk there]. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads [NIV: everlasting joy will crown their heads]; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

The prophecy makes clear what this people should do, and what their descendants would do not only when they returned from captivity in Babylon, but when they were redeemed from the bondage of sin. They should walk the right way. Isaiah writes: “A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way [NIV: the Way of Holiness].”

‘A highway shall be there’ – Where? In Zion, in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus preached, performed miracles, restored the presence of God in the temple and made the greatest sacrifice of all: He died on the cross as a total surrender to God, bringing salvation to all those who were ready to walk by the Holy Way, that is, those who were willing to follow His steps, to be His disciples and His ambassadors on earth and receive His authority to place the feet of those who were lost in a path of holiness. He brought the simplicity of God to men, breaking the yoke and the curse of the law, leaving only two to be obeyed: ‘to love God above all things’ and ‘to love your neighbor as yourself.’ He had already set the example of how to live a holy life, so men no longer had an excuse not to know the right way to reach God and be saved. During

the Last Supper, Thomas asked Jesus, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (Jn. 14: 5-6).

We can see that in Isaiah, the biblical translations write the ‘the Holy Way’ or ‘Way of Holiness’ with a capital letter to differentiate the Way He had traced to His followers from the other ways traced by the religious doctrines of men. It is interesting that ‘the Way’ was the name of the doctrine of Christ after His death, when the Early Church began to rise and spread His teachings. This is confirmed in several verses in the book of Acts: Acts 9: 2; Acts 19: 9; Acts 19: 23; Acts 22: 4; Acts 24: 14; 22.

The Way of God for us will always be a Way of Holiness until His second coming. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we need not be afraid to err or to know which way to go (“no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray [NIV: wicked fools will not go about on it – or ‘the simple will not stray from it’]”). Just read and understand the word of God and let it really enter our hearts and teach us how to do things. “Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God?” (Ps. 77: 13).

Isaiah also wrote: “The unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people [NIV: it will be for those who walk in that Way].” Just as the impure in the OT (like the lepers, those who suffered from bleeding, or had some kind of discharge, or were in sin, etc.) were separated from the congregation of Israel and remained outside the camp until they were cleansed, the Way traced by Jesus would be a Way only for the saints, those who have decided to give themselves totally to Him, those who have His seal on their foreheads. Here we can understand that it is not only the impure ones of this world who will be left out of the Holy Way and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 8; Rev 22: 15; Rom. 1: 26-27; 1 Cor. 6: 9-10; Eph. 5: 5; Col. 3: 5-10; 2 Tim 4: 2-4), but ‘The Unclean’, that is, Satan and all his works, for whoever has a covenant with the Lord also has the guarantee of His protection. The way becomes free from the tricks and barriers and cunning of the evil one, for the light of the Spirit shows us when to turn away from these things or when we should use His authority to drive them out of our life.

The prophet continues to tell his people that “No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there [NIV: But only the redeemed will walk there]. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads [NIV: everlasting joy will crown their heads]; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” Everything that threatened them as a more powerful and destructive force will no longer be present on the Way, for this will only be for those who share the same desire for holiness and the same willingness to fulfill the will of God on earth. He has always promised to gather His people and gather them from all the places to which they have been scattered in their captivity in other nations. Here, it would be the same. The reign of the Messiah would bring them together in one faith and in one place, not only in the physical Jerusalem, but in the spiritual Zion, the great Church of Jesus. Only He could take away the sorrow and sighing from the hearts and put joy on the lips of the redeemed, a song of praise and a crown of glory and justice.

‘No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it’ – there shall be no more violence or danger, but peace and unity.

Chapter 36

Sennacherib invades Judah – v. 1.

- Isa. 36: 1 (see 2 Kin. 18: 13-37; 2 Chr. 32: 1-8): “In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.”



Shfela or Shephelah

As it was written in Isaiah 10, Sennacherib marched against Syria, besieged Sidon, and marched south to attack Ashkelon (city of Philistia). He invaded the Kingdom of Judah (701 BC), having taken forty-six fortified cities. He besieged Lachish successfully (2 Kin. 18: 13-14; 17; Mic. 1: 13) and went to Jerusalem to attack Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18: 17-19). Lachish was situated in the most fertile agricultural area of Judah (Shfela or Shephelah, literally, ‘lowlands’); therefore, it was of vital importance to the kingdom’s economy. It was completely destroyed. History says that the Jewish city of Azekah, as well as Lachish, was also attacked, pillaged and then devastated. Besides Lachish, in the valuable agricultural land of Shfela or Shephelah (the coastal plain of Philistia in the land of Judah), there were other cities, which were delivered into the hands of the Philistines. Lachish and Azekah were rebuilt.

When the Babylonians commanded by Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, they were the last cities that fell before Judah was taken (Jer. 34: 6-7). Isa 10: 28-32 describes the march of Sennacherib to Jerusalem.

The affronts against the God of Hezekiah and his despair – v. 2-22.

- Isa. 36: 2-4: “The king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh [NIV: his field commander] from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem, with a great army. He stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller’s Field [NIV: When the commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman’s Field,...]. And there came out to him Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace [NIV: the palace administrator], and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder. The Rabshakeh said to them, ‘Say to Hezekiah: Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you base this confidence of yours?’”

The Fuller's Field or the Washerman's Field (see Isa. 7: 3) was a place outside the eastern wall, where the garments were stretched to dry in the sun, according to the custom of the washer men. The washer man was called a fuller because he washed clothes outside the city and near much water, where cloths could be cleaned by being stepped on a submerged stone. In some places, the washer man was also the dyer, for in addition to wash, he dyed the cloths.

In 2 Kin. 18: 14-16 it is written that, knowing of the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, Hezekiah sent to Sennacherib a message of submission, accompanied by valuable gifts to appease the fury of the enemy: 300 talents of silver and 30 of gold as a tribute, plus silver found in the House of the Lord and the treasures of house of the king, and the gold that was removed from the doors and the doorposts of the temple. But the Assyrian monarch was not satisfied and sent to Hezekiah his officers: the Tartan (his supreme commander), the Rabсарis (his chief officer) and Rabshakeh (his field commander), demanding the surrender of Jerusalem. Eliakim ('who was in charge of the palace'), Shebna ('the secretary') and Joah ('the recorder') were Hezekiah's intermediaries in the negotiation (2 Kin. 18: 37; 2 Kin. 19: 2). This was only the beginning of Rabshakeh's affronts.

- Isa. 36: 5-10: "Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? On whom do you now rely, that you have rebelled against me? See, you are relying on Egypt, that broken reed of a staff [NIV: that splintered reed of a staff], which will pierce the hand of anyone who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him. But if you say to me, 'We rely on the Lord our God', is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar'? Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them [NIV: Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses – if you can put riders on them!]. How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants, when you rely on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? Moreover, is it without the Lord that I have come up against this land to destroy it? The Lord said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.'"

Rabshakeh affronted the trust of Hezekiah and the people of Judah in the Lord, and still used His name as an excuse to have received permission from Him to invade Judah and Jerusalem because of their sins. He also mocked Hezekiah for trusting in Egypt to help him. He offered two thousand horses in exchange for an agreement with the king of Assyria, but he did not believe they had enough men or good enough to ride on them. He said that Hezekiah's strength was very small, compared to Sennacherib's, for they could not chase a single Assyrian captain.

Egypt was called by him (and perhaps by many nations) 'that broken reed of a staff' [NIV: that splintered reed of a staff], because it was no longer a strong nation (Isa. 19 – the Egyptian dynasties). At that moment, it was a divided and weakened nation. In Isa. 30: 1-7 we have seen Isaiah's prophetic warning about trusting in Egypt. God exhorted them not to trust the Egyptians. From Uzziah, and going through Jotham and Ahaz, the ancestors of Hezekiah, no help was sought from Egypt. In this campaign of Sennacherib in 701 BC against the fortified cities of Judah, many Jews sought refuge there. Hezekiah himself seemed to be very prone to trust in the Egyptians, although the bible does not make clear any situation such as sending emissaries to Egypt for the purpose of an alliance.

• Isa. 36: 11: “Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh [NIV: the field commander], ‘Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; do not speak to us in the language of Judah [NIV: in Hebrew] within the hearing of the people who are on the wall.’”































As I commented in Isa. 33:19 about the language spoken by those ancient peoples, cuneiform language (written with the aid of wedge-shaped objects) was created by the Sumerians some about 3,500 years ago and underwent several changes in its evolution. The cuneiform language was adopted by Akkadians (northern part of Sumer), Babylonians, Elamites (in lower Mesopotamia, today Iran), Hittites (north of Assyria) and the Assyrians, among other ancient peoples, to be written in the very language of these peoples (dialects, we can say). The cuneiform documents were written on clay tablets. For 3,000 years, it has been widely used in Mesopotamia, although the syllables (as established by the Sumerians) were not intuitive to those of Semitic languages. Cuneiform language was created, so to speak, to meet the administrative needs of palaces and temples, such as tax collection, livestock records, grain measurements, etc. Cuneiform writing was gradually replaced by the Phoenician alphabet during the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911-612 BC), and was extinguished in the second century AD.



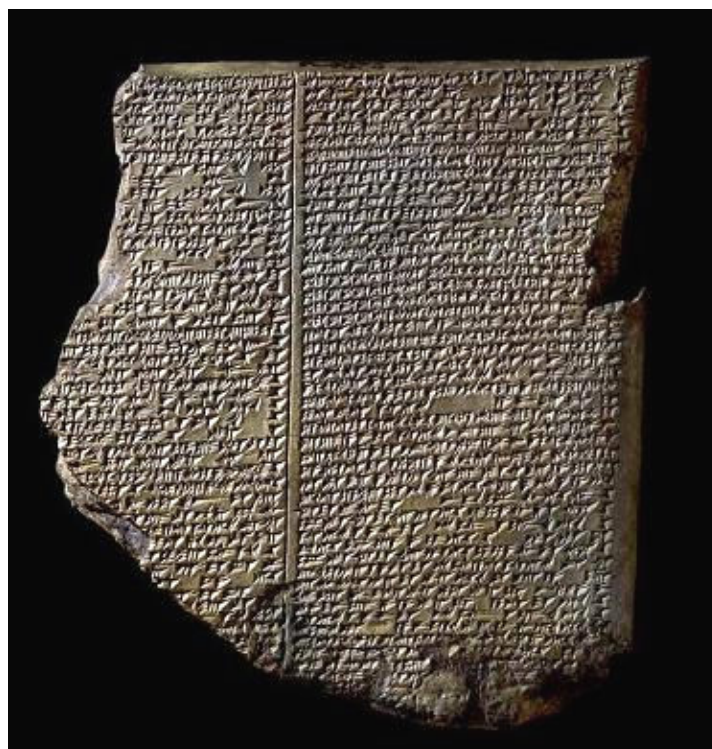
Sumerian Cuneiform (crystalinks.com)

Cuneiform language also inspired the ancient Persian and the Ugaritic alphabet. Ugaritic was the language spoken in the ancient city of Ugarit (Arabic: Ūgārīt, whose ruins are called Ras Shamra) in Syria. The Assyrians had as their official language, the Akkadian, the Sumerian (or ancient cuneiform language) and Aramaic (official language of the Babylonian Empire). Aramaic is the designation given to the different dialects of a language used by people living in the Middle East and it was the religious and administrative language of several empires of the Ancient times. Belonging to the family of African-Asiatic languages it is classified in the subgroup of Semitic languages to which also belong Arabic and Hebrew. Aramaic is also a Semitic language North-Western, quite similar to Hebrew, and lent many words and expressions to Hebrew. The Assyrian language was a kind of ‘adaptation’ of cuneiform language, or the Akkadian, since Aramaic was understood and spoken by many peoples, including the Jews, mainly

by the people connected to the court, who needed that commercial and administrative language to make their political agreements and commercialize their products with other nations.

					
'a	b	g	h	d	h
					
w	z	h	t	y	k
					
s	l	m	d	n	z
					
s	'	p	s	q	r
					
t	g	t	'i	'u	s ₂

Ugaritic Alphabet (crystalinks.com)



Fragment of a clay tablet from the library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh with an Assyrian account of the Flood (crystalinks.com)

So when Sennacherib sent his officers to affront Hezekiah, the ambassadors of Judah (Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah) told him to speak with them in Aramaic because

they understood but not Hebrew, that is, the language of Canaan or the language of Judah, because the humble people spoke it, and they did not want the Jews of the city to understand what they were talking about and be discouraged by their affronts, losing faith in God and the words of King Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18: 26).

- Isa. 36: 12-20: “But the Rabshakeh said, ‘Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and drink their own urine?’ Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah, ‘Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. Do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the Lord by saying, ‘The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’ Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: ‘Make your peace with me and come out to me; then everyone of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. Do not let Hezekiah mislead you by saying, ‘The Lord will save us’. Has any of the gods of the nations saved their land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of these countries have saved their countries out of my hand, that the Lord should save Jerusalem out of my hand?’”

The Rabshakeh continued to shout in the Hebrew language for all to understand; so Hezekiah would be demoralized before the people, and he would surrender to Sennacherib, losing faith in the Lord. First, he threatened them with starvation because of the siege. Then, to brag, in verse 19 he speaks of the gods of other cities of Syria, whom the Assyrian army had invaded, and told them that none of these gods had delivered them out of their hands. How, then, could the God of Israel save Judah and Jerusalem from this invasion?

In Isaiah 10 was commented on the city of Hamate. Hamath, ‘Fortress’ or ‘sacred enclosure’ was a city and kingdom of upper Syria, on the banks of the Orontes River. The entrance to Hamath is an opening that led to the Syrian valley. It was the boundary of that territory, given to the Israelites (Num. 13: 21), but they didn’t get to take possession of that land. Hamath was of great importance and prosperity in the time of David (2 Sam. 8: 9-10) and Solomon, who built storehouses there (2 Chr. 8: 4; 2 Kin. 14: 28). After Solomon’s death, Hamath became a free state again, and retained its independence until King Jeroboam II of Israel (782-753 BC) took it from Judah, destroying its fortifications (2 Kin. 14: 28). Later, Hamath became part of the Assyrian empire (2 Kin. 18: 34; Isa. 10: 9), passing to the Chaldeans in the time of Zedekiah (Jer. 39: 5; Jer. 49: 23; Jer. 52: 9; 27). It was not only an important commercial center, but had also become remarkable due to its irrigation system by means of large wheels (‘norias’), which brought up the water from the river Orontes to be taken to the upper city. It is now known by the name of Hama.

Arpad was in Syria and was first captured by the Assyrians in 754 BC, in the reign of Ashur-nirari V (755-745 BC), in his efforts to control the route to Hamath and Damascus, which were its allies (Jer. 49: 23). Arpad was sacked by Tiglath-Pileser III in 740 BC, after two years of siege, and again by Sargon II, in 720 BC. Its fall symbolized the overpowering power of Assyria (Isa. 10: 9). Today there are ruins of it in Tell Rifa’ad, thirty-two kilometers northwest of Aleppo (Syria).

Sepharvaim (Isa. 10: 9; 2 Kin. 17: 24; 31; 2 Kin. 18: 34; 2 Kin. 19: 13; Isa. 37: 13) was a city captured by the Assyrians. No one knows its correct location. Some suggest that Sepharvaim was the ancient Sippar, for Sepharvaim means ‘the two Sipparas’ or ‘the two libraries’, implying that there were two cities with this name. The city on the east bank of the Euphrates is now called Tell Abu Habbah, about thirty seven miles north of Babylon and nineteen miles southwest of Baghdad in Iraq. The other Sippar, Sippar-Amnanum (the modern Tell ed-Der), lay on the west bank of the Euphrates River in Akkad, northern Sumer, and was the old capital of Sargon I, where he established a large library. Sippar-Amnanum was more specifically called Sippar-Yahrurum. After the deportation of the Israelites (Samaria), at least some of the inhabitants of this city were brought to Samaria to repopulate it, along with inhabitants of other Assyrian cities. Sippar was dominion of the Babylonians, in the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626-539 BC); then passed to the Achaemenid, Seleucid and Parthian Empires. The gods of Sepharvaim were Adrammelech and Anammelech (2 Kin. 17: 31), who were worshiped with rites like those of Molech (Malcam or Milcom; in Greek: Moloch; god of the Ammonites): with the sacrifice of children.

- Isa. 36: 21-22: “But they were silent and answered him not a word, for the king’s command was, ‘Do not answer him’. Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace [NIV: the palace administrator], and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh [NIV: the field commander].”

The people trusted Hezekiah, and remained silent in face of the affront, but the emissaries tore their clothes as a sign of great sadness and returned to the king of Judah to tell him what they had heard.



Hamath

Chapter 37

Jerusalem's deliverance foretold – v. 1-7.

• Isa. 37: 1-7 (see 2 Kin. 18: 37; 2 Kin. 19: 1-7): “When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. And he sent Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. They said to him, ‘Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that the Lord your God heard the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the Lord your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left’. When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, Isaiah said to them, ‘Say to your master, ‘Thus says the Lord: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. I myself will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor [NIV: when he hears a certain report], and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.’”

King Hezekiah was troubled by what he heard from his messengers: Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder (2 Kin. 18: 37). Then he humbled himself before the Lord and tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the Lord. And, along with the chief priests he sent his officers to the prophet Isaiah, and asked him to intercede for the inhabitants of the city.

‘This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth’ – The anguish that troubled the king and all the people because of the threat of an invasion was very great, like that of a woman in labor, and if she is too weak she cannot give birth and needs help from other women so that the child is born. Likewise, he was inwardly without strength and courage, his spirit lacked faith and he needed the strength of the Spirit of God to be able to defend himself from that humiliating situation. He had prepared himself for that moment through the public works that were carried out to defend the city from the effects of a siege, but he could not remember it anymore, for he let himself to be intimidated by the offensive words of an impious man. So he sent his message to Isaiah: ‘lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left’ [NIV: Therefore pray for the remnants that still survives]. Notice that here is a question: what remnant was he talking about? Of the Jews of other cities of Judah who had suffered because of the invasion of Assyria, as the city of Lachish and Azekah (Is 37: 27), and who were now without strength, dismayed and few in number? Or did he mean the inhabitants of Jerusalem? No one had yet died there by the sword of Sennacherib, at least for the time being; and it seems that he had not yet besieged the city, but was in Libnah after he had invaded Lachish (Isa. 37: 8). So fear overcame the good sense. Uncontrolled emotions supplanted the reason and the strength of the Spirit.

It is interesting to comment on Hezekiah's behavior toward Assyria at the beginning of his reign (2 Kin. 18: 7-8) and after about twenty-four years. In the beginning, he rebelled against the king of Assyria and ceased to serve him (probably Sargon II – 722-705 BC, or his predecessor, Shalmaneser V – 727-722 BC), which occurred in the fourth year of Hezekiah described here in bible, during his period of co-regency with Ahaz (729-716 BC), when the Assyrian king came up against Samaria and besieged it (725 BC). After about twenty-four years (around 701 BC), Hezekiah showed

fear and concern about the threat of Sennacherib by paying him a high tribute in gold and silver, and still giving him the gold of the temple and the royal house.

The letter from Sennacherib to Hezekiah – v. 8-13.

• Isa. 37: 8-13: “The Rabshakeh [NIV: The field commander] returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah; for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. Now the king heard concerning King Tirhakah of Ethiopia [Hebrew, Cush], ‘He has set out to fight against you.’ When he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, ‘Thus shall you speak to King Hezekiah of Judah: Do not let your God on whom you rely deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. See, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, destroying them utterly. Shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my predecessors destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar [NIV: Tell Assar]? Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?’”

The Assyrian monarch had sent to Hezekiah his officers: the Tartan (his supreme commander), the Rabsaris (his chief officer) and Rabshakeh (his field commander), demanding the surrender of Jerusalem, which was refused. They returned to Sennacherib, who had already withdrawn from Lachish, and was now at Libnah (2 Kin. 19: 8) and told him the words of Hezekiah. The Assyrian king sent messengers to Hezekiah again with a threatening letter (Isa. 37: 14), mentioning the strength and determination of Assyria, as well as the glory of his ancestors, overcoming the defense ability of the gods of all the cities they had already conquered. Sennacherib, who insisted on affronting the Lord, was boasting too much, not knowing how his end would be, or how Hezekiah or the God of Israel would deal with this situation. It was somewhat like the situation that King Ahab of the Northern Kingdom lived with Ben-Hadad, king of Syria (Aram), who also threatened and affronted him, demanding tribute and surrender, lest to invade Samaria. But Ahab answered him (1 Kin. 20: 9-11), “One who puts on armor should not brag like one who takes it off.” Through the true prophets, God instructed him, and he had victory over the enemy army, which was destroyed.

For us, this episode of Hezekiah and Sennacherib teaches us that we should not listen so much to the enemy’s threatening and discouraging words, using the modern media as his instrument, constantly giving bad news. Hezekiah lost his spiritual focus with the threats of Sennacherib by the mouth of Rabshakeh, already imagining the worst before it happened. After the great religious reformation he had made at the beginning of his reign (2 Chr. 29: 2-36), breaking works of idolatry (2 Chr. 29: 16; 2 Chr. 30: 14; 2 Chr. 31: 1-21), sanctifying the temple, opening its doors and re-establishing the Levitical ministry, even calling the people of other tribes of Israel to celebrate Passover (2 Chr. 30: 1-27), now with Sennacherib at the gates of Jerusalem the king of Judah seemed to have forgotten the strength of the Lord who helped him to do all those works. So it is with us, when the enemy comes to brag of his false power, more exactly, of his power of destruction. He does in a way that our image of God is distorted; he makes us see an impotent God, incapable of overcoming all evil. That’s why we lost many battles. If we looked up to heaven and did not listen to the misfortunes that we see around us, which sometimes do not even happen, we would see the immeasurable size of our God, a God of life and resurrection; a God of miracles and deliverances; a God of creativity, who has a different way out for every problem we face.

- In Isa. 10: 9 and Isa. 36: 19 there is a reference to the city of Hamath, Arpad, and Sepharvaim. Some cities have also been quoted in Isaiah's previous chapters: Cuthah (2 Kin. 17: 24; 30) and Calno (Isa. 10: 9). But here are others mentioned in the verses above: Gozan, Haran, Rezech, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar [NIV: Tell Assar]; Halah, Hena and Ivvah (or Avva).

- Cuthah – In 1881-1882 excavations were made at the archaeological site today called Tell Ibrāīm, observing that Cuthah was a great city in the land of Babylon. Cuthah (in Akkadian, kütu; Sumerian, gu-du-a) was the seat of the god Nergal, whose inhabitants were deported by Sargon II to repopulate Samaria (2 Kin. 17: 24; 30). Nergal was the Sumerian god of war and death, half-brother to Marduk (Merodach or Bel). He was also the deity responsible for civil and military disturbances, god of pestilence and disease.

- Calno was located in Syria, before being captured by the Assyrians. Calno (Isa. 10: 9) can be the same Calneh or Kalneh of Amos 6: 2: "Cross over to Calneh [NIV: Kalneh], and see; from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is your territory greater than their territory?" The city is identified by some archaeologists as Kulnia, Kullani or Kullanhu, the modern Kullan-Köy, between Carchemish in river Euphrates and Arpad, near Aleppo, in northern Syria, about nine kilometers and six hundred meters southeast of Arpad. Calno or Calneh was associated with Canneh (Ezek. 27: 23), as one of the cities with which Tyre maintained commercial relations. In Gen. 10: 10 it is written that it was one of the four cities founded by Nimrod: Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh [NIV: "The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in Shinar"; in NRSV: "The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar"]. But it is probably not the same city, since these four cities were located in Chaldea, north of Sumer, and not in the region of Mesopotamia (in the North), where the Assyrian Empire was later established. In the case of Nimrod (Gen. 10: 10), W. F. Albright (1944) says that the word 'Calneh' did not refer to a city but was corrupted from an expression meaning 'all of them'.

- Hena (2 Kin. 18: 34; Strong #2012; in Hebrew, Hena'). In the Septuagint is identified with Anna, city of Mesopotamia in the banks of the Euphrates.

- Ivah or Ivvah – Strong #5755, Hebrew, 'Ivvah or eAvvae is used for the region of Assyria Ivvah or Avva; this word is related to another: Strong #5754, in Hebrew, 'avvah, which means 'overturn, overthrow.' Ivvah was a city in Assyria on the Euphrates River between the cities of Sepharvaim and Hena. It is mentioned in Isa. 37: 13; 2 Kin. 18: 34; 2 Kin. 19: 13. Today, the site is unknown. Some scholars suggest that it is the same city quoted in 2 Kin. 17: 24; 31 (Avva, Avvites – Strong #5757; Hebrew, 'Avviy: a native of Avvah, only in the plural: Avvites). The bible says (2 Kin. 17: 31): "The Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire as sacrifices to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim" (NIV). Nibhaz (Strong #5026, in Hebrew: Nibchaz, meaning 'lord of darkness.'

- Gozan is identified as the ancient Guzana in the region of Mesopotamia (10th century BC), on the Upper Habor River (now Habür or Khabur River; in Arabic, al-khābūr), and with the modern Tell Halaf in the north of Syria, near the modern border with Turkey. Gozan was initially a Hittite city in the 6th millennium BC, according to archaeologists; and in the late 9th century BC the city and its surroundings were incorporated to the Assyrian Empire – 808 BC. Tell Halaf is a local Aramaic name; 'Tell' means 'hill', and 'Tell Halaf', 'made of ancient city.' Gozan rebelled severely against the Assyrians in 759 BC, in the reign of Ashur-dan III (773-755 BC), and survived until the Roman-Parthian Period. Habor (2 Kin. 17: 6; 2 Kin. 18: 11; 1 Chr. 5:

26), now Habūr or Khabur, is a river that empties into the Euphrates. It crossed the Assyrian province of Gozan (n^ēhar gôzân, ‘river of Gozan’).

- In 2 Kin. 18: 10 and 2 Kin. 17: 6 it is written that in the sixth year of Hezekiah and the ninth year of Hoshea, Samaria was taken by Sargon II (722 BC) and this king carried the Israelites away to Assyria, settled them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes (2 Kin. 17: 6; 2 Kin. 18: 11; 1 Chr. 5: 26). Halah (1 Chr 5: 26 – Strong # 2477 – Chalach) is referred as a region of Assyria, near Nineveh. In Gen. 10: 11 it is written that Nimrod dwelt between Nineveh and Calah (probably Halah).

- Rezeeph means ‘pavement.’ It is an archaeological site about one hundred and thirty-one miles east-northeast of Hamath in the city called Al-Resafa or Al-Rusafa in modern Syria. It was an important center of caravans, on the Euphrates route to Hamath. There are several ways to write his name: Reseph, in the biblical Hebrew; Râphes, Πάφες, in the ancient Greek of the Septuagint (Isa. 37: 12); in Akkadian: Rašappa; in Assyrian: Resâfa; in the present Greek: Rhesapha (Ρεσαφα). It had a great story in the Eastern Roman Period, when it became known as Sergiopolis, due to the name of an Orthodox Christian soldier, martyr in that place.

- Telassar or Tell Assar – the name t^ēla’ssâr or t^ēlassâr (Strong #8515 – tla’ssar or tlassar – 2 Kin. 19: 12; Isa. 37: 12) is mentioned these two times in the bible. Telassar was inhabited by the children of Eden (b^ēnê ‘edhen) and is mentioned along with Gozan and Haran, which are in the north of Mesopotamia. They probably lived in the area between the Euphrates and Belikh rivers, which the Assyrians called Bîti-Adini (Heb.: Beth-Eden) or ‘the House of Adinu’, ‘house of evil’ or ‘house of delight.’ The terms Eden or Edin first appear in Sumer, the southern Mesopotamian region that produced the first written language in the world. This occurred in the third millennium BC. In Sumerian, the word Eden simply means ‘the fertile plain’ (in Hebrew means delight, place of delight). In the archaeological findings is mentioned by Tiglath-Pileser III and Esarhaddon a place called Til-Assuri, which seems to be near the Assyrian border with the Elam. However, this location cannot be proven. It’s not known if the name ‘the House of Adinu’ is related to the name of the ruler of that city, Ahuni (also referred to as Akhuni), during the mid-ninth century BC (in the period of Neo-Hittite and Aramaean kingdoms; c. 1000-800 BC), or if it is related to a primitive Mesopotamian god.

- Haran (Gen. 11: 31-32; Isa. 37: 12 – Strong #2771 – hârân or charan, חָרָן, ‘parched’; in Greek, Cháran, Χάρων) is also called Hara (2 Kin. 19: 12; 1 Chr. 5: 26). Pul (2 Kin. 15: 19; 1 Chr. 5: 26) is an alternative name for Tiglath-Pileser III (2 Kin. 15: 29; 1 Chr. 5: 26), king of Assyria. The bible calls it as one of the ‘cities of the Medes’, while the Septuagint translates as ‘mountainous’, which may represent the Hebrew term hârê or hara’ (חָרָא, Strong #2024), ‘mountainous region’, a region of Media. In 1 Chr. 5: 26 (NIV) it is written: “So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria (that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria), who took the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh into the exile. He took them to Halah, Habor, Hara (חָרָא, Strong #2024) and the river of Gozan, where they are to this day.”

The most interesting thing is that the bible uses the two words in the various texts: Hara and Haran (the latter, here in Isa. 37: 12). Haran was the city where Abraham settled after leaving Ur, in Chaldea. It was dominated by Assyria for being on the trade route between Nineveh and Aleppo, a commercial center that maintained contact with the ports of Tyre (Ezek. 27: 23). Adad-nirari I (1310 BC) fortified it, and Tiglath-Pileser I (1115 BC) embellished the ancient temple of Sîn, the moon-god. For a long time it was the province of Assyria. It rebelled and was sacked in 763 BC (during the reign of

Ashur-dan III). The city was restored by Sargon II, and the temple was repaired and furnished again by Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. After the fall of Nineveh (612 BC) Haran became the last capital of Assyria, before its capture by Babylon in 609 BC. The Babylonians restored the Temple of Šin in Haran and Ur for interest in the temples of Babylon. The Parthians and the Romans dominated it, and then the Islamists.

In Abraham's time, the Aramaeans (in Aramaic, 'aramáyê) was an ancient Semitic Aramaic tribal confederation of the Northwest that emerged from the region known as Aram (modern Syria) in the 8th century BC. They seized large extents of Mesopotamia. Thus, Aramaeans is a common name for Syrians and Assyrians, since it refers to the region of Aram, in the bible.



As I commented in Isa. 33: 1-22, the formal language of the Babylonian Empire was Aramaic, whose name derives from Aram ('highlands' in Canaanite, and ancient name of Syria) or from Aram Naharayim, wrongly translated as referring to 'Mesopotamia', but more precisely, a northern region within Mesopotamia.

Ancient writers used the name 'Mesopotamia' for all of the land between the Tigris and Euphrates, from the Mountains of Ararat (Turkey) through Aram (Syria), to Assyria (Iraq), and into the Persian Gulf.

The Hebrew word Aram-Naharaim (Aram Naharayim, Strong #763) is mentioned six times in the Old Testament: Gen. 24: 10; Deut. 23: 4; Judg. 3: 8; 10; 1 Chr. 19: 6; Ps. 60: 1 – Explanation about David's victory.

The land of Aram-Naharaim ('Aram of the Two Rivers') included Paddan-Aram and the city of Haran (or Harran), mentioned ten times in the Bible (Gen. 11: 31-32; Gen. 12: 4-5; Gen. 27: 43; Gen. 28: 10; Gen. 29: 4; 2 Kin. 19: 12; Isa. 37: 12; Ezek. 27: 23).

Paddan (Strong #6307, פַּדָּן) or Paddan-Aram ('Field' or 'the table-land of Aram' or 'the plain of Aram') is the geographical name given to the region around the biblical city of Harran, in Syria, and comprised the area within the great bend of the Euphrates between Carchemish in the west and the Khabur River in the east (Habur, in Turkish).

This region is traditionally considered to have been populated by descendants of Aram, son of Shem (Gen. 10: 22; 1 Chr. 1: 1-27), the father of the Semitic peoples, including the father of the Hebrews (descendants of Eber). The Semitic peoples therefore include Israelite and non-Israelite peoples such as the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Arabs, the Akkadians and the Arameans: Syrians and Assyrians who occupied much of Mesopotamia.

In the Book of Genesis, the name Aram-Naharaim is used both for the region of Aram-Naharaim itself (Strong #763, 'Aram Naharayim' – Gen. 24:10 – 'Mesopotamia', referring to the land of Abraham's brother Nahor Gen. 22: 20-23), and for Paddan-Aram (Gen. 25: 20) and Haran (Gen. 11: 31-32; Gen. 12: 4-5; Gen. 27: 43; Gen. 28: 10; Gen. 29: 4), to refer to the place where Abraham stayed briefly with his father Terah's family after leaving Ur of the Chaldees while on his way to Canaan (Gen. 11: 31), and the place from which later patriarchs obtained wives rather than marrying daughters of Canaan (Gen. 24: 4; 15; 67 – Isaque; Gen. 28: 1-2; 6-7; Gen. 29: 5 – Jacó).

It is worth mentioning that Terah had three sons: Abram, Nahor and Haran (Gen. 11: 26). The name Haran (with an H), Abraham's brother, in Hebrew, is also written as הָרָן, Strong #2039, and means 'mountaineer.' In English it is written as 'Haran.' There are two other men with the same name in the Bible:

1) Aram (Strong #758, אֲרָם, the highland) – Gn 10: 22-23 – son of Shem, father of the Arameans; but his name is without the 'H', both in English (Aram) and in Portuguese.

2) Aram – Gn 22: 21 – grandson of Nahor, brother of Abraham; his name is also without the 'H', both in English (Aram) and in Portuguese.

When I wrote about the gods of Sepharvaim and the other Assyrian cities whose inhabitants brought with them to repopulate Samaria, the Holy Spirit reminded me of other gods quoted by the prophet Amos (Am. 5: 24-27, especially in verse 26). Amos came a little before Isaiah (kingdom of Judah – 740-681 BC), for his prophetic period is around 760-750 BC, a few years before Isaiah began his, and prophesied in Israel the northern kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II, contemporary of Uzziah, great-grandfather of Hezekiah. Amos 5: 24-27 says, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves [Septuagint: lifted-up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, their idols]); therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts." This means that God was already warning Israel of their deportation to Assyria after the invasion of Samaria in 722 BC because of their idolatry. 'Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images' (verse 26) concerns Assyrian gods, but also worshiped in Egypt. Sakkuth was an idol whom was given the title of king. Kaiwan (Hebrew: Kiyuwn) means: an image, a pillar. It was probably a statue of the Assyrian-Babylonian god of the planet Saturn. We know that Haran or

Padam-Aram, since the time of Abraham, had commercial and friendly relations with Egypt. No wonder the people of Israel have knowledge of them! Chiun in Egypt is the same as Saturn and is sometimes called Kaiwan or spelled as Khiun, meaning 'star.' The star of Saturn was a god. Sakkuth or Kaiwan or Chiun are Assyrian gods and are objects of idolatrous worship which, in Akkadian, mean 'the planet' or 'star', Saturn. Though being delivered from Egypt, the people of Israel remembered those gods in the wilderness.



Hezekiah's prayer – v. 14-20.

• Isa. 37: 14-20: "Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; then Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, saying: 'O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, and have hurled their gods into the fire, though they were no gods, but the work of human hands – wood and stone – and so they were destroyed. So now, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the Lord' [cf. 2 Kin. 19: 19, NIV: Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God]."

Hezekiah received the letter of Sennacherib, but delivered it in prayer in the hands of God in His house, and He answered him through the prophet Isaiah with words of deliverance to Judah and judgment on the oppressor (2 Kin. 19: 14-34; Isa. 37: 21-35).

So we must do with the malicious words and the adverse situations that come to our lives, when we feel powerless to do something, because we do not know what to do. In Job 26: 1-3 it is written: “Then Job answered: ‘How you have helped one who has no power! How you have assisted the arm that has no strength! How you have counseled one who has no wisdom, and given much good advice!’” And in 2 Cor. 12: 10b, Paul writes: “For whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”

The prophet comforts Hezekiah – v. 21-35.

- Isa. 37: 21-35 (see 2 Kin. 19: 20-34): “Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying: Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Because you have prayed to me concerning King Sennacherib of Assyria, this is the word that the Lord has spoken concerning him: She despises you, she scorns you – virgin daughter of Zion; she tosses her head – behind your back, daughter of Jerusalem. Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and haughtily lifted your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel! By your servants [NIV: by your messengers] you have mocked the Lord, and you have said, ‘With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains, to the far recesses of Lebanon [NIV: to the utmost heights of Lebanon] I felled its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses; I came to its remotest height, its densest forest. I dug wells and drank waters, I dried up with the sole of my foot all the streams of Egypt.’ Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins [*God makes clear that it was by His will*], while their inhabitants, shorn of strength, are dismayed and confounded; they have become like plants of the field and like tender grass, like grass on the housetops [Masoretic: on the roof and terraced fields], blighted before it is grown. I know your rising up and your sitting down, your going out and coming in, and your raging against me. Because you have raged against me and your arrogance has come to my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth; I will turn you back on the way by which you came. And this shall be the sign for you [NIV: This will be a sign for you, O Hezekiah]: This year eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from that; then in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, shoot an arrow there, come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return; he shall not come into this city, says the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.”

Isaiah gave a word of comfort to Hezekiah and firmed in him the faith that God Himself would respond to the affronts, would deliver Jerusalem and perform His revenge against the enemy. God said that Jerusalem would mock the Assyrians, as they had done to her. He also reveals His power to search each one’s thoughts and hearts, and He is the only one able to move men to accomplish only His will, even though they think they are succeeding by their own strength. God has already planned everything from eternity, and will always punish arrogance, disobedience, haughtiness and every argument that stand up against His true knowledge (2 Cor. 10: 4-5). This is how He acts against our enemies; they come by one way but return for seven (Deut. 28: 7 – cf. Ex. 23: 22).

‘The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this’ (Isa. 37: 31-32).

Here, the prophet was referring to the few who escaped from the fortified cities of Judah at the time of Sennacherib’s invasion of the land and fled to Jerusalem seeking safety. These represent the few ones chosen and rescued of God who in Christ are saved. Those Jews would again take root downwards and bear fruit upward, meaning that those who fled their own dwellings to Jerusalem should return to their houses, for there would be no siege in this city; they should settle in their land and live peacefully and prosperously, abounding in all good things. This symbolizes the believers who come back to create root in the love and word of God (a hidden root) and who are the source of salvation, bringing blessings that will never be taken: “I give them eternal life [*the sheep, that’s what Jesus meant*], and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand” (Jn. 10: 28-29). A believer grounded in the Lord, even going through tribulations, continues to bear fruit, to do the good works resulting from the spiritual gifts poured upon him.

‘For from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors’ may relate to the times of the gospel when Jesus’ disciples left Jerusalem, taking His word and His teachings throughout the world, including the Gentiles, for they were firmly established in it and in the presence of the Lord in the temple of their hearts, on the throne of grace from which the true law came (‘For out of Zion shall go forth instruction’ or ‘the law will go out from Zion’ (NIV) – Isa. 2: 3; Mic. 4: 2b). Zion is a symbol of the temple of God, of His throne, from which the true teaching and the greatest blessings come; from the place where God sits on the throne. For us, Zion is our spirit, our inner temple; and Jerusalem represents our life, more specifically, our soul sanctified by the power of the Spirit of God, where the saints and the faithful have permission to enter, but the wicked and impure are forbidden by God Himself, just as it will be in the heavenly New Jerusalem. Our body is the dwelling of our spirit and our soul, where the Lord dwells. But after His second coming, the New Jerusalem will be a wider place where He will welcome all His chosen ones to live eternally with Him. Verse 35 ends by saying that the Lord would defend Jerusalem for His own sake and for the sake of His servant David. God never invalidated His promises to David, even because the Messiah would be a descendant of David (Acts 13: 22-23; Jn. 7: 42). In the same way, He will never invalidate His covenant made with us: ‘I will never leave you or forsake you’ (Heb. 13: 5b).

The destruction of the Assyrian army – v. 36-38.

- Isa. 37: 36-38 (see 2 Kin. 19: 35-37; 2 Chr. 32: 21-22): “Then the angel of the Lord set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies. Then King Sennacherib of Assyria left, went home, and lived at Nineveh. As he was worshiping in the house of his god Nisroch [NIV: One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch], his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped into the land of Ararat. His son Esar-haddon succeeded him.”

The result of this campaign of Sennacherib in 701 BC was described in the bible: the destruction of 185,000 Assyrian army soldiers during the night by the angel of the Lord (2 Kin. 19: 35; 2 Chr. 32: 21-23, Isa. 37: 36). Sennacherib, however, gave up the siege of the city, withdrawing to his capital, Nineveh (2 Kin. 19: 36; Isa. 37: 37-38), where he was killed by two of his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer. But here it is quite

likely that there was a time gap between the two events, for his death is recorded in History in 681 BC, when his younger son Esarhaddon came to power; even because the NIV says: “One day, while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.” This may confirm that there has been an interval of years between events. It is known that after this campaign against Hezekiah in 701 BC, he spent the remaining years of his reign in military campaigns against rebels in his empire. Nisroch could be a translation of the name of the national god of Assyria, Assur or Ashur (in the Septuagint, Esorach).

Chapter 38

Hezekiah's illness – v. 1-21 (see 2 Kin. 20: 1-11; 2 Chr. 32: 24-31).

Hezekiah, in his illness, receives from Isaiah a message of death – v. 1.

• Isa. 38: 1: “In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover.’”

It is not known Hezekiah's disease; only that it should be very serious, because the prophet told him that God would take him soon.

He prays to God – v. 2-3.

• Isa. 38: 2-3: “Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord: ‘Remember now, O Lord, I implore you, how I have walked before you in faithfulness with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight’. And Hezekiah wept bitterly.”

Hezekiah was shocked to hear the news, like anyone receives an unfavorable diagnosis from the doctor. Hezekiah remembered the Lord and decided to pray for healing. The argument that came to his mind was what he had already done of right and good in the eyes of God, and hoped that He would take this into account to give His final judgment. Perhaps what passed through his mind is that after many things he had suffered and overcome, or what he had already done for the sake of his people and for the things of the Lord, it would be unfair to suffer such a disease and die because of it. It would be like he was being punished by God. At that time, it was common to think that any serious illness that came upon someone was a sign of punishment for some sin he had committed; just remember Job and what he heard from his own friends. Perhaps at that moment Hezekiah remembered many wrong things he had done in his life, and the tears were tears of repentance as he was confronted with his frailty, incapacity, and humanity before such a powerful God. Perhaps he was weeping for his people and for the responsibility that he, as king, had over his subjects who at this moment seemed abandoned and without direction. Or, then, he cried because, as a human being, the news had hurt him. It is not known exactly why he cried, but the bible says he cried a lot and bitterly, which might give us an idea of the cause of his crying: a bitter weeping of those who find themselves wronged or frustrated in their dreams; of those who see that they have not done enough good in life and now regret having made so many wrong decisions; the bitter cry of feeling abandoned when he needs solace most; or many other causes. But the Lord knew why and was only waiting for this act of humility from Hezekiah in order to begin to act. David also wept when the son of his sin with Bathsheba died; he wept for his sin, repented and asked for mercy, and was heard, for his sincerity touched God's heart. That is why Jesus said in the beatitudes: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt. 5: 4 cf. Isa. 61: 2). This tells us about the cry of a sincere soul who desperately seeks something that God alone can give, that is invisible to human eyes and impossible to be bought with money: salvation, forgiveness, divine justice, reconciliation with someone, a sense of purity and innocence, restoration of the intimacy with God, being able to smile again, the healing of a trauma that needs to be forgotten to continue to live, fulfill one's mission on earth with freedom, etc. Those who weep are happy, because they receive comfort from God. And the cry that the Lord speaks here is the cry of repentance that produces a desire to change one's own life. It means to cry for divine justice to be established on earth, freeing, healing and bringing back the joy of communion with Him. Blessed are those

who mourn for their separation from God, because He hears their crying and comforts them, reestablishing their relationship again and their intimacy with the Father. Jesus said: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16: 33 – NIV).

God prolongs his life and gives him a sign – v. 4-8.

• Isa. 38: 4-8: “Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: ‘Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life (The bible adds in 2 Kin. 20: 5b: ‘On the third day from now you will go up the temple of the Lord.’). I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and defend this city. This is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing that he has promised: See, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz turn back ten steps.’ So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined [NIV: I will make the shadow cast by the sun go back the ten steps it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.’ So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had gone down].”

The Lord was adding fifteen years to his life without that disease, and confirmed to him, Hezekiah, and to his people their deliverance from the hands of Assyria. And to increase his faith, He would give him a visible sign. In 2 Kin. 20: 8-11 it is written that Hezekiah asked the prophet what sign God would give him, so that he knew that he would be really healed. Isaiah gave him a choice, Hezekiah chose what he thought best, and God fulfilled what for Hezekiah would be a sign of his healing.

In 2 Chr. 32: 24-31 it is written: “In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. He prayed to the Lord, and he answered him and gave him a sign. But Hezekiah did not respond according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah. Hezekiah had very great riches and honor; and he made for himself treasuries for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for shields, and for all kinds of costly objects; storehouses also for the yield of grain, wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds of cattle, and sheepfolds. He likewise provided cities for himself, and flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him very great possessions. This same Hezekiah closed the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them down to the west side of the city of David. Hezekiah prospered in all his works. So also in the matter of the envoys of the officials of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.”

The verse above, ‘In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. He prayed to the Lord, and he answered him and gave him a sign’ refers to a time after the exaltation of his heart because of everything the Lord had given him.

So this gives us a clue that his weeping is linked to the repentance of his heart’s behavior in relation to all the benefits received from God, to everything he did in Judah as a competent administrator, and which was put in 2 Chr. 32: 27-30. Here we suppose that because of all this his heart was proud and there was wrath from God against him and against Judah and Jerusalem, bringing Sennacherib against them. But Hezekiah humbled himself because his heart was proud, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come against them in the days of Hezekiah. And now, this sickness made him rethink everything he had done.

Probably the other part that speaks: ‘So also in the matter of the envoys of the officials of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart’ refers to a new episode of exaltation of the heart of Hezekiah, where the bible no longer mentions the wrath of God against Judah and Jerusalem; only against the king (‘God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart’), for the king may have exalted himself in regard to the deliverance which he received from Sennacherib, and that was certainly known to several nations, and also because of his wonderful healing. That is why (Isa. 39: 1-8) he acted presumptuously in regard to the Babylonian messengers, and then the Lord forsook him, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart. In Isa. 39: 8 the bible says that Hezekiah accepted God’s sentence, but does not mention again a cry of repentance or intercession for his descendants, who would suffer because of his attitudes. He cared only for himself at that moment.

His song of praise to God – v. 9-20.

- Isa. 38: 9-20: “A writing of King Hezekiah of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness: I said: In the noontide of my days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years [NIV: I said: ‘In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and robbed of the rest of my years?']. I said, I shall not see the Lord in the land of the living; I shall look upon mortals [NIV: mankind] no more among the inhabitants of the world. My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd’s tent; like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom; from day to night you bring me to an end; I cry for help until morning; like a lion he breaks all my bones; from day to night you bring me to an end [NIV: I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me]. Like a swallow or a crane I clamor, I moan like a dove. My eyes are weary with looking upward. O Lord, I am oppressed; be my security! [NIV: I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!] But what can I say? For he has spoken to me, and he himself has done it. All my sleep has fled because of the bitterness of my soul [NIV: But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul]. O Lord, by these things people live, and in all these is the life of my spirit. Oh, restore me to health and make me live! Surely it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but you have held back my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. For Sheol [NIV: the grave] cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living, they thank you, as I do this day; fathers make known to children your faithfulness. The Lord will save me, and we will sing to stringed instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of the Lord.”

In this song of praise for his recovery, Hezekiah puts some phrases that he himself told the Lord during the prayer he asked for healing. The song shows that he has once again recognized God’s lordship over his power as king of a nation. His spirit returned to the position of humility.

His recovery – v. 21-22

- Isa. 38: 21: “Now Isaiah had said, ‘Let them take a lump of figs [NIV: a poultice of figs], and apply it to the boil, so that he may recover’. Hezekiah also had said, ‘What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?’”

Little is known about the healing effects of figs in ancient times. Some sources [Douglas, J.D.] refer to the medicinal use of lump of figs, which in Ugarit [an ancient city in Syria (In Arabic, Ūḡārīt), whose ruins are called Ras Shamra] was used as a medicine for horses. We only know that figs are rich in vitamins A, B1 and B2, which have an antioxidant effect, and minerals such as: calcium, iron, phosphorus, magnesium, sodium and potassium. In the case of Hezekiah, it is clear that the healing came through the hands of God, not exactly through the lump of figs [NIV: poultice of figs]. This was just an auxiliary physical factor, a strategy of healing for the king's illness. Mixed with some type of ointment, the fig might help with the eruption of a boil and the elimination of pus.

Chapter 39

Envoys from Babylon – v. 1-2

- Isa. 39: 1-2 (see 2 Kin. 20: 12-19): “At that time King Merodach-baladan son of Baladan of Babylon [NIV: Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon] sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. Hezekiah welcomed them; he showed them his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.”

Merodach-Baladan, in Babylonian means: ‘Marduk bore a son’ or ‘Marduk gave a son.’ Marduk or Merodach, as he is presented in the bible, is a protective god of the city of Babylon, belonging to a late generation of gods of ancient Mesopotamia. Marduk is called Merodach by the Hebrews (2 Kin. 25: 27; Isa. 39: 1; Jer. 50: 2). In Assyrian and Babylonian cuneiform inscriptions, the name Merodach-Baladan is written as Marduk-apla-iddina II, originally governor of Bit-Yakin (731-710 BC), a small Chaldean district north of the Persian Gulf and south of Babylon. When Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) entered Babylon in 731 BC, Merodach-Baladan brought him gifts and supported the Assyrians against a rebel sheikh, Ukin-zer. When Sargon II (Sharrukin II – 722-705 BC) came to power in 722 BC, Merodach-Baladan entered Babylon and claimed the throne. The Assyrians reacted and attacked the Elamite allies of Babylon the following year. The result of the battle is not known very well; only that Merodach-Baladan remained on the throne of Babylon until 710 BC, when Sargon II, after neutralizing the Elamites, entered Babylon without any opposition. When the Assyrians moved south to Bit-Yakin, Merodach-Baladan was kept as local chief and no longer opposed the Assyrians. But with Sargon’s death in 705 BC, Merodach-Baladan returned to work for their independence from Assyrian dominion. It was probably at this time (703–701 BC) that he sent the envoys to Hezekiah (Isa. 39: 1; 2 Kin. 20: 12) to congratulate him on his recovery, and perhaps to assert his help against Assyrian efforts to dominate the ancient Middle East. Merodach-Baladan wished to form a coalition between Babylon, Judea, and Egypt against Assyria. Isaiah’s opposition thwarted his plans to have the king of Judah as his ally. In 689 BC the Assyrians sacked Babylon, returning the rule of the empire of Assyria to the hands of Sennacherib. Merodach-Baladan was forced to flee, first to Bit-Yakin and then to the southwest of Elam, where he died. Sennacherib remained as king of Assyria until 681 BC.

Isaiah predicts the Babylonian captivity – v. 3-7.

- Isa. 39: 3-7 (cf. 2 Kings 20: 18): “Then the prophet Isaiah came to King Hezekiah and said to him, ‘What did these men say? From where did they come to you?’ Hezekiah answered, ‘They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon.’ He said, ‘What have they seen in your house?’ Hezekiah answered, ‘They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.’ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, ‘Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: Days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your ancestors have stored up until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the Lord. Some of your own sons who are born to you, shall be taken away; they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’”

As it was said in the previous chapter of Isaiah, in 2 Chr. 32: 31 it is written: “So also in the matter of the envoys of the officials of Babylon, who had been sent to him to

inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.”

Probably this refers to a new episode of exaltation of the heart of Hezekiah, in relation to the deliverance that he received as for Sennacherib, which was certainly known to several nations, and also because of his wonderful healing. So he acted presumptuously in regard to the Babylonian messengers, and then the Lord forsook him, to test him and to know all that was in his heart.

The prophet not only rebuked him because of his reckless attitude towards foreign emissaries, but gave him a personal prophecy for the future of his own family, for all that he had would be taken to Babylon along with his descendants. Isaiah says that they would become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. In the fourth and fifth generations, his descendants, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, were taken by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon. The bible only tells that Jehoiachin was released from captivity by Evil-Merodach (also called Amel-Marduk), son of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kin. 25: 27-30; Jer. 52: 31-34) and remained the rest of his days there; Shealtiel (Salathiel) his son and father of Zerubbabel (Ezr. 3: 2; 8; Ezr. 5: 2; Neh. 12: 1; Hag. 1: 1; In 1 Chr. 3: 19 it is written that Zerubbabel was the son of Pedaiah, the brother of Shealtiel) was born after the exile to Babylon (NIV: Matt. 1: 12), i.e., in captivity. The bible also says that Zedekiah was taken captive, saw his sons be slain by the sword, had his eyes taken off [NIV writes: he put out Zedekiah's eyes], and died in the captivity in Babylon (2 Kin. 24: 7; Jer. 52: 9-11).

The son of Hezekiah who succeeded him was Manasseh, and was a bad king, suffering punishment from God. Manasseh, son of Hezekiah and Hephzibah (2 Kin. 21: 1), reigned as co-regent with his father around 697-687 BC, and as sole regent: 687-642 BC. In 2 Chr. 33: 10-13 it is written: “The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they gave no heed. Therefore the Lord brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon. While he was in distress he entreated the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord indeed was God.”

The bible does not make it clear what Assyrian king was this, if Esarhaddon (681-669 BC, the youngest son of Sennacherib) or Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC). What is known is that in the government of Manasseh there was a great religious regression, with the cult of Assyrian and Canaanite gods (2 Kin. 21: 1-9; 2 Chr. 33: 1-9; 19). His prayer was heard by God, who brought him back to Jerusalem, to his kingdom. But his religious reformation was superficial (2 Chr. 33: 15-17), if we look at the reign of his son Amon (642-640 BC – 2 Chr. 33: 21-25), who was a very bad king, following the bad example of his father.

Hezekiah's submission to God's sentence – v. 8.

- Isa. 39: 8: “Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, ‘The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good.’ For he thought, ‘There will be peace and security in my days.’”

The bible says that Hezekiah accepted the judgment of God, but does not mention again a weep of repentance or intercession for his descendants, who would suffer because of his attitudes. He cared only for himself at that moment, and probably rejoiced and thanked God for having peace in the rest of his years.

We'll give sequence to our study with the volumes 2 e 3 about the second and third part of the prophecies of Isaiah:

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/thebookofprophetisaiah2.pdf>

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/thebookofprophetisaiah3.pdf>