

The book of prophet Isaiah – volume 2 **(Explanation on the prophecies – 40 to 55)**



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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.

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose against you will be as nothing and shall perish. Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all. For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you” (Isa. 41: 10-13).

Introduction

This is the second volume of ‘The Book of Prophet Isaiah’, addressing chapters from 40 to 55. From now on the content of the prophecy comes to be exilic, and the focus is given to the coming of the Messiah (Here, He is prefigured in David, Cyrus and, often in Isaiah, called the ‘Servant’).

As I said in the first volume, 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 the prophecy in History, what characters they were referring to, the location of the cities there, and the figures of speech used at the time to give me more insight into the writings of the prophets.

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 God greater 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.

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.

Another thing that called my attention in this second part of Isaiah’s prophecies is the call of Cyrus as an instrument of God to deliver His people from the Babylonian captivity. Cyrus was obedient to the voice of the God of Israel within him, even more than the Jews themselves, and accomplished His design, for the Lord found in him a propitious heart to carry out His justice. God called a Gentile and clothed him with authority to accomplish this mission, but did not interfere in his private life, so to speak, allowing him to exercise his free will and choose his own spiritual way. In other words, Cyrus did not become a Jew, but he respected other religions, like all rulers of his dynasty, not having a specific religion, according to historians. He seemed only to enjoy the doctrine of Zoroaster (In Latin, Zoroastrós; in Ancient Greek, Zoroastres, Ζωροάστρης Zōroastrēs; in later Greek orthographies, Ζωροάστρις Zōroastris), Greek name of Zarathushtra (in modern Persian: Zartosht), a prophet and poet born in Persia (present-day Iran) in the 7th century BC and who founded Zoroastrianism, in the 6th century, the first monotheistic religion of Antiquity after Judaism, officially adopted by the Achaemenid rulers (558-330 BC). The meaning of his name in Persian (Zarathustra) is obscure; but in Greek, Zoroastres means ‘he who gazes at the stars’, ‘he who observes the stars’; astron = star. According to Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda (‘Wise Spirit’) was the God of Good, the God of principle, who created all things.

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.

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.

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].

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 1 and 3 of this book:

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/thebookofprophetisaiah1.pdf>

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

- 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).

Introduction to the second part of Isaiah's prophecy

From 40th chapter of Isaiah to the 55th, the content of the prophecy comes to be exilic, and the focus is given to the coming of the Messiah (Here, He is prefigured in David, Cyrus and, often in Isaiah, called the 'Servant').

Jerusalem appears ruined, Israel is in the exile of Babylon, and the exile had lasted long. Israel's people were in great consternation. The indignation of God weighed upon them because of their sins. They thought that the Lord had forgotten them and some of them came to consider that the place where they were exiled was their own homeland.

The prophet promised that God was about to deliver His people, and urged them to trust in this promise. He said that only the Holy One of Israel was able to help. It was He who was guiding the course of events, acting according to His will, and His decree would certainly be fulfilled, for His word does not return empty. Therefore, the trust in other gods was futile. Cyrus was an instrument in His hands for the accomplishment of His purposes, and for the sake of His own name and reputation, Israel would be delivered (Isa. 48: 1-11). Babylon would be overthrown by Cyrus; the Jewish exiles would be gathered from all the lands through which they were scattered, and they would return to Canaan.

In this second part of the prophecy of Isaiah God rebukes the nations, especially Babylon because of their hostility against Israel, and also because of their idolatry. The course of all world events leads to a single target, which is to make Israel and all other nations of the earth prostrate before the one true God (Isa. 45: 23).

The coming of the Messiah was prophesied by several prophets, especially by Isaiah, hence called the Messianic prophet. However, the word 'Messiah', 'The Anointed One', was only used twice, in Dan 9: 25-26. The prophets referred to the Deliverer of Israel in other words, such as: Servant, Righteous Branch or Root of David, Prince, and Immanuel (which means 'God with us'). Other words like 'Redeemer', 'The Mighty One of Jacob' and 'The Holy One of Israel' (qedoshôsh Yisra'el) are actually used to refer to God Himself as the tireless defender of the nation. Biblical references to the 'Redeemer' are: Isa. 41: 14; Isa. 44: 6; Isa. 47: 4; Isa. 48: 17; Isa. 49: 26; Isa. 54: 5; Isa. 54: 8; Isa. 59: 20; Isa. 60: 16. The Messiah is a figure of Salvation for Israel. The word 'salvation' (in Hebrew, ישועה, yeshu'âh, Strong #3444) 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 (Strong #3444), just as Jesus (Yeshua – ישוע) is commonly called. 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 matnay, meaning 'to give' or 'reward.' The Greek words sôtêrias, sôtêria or sôtêrion mean: 'ransom, safety, liberation, health, salvation, saved, 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."

Even translated in different manners (yeshu, yshu, yish, etc.) in other biblical verses, the word keeps the same basic letters, and the most important of all, the same meaning: salvation. According to the ‘Lexicon Strong’s Concordance’, the word yshuw`ah (or yeshu`âh) means ‘something saved’ that is, ‘deliverance’; therefore, aid, victory, prosperity, health, help, salvation, save, saving (health), to protect, to guard, to preserve (health), welfare. The word yshuw`ah is linked to the word yasha` (Strong #3467), which is a primitive root whose meaning is: to be open, wide 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. Yshuw`ah (or yeshu`âh) is derived from Yhowshuwa` (Jehoshua; Joshua), transliterated to the Greek as Iēsoûs (Ἰησοῦς), Jesus (Strong #g2424) – Matt. 1: 21.

Yeshua (יֵשׁוּעַ) means ‘Salvation’, and is the Hebrew name of Jesus, so it’s written in Matt. 1: 21 (Lk 1: 27): “She will bear a son, and you [*the angel was talking to Joseph about Mary*] are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Thus, we can say that in Jesus Christ the prophecies about the Messiah were fulfilled, that is, He came as a man, from the royal offspring of David and as a servant of God to fulfill His role as the Redeemer of Israel (God always said to be the Redeemer of Israel, the Mighty One of Jacob, the Holy One of Israel: Isa. 41: 14; Isa. 44: 6; Isa. 47: 4; Isa. 48: 17; Isa. 49: 26; Isa. 54: 5; Isa. 54: 8; Isa. 59: 20; Isa. 60: 16). He came as a king and anointed conqueror (Lk.17: 20-21; Acts 10: 38; Jn. 18: 33-37; Jn. 19: 19; Matt. 11: 12-13; Jn. 1: 29; Col. 2: 13-15), freeing us, definitely, from the power of death (generated by our own sins; Jn. 1: 29; Col. 2: 13-15), and giving us a spiritual kingdom (Jn. 18: 33-37), not material (Contrary to what the Jews were expecting), where we not only receive the adoption of children, but the same authority that was in Him through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1: 10-14; Jn. 14: 12-15; Rom. 8: 14-17).

Cyrus, a figure of the Messiah, as king and anointed conqueror:

In Isaiah 41: 1-29, especially verses 2 and 25, the prophet is speaking of Cyrus, who is chosen by God to deliver His people from the Babylonian yoke, and also called His servant. And in other verses, his name is clearly mentioned:

- Isa. 44: 28: “... who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose’; and who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be rebuilt’, and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’”

- Isa. 45: 1: “Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him – and the gates shall not be closed.”

- Isa. 45: 13: “I have aroused Cyrus in righteousness, and I will make all his paths straight; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward, says the Lord of hosts.”

- Isa. 48: 14-15: “Assemble, all of you, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? The Lord loves him [*Cyrus*]; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken and called him, I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way.”

- Isa. 44: 26; 28 (the victory of Cyrus leads to the rebuilding of Zion): “... who confirms [*He, God*] the word of his servant* [*probably Isaiah, prophesying the deliverance of his people*], and fulfills [*He, God*] the prediction of his messengers [*the prophets*]; who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be inhabited’, and of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins’... who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my

shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose'; and who says of Jerusalem, 'It shall be rebuilt', and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"

* In NIV, it is written: 'his servants', in the plural, which makes us think about the prophets.

The Messiah – the Servant:

In the next biblical references it's very clear the relation between the word 'servant' and the Messiah, for us, Jesus:

- Isa. 42: 1-9 (Jesus) cf. Matt. 12: 18-21: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them." – see Matt. 12: 18-21: "Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope."

- Isa. 49: 1-7 with special focus on verse 7: "Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers [NIV, 'to the servant of rulers'], 'Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves [*they'll worship the Messiah, Jesus*], because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.'"

- Isa. 50: 1-11 (with special focus on verse 10): "Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant, who walks in darkness and has no light, yet trusts in the name of the Lord and relies upon his God?"

- Isa. 52: 13: "See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high."

- Isa. 53: 1-12 (with special focus on verse 11): "Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities."

Servant –

There's a comment to make about the word 'servant', which is used in the bible to other people besides the Messiah. In addition to be used in relation to servants and masters, God uses this word even to the wicked, which are His instruments on earth for correction of His people. For example, He calls the people of Israel 'servant', as well as His prophets, King David and even the king of Babylon. He also called Cyrus the Persian, a servant, as we will see later on, not only as a king to help His people but also as a prophetic figure of the Messiah. Let's see the biblical references:

- Israel (Jacob) Jer. 30: 10; Jer. 46: 27-28; Isa. 41: 8-9; Isa. 44: 1-2; Isa. 44: 21; Isa. 45: 4; Isa. 48: 20; Isa. 49: 3.
- Prophets (Servants): Jer. 7: 25; Jer. 25: 4; Jer. 29: 19; Jer. 35: 15; Jer. 44: 4.
- David: Jer. 33: 21; Jer. 33: 22; Jer. 33: 26; Isa. 37: 35; Ezek. 37: 24.
- King of Babylon: Jer. 25: 9; Jer. 27: 6; Jer. 43: 10.

David, a figure of the Messiah:

- Jer. 30: 8-9: “On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will break the yoke from off his neck, and I will burst his bonds, and strangers shall no more make a servant of him. But they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king [*referring to Jesus, who would be born of the house of David*], whom I will raise up for them.”
- Ezek. 34: 22-24: “I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David [*referring to Jesus*], and he shall feed them: he shall feed them (Rev. 7: 17) and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.”
- Ezek. 37: 24: “My servant David [*referring to Jesus*] shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes.”

Chapter 40

The coming of the Lord is foretold, as well as that of the one who will open the way for Him – v. 1-11.

- Isa. 40: 1-11: “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins [NIV: Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for her sins]. A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God [NIV: A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God’ (Septuagint: make straight the paths for our God)]. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’ A voice says, ‘Cry out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field [NIV: ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field’]. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’ See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom [NIV: close to his heart], and gently lead the mother sheep [NIV: he gently leads those that have young].”

Here the prophet brings a word of hope to those who have returned from captivity, saying that the Lord has forgiven them and blotted out their sins. He receives an order to

cry out in the wilderness and prepare the ways of the Lord, of the Messiah who will come to them, to make straight the paths for their God, because everything that was wrong or crooked will be corrected and rectified. When one speaks of preparing or making straight the ways for the Lord, it means changing the way one behaves up to that moment, re-evaluating the doctrines on which they were established so that the new things of God could come. Hearts and ears should be prepared to hear and receive the truth, for the Lord would manifest Himself to them as He had never done until then. The righteousness of God would come in a visible way to all who were prepared.

The voice from heaven says, ‘Cry out!’, but he asks what he shall cry. And the voice from heaven answers again: ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass’ – that is, it is for the prophet to say that humankind is frail and unstable, and its fidelity to God looks like a flower that beautifies for a while, but with a stronger wind it falls and withers. So it was the people of God who had returned from captivity: forgiven by the Lord, but empty of His presence, needing to remake their covenant with Him and learn again the way of truth that had been erased by idolatry and by doctrines created by men. They wanted to follow God, but their flesh was as weak as a flower; their faithfulness, unstable, and therefore their hearts needed to be prepared for when He manifested among them. They might make mistakes, but the Lord would always remain faithful in His words and promises.

“Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings” – it means that Jerusalem, the city of God, which was set upon a hill, would be the bearer of the good tidings of a new time for all the people of Judah and Israel, and then to all nations, for Jerusalem would be the first to contemplate this marvelous work of God and the glorious appearance of its God. There, on Mount Zion, the mount of the temple, was where Jesus performed great miracles and filled that House with the presence of God once more. He was again with His people. From Jerusalem this light would shine to the peoples. The Messiah would dominate over everything, and would bring reward and honor with Him. Here, He assumes the figure of the shepherd who will tend his flock with care, from the little lambs to the older sheep.

“A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God [NIV: A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God’ (Septuagint: make straight the paths for our God)]” – this implies the presence of a prophet, a messenger, one who can be the mouth of God on earth to prepare the hearts for His coming. This forerunner of the Messiah was John the Baptist, who came to give the people the knowledge of their sins, to cause them to repent and to cleanse themselves inwardly so they could receive the true doctrine preached by Jesus. Although the prophet Malachi refers to John the Baptist as Elias (Mal. 4: 5-6), the four evangelists make use of this text from Isaiah when they refer to the prophet (Matt. 3: 3, Mk. 1: 3; Lk. 3: 4-6; Jn. 1: 23). John the Baptist refers to himself by mentioning this prophecy. In fact, John the Baptist is considered to be the last member of the prophetic succession in regard to the annunciation of the coming of the Messiah. The NT prophets would have nothing to add to that; only, to proclaim that He has already come; to exhort the fallen, to rebuke the rebel, and to reinforce hope in what was preached and promised by Jesus Himself as to the end of time, when there will be the final judgment of all evil.

The majesty of the Lord – v. 12-17.

• Isa. 40: 12-17: “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the spirit of the Lord, or as his counselor has instructed him? [NIV: Who has understood the mind (or Spirit; or spirit) of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor?] Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as dust on the scales; see, he takes up the isles like fine dust. Lebanon would not provide fuel enough, nor are its animals enough for a burnt offering [NIV: Lebanon is not sufficient for altars fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings]. All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness [NIV: Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing].”

In this part of chapter 40, the prophet shows the majesty, the greatness, and the power of the Lord, so that the human being could know better his Creator and how much God was greater than a mere human being, as well as all earthly things He Himself had created.



He begins by saying that God was so great (the bible says He is spirit), that He could measure the size of heavens with a span of His hand. The waters were measured by Him in the hollow of His hand, even the seas, which a man could not see where they ended. When God created the Earth, He determined the limit of the oceans and the size of the dry portion, which He called earth; and did it in a so accurate and calculated manner as if he had enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure (in an ephah – an old measure of capacity equivalent to 17.62 liters).

The bible says that it was with the Spirit of God that all things were created, for with Him is the wisdom for all things (Prov. 8: 22-31); and here in Isaiah, God asks the man, ‘Who has directed the spirit of the Lord’ or ‘Who has understood the Spirit of the Lord’ or ‘Who has understood the mind of the Lord?’ (1 Cor. 2: 11; 16). So, no matter

how wise a man might be, God and His Spirit of life and creativity, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, and might (Isa. 11: 2) would always overcome him. He put everything under His feet, including the rulers of darkness; even Satan himself. With all these metaphors, God showed Himself to the prophet and His people; He showed a new facet of His character.

The text goes on with the Lord, saying, ‘Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice?’ – This means that there would be a man capable of giving advice to the Lord and telling Him what to do, as it was in the beginning of Creation, or to teach Him how to exercise justice properly? This does not remind us of Job chapters 38; 39; 40: 1-2, when God asks questions to His servant and convinces him of his ignorance?

There are still many arguments used by Him in this text to give His people the exact notion of His power, of His greatness: for Him the islands were so small that they were but a grain of sand (‘like fine dust’). And if anyone wanted to offer Him a pleasing sacrifice and compatible with all that He had spoken of Himself, neither the abundant forests of Lebanon nor the animals existing there would be enough for the burnt offering.

“All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness” or “they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing” is what the bible says. If we bring this to our days, we can have an extremely greater vision of the power of God than that we have had to this day, when we think of Jesus on earth, resurrecting the dead, casting out demons, taking dominion over the forces of nature, healing people from diseases incurable to science, and even resurrecting Himself from the dead to show His victory over death. When we see nature, with birds and all immeasurable kinds of animal species, the mountains, seas, plants with countless varieties, the several colors that appear in the sky with different hues of blue, depending on the hour of day we observe, and much more things like these, our consciousness expands to perceive the creativity of the Spirit of God; more than we have sometimes to draw something so simple or to plan the menu of for lunch of tomorrow. This reflection goes much further, when we hear from NASA satellites landing in comets or scanning the Universe, bringing the images of celestial bodies never imagined, or spacecrafts orbiting the rings of Saturn in search of information that gives the human being the answer which he has been seeking about himself. When we see things from such a big perspective, we can understand what the bible says about Jesus having stripped Himself of all His glory to incarnate in a mortal body like ours and make things easier for us by showing what it means to live in holiness, and what the Father expects of us (Phil. 2: 7-8: “but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross”). By resurrecting and ascending to heaven, He detached from this limited body and regained His glory and His power as Spirit (Eph. 1: 20-23; Heb. 1: 3-4). The bible says that the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3: 17). Although this last quote is referring to the free action of the Holy Spirit in our midst we can imagine that His being fills the entire Universe and controls it with full awareness of all that is happening in it. Solomon said in his prayer to the people, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!” (1 Kin. 8: 27; 2 Chr 6: 18). Now can you understand what the Lord was revealing to Isaiah? Before such an immense being, the planets, the nations, and the islands were nothing; it was as if He were watching them through a microscope. Therefore, His people should no longer fear any great empire upon the earth, for all of

them, however greater they were, remained nothing before Him; they were only His instruments. And when He wished, He Himself would destroy them.

The madness of idolatry – v. 18-26.

- Isa. 40: 18-26: “To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? [NIV: What image will you compare to him?] An idol?—A workman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts for it silver chains. As a gift one chooses mulberry wood—wood that will not rot—then seeks out a skilled artisan to set up an image that will not topple [KJV: “He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved”]; NIV: “A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple.”]. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? [NIV: Have you not understood since the earth was founded?] It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.”

In this passage, the prophet continues to show the majesty of God, now comparing it with the madness and insignificance of idolatry. Could idols made of wood, gold and silver compare with God? Who could compare to Him? Would they have the power to create the world as He did; He who created the stars in heaven, and knows each one of them (‘calling them all by name’) and does not let them simply disappear? Did they not remember anymore what was told by their ancestors, who transmitted the word of God to them through the Torah? God could reduce to nothing both the princes and the judges of the earth. And they bowed before idols too! What was the result of all this? Only captivity, exile, destruction, divine judgment! In Ps. 115: 3-8 it is written: “Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they make no sound in their throats. Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them.” Therefore, this passage from the prophet Isaiah reinforces his constant message that the God of Israel is holy, and compares to nothing that other nations call gods. Therefore, He Himself writes the words of the Lord in Isa. 42: 8: “I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.”

Comfort for God’s people – v. 27-31.

- Isa. 40: 27-31: “Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God’? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles [NIV: They will soar on wings like eagles], they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

When the people complained and said that the Lord was not interested in the situation which they were in, that He did not care for them and did not pay attention to them, the prophet tells them that, on the contrary, the Lord knew very well the conditions of His people. The captives had been forgiven by the Lord, but were empty of His presence, needing to remake their covenant with Him and learn again the path of truth that had been erased by idolatry and the doctrine of men. Now they felt tired and helpless, for their exile was already long lasting, and they were discouraged and discredited. Their flesh was as weak as a flower; their faithfulness, unstable, and therefore their hearts needed to be prepared for when the Messiah manifested among His people. This verse 27 (“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God?’”) can be compared to Isa. 49: 14-16 which says, “But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me’. Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.”

Isaiah speaks to them that in His infinite wisdom and mercy, the Lord would never forget them. He knew that they were tired after all they had gone through; tired of the captivity, but He did not get tired, and was able to invigorate them, in every ways, so that they could come back to be what they were in the past, in the glorious season of their nation. Babylon would not be their land forever. They would not live there definitely. That was temporary, contrary to what some of them were already thinking. God was their strength, and was able to make them think more comprehensively about all things, turning their eyes to the spiritual, not to the material side only (‘but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles’). The trust in God and the rest in Him, which they had rejected in the past, would now be the way to strengthen and stabilize them inwardly.

Chapter 41

The Helper of Israel— v. 1-7.

• Isa. 41: 1-7: “Listen to me in silence, O coastlands [NIV: you islands]; let the peoples renew their strength; let them approach, then let them speak; let us together draw near for judgment. Who has roused a victor from the east, summoned him to his service? [Hebrew: whom victory meets at every step] He delivers up nations to him, and tramples kings under foot; he makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow. He pursues them and passes on safely, scarcely touching the path with his feet [NIV: He pursues them and moves on unscathed, by a path his feet have not traveled before]. Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, am first, and will be with the last [I, the Lord – with the first of them and with the last – I am he]. The coastlands [NIV: the islands] have seen and are afraid, the ends of the earth tremble; they have drawn near and come. Each one helps the other, saying to one another, ‘Take courage!’ The artisan encourages the goldsmith, and the one who smooths with the hammer encourages the one who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, ‘It is good’; and they fasten it with nails so that it cannot be moved.”

In these verses we see the presence of God as the deliverer and Redeemer of His people, to whom no one else can resist. He stands definitively as the only God, who has dominion over all events and over all people. In verse 1 He tells everyone to be silent and to come and defend themselves and express their reasons for the matter to be settled once and for all. The word ‘coastlands’ or ‘islands’ 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. God spoke to them, “let them approach, then let them speak; let us together draw near for judgment.” But what cause was He referring to? What was the issue that needed to be decided once and for all? In chapter 40 (Isa. 40: 12-26), as it was said, God had declared His majesty and sovereignty before all, not only before His own people, but also before all peoples, showing that the world was created by Him, and the idols of the nations did nothing to prevent the world events until that moment. More than idols, He referred to the idolaters of these nations, as the wise men, soothsayers and augurs, who ‘disputed power’ with Him, trying to predict the future and the events and movements of other peoples in order to be able to take a stand or avoid some kind of catastrophe. All empires were under His hands, and everything that happened to Israel was not by chance or force of any army, but because He had determined and allowed such a thing. All nations saw the natural and supernatural signs He had made before them, choosing His instruments of punishment and judgment. No other god of wood, stone, gold or silver could act in favor of his worshipers or deliver them from the hands of their oppressors. He did have the power to do what He wanted, for He was the true God, the same One who had taken His people out of Egypt and now would also deliver them out of Babylon’s captivity in His due time. Hence, He had already chosen His instrument of deliverance: Cyrus, who in this prophecy has not his name revealed, as well as in Isa. 46: 11, where God calls him ‘a bird of prey’ [in other prophecies he has his name revealed: Isa. 44: 28; Isa. 45: 1-4; Isa. 45: 13-14; Isa. 48: 14].

Here in Isa. 41: 2 the bible only says that he would come from the East (*Persia*) and would be a victorious man, to whom the nations would submit. He would crush kings and destroy them with his sword and with his bow, and they would be compared to dust

and straw that flies in the wind. The bow was part of the armament of the peoples of Media and Persia, such as Elam, for example, which we saw in Isa. 22: 6. He would pursue his enemies, advance safely through lands previously unknown to him. But the Lord made it very clear that this man would be only His instrument of redemption for Israel, not because he was greater or better than any other warrior that existed before him, but by the anointing of the Holy One of Israel poured out upon him. All nations would see this and tremble before him. A man would give strength to his companion so that both can stand and have confidence in themselves, like an artisan who works with an idol needs confirmation from another fellow to make sure the image is firm and well-made and will not topple. God reaffirmed what He had said in chapter 40: the trust in other gods was vain.

Cyrus prefigures the Messiah, as king and anointed conqueror. In other places, he is also called servant. In this part, it is well understood that only He, the Holy One of Israel, is able to deliver His people.

Israel encouraged by promises of security and deliverance – v. 8-20.

- Isa. 41: 8-20: “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend (2 Chr. 20: 7; Jam. 2: 23); you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are my servant’, I have chosen you and not cast you off [NIV: I have not rejected you]; do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand [NIV: I will uphold you with my righteous right hand]. Yes, all who are incensed against you [NIV: All who rage against you] shall be ashamed and disgraced; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all [NIV: Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all]. For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, Do not fear, I will help you. Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you insect Israel! [NIV: Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel] I will help you, says the Lord; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. Now, I will make of you a threshing sledge, sharp, new, and having teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and crush them, and you shall make the hills like chaff. You shall winnow them and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. Then you shall rejoice in the Lord; in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys [NIV: I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys]; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together [NIV: I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together], so that all may see and know, all may consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.”

In this passage, the Lord gives a word of hope to His people whom He had chosen, and who were descendants of Abraham. If God called Abraham a friend, they too would receive the privilege of being called His friends if they returned to Abraham’s obedience and the intimacy he had with the Most High God. Here, He also calls Israel (Jacob) a servant, as He does in other verses: Isa. 44: 1-2; 21; Isa. 45: 4; Isa. 48: 20; Isa. 49: 3; Jer. 30: 10; Jer. 46: 27-28; and this is to remind them of the importance of serving

only Him, instead of serving other gods, and the privilege that this meant. It was a privilege to be chosen as His instrument on earth. Israel was being encouraged again by the promises of safety and deliverance, so no longer should fear desolation or destruction. God assured His people that He was not rejecting Him; on the contrary, He was with them in their captivity. But He was their strength, their help and their sustenance, for His hand was mighty, and He was working for them. All the peoples who raged against them would be ashamed, confused, and already had a day determined by God Himself for their destruction. Israel would no longer see its oppressors.

For the second time, He repeats, “Do not fear, I will help you. Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you insect Israel [NIV: Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel]!” It seems strange to say that, but the Lord called His people a little people, a worm, so small in number and humbled before all the Gentiles, but it had to be so that they would learn to follow the ways of God, rather than that of foreigners. As they followed them, they turned away from the Lord, who says here that He is their Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

God will cause Israel to destroy its enemies, from the great to the small, such as grain is threshed and then crushed or ground. Here the Lord uses the figure of speech of a well-known agricultural tool, which was the threshing sledge (in KJV: a threshing instrument; cf. Isa. 28: 24; Hos. 10: 11). It was a hooked instrument drawn over the ground to break the clods of earth after the plow had passed. Although the exact form of the instrument is uncertain, it is known that it was pulled by an ox (Job 39: 10). It may even have the same purpose as the ‘harrow’ or ‘garden rake’ or the ‘spring-tooth harrow’ (drag harrow) used by farmers, but there is no way to represent it, at least at the time they used it. God says that He would make of them a sharp and new threshing sledge, with double blades and many teeth. Thus, they would grind and crush the mighty ones (‘mountains and hills’), reducing them to chaff.

The Lord also shows what else they will do to their enemies: “You shall winnow them and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. Then you shall rejoice in the Lord; in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.” To winnow is a method of sifting the cereal or throwing it up with the shovel (the bible writes ‘the winnowing fork’ – Mt 3: 12) in order to clean it in the threshing floor, that is, to blow a current of air through the grain in order to remove the chaff. They would cause terror to the enemy and this one would be spread to the four corners of the earth, like chaff is carried away by the wind. With the victory given by the Lord, they would rejoice and believe Him again, for they would understand that the glory belonged to their God.

Even though we don’t know what a threshing sledge was like in Isaiah’s day, we can see below the threshing sledge used in Jesus’ time, used to separate the chaff from the wheat and the other instruments used by farmers, such as the sickle and the winnowing fork. The threshing sledge was like a wooden board with stones underneath, attached to the ox or the donkey. And usually a little boy climbed on top of it and beat the animal so that it began to walk in circles on the wheat that was on the threshing floor. In this way the separation was made between the grain and other debris. Then, with sticks they beat the threshed cereal. With the winnowing fork, the grain was thrown into the air and the wind carried the remnants of chaff. In a second stage, the almost clean wheat was placed in a sieve, and a circular movement was made with it; they threw the cereal up to let the chaff go with the wind. This process was called winnowing or sifting.

In the images below you can see the threshing sledge, the sickle and the winnowing fork, and the winnowing of grain. Winnowing means to throw the grain up and let the wind carry the chaff.



The prophet continues to speak in the name of the Lord. He knows that His people are afflicted and thirsty and hungry, but He will never forsake them. His miracles will be seen, like those made in the past, when the people left Egypt and, being thirsty, was satiated in the wilderness by fountains of water that the Lord cause to sprout from a rock. This part of the prophecy takes us to the future, to the times of the gospel, where Jesus would be like rivers, pools and springs of living water to the thirsty for deliverance and salvation from God, through the word that came out of His lips. It was not impossible to accomplish these things materially as He did in the past, but the prophecy intends to increase the spiritual capacity of that people and make them see what their real thirst was, that is, what kind of thirst was most important for them to be quenched. Jesus said several times in the gospel that He was the source of living waters, and that water would flow from whoever believed in Him. He also said that He was the manna that came from heaven, the bread of life.

- Isa. 41: 18-20: “I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together [NIV: I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together], so that all may see and know, all may consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.”

A bare height means a slope of a mountain without any tree, totally smooth, because the vegetation does not grow there because of lack of favorable conditions (Jer. 14: 6). There are no rivers in mountains, yet the Lord says that He would open rivers on these high places. He also says He would open fountains in the midst of the valleys. In Palestine, where rain falls only during a certain period of the year, the landscape is cut by many narrow valleys and beds of streams (Hebrew, *nahal*; or in Arabic, *wadis*), which only display water during the rainy season. Groundwater can often be found in these *wadis* during the dry months (Gen. 26: 17-19). Perennial rivers pass through valleys (in Hebrew, *‘emeq* = valleys) and broad plains, or else they cut narrow gorges through the rock.



Shfela or Shephelah

The Hebrew word *sh^cphelâ* denotes low ground, especially the coastal plain of Philistia in the land of Judah, agricultural land of Shfela or Shephelah. Thus, returning to Isaiah, it's more likely to see dry beds in a valley; at most, small streams, or dug wells (Gen. 26: 17 – Isaac), but it is very different from a spring of water that gives rise to a river. Jesus would make of a wilderness a pool of water, and a dry land, a spring; it means that sterile and unproductive lives, dry and needy in every way, would be transformed by His presence, and could quench the thirst of others who also suffered for lack of comfort and strength to overcome their difficulties ('valleys'). His Spirit flows with abundance from the hearts of all who are willing to be His servants, and free from sins of the past.

He ends the passage saying that He would plant cedar, acacia, myrtle and olive tree in the desert. This means that in the life of those people there would be no more desolation and sterility, but the anointing, the strength and blessing of God (olive tree), the sense of nobility and the awakening of their potential (acacia), dignity and honor (cedar) and divine generosity, for in the previous chapters of Isaiah when the Assyrians came to devastate the land, the prophecies said that thorns and thistles would grow on the earth. God was now reversing the situation.

- The cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) is a majestic conifer of durable wood; so David built his house with cedar, and Solomon, the temple, as well as the second temple of Ezra was also reconstructed with this wood. The cedar can reach one hundred and thirty-one feet high and the ancient writers used it as a symbol of the stature of a man (Ezek. 31: 3; Am. 2: 9), also of strength, majesty and power (Song 3: 9), pride, hardness, inflexibility (Ps. 29: 5).

- Acacia (in Hebrew: *shittah*) is a tree of many species, widespread in Egypt, Arabia, and Palestine. It was the tree that supplied the wood to the Hebrew people, the sacred and fragrant wood of Shittim and was much employed in the building of the tabernacle. The acacia was often found in Sinai, where God spoke to Moses. The word for bush in Hebrew is *Sneh* (the same root as the name 'Sinai'), which literally means 'bush', 'shrub' or 'thorn bush.' The plant found in Sinai, where God spoke to Moses is the *Seneh*, also known as *Shittah* (in the singular; or *Shittim*, in the plural – Joel 3: 18) and refers to *Acacia nilotica* (or *Vachellia nilotica*), a thorny plant, a small tree or shrub of the *Fabaceae* family, genus *Acacia*. All the furnishings of the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon (including the Ark of the Covenant) were built of acacia wood (*Acacia nilotica*), as was indicated to Moses in the divine revelations. *Shittim* also refers to a place of idolatry and immorality in front of Jericho, on the plains of Moab, to the east of the Jordan River. There is a prophecy in Joel 3: 18: "In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Wadi Shittim ('Valley of the Acacia')." This means that after sincere repentance, the people that were depraved before will receive the life-giving water on the Lord's Day. Acacia means: potential, nobility.

- Myrtle is a small shrub (*Myrtus communis* L.) of Mediterranean origin, cultivated to make hedges and is characterized by small leaves, compact and fragrant. The flowers are white and were used as perfume. Its name in Hebrew is *h^adas*, and *Hadassah* (Hebrew name of Esther) derives from it. The shrub reaches thirty-three feet tall (ten meters). The myrtle is an evergreen plant. The bible describes the myrtle as a symbol of divine generosity. Isaiah foresaw the myrtle, replacing the thorn bush in the wilderness (Isa. 55: 13; Isa. 41: 19).

- The olive tree (*Olea europaea*; in Hebrew is *shemen ets* שמן עץ, and in Greek, *elaia*, *ελιά*) is a symbol of beauty, strength, blessing, prosperity, friendship,

fructification and peace. Kings and priests were anointed with olive oil; therefore, olive tree also represents divine sovereignty and strength (the anointing of God). The olive tree can grow up to twenty-three feet high, has twisted trunk and numerous branches. Its development is slow, reaching even centuries of age. Olives (zayit זית) ripen in early autumn, but are harvested in late November (almost near the winter in Israel). In ancient times, a shallow cistern was carved in stone and then the olives were crushed with a great millstone.

The last sentence of the text says: “I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together [NIV: I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together].” Here, we have a probable error of translation in relation to the plane tree (*Platanus occidentalis*, American sycamore), described by NRSV.

We need to understand that the plants designated in the bible were not always the same ones to which we give the same names in different parts of the world today. In second place, what we see in Palestine today is not always the native plants narrated in biblical times. In third place, not all bible versions identify them correctly. This is because biblical writers were not very interested in botanical issues and did not actually know their scientific names as we know them today. For example, apricot is often called an apple; the terebinth is called elm; acanthus is called nettle, and so on.

Let's see the following translations:

NRSV: I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together.

NIV: I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together.

KJV / ASV: I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together.

If we check the Lexicon Strong's Concordance for these words in Hebrew (KJV), we will have:

- Fir tree [berosh or browsh – Strong #1265 – a cypress tree; therefore, a lance or a musical instrument (as made of that wood): fir (tree)]. In fact, this Hebrew term refers to the trees that belong to the genus *Pinus* (Hebrew, berôsh, berôthîm).

- Pine [tidhar – Strong #8410 – A kind of hardwood or lasting tree (perhaps oak): pine (tree)].

- Box tree [te'ashshûr or t'ashshuwr – Strong # 8391 – a species of cedar; box (tree)].

- The pines (Hebrew, 'oren), in many versions are translated as cypress or cedar. The cypress (Hebrew, tirzâ, *Cupressus sempervirens* L., the well-known Italian cypress, Tuscan cypress, Persian cypress, or pencil pine) and pine (*Pinus brutia* Tenore or *Pinus halepensis* Mill or *Pinus pinaster*), botanically, belong to the genus *Pinus* (Hebrew, berôsh, berôthîm). The fir tree is the popular name of the various species of the genus *Abies*: a conifer tree of the Pinaceae family (Hebrew, berôsh, berôthîm) with cones upright (like candles), flat leaves in form of needle and small and aromatic, disposed in two rows. Fir tree produces abundant pollen during the breeding period. It is a large tree, reaching 10–80 meters tall when mature. It is a native tree to temperate forests of Europe, Asia and North America. The fir trees are used as a source of timber, and from its leaves are extracted resins and essential oils for pharmacology and some alternative medicines. They have a decorative effect, so they are used as Christmas trees and as protection against the wind. Most string instruments (violin, cello and double-bass, for example) use the fir tree in their upper part (soundboard) and in some parts in the interior of the instrument because the wood gives it a peculiar characteristic of resonance that is much appreciated. The cypress and pine are perennially green conifers, native to the hills of Palestine and Lebanon. The cypress (Isa. 41: 19; Isa. 55: 13) is a symbol of fertility. It is also an excellent wood for construction. Solomon, for example,

built the temple not only with cedar, but with cypress and olive wood (1 Kin. 6: 31-36). Therefore, it also symbolizes the grandiosity, royalty and reverence to God.

- Box tree is a shrub or small tree (up to nine meters high), native to Europe and Asia, with small, white flowers, capsular fruit, and wood useful for marquetry (art of inlaying woodwork; embedding pieces of ivory, wood, brass etc. in some woodwork), lathe, musical wind instruments and drawing instruments. Box tree (Hebrew, *te'ashshür* – Isa. 41: 19; Isa. 60: 13) has the botanical name of *Buxus longifolia* Boiss., a small tree up to six meters high, with perennially green leaves. The wood is extremely hard and of fine granulation. It is native to the Mediterranean islands and Lebanon (Box tree, *te'ashshür* – Isa. 41: 19; Isa. 60: 13), but not present in Israel. On the other hand, *Buxus sempervirens* (the common box, European box, or boxwood) is native to western and southern Europe, northwestern Africa and southwest Asia (includes Israel), from southern England to the north of Morocco, and east through the northern Mediterranean region to Turkey.



Italian Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens* L.) – the two images above



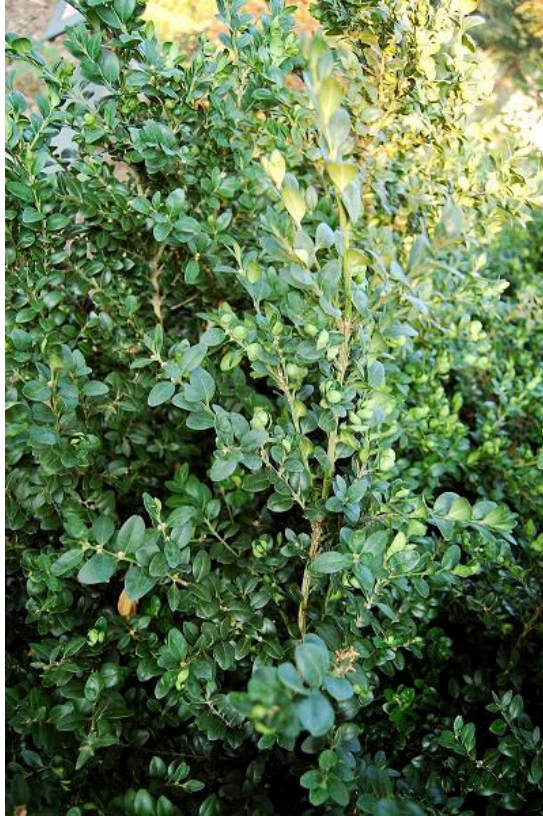
Cypress (Genus *Pinus*)



Pine Trees



Box tree (*Buxus sempervirens* – fruit)



Box tree (*Buxus sempervirens*)



Buxus sempervirens – flowers – photo: Didier Descouens – wikipedia.org



Acacia (*Acacia nilotica*) in the desert of Negev



Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*)



Fir tree (*Abies balsamea*) / Fir tree (*Abies fabri*, Sichuan, China) – Wikipedia.org



Olive Tree (*Olea europaea*) / Olive Tree (*Olea europaea*) – trunk



Myrtle (*Myrtus communis* L.)

The vanity of idols – v. 21-24.

- Isa. 41: 21-24: “Set forth your case, says the Lord; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen [NIV: Bring your idols to tell us what is going to happen]. Tell us the former things, what they are, so that we may consider them, and that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come. Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be afraid and terrified [NIV: tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed all filled with fear]. You, indeed, are nothing and your work is nothing at all; whoever chooses you is an abomination.”

Here God presents a new challenge to the idolaters, as He did in Isa. 40: 18-26, showing His majesty to them and saying that He made all things. It is clear here also (Isa. 41: 1-7) that He was addressing not only the idols of the nations, who did nothing to prevent all world events until that moment, but also the idolaters of these nations, as the wise men, soothsayers and augurs, who ‘disputed power’ with Him, trying to predict the future and the course of the current events.

Redemption through Christ – v. 25-29.

- Isa. 41: 25-29: “I stirred up one from the north, and he has come, from the rising of the sun he was summoned by name [NIV: I have stirred up one from the north, and he comes—one from the rising sun who calls on my name]. He shall trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay. Who declared it from the beginning, so that we might know, and beforehand, so that we might say, ‘He is right’? There was no one who declared it, none who proclaimed, none who heard your words. I first have declared it to Zion, and I give to Jerusalem a herald [NIV: messenger] of good tidings. But when I look there is no one; among these there is no counselor who, when I ask, gives an answer. No, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their images are empty wind [NIV: See, they are false! Their deeds amount to nothing; their images are but wind and confusion].”

God keeps saying that He will raise up a deliverer for His people, and this man will come from the East. By ‘herald’ or ‘messenger’, He suggests that it is about a prophet or someone who can predict accurately when the deliverance of the captivity from Babylon will come to pass. None of the idolatrous fortune tellers could tell what would

happen. God could find no counselor to give or answer His questions, that is, there is no one to compare to Him. The more the molten images of idols! They are nothing to God.

In verse 25 the Lord says that the defender of Israel will come from the north, and soon after, He says that He will come from the east ('from the rising of the sun' or 'from the rising sun'). It is about the same person: Cyrus, whose ancestry was Mede ('from the north') by mother, and from Persian ancestry ('from the rising of the sun', that is, the east) by father. When the bible speaks here of the North or East, it is referring to the land of Israel as a geographical reference point. Cyrus' father, Cambyses I, also united the kingdom of Media to the Persian nation.

Israel's deliverance from the Babylonian yoke by Cyrus occurred more than one century after this prophecy (about a hundred and fifty years).

Even though Cyrus does not know the God of Israel, he will obey Him, and this will be a way of proclaiming His name ('one from the rising sun who calls on my name'), for only He can change the hearts of men and enable them to perform His sovereign will. Cyrus, though not a Jew, admitted the existence of the God of Israel and credited Him the success of his deeds:

- Ezr. 1: 1-2: "In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared: 'Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah.'"

- 2 Chr. 36: 23: "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up" see Isa. 44: 28: "who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose'; and who says of Jerusalem, 'It shall be rebuilt', and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"

God also says that Cyrus will ignore the power of kings of other nations or of his nobles; he will trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay.

Chapter 42

The Messiah is called the Servant of the Lord; the ministry of Christ – v. 1-9.

- Isa. 42: 1-9: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit [NIV: Spirit] upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice [NIV: a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice]. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching [NIV: he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope]. Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations [NIV: a light for the Gentiles], to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.”

The expression ‘the coastlands’ or ‘the islands’ 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. This confirms that Jesus, the Messiah, would also come to the Gentiles:

- Isa. 42: 6: “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations [NIV: a light for the Gentiles]” see Isa. 49: 6: “he says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth’”; Lk. 2: 32 (The praise of Simeon, when the baby Jesus was presented in the temple): “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

The relationship between the word ‘Servant’ and the Messiah, Jesus, is clear to us:

In Isa. 42: 1 God says that He delights in His servant, Jesus. A similar phrase is repeated in the NT in the episode of Jesus’ baptism and at the moment of the transfiguration: Matt. 3: 17 (‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased’); Matt. 17: 5 (‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’); Mk. 1: 11 (‘You are my Son, the Beloved [my beloved Son]; with you I am well pleased’); Lk. 3: 22 (‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’); Lk. 9: 35 (‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’).

In the verses of Isa. 42: 1-4, we can see other identification with Jesus if we compare with Matt. 12: 15-21, when the Master leaves the synagogue after the healing of the man with the withered hand (or shriveled hand):

- Isa. 42: 1-4: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit [NIV: Spirit] upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice [NIV: a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice]. He will not grow faint or be

crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching [NIV: he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope].”

• Matt. 12: 15-21: “When Jesus became aware of this [*That the Jews intended to kill Him*], he departed [*from the synagogue*]. Many crowds followed him, and he cured all of them, and he ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles [NVI, ‘he will proclaim justice to the nations’]. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory [NIV, ‘he leads justice to victory’]. And in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

This passage from Isa. 42: 1-9 confirms that the Lord has come to the Gentiles, to whom He’d make known His justice. In the penultimate verse from Matthew: ‘until he brings justice to victory’ the bible possibly means: God’s judgment on sin, a judgment that has been made by Jesus on the cross, making the divine justice prevail, therefore, the Gentiles would wait for Him and would be His people too, a people avenged from injustice.

But we can see some words and phrases that deserve comment: ‘he will bring forth justice to the nations’ and ‘... and ‘he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.’

Researching in the Hebrew bible, the correct word for the 1st verse of Isaiah 42 is ‘judgment’ or ‘trial’ (Mishpâth), where NRSV and NIV write ‘justice’: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice (Hebrew: Mishpat or Mishpâth) to the nations [bring justice to the Gentiles – NVI].”

Mishpâth means ‘judgment, trial.’ For us, the words ‘judgment’ or ‘trial’ are slightly different from ‘justice’, written in our Christian translations.

Justice = rectitude, to make prevail the rights of someone, to treat or judge someone in a fair way in conformity with the law; a right that the person has.

Trial = to put someone to the test to see if he is guilty or innocent; discernment; to make critical distinctions and achieve a balanced viewpoint, leading to a decision and the pronouncement of a sentence. There are meanings less relevant for this word.

Judgment = sentence, decree, verdict, pronounced after the decision taken in the trial. The word ‘Judgment’ can also refer to the ‘Last Judgment’, when God will decide the worthiness or unworthiness of the individual or of all mankind; God’s subsequent decision, determining the final destinies of all individuals.

Let us explain better:

In Lexicon Strong’s Concordance, the word ‘mishpâth’ (Strong #4941, mishpat, מִשְׁפָּט) can be translated more properly as a verdict (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a sentence or formal decree, human or a participant’s of the divine law, including the act, the place, the fact, the crime and the penalty. Abstractly, the word means ‘justice’, including a participant’s right or ‘privilege’ (legal or customary). It also means ‘to be judged, judgment, justice, manner of law, lawful, order, ordinance, right, sentence’.

‘Mishpat’ comes from the word ‘Shaphat’, a primitive root which means ‘to judge’, i.e., ‘to pronounce a sentence’ (for or against) and, by implication, ‘to vindicate or punish, to govern, to litigate (literally or figuratively); to avenge, which condemns, to contend, to defend, to execute (judgment), to be a judge, to plead, reason, rule.’

In Matt. 12: 18 it’s written: “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim

justice to the Gentiles [NVI, 'he will proclaim justice to the nations'].” The word ‘justice’, in Greek is *krisin* – κρίσιν’ (Strong #g2920 – *krisis*: a decision, judgment, judging, divine judgment). *Krisis* is a feminine noun derived from a cognate, *krínō* (Strong #g2919), meaning: to separate, distinguish, judge, judgment, emphasizing its qualitative aspect that can apply either to a positive verdict (for righteousness), or more commonly, a negative verdict which condemns the nature of sin upon which it is brought. *Krínō* (κρίνω) or *krinó* (transliteration) means: to judge, decide, I judge, decide, I think (it) good.

In short, the Lord would be the defender of the Gentiles in the same way He was the defender of the Jews and would judge them in the same way too. Thus, we can think, with the Law of the first covenant, or with the Law of the Grace brought by Jesus, we are judged the same way. If we are children and chosen, as the bible says, will He not correct us the same way?

- Rom. 2: 12: “All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.”

- Isa. 42: 2-3: “He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice [NIV: a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice].”

‘He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street’ means: unlike John the Baptist, who had a mission to proclaim the coming of the Messiah and to preach repentance to hardened hearts, therefore he often had to shout and exalt himself in his preaching, Jesus was coming to a land already prepared (repentant hearts); beyond what He would come without the ostentation of the world to draw the attention of that people to His person. He would not have to raise His voice to be heard; the Father’s authority over Him was enough for people to respect Him and shut up when He spoke, except for some teachers of the law, who sometimes provoked Him to respond a little more rudely when they doubted His authority to forgive sins. The bible says: “for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt. 7: 29). His voice was heard on the street in a ministerial manner, not to discuss opinions like any other human being. He preached on the street as in many other public places (Lk. 13: 26), but not in a contentious way, or threatening or ostentatious, bragging about Himself, or about His doctrine and miracles; on the contrary, Jesus behaved with great humility and meekness.

‘A bruised reed [Hebrew, *qaneh*] he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice [Hebrew, *Mishpat*]’ or ‘a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice’ – once I heard a preaching about this verse, saying that in the time of Jesus there was a child’s play with the reed. The Hebrew words translated as ‘reed’ are generic terms, which apply to a variety of vegetables, such as reeds, papyrus or bulrushes (Gome’ – Ex. 2: 3 – KJV, while NRSV and NIV translates as papyrus), or other plants that grow in water (Jon. 2: 5 – *Cuwph*, translated by ‘weeds’ or ‘seaweeds’). Thus, the word ‘reed’ (in Hebrew) has many meanings, beyond what we think today, for example, for the term ‘*qaneh*’ (Strong #7070), as in this text of Isaiah means, a reed (as erect); by resemblance a rod (especially for measuring), shaft, tube, stem, beam (of a steelyard): balance, bone, branch, calamus, cane, reed, spearman, stalk. In this child’s play, they took a reed or papyrus, for example, or any plant that had a hollow stem, and made holes in it to make a flute. When it broke or did not emit exactly the sound that was expected, they broke it and threw it away. Perhaps that is why the

prophet has made this comparison here with those people despised, neglected and abandoned because they are weak, ignorant or are good for nothing. This reminded me of a passage from the gospel where Jesus mentions something similar: “But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn’” (Matt. 11: 16-17), which leads us to believe that the children’s play still existed in His days.

This means that the Messiah would not treat in a rigorous or boorish way those who came to Him, even though they were weak and despised, but would treat them gently, healing them and comforting them in their physical and emotional frailties. He would not hurt the weak; on the contrary, He would support and strengthen them. Jesus had tenderness toward the weak and ignorant, like the new and weak believers in the faith, and which to the wise in religion they were like broken reeds that had no value to God. The weak and impotent didn’t feel themselves worthy of mercy on the part of men, for they, being weaker, were also more sensitive to what they saw and suffered; for example, the lepers who begged for mercy to Jesus, for they saw in Him the Son of David. Tax collectors, prostitutes and demon possessed people, those marginalized by society, found comfort in the Lord’s words. He did not crush or embarrass them, but showed them the justice of God. As it is written in Isaiah, He acted: “he will faithfully bring forth justice”, that is, He judged them rightly, in the manner of God, not by appearances, but with right judgment (Jn. 7: 24).

‘A dimly burning wick’ or ‘a smoldering wick’ would not be quenched by the Messiah. At that time, the linen wick or a strip of porous material of a candlestick (or lamp) was rolled up and placed inside the container with oil so that, after it was wet, it began to burn and to illuminate the place. ‘A dimly burning wick’ or ‘a smoldering wick’ means the wick that is almost extinct, which can barely illuminate the house, transmits little heat, but makes a lot of smoke with an unpleasant odor. This may symbolize those who once knew the word of God, but the disappointments of life have made them ‘cold’ in the faith; their light is almost fading. They no longer have the strength to continue the walk with the Lord; what they say no longer emits the light of truth, but blurs people’s thoughts like a smoke from a candle when it is almost at an end. Then, Isaiah said that the Messiah would be acting again to prevent the flame of the Spirit in those lives from being extinguished, or that someone else quenched them. He would renew their faith, hope, and awareness of the divine truths through His grace. Knowledge and understanding of the things of God would come back to them. There would be a revival. He, again, would judge with justice and truth.

And this would happen not only with the people of Israel, but also with the Gentiles: “He will bring forth justice to the nations... and the coastlands wait for his teaching [NIV: In his law the islands will put their hope]... I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness... I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations [NIV: a light for the Gentiles], to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” In short, the Lord would be the defender of the Gentiles in the same way that He was the defender of the Jews and would also judge them in the same way.

“I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols” – He returns to speak against idolatry (Isa. 42: 8); the trust in other gods is vain, and worship of idols is sin. God ends this part of the prophecy by saying that He was announcing something new, because the old prophecies had already been fulfilled. Here the prophet places all this as past, already predicting the messianic age: “See, the former

things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them” (Isa. 42: 9).

Song of praise to the Lord for the salvation of the people – v. 10-17

• Isa. 42: 10-17: “Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth! Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants [NIV: Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that lives in it, you islands, and all who live in them]. Let the desert and its towns lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the tops of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare his praise in the coastlands [NIV: Let them give glory to the Lord and proclaim his praise in the islands]. The Lord goes forth like a soldier, like a warrior he stirs up his fury; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes. For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant. I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them. They shall be turned back and utterly put to shame – those who trust in carved images, who say to cast images, ‘You are our gods.’”

In this part of the prophecy of chapter 42, Isaiah raises a song of praise to God for the deliverance He will give to His people. He is speaking of the captivity in Babylon, and invites all peoples from near and far to rejoice with Israel.

“Let the desert and its towns lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the tops of the mountains.”

Desert here conveys the idea of desolation, sterility. The prophet tells this people of the desert to rejoice too, for the salvation of the Lord is about to come. His grace will turn this sterility into fertility and joy.

“Let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy” – in Hebrew: Sela‘ or has-sela‘ or Cela` – Strong #5553 – meaning: rock, stone, stony, rocky place; a craggy rock; rough rock, stronghold, a fortress (place of defense). Many Arabs dwelt in mountainous regions, and these ones also were being invited by the prophet to praise the Lord.

The Hebrew word found here (Sela‘ or has-sela‘ or Cela` – Strong #5553) is also found in other verses of the bible, with the simple meaning of ‘rock, stone, stony; a craggy rock; rough rock, stronghold, a fortress (place of defense)’, that is, any rocky place:

- 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.’

But there is a specific Sela (or Selah) (Strong #5554) that 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 one thousand and one 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. During the sixth century BC, Sela was an important trade route between the Arabian Peninsula and Damascus.



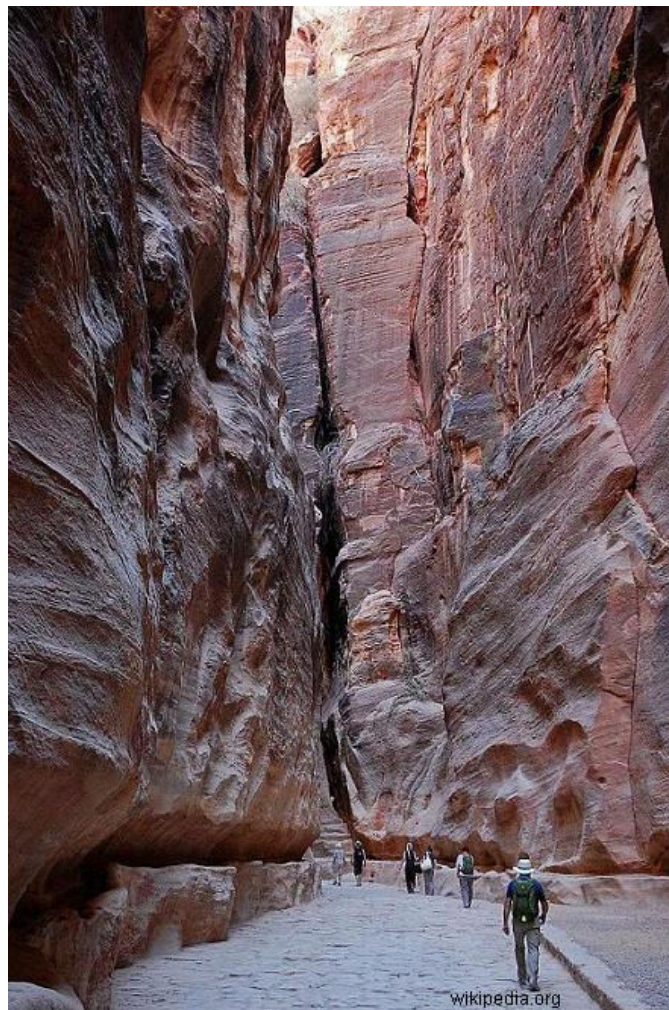
Mount Seir (Edom) and Sela (Selah or Petra)



View of Petra

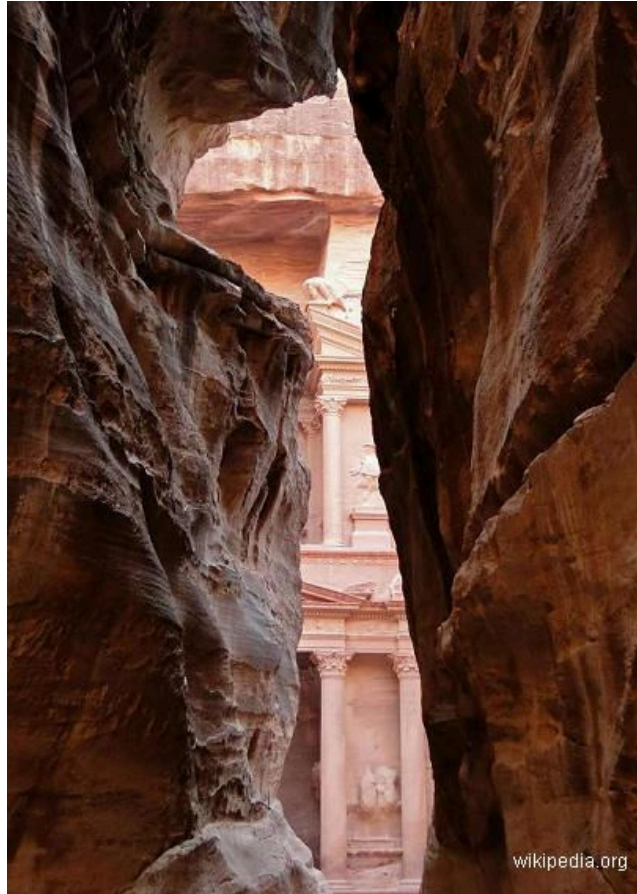
The village was conquered by the Nabataeans, one of the Arab tribes, in 312 BC, forcing the Edomites to move to southern Palestine, a region that became known as Idumea, a name derived from the Edomites or Idumeans. Then Petra passed into Roman

rule; and in 106 AD Trajan placed it under direct control of Rome, rather than the control of Nabataea, when the city became the capital of the region known as Arabia Petrea 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 part of the World Heritage Site. It is known as Rose City due to the color of the stone out of which it is carved.

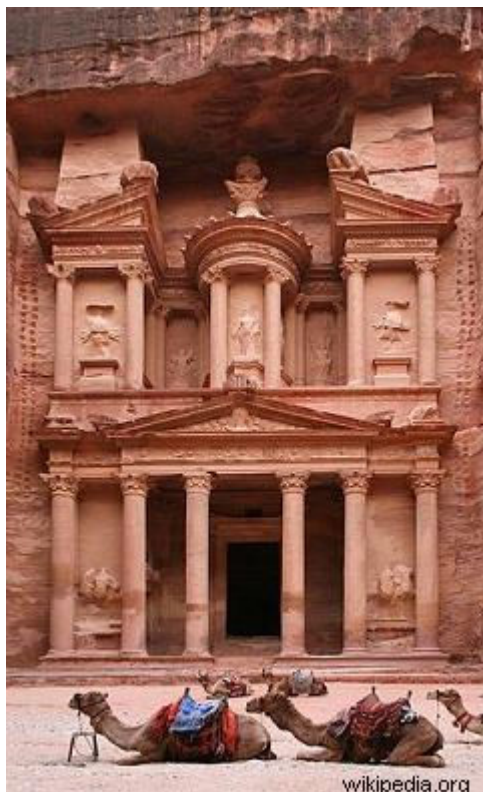


The Siq (al-Sīq)

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')



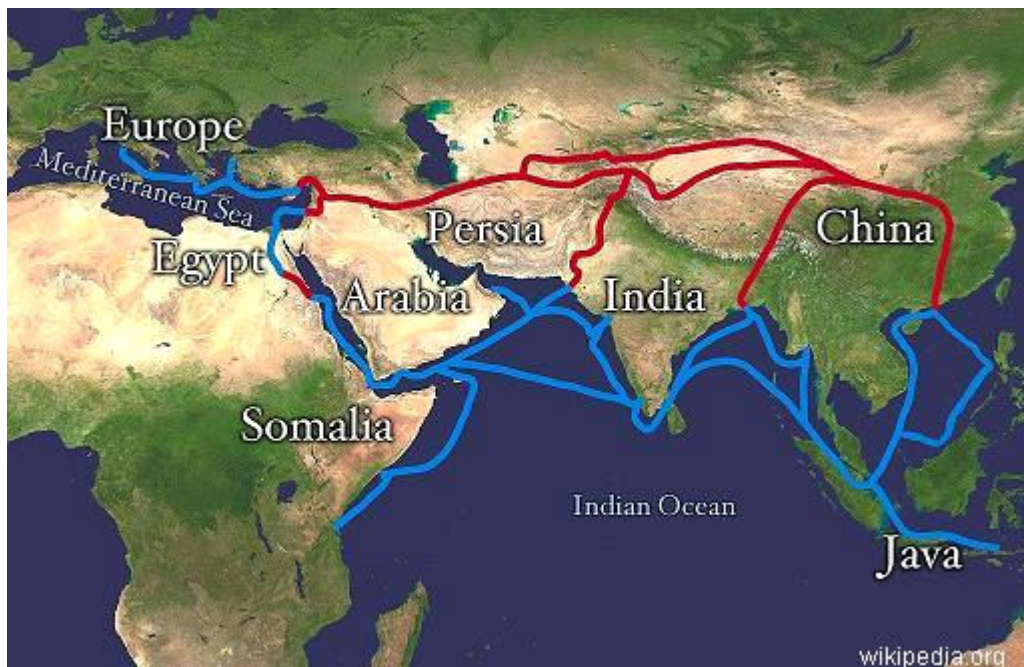
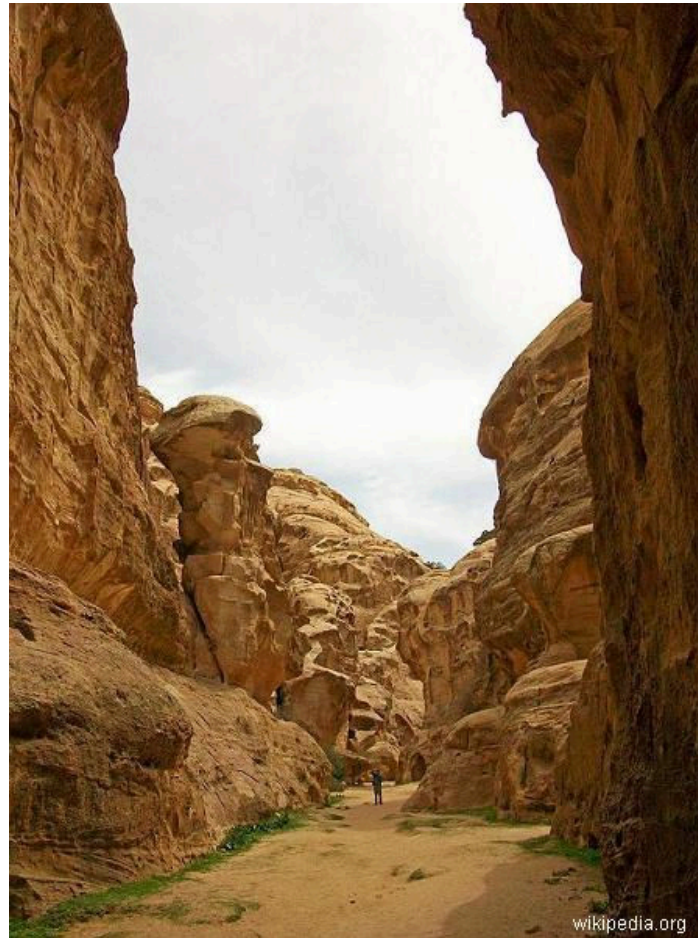
The great temple of Petra



Ancient columns of the great temple

Five kilometers to the north of Petra, in the Ma'an Governorate of Jordan, there is another Nabataean archeological site built during the 1st century AD, called 'Little Petra' (In Arabic: al-batrā aṣ-Ṣağira), 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.

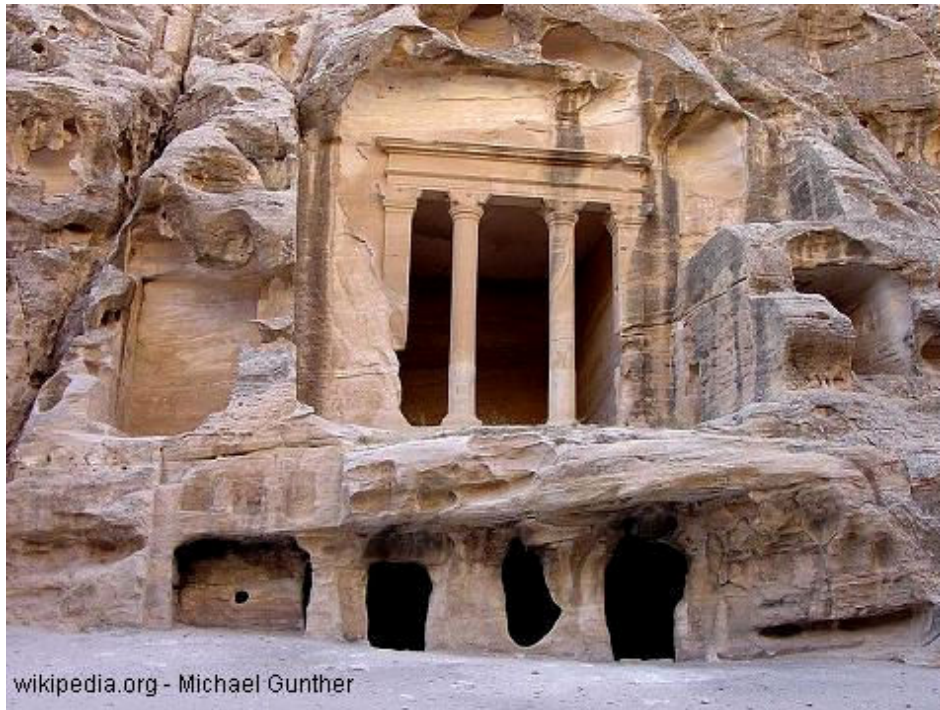


The Silk Road

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 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.

We spoke about Kedar in Isa. 21: 13-17 by mentioning the attack of the Assyrians upon them, and which would probably come under Sennacherib, when he invaded the cities of Judah (701 BC) and could take Arabia on his way. Jeremiah (Jer. 49: 28-33) prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would invest against the Arabs (he speaks of Kedar), which occurred around 599-598 BC.

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 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' (Isa. 21: 16) was their flocks of sheep (Isa. 60: 7), goats and she-goats. In

Songs of Songs 1: 5 there is a reference to Kedar, whose tents were generally made of black goat skins. Psalm 120: 5 also mentions this tribe.



In addition to their flocks, this nomadic tribe was endowed with skillful archers, so Isa. 21: 27 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. Perhaps because they also knew the bitterness of destruction and captivity is that Isaiah invites them to praise the Lord along with the Jewish exiles, for His deliverance would cover all the peoples dominated by Babylon.

Thus the prophet was speaking of the salvation of the nations of the earth, either in the physical sense (because of the Babylonian yoke) or spiritual (the salvation of the nations brought by the Messiah).

“The Lord goes forth like a soldier, like a warrior he stirs up his fury; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes. For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant. I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools” – this shows the vengeance of the Lord being made in Babylon. The destruction that the Babylonians had caused, they would now experience. And they would know that the God of Israel was the agent of this judgment.

“I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them” – this was God’s promise to those who could not see Him with the eyes of faith, nor to understand His motives and His way of working with them. It is more likely that He is speaking to His own people rather than to the Gentiles, since this prophecy of Isaiah is followed by the ‘Blindness of Israel’ (verses 18-25). Idolatry had blinded them, as well as rebellion against Him by rejecting the prophets He had sent, who spoke the same things and made

the same warnings for so many centuries. After the captivity, the Lord would bring them back to Zion and open their understanding to His light, His word, and they, who were previously blinded by their sins, would begin to see the straight and smooth way by which to walk. They would be led by the Lord in another way and this was unknown to them ('I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them'). More than a return from exile here, we can understand that this was accomplished even in the time of the Messiah, for the people became corrupt again in the days of Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, when even the priests seemed to have grown cold in the faith. In the Intertestamental Period, with the Hellenism introduced by Alexander the Great and all that followed until the birth of Jesus, the darkness over mankind became great, for there was no more prophecy for that people; and the word of God says, "Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint" (Prov. 29: 18a). Thus, when the bible speaks in this text of Isaiah, "I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them", these paths unknown to them would be the new and sound doctrine of Jesus, completely different from that His people had heard of rabbis and religious leaders until that moment.

"They shall be turned back and utterly put to shame – those who trust in carved images, who say to cast images, 'You are our gods.'" God speaks again against idolatry (cf. Isa. 42: 8), and much probably he refers here to the idols of Babylon.

The blindness of Israel – v. 18-25

- Isa. 42: 18-25: "Listen, you that are deaf; and you that are blind, look up and see! Who is blind but my servant, or deaf like my messenger whom I send? Who is blind like my dedicated one [NIV: who is blind like the one committed to me?], or blind like the servant of the Lord? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. [NIV: You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing]. The Lord was pleased, for the sake of his righteousness, to magnify his teaching and make it glorious [NIV: to make his law great and glorious]. But this is a people robbed and plundered, all of them are trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become a prey with no one to rescue, a spoil with no one to say, 'Restore!' [NIV: But this a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made lot, with no one to say, 'Send them back']. Who among you will give heed to this, who will attend and listen for the time to come? Who gave up Jacob to the spoiler, and Israel to the robbers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey? So he poured upon him the heat of his anger and the fury of war; it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand; it burned him, but he did not take it to heart [NIV: So he poured out on them his burning anger, the violence of war. It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand; it consumed them, but they did not take it to heart]."

- Isa. 42: 18 'Listen, you that are deaf; and you that are blind, look up and see!' – The Lord call whoever wants to hear and see what He has to speak and show.

- Isa. 42: 19-20: "Who is blind but my servant, or deaf like my messenger whom I send? Who is blind like my dedicated one [NIV: who is blind like the one committed to me?], or blind like the servant of the Lord? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. [NIV: You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing]."

When the prophet writes: “Who is blind but my servant, or deaf like my messenger whom I send” He was referring to Jacob, to Israel, to the people of the Lord, whom he calls my servant and whom He commissioned to take His word to other peoples. Through Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12: 3; Gal. 3: 8b), so the Word says, therefore we may think that Israel was His servant to teach His law as a missionary among other nations.

Then the prophet goes on saying: “Who is blind like my dedicated one [NIV: who is blind like the one committed to me?]”, or “blind like the servant of the Lord?” This part now refers to the high priest and the Levites priests, because the priest, more than anyone else is in proximity with the Lord. They were given the task of teaching the people, not only to make sacrifices for them (Deut. 31: 10-13; 2 Kin. 17: 27-28; 2 Chr. 19: 8; 2 Chr. 29: 11; 2 Chr. 34: 30-31; Neh. 8: 2-3; 7-8). Jesus rebuked the Sadducees, Pharisees and scribes, and called them blind guides (Matt. 15: 7-9; 14; Matt. 23: 13; 16-19; 23-24; 34-35), for they led the people astray from the true doctrine, to give them corrupted doctrines of men. The word ‘messenger’ (Hebrew: mal’ak) may refer to an angel of the Lord, to the prophets, priests or teachers, although in this text it refers to the Jews as a whole, sent by God to teach the other nations (‘my messenger whom I send’), as were the disciples and apostles of Jesus in the NT.

The people and the priests saw what God had done for them, but they did not pay attention to it. Even when they heard the prophet speak, they did not understand; perhaps even by the Lord’s own will (Isa. 6: 9-13 – Isaiah’s commission; Isa. 29: 13-14, where the prophet also speaks of the blindness of Israel; or other passages: Isa. 29: 9-16; Matt. 13: 13-15; Matt. 15: 7-9; Rom. 9: 14-18 cf. Ex. 33: 19; Ex. 7: 2-5; Ex. 9: 6; Deut. 29: 2-4). Likewise, the scribes and Pharisees saw Christ in flesh and witnessed His miracles, but they did not receive Him into their hearts.

- Isa. 42: 21: “The Lord was pleased, for the sake of his righteousness, to magnify his teaching and make it glorious [NIV: to make his law great and glorious].”

This verse talks about God’s treatment with His people. By punishing them for their sin, He was fulfilling His own law, His sound rules for the human being, and therefore aggrandizing this law, for it itself was being exercised for the correction of the ways and for the salvation of His people. However, the full aggrandizement of this law occurred with Jesus. He fulfilled the whole law so that men could be delivered from the curse and the punishment that it inflicted on those who sinned (Gal 3: 10; Gal 3: 13-14; 2 Cor. 5: 21).

- Isa. 42: 22: “But this is a people robbed and plundered, all of them are trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become a prey with no one to rescue, a spoil with no one to say, ‘Restore!’ [NIV: But this a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made lot, with no one to say, ‘Send them back’].”

The people of Israel in the exile of Babylon were in great consternation. They had already been robbed and plundered in every way, but no one was willing to rescue them; no one was willing to free them. This happened by God’s own judgment. Because they did not heed to the mercy and the law of the Lord, the people Israel allowed themselves to be stripped by their enemies; all this was happening because of their unbelief in the words of the prophets. The enemy would not return what he had stolen, nor offer himself to free them. Therefore, God would have to provide a deliverer. After seventy years of captivity, He would call upon Cyrus to deliver His people; but Cyrus could

only release them physically, for he was a man and not God. Only Jesus could pay the full ransom.

• Isa. 42: 23-25: “Who among you will give heed to this, who will attend and listen for the time to come? Who gave up Jacob to the spoiler, and Israel to the robbers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey? So he poured upon him the heat of his anger and the fury of war; it set him on fire all around, but he did not understand; it burned him, but he did not take it to heart [NIV: So he poured out on them his burning anger, the violence of war. It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand; it consumed them, but they did not take it to heart].”

Here, God assumes the authorship and responsibility for the punishment of His people, for if they had not listened to Him until now, they would not hear Him later, even though they were so harshly tested. However, He warned them to look at their actions in the past and not to repeat them now, for there would be punishment in the future. And that would last until the veil over their hearts was removed, “But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed” (2 Cor. 3: 14-16). God knew how to deal with the stiff-necked people who were there.

Chapter 43

Israel's only savior – v. 1-13.

• Isa. 43: 1-13: “But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life [NIV: Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life]. Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, ‘Give them up’, and to the south, ‘Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.’ Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears! Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble. Who among them declared this, and foretold to us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses to justify them, and let them hear and say, ‘It is true.’ You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior. I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses, says the Lord. I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it? [NIV: Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?]”

• Isa. 43: 1: “But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”

The Lord begins by telling them not to be afraid, for He Himself will rescue them from the hands of the enemy as He did in the time of Moses, delivering His people from Egypt. ‘I have called you by name’ is an expression that means ‘to call someone for an important mission’, ‘for a different purpose’, and that means that God has a greater intimacy with that person, knows his name and calls him to do something important that has value for Him. Despite all the infidelity of Israel, the Lord has never abandoned him, and still tells him that he knows him by name, for it was He who created him. Now, He has an important work for His people to do, and that is to show His glory before the peoples, to carry His word forward. The ransom is coming for them.

• Isa. 43: 2: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.”

This parallel is made with what happened in the past and reminds us of the crossing of the Red Sea just as Noah survived the catastrophe of the Flood because he was inside the ark under the protection of God. Spiritually speaking, the waters symbolized both for Noah and the Hebrews led by Moses a great difficulty to separate themselves from the world, from the old things and to face the new, that is, to have a new beginning, to live a new life with God. Noah and his family passed unscathed by the trial, and the very way of trial against sin of that generation, paradoxically, ensured their deliverance.

The Hebrews had to go through the judgment of God over Egypt to see from what the Lord was releasing them. The time they spent in that nation during the ten plagues was a time of preparation for them, so that they could understand what God wanted from them thenceforth. There would be a change of masters: the Hebrews would no longer serve Pharaoh and would begin to serve God.

As we know, the bible itself tells us that Noah's experience can be compared to water baptism, where through repentance there is a separation from the world and a new birth with God (1 Pet. 3: 20-21: "who [*the spirits of the pre-Flood people who didn't know Jesus*] in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ").

And in 1 Cor. 10: 1-4, Paul says, "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ."

The Lord's Supper ('spiritual food') was prefigured in the drink of the Rock (v. 4: 'the spiritual rock'), and the baptism was prefigured in the sea (the baptism of repentance) and the cloud (baptism in the Holy Spirit). The Israelite baptism symbolized the separation. The passage by the sea separated them from the Egyptians; the cloud set them apart for God (baptism of the Spirit). So when we read what happened to Noah, and what happened to the Hebrews released from Egypt by the mighty hand of God, we can say that the believer crosses the waters like those of a sea, goes through the judgment against sin, being washed by the blood of Christ and experiencing the power of His resurrection.

This is what God was speaking through Isaiah to that captive people. The waters would be the exile in Babylon (The bible says that Babylon lives "by many waters" or "by mighty waters" – Jer. 51: 13), where they would go through the judgment of God for their sin of idolatry, rebellion, unbelief, and lack of fidelity to Him. Likewise, the waters symbolize a period of great distress where the Lord acts in our spirit and in our life, judging the sin with the intention of making a separation, that is, to leave the bad things of the past and to wash, in order to receive the new that comes from the clean, holy and pure way of His hands to us.

"When you pass through... the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you" – it is a parallel with what happened in the crossing of the River Jordan. The people were already cleansed by the suffering they had experienced in the desert. However, they needed to change their way of thinking so they could take possession of the Promised Land. Instead of seeing themselves as poor things and impotent slaves, now they would have to go through another test, one more challenge, for Jordan means a watershed, a separation, the separation God's mind from the mind of man, where the flesh, once again, surrenders to God to give place to the Spirit. In Isaiah, the rivers would be to that people a new test of God; a test for those returning from exile, for they would have to put aside the slave's mind and think with the mind of a freeman who has the ability to rebuild his own life and take possession of his homeland again. The rivers could also symbolize the trials they would still have to pass through in the hands of the Persians and the Greeks and all the situations of the Intertestamental Period to firm their faith in Him and acquire not only a sense of patriotism, of unity among them as a nation, but

also a test, in order to be prepared for the doctrine of the Messiah. He would bring to the world God's way of thinking, not that of men.

"When you pass through... fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." Fire implies a greater test from God with the purpose of sanctification, purification and perfecting, as occurs with gold or silver in the refining process, cleaning the metal from all the slag. In Matt. 3: 11 John the Baptist said, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." The baptism with fire is a baptism of sanctification, which places the believer in harder tests to cleanse his garments and increase his anointing, empowering him to greater victories and to exercise God's authority on earth more forcefully. Other times in the bible this baptism may refer to God's judgment. The age of the Messiah would bring a new challenge to anyone who stood on the side of God, even within the Israelite nation. After the death and resurrection of Jesus a new time began for humanity, beginning with the 'fire' of the Roman Empire, which made the Master's followers the martyrs of truth. Also Christianity began as a great fortitude, appearing to show the path of light and the power of the kingdom of God to those who walked in darkness.

For the Jews of Isaiah's time, the fire could be the symbol of the violence of the Chaldeans. Nebuchadnezzar, for example, burned Jerusalem when he invaded it; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into the furnace of fire as an act of arbitrariness on the part of Nebuchadnezzar because they refused to worship his golden statue. But God saved them from death. In Babylon, some Jews would go through harder tests, but the Lord would be with them to deliver them and to make them thrive in that land, despite all things. The bible says that Zedekiah saw his sons be killed by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah when the land of Judah was invaded, and he himself had his eyes pulled out and died as a slave in Babylon, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah. However, Jehoiachin was freed from prison by the son of Nebuchadnezzar and received a special honor among the captives (Jer. 52: 32-34). Jeremiah also wrote that the Babylonians allowed the Jewish exiles to form families, build their houses, plant gardens (Jer. 29: 5-7) and consult their own leaders and elders (Ezek. 20: 1-44); that's why many of them preferred to stay in Babylon after the release of Cyrus, for they had a life built there. Daniel escaped alive from the lion's den and had a special honor before the Babylonian and Persian rulers; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego too. Thus Isaiah's prophecy shows that despite the dangers and the treatment of God with them, His deliverance would be present as well.

Summing up this verse from Isaiah (Isa. 43: 2), the people received from God the confirmation that there would be trials to be overcome, but He would always be with them.

- Isa. 43: 3: "For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you."

Only the Holy One of Israel was able to help His people. The same way He had delivered Egypt to destruction because of the evil done to the Jews in the past, He was willing to hand over these nations (Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba) to the dominion of the enemy to save His people. Note that in KJV, the verb tense is in the past perfect (I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee). In ASV, the verb tense is in past participle (I have given Egypt as thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in thy stead); and in NRSV and NIV, the verb tense is present (I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you). It is as if He could make a 'bargain' with the Babylonians, "You give me my people and I give you three nations in return, okay?"

We may remember that God delivered Jerusalem from the hands of Sennacherib (701 BC) when He destroyed his army and made him return to Nineveh. It is known that after this campaign against Hezekiah, he spent the remaining years of his reign in military campaigns against rebels in his empire, and died in 681 BC at the hands of his two sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer. His heir, Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) made a great expedition against the Egyptian delta in 672 BC, installing Assyrian governors at Thebes and Memphis. He applied his forces against Egypt (which he re-conquered for a short time – 669 BC), Ethiopia (in Hebrew, Cush) and Seba (Seba – Strong #5434, in Hebrew, Cba'iy, or Cba'). Seba refers to a son of Cush (Gen 10: 6-7) who settled to the southwest of Ethiopia. The Sabeans and the Ethiopians were allies.

Esarhaddon established Ashurbanipal as the crown prince of Assyria, and Shamash-shum-ukin as crown prince of Babylon. At the beginning of his reign Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) 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, although in 663 BC it had begun to show signs of weakness, and had been attacked by the Medes at this time. 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 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 were gradually breaking free from Assyria.

Pharaoh Psamtik I (664-610 BC) rebelled against Ashurbanipal and freed the Egyptian nation. He began the period of economic, social and cultural revival for Egypt. He himself established the capital at Sais (present Sa el-Hagar, in the west of the Delta), instead of Thebes. Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), at the end of his reign, with Assyria already in decadence (around 633 BC), passed the empire into the hands of his son Sinsharishkun (628-612 BC), for Nabopolassar (626-605 BC) king of Babylon and father of Nebuchadnezzar, already arose in the area of Mesopotamia. Nineveh had been attacked in 633 BC by the Medes, who allied themselves with the Babylonians and attacked it again in 625 BC; it finally fell into the hands of the Chaldeans in 612 BC. Egypt, therefore, did not invade Palestine. While Psamtik I reigned in Egypt, Josiah was king of Judah (640-609 BC).

Psamtik I died in 610 BC and his son Necho II (or Wehemib-re) began to reign in Egypt (610-595 BC). He witnessed the end of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nabopolassar. Necho II tried to stop the advance of Babylon by allying himself with the Assyrians, but was stopped by Josiah in Megiddo, a city in center northern Israel (2 Kin. 23: 29; 2 Chr. 35: 20-22). In 609 BC, he defeated Josiah in the battle of Megiddo and killed him. The decisive battle of Necho II against Nebuchadnezzar (son of Nabopolassar) occurred in 605 BC, in Carchemish, in the north of Syria. Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho II and the Egyptians at Carchemish and Hamath (Jer. 46: 2). At this time he conquered the whole region of Hatti, when Jehoiakim was in his fourth year of reign. He also took the throne on September 6th, 605 BC after the death of his father. Thus, with the defeat of Necho II, Babylon conquered everything that belonged to the king of Egypt (Psamtik II, son of Necho II – 595-589 BC), between the River Nile and the Euphrates (2 Kin. 24: 7).

Hatti was in central Anatolia, near present-day Ankara, Turkey. In Ancient times, Ankara was known as Ancyra and Angora because of the Angora wool. Angora may refer to a certain breed of cats, goats or rabbits, noted for their long, thin fur. Natural

wool was made with the fur of any of these animals. At its maximum extent, about 1300 BC, the Hittite Empire comprised Anatolia, Lebanon, and Syria. The Hittites are described in the bible as one of the seven Canaanite nations, who were the sons of Canaan, the son of Ham, the son of Noah (Gen 10: 6; 15-18). Heth begat the Hittites, also called 'sons of Heth' ('children of Heth'). They are mentioned as living in Canaan or its neighboring since the time of Abraham (2000-1500 BC) to the time of Ezra, after the Babylonian captivity (450 BC). In the time of Joshua, the Hittites are quoted as inhabiting to the south of Canaan near Hebron (Mamre – Gen. 23: 19), which probably refers to a group of Hittites who migrated there, since the Hittite Empire was always north as it is Turkey, and never covered South Asia or Palestine.



Map above: Neo-Babylonian Empire showing the territory of Hatti
(source: wikipedia.org).

God delivered the Jewish people in the past and would deliver them again from the hands of the king of Babylon.

- Isa. 43: 4: “Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life [NIV: Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life].”

God chooses us like He chose Israel; it is not we that chooses Him (Jn. 15: 16). This way, whoever He chooses He seals as His exclusive property and therefore He defends. He always defended and will always defend the righteous and judge the

wicked. Our God is the God of justice, though we often do not understand His ways of judging. Hence, He was telling His people that, because of His love for them and because of His unchanging covenant, He would make an exchange. For their lives and their freedom, He would give up other peoples who did not have and did not want to have a covenant or commitment to Him. This fact, by itself, already testified against them.

- Isa. 43: 5-7: “Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, ‘Give them up’, and to the south, ‘Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.’”

The Lord continued to tell the children of Israel not to fear, for they would be delivered. All the exiles would come from the north and the south, from the east and from the west, because He would give a command to the nations in the four corners of the earth. He would deliver them and bring them back to their land. He adds that these people carried His name; they had been created to show His glory, that is, to be witnesses of His majesty and dignity, for He was not a false god, but the living God. Through their testimony He would be honored and glorified.

- Isa. 43: 8: “Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears!”

The Lord gives a command to Israel as a whole to call the Gentiles also, even though they understood nothing and were stubborn and deaf to His words and blind to the miracles that had already been done for the chosen people. Not only Gentiles were spiritually blind and deaf. Israel had also heard this from the mouth of Isaiah: Isa 29: 9-16; Isa. 42: 18-20 (the blindness of the nation and the priests) – see Jeremiah 5: 21. Both Jews and Gentiles did not know the Lord. However, this call extrapolated the time in which they were living. God’s call to bring the blind and the deaf so they have their understanding open to His truth also refers to the time of the Messiah, that is, the call was being made to many people in the generations to follow until the coming of the Messiah, when the prophecy would be fulfilled (see Matt. 11: 3-6: “and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me’”).

- Isa. 43: 9: “Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble. Who among them declared this, and foretold to us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses to justify them, and let them hear and say, ‘It is true.’”

The prophet speaks what he had spoken previously. God again was challenging idolaters to gather and defend their idols. Would they be able to free Israel? (see Isa. 41: 1; 21-24; 28-29). Did fortune-tellers, astrologers, and sages of several nations predict the current or future events or even explain the ancient predictions? He challenges them to call their witnesses. Let them confirm what He is saying; let them say that His words are true; yes, that the Jews were delivered from captivity because God so desired.

- Isa. 43: 10-13: “You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the Lord, and besides me

there is no savior. I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses, says the Lord. I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it? [NIV: Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?; KJV: Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?]"

God returns to speak to His own people, confirming that they are His witnesses; they can confirm that He is the true God, and everything He said that would happen came to pass. No prophetic word failed to be fulfilled. Israel is again called a servant (Isa. 41: 8), that is, God reminds them that as servants they owe Him obedience; more than this, that the covenant made with Him from ancient times still stands. They were His messengers (Isa. 42:19) among the nations. When His word is fulfilled, they will know, believe and understand that God is always the same and that there is no other; and in Him alone is the salvation they need, now and ever (Acts 4: 12). Jesus is the greatest proof of this.

"I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it?" [NIV: "Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"] – This concerns His eternity and His authority over the soul of every man.

No one created Him or gave birth to Him (Jn. 1: 1-4). In the same way, no one will finish with Him so that He ceases to exist. When He decides to act who can stop Him or undo what He has already done? (Job 23: 13-14). Who can say no to Him? Who can say no to what He did or will do? (Ecc. 8: 4).

"I work and who can hinder it?" or "When I act, who can reverse it?" or "I will work, and who shall let it?" ('Who shall let it?' – in Hebrew, who shall turn it back?) – In Hebrew, the verbs used are:

"Act" or "work": Hebrew: pa'al – Strong 6466 – to do or make, to practice, to commit (evil), evildoer, to ordain, to work, worker.

"Who can hinder it?" or "who can reverse it?" or "who shall let it?" – Shuwb – Strong #7725: return to the starting point; to retreat; bring again, bring back, come back, convert, deny, draw back, hinder, refresh, retrieve, reverse, reward, say nay, to turn again, to turn back; withdraw.

Liberation from the yoke of Babylon – v. 14-21.

• Isa. 43: 14-21: "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I will send to Babylon and break down all the bars, and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation [NIV: This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians', in the ships in which they took pride]. I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King. Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick [NIV: who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick]: Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches [NIV: owls]; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise."

Let's comment in parts:

• Isa. 43: 14-15: “Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I will send to Babylon and break down all the bars, and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation [NIV: This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians’, in the ships in which they took pride; KJV: Thus saith the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ship (Note: nobles: Heb. Bars)]. I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.”

The Lord confirms the fall of Babylon by the hands of the Persians (Cyrus, though his name is not written here), besides reaffirming to Israel that He is their God, and the only one who can help. The redemption of His people was in His eternal plans, and He would cause the Chaldeans to seek an escape through their ships that patrolled the abundant waters of the Euphrates. But Cyrus and Darius the Mede had diverted the waters of the river to enter the city and plunder it. So, even the ships would not be of help to the Chaldeans at that hour. Darius the Mede was his uncle by his mother, and Cyrus left him as his ruler in Babylon.

“I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King” confirms the Lord’s lordship over His people, as well as making it clear once more that He created them.

• Isa. 43: 16-17: “Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick [NIV: who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick].”

This passage refers to the deliverance from Egypt, when Pharaoh’s soldiers, horses and chariots were swallowed by the waters of the Red Sea, and all died (Ex 14: 26-31). God tells His people that they stayed there and never rose again to pursue them. They are like the snuffed wick of a candle, which will no longer light. This means that even though they still remembered this episode as the only good memory they had of God and His deliverances, it was now past. It was extinguished.

• Isa. 43: 18-21: “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches [NIV: owls]; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.”

Israel’s deliverance from Egypt would be recorded in History and in the memory of the Israelites as a past thing. Now the Lord had something new for them. Could they not see? He had great promises of blessings for the future, new miracles so that these people could rejoice; after all, they were created for God, to celebrate His praise. Their deliverance from Babylon would be more glorious than the deliverance from Egypt. The memory of scarcity, sterility and destruction would give way to a vision of life and fertility, to the water of consolation and strength, coming from the throne of God to the discouraged and weary spirit of those people. Even the animals already accustomed to living in arid and uninhabited places would feel something different because they would drink water and could contemplate a more fertile land, for the Lord would be favorable to it. He would bring rain and cause the plantation to bring forth, and consequently there

would be food and water for all, both men and animals. Even the animals would realize that God became favorable to His people again and poured His blessings; not to mention the spiritual water that He would pour into their hearts, reviving their faithfulness and thirst for His word.

God's mercy and Israel's unfaithfulness – v. 22-28.

- Isa. 43: 22-28: “Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel! [NIV: Yet have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, o Israel]. You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings [NIV: grain offerings], or wearied you with frankincense [NIV: nor wearied you with demands for incense]. You have not bought me sweet cane with money, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities [NIV: You have not brought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses]. I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Accuse me, let us go to trial; set forth your case, so that you may be proved right [NIV: Review the past for me, let us argue the matter together; state the case for your innocence]. Your first ancestor sinned, and your interpreters transgressed against me [NIV: Your first father sinned; your spokesmen rebelled against me]. Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary, I delivered Jacob to utter destruction, and Israel to reviling [NIV: So I will disgrace the dignitaries of your temple, and I will consign Jacob to destruction and Israel to scorn].”

Let's consider the first few verses:

- Isa. 43: 22-24: “Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel! [NIV: Yet have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, o Israel]. You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings [NIV: grain offerings], or wearied you with frankincense [NIV: nor wearied you with demands for incense]. You have not bought me sweet cane with money, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities [NIV: You have not brought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses].”

Since this is a prophecy, that is, of something that has not yet happened (such as exile in Babylon, for example), it is assumed that in this passage there was a temporal change. Let's explain better: Isaiah was alive when he wrote this prophecy; most likely at the end of his life, perhaps already in the reign of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah. As we said in previous chapters, in the reign of Manasseh there was a great religious regression, for he took a path contrary to God's will and destroyed every benefit that had been won by the religious reform of his father, Hezekiah. From the 40th chapter of Isaiah, the prophecies are addressed to a people who are already captive in Babylon, so they were written almost a century before the event of the fall of Jerusalem. But if we put a chronology in this current prophecy, especially on this passage above (Isa. 43: 22-24), we can notice that the prophet Isaiah was still alive, the Assyrian yoke still weighed on Palestine and on most of the eastern nations around it; and they were all being warned by God because of the growing idolatry that drove them away from Him. It is a reason to think that this part of the prophecy did not concern the captive people in Babylon, because in a foreign and idolatrous land they could not do the worship to God as they had always done, with the sacrifices in the hours and days determined by Him.

In truth, Isaiah may be speaking to the people of his time who insisted on not listening to him or, at best, he was leaving the prophecy to a future closer to the history of Israel, where kings and the people had already completely bent to the idols (as happened in Jeremiah's prophetic period, almost sixty years after these words).

Why am I saying this?

Because in verses 27-28 it is written: "Your first ancestor sinned, and your interpreters transgressed against me [NIV: Your first father sinned; your spokesmen rebelled against me]. Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary, I delivered Jacob to utter destruction, and Israel to reviling [NIV: So I will disgrace the dignitaries of your temple, and I will consign Jacob to destruction and Israel to scorn]."

This means that, because of what they were doing today, in the near future the Lord would deliver both the chief priests ('the princes of the sanctuary') and the other Levite priests ('your spokesmen') and the people of Israel to the shame of exile. In NIV the verb is in the future. If He was going to deliver them to scorn and destruction, it is because, theoretically, they had not yet been exiled.

"Your first ancestor sinned" or "Your first father sinned" – we will see soon.

Thus we can conclude that Isaiah repeats here (Isa. 43: 22-24) a warning he had previously made about giving up idolatry and returning to worship God with the heart, with the devotion of before. And the most interesting is that in chapter 1 of the book of Isaiah God's complaint was the same as the present: "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" (Isa. 1: 11-14).

The passage we are analyzing (Isa. 43: 22-24) tells first that God saw the hypocrisy of their worship. They had been weary of the Lord and did not call upon Him anymore, for they preferred to invoke the idols and offer sacrifices to them. And God too was weary of them. The people already made the sacrifices as if it were an excessive burden, and He says that He had not given them any burden; He had not planned that kind of worship to tire them. They, yes, were tiring and burdening God with their sins.

'You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honored me with your sacrifices' – they were not bringing the sheep and the sacrifices to the Lord but, perhaps, giving to the priests already corrupted by sin and who made of that a ritual without any spiritual meaning, without love; or, then, they could be offering the sacrifices to the other gods. What matters is that the Lord was not demanding anything they could not do; He did not want to see them exhausted. However, they had already burdened Him with their sins and wearied Him with their iniquities.

- Isa. 43: 25-28: "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Accuse me, let us go to trial; set forth your case, so that you may be proved right [NIV: Review the past for me, let us argue the matter together; state the case for your innocence]. Your first ancestor sinned, and your interpreters transgressed against me [NIV: Your first father sinned; your spokesmen rebelled against me]. Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary, I delivered Jacob to utter destruction, and Israel to reviling [NIV: to scorn]."

The Lord was the only one who could erase their transgressions for His sake, not because they had done anything to deserve it. And when He forgives, He forgets. God goes on calling His people to a conversation in order to discuss this cause and come to a conclusion. They would not have argument strong enough.

When he says: 'Your first ancestor sinned' or 'Your first father sinned' we can think of the ancestors of that people. Just as they were sinners, so were their progenitors, even the best of them. The Lord would deliver both the chief priests (the temple leaders) and the other Levite priests ('your interpreters' or 'your spokesmen') and the people of Israel to the scorn of exile. In Hebrew, the word 'interpreters' or 'spokesmen' means interpreters (Luwts, Strong #3887: interpreter, teacher, intercessor, ambassador); and 'princes' [NIV: 'the dignitaries of your temple'] refers to the highest religious leaders (1 Chr. 24: 5), as the high priest and the priests of the Aaronic lineage [Prince = Sar, Strong #8269: a leading person (any position or class): captain, ruler, chief, general, governor, guardian, lord, master, prince, steward]. The priests were the intercessors of the people with God; they were the interpreters (of the law), for it was up to them to interpret the word of God for the people, to teach them in the correct way (to guide them and be spokesmen of the Lord to them), but they did not do it; on the contrary, they distorted the word of the Lord, rebelled against Him, and led Israel into error (just as the teachers of the law in the time of Jesus). They judged causes in a wrong way, twisting righteousness; they perverted the law, and adulterated the pure word of God, creating traditions of men. The teachers of the law (in the time of Jesus) were called Rabbi, that is, teacher, master. Isaiah says here that both the priests and the people had transgressed, so they had no reason to consider themselves innocent. Therefore, God says that because of all this He will profane the leaders of the temple and deliver Israel to mockery and destruction.

Chapter 44

The Lord is the only God – v. 1-8.

- Isa. 44: 1-8: “But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you: Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit [NIV: my Spirit] upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring. They shall spring up like a green tamarisk, like willows by flowing streams [NIV: They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by following streams]. This one will say, “I am the Lord’s,” another will be called by the name of Jacob, yet another will write on the hand, “The Lord’s,” and adopt the name of Israel [NIV: One will say, ‘I belong to the LORD’; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, ‘The LORD’s’, and will take the name Israel]. 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 [NIV: Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come]. Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock [NIV: Rock]; I know not one.”

- Isa. 44: 1-2: “But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you: Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen.”

In verse 1 the Lord addresses His people and continues to call Israel the servant of His chosen people among the nations and says that He has formed them and will help them.

In verse 2, He calls Israel by the name of Jeshurun (the symbolic name of Israel) which appears 4 times in the Old Testament in Deut. 32: 15; Deut. 33: 5; Deut. 33: 26 and Isa. 44: 2. Jeshurun (Yshuruwn – Strong #3484) means ‘the upright one’ (Israel). God speaks through the prophet Isaiah to a remnant of Israel whom He considers separate for Him; a people from within Israel that are yet to be born, a remnant chosen according to Grace (verse 3: ‘I will pour my spirit [NIV: my Spirit] upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring’). From ancient times when the Lord chose Israel to be His people, He formed and created him, that is, prepared and made him grow in intimacy with Him so that one day he could be ready for God’s great project. In fact, this concerns a new creation, not of the flesh, but of the spirit; it was a spiritual creation from the heart and mind of God, and which had been in progress for a long time, even though they did not understand it. The inheritance left by them now would be for their chosen descendants from among the Israelites for His new purpose for mankind (Ps. 100: 3; Gal. 1: 15). This remnant concerns those righteous and upright Israelites in whom there would be no wickedness, the Israelites who were separated to serve God, not exactly with the priesthood described in the OT, but in a special way where He Himself would help them to do this service, which happened, for example, with the apostles in the NT and with all the Jews separated by God for having believed in Jesus and placed themselves at His disposal as His servants. Though persecuted, rejected and hated by their own countrymen, they would send forth the word of God to

the Gentiles, for the Lord would give them strength and would help them to carry out this mission.

- Isa. 44: 3-5: “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit [NIV: my Spirit] upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring. They shall spring up like a green tamarisk, like willows by flowing streams [NIV: They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by following streams; KJV: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses]. This one will say, “I am the Lord’s”, another will be called by the name of Jacob, yet another will write on the hand, “The Lord’s”, and adopt the name of Israel [NIV: One will say, ‘I belong to the LORD’; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, ‘The LORD’s’, and will take the name Israel].”

In NIV, the word ‘spirit’ is written with a capital letter (‘Spirit’), clearly showing that it is about the Spirit of God, which was poured only when Jesus came in the flesh, that is, at His first coming. Only Jesus could bring the Holy Spirit in a complete manner to fulfill the prophecy described here, especially on the day of Pentecost. Therefore, it is about a Messianic prophecy. Water is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, whose gifts are poured out abundantly (cf. Joel 2: 28; Acts 2: 17). God in Christ was the only Rock and the only Redeemer who could defend them. His living water would quench the thirst not only of His chosen ones (the holy remnant chosen from among the Jewish people), as it would flow freely to the thirsty in all nations (Jn. 7: 38).

What the exiles would receive as a sign of favor and life from God (‘I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground’), renewing in them the will to rebuild their nation and thirst for His word, would only be the beginning of a great outpouring of the Spirit upon their posterity. This blessing, through the chosen remnant of Israel, would bring other nations, the Gentiles, to the presence of the Lord. Such offspring would be as numerous as the grass and willows that spring up near the streams, for they feel the need for water in order to flourish. In the same way, the Jews would multiply; especially those who felt attracted to the renewing waters of the Holy Spirit in the physical presence of the Messiah.

- Isa. 44: 6: “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” (see Isa. 48: 12; Rev. 1: 17; Rev. 22: 13).

In this verse, God shows Himself to Israel as He is; with all His qualities. He fully defines His personality and His functions, for He is responsible for those people.

In the first place He declares Himself as the Lord, that is, the name given to Moses at Mount Sinai, whereby He would be known by them: YHWH (יהוה). It was not Baal nor any other false god, but He alone, the LORD.

Then God introduces Himself as the King of Israel (king, in Hebrew, *melek*). Israel did not need to be ruled by men, as the heathen nations had their kings. God was the King of Israel; in fact, the only ruler truly able over those people.

Then He speaks of His function as the Redeemer of Israel, as the kinsman-redeemer of a family in the Old Testament (Boaz, for example). Redeemer (in Hebrew, *go’el* or *gho’el*) comes from the verb to redeem (*gal’al*, Strong #1350). Therefore, the Hebrew word *ga’al* or *go’el* means: to redeem (according to the Oriental law of kinship), that is, to be the next of kin (and as such, to exercise the role of kinsman-redeemer); to avenge, avenger, deliver, perform the part of near kinsfolk, kinsman, purchase, ransom, redeem, redeemer, revenge. The redeemer is also called ‘kinsman-redeemer’ and ‘avenger.’ The Redeemer was a not so distant relative, influential, whom the family could usually call upon when their lineage or their goods were at risk of being lost. He should:

- Buy back the family land that was sold in times of crisis (Lev. 25: 25).
- Rescue enslaved relatives (Lev. 25: 47-49).
- Ensure an heir for the deceased brother (Deut. 25: 5-10).
- Avenge the death of a relative (Num. 35: 19-21).
- Take care of relatives in difficult circumstances (Jer. 32: 6-25).

Therefore, in this verse of Isaiah, God showed Himself to His people as the Kinsman-Redeemer, the closest relative of Israel who would buy him from the hand of any other owner or possessor, would restore his land and his inheritance, would deliver him from slavery and would avenge him from unrighteousness.

In fourth place, God calls Himself 'the Lord of Hosts' (yhwh tsebhâ'oth or yhw sebhâ'ôth; tsebhâ'oth). 'Hosts' (Strong #6635, in Hebrew, tsaba'), means: a mass of persons (or figuratively, things), especially a regiment organized for war (an army); a campaign, company, battle, host, service, soldiers, war. The word tsaba' also comes from a primitive root meaning: to mass (an army or servants); to assemble (as in an assembly), to perform, fight; wait upon; to gather; to muster; war. 'The Lord of hosts' appears for the first time in the book of Samuel (1 Sam. 1: 3), a term by which God was worshiped in Shiloh. It was a term used by David in defying Goliath (1 Sam. 17: 45), and then in a song of victory (Ps. 24: 10). It is often found in the book of prophets (88 times in Jeremiah) to show God as the savior and protector of His people (Ps. 46: 7; 11, for example). The host of heaven, the army of heaven or powers of heaven (Dan. 4: 35) or heavenly hosts are all heavenly powers, in this case, the army of angels ready to obey the Lord. The Lord governed the host of heaven to fight every enemy of Israel, just as He always did with all the armies of the earth that came against His people, or strengthened their army for all the wars they had faced until that moment. It was He who had given great victories to the kings of Israel and Judah with their armies. This conveyed to them the idea that He, as a general, always knew the best strategies of war to give victory to His children. Soon they would see it.

After declaring Himself Lord of Hosts, God renews the memory of the Jews, saying that He was first and the last, an expression used in Isa. 48: 12 and well known in Rev. 1: 17; Rev. 21: 6 and Rev. 22: 13. 'The first and the last', 'the Alpha and Omega', 'the beginning and the end' mean the same thing, that is, it was He who started all things, and it will be He who will finish. He opens and He closes, He begins and He finishes what began, like the alphabet begins with the letter 'A' and ends with the letter 'Z' (in the western languages), or with the 'alpha' and the 'omega' (in Greek).

The word 'first' in Hebrew is ri'shown or riishon (רִאשׁוֹן, Strong #7223, derived from ri'shah, Strong #7221, 'beginning'), and means: pioneer, first in place, time or rank; ancestor, that were before, before time, beginning, eldest, first, forefather, foremost, former (thing), of old time, of an ancient age, past.

The word 'last', in Hebrew, is 'acharown or (abbreviated) acharon (Strong #314), and means: late, last, latter; hinder, delay; as facing the west; western; after, afterward, following, then, to come, the end, rearward.

Finally, the Lord repeats once again that He is God (Elohim, אֱלֹהִים) and there is no other ('besides me there is no god'). This ends with all idolatry, with all doubt about whom His people should serve, or who is the author of the deliverances and miracles they have already witnessed or heard from their ancestors.

• Isa. 44: 7-8: "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 [NIV: Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come – yes, let him foretell what will come]. (See Is 41: 23; 26) Do not fear, or be

afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock [NIV: Rock]; I know not one.”

Again, God speaks about His eternity and His superiority over all other gods and over sages, astrologers, diviners, false prophets and augurs. He also tells us that He made predictions since He made the first man on earth from the earliest ages of the world. Everything He has said is recorded. It was He who spoke from the beginning and made the human being to know His will and what was in His heart. Had He not told what would happen until then? Had He not said what is happening now with that people and what will happen in the future; what is near and what is far from them? The divine purposes were immutable and everything was already ordered from the beginning. No one besides Him could foretell the things to come, of which He gave warning through His prophets. Israel was His witness. The pagan peoples were His witnesses, for they saw what He had already done for Israel. Could the pagan gods do this? Who could compare himself with the Redeemer and King of Israel? God ends by saying that there is no other Rock besides Him.

The word ‘Rock’ is used here by God to refer to Himself as the Mighty One of Israel, as a force, a strong place of shelter for His people. In our bible, the word ‘Rock’ in this verse from Isaiah, in Hebrew is tsuwr or tsur (Strong #6697), which means: a cliff, a sharp rock (as if compressed); usually rock or boulder; stone, strength, strong (person); figuratively, a refuge; the Mighty One (God).

This Hebrew word appears 75 times in the Old Testament, with the meaning of ‘Mighty God’, ‘force’, ‘Rock’ (with a capital letter referring to God, and with a lowercase letter referring to other gods or a common noun: rock, stone):

- Deut. 32: 4: “The Rock (*referring to God*), his work is perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he.”

- Deut. 32: 15: “Jacob ate his fill; Jeshurun [*Israel*], grew fat, and kicked. You grew fat, bloated, and gorged! He abandoned God who made him, and scoffed at the Rock (*referring to God*) of his salvation.”

- Deut. 32: 18: “You were unmindful of the Rock (*referring to God*) that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.”

- Deut. 32: 30-31: “How could one have routed a thousand, and two put a myriad to flight, unless their Rock (*referring to God*) had sold them, the Lord had given them up? Indeed their rock (*their gods, but the same Hebrew word*) is not like our Rock (*referring to God*); our enemies are fools.”

- Deut. 32: 37: “Then he will say: Where are their gods, the rock (*their gods, but the same Hebrew word*) in which they took refuge?”

As we saw in Isa. 42: 11 there is another word for ‘rock’ in Hebrew, Cela’ (Strong #5553), of an unused root meaning to be raised; rock, stone, stony, rocky place; a craggy rock; rough rock, stronghold, a fortress (place of defense).

David also makes use of the word ‘rock’ when he refers to God as His refuge, protection, shelter; and the Hebrew word is cela’, translated as ‘rock’:

- 2 Sam. 22: 2: “He said: The Lord is my rock (cela’), my fortress, and my deliverer.”

- Ps. 18: 2: “The Lord is my rock (Heb. cela’), my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock (strength, Heb. tsuwr) in whom I take refuge, my shield (Heb. magen, buckler), and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”

In the NT, the Greek word is ‘petra’ (πέτρα – Strong #g4073), when in our translation it is ‘rock’; and ‘lithos’ (λίθος – Strong #g3073) when in our translation is ‘stone.’

In the NT the word 'rock' appears 9 times; it is written together with another: 'lithos', 'stone' (Rom 9: 33); or is replaced by the Greek word 'laxeutos' (λαξευτός – Strong #g2991), in Lk. 23: 53 in the sense of a compound of stones, quarry, (made of) stone. Although we can see the symbolic reference to Jesus, the word 'rock' in the NT texts is written in the sense of a common noun.

The texts in the NT are in:

- Matt. 7: 24: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock (petra)."
- Matt. 7: 25: "The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock (petra)."
- Matt. 16: 18: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock (petra) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."
- Matt. 27: 51: "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks (petra) were split."
- Matt. 27: 60: "and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock (petra). He then rolled a great stone (lithos) to the door of the tomb and went away."
- Mk. 15: 46: "Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock (petra). He then rolled a stone (lithos) against the door of the tomb."
- Lk. 6: 48: "That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock (petra); when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built."
- Lk. 23: 53: "Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn (laxeutos) tomb where no one had ever been laid."
- Romans 9: 33: "as it is written, 'See, I am laying in Zion a stone (lithos) that will make people stumble, a rock (petra) that will make them fall, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'"
- 1 Pe. 2: 8: "and 'A stone (lithos) that makes them stumble, and a rock (petra) that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do."

The folly of idolatry – v. 9-20

• Isa. 44: 9-20: "All who make idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit; their witnesses neither see nor know. And so they will be put to shame [NIV: All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame]. Who would fashion a god or cast an image that can do no good? Look, all its devotees shall be put to shame; the artisans too are merely human. Let them all assemble, let them stand up; they shall be terrified, they shall all be put to shame. The ironsmith fashions it and works it over the coals, shaping it with hammers, and forging it with his strong arm; he becomes hungry and his strength fails, he drinks no water and is faint. The carpenter stretches a line, marks it out with a stylus, fashions it with planes, and marks it with a compass; he makes it in human form, with human beauty, to be set up in a shrine. He cuts down cedars or chooses a holm tree [NIV: cypress] or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it can be used as fuel. Part of it he takes and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Then he makes a god and worships it, makes it a carved image and bows down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he roasts meat, eats it and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, 'Ah, I am warm, I can feel the fire!' The rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, bows down to it and worships it; he prays to it and

says, ‘Save me, for you are my god!’ They do not know, nor do they comprehend; for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see, and their minds as well, so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, ‘Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals, I roasted meat and have eaten. Now shall I make the rest of it an abomination? [NIV: a detestable thing] Shall I fall down before a block of wood?’ He feeds on ashes; a deluded mind [NIV: a deluded heart] has led him astray, and he cannot save himself or say, ‘Is not this thing in my right hand a fraud?’”

Here the prophet explains how a man makes an idol so that people perceive the folly of idolatry. A man cuts a grove tree so he can burn and bake his food. With what is left of the wood he makes an idol and bows down before him, but his heart is so deluded and his mind is so closed to the truth that he can not see the futility of it all. He makes an image of wood or metal in the likeness of man, and thereby displeases God. The worldly things, the corruptions of his mind, unbelief, superstition, or any kind of religious doctrine are like ashes to feed the stomach of this craftsman. Nothing that a man does with his own hands can save his soul or deliver it from hell. Those who continue on this path should question themselves if what they do has any benefit. Idols in which people feel so much pleasure are worthless. And what they make testifies against them. The artisan chooses the best wood for the image to last longer, such as oak wood, for example, rather than using wood for a more useful purpose. After the idol is ready, the man places him in a sanctuary; and other people also follow his mistake, thinking that what they are doing is right. They are not even aware of the true God who made them.

‘The ironsmith fashions it and works it over the coals, shaping it with hammers, and forging it with his strong arm; he becomes hungry and his strength fails, he drinks no water and is faint’ – This phrase shows their zeal for the idols, their devotion improperly employed, for they don’t eat and drink, and even faint due to excessive physical exertion, but is there any good in this?

A promise of deliverance; Jerusalem to be inhabited – v. 21-28

• Isa. 44: 21-28: “Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you. Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel. Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who by myself spread out the earth (see Isa. 40: 12); who frustrates the omens of liars, and makes fools of diviners; who turns back the wise, and makes their knowledge foolish [NIV: who foils the signs of the false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense]; **26** who confirms the word of his servant (*) [*probably Isaiah, prophesying the deliverance of his people*], and fulfills [*He, God*] the prediction of his messengers [*the prophets*]; who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be inhabited’, and of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins’; who says to the deep, ‘Be dry – I will dry up your rivers’ [NIV: who says to the water deep, ‘Be dry’, and I will dry up your streams]; who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose’; and who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be rebuilt’, and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’”

* In NIV, it is written: "... who confirms [*He, God*] the word of his servants [*The word is in the plural, which can mean 'the prophets'*], and fulfills the prediction of his messengers; who says of Jerusalem, 'It shall be inhabited', and of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins.'

The Hebrew word for 'servant' here in Isa. 44: 26 is: 'ebed (Strong #5650), which means 'slave', 'servant.' It comes from another Hebrew word: 'abad (Strong #5647), a primitive root meaning: to work (in any sense); by implication, to serve, to enslave, to be in slavery, to keep in bondage, to be slaves, bond-service, to compel, husbandman, to cultivate, laboring man, to till, to work hard, to be a servant, to do service, serving, to be or become a servant, to define a work, to be wrought, a worshiper.

The feminine of 'ebed, as in Ex 21: 32, 'maidservant' or 'female slave', is 'amah (Strong #519) and means: a maidservant or female slave: handmaiden, bondmaid; maid.

In the OT the Hebrew words for 'servant' are translated as: a boy, a person of service, or a slave. Sometimes the word 'servant' is used to lowly people (Gen. 32: 18, 20: 'ebed) and also in relation to high court officials (Gen. 40: 20; 2 Sam. 10: 2; 4, 'ebed). A third word refers to one who is at the command of someone to help him (Ex. 33: 11: "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle – KJV"). Here, the word 'servant' in Hebrew is sharath (Strong #8334), which means: to attend as a menial or worshipper; to contribute to; to minister to, to become a servant, to serve, a servant, to wait on. But most often in the Old Testament, it is about a slave.

In the NT, the word 'servant' appears as a translation of the Hebrew words, meaning 'a servant of the house', 'a domestic servant', or 'a lad', or else, 'a subordinate officer', but most of the times the term refers to 'a slave':

- Lk. 16: 13: "**No slave** [NIV: **no servant**] can **serve** two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth [NIV: both God and Money]."

KJV: "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

'No servant' or 'no slave', 'oiketes' (Strong #g3610), means: a fellow resident, i.e. menial domestic; household servant.

'Serve', 'douleuo' (Strong #g1398) means: to be a slave (literal or figurative, involuntary or voluntary): to be in bondage, subjection or subservience, serve, do service.

Jesus did not say that it was a sin to be rich, nor did He say that to follow Him it was necessary to be poor. What He meant was that we should not be slaves of money. Money must be our slave.

- Matt. 8: 6: "Lord, my **servant** is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress."

'Servant', in Greek is 'pais' (Strong #g3816), and means: a boy, a girl, a child; specially, a slave or servant (especially a minister to a king; and by eminence to God); maidservant, (man) servant, son, young man, household servant.

- Matt. 8: 9: "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go', and he goes, and to another, 'Come', and he comes, and to my **slave** [KJV: my servant], 'Do this', and the slave does it."

'Servant', 'doulos' (Strong #g1401) means: to be a slave (literal or figurative, involuntary or voluntary): in a sense of subjection or subservience: slave, bondman, servant.

• Matt. 26: 58: “But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the **guards** in order to see how this would end.” KJV: “But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with the **servants**, to see the end.”

‘Servants’ or ‘guards’ ‘huperetes’ (Strong #g5257), means: a minister, an agent, a subordinate officer, assistant (servant) or guard.

Most of the times, the term ‘servant’ refers to ‘a slave.’

Here, in Isa. 44: 21 (“Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me”), God calls Israel again His servant, reaffirming that He made this nation to serve Him. And He also says that He does not forget them and that He can turn their transgressions into nothing, as one blows a cloud or like the mist dissipates in the heat of the sun (Isa. 44: 22). For us, the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus, dispelled the clouds of darkness that separated us from Him because of our sins. Once more, He calls His people back saying that they have been redeemed by Him. Therefore, all nature can rejoice together with them for this deliverance. The Lord is sure of His ability to give victory over the enemies of His people. Their wisdom is nothing before Him; on the contrary, they are folly. The diviners and astrologers, numerous and highly esteemed in Babylon, had foretold the longevity and prosperity of the Chaldean Empire. These fortunetellers and false prophets will be ashamed, for they will recognize that what they have said and predicted did not happen as they imagined because the God of Israel was against them. However, the prophecies that come from Him through the mouths of His prophets will be fulfilled. Their fulfillment is a sign of God’s confirmation as to their truthfulness. What the Lord had reserved for His people was already being prophesied here, even before they went into captivity. He knew the hardships they would go through until this deliverance occurred, but there would be a way out: God was already preparing a deliverer, who in this prophecy already has his name revealed: Cyrus (in Isa. 41: 1-7 his name still had not been revealed). When the captives heard of his name, they would know that redemption was near.

Cyrus here prefigures the Messiah, the king and anointed conqueror, which is ready to fight for the cause of righteousness, for God Himself has chosen him. The comparison of him with a shepherd of God makes him, no doubt, like Jesus our Good Shepherd. He would take Israel out of the mouths of the ‘wolves’ and would gather them from all nations where the people had been scattered, ruling over them gently and taking them back to the ‘sheepfold’ (Palestine).

It is not known exactly when Isaiah made this prophecy, but it is known that his prophetic exercise was in the period of 740-681 BC. Historical sources report the birth of Cyrus around 599 BC; and his death, in 530 BC. It is also known that Cyrus (Cyrus II or Cyrus the Great) was of the Achaemenid Dynasty (founded by King Achaemenes of Persia, his paternal great-grandfather), and reigned as king of Persia in the place of his father, Cambyses I, in the 559-530 BC. In 550 BC, he took the throne of his maternal grandfather Astyages (585–550 BC) king of Media, to rule over the Medes as well. He conquered Lydia around 547 BC (the ancient Hittite empire conquered by the Assyrians and located in western Anatolia, now Turkey, where the seven churches of Asia Minor were in the NT), deposing Croesus, its ruler. Historians say that in all his conquests Cyrus made use of an unusual generosity in his time, sparing his vanquished enemies or employing them in administrative positions of his empire, as happened with Croesus king of Lydia (though there are other stories about his end). Croesus had been famous for his wealth, which was attributed to the exploration of the alluvial gold of the Pactolus. Pactolus River (in Turkish, Sart Çayı) is a river near the coast of the Aegean

Sea in Turkey. Its wellspring is on Mount Tmolus (now Bozdağ) and flows through the ruins of the ancient city of Sardis, the capital of Lydia, and empties into the river Gediz, the ancient Hermus. Pactolus contained an alloy of gold and silver (the 'Electrum'), which was the basis of the economy of the former state of Lydia in Ancient times. The Electrum is a natural alloy of gold and silver, with traces of copper and other metals such as nickel, sometimes zinc. As its color ranges from pale yellow to bright yellow, depending on the proportion of gold and silver, the ancient Greeks called it 'white gold' or 'gold', to distinguish it from refined gold; so it would be more appropriate to call it 'pale gold.' The natural Electrum of Western Anatolia has a gold content ranging from 70 to 90%. Its name is the Latin form of the Greek word ἤλεκτρον (ēlektron), which also originated the words 'electron' and 'electricity.' The 'Electrum' seems to have the same electrostatic properties of amber. What we call today 'white gold' usually refers to the gold alloy with some of the following metals, or with a combination of them: silver, platinum, nickel and palladium, which produces a silver-colored gold.



Anatolia, with the region of Lydia, the city of Sardis and Pactolus River



Pactolus River (Wikipedia.org)



Mount Tmolus (today, Bozdağ), where the spring of Pactolus River is (Wikipedia.org)



Ruins of Sardis Synagogue 3rd Century AD (Wikipedia.org)



The Greek Temple of Artemis in Sardis, Turkey (Wikipedia.org)



Remains of the Greco-Byzantine shops in Sardis (Wikipedia.org)

Sardis, described in the book of Revelation and where there was a Christian church, also enjoyed this wealth in the times of the NT.

In 539 BC Cyrus took Babylon from the hands of Nabonidus, who ruled with his son Belshazzar. Assuming that Isaiah wrote this prophecy a few years before his death (681 BC), we can say that from the time it was written until the year of the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, liberating the Jews from captivity (539 BC), approximately 140-150 years passed.

His 29 years of reign as ruler of all Medo-Persian Empire (559-530 BC) were of great benefit to many conquered peoples, following the policy of the entire Achaemenid dynasty, with its tolerance for various religions and cultures, rebuilding temples previously destroyed and allowing their subjects to be under the leadership of local leaders, and thus, many of those peoples were better off under the Persians than independent of them. The rulers of the Achaemenid Dynasty built roads linking major cities, and their mail system was quite efficient. Roads also facilitated trade from Egypt

and Europe with India and China, from which Persia benefited greatly. The political ability of Cyrus the Great, followed by his immediate successors, ensured the strength and unity of his great empire, made up of a myriad of different peoples, something that had never been achieved in the history of mankind until then (Media, Iran, Lydia, Syria, Babylon, Palestine, Armenia and Turkistan).

Here we can already see the hand of God over someone He anointed by His sovereign will, but who did not know Him. History says that Cyrus did not have a specific religion, although he recognized the existence of our God and credited Him the success of his deeds:

- Ezr. 1: 1-2: “In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared: ‘Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah.’”

- 2 Chr. 36: 23: “Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up”; see Isa. 44: 28: “who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose’; and who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be rebuilt’, and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’”

He ordered that all that had been stolen by Nebuchadnezzar, including the utensils of the temple of Jerusalem, was returned and placed under the care of Sheshbazzar, whom he appointed prince of Judah. The Persians and all the citizens of the kingdom helped the Jews by giving them silver, gold, goods and cattle, precious things, besides the voluntary gifts to the House of God. So the Jews returned and rebuilt the temple of the Lord.

Cyrus, who in the prophecy of Isa. 41: 1-7 does not have his name revealed, is clearly described in Isa. 44: 28; Isa. 45: 1-4; Isa. 45: 13-14; Isa. 48: 14. In the prophecy of Isa. 46: 11 he is called ‘a bird of prey.’

His mother was Mandane, daughter of the last king of Media, Astyages (reign: 585–550 BC). In 600 BC she married Cambyses I, the son of Cyrus I, king of Persia. When the son (Cyrus the Great or Cyrus II) was about to be born, Astyages had two prophetic dreams which were interpreted by the magicians as a prediction that his grandson (Cyrus II, Kūruš, in ancient Persian) would one day rebel and would succeed him on the throne; so he sent for her in Persia with the intention of murdering the baby as soon as he was born. He ordered the butler, Harpagus, to kill him. Some historians say that Harpagus was a general of Astyages. However, the child was not killed, but left to the care of a shepherd. In his place, they presented Astyages a stillborn child, and the father of this dead child, the shepherd, adopted Cyrus as his son. At the age of ten, Cyrus was introduced to his grandfather. By intervention of the magicians he did not suffer punishment, and was sent back to Persia to the biological parents. Years later, by a revolt of Harpagus against Astyages, Cyrus dominated Media (region of the present Iran), entering the capital, Ecbatana, and spared the life of his grandfather. Perhaps by the story of his birth and childhood, God called him a shepherd (Isa. 44: 28) besides using him to lead His people back to Israel. The successor of Cyrus was his son Cambyses II.

Chapter 45

Cyrus, the deliverer of Israel – v. 1-7.

- Isa. 45: 1-7: “Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes [NIV: strip kings of their armor], to open doors before him – and the gates shall not be closed: I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name [NIV: who summons you by name]. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me [NIV: for the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me]. I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me [NIV: I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have acknowledged me], so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things [NIV: I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things].”

- Isa. 45: 1: “Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes [NIV: strip kings of their armor], to open doors before him – and the gates shall not be closed.”

In this prophecy, Cyrus has his name revealed (Isa. 45: 1-4; 13-14), and prefigures the Messiah as king and anointed conqueror. It is interesting to notice that, even though he is not an Israelite nor even knows the Jewish religion, God calls him His anointed one. This shows us that it is the Lord who determines all things and empowers and chooses whoever He wants, in order to accomplish His purposes. There was no possibility of choosing a Jew for this liberation, for it would have to be someone with the power to reign over a great empire and with a great thirst for conquest, since at that moment the circumstances worldwide led to the necessity of a change, of a readjustment in many kingdoms and rulers. The right side, in the bible, is a symbol of blessing, strength, privilege, honor, power, authority. God was taking him by the right hand and placing him in a position of honor to accomplish this mission, because He found in him a propitious heart for it. With Cyrus, God was bringing His salvation. Then the bible says: “to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes [NIV: strip kings of their armor], to open doors before him – and the gates shall not be closed.” The belt was an important part of a warrior’s armor, for that was where the sword stood, symbolizing his courage, authority, strength, and sense of justice. God would give him the ability to remove all this from his enemies, and they would become impotent before him. The doors of the fortified cities were their defense against the invaders; also, symbol of power, opportunity and permission. As a conqueror Cyrus would knock these doors down and they would no longer close before his face; on the contrary, they would be open as new chances of victory and well-being for him and for all who were under his authority. The doors of deliverance would be open to the people of Israel. He was gaining the power to open or close the doors for whoever it was.

- Isa. 45: 2-3: “I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of

darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.”

The Lord of Hosts would go before Cyrus, removing all impediments and obstacles, destroying all who opposed him and tried to raise difficulties in his way. This is what God does with our spiritual adversaries when we decide to fight His wars to conquer the kingdom of God for ourselves and for others. What lies before us trying to prevent our progress is destroyed and removed by the power of God and the swords of His angels of war.

The bible often translates indifferently the word ‘copper’ in Hebrew (nehosheth or nchosheth – Ed 8: 27; in English versions as NRSV and NIV, the Hebrew word is translated as bronze, while KJV translates as ‘copper’) by ‘bronze’ or ‘brass’ (nehushah or nchushah). In Deut. 8: 9 it is written: ‘copper’ (nehosheth – Strong #5178, both in NRSV and NIV, while KJV writes ‘brass’). In Job 41: 27, the bible writes ‘bronze’ (NRSV and NIV) or ‘brass’ (KJV); and in Hebrew, nehushah or nchushah – Strong#5154, that is, bronze or brass. In Ezek. 1: 4, the bible perhaps describes the true ‘brass’ (a yellow alloy of copper and zinc) or ‘bronze’ (a yellowish-brown alloy of copper with up to one-third tin). The word used by Ezekiel is hashmal (‘gleaming amber’ or ‘gleaming metal’ or ‘as the colour of amber’ in our translation). Hashmal or chashmal, Strong #2830 means: bronze or polished spectrum metal: amber). Here in Isa. 45: 2, the word translated as ‘bronze’, in Hebrew is nchuwshah or nchushah or nehushah (Strong #5154). Copper or bronze means God’s judgment upon sin. Copper was a metal used in the outer court of the sanctuary, where sacrifices were made for those who had sinned and needed God’s forgiveness. Even the priests offered sacrifices for themselves and purified themselves to enter the Holy Place and burn incense. For us today, this refers especially to those who are still in the world in sin (out of the linen curtains of the Tabernacle), and do not know the Lord, and need to repent, receive His forgiveness through the blood shed on the cross (to go through the ‘bronze altar’ and ‘the bronze basin’ or ‘the basin for washing’), to then have access to the heart of God and to let Him make their bodies a living sanctuary for Him (to be a tabernacle where the Holy Spirit dwells). In the case of Isa. 45: 2, the meaning could be: God would overthrow the affronts, the false accusations, the false judgments that the enemies might raise against Cyrus, as well as He would give him the power to judge correctly.

Iron, in Hebrew: barzel [Strong # 1270] means: iron (as cutting); any tool or object of iron: ax, for example. In Rev. 2: 27 iron appears, when the Lord speaks about the church of Thyatira: the faithful should keep what they had until the coming of the Lord to receive authority over the nations (‘scepter of iron’). Therefore, iron symbolizes ‘strength’, ‘authority’; here in Revelation, the divine strength to rule with authority, shattering the clay (the things of the flesh and perishable things). In Isaiah, iron was representing human strength and the obstacles that opposed to Cyrus and therefore to the justice, the authority and the deliverance already decreed by God. Therefore, He would destroy all this (‘I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron’).

‘I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name [NIV: who summons you by name]’ or KJV: ‘And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel’ – when He speaks of treasures, they were many indeed, for all the kings of Babylon, who plundered many nations, brought these spoils to the royal palace. That is why Nebuchadnezzar boasted so much about what he had, especially in his magnificent city. These treasures were kept for long in secret, hidden

places where no one had access to them except their possessor. Even the gold and silver utensils of the temple of Jerusalem were there. Now the Lord would give to Cyrus these treasures which were so carefully guarded that he might know that He was the Lord, the God of Israel, who called him by his name. This meant that nothing was hidden from God's eyes, not even the riches once belonging to the wicked and gained at the cost of the suffering, misery, and death of many peoples whom the Babylonians had plundered. 'The treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places' – in Hebrew version, the words used are:

- Treasures (Strong #214) – 'owtsar: a depository: armory, cellar, garner, storehouse, treasure house; treasury. It comes from the primitive root 'atsar (Strong #686), which means: to store up; put into storage; lay up in store; make treasure.
- Darkness (Strong #2822) – choshek: the dark; hence (literally) darkness; figuratively, misery, destruction, death, ignorance, sorrow, wickedness; darkness, night, obscurity. It comes from the word chashak (Strong #2821) – a primitive root meaning: to be dark (as holding up light); darken; be black, be or make dark, cause darkness, be dim, hide.
- Riches hidden (Strong #4301) – matmown or matmon or matmun: a secret storehouse; hence, a secreted valuable (buried); generally money: hidden riches, hidden treasure; it comes from the root taman (Strong #2934) – to hide (by covering over): hide, lay privately, in secret. Therefore, the Greek translation of the word 'money' or 'wealth' is 'mammonas' (Strong #g3126), which is a word of Chaldean origin, meaning: confidence, i.e. wealth; riches; money; avarice (deified); Mammon (a god; deified wealth). In the NT, this Greek word appears 4 times, where our bible writes the word 'wealth' or 'riches': Matt. 6: 24 (wealth – NRSV; money – NIV); Lk. 16: 9 (wealth – NRSV and NIV); Lk. 16: 11 (wealth and riches – NRSV and NIV); Lk. 16: 13 (wealth – NRSV; money – NIV). KJV uses the word mammon in all of them.
- Secret places (Strong #4565) – mictar: hide, conceal, one that hides; a hiding place; a covert; secret place; secretly. Derived from the primitive root, cathar (Strong #5641), which means: to hide (by covering), to cover, to be absent, to keep close, to hide, to conceal, to keep secret.

For us, this means that the Lord would give Cyrus the opportunity to plunder the storehouses of the enemy again, where he had kept the blessings of the righteous, like a figure of Jesus who took from the hands of the devil the keys of death and hell, therefore, the power over the life of men. Hence, He said in His word: "Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death" (Jn. 8: 51). The great treasures and riches reserved for His beloved ones, which had been hidden by impure hands, were now free and available to all who kept His word, the hope in Him and in His power to restore all things and to make His great justice. He would allow Cyrus to see and take possession of all that wealth and all these treasures to get an idea of the true God who could give much greater riches and treasures to those who were willing to obey Him and be His servants. Somehow, Cyrus would know within his spirit that it was the Lord, the God of Israel, who was calling him by name, i.e., for a special purpose that would be recorded in History, though he had no idea of this. No one knows if Cyrus was informed about this prophecy and about his calling by God as someone anointed by Him, but he acknowledged that 'The Lord, the God of heaven' (2 Chr. 36: 23; Ezra 1: 2) had been the author of his victories. Perhaps when he entered Babylon and freed the captives, leaving there Darius the Mede (his maternal uncle), as governor in his name, Cyrus had met the prophet Daniel, who was still alive, and he may have been an instrument of God to tell him about all these things. Surely the explanation would be very different from

the one he received from the magicians, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Persia in the time of his grandfather Astyages.

• Isa. 45: 4-7: “For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me [NIV: for the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me]. I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, [NIV: I will strengthen you, though you have acknowledged me] so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things [NIV: I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things; KJV: I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things].”

Here the Lord speaks to Cyrus, showing that it is for His love of Israel His servant that He has chosen him for the task of deliverance. He has no knowledge of who calls him; nor did he know, when he was a child, that he would one day be chosen for such a thing. God reveals His majesty to him and repeats once more that He is the only God and there is no other, and that He will gird him with authority and daring as a warrior, which will make him strong and ready for great undertakings. What he does will be known in all the nations and this will be a testimony to them that they may know and turn to the God of Israel. Also to remind them that one day this event had already been prophesied. All world events lead to a single target: “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (Isa. 45: 23), and in this goal it was included the salvation of all nations of the earth (Isa. 45: 6; 22-24).

“I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things [NIV: I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things; KJV: I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things].”

“I form (יצר *yatsar* Strong #3335, a material activity, as molding into a form, like giving the idea of a potter working clay with his hands) light and create (ברא *bārā*; Strong #1254 = to create, which expresses divine activity as a choice, a formative process out of nothing) darkness, I make (עשה *asah* Strong #6213, to accomplish, to do, to do or make, in the broadest sense of the word) weal and create (ברא *bārā*; Strong #1254 = to create, which expresses divine activity as a choice, a formative process out of nothing) woe (רע *ra* – Strong #7451, adversity); I the Lord do (עשה *asah* Strong #6213, to accomplish, to do, to do or make, in the broadest sense of the word) all these things [NIV: I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things; KJV: I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things].”

The ‘evil’, ‘disaster’ or ‘woe’, which Isaiah mentions here, in Hebrew, Heb.: *ra* (רע – Strong #7451, which means ‘adversity’), includes all that men call evil: misfortune, calamities, affliction, punishment, misfortunes, hardships, things that befall man as a consequence of sin in the world, the breaking of moral laws created by God. He is not morally responsible for the existence of sin. All things are within divine providence and subject to his power. The word *ra* (רע) in Hebrew is derived from *raa*, which means: bad or evil (natural or moral).

I would like to make a comment here regarding a statement that we read in the bible in the prophetic books, especially in Isa. 45: 7 (about God making peace, prosperity and weal and creating evil) and Isa. 54: 16 (about God creating the ravager to destroy).

We need to understand one thing: there is a separation between the view of before and after the fall of man. It is logical that when God created the angels, before creating our physical, temporal universe, His intention was to create something good, because God is love and in Him there is only good. But with Lucifer's rebellion and the entry of moral evil into Creation, things changed. Even creating man in His image and likeness for a life of good, beauty and bliss, the Lord already had knowledge of good and evil and knew that giving free will to this being would be to take the risk of losing it to Satan; however, He cannot change His character or His own laws. Thus, when Adam and Eve gave in to the serpent's temptation and sinned, the Lord did not prevent Creation (men and animals) from following its course. However, he kept in mind His eternal plan of redemption through His Son.

The calamities and adversities that came after the establishment of this moral evil unleashed by Satan, that is, the infraction of divine laws, became under the control of God Himself to be used for His eternal purposes. So we can see that the artistic and creative qualities placed in Adam's descendants were maintained; like Jabal, for example, in the 6th generation of Cain, who was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle (Gen. 4: 20), and his brother was Jubal (Gen. 4: 21), who was the father of all who play the harp and flute. Or, Tubal-Cain (Tubalcain), who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools (Gen 4: 22). In this way, the ability to handle metals could be used for a peaceful purpose, manufacturing agricultural instruments, or used in a warlike activity, manufacturing weapons of war. Therefore, here in Isaiah 54: 16 the Lord says that He created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and produces a weapon fit for its purpose; and also created the ravager to destroy. This means that He uses human beings with their proper personalities and activities (good or bad) to accomplish His purposes of correction and discipline, both of the wicked and of His own people. God holds all things under his power.

The Lord is the Creator – v. 8-12.

- Isa. 45: 8-12: "Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may spring up, and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also; I the Lord have created it [NIV: You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the Lord, have created it]. Woe to you who strive with your Maker, earthen vessels with the potter! Does the clay say to the one who fashions it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles?' Woe to anyone who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' or to a woman, 'With what are you in labor?' [NIV: Woe to him who say to his father, 'What have you begotten?' or to his mother, 'What have you brought to birth?'] Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands? [NIV: This is what the Lord says – the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands?] I made the earth, and created humankind upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host [NIV: I marshaled their starry hosts]."

This work of deliverance of His people from captivity is described as a new creation (see Isa. 45: 18; Isa. 41: 20). He does as He pleases, as the potter molds the clay and no one needs to argue with him because of this. His acts of righteousness and grace will fall from heaven again upon His people, as if they were rain from the clouds. He commands the earth to open and show the fruit of salvation resulting from the spiritual blessings that have been poured out. Who can predict what will happen, but

Him? No one can give order about His children. If He sets them free, what does it matter? He has already given orders to His angels ('the starry hosts' or the heavenly hosts), just as He has always given orders to all elements of heaven: sun, moon, stars, planets, etc. they continue in their course from the beginning, by a command from His mouth.

God will help Cyrus – v. 13-14.

• Isa. 45: 13-14: "I have aroused Cyrus in righteousness, and I will make all his paths straight; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward, says the Lord of hosts. Thus says the Lord: The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, tall of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will make supplication to you, saying, 'God is with you alone, and there is no other; there is no god besides him.'"

God confirms Cyrus as His chosen one, and says that he will rebuild Jerusalem and free the exiles unconditionally, without asking anything in return, without demanding money or any reward for it. In other words, as an instrument of God's righteousness, Cyrus would do what the Lord had commanded: to punish the Babylonians and defend the cause of the oppressed, manifesting His truth and goodness; above all, showing the faithfulness of God's promises. Not that God has spoken directly to Cyrus about this, for he did not know Him; however, the Lord has placed in his heart the right motivation for this task.

The bible says, "The Sabeans, tall of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you." That phrase is God speaking to Jerusalem, not to Cyrus.

This means that Jerusalem will not only be rebuilt, but the wealth and merchandises of other countries will be brought back to it. These countries are more specified here as being Egypt, Ethiopia and the Sabeans (Cba'iy, Strong #5436; or Cba', Strong #5434), descendants of Cush, the son of Ham, who established his nation (Seba or Sheba; in Hebrew, s^ebha' or sh^ebha'), which later came to be Ethiopia. In Joel 3: 8, the Sabeans are mentioned again (here, there is a variation of the Hebrew word above (Shba'iy, Strong #7615; or Shba', Strong #7614, referring to the first progenitors of a district of Ethiopia).

In Isa. 18: 1-6 (prophecy against Ethiopia), we saw that Ethiopia was part of the kingdom of Nubia, stretching from Swenett (or Aswan; KJV: Syene, the border between Egypt and Ethiopia) to the south. From the 16th to the 9th centuries BC the Ethiopians were dominated by the Egyptians. Around the 8th century BC, taking advantage of the internal strife of Egypt, its king brought independence to this land. For 60 years, Ethiopian rulers controlled the Nile River valley. The destruction of Thebes in 661 BC (Nah. 3: 8-10) caused reflection in Ethiopia, which also came to fall, fulfilling the prophecy of Isa. 20: 2-6 (written during the reign of Sargon II – 722-705 BC – Isa. 20: 1). In 605 BC the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians and the Assyrians in Hamath (prophecy of Isa. 10: 5-12; Ezek. 30: 4-5). In 568-567 BC Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt (Jer. 43: 8-13), but failed to incorporate Ethiopia into his empire. 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 names 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). Part of Ethiopia from biblical times today comprises three independent countries: Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia.

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 of the Upper Nile, known as Abyssinia, where Jewish settlers had apparently established along with other Semitic peoples from southern Arabia, and nowadays is occupied by Ethiopia and Eritrea. 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). Most likely, some of them also descended south to Ethiopia.

In Isa. 18: 7, 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, just as Isaiah (Isa. 45: 14) says that the Sabeans, tall of stature, shall belong to Jerusalem. This was partially fulfilled when many of the peoples of the earth became Jews (Est. 8: 17), for they knew that God was on their side (Zech. 8: 23). The restoration of Jerusalem would be a means of convincing many foreigners of the power of the God of Israel, as well as a means of converting some.

‘They shall follow you; they shall come over in chains’ means the conversion of the Ethiopians, which was most fully accomplished in the time of the Gospel, when the Gentiles came to Jerusalem to worship the Lord in the Temple, as happened to the Ethiopian, the official of Queen Candace, who was baptized by Philip on the road to Gaza when he returned from Jerusalem to his land (Acts 8: 27-28; 34-38). He was an example of foreigners who came to Jerusalem because of the new doctrine, besides Greeks and all the peoples mentioned on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2: 9-11, Jews dwelling in other nations. Thus the Gentiles yielded to the city of Jerusalem because of the new doctrine of Christ, drawn by the fetters of God’s mercy and forgiveness.

Candace was a title attributed to a kind of dynasty of warrior queens, women warriors who held the power of the kingdom of Meroe in southern Ethiopia shortly before the Christian era, forming a matrilineal society. A parallel can be made to the title of ‘Pharaoh’ given to the Egyptian king. In Ancient times, the term ‘Ethiopia’ (in Hebrew, Cush) was used to denote the region where the black peoples of the African continent were situated, which could refer to the Nubia of southern Egypt and to Sudan and Ethiopia. There are studies saying that the kingdom of Meroe was ruled by queens that received the title-name of Candace, in which the power would be passed to the female descendants. The Sabeans here in this text were most likely the descendants of Seba, the son of Cush, the son of Ham, the son of Noah. Ancient historians said that the men of Meroe were very tall men (“the Sabeans, tall of stature, shall come over to you and be yours” – Isa. 45: 14a). Meroe was the capital of Ethiopia some centuries after Napata (in the reign of Esarhaddon – 681-669 BC, when the Cushites were expelled from Egypt by the Assyrians).

The apostles and disciples preached the word in that nation until the persecution by Rome. John Mark preached the gospel in Alexandria (Egypt). Bartholomew (also known as Nathanael) preached in India with Thomas, returning to Armenia, **Ethiopia** and southern Arabia. Matthew ministered in Persia (now Iran) and **Ethiopia**. It is not known if he was martyred in Ethiopia (stabbed to death). Through these men, the gospel reached Egypt, Ethiopia, and other Gentile nations. This was the seed planted by the Early Church, built upon the doctrine of Jesus and preached by the apostles. Then a Christian church was established there, and the original Christianity remained until the fourth century. In the fifth century after the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) a discussion concerning the human and divine nature of Jesus began, and the church in the countries of the East only accepted the divine nature of Jesus, not His human part within Him (even coming in the flesh among us). This and other constant conflicts

between the West and the East led to the great division of the Church in 1054 AD. The Eastern Churches separated from the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church (of the West) and gave birth to Oriental Orthodox Churches: Coptic Orthodox Church (Egyptian), Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Eritrean Orthodox Church (East Africa), Jacobite Syrian Church (Syria), Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church and Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (Indian Orthodox Church). Ethiopia established the Coptic Church, and Christianity was religion practiced by the majority, until Islam arrived. Although Muslim Arab expansion began as early as the 7th century (632–732) in Egypt and Nubia (the Nile region shared by Egypt and Sudan), which was initially a Christian kingdom, Islam in Africa gained strength from the 18th and 19th centuries with the slave trade. Ethiopia today still has a Christian majority, but a third of the population is Muslim. Until 1980, a significant population of Ethiopian Jews resided in Ethiopia.

The mysteries of God are unsearchable – v. 15-18.

- Isa. 45: 15-18: “Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior. All of them are put to shame and confounded, the makers of idols go in confusion together. But Israel is saved by the Lord with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity. For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): I am the Lord, and there is no other [NIV: For this is what the Lord says – he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth; he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited – he says: ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other’].”

In this passage there is a meditation from the prophet Isaiah about the revelations of God and how He treats His people and the other nations in the world. When he says that God is mysterious (‘a God who hides himself’), he means that the mysteries of God are unsearchable and man can not understand them. His ways and thoughts and purposes are always higher than ours. The Lord was only doing something physical in the eyes of men, but in the spiritual realm he did something far greater and more important, for the future of His people and of humanity depended on the events of that time, so that later on, there would be a synchronism with the coming of Jesus, bringing salvation and a new dispensation. Isaiah, in his concern for holiness, speaks again about the fall of idolatry, here referring to the idolatry of Babylon. There will be shame for the wicked while there will be eternal salvation for Israel. He believes in the sovereignty, omniscience and creative power of God and is sure that He did not create the earth to be empty or to be a chaos, that is, a place without government, without control, without the light of truth, nor to be empty of the presence of the Lord.

The Lord and the idols – v. 19-21.

- Isa. 45: 19-21: “I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in chaos’ [NIV: Seek me in vain]. I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right. Assemble yourselves and come together, draw near, you survivors of the nations! [NIV: you fugitives from the nations] They have no knowledge – those who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a god that cannot save. Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is no one besides me.”

The Lord always spoke plainly to all who had a heart open to Him. And everything He said He did openly through the mouths of His prophets, not like idolaters, hidden inside caves or in hiding places within palaces or temples. His prophecies and

revelations were delivered to Israel in broad daylight, publicly. This was what Jesus said to Annas, the high priest: “Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, ‘I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said’” (Jn. 18: 19-21).

In Isaiah, God goes on saying that He never deceived or disillusioned anyone who trusted Him, making this person offer a vain worship, without his prayers being heard or answered. He abhors ungodliness and proclaims the truth, for in His mouth there is no twisted or crooked word (Prov. 8: 8). Here, He calls the people who returned from exile and console them saying that idolaters know nothing. What they say does not happen; they only know how to carry their idols of wood from one side to the other, but these idols do not save, do not free anyone, nor do they know how to predict future things. However, He, the Lord, has long spoken to them, and what He said happened, or is about to happen. He affirms again that He is the true God, the only God, and does this as if He were speaking to a people who despite everything they saw and lived still could not perceive that truth; they seemed to be blind, deaf, heart-hardened, with their mind calloused, believing in illusions, and afraid to commit to Him, to take a stand, to face the struggle and win.

The salvation of the nations of the earth – v. 22-25

- Isa. 45: 22-25: “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear’ [NIV: By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear]. Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; all who were incensed against him shall come to him and be ashamed. In the Lord all the offspring of Israel shall triumph and glory [NIV: But in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult].”

‘Turn to me and be saved’ is a call to idolaters, that they may repent. Let them look to God with the eyes of faith. The relationship between this prophecy and the coming of Jesus is unmistakable, for He alone was able to bring salvation and justify His people, not by the works of the law, but by faith. Here are included all the nations of the earth, Jews and Gentiles alike. His lordship and authority are evident, and no creature on earth or under the earth will fail to bow down before Him. Every tongue will confess that He alone is the Lord and His word will not be revoked. His enemies will come to Him and will be ashamed as ever were those who rose up against God, whether men or demons.

God also speaks in the prophecy above that only in Him there is righteousness and strength. The word ‘strength’ in Hebrew is: *’oz* (fully, ‘rowz’ – Strong #5797), which means ‘strength’ in various forms (force, security, majesty and praise), boldness; power, might (in the sense of a great and impressive power or strength, especially of a nation, large organization, or natural force); strong. For us, this means that only in Him we find the capacity to overcome all obstacles, to reach the goals that seem impossible, and to accomplish the great things that we can not do in our mortal flesh.

Chapter 46

Gods of Babylon – v. 1-2.

- Isa. 46: 1-2: “Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle [NIV: by beasts of burden]; these things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary animals. They stoop, they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity.”

In these verses the prophet talks about the shameful position of the idols of Babylon. Even the animals, which were weary of bearing them, fell under their weight; and the gods themselves had no power to strengthen the animals. The Babylonians could not free their idols from destruction, just as the idols could not deliver them either.

Bel was the chief Babylonian deity, whose overthrow is synonymous with the end of Babylon and its dominion (Jer. 50: 2; Jer. 51: 44). Bel means ‘lord’; comparable to the Hebrew, ‘Baal’, ‘lord, possessor, husband.’ Bel was the master of the storms and other natural manifestations linked to the atmosphere (lightning and thunder). He was one of the gods of the original Sumerian triad (Bel, Anu and Enki). Anu was the god of the sky. Enki (‘Lord of the deep waters’) in Sumerian mythology, later known as Ea, in Akkadian, was the divinity of crafts (gašam); mischief; magic; water, sea water, lake water (a, aba, ab), intelligence or knowledge (gestú, literally ‘ear’) and creation (Nudimmud). In the second millennium BC, Bel began to be called Marduk or Merodach, and received the additional name of Bel, namely, Bel-Marduk. Marduk or Bel was compared to Jupiter, of the Romans. Marduk was considered the supreme god because he defeated the goddess Tiamat (‘the dragon-chaos’ of the oceans).

Bel has his name attached to that of the god Nabu (Nebo), who was considered his son. Nebo or Nabu appears as part of names people (Nebuchadnezzar and, perhaps, Abednego). His name in Babylon means: ‘height, elevation’; therefore, he was the god of scholarship (erudition, knowledge) and, therefore, writing, astronomy and all sciences. 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 Babylonians used to bow down to worship them; now they bowed to the victorious Persians. Cyrus entered there on October 16th, 539 BC, after the city being seized by his general (in Greek, his name was Gobryas; in ancient Persian, Gaubaruva or Gubaru), and captured Nabonidus. The course of the river Euphrates was diverted upstream, and the Persian army passed with water at the height of a man’s thigh, for the gates were open. The main buildings were spared, and the temples and the images that perhaps were destroyed during the invasion were later rebuilt by royal decree.

As we saw in Isa. 45: 3, when the Lord speaks of treasures, they were many indeed, for all the kings of Babylon who plundered many nations brought these spoils to the royal palace. That is why Nebuchadnezzar boasted so much about what he had, especially in his magnificent city. These treasures were kept for long in secret, hidden places where no one had access to them except their possessor. Even the gold and silver utensils of the temple of Jerusalem were there. Now the Lord would give to Cyrus these treasures which were so carefully guarded that he might know that He was the Lord, the God of Israel, who called him by his name. This meant that nothing was hidden from

God's eyes, not even the riches once belonging to the wicked and gained at the cost of the suffering, misery, and death of many peoples whom the Babylonians had plundered.

It is also written in Isa. 45: 13: "I have aroused Cyrus in righteousness, and I will make all his paths straight; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward, says the Lord of hosts." God confirms Cyrus as His chosen one, and says that he will release the exiles unconditionally, without asking anything in return, without demanding money or any reward for it. In other words, as an instrument of God's righteousness, Cyrus would do what the Lord had commanded: to punish the Babylonians and defend the cause of the oppressed.

The behavior of Cyrus when invading Babylon was very different from the behavior of Nebuchadnezzar when invading Jerusalem or other nations. His motivations were different. Like all rulers of the Achaemenid Dynasty, he showed his tolerance toward several religions and cultures, rebuilding temples destroyed before, among other benefits he accomplished in the conquered nations. History says that Cyrus did not have a specific religion; it even says that when he entered into Babylon, he was crowned king in the temple of Marduk. But he acknowledged the existence of our God and credited Him the success of his deeds (2 Chr. 36: 23, Ezr. 1: 1-2).

So with regard to this fall of the Babylonian idols described in Isa. 46: 1-2, this relates to their shame at not being able to prevent the Persian invasion of the city or the deliverance of the people of God. The prophet was mocking the Babylonian idolatry, and the prophecy was addressed to them, the Babylonians. These gods would remain there for the wicked idolaters who wanted to continue to worship them. However, the Lord entered there to save His people, who had the true God and should no longer bow before idols. In other words, Israel was free, so the prophet also showed them, the Israelites, the ridicule and uselessness of idolatry. As was said previously, the temples and the images that perhaps were destroyed during the invasion (Jer. 51: 52; 54) were later rebuilt by Cyrus, even because the policy of the Achaemenid Dynasty was to preserve the religions and cultures of other peoples. Cyrus killed the representatives of evil who were oppressing the defenseless, that is, Belshazzar, the Babylonian princes, his wise men, his rulers, his viceroys, and his mighty men (Jer. 51: 57), that is, the soldiers who opposed his entry there and all the royal magicians and advisors. The combats were brief, but many people were killed (Jer. 51: 53-56). He also captured Nabonidus, the father of Belshazzar.

The love and fidelity of God for the Jews – v. 3-4.

- Isa. 46: 3-4: "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb [NIV: I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth]; even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save [NIV: Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you]."

The Lord shows His zeal for Israel and says that since they were conceived He carried them, and until the day of their death He would carry them. This shows the care of parents towards their children, just as that of a God always present in the lives of those whom He Himself chooses for a great purpose. And Israel was chosen by God, through Abraham, to make His name known on earth. God took them through their tribulations as a nation and would continue to lead them during the captivity and their deliverance from it, for His designs were of peace and salvation to them. Unlike the

idols, which were carried, God carried His people. The Lord says that He has begotten them, fed them, and preserved them until here.

Idols do not compare to God – v. 5-8.

- Isa. 46: 5-8: “To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, as though we were alike? Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales—they hire a goldsmith, who makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries out to it, it does not answer or save anyone from trouble. Remember this and consider, recall it to mind, you transgressors, [NIV: Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels].”

Again the Lord defies idolaters with the question He had asked before: who would compare himself with Him, or to whom would they liken Him? With their silver idols, who cannot even move from their place and who has no answer to give to anyone? With their idols that cannot rid anyone of their problems? God speaks harder to the rebels and says it would be good if they took what He says seriously, so that after the misfortune comes they will remember that they were warned.

God’s word prevails; He calls Cyrus; His justice is near – v. 9-13.

- Isa. 46: 9-13: “remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfill my intention’, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man for my purpose from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have planned, and I will do it. Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from deliverance [NIV: righteousness]: I bring near my deliverance [NIV: I am bringing my righteousness near], it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.”

In these verses God shows that man’s unbelief cannot abolish His promise. What He said will happen because He Himself will make it happen. His purpose will be standing, and He will do whatever pleases Him; no one will stop Him. He reminds His people that from the earliest times He already existed, and from those times He revealed His mysteries and His purposes to man. No other God was capable of this.

In this prophecy, Cyrus does not have his name revealed, but the Lord calls him ‘a bird of prey.’ Cyrus was called ‘bird’ by his swiftness, and ‘voracious’ for his ferocity and victory over his enemies (a bird of prey, like the eagle). He was fast on his horse, being compared to this bird. As Plutarch relates (he was a Greek historian and philosopher – 46-120 AD), Cyrus had an aquiline nose; therefore, men who have such a nose among the Persians are highly esteemed. According to Plutarch, Cyrus (Kūruš, in ancient Persian) is the Persian word for ‘sun.’ Xenophon said that Cyrus’ standard was a golden eagle on top of a high spear, and was held by the kings of Persia. Xenophon was a Greek historian, writer and military leader, disciple of Socrates, and who lived around 430-354 BC. He was a contemporary of Artaxerxes II, one of Cyrus’ successors as king of Persia. Artaxerxes II lived between 436 and 358 BC and reigned in the period of 404-358 BC.

Taking into account the biblical text of Isaiah, Cyrus can be compared to a bird by its speed in coming at the time determined by God. He came from the east as the rising sun of righteousness, being called to do the will of the Lord. The work of the redemption of Israel was in accordance with the eternal purpose of God, prophesied by all the holy prophets, and now fulfilled. And the divine righteousness and salvation are

mentioned in verses 12 and 13: “Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from deliverance [NIV: righteousness]: I bring near my deliverance [NIV: I am bringing my righteousness near], it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory” (Isa. 46: 12-13).



Cyrus standard, later adopted by the Achaemenid Dynasty (Wikipedia.org)

Chapter 47

The fall of Babylon – v. 1-15.

• Isa. 47: 1-15 (see Isa. 13: 1 – 14: 23; Jer. 50: 1 – 51: 64): “Come down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon! Sit on the ground without a throne, daughter of Chaldea! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones and grind meal [NIV: flour], remove your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers. Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your shame shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one. Our Redeemer—the Lord of hosts is his name—is the Holy One of Israel. Sit in silence, and go into darkness, daughter of Chaldea! [NIV: daughter of the Babylonians] For you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms [NIV: queen of kingdoms]. I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand, you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy. You said, ‘I shall be mistress forever’, so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end [NIV: You said, ‘I will continue forever—the eternal queen!’ But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen]. Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children’ [NIV: Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, ‘I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children’]— both these things shall come upon you in a moment, in one day: the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments. You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, ‘No one sees me.’ Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me’. But evil shall come upon you, which you cannot charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, which you will not be able to ward off; and ruin shall come on you suddenly, of which you know nothing. Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed, perhaps you may inspire terror. You are wearied with your many consultations; let those who study the heavens, stand up and save you, those who gaze at the stars [*its astrologers*], and at each new moon predict what shall befall you [NIV: All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you]. See, they are like stubble, the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before! Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have trafficked with you from your youth [NIV: since childhood]; they all wander about in their own paths [NIV: Each of them goes on in his error]; there is no one to save you.”

The word “Babylon” in Sumerian is written as *kà-dingir-ra*, which means “Gate of God”; and in Hebrew it is written as *Babhel* (Strong # 894; Gen. 10: 10; Gen. 11: 9 – the tower of Babel), which comes from the Hebrew root *bālal* (Strong #1101), meaning “confusion” or “mixture.”

In this prophecy God rebukes Babylon because of its hostility against Israel and also because of its idolatry. Further up, I am going to write what the city of Babylon was like, and then we can see why the prophet Isaiah and others criticized the idolatry in that city and that kingdom so much; why the prophets have mocked the idols so much, and why they have rebuked the people of God so insistently on this subject. If we compare this chapter of Isaiah with Jer. 50: 1 – Jer. 51: 64 we will see that the

destruction of Babylon did not come at once through Cyrus. He took away its supremacy. The rulers who followed, both Persians and Greeks (Alexander) and Seleucids (Syria), Parthians and Romans finished what had already been prophesied and turned it into ruins through the generations, taking advantage of the rebellions of the descendants of their kings from Belshazzar on. Despite Cyrus' preservation policy, as it was started by the Achaemenid Dynasty, the Persians were also a warlike and cruel people as described in Jeremiah's prophecies cited above (Jer. 50: 41-42).



Chaldea

Let's talk a little about the city of Babylon:

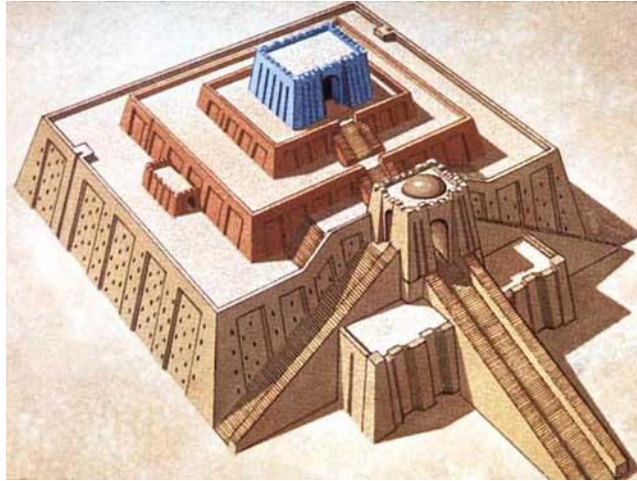
Great monuments were built in Babylon, as well as its large and thick walls, but no concrete evidence has yet been found on the 'Hanging Gardens', whose location has not yet been identified. In addition to the 'Hanging Gardens', another Babylonian monument was the Ziggurat, which gave rise to suppositions about the appearance of the tower of Babel cited in the bible (Gen. 11: 1-9). It was a kind of temple to 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 one built upon another, with oval, rectangular, or square platforms that went diminishing in size like a pyramid to the top. The number of floors varied from two to seven. There were several Ziggurats in Babylon.

The center of the ziggurat was of fired bricks (Gen. 11: 3), tougher than the sun-baked bricks that were placed on the exterior of the building. On the outside were also placed some adornments, usually glazed in different colors. To get to the top, one climbed a series of ramps by the side of the building or by a spiral ramp from base to top. The first known ziggurats were built around 3,000 BC. Some of them built in the

sixth century BC are famous, such as Chorsabad or Khorsabad in Mesopotamia, and Ur in Chaldea. Khorsabad is the current name of a village in northern Iraq known in Antiquity as Dur Sharrukin ('Fortress of Sargon'), for Sharrukin is the Akkadian name of Sargon II, written as Šarru-kin or Šarru-kinu, meaning: 'the true king' or 'the rightful king'; and in cuneiform, ŠAR.RU.KI.IN; LUGAL.GIN. Dur Sharrukin was an ancient capital of Assyria (713 BC) built by Sargon II in 717 BC. After his death, Sennacherib transferred the capital to Nineveh. The ziggurat of Ur of the Chaldeans was dedicated to Sin (Šin), the Akkadian god of the moon, named Nanna, in Sumerian. The ziggurats were not places of public ceremonies or idolatry. In Mesopotamia they were considered the abode of the gods, where they stood close to humanity; so in every city, people worshiped their own gods or goddesses. Only the priests entered there and took care of the worship of the gods and interceded for the community. The ziggurats were also places for storing grain, a residence for rulers, a library and a place from which the sky, the stars and the floods of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were observed. One of the largest and strongest ziggurats is the Etemenanki, dedicated to Marduk. Etemenanki (É.TEMEN.AN.KI) is a Sumerian term meaning 'The foundation of heaven and earth.' It was built by Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC), a Babylonian king who conquered Sumer and Akkad, and extended his kingdom northward, conquering Assur. Afterwards, several kings built on the site until the structure was finished by Nebuchadnezzar. Nothing of it was left, not even the base, but the archaeological findings and historical sources suggest that it was composed of layers of several colors, especially indigo blue, and at the top there was a temple of considerable proportions, and three floors of stairs led to the temple; two of them went up only halfway of the ziggurat. At first, it seems to have been built on seven floors, reaching a height of ninety-one meters.



The Tower of Babel – Pieter Bruegel, the elder, 1563 (Dutch painter) – Museum of Vienna (wikipedia.org)



Ziggurat in Ur of the Chaldeans – drawing (crystalinks.com)



Reconstructed facade of the Ziggurat in Ur of the Chaldeans (crystalinks.com)



Ruins of Babylon (Wikipedia.org)



Hanging Gardens of Babylon

The defensive system of the walls of the city of Babylon consisted of several walls: one around the outer city, in triangular form, on the east bank of the Euphrates, and one around the inner city (from the time of Nebuchadnezzar II) with twenty-seven kilometers length. There were also walls and towers on the outskirts of the outer city to the southeast that led to the city of Kish and north to the city of Sippar (quoted in the bible with the name of Sepharvaim). The walls, extremely high (15-20 meters), were constituted by three successive walls, of which the one of the middle was the most solid, separated by moats. The outer moat outside the walls was fifty meters wide and filled with water. The inner wall (which protected the palace of Nebuchadnezzar) consisted of two parallel walls, built by Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal, Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar, walls strong and thick enough for chariots to pass through them. The outer wall of this inner wall was six and a half meters thick, and it was from a distance of seven meters and twenty centimeters from the inner wall, with three meters and seventy centimeters thick. The outer row of these two walls was protected by defense towers every thirty or fifty meters and had eight gates. The inner wall is called 'Imgur-Enlil' ('Enlil has shown his favor'), and the exterior, thicker, is called 'Nimit-Enlil' ('wall of Enlil'). During the 1960s and 1970s, Iraqi archaeological teams undertook the restoration of ancient monuments in the country, for tourist purposes, in parallel with new excavations. Among these restorations are the walls of the ancient city of Babylon. Every thirty or fifty meters there were defensive towers. There were dozens of towers in the city.

The city had eight gates, all with names of deities (with the exception of the 'King's Gate'), protecting the respective gates. Besides the name of the deity there was a phrase that emphasized this protection, for example, 'the enemy is disgusting to her' at the gate of the goddess Uras (Urash or Uraš), goddess of the earth and one of the wives of Anu the god of the sky; 'Hate your aggressor' at the gate of Zababa, the warrior god, patron of Kish; 'Ishtar knocks down her assailant' at the Ishtar Gate, the Babylonian goddess of love and fertility. Four gates were excavated and identified in the eastern part: that of Ishtar, Marduk, Zababa, and Urash. Marduk (formerly called 'Bel') was considered the supreme god because he defeated the goddess Tiamat ('the dragon-chaos' of the oceans). The other gates of the western part, located inaccurately were: the King's Gate; the Gate of Adad (also known as Ada, Ande, Hadad, or Adu: he was the god bound to thunder); the Shamash Gate (Shamash or Samas was the Akkadian Sun-god) and the Gate of Enlil (uncle of Marduk). Enlil (in Sumer, called 'En' or 'Enlil'), was the god of air and winds. The precise translation of his name in Sumerian is 'Lord of the Wind' ('En' = 'Lord'; 'Lil' = Wind, Air).



Walls of Babylon – rebuilt in 1970 by the Iraqi government (wikipedia.org)



Ruins of Babylon in 1932 (wikipedia.org)



Map of the city of Babylon 6th century BC; Inner wall (wikipedia.org)

The Ishtar Gate (on the east side of the Euphrates River and placed on the north wall) was massive and led to the processions' sacred way (the 'Processional Way' or 'Processional Street' or 'Ay-ibur-šabu', meaning 'the arrogant enemy may not pass'). Ishtar Gate was built with glazed bricks and decorated with lions and rosettes. The processions' sacred way proceeded southward to the Ziggurat of Etemenanki and the fortress of Esagila (both are identified with the temple of Marduk, and the Ziggurat being a major monument to him). Esagila, in Sumerian, É-SAĜ-ĪL.LA, means: 'temple whose top is lofty.' The presence of the statue of Marduk at Esagila was a sign of victory, and was carried to the capital of the enemy who conquered it. The Processional Way was a paved avenue, one kilometer long, whose walls were covered with bricks decorated with one hundred and twenty lions (symbol of Ishtar) and five hundred and seventy-five dragons ('mushrishu', mušḫuššu, symbolizing Marduk, or Bel, his oldest name) and bulls (symbol of Adad; in fact, 'aurochs', a now extinct ancestor of cattle), lined up vertically and alternately. The Processional Way turned west, crossing the Euphrates by a bridge connecting the New Town, at the west bank, to the old capital, at the east bank. Fifty-three temples were recovered in several districts of the city, but the successive destruction left very little of the content of these temples in their place of origin.



Ishtar Gate (crystalinks.com)



Detail of the reconstruction of Ishtar Gate – lion and bull – wikipedia.org



Ishtar Gate (Pergamon Museum in Berlin) – crystalinks.com



Above: Ishtar Gate and walls of the Processional Way rebuilt with glazed bricks and decorated with flowers (rosettes), 120 lions and 575 dragons and bulls, alternately lined up vertically (Pergamon Museum in Berlin) – Wikipedia.org.



One of the dragons (mušḫuššus) on Ishtar Gate (Pergamon Museum) – wikipedia.org



Original tiles of the Processional Way (ancient Babylon, Iraq) – Wikipedia.org

Nebuchadnezzar had three royal palaces in the area of the Kasr ('Palace or Castle'), the section of the palaces in the eastern part of the city, next to the walls: the 'South Palace' and the 'North Palace'; and another isolated further north, known as the 'Summer Palace.' The 'South Palace' (Südburg, 'Fortress of the South' or 'the south citadel', name given by the German archaeologists who excavated the city) is the famous royal palace in Babylon (The king also called it 'The wonder of mankind', 'the center of the earth', 'the shining abode', 'the abode of majesty'). It consisted of five buildings separated by large courtyards that communicated with each other. It is

probable that the divisions of the northern part had an administrative function; and those of the southern part were the sites of the royal palaces.

Among these buildings is the throne room, fifty-two to fifty-six meters long and seventeen wide, and perhaps used in the time of Daniel. At the north-eastern corner of the Kasr are the remnants of vaulted pillars, which Koldewey (Robert Johann Koldewey, 1855-1925, German archaeologist who did a deep dig at the site of the ancient city of Babylon) thought to be the stands for 'hanging gardens' built by Nebuchadnezzar in honor of his wife, Amitis, so that she could remember her land of origin, Media, with much vegetation. The glazed brick decorations on the walls of the throne room of the South Palace were: palms, flowers (rosettes) and lions, and date from the period of Neo-Babylonian Empire (626-539 BC), more specifically, the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II – 605-562 BC). The throne room was in the third courtyard of the royal palace. At Pergamon Museum in Berlin, there is a reconstruction of these walls and placed to the left of the Ishtar Gate. The lower part of the facade, with the representation of the lions, was rebuilt from the original fragments of baked bricks (fired bricks). The lions turned to the main entrance of the room, that is, they were facing the entrance. Koldewey excavated the throne room around 1899-1917. It was used as an official reception room.



Brick decoration of the Throne Room (Wikipedia.org)

Cyrus began the process of the fall of Babylon, taking away its supremacy. Therefore, Jeremiah (Jer. 50: 39; 46) says that the complete extinction of Babylon would not be fulfilled immediately, but gradually (Jer. 50: 39 – 'from generation to generation' – NIV; 'for all generations' – NRSV).

Ancient Babylonian rulers raised insurrections, trying to regain the throne:

- Nebuchadnezzar III (Nidintu-Bêl) against Darius I (522-486 BC) – in the year 522 BC. Darius took a little more than 1 ½ year to take the city.
- Nebuchadnezzar IV against Darius I – 521 BC. Darius deprived the city of its fortifications; the walls were partially destroyed.
- Bel-shimanni and Shamash-eriba, in the reign of Xerxes I (486-465 BC), the son of Darius I – 482 BC.

Because of these insurrections Xerxes destroyed the city almost totally in 478 BC. The kings mentioned above were native Babylonian kings who briefly regained independence, but when these rebellions were repressed Babylon remained under Persian rule for two centuries until the entry of Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Alexander sponsored the restoration of channels and the Esagila (temple of Marduk; the Esagila, in Sumerian, É-SAĜ-ÍL.LA, means ‘temple whose top is lofty’). After his expedition to India, he settled in the city for a few months and resided for a time in one of the palaces of Nebuchadnezzar, but he died in June 323 BC, before the restoration work of the city was finished. The Seleucids, who followed Alexander, moved the capital to Seleucia on the west bank of the Tigris River, taking with them the Babylonian citizens and the wealth of that place. Seleucia was a great Mesopotamian city of the Seleucid Empire (323-63 BC), Parthian (247 BC-224 AD) and Sassanian (224-651 AD). The city was on the west bank of the Tigris River, opposite Ctesiphon, within Babylon, present-day Iraq. Thus, in 312 BC, the city of Babylon once again fell into destruction and ruin because of the Seleucid invasion, although the temple of Bel had remained until 75 AD. After the Seleucids, the city of Babylon, almost totally destroyed, passed into the hands of the Parthians (247 BC-224 AD), who also changed the capital of the empire from Seleucia to Ctesiphon on the eastern bank of the Tigris, in front of the ancient Greek city of Seleucia, and northeast of the ancient city of Babylon. Ctesiphon (near modern Al-Mada’in, Iraq) was the capital of the Parthian (247 BC-224 AD) and Sassanian (224-651 AD) Empires. The Roman Emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD) left nothing of Babylon but ruins.



Ctesiphon, Seleucia and Babylon

Returning to Cyrus on a night of 5th to 6th October 539 BC, he encamped around Babylon with his army. The walls were considered impenetrable. The only way into the city was through one of its many gates or across the Euphrates River. The metal bars of

the gates came even underwater, allowing the river to flow through the city walls, while avoiding invasions. The Persians devised a plan to enter the city across the river. Cyrus' troops ingeniously diverted the waters of the Euphrates upstream to an artificial lake, and while the Babylonians feasted at the banquet of Belshazzar, the Persian army under the command of Cyrus' general, Gobryas (in Greek, Gaubaruva, or in Ancient Persian, Gubaru), passed with the water at the height of a man's thigh, for the gates were open (Jer. 51: 36). They attacked the city by surprise on October 7th, 539 BC (Jer. 51: 41). On the banks of the Euphrates there were large quantities of big and tall reeds, which the Persians burned at the base of the outer walls, and then demolished them (Jer. 51: 58). The Persian army conquered the outlying areas of the city, while most of the Babylonians in the center of it were unaware of the invasion.

Thus Cyrus' general captured the city (Jer. 51: 31-32) and Nabonidus. The combats were brief, but many people were killed (Jer. 51: 53-56), especially when Belshazzar was caught in the course of his banquet. The evildoers who were oppressing the defenseless were killed, namely, Belshazzar, the Babylonian princes, their wise men, their rulers, their viceroys, and their mighty men (Jer. 51: 57), that is, the soldiers who opposed his entry there and all the royal magicians and advisors.



Cyrus entering the city of Babylon

A few days later, the Persian armies under his command entered the city (October 16th, 539 BC) under the cheering of the people, an unusual event in Ancient times. The corruption and the immoralities lived in the court of Nabonidus, its last king, provoked the displeasure of the people, facilitating the Persian conquest. In Dan. 5: 30 it is written that Belshazzar the son of Nabonidus was killed the same day of the interpretation of the inscription on the wall (MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN). Nabonidus (reign: 556-539 BC) reigned in co-regency with his son Belshazzar, for from 554 to 544 BC he had been expelled by his own people because of his attitudes of government, disdaining the clergy of Marduk; apparently he lost interest in this god in favor of the moon god Sîn. So he lived for ten years in Tema in Arabia. Tema 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). It is mentioned together with Dedan and Buz as a distant place (Jer. 25: 23), and as an oasis in the desert that lay within the trade route that crossed Arabia (Isa. 21:

14), in northwestern Arabia. The city (in Babylonian, Tema'), now in ruins (Tayma), also appears in documents that record its occupation by Nabonidus, king of the Babylon, during his exile. He returned to Babylon in 544 BC, but already found a weakened and divided country. After the capture of the city by the general of Cyrus, Belshazzar was killed and Nabonidus remained alive for some time yet, being killed later.

Cyrus II expressed his desire to preserve the city and won the favors of the local clergy proclaiming a decree that was very favorable to them, which is written in Cyrus Cylinder, discovered in the ruins of Babylon. Cyrus Cylinder is a clay cylinder in whose interior there are great gray stones, currently divided in several fragments, in which is written a declaration in Akkadian cuneiform script, listing his genealogy as a king of a lineage of kings, and reporting his capture of Babylon in 539 BC.



Cyrus' Cylinder (Wikipedia.org)

The cylinder measures 22.5 cm length and 10 cm in its maximum diameter. The text says that the victorious Cyrus was received by the people of Babylon as their new ruler and entered the city in peace. It extols Cyrus' efforts as a benefactor of the citizens of Babylon and responsible for improving their lives, repatriating displaced peoples and restoring temples and religious sanctuaries through Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the region. It concludes with a description of Cyrus' work of repairing the walls of Babylon. The text of the cylinder denounces the deposed Babylonian king Nabonidus as impious and portrays Cyrus as pleasing to the chief god Marduk. It probably dates from the sixth century BC (539 BC). There is much controversy among scholars about something written in Cyrus Cylinder on the repatriation of the Jews (Ezr. 1: 1-4; 2 Chr. 36: 23). Although not mentioned specifically in the text, the repatriation of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity has been interpreted as part of this general policy.

In fact, his reign followed the policy of the entire Achaemenid Dynasty, with its tolerance for various religions and cultures, rebuilding temples previously destroyed and allowing their subjects to be under the leadership of local leaders, and thus, many of

those peoples were better off under the Persians than independent of them. The rulers of the Achaemenid Dynasty built roads linking major cities, and their mail system was quite efficient. Roads also facilitated trade from Egypt and Europe with India and China, from which Persia benefited greatly. The political ability of Cyrus the Great, followed by his immediate successors, ensured the strength and unity of his great empire, made up of a myriad of different peoples, something that had never been achieved in the history of mankind until then (Media, Iran, Lydia, Syria, Babylon, Palestine, Armenia and Turkistan).

Here we can already see the hand of God over someone He anointed by His sovereign will, but who did not know Him. History says that Cyrus did not have a specific religion; it even says that when he entered Babylon, he was crowned king in the temple of Marduk. But he acknowledged the existence of our God and credited Him the success of his deeds (Ezr. 1: 1-2; 2 Chr. 36: 23, see Isa. 44: 28).

He ordered that everything that had been stolen by Nebuchadnezzar, including the utensils of the temple of Jerusalem, was returned and placed under the care of Sheshbazzar, whom he appointed prince of Judah. The Persians and all the citizens of the kingdom helped the Jews by giving them silver, gold, goods and cattle, precious things, besides the voluntary gifts to the House of God. So the Jews returned and rebuilt the temple of the Lord.

It is interesting to realize that this sudden entry into the city was, indeed, by the providential help of God. According to some historians, Cyrus received a 'divine inspiration' about the strategy of the invasion.

When we read the bible and pay attention to all miraculous victories that the Lord gave to His people, we can see that none of them have been repeated in thousands of years, however much incredible and absurd it may seem (remember Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, and so many others). This leads us to think about God's creativity and His vision as a warrior and strategist. If He has done this in the past with natural and physical things, how much more can He do today with our spiritual enemy, catching Him by surprise when He tries to set traps on our way or prevent our conquests! We also see that He alone moves the human heart according to His will, and this we can perceive through the manner how the city was conquered. Despite Persian cruelty and its aggressiveness in war, this victory was like a 'holy war', that is, Cyrus killed 'who needed', the representatives of evil who were oppressing the defenseless; he destroyed the city with a violence controlled by God, we can say so, because the ultimate goal was to do justice, destroying evil, not simply to satisfy a carnal desire for power and conquest. The bible says in Prov. 21: 1, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." When we analyze this prophecy of Isaiah we realize that there is a difference from that of Jeremiah, where the description of the destruction of Babylon seems to be more detailed, perhaps even more violent (Jer. 51: 35; 52-58). However, there are some verses in Is 13: 1-22 (especially in v. 11-19) that give us an idea of the violent action of the Medes and Persians, sparing nothing and no one, regardless of age, and the despair of the Babylonians wanting to flee somewhere, but without success ... Many men will be killed, and few will be left ('more rare than the gold of Ophir' – Is 13: 12 – NIV). Some verses here in Isaiah are interesting to comment:

- 'Come down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon! Sit on the ground' – this may mean a sign of humiliation for a city that was extremely powerful and invincible, the symbol of an imperishable realm, proud because of its wealth, its commercial power, its scientific capabilities, for example, its knowledge of astronomy, and its deities and religious practices, such as astrology, divination, and occult sciences

favorable by its pantheon of gods. It is as if God said to it, 'Come down from your pride and your haughtiness and sit on the ashes mourning your defeat.' Dust and ashes was a sign of deep sorrow.

- Then here comes another interesting expression: 'O virgin daughter of Babylon!' In spite of being very devastated and invaded by the ancient peoples, like the Hittites, and until the time of the Assyrian Empire because of many revolts between the local rulers of the city and their dominators, Babylon underwent a great restoration, almost a reconstruction, in the times of the Neo-Babylonian Empire initiated by Nabopolassar (626-605 BC). So he and his son Nebuchadnezzar made it an extremely beautiful and rich city, like a city that had just been founded, or as a spoiled girl or a virgin daughter who was always protected by a very careful father.

- 'Sit on the ground without a throne, daughter of Chaldea! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate' – there would be no ruler or throne to give the city the pampering and trifles of those who live with all the facilities of the court. It could no longer call itself the queen of the nations.

- 'Take the millstones and grind meal, remove your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers. Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your shame shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one' – this means: 'Work as everyone else and fight or flee, if you wish, for your evil deeds can already be seen by all and I am ready to act with rigor.' No one will escape God's judgment. As for His people, they know well who their God is ('Our Redeemer—the Lord of hosts is his name—is the Holy One of Israel').

- Isa. 47: 5-7: "Sit in silence, and go into darkness, daughter of Chaldea! [NIV: daughter of the Babylonians] For you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms [NIV: queen of kingdoms]. I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand, you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy. You said, 'I shall be mistress forever', so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end [NIV: You said, 'I will continue forever—the eternal queen!'] But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen]" – God rebukes Babylon for the violence and cruelty with which it treated His people, but it did not even think that there could be a punishment for this.

- Isa. 47: 8-9: "Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children' [NIV: Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children']—both these things shall come upon you in a moment, in one day: the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments" – see Rev. 18: 7-8 (The announcement of the fall of Babylon): "As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief. Since in her heart she says, 'I rule as a queen; I am no widow, and I will never see grief', therefore her plagues will come in a single day – pestilence and mourning and famine – and she will be burned with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who judges her."

In the book of Isaiah God speaks to Babylon that, contrary to what it thinks, He will take away all its security, for it will be a widow of its gods, of its 'lovers', as the bible refers to idols, and it will be destitute of its inhabitants, especially of its flattering sons, which that city has led astray with the multitude of its enchantments and sorceries. Here it is more likely to refer to the idolatrous priests, to the wise men, to the magicians, and

to all those who have made use of these things to seduce people and to lead them by ways of darkness.

• Isa. 47: 10-15: “You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, ‘No one sees me’. Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me’. But evil shall come upon you, which you cannot charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, which you will not be able to ward off; and ruin shall come on you suddenly, of which you know nothing. Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed, perhaps you may inspire terror. You are wearied with your many consultations; let those who study the heavens, stand up and save you, those who gaze at the stars [*its astrologers*], and at each new moon predict what shall befall you [NIV: All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you]. See, they are like stubble, the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before! Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have trafficked with you from your youth [NIV: since childhood]; they all wander about in their own paths [NIV: Each of them goes on in his error]; there is no one to save you.”

‘But evil shall come upon you, which you cannot charm away’ – this means that however much knowledgeable Babylon might be in spiritual things, by no means this city could be able to get rid of the decree God had already given against it. From the beginning of time (‘from your youth’ or ‘since childhood’) it had given itself to idolatry; now, the Lord would make the adjustment.

‘See, they [*its astrologers*] are like stubble, the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame’ may mean the death and physical destruction of those sorcerers during the Persian invasion, as well as their eternal destruction in the lake of fire. So it will be in the last days with all who practice witchcraft (Rev. 21: 8; 22: 15).

We can ask a question, “When this was actually accomplished, since Cyrus maintained his policy of preserving foreign religions, and his successors of all the empires that followed remained in the same conditions of idolatry in one way or another? There must have been very few people who could see the truth and turned to the God of Israel.”

The answer to this may be: although the material destruction of the city has occurred in succeeding generations and today remain only ruins of what once was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and the spiritual entities of darkness have only changed their name, continuing to seduce humans throughout the planet, God’s mercy remains available until today for those who want to repent and be saved. The fall of Babylon mentioned in the book of Revelation will put an end and a fulfillment to the prophecy in question, for in that day there will be no more chance of redemption for anyone, but God’s judgment on men and demons. This answer can be endorsed by the prophecy of Hosea who, through the disappointment he passed with his unfaithful wife, found the mercy of God, especially in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 2, where the Lord says, “On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, ‘My husband’, and no longer will you call me, ‘My Baal.’ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more” and in Hos. 3: 4-5, “For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim [NIV: household gods]. Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek the Lord

their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.”

In volume 1 of the book, I commented on some reasons of pride for Egypt: such large expanses of water, in rivers and lakes, joined with the fertility of the country in agriculture, 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 the Egyptians the sense of power. But they credited all this to their idols and their own strength. Therefore the Lord was not pleased with them.

Likewise, we can imagine how proud Nebuchadnezzar must have felt to see a city like that, so rich (Dan. 4: 30), and a land so fertile and so well known by ancient peoples as was the land of Babylon and the Babylonian Empire. How he should have felt when God revealed his dream (‘with the tree’ – Dan. 4: 1-37) to the prophet Daniel telling him that for seven times he would go through a period of madness, feeling like an animal, until he knew the Most High God had dominion over the kingdom of men (Dan. 4: 23-25), and was able to humble those who walk in pride (Dan. 4: 37)? How would he feel if he were still alive at the time of the fall of his magnificent city? Many theologians agree that the seven times in which he was deprived of his rational conscience, moved away from coexistence with men and behaved like an animal refer to seven years (the time of his madness), already at the end of his life, and that he did not live more than a year after his restoration. His grandson Belshazzar, even knowing all this, tempted God by giving a feast in his palace and using the utensils of the temple of Jerusalem to give drink to his guests.

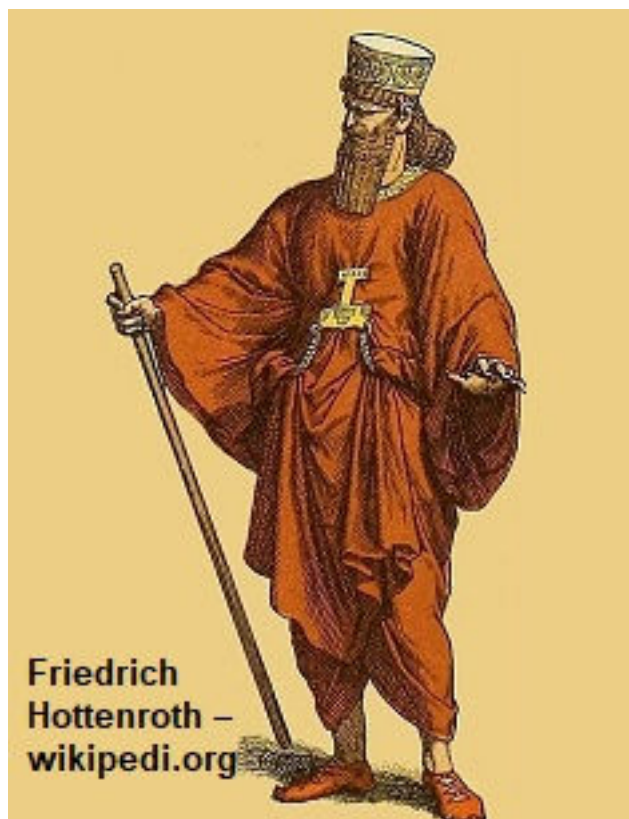
In Isa. 26: 5 we have seen what the prophet wrote: “For he [*God*] has brought low the inhabitants of the height; the lofty city he lays low. He lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust.” The Lord lays low the proud and haughty as He did with the sumptuous city of Babylon, with its tall buildings like mountains trying to reach the sky, and with wide walls that made it feel impregnable. He humbled it and destined it to ruin. So He does with those who are powerful and self-sufficient, attributing their great achievements to themselves and to their own strength.



Nebuchadnezzar in his palace



Garments of Mesopotamia (crystalinks.com)



Costume of Median male – by Friedrich Hottenroth



Tomb of the prophet Daniel in Susa, present-day Iran (Wikipedia.org)



Interior of Prophet Daniel's tomb (Wikipedia.org)

Chapter 48

Infidelity and stubbornness of Israel is rebuked – v. 1-8.

- Isa. 48: 1-8: “Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and who came forth from the loins of Judah; who swear by the name of the Lord, and invoke the God of Israel, but not in truth or right. For they call themselves after the holy city, and lean on the God of Israel; the Lord of hosts is his name. The former things I declared long ago, they went out from my mouth and I made them known; then suddenly I did them and they came to pass. Because I know that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew and your forehead brass, I declared them to you from long ago, before they came to pass I announced them to you, so that you would not say, ‘My idol did them, my carved image and my cast image commanded them.’ You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it? From this time forward I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known. They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them, so that you could not say, ‘I already knew them.’ You have never heard, you have never known, from of old your ear has not been opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and that from birth you were called a rebel.”

God calls His people, the people called by the name of Israel, of the lineage of Judah, who call themselves a citizen of the holy city and say to trust in the God of Israel, whose name is the Lord of hosts. They confess all this, but do not practice what they preach, for their heart is far from Him. They only say this out of vanity. God announced to them all past things and they happened. But they continued to be a stubborn, stiff-necked people (Ex. 32: 9; Ex. 33: 3; 5; Ex. 34: 9; Deut. 9: 6; 13; Deut. 31: 27; 2 Kin. 17: 14), and God already knew that. Since that time the Lord had raised prophets and revealed what would happen so that they did not say that their idols had done those things. He asked them to look at all that they were living and to admit what He is telling them. From that moment He would reveal new things to them, things which they had never heard so that they would not say, ‘Ah! I already knew them.’ Their ears were closed to the voice of God since the distant past, and God knew how they would react: in a rebellious and treacherous way. But He spoke to them about their deliverance from captivity.

He spares them for His own name’s sake – v. 9-11.

- Isa. 48: 9-11: “For my name’s sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, so that I may not cut you off. See, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tested you in the furnace of adversity. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for why should my name be profaned? [NIV: defamed] My glory I will not give to another (see Isa. 42: 8).”

God would deliver them for His own sake, so that His holy name did not be defamed among the Gentile nations. He restrained His wrath not to destroy them, for they deserved it. Even through trials they were not yet sanctified, for He would not deal so severely with them, as one refines silver; otherwise they would be consumed by the fire of His wrath. And what He was doing was for His name’s sake, for His glory (His honor) He would give to no one else, much less to false gods.

The powerful salvation from God is a reason for obedience – v. 12-17.

- Isa. 48: 12-17: “Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called: I am He; I am the first, and I am the last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand

spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they stand at attention [NIV: they all stand up together]. Assemble, all of you, and hear! Who among them [‘the idols’ – NIV] has declared these things? The Lord loves him (Cyrus, this is what it means – see Isa. 44: 28; Isa. 45: 1-4; Isa. 45: 13-14; Isa. 48: 14); he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken and called him, I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way [NIV: he will succeed in his mission]. Draw near to me, hear this! From the beginning I have not spoken in secret (see Isa. 45: 19), from the time it came to be I have been there. And now the Lord God has sent me and his spirit [NIV: Spirit]. Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your own good [NIV: who teaches you what is best for you], who leads you in the way you should go.”

The Lord summons them and asks them to listen. He is the first and last, that is, He is eternal, He begins something and ends the same way. It was He who created the earth and the heavens, and even they will respond to His call and present themselves before Him. Therefore, He also asks them to gather themselves and open their ears. Who else could announce these things that were happening and would still happen? Could their false gods? When things happened, He would be there. Cyrus is His instrument of deliverance, for He loved him and knows that He will perform all His will against Babylon. By his obedience to God, Cyrus will succeed; God will make his ways prosper. When God summons them, He is not calling them just to hear the prophecy; this is a figure of speech, meaning that His exiled children will be gathered from all the lands through which they have been scattered, and will return to Canaan. The Lord repeats what He said before: that He always spoke openly and not in secret (Isa. 48: 16; see Isa. 45: 19).

- Isa. 48: 16b-17: “And now the Lord God has sent me and his spirit [NIV: Spirit]. Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your own good [NIV: who teaches you what is best for you], who leads you in the way you should go.”

This part of the verse, because it is placed with two phrases in sequence, and in the second the Lord reveals Himself as the author of these words, is clearly implicit the reference to Jesus, even though He is using the mouth of His prophet. The most interesting is the use of the verb ‘to send’: “And now the Lord God has sent me and his spirit [NIV: Spirit]” (Jn. 8: 42), as Jesus was sent (Jn. 1: 9-11) along with the Holy Spirit who is in the Father, so that the Son could reveal Him to men: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14: 9). One more detail is the phrase of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa. 48: 16a; see Isa. 45: 19) that Jesus used when He came to earth and was judged by the high priest Annas: “Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, ‘I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said’” (Jn. 18: 19-21). As it was said here (“I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your own good [NIV: who teaches you what is best for you], who leads you in the way you should go”), Jesus also came to lead men in the way they should go.

God laments their stubbornness – v. 18-19.

- Isa. 48: 18-19: “O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea [NIV: If only you have paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea]; your offspring would have

been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.”

If Israel had obeyed, God would make them a great offspring, and their name would not be cut off from before His eyes. They would have peace, a peace as great as a perennial river; their righteousness would be like the waves of the sea, which never cease to break on the shore day and night, every day since the world was made till its end.

Deliverance from Babylon – v. 20-22.

- Isa. 48: 20-22: “Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, ‘The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob!’ They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split open the rock and the water gushed out. ‘There is no peace’, says the Lord, ‘for the wicked.’”

After showing them the cause of their captivity and warning them of the evils of idolatry and rebellion, He shows them the joy of deliverance. And He tells them to proclaim to the ends of the earth that the Lord has redeemed them. The same way He quenched their thirst in the desert at the time of Moses, when He delivered them out of Egypt (Ex. 17: 1-7; Num. 20: 2-13), He would satiate them again in the present, and in the near future with living water that would spring from the ‘Rock’, Jesus. However, for the wicked there is no peace (Isa. 57: 21); there never was and there will never be, because they cannot enjoy His mercy. Only His chosen ones know it: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (Jn. 14: 27).

Chapter 49

From this prophecy on, it can be said that there is a change in the anointing that God pours on the prophet. Until now He called Israel a servant and witness of His word among men, even among the Gentiles, to be a light on the earth. But with the course of circumstances, God's attitude has also become different, putting His plan of salvation into action in a stronger, faster, more effective and definitive way. Then He goes on to speak clearly about the Messiah as the personification of that Servant who will accomplish all His will, that is, the people begin to hear of a new prophecy of God and, more than a prophecy only, a concrete attitude, showing them what should be the true posture of a servant. The name given by the theologians to the verses of Isaiah that refer to the suffering Servant is 'the song of the servant.' The biblical references are: Isa. 42: 1-7; Isa. 49: 1-6; Isa. 50: 4-9; Isa. 52: 13 – 53: 12. The relationship with Jesus and His ministry is undeniable, for in several passages of the Gospel He places Himself as a servant and mentions the prophecies of Isaiah to show that His coming had already been prophesied seven hundred years before: Mk. 10: 42-45; Lk. 22: 25-30; Lk. 22: 37 cf. Isa. 53: 12. His attitude of washing the disciples' feet at the Last Supper (Jn. 13: 2-20) demonstrated His humility as a servant, for washing someone's feet was a service done only by the smallest servants, the least important.

In Isa. 44: 26 we talked about the word 'servant.'

The Hebrew word for 'servant' is: 'ebhedh or 'ebed (Strong #5650), which means 'slave', 'servant.' It comes from another Hebrew word: 'abad (Strong #5647), a primitive root meaning: to work (in any sense); by implication, to serve, to enslave, to be in slavery, to keep in bondage, to be slave, bond-service, to compel, husbandman, to cultivate, laboring man, to till, to work hard, to be a servant, to do service, serving, to be or become a servant, to define a work, to be wrought, a worshiper. The feminine of 'ebed, as in Ex 21: 32, 'maidservant' or 'female slave', is 'amah (Strong #519) and means: a maidservant or female slave: handmaiden, bondmaid; maid.

However, the word 'maidservants' in the book of Genesis (Gen. 33: 2) is Shiphchah (Strong #8198), which means: to spread out (as a family); a female slave (as a member of the household): bondmaid, handmaiden, maid, bondwoman, servant (woman).

In the OT the Hebrew words for 'servant' are translated as: a boy, a person of service, or a slave. Sometimes the word 'servant' is used to lowly people (Gen. 32: 18, 20: 'ebed) and also in relation to high court officials (Gen. 40: 20; 2 Sam. 10: 2; 4, 'ebed). A third word refers to one who is at the command of someone to help him (Ex. 33: 11: "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle – KJV"). Here, the word 'servant' in Hebrew is sharath (Strong #8334), which means: to attend as a menial or worshipper; to contribute to; to minister to, to become a servant, to serve, a servant, service, to wait on. But most often in the Old Testament, it is about a slave.

In the NT, the word 'servant' appears as a translation of the Hebrew words, meaning 'a servant of the house', 'a domestic servant', or 'a lad', or else, 'a subordinate officer', but most of the times the term refers to 'a slave':

- Lk. 16: 13: "**No slave** [NIV: **no servant**] can **serve** two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth [NIV: both God and Money]."

KJV: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

‘No servant’ or ‘no slave’, ‘oiketes’ (Strong #g3610), means: a fellow resident, i.e. menial domestic; household servant.

‘Serve’, ‘douleuo’ (Strong #g1398) means: to be a slave (literal or figurative, involuntary or voluntary): to be in bondage, subjection or subservience, serve, do service.

Jesus did not say that it was a sin to be rich, nor did He say that to follow Him it was necessary to be poor. What He meant was that we should not be slaves of money. Money must be our slave.

• Matt. 8: 6: “Lord, my **servant** is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.”

‘Servant’, in Greek is ‘pais’ (Strong #g3816), and means: a boy, a girl, a child; specially, a slave or servant (especially a minister to a king; and by eminence to God); maidservant, (man) servant, son, young man, household servant.

• Matt. 8: 9: “For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go’, and he goes, and to another, ‘Come’, and he comes, and to my **slave** [KJV: my servant], ‘Do this’, and the slave does it.”

‘Servant’, ‘doulos’ (Strong #g1401) means: to be a slave (literal or figurative, involuntary or voluntary): in a sense of subjection or subservience: slave, bondman, servant.

• Matt. 26: 58: “But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the **guards** in order to see how this would end.” KJV: “But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with the **servants**, to see the end.”

‘Servants’ or ‘guards’ ‘huperetes’ (Strong #g5257), means: a minister, an agent, a subordinate officer, assistant (servant) or guard.

Most of the times, the term ‘servant’ refers to ‘a slave.’

We may summarize it in another way: the word ‘servant’ in its secular usage may mean:

- A person placed at the disposal of another
- Worker belonging to his master
- Slave, servant at the service of the king, subject, self-description of humility
- Servants of the sanctuary

In his religious employment, the word ‘servant’ means:

- The humble position of who speaks
- Someone chosen by God
- Trust and commitment to God
- Description of Israel as fully belonging to God; title given by Himself to the Israelite nation (Isa. 41: 8).

Usually, people don’t like when one speaks about being God’s ‘servant’ with the connotation above, that is, a slave (in a sense of subjection or subservience) because it does not give the impression of someone who helps another in a voluntary way, but is obliged to serve. In other words, the human being does not like much to serve; prefers to give orders. If he does not like being a servant, let alone being a slave! However, there is a very good thing to be said about this for whoever calls himself God’s servant or intends to serve Him. There is a verse written in 2 Chr. 12: 8 (cf. 1 Kin. 14: 25-28) about the case of the invasion of Judah by Shishak king of Egypt (925 BC), where Rehoboam the son of Solomon did not like the idea, but upon hearing the prophetic rebuke, he recognized the reason for the attack and said that the Lord was just.

Therefore, God used the prophet and said He would not allow the invasion, but they would pay tribute to the king of Egypt: “Nevertheless they shall be his servants, so that they may know the difference between serving me and serving the kingdoms of other lands.” The people of Judah, beginning with the king, had turned aside from the way of the Lord; therefore He had brought Shishak (Shoshenq I or Sheshonq I or Sheshonk I, a tribal chief of Libya of the 22nd Egyptian Dynasty – 943-922 BC). Thus the difference between the servitude to God and the servitude of the world is clear; the difference between to be a ‘slave’ (servant of God) and to be a slave of the world.

The slave was the property of his master and his ear was pierced with an earring as a symbol of that property. The Lord made laws to treat slaves with humanity, especially the Israelite slaves. And this makes us think of what Paul said in 1 Cor. 6: 19-20: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” When we surrender our lives to Jesus, we receive His seal on our forehead (Ezek. 9: 4; Rev. 7: 3; Rev. 9: 4; Rev. 14: 1; Rev. 22: 4) so we are no longer in possession of the devil and the world and we have a new owner. We are no longer masters of ourselves, but of the Lord. And this is a very good servitude because with His seal on us, we are His exclusive property. His lordship over our soul, over our whole being, is that of a good and respectful owner, who does not mistreat us; on the contrary, it makes us feel honored and privileged to be able to serve Him. And that honor is so great, that the bible also calls us beloved children. A child serves parents with love, so there is no yoke. Therefore, being a servant of God is better than having human bosses or being a servant of the world.

There is also a comment to make about the word ‘servant’, which is used in the bible for people other than the Messiah (in the case of Isaiah 49). In addition to be employed in relation to servants and masters, God uses this word even for the ungodly ones who are His instruments on earth for the correction of His people. For example, He calls ‘servant’ the people of Israel, as well as His prophets, David, and even the King of Babylon. He also calls Cyrus the Persian a servant, not only as a king to help His people, but also as a prophetic figure of the Messiah. Let’s see the biblical references:

- Israel (Jacob) Isa. 41: 8-9; Isa. 44: 1-2; Isa. 44: 21; Isa. 45: 4; Isa. 48: 20; Isa. 49: 3; Jer. 30: 10; Jer. 46: 27-28
- Prophets (Servants): Jer. 7: 25; Jer. 25: 4; Jer. 29: 19; Jer. 35: 15; Jer. 44: 4.
- David: Jer. 33: 21; Jer. 33: 22; Jer. 33: 26; Isa. 37: 35; Ezek. 37: 24 (here David prefigures Jesus).
- King of Babylon: Jer. 25: 9; Jer. 27: 6; Jer. 43: 10.

The Servant of the Lord is a light for the Gentiles – v. 1-7.

• Isa. 49: 1-7: “Listen to me, O coastlands [NIV: islands], pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb he named me. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified’ [NIV: in whom I will display my splendor]. But I said, ‘I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God.’ And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—he says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end

of the earth.’ [NIV: he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth”]. Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers [NIV: to the servant of rulers], ‘Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you’ [NIV: Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you (*Jesus, the Messiah*)].”



This prophecy concerns the Messiah. The relationship between the word ‘Servant’ and Jesus is clear. Here, God the Father speaks with the Son (Jesus), and Isaiah pronounces these words in the name of Christ. Then Jesus summons the lands far from Israel, beyond the sea, called by the Jews ‘islands’ (or ‘coastlands’), so that they hear what He has to say, because He is the great prophet of His Church. He says that from His birth God called Him to be His servant on earth, and from His mother’s womb He made mention of His name, that is, before He was born His coming was already being prophesied, and this prophecy was one of them. God hid Him and protected Him with the shadow of His hand, and made His mouth like a sharp sword and like a polished arrow and kept it until the right moment to use it; and this moment would soon come. The bible says that Jesus is the living word, and that the world was created through it. Like a sharp two-edged sword is this word that divides joints from marrow, soul from spirit, it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account (Heb. 4: 12). God calls Him a servant, as He has called His people Israel until now, and through His life, God the Father will be manifested and glorified by all. In Jesus, God will show His splendor and His power. Jesus is called Israel, for He was an Israelite in the flesh, as well as the head of spiritual Israel, namely, His Church. The way to glorify God would be through His ministry and His death,

rescuing these people who have been difficult to convince. He sees that His word seems to be a useless work with the people of Israel; yet what is due to Him is in the hand of the Lord, and His reward is with His God (Isa. 40: 10). He spent His strength preaching the word, and it seems that it did not bear fruit; but His reward will come, for the Father is pleased with His work. He knows that this work will go further than simply preaching His word in person or performing miracles in the midst of the Jewish people. His mission will bring the complete deliverance, will do the utmost for what it has been designed, and then, the reward will come (Jn. 12: 28; Jn. 17: 1-8; Phil. 2: 9-11; Isa. 53: 11-12).

Then Isaiah continues to speak in the name of Jesus: “And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—he says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel [NIV: It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept].’”

He confirms that before He was born God’s plan of salvation was already established. The Father prepared Him from the womb and anointed Him with His Spirit to be a mediator between Him and men (Isa. 42: 6: ‘I have given you as a covenant to the people’), to bring Israel and Jacob to Him again, or rather the remnant, the chosen ones who would accept His word and could sow it in other fertile lands. God would be His strength in this task, for He was honored in His sight, the only Holy One to be accepted for this kind of mission: that of a true kinsman-redeemer. He would be His strength to support Him as a man subject to frailties and temptations, delivering Him from His true enemy until the mission was fully fulfilled as He promised (Ps. 89: 21-24).

Generally, when Isaiah speaks of ‘Israel,’ he is speaking with respect to the natural seed of Israel, to the Jews (the Israelites). And when he speaks of ‘Jacob,’ he refers to the remnant of them who will survive all their calamities, that is, to a remnant according to the election of grace, ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel,’ God’s elect from among the Jews (ref.: Isa. 9: 8; Isa. 10: 20; 21; 22; Isa. 14: 1; Isa. 27: 6; 7-9; Isa. 29: 22-23; Isa. 43: 1; 22; 27-28; Isa. 44: 1-2; Isa. 45: 4; Isa. 48: 1; Isa. 49: 5-6).

God the Father continues to tell Jesus that this was still little; Israel was very little reward: “I will give you as a light to the nations [NIV: for the Gentiles – cf. Isa. 42: 6], that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’ Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers [NIV: to the servant of rulers], ‘Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you’ [NIV: Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you (*Jesus, the Messiah*)].”

This means that before Jesus was born it was already prophesied that He would also come to the Gentiles, and this would complete His victory and increase His reward, for the whole earth would be under His authority, under His power. Then God the Father confirms that, although He is despised and abhorred by His own kinsmen, friends and countrymen, kings and priests, Jews and ungodly rulers (Ps. 69: 1-36), He will not be forsaken and all will be witnesses to His victory and will come and bow down before Him because the Father has said it. He is faithful to His promises and honors those whom He chooses to serve Him; especially the One who received the title of Redeemer of mankind.

Restoration of Israel – v. 8-13.

• Isa. 49: 8-13: “Thus says the Lord: In a time of favor I have answered you, on a day of salvation 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; saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out’, to those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’ They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down [NIV: They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them], for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. And I will turn all my mountains into a road, and my highways shall be raised up. Lo, these shall come from far away, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene [NIV: those from the regions of Aswan (Dead Sea Scrolls; in Masoretic text, ‘Sinim’)]. Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.”

The word continues to be addressed to Jesus: at the right time the Father will hear Him, and on the day of salvation He will help Him, for His death will bring salvation to mankind; and unto Him, glory and honor, as neither anyone has ever had nor shall ever have (Heb 1: 1-4; 9). His mission as mediator of a new covenant remains standing, as well as the authority given Him to restore the lives and properties of the people, to deliver the captives of the devil and of men’s traps (works of the flesh), both Jews and gentiles, and free they will live in peace. They will not feel want of anything: they will neither hunger nor thirst, nor be afflicted with the scorching heat of the desert nor with the excessive sun, for like sheep they will be guided by the Good Shepherd to the springs of water. The Lord will make their lives easier, without obstacles that they cannot overcome, opening their understanding to come to know God. The Lord will make the paths straight. Many people will come from all parts of the earth to receive from this living water, both Gentiles and Jews scattered throughout the nations: from the North, from the West, and from Sinim (Sinim in the Masoretic text; Aswan or Syene, in the Dead Sea Scrolls), which for us may have different meanings. But it does not matter the geographic place; what matters is that from far lands people will come to seek the light, the truth, the healing and the deliverance that will flow from the Servant of God, Jesus. The verse ends by saying: ‘Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.’ The deliverance of the people of God from the Babylonian captivity is a reason for much joy, just as it is the salvation brought by the Messiah, delivering lives from the bondage of Satan.

In the four Gospels, the bible mentions the word ‘crowd’ or ‘crowds’ many times, almost a hundred times, referring to Jesus, which confirms Isaiah’s prophecies about the large number of people who would come to Zion, attracted by the doctrine of the Messiah. Some verses are more important to be mentioned, for they are related to the passages of healing, preaching, teaching, and miracles from the Lord:

Matt. 13: 2 (The parable of the sower); Matt. 14: 14; 19 (The first multiplication of loaves and fish – Jesus healed the sick); Matt. 15: 33 (The second multiplication of loaves and fish); Matt. 20: 31 (The healing of two blind men of Jericho); Mk. 2: 4 (The healing of a paralytic at Capernaum); Mk. 2: 13 (Jesus teaches the crowd – just before calling Matthew to be His disciple); Mk. 4: 1 (Jesus returned to teach the crowd by the sea); Mk. 5: 27; 30-31 (The healing of a woman with flow of blood); Mk. 6: 34 (The first multiplication of loaves and fish – Jesus taught the crowd again); Mk. 9: 17; 25 (The healing of a boy with an evil spirit); Mk. 10: 46 (The healing of the blind man of

Jericho); Lk. 5: 1 (Jesus teaches the crowd); Lk. 5: 19 (The healing of a paralytic at Capernaum); Lk. 7: 11-12 (The resurrection of the widow's son at Nain); Lk. 9: 11-12 (The first multiplication of loaves and fish – Jesus healed the sick and preached to the multitude); Lk. 9: 37-38 (The healing of a demon possessed boy); Lk. 13: 14 (The leader of the synagogue rebuked the multitude after Jesus had healed the crippled woman on the Sabbath Day); Lk. 18: 36 (The healing of the blind man at Jericho); Lk. 19: 3 (Zacchaeus the tax collector seeks to see Jesus); Jn. 5: 3 (The healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda); Jn. 6: 2; 5 (The multiplication of loaves and fish – the crowd sees the miracle and recognizes that Jesus is the great prophet); Matt. 5: 1 – 7: 29 (the sermon on the mount – Jesus teaches the crowd); Matt. 8: 1-3 (The healing of a leper); Matt. 9: 35-36 (Jesus healed the sick, taught in the synagogues and preached to the crowds in many cities); Matt. 15: 29-31 (Jesus healed the sick by the Sea of Galilee); Lk. 5: 15 (After the healing of a leper – the crowds came to hear Him and to be cured of their diseases); Lk. 9: 11 (The first multiplication of loaves and fish – Jesus healed the sick and preached to the crowds).

Multitudes were drawn to Him: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (Jn. 12: 32) cf. Jn. 8: 28: “So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me.’”

As we saw in the prophecies of Isaiah, a great number of people came from all places to see Him, because they have heard about Him:

- Mk. 3: 7-9: “Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from **Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon**. He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him.”
- Mk. 8: 1-3: “In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, ‘I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way – and **some of them have come from a great distance**.’”
- Lk. 6: 17-19: “He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from **all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon**. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.”
- Lk. 8: 4: “When a great crowd gathered and **people from town after town** came to him, he said in a parable” (The parable of the sower).
- Jn. 12: 29: “The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him’” (The **Greeks** ask to see Jesus).
- Matt. 4: 24-25: “So his fame spread throughout all **Syria**, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from **Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan**.”

In other passages the bible writes that Jesus went to other cities out of Israel, or out of Judea and Galilee, that is, He entered the territory of the Gentiles:

- Matt. 15: 21: “Jesus left that place and went away to the district of **Tyre and Sidon**” (The Canaanite woman).

- Matt. 19: 1-2: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea **beyond the Jordan**. Large crowds followed him, and he cured them there” (Jesus goes to the other side of the Jordan and heals the sick).
- Mk. 7: 31: “Then he returned from the region of **Tyre**, and went by way of **Sidon** towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the **Decapolis**” (Jesus the deaf and mute man).
- Mk. 10: 1: “He left that place and went to the region of Judea and **beyond the Jordan**. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he again taught them” (Jesus crosses the Jordan and teaches the crowds).

Thus Isa. 49: 8-13 is a prophecy of the conversion of Jews and Gentiles in the times of the gospel and the end times, in several parts of the world: “Lo, these shall come from far away, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene [NIV: those from the regions of Aswan (Dead Sea Scrolls; in Masoretic text, ‘Sinim’)].” Israel is the point of reference in relation to the cardinal points mentioned. From the north may refer to Media, to lands formerly belonging to Assyria, as well as may refer to Lebanon to Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon), where the gospel of the Lord came through His own person, when He descended beyond Galilee and found the Syro-Phoenician woman (the Canaanite woman). Later, Damascus and Antioch in Syria were the first cities to house a Christian church, through Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus and John Mark. Through them the gospel then spread throughout Asia Minor, such as Pamphylia, Antioch in Pisidia (Turkey), Galatia, Lycaonia, Phrygia, and each time going to the West, starting with Cyprus and Salamis, reaching as far as Rome.



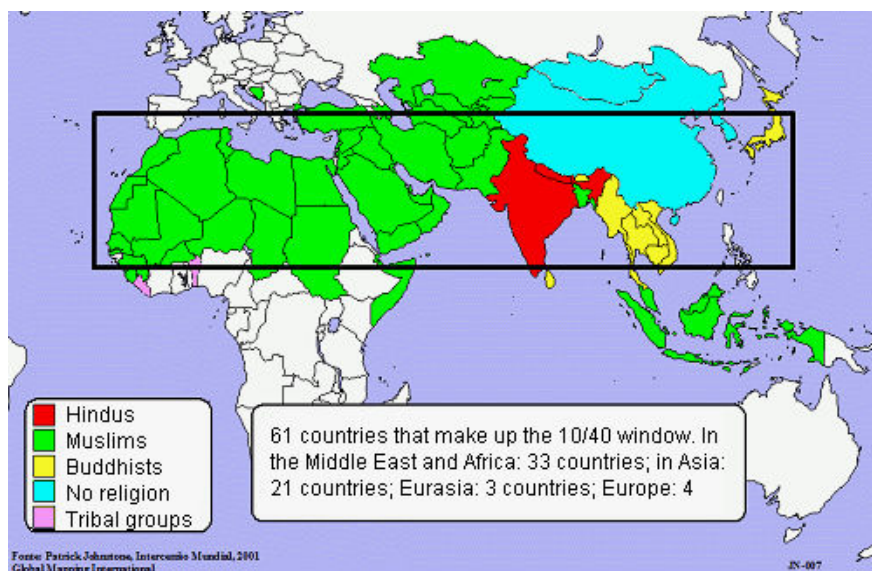
Ancient region of Anatolia (now Turkey) – Wikipedia.org

When we read Acts 2: 9-11, we see the citation of the places where the Jews who lived in other nations came from: “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt

and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” From the West came, still in Jesus’ time, the Jews residing in Rome and the Roman soldiers themselves who, with the excuse of controlling the people’s revolt in Judea, were always listening to His preaching. Greeks also came and wanted to talk to Him (Jn. 12: 20-22).

As for the word ‘Sinim’ (in the Masoretic text: seweneh), the Latin Vulgate translates as ‘southern land’, while the Dead Sea Scrolls write Aswan. KJV writes ‘Sinim.’ Lexicon Strong’s Concordance writes, in Hebrew, ‘Ciyniym’ (Strong #5515), which means only: a distant Eastern region; the Far East.

It cannot refer to China, as many people think, even because China did not have a specific name for its country at the time, but it took the name of the rulers of its dynasty. Then the bible never implied that the gospel came there through any disciple of Christ in the first century of the Christian era. When we look at the World Map with the countries of the 10/40 Window, we can see that China does not have a religion, although it follows some philosophies of its ancestors. Some sources say it is the most populous country on the planet, with more than 1,400,050,000 inhabitants (2019 estimate) and it is assumed that in 2008 there were between 21 and 130 million Christians living there, most Protestant. The 10/40 window is a strip of the planet located between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, extending from West Africa to Asia and including the Middle East on its way. It is a little over half the non-Christian world’s population. The largest countries included are China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Turkey and Iran, among the 61 countries that make up the 10/40 window. In the Middle East and Africa: 33 countries; in Asia: 21 countries; Eurasia: 3 countries; Europe: 4.



In the NRSV is written ‘the land of Syene’, and in NIV is written ‘Aswan.’ Therefore, it is more likely to be a land south of Israel, as we saw in Isaiah’s previous prophecies, which relate to the land of Cush (Ethiopia), for thus the prophecy has a basis to have been fulfilled in the times of the gospel. ‘Aswan’ is the same city formerly called Syene. Aswan, in the Egyptian Arabic is Aswān; in ancient Egyptian: Swnett; in ancient Greek: Σούνη, Syene) – Ezek. 29: 10 (Syene – NRSV and KJV; Aswan – NIV);

Ezek. 30: 6 (Syene; in Hebrew: Seveneh or Cveneh or Cven – Strong #5482, which means ‘Seven’). The ancient Egyptian name ‘Svenett’ suggests that the city received its name from the Egyptian goddess Svenett, 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).

Let us remember what was written in Isa. 18: 1-7 (our commentary on the prophecy against Ethiopia):

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 near the modern city of Khartoum (capital of Sudan). In Ancient times 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 (‘Aswān or Aswān, in Egyptian Arabic) or Assuan was called in Ancient times the city of Seveneh, in Hebrew (Strong #5482; s^ewenēh, in Masoretic; Svenett or Swn, in Ancient Egyptian), and later known as Syene (or Suēnē, Συήνη, 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. 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 Shoshenq I or Sheshonk I (the Shishak I of the bible – 945-924 BC or 943-922 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 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. Around this time (10th century BC), the Ethiopians attempted an attack against 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 – 744-714 BC) 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 720 BC and 660 BC, Ethiopian kings dominated Egypt, forming the 25th dynasty. For 60 years, Ethiopian rulers controlled the Nile River valley. 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). 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.

‘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. 49: 14-23: "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. Your builders outdo your destroyers, and those who laid you waste go away from you [NIV: Your sons hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you]. Lift up your eyes all around and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall put all of them on like an ornament, and like a bride you shall bind them on. Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land—surely now you will be too crowded for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children born in the time of your bereavement will yet say in your hearing: 'The place is too crowded for me; make room for me to settle' [NIV: The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, 'This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in']. Then you will say in your heart, 'Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away—so who has reared these? I was left all alone—where then have these come from?' Thus says the Lord God: I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders [NIV: See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders]. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame."

Despite all the favorable promises of God, the Jews in exile thought that the Lord had forgotten them. But He tells them that even if a mother forgot the newborn child, He would not forget them. That captivity would not last forever; it was coming to an end. The fact of having inscribed them on the palm of His hand, or as a seal on His arm, denotes that He is always attentive to them. It is like us, who have once written on the hand or put a note on it so that we did not risk forgetting to do something important. Thus, with the name of Israel written in His hand, God could never look at it without seeing their name written there. Surely they prayed to God with anguish in their hearts because of the captivity they were in, and they hoped that deliverance could come soon. Some of them might even think that their home would be there from now on and they would never return to Canaan, for the suffering seemed to be lasting, and this discouraged them. However, for the Lord, the owner of eternity, those seventy years were only minutes. The bible says that for God, a thousand years are as one day (2 Pet. 3: 8), and He does not delay His promise (2 Pet. 3: 9), but will do His justice soon, though it seems delayed: "And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk. 18: 7-8).

The 'walls' remind the Jews that even if they have been completely destroyed, they will be restored again. God cares about the defense of Jerusalem. Then, He talks about

the repatriation post-exilic; the city of Zion will once again be inhabited. Its 'sons' (its inhabitants) come, while the invaders withdraw from it. The Lord asks them to look around and see, by faith, how many people gather to return to Jerusalem (Ps. 69: 35-36). Even the Gentiles can return to it, and the city will be beautiful and settled again, full of songs and feasts, as if adorned with jewels. There will be so many people in it that space will seem small. They will have to increase it to hold its inhabitants. God promises that those who have plundered and destroyed it will be far away. Even the Jews who were taken during the invasion of the city or who were born during the exile will come to the city, and even the Gentiles that it has never seen will come for the sake of the Lord, for He Himself will call them: "I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples [NIV: See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples]." Gentile rulers and powerful people will bow down to it; they will bow down in a sign of honor and respect. This may mean their conversion to the gospel.

- Isa. 49: 24-26: "Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? [NIV: Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives rescued from the fierce?] But thus says the Lord: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued; for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children [NIV: But this is what the Lord says: Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save]. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh [NIV: Then all mankind] shall know that I am the Lord your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

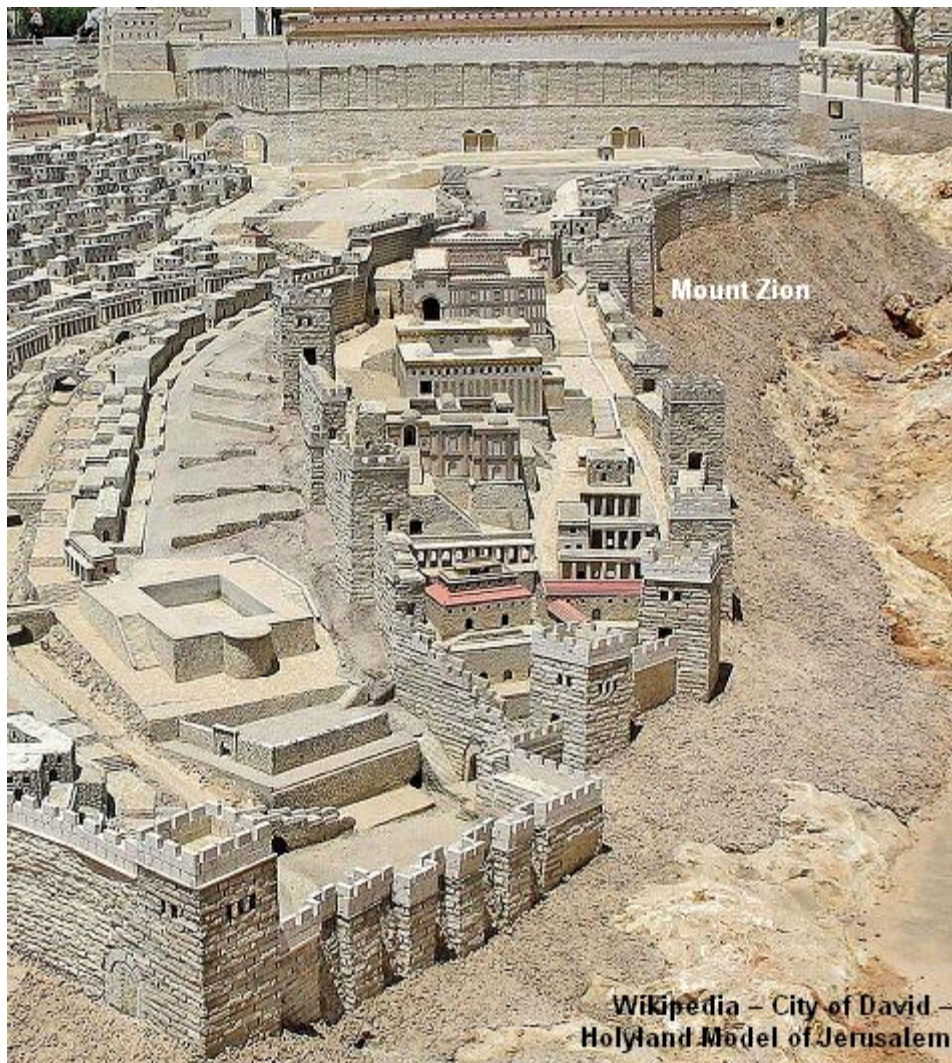
Though one doubts the power of the Lord to deliver His people from such a strong tyrant, He confirms that with Him all things are possible and Israel will be set free, their exiled children will be gathered from all the lands where they have been scattered, and will return to Canaan. He will make the evil deeds of the enemy fall upon his own head. Everyone will know that He is the Lord, the Savior and Redeemer of His people, and that His hand is mighty.

Chapter 50

Israel's sin and the Servant's obedience – v.1-3.

• Isa. 50: 1-3: “Thus says the Lord: Where is your mother's bill of divorce with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? No, because of your sins you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away. Why was no one there when I came? Why did no one answer when I called? Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? [NIV: Was my arm too short to ransom you? Do I lack the strength to rescue you?] By my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water, and die of thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering.”

Here the Lord takes the land of Israel ('Zion') as the example of a wife who has been repudiated. He is the husband, and the Jews are the children who are now in bondage. When He speaks 'your mother', He is referring to Zion.



Wikipedia – City of David – Holyland Model of Jerusalem

‘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’ came 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.

In Ancient times, when a man saw in his wife something that displeased him or more specifically, if he distrusted his conjugal fidelity, he gave her a certificate of divorce and repudiated her (Deut. 24: 1). And also, when a poor man had no money to pay his creditor, he was forced to sell his children as slaves (Neh. 5: 5).

Therefore, God addresses His children in captivity and says that He had not repudiated the land of Israel (‘Your mother’) or its children. But they were sold to the enemy by their own sin. Even if they complained and put the blame of their misfortune on the Lord, He still had the ability to save them.

‘When I came’ means ‘first by my prophets’, asking them to leave their sins and to avoid their own ruin. Finally, He sent His Son, but His own people did not receive Him (Jn. 1: 9-11). To silence their complaints, He gives them the proofs of His power, “By my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water, and die of thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering.” It is as if He said to them, reminding them of the miracles of the time of the Exodus: “Can I not help you like I helped your ancestors, when I divided the Red Sea for them to go through it on foot over dry ground and when I polluted the waters of the Nile with blood, killing the fish with thirst?”

‘I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert’ may also mean figuratively a period of silence on His part, or a manifestation of His discontent; a period of trial and dryness in their relationship with Him. Could He not do so to discipline them?

‘I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering’ may also refer to the time of slavery in Egypt, when He brought darkness for three days on that land (Ex. 10: 21), or a period of distress as the result of His displeasure, when it seems that God withdraw and the heavens are closed.

But since we are talking about Jesus as the figure of the Servant who was rejected by the Jews when He came in flesh, we can see that the displeasure of God the Father because of the death of His Son on the cross brought some manifestations that caused astonishment in the Roman soldiers who were near the cross, and believed that He was indeed the Son of God: “From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon... At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, Truly this man was God’s Son!” (Matt. 27: 45; 51-54).

The obedience of the Servant; God is with Him – v. 4-9.

• Isa. 50: 4-9: “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher [NIV: has given me an instructed tongue], that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? [NIV: who is my accuser?] Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? [NIV: Who is he that will condemn me?] All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.”

As in chapter 49 (Isa. 49: 1-7), Isaiah pronounces these words in the name of Christ. God the Father had given the gift of the Word (Jn. 7: 14-18; Matt. 7: 29) to teach, minister to the sick and the needy, to open the eyes of the blind to the understanding of spiritual truths; to drive out demons with this word of authority, and even to argue wisely with the teachers of the Law, especially the scribes, who sought to catch Him in some slip to condemn Him by what came out of His own mouth.

‘Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught’ – this means that He was daily attentive to the teaching His Father gave Him, for with the assistance of the Holy Spirit He would perform His duty more carefully, overcoming the hypocritical teaching and doctrines of Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes, so that those who were thirsty for the truth could be satiated. The word of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom had been given to Him so that He could speak the good word to the weary; wearied of sin, of injustice, of the monotony of life, of the dead and hypocritical word that came from the mouths of the religious leaders and which did not resolve their problems; wearied of heavy work without reward, tired of oppression, tired of seeking in God Himself and in other gods the solution to the problems of their existence; tired of the lack of response to their supplications, what only brought distress and disappointment. Jesus came to bring the release of this kind of weariness and others that were not mentioned here.

Then Jesus, the Servant, says that God had opened His ears to His eternal will: for Him to be the Redeemer of mankind. Then He says that He did not turn away from His calling, He was not rebellious, though He knew all the suffering that would have to pass. Paul repeats something similar in Acts 26: 19, when he defends himself before King Agrippa: “After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” The ‘heavenly vision’ refers to Paul’s mission of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, which he received when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and was blinded by the light; and then when Ananias reaffirmed the call and he came to see again.

The next verses of Isaiah describe the insults and afflictions of Jesus until He came to the cross: “I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.” In Ps. 129: 3-4 there is also a reference to the lashes: “The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long. The Lord is righteous; he has cut the cords of the wicked.”

Like Jesus, we do not turn our back on our calling. In the face of any difficulty it brings in our journey, we go forward because we know that the one who justifies us is on our side, and there is no one who can accuse a child of God who follows His steps and fulfills His will with fidelity: “Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” (Rom. 8: 33). Jesus bore those who struck Him because He knew that He was not alone; the Father was there (“And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him” – Jn. 8: 29), and it was the Father who justified Him. With the help of God, who could condemn Him or put Him to shame? He knew what their future would be: “The Lord God helps me; therefore

I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? [NIV: who is my accuser?] Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? [NIV: Who is he that will condemn me?] All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up” (Isa. 50: 7-9).

An exhortation not to trust in ourselves but in God – v. 10-11.

- Isa. 50: 10-11: “Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant, who walks in darkness and has no light, yet trusts in the name of the Lord and relies upon his God? But all of you are kindlers of fire, lighters of firebrands. Walk in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that you have kindled! This is what you shall have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment [NIV: But now, all you who lights fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment].”

Here the prophet speaks again in the name of Jesus, of the obedient Servant, who also knew what darkness is at the time of the abandonment of His Father, when He was on the cross. He says to those who are in darkness, to those who cannot see the truth or who do not want to see it, he says them to trust in God, rather than to trust in themselves. It is no use seeking the false comfort of those who find solutions by their own means or resources. It was like lighting a torch, which illuminates only the physical environment where it is, but it cannot illuminate the thoughts or the spirit. He who seeks consolation on his own, refusing the light that God offers will remain in sorrow and torment because he cannot have hope in his future. This was what was happening to the captive people in Babylon. They had grown weary of their God, felt abandoned by Him, but in fact they had turned away from Him for refusing to hear the prophetic voice; therefore, they didn’t have hope to be released anymore.

Chapter 51

Word of comfort and everlasting salvation for Zion – v. 1-8.

• Isa. 51: 1-8: “Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope [NIV: My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm]. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended [NIV: my righteousness will never fail]. Listen to me, you who know righteousness, you people who have my teaching [NIV: my law] in your hearts; do not fear the reproach of others, and do not be dismayed when they revile you. For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my deliverance will be forever [NIV: my righteousness will last forever], and my salvation to all generations.”

God comforts His people and asks them to remember Abraham and Sarah, their ancestors, who won the favor of the Lord and attained His promises by faith in Him. He compares these people to a rock or a quarry, for they stood firm during the times of tribulation by faith in the Lord, and eventually saw the impossible for men to be transformed into a miracle of God before their eyes. They did not lose heart or give up because of unfavorable conditions. Abraham believed in God and this was attributed to him as righteousness. Therefore, He made a strong covenant with His chosen one, promising to him the blessing of the offspring (in the person of Isaac), the possession of the land of Canaan, and the intimacy with God, and in him all the families of the earth would be blessed. Abraham was alone when God called him; he did not have a son, but God gave him Isaac, who was the beginning of a great offspring. God blessed him and multiplied him, and He would do the same with this people who were now in captivity, and felt so tiny. In the same way, the Lord will have pity on His nation and will transform it into a garden, like the garden of Eden. Its desolation will be undone, and the deserted and wasted places will be inhabited again. Joy will return, as well as the songs of thanksgiving and the sound of music.

The Lord calls them to give heed to Him, for the law will go out from Him, and His justice will become a light to the nations. And here He is speaking of a new law, the law of the gospel of grace that is about to manifest itself in the person of the Messiah. This is His true righteousness; not just the righteousness to which they were accustomed, following the commandments of God to be saved and to be under His approval, but the righteousness resulting from the justification of their sins by the blood of His Son on the cross; in other words, salvation. He says that His salvation is already appearing, it is on the way, and it is His own arm that will do this miracle of bringing justice to the nations, dominating them with His meekness, love and mercy. The Gentiles will also be under His authority. The word ‘salvation’ in this verse 5, in Hebrew is *yeshah* or *yeshai*

(Strong #3468), which means: freedom, liberation, prosperity, security, salvation, saving (in the sense of protection). The heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, but His salvation and His righteousness will last forever. The figures of speech applied here show great world changes, while He protects those who are His. Therefore, He says not to fear the affronts of men, nor His words of threat because they too will pass, be consumed, destroyed. The salvation of God, however, will last for all generations.

A prayer in time of anguish – v. 9-11.

- Isa. 51: 9-11: “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago! Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon [NIV: monster]? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross over? So 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.”

The prophet addresses a prayer to God in the name of the people, as if feeling their affliction, but recognizing that the same God who has accomplished a great deliverance in the past will do the same thing again with them. In the original Hebrew, the word ‘Rahab’ is an epithet given to Egypt (as in Ps. 87: 4). Rahab (Strong #7294) means: boaster, bluster, blusterer, boisterously, proud, insolent, strength.

The word ‘dragon’ or ‘monster’, also an allusion to Egypt, in Hebrew is ‘tanniyn’ or ‘tanniyim’ (Strong #8577), which means: a marine or land monster, sea serpent or jackal; dragon, sea monster, serpent, whale; crocodile [Ezek. 29: 3 – ARA-PT; in English: ‘Great monster’ (NIV; ASV) or ‘The great dragon’ (NRSV; KJV)]. Pharaoh was called a sea monster or Leviathan (Ps. 74: 14 – KJV, NRSV, NIV, and ASV).

The Lord’s answer – v. 12-16.

- Isa. 51: 12-16: “I, I am he who comforts you; why then are you afraid of a mere mortal who must die, a human being who fades like grass? You have forgotten the Lord, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. You fear continually all day long because of the fury of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction. But where is the fury of the oppressor? The oppressed shall speedily be released; they shall not die and go down to the Pit, nor shall they lack bread [NIV: The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread]. For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord of hosts is his name. I have put my words in your mouth, and hidden you in the shadow of my hand, stretching out the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and saying to Zion, ‘You are my people.’”

The Lord answer to His prophet that it is He who comforts them; so they should not fear the man who was a mortal being who fades like grass, while He, the Lord, is eternal. He made all things; He did not see the oppressor anymore, for His deliverance would come suddenly. The exiles will return to the land of Canaan and will not die in Babylon. They will not lack bread. The Lord of hosts does what He wants: He stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; He puts His words in the mouth of His anointed ones and protects them with His hand, for He who made heaven and earth says to Zion, ‘You are my people.’

The cup of the Lord’s wrath given to His people will be given to their enemies – v. 17-23.

• Isa. 51: 17-23: “Rouse yourself, rouse yourself! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering. There is no one to guide her among all the children she has borne; there is no one to take her by the hand among all the children she has brought up. These two things have befallen you—who will grieve with you?—devastation and destruction, famine and sword—who will comfort you? Your children have fainted, they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of the Lord, the rebuke of your God. Therefore hear this, you who are wounded, who are drunk, but not with wine: Thus says your Sovereign, the Lord, your God who pleads the cause of his people: See, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; you shall drink no more from the bowl of my wrath. And I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have said to you, ‘Bow down, that we may walk on you’; and you have made your back like the ground and like the street for them to walk on.”

Jerusalem appears ruined, Israel is in the exile of Babylon, and the exile had lasted long. Israel’s people were in great consternation, inconsolable because of the ruin and desolation of their city, and because of their own destruction by famine and sword; there was no one to console this nation or Jerusalem. The fury of God weighed upon them because of their sins, but now He takes from them this bitter cup and promises to defend them. He will place this cup of His wrath in the hands of their adversaries. These ones will know the wrath of the Lord, for they have humiliated His people too much, as if they were compelled to lie down on the ground and the enemies passed over their backs and trampled them. It was time to get up, for the wrath of the Lord had passed; they had already tasted it to the end. The era of the Messiah could be compared to the creation of new heavens and new earth (cf. Isa. 65: 17).



Chapter 52

The Lord summons His people to prepare for deliverance; His name will no longer be blasphemed – v. 1-6

• Isa. 52: 1-6: “Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter you no more. Shake yourself from the dust, rise up, O captive Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion! For thus says the Lord: You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money. For thus says the Lord God: Long ago, my people went down into Egypt to reside there as aliens; the Assyrian, too, has oppressed them without cause. Now therefore what am I doing here, says the Lord, seeing that my people are taken away without cause? Their rulers howl, says the Lord, and continually, all day long, my name is despised [NIV: ‘And now what do I have here?’ declares the Lord. For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock, declares the Lord. And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed]. Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I.”

‘Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter you no more’ – This first verse is a continuation of the thought of Isa. 51: 23 (a ransom from Zion’s humiliation), where the Lord summons His people and encourages them to react and prepare to leave Babylon, no longer in the garments of exile, but with strength, determination, and with the robes of splendor of those who are children of God. They will no longer be invaded or destroyed, and the uncircumcised and the unclean will not enter through its gates.

In the next verse the Lord commands them to shake off the dust of this land of captivity and leave their filth and their pagan customs there, and again acquire the dignity of those who know how to reign and have authority. Enough of chains of slavery around their neck. They no longer exist. They were sold for nothing, they are mocked by the enemies, but they will be rescued without any money; only by the command of the Lord. We have seen in earlier chapters that the prophet wrote about Cyrus: “I have aroused Cyrus in righteousness, and I will make all his paths straight; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward, says the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 45: 13). Here in Is 52: 4 God confirms that both Egypt and Assyria were oppressors of His people. It is interesting to notice that the NIV says: ‘lately, Assyria has oppressed them’, which helps us to imagine the approximate time for this prophecy within the other prophecies of Isaiah, that is, the Jews were still in their land, under the Assyrian threat, and the people of Samaria had already been taken captive. Then God says something that is going to happen, but in His eyes it is already happening, for He sees the state of the exiles in Babylon and asks to Himself: “Now therefore what am I doing here, says the Lord, seeing that my people are taken away without cause? Their rulers howl, says the Lord, and continually, all day long, my name is despised [NIV: ‘And now what do I have here?’ declares the Lord. For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock, declares the Lord. And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed].” This means that His name was mocked among the wicked nations because of His own sinful people; because of their iniquity, He delivered them into the hands of the enemy. That is why Paul repeats this to the hypocritical Jews who preached holiness to the Gentiles, but committed the same sins: “For, as it is written, ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of

you” (Rom. 2: 24). This is the importance of walking in the light, for when a believer does not act as he should the name of Jesus is ridiculed, mocked and blasphemed by the ungodly because of his unworthy attitude. Returning to Isaiah 52, now God will have to do something amazing so that other people stop blaspheming and begin to glorify His name. Then He says, “Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I.” In other words, the day they are released from captivity they will know that this was God’s work and will remember that He had already foreseen it.

The liberation from slavery; the Lord’s return to Zion – v. 7-12.

- Isa. 52: 7-12: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’. Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Depart, depart, and go out from there! Touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of it, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord. For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.”

Here we have a prophecy about the joy of the land of Judea when the news of the return of the exiles is given, for this means the reconciliation between God and His people, and He will again be with them in the new temple, and much more with the coming of the Messiah. Blessed is he who announces this good news, for he will bring peace to the hearts when people know of the liberation of the exiles. This prophecy is quoted in Nah. 1: 15 in relation to the fall of Nineveh (Nahum made use of a part of this verse from Isaiah: ‘Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!’), for it reflects the joy of the Jews in receiving the good news that Nineveh was destroyed and they would no longer be oppressed by the Assyrians. At last, the Jews would have peace. Here in Isaiah, this news is more directed to the liberation of the Jews and their return to homeland, and more than that, the reconciliation with God, for He will be present with them again, bringing salvation (‘who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’’, ‘for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion’). The word ‘Salvation’ can extend this prophecy to the Messianic Age when, in fact, salvation came to mankind, freeing it from the bondage of spiritual death. For the city of Jerusalem that is in ruins it is a great joy to know that the Lord has done a great miracle of deliverance, and that His people, grieved before, are now comforted.

In particular, the priests and Levites are exhorted to sanctify themselves and not touch idols, pagan superstitions or other impure things, for they carry the vessels of the Lord, that is, they are responsible for the care of the House of God; therefore, the first to show that there has been an inner change, that their heart is now purified. However, the departure of Babylon will not be the same as their going into captivity, when the enemy came and took them quickly as they were, with no preparation, and many Jews fled to Egypt and other lands to not to be carried along with the Babylonians. Now it would be different: the Lord would go ahead of them, as He once went in a pillar of cloud through the wilderness before Moses and the people of Israel to guide them. This means that the Lord Himself would go ahead of them, clearing the way, preparing carefully the return to their homeland and facilitating it with the help of other peoples. He would also guard

the rear so that the enemies who survived did not come to attack the Jews, trying to take them back into exile. This means that the Lord would break all bonds with this painful past so that they did not suffer again or felt themselves tempted to repeat the errors of before; on the contrary, they would look at the new things which lay ahead.

If we transpose this prophecy to the present days, we can say that watchmen are the ministers of the gospel who are bringing the good news of salvation and deliverance from the bondage of sin to those who have their lives destroyed by their separation from God and lack of the knowledge of Him. The good news is that the Lord will now come to their inner temples and will never leave there; and the enemy shall no more afflict them.

The suffering and glory of the Servant – v. 13-15.

• Isa. 52: 13-15: “See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as there were many who were astonished at him—o marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals—so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate” (NRSV).

NIV: “See, my servant will act wisely [or will prosper]; he will be raised and lifted up, and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him [Hebrew: at you]—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—so will he sprinkle many nations [in Hebrew; the Septuagint writes: so will many nations marvel at him]; and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard they will understand.”

This is the beginning of a new prophecy that continues until the end of the next chapter. ‘My Servant’ is Jesus. He will act wisely, and despite what will be described in the next chapter on what He suffered on the cross and His humiliation, the verse here says that He will prosper, be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high [NIV: ‘he will be raised and lifted up, and highly exalted’]. This means that His suffering will not be in vain, for it will result in a great victory for all mankind and for His name to be magnified and exalted even more in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Here we can already see how the face of Jesus was disfigured by so many blows received by His executioners before being crucified. The prophet says that He did not even look like a human being, and that many were so astonished that they could say nothing after seeing Him like that. Maybe they could not understand how He could stand it quietly, without rebelling against that humiliation and suffering, as if He deserved to suffer. But in His humiliation and His wise behavior in the face of that situation, many Gentiles who had never heard the prophecies concerning Him would ponder in their hearts that this event extrapolated the human understanding and had a divine purpose far greater than they were seeing: “For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard they will understand.” It is incredible how, after so many punches in the face, Jesus did not have any of His bones broken, in order to fulfill the Scriptures (Jn. 19: 33; 36; Ex. 12: 46; Num. 9: 12; Ps. 34: 20). He was disfigured, yes, but His bones were preserved. Certainly, many Roman soldiers right there at the foot of the cross must have realized His divinity; many soldiers besides the centurion who is mentioned in Matt. 27: 54 and Lk. 23: 47.

Chapter 53

The Suffering and Glory of the Servant of the Lord – v. 1-10

• Isa. 53: 1-10: “Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? [NIV: Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?] For he grew up before him like a young plant [NIV: like a tender shoot], and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity [NIV: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering]; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed [NIV: the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed]. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? [NIV: And who can speak of his descendants?] For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich (Matt. 27: 57; Mk. 15: 43; Lk. 23: 50-53; Jn. 19: 38-42), although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.”



Here the unbelief of both Jews and Gentiles is mentioned. The prophet shows that very few will receive the preaching of Christ and His deliverance through Him (Jn. 12:

38; Rom. 10: 16). The Messiah is called the arm of the Lord or the power of God, because all the power of God was upon Him.

‘To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ – Revealed inwardly, this is what it means.

‘For he grew up before him like a young plant [NIV: like a tender shoot], and like a root out of dry ground’ – ‘before him’ means before God the Father, in the frailty of a man’s body, and in a dry land and barren of love, of spiritual life, and faith in God, in the land of an unbelieving Israel. One of the reasons why the Jews rejected the Messiah is that they expected someone who called attention, someone who could come with the appearance and power of a powerful man, as a worldly king. But He came in a simple and humble way as if rose from the ground like a fragile and insignificant plant that is born on a dry and barren land. It was as if they looked at the tree of life in Paradise, which should not draw so much attention, and to the tree of good and evil, full of ‘attractive fruit’; surely, they would feel seduced by it as happened to Eve.

‘He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him’ – the humble conditions of His birth and His simple way of living, without expensive clothes and without the flattering of the world were not a sight pleasing to the Jews. When Isaiah here uses the plural pronoun (that ‘we’ should desire him) he is putting himself together with his unbelieving people, the Jewish nation. Like an insignificant plant Jesus grew silently, without the glory that was expected of a Messiah. Nor did His genealogy have interest to them, for even the house of David was in a state of decay.

If this happened during His childhood and His ministry, what about His disfigured appearance when He was on the cross, with so many wounds on His body! There was nothing attractive in Him there. Just as His person did not seem attractive to the Jews, so His doctrine did not please them, for He preached love, meekness, humility, submission, and surrender; and this was repugnant to their eyes, still more under the rule of Rome. The church of Christ also began in a small and contemptible way in the eyes of many.

‘He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity [NIV: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering]; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account’ – Jesus put Himself into certain clashes with the Jewish leaders that brought only scorn and rejection upon Himself. Under the pernicious influence of these leaders, the unbelieving and carnal Jews also held Him of no account, they didn’t esteemed Him, and hid their faces not to look upon Him, as if He were a murderer, a leper or a sinner who had done something very wrong and was worthy of shame. In fact, for them He was always a sinner who blasphemed when He was said to be the Son of God. He suffered during His ministry with all this and much more on the cross, where He was mocked by many, for if He was indeed the Son of God, why did not He descend from there? If He had healed so many people, why did He not heal Himself at that hour?

‘Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed [NIV: the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed].’ He took our sins upon Himself, and for the people of that time, those who were punished in that way were under God’s judgment. The bible says that everyone who was hung on a tree was cursed (Gal. 3: 13, Deut. 21: 23, 2 Cor. 5: 21; Matt. 8: 17; 1 Pet. 2: 24).

All kinds of sin that there can be upon the face of the earth were present there in those wounds. When we think about it, is it even difficult to understand how a man of flesh and blood could bear this if he were not God either? The color of His soul was so ugly because of our sins that even God turned His face away, so He cried out, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Matt. 27: 46; Mk. 15: 34; Ps. 22: 1).

If we pay attention to what is written in the gospels, at the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, that is, from noon to three in the afternoon (Mt 27: 45; Lk 23: 44), and Jesus was crucified at 9:00 am, that is, the third hour (Mk. 15: 25). This means that Jesus was on the cross for six hours; the first three hours of which He was under the mockery of men and Satan, and the final three hours were reserved for bearing the punishment, divine wrath upon Himself for the sins of mankind. This shows us the size of Jesus’ suffering and the size of God’s wrath towards men for their sins. It’s as if for three hours Jesus was the lamb sacrificed on the altar and consumed with fire until everything was just ashes. Therefore, He said before expiring: “It is finished!” And this brings us full certainty that all of God’s wrath was consummated on the cross and all of man’s salvation was also completed there, which shows us that Jesus did not have to go to hell, as some Christian doctrines preach, based on 1 Pet. 3: 18-19 (it is good to understand the context in which this was written –

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/estudoevangelicosobreamorte.html#1pe3:18-19>).



Do you want more? Luke writes what Jesus said to the repentant malefactor beside him: “And he added [the man said]: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus answered him, Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23: 42-43). If Jesus told him that, why would he stay in hell? If the thief, as a sinful being received redemption at that moment and his soul went to heaven that same day like the souls of all the righteous who believe in Jesus, why would Jesus’ own soul descend to hell? If He consummated His mission on the cross (“It is finished!”) and God the Father consummated His wrath for the sins of humanity there, we can think that Jesus’ spirit went to heaven, since the spirit of every human being belongs to God (Job 12: 10; Eccl. 12: 7; Ps. 146: 4) and returns to Him. His soul, like that of the repentant thief, went to heaven like that of a righteous man (Ezek. 18: 4 – all souls also belong to

God), His body stayed in the tomb, fulfilling the prophecy that He would not see corruption, i.e. would not deteriorate; and only on the third day did He rise, show Himself to men on earth and, only after His ascension, He resumed His position of glory at the Father's side. The fallen human being attracted to the ugly and even has horrifying fantasies around the redemptive mission of Jesus on the cross. Beware! Hell is not a compelling horror movie that you watch and then forget about; it's much worse than that.

Secondly, throughout the entire crucifixion process Jesus was conscious, both physically and spiritually. His brain was alert and conscious, completely awake. I say this because despite the suffering He went through from Gethsemane to the crucifixion, Jesus did not go into hypovolemic shock due to dehydration or blood loss; nor did he go into cardiogenic shock, as some scholars often try to explain, since this would have caused Him to lose consciousness. Therefore, He could not have said everything He said during those six hours to Mary, to John, to the soldiers, to the criminals, and to the Father. He knew what He was doing and saying.

You may ask: "Why did it take such a cruel sacrifice like that?"

"Because our reconciliation with God was a purchase, and the price was high and had to be paid in full. This punishment paid by Jesus in our place (1 Cor. 15: 3) brought us peace, that is, the divine justice was done there on the cross, so we can be at peace with God by accepting that sacrifice. His blood justified us and still justifies us from every accusation; by His wounds we were healed, we were saved from our sins."

'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way (1 Pet. 2: 25), and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.' All humanity always turned away from God since the sin of Adam and Eve, by the ways of its own flesh (Jn. 3: 19-20); just pay attention to all the chapters of Isaiah where God rebukes His people for their sins, especially the sin of idolatry. There are so many prophetic reprimands about this in the bible that it frightens us and makes us ask: "Did not these people understand? How long would God say the same thing?"

"But we too, if we are not under the will of God through the Holy Spirit, we'll walk according to the ideas of our own head. That is why the total surrender to Him is important; at least, we will not be led by paths of sin and sorrow like blind and wandering sheep that fall from the slopes. Jesus brought upon Him the punishment for our iniquities because no one would bear the proper punishment from God. Do you remember the prophecy of Isaiah where God spoke that He had purified His people, but not like silver? (Isa. 48: 10: 'See, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tested you in the furnace of adversity'). He restrained His wrath not to destroy them, for they deserved it. Even through trials they were not yet sanctified, for He would not deal so severely with them like someone refines silver; otherwise they would be consumed by the fire of His wrath."

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." Even in the face of all suffering and the false accusations, He remained silent: Matt. 26: 63; Matt. 27: 12-14; Mk. 14: 60-61; Mk. 15: 4-5; Lk. 23: 9; Jn. 19: 9; Acts 8: 32; 1 Pet. 2: 22-23.

"By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? [NIV: By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants?] For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich (Matt. 27: 57; Mk. 15: 43; Lk. 23: 50-53; Jn. 19: 38-42), although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth (1 Pet. 2: 22). Yet it was the will of the

Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.”

Here the prophet repeats that it was by the transgression of his people that the Messiah died in that way (‘cut off’ means: by violent death), and this was done by the will and consent of the Father, but He will know that His sacrifice was not in vain, because He will see His offspring and will live eternally in the presence of the Father.

‘They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich (Matt. 27: 57; Mk. 15: 43; Lk. 23: 50-53; Jn. 19: 38-42)’ – Wesley explains that it is not about the same place as that of the wicked (that is, the evildoers crucified next to Him), because generally criminals, even more condemned to the cross, were buried in mass graves, without private graves for them, but it is about the condition of how men wanted Jesus to be buried: as an ungodly, as an evildoer, without a proper burial. Jesus died and was buried as any man. However, Joseph of Arimathea, who was rich, gave Him a new tomb to be buried, that is, He was buried in an honorable way, as a just man.

His exaltation and glory – v. 11-12.

- Isa. 53: 11-12: “Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (NRSV).

NIV: “After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life (Masoretic text does not have ‘the light of life’) and be satisfied [Masoretic text: He will see the result of the suffering of his soul and be satisfied]; by his knowledge [or ‘by knowledge of him’] my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great [or ‘many’], and he will divide the spoils with the strong [or ‘numerous’], because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

After all things, the Lord will see the result of the so painful labor of His soul and will be satisfied because His blood will justify all who believed in Him, and they will obtain salvation. Because of His act and His obedience, the Father will give Him many lives as a spoil, from every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev. 7: 9). “He shall divide the spoil with the strong” or “he will divide the spoils with the numerous” – this means that God the Father promises to Jesus that He will have a portion greater than that of the strong and mighty of this world (kings and princes of the earth) and will be placed in a higher position than they and will inherit greater name than theirs (Phil. 2: 8-11) because of His obedience to God. Like a great and powerful hero, God will give Him success in His glorious enterprise; He will conquer all His enemies and will establish His universal and everlasting Kingdom in the world.

When Jesus was crucified as a transgressor between the two evildoers (“was numbered with the transgressors”), He asked the Father to forgive those who crucified Him (Lk. 23: 24), for they did not know what they were doing. Even today He intercedes with the Father for us (Rom. 8: 34; Heb. 7: 25; 1 Tim. 2: 5).

Chapter 54

The future glory of Zion – v. 1-5.

• Isa. 54: 1-5: “Sing, O barren one who did not bear; burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord. Enlarge the site of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left, and your descendants will possess the nations and will settle the desolate towns. Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace [NIV: you will not be humiliated]; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the disgrace [NIV: reproach] of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.”

God says again that His relationship with Israel is compared to a marriage bond. He is the husband who defends Israel from all the humiliation and shame that they (the people of Israel) suffered in captivity (the exile in Babylon), where they felt widowed (“the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more”) and childless (“Sing, O barren one who did not bear”, that is, its population would be torn from Israel and taken by the Chaldeans). The exiles who returned from captivity still felt this way, like a barren and lonely people, like an abandoned woman, but God encouraged them to sing and rejoice, because their descendants would be greater than they thought. They needed to broaden their way of thinking, ‘to enlarge the tent’ of their hearts again, and strengthen the stakes of their faith, that is, to establish themselves in the correct doctrine and in a sincere relationship with God because He would cause Jerusalem and the cities of Judah that were deserted to be populated again, and even with Gentiles. “The shame of your youth” refers both to the people’s captivity in Egypt and to their rebellion and unfaithfulness to God in the wilderness (some theologians also include the apostasy of the period of the Judges and the divided monarchy). God’s restoration would make them forget all that had happened. The Messiah would bring restoration, and the children of Israel would be more numerous than before the exile.

The Jews would also live in other nations and would bring the name of the Lord to them. This prophecy speaks to the people who had already returned from captivity, but it extends to the time of the gospel, when Jerusalem became known among the nations because of the new doctrine of Jesus. Since the prophecy in question follows the sacrifice of the Messiah (Isa. 53), we can say that it is also addressed to the Early Church, which had just been born and was not yet bearing fruit; these fruits would soon appear, and they would be numerous, just as the Christians who emerged after Pentecost with Peter’s speech and with the spread of the gospel in Samaria, Damascus and other regions, before the beginning of Paul’s ministry and, especially, after, when Christ raised him up for the mission among the Gentiles. In the New Testament Period, Israel would spread the true faith throughout all the lands of the Gentiles, whose lands would be conquered by the gospel (“your descendants will possess the nations and will settle the desolate towns”).

In Gal. 4: 21-31, Paul uses this passage from Isaiah to explain the difference between the old and new covenants of God with His people and with the Gentiles as well. “Those who believe are the descendants of Abraham”, the true children of Abraham, according to faith, not according to the Law (Gal. 3: 7). Sarah, Abraham’s legitimate wife, was barren and free, but she was mocked by Hagar who, despite being a

slave, gave Abraham a son (Ishmael). Ishmael was a child of the flesh. However, the Promised Land had been given to Isaac, the son of the promise. Thus, Ishmael, the son of Hagar, the slave, was according to the flesh, symbolizing the 1st covenant (the Law). Those of the 2nd covenant (made by Jesus) are those born of faith and are no longer slaves of the Law. They are the children of God's promise to live in the heavenly New Jerusalem. So, blessed is the barren woman (Sarah), who through Abraham's faith in God inherited the promise, and blessed is the nation of Israel who now, in exile, felt abandoned, barren and without a husband, because after the coming of the Messiah, they would inherit the promise of fertility and eternal life, while the "children of the flesh" (like Hagar's), who clung to earthly things and boasted of having a husband and children, would not inherit the blessing brought by the new covenant, and continued to be slaves of the Law.

The Lord turns to Zion with compassion – v. 6-9.

- Isa. 54: 6-9: "For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God [NIV: The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected, says your God]. For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer. This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you."

God remembers the joyous beginning of His relationship with Israel as a husband remembers his wife with whom he married in his youth. 'For a brief moment I abandoned you' refers to the seventy years of captivity, where He punished them for their sins and made them miss His presence until there was repentance. The people who have returned from captivity have the promise of being welcomed again by the Lord and no longer punished. He tells His people that He is turning to them with mercy and that He will no more deliver them to destruction. He will gather them from all the places to which they have been scattered. The new covenant that He makes with His people is as enduring as that He did with Noah.

Zion is rebuilt again and protected – v. 10-15

- Isa. 54: 10-15: "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you. O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted, I am about to set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires [NIV: O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires (or 'lapis lazuli')]. I will make your pinnacles [NIV: your battlements] of rubies, your gates of jewels, and all your wall of precious stones. All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the prosperity of your children [NIV: great will be your children's peace]. In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. If anyone stirs up strife, it is not from me; whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you [NIV: If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you]."

Though the mountains and hills were shaken and removed from their places, yet the faithfulness of the Lord would not be removed, nor His peace, for He has compassion on Zion. He recognizes the afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, but tells

it that it will be rebuilt, as if it were with precious stones, for a new spirit He is placing within the heart of each of His children, a spirit of humility, fear of the Lord and thirst to learn the truth. They will be taught by the Lord and, therefore, walking in the right way, they will feel peace. In regard to the NT, these colored stones are symbols of respect, majesty, royalty, glory, wealth, something precious, ‘ornaments’, that is, spiritual gifts poured out in abundance on all who have experienced the storms, the destruction, weeping and defeat, but kept their faith firm in a God who does not lie and who is able to turn back with mercy to those who repent and begin to seek Him with all their heart; it also reflects the glory of the spiritual New Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 18-21).



“In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you” – The people who returned from exile can have a certainty: their land will be established by the righteousness of God, the dread shall be removed from it, and shall no more draw near to Zion. Their rulers shall no more oppress them, nor the foreign nations. One may even try to create strife, or try to attack the Jews, but it will not be God’s doing or by His will. He goes on to say that whoever stirs up strife or attack them will fall before their eyes because God is with them to defend them.

Here the promise of the Messianic kingdom is clear, for in the material scope this did not happen to Israel, not even with the conclusion of the construction of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, when there were many threats of interruption of these works by the peoples who existed in the land (Ezr. 3: 3; Ezr. 4: 4-6; 24; Ezr. 6: 6-7; 12; Neh. 2: 10; 19-20; Neh. 4: 1-3; 7-8; 15; Neh. 6: 1-3), not to mention the empires that dominated the Israelite nation in the Intertestamental Period. This was a promise for a time not so near, but surely it would come. God was shaping them to receive the spiritual realities, characteristics of the new dispensation that was already prepared for them. We can see that **justice is the characteristic of the Messiah’s reign** (Isa. 11: 4-5; Ps. 72: 2-4; Rev. 19: 11). With Jesus on our side there is no longer oppression, no fear, no terror, because His love does not allow this to come to us (1 Jn. 4: 18). To endure the opposition of the

world, for example, the Early Church was strongly clothed with the Holy Spirit, who gave the apostles and disciples, like Peter, Stephen, and Paul, the courage to respond to any human threat, whether from kings of Judea, whether from Roman emperors or governors, or from the Sanhedrin.

Zion is rebuilt again and protected – v. 16-17.

- Isa. 54: 16-17: “See it is I who created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and produces a weapon fit for its purpose; I have also created the ravager to destroy. No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, says the Lord [NIV: ‘no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me’, declares the Lord].”

- Isa. 54: 16: “See it is I who created (בָּרָא *bārā*; Strong #1254 = to create, which expresses divine activity as a choice, a formative process out of nothing) the smith who blows the fire of coals, and produces (יָצָא *yatsa*, Strong #3318 = to bring forth, to beget, to come, to go out, to come abroad, a material activity, as molding into a form, like giving the idea of a potter working clay with his hands) a weapon fit for its purpose; I have also created the ravager to destroy.”

I would like to make a comment here regarding a statement that we read in the bible in the prophetic books, especially in Isa. 45: 7 (about God making peace, prosperity and weal and creating evil) and Isa. 54: 16 (about God creating the ravager to destroy).

We need to understand one thing: there is a separation between the view of before and after the fall of man. It is logical that when God created the angels, before creating our physical, temporal universe, His intention was to create something good, because God is love and in Him there is only good. But with Lucifer’s rebellion and the entry of moral evil into Creation, things changed. Even creating man in His image and likeness for a life of good, beauty and bliss, the Lord already had knowledge of good and evil and knew that giving free will to this being would be to take the risk of losing it to Satan; however, He cannot change His character or His own laws. Thus, when Adam and Eve gave in to the serpent’s temptation and sinned, the Lord did not prevent Creation (men and animals) from following its course. However, he kept in mind His eternal plan of redemption through His Son.

The calamities and adversities that came after the establishment of this moral evil unleashed by Satan, that is, the infraction of divine laws, became under the control of God Himself to be used for His eternal purposes. So we can see that the artistic and creative qualities placed in Adam’s descendants were maintained; like Jabal, for example, in the 6th generation of Cain, who was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle (Gen. 4: 20), and his brother was Jubal (Gen. 4: 21), who was the father of all who play the harp and flute. Or, Tubal-Cain (Tubalcain), who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools (Gen 4: 22). In this way, the ability to handle metals could be used for a peaceful purpose, manufacturing agricultural instruments, or used in a warlike activity, manufacturing weapons of war. Therefore, here in Isaiah 54: 16 the Lord says that He created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and produces a weapon fit for its purpose; and also created the ravager to destroy. This means that He uses human beings with their proper personalities and activities (good or bad) to accomplish His purposes of correction and discipline, both of the wicked and of His own people. God holds all things under his power.

Regarding this verse from Isaiah 54:16:

God created all things, good and evil (Isa. 45: 7). It was He who created the blacksmith to make swords and weapons of war, but men only have the right to use them when He allows or gives orders to someone to destroy. The soldiers are under His command; therefore, they cannot hurt the people of God without permission from Him. Thus, He Himself gives us the defense, putting the word of power in our tongues to refuse all accusations and affronts against us, to condemn to death every evil word of threat that can take away our peace or try to destroy what we are building, whether with pessimism or ostentation of power or any other subterfuge; in the case of the Jews, for example, the city of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah. God gave him the discernment necessary to reject the words of threat, humiliation and blackmail that the enemy tried to use to stop the rebuilding of the walls. Nehemiah rejected and condemned all that to death, that is, destroyed the power of destruction of these evil words by the word of faith in the Lord's promise. In the same way, this promise is ours, believers in Christ; and Paul writes this in His epistles when He says that the Lord has left us the defensive weapons (the armor of God) and the offensive ones (the sword, the word), to destroy all the weapons of the devil. In 2 Cor. 10: 3-6 it is written: "Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. We are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete." And in 2 Cor. 6: 4a; 7 it is written: "but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through... truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand (*for attack*) and for the left (*for defense*)."

Chapter 55

Invitation to the thirsty – v. 1-5.

• Isa. 55: 1-5: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you [NIV: he has endowed you with splendor].”

The prophecy takes us forward to the times of the gospel, where the people thirsty for the grace of God would receive again the living waters from the mouth of Jesus. This grace was not sold, but given freely to all who humbly acknowledged that they needed it. It was not sold because nothing in the world would pay for it. The price of the ransom of mankind would be realized on the cross by the Son of God. The people were accustomed to much trade, even within the courts of the Temple. Everything was bought and sold, so Jesus was so angry to see the House of God transformed into a market place. He turned the tables of the money changers because even the animals for the sacrifices were sold at prices inflated by the greed of that materialistic people. And here, God calls them to come and buy without price a commodity more precious than they bought from traders or imported from foreign nations, and that was the undeserved favor of God; only the Messiah possessed this kind of product that they needed so much, but out of pride, they rejected. They spent their money uselessly in what was not the true bread, or used it to buy things that did not satisfy the thirst of the spirit. Now they could freely buy water, wine, milk and bread, that is, things necessary for the spiritual life, like these ones are necessary for the life of the body. God says in this prophecy, “Come;” the same thing that Jesus said, “come to me” so that they could be relieved from the yoke of sin, and their souls could live a full and abundant life. Just as He had made a covenant of eternal reign with David in the past, He would do now through Jesus, from the root of David. He would be the prince and governor of the peoples, the high priest who would make the final sacrifice for them on the altar, and the prophet promised by Moses, whom they should listen to and obey. He had been sent to serve as a testimony to the peoples; a testimony of the truth and the will of God, a testimony of the confirmation of His promises and of His salvation to the Gentiles as well.

“See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you” [NIV: “Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour”] – God speaks here to Jesus about nations, nations of believing Gentiles because of the glory of God which was being poured upon Him. All peoples would be the Church of Christ, a people belonging to God, a holy nation (1 Pet. 2: 9-10). ‘Nations that you do not know’ means ‘unknown’ to Jesus before being called by Him and receiving His seal on the forehead, that is, without intimacy with Him, without recognition of being His property, for it is evident that God knows them; He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, and knows those who

belong to Him since the foundation of the world or ‘from the creation of the world’ (Jn. 13: 18; 2 Tim. 2: 19; Gal. 1: 15; Rom. 8: 29; Eph. 1: 4; Rev. 17: 8; Rev 13: 8 – ‘from the foundation of the world’). This implies a nation that was not called by His name, but would come to be, and was not constituted by the Jewish people.

We saw in Isa. 49: 1-7 that Jesus’ way of glorifying God would be through His ministry and His death, rescuing the Jewish people, so difficult to convince. His mission would bring the complete deliverance, would do the utmost for what it has been designed, and then, the reward would come (Jn. 12: 28; Jn. 17: 1-8; Phil. 2: 9-11; Isa. 53: 11-12).

Then Isaiah continues to speak in the name of Jesus, “And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—he says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations [NIV: for the Gentiles], that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth’” (Isa. 49: 5-6).

Therefore, the verse in Isaiah 55: 5 concerns Jesus who, through His ministry, death and resurrection, would convert the Gentiles to Him, for they would be aware of His divinity and the Father’s purpose of salvation for mankind, where they were included. Those who did not believe in His preaching were converted during His death, and those who did not believe during the episode of His death believed when they knew of His resurrection and after being baptized with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Thus the Father glorified Him (Jn. 12: 23-26; 28; Jn. 17: 1-8; Phil. 2: 9-11; Isa. 53: 11-12), and therefore multitudes were drawn to Him: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (Jn. 12: 32); cf. Jn. 8: 28: “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me.”

And those who have not believed to this day will believe before the judgment of the Last Day: “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (Isa. 45: 23b).

God called His children not only through the preaching of Jesus and the preaching of His apostles, but He also called them as He often calls them today, inwardly, by His grace and His Spirit, according to His eternal purpose; and they, by themselves, begin to seek Him until they find the right place in the midst of His great flock. This is how He does with His elect most of the time, even though no believer has preached the word to them. The centurion Cornelius was one of them, and the bible says that he was a devout and God-fearing man who gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God (Acts 10: 2). No one knows if anyone preached the word of Jesus to him, but the feeling of fear of the Lord and piety in his heart were not put by men, but by God. The fact that he has the vision (Acts 10: 3) of the angel already shows that his intimacy with the Lord was different, and his spirit was prepared to receive the Holy Spirit; so he sent for Peter. The bible says: “While Peter was still speaking [*about Jesus of Nazareth and His resurrection*], the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days” (Acts 10: 44-48).

To approach God through repentance – v. 6-7.

• Isa. 55: 6-7: “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

The prophet gives the message from God: seek the Lord while He offers Himself by the preaching of His word, while He is near, freely offering salvation and deliverance; while He offers mercy and reconciliation, while He is near and willing to receive His children with pity. Due to the seed of the devil in Eden, the human being has acquired one of the worst flaws of character that can exist within someone: pride. That is why God has so often called His people for centuries without response, because pride and rebellion prevented them from recognizing their error, seeking forgiveness, reconciling with their Creator, and receiving salvation. Even with Jesus coming in the flesh and fulfilling His sacrifice, breaking once and for all the separation between God and men, He has called His children persistently to repentance while He is pouring out His Spirit to all who understand His will and while He is willing to have mercy on men. When ‘the measure of the iniquity’ of man is filled, and the Lord resolves to change everything to begin to bring His judgment and make definitively the separation between tares and wheat, that is, to decide that the day of harvest has come, then it will be too late to seek Him because His judgment will come upon the earth and finish His wrath for so much sin of mankind. There will be no more excuse for the human being.

Jesus said:

“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them. Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me’” (Jn. 14: 21-24);

“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It was to fulfill the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause’” (Jn. 15: 22-25).

When He healed the man blind from birth, He said, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (Jn. 9: 4). This has two meanings: one related to Himself, another to us. While He was exercising His ministry on earth, He could do the Father’s work; however, when the time came for Satan to prevail upon Him to take Him to the cross, the work would be another and He could not perform what He was doing at this moment. There on the cross, His work would be of redemption and He would carry on Him the darkness (sins) of us all. The second meaning is to us, that is, while God is pouring out His Spirit upon our lives, He is also pouring the anointing to accomplish His work; however, when Jesus comes back, leaving on earth only those who will go through the plagues, we shall no longer do the work because it will be the time of the judgment of God upon sin. As a teaching remains the idea that we should do God’s work while we have opportunity, because His Spirit is pouring His anointing.

The thoughts and purposes of God are greater than those of men; His word does not return empty – v. 8-11.

• Isa. 55: 8-11: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

When the people were warned from the beginning by the prophet Isaiah, and even after they went into captivity, none of them was able to understand God’s purpose for that situation. With us it’s the same thing. We work with a certain area of our lives to achieve a purpose, while the Lord not only helps us there, but takes advantage of that circumstance to work something far greater, beyond our comprehension, with lives we do not even know and with situations to which we are totally oblivious. Maybe, in the near future we will know what it is about, as Jesus said in Jn. 13: 7, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” Or, then, we will only understand it in the New Jerusalem. What matters is to believe in Him and His word that says, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8: 28). The bible also says, “his understanding is unsearchable” (Isa. 40: 28). That means that, thank God, we do not see things the way He sees, for if we saw the sins and abominations that He sees on the planet for thousands of years, we could not stay alive for one minute; then we understand the size of the spiritual darkness carried by Jesus for the sake of mankind in all ages. Can you reach the depth of the teaching? Who can argue with Him based on so small and limited reasons, without knowing the whole? The Holy Spirit reveals to us **what He desires us to know**, for it is written in 1 Cor. 2: 10-11; 16, “these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God... For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” This does not mean that we know everything, that He reveals everything to us; nor does it invalidate what is written in Deut. 29: 29, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law.” What is not revealed to us belongs to Him.

Then Isaiah continues: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

The prophetic word that proceeds from the mouth of God is like the cycle of water that is not completed returning to heaven, before it first waters the earth and prepares it to bear fruit. This means that, like a double-edged sword, when the word is released with a purpose and with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, it will fulfill completely what has been spoken and will not go back nor return empty without having achieved its goal. Therefore, everything that has been spoken until now by the true prophets of God will be fulfilled fully, without missing a single comma, and nothing and no one will be able to stop it. As it was in the past with the coming of Jesus, so it will be with things already predicted by other prophets besides Isaiah, and will happen as God intended. No magician, fortune-teller, astrologer, or sorcerer of Egypt or of Babylon prevented events determined by the Lord for His people or for their own kingdoms; they fell, just as

every work of Satan will fall (Acts 10: 38; 1 Jn. 3: 8) in the life of every perseverant and determined believer who keeps the covenant made with Jesus.

The joy of the believers – v. 12-13.

- Isa. 55: 12-13: “For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress [NIV: pine tree]; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

This word concerns those who were in the exile of Babylon, but already had the project of deliverance from God. So it is for everyone who is in the exile of the bondage of sin, but already has a purpose of deliverance from God, just by his prayer and his repentance for the divine blessing be put into action.

When the Lord releases a blessing on a child, all of His creation participates in this joy. It is as Jesus said to the Pharisees in the parable of the lost sheep, that there will be greater joy in heaven for one sinner who repents than for ninety-nine righteous who need no repentance (Lk. 15: 7). Therefore, in this prophecy of Isaiah, deliverance from captivity will be a source of joy, as if trees and hills, large and small, could sing and rejoice together with His people because of the redemption and forgiveness of God that was poured upon the exiles.

Myrtle is a shrub (*Myrtus communis* L.) of Mediterranean origin, cultivated to make hedges and is characterized by small leaves, compact and fragrant. The flowers are white and were used as perfume. Its name in Hebrew is *h^adas*, and *Hadassah* (Hebrew name of Esther) derives from it. The shrub reaches thirty-three feet high (ten meters). The myrtle is an evergreen plant. The bible describes the myrtle as a symbol of divine generosity. Isaiah foresaw the myrtle, replacing the thorn bush in the wilderness (Isa. 55: 13; Isa. 41: 19). Trees and green plants would grow in a land that was once desolate and dry like a desert, showing the return of the goodness and grace of God. And this would be seen and understood as a memorial of His power and majesty forever.

Cypress and Pine tree are perennially green conifers native to the hills of Palestine and Lebanon. The cypress (Isa. 41: 19; Isa. 55: 13) is a symbol of fertility. It is also an excellent wood for construction. Solomon, for example, built the temple not only with cedar, but with cypress and olive wood (1 Kin. 6: 31-36). Therefore, it also symbolizes majesty, royalty and reverence to God.

We'll give sequence to our study with the volume 3 about the third part of the prophecies of Isaiah:

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