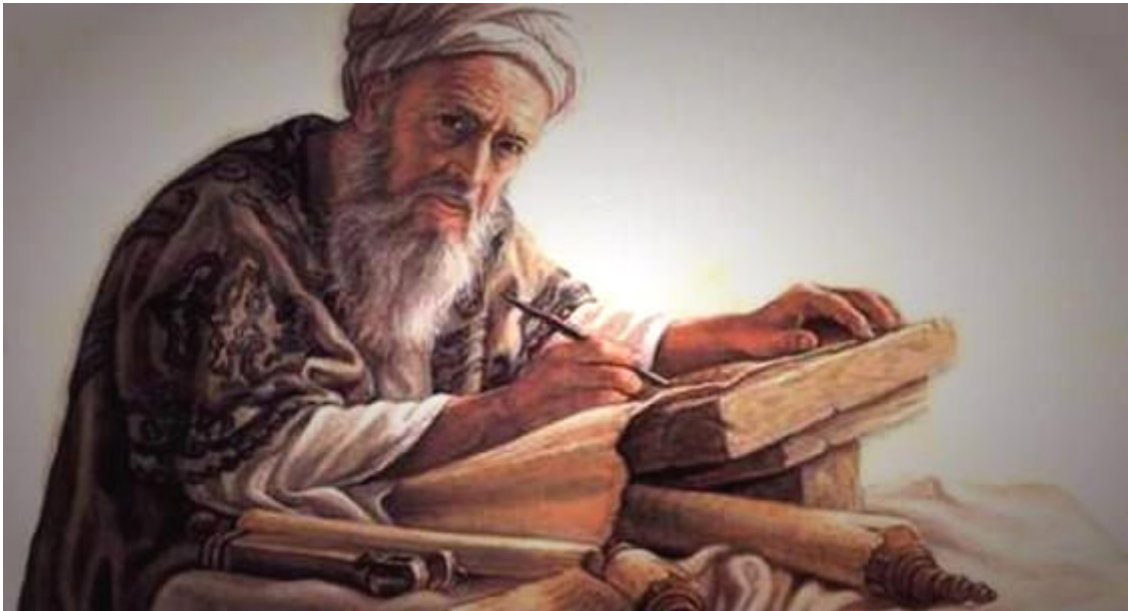


The book of prophet Isaiah – volume 3 **(Explanation on the prophecies – 56 to 66)**



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The book of prophet Isaiah – volume 3
(Explanation on the prophecies – 56 to 66)



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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.

“See, the Lord’s hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear” (Isa. 59: 1).

Introduction

This is the third volume of ‘The Book of Prophet Isaiah’, addressing now the chapters 56 to 66. From the 56th chapter, the content of prophecy is no longer directed to the returning exiles (though at some moments it seems to be referring to them), and begins to reveal the character of God as the only Living God. He is fearsome in His wrath (Isa. 59: 16 et seq., 63: 1-6), but bends over in kindness toward His people, showing them mercy, restoring His comfort in them and delighting in Zion (Isa. 60: 10; Isa. 61: 1 et seq.; Isa. 61: 8; 19; Isa. 66: 2; 13). This part also refers to the glorification of Zion. Zion is not only the capital of Judah, but is also the dwelling place of God; and the Gentiles who turn to Him will share in His salvation (Isa. 60: 3). It still alludes to the Messiah in His role as Redeemer of Israel. His coming is like a new creation (‘new heavens and new earth’ – Isa. 65: 17), preparing the people’s soul for a new dispensation that will come to mankind.

Sometimes we have the impression that from the 56th chapter the prophecy is not only addressed to the returning exiles, but seems that it is addressed again to the people who are still in Israel practicing idolatry and sin of rebellion, at the same time in who speaks more intensely about the Messianic kingdom to come. For example, in Isa. 56: 9-12 the prophecy is being delivered to the Jews still in the time of the Assyrians, before the Babylonian captivity, and shows what would happen to them if they neglected the prophetic warning from God. Unbelief took hold of the people, the prophets, the priests, and the kings. The growing idolatry moved them away from Him. In Isa. 57: 14-19 the prophet continues to speak of idolatry, and the prophecy seems to be directed to the people who are still in Israel, for they could not go up to the hills to render idolatrous worship, nor offer sacrifices under the terebinths or oaks, being in captivity in a foreign land. Therefore, it is presumed that all these practices were being carried out in Israel itself.

In Babylon the Jews felt the oppression of the idolatry of that land, and they tried to adapt to a new way of life and commitment to their God. They tried to revive the traditions of their homeland in the best possible way. The priesthood began to be revived in a new way now: priests dedicated themselves to writing, interpreting historical events from the priestly point of view, preserving the Jewish scrolls and adding other writings (priestly literature). The priests sought to unite the people around the word of God. 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 way, they set a community in that nation. In addition to agriculture, some Jews devoted themselves to trade in order to survive. The institution of the synagogue was important for meetings of prayer, reading and teaching of the Torah, the songs of Psalms and comments of the writings of the prophets. Among this group of priests was the prophet Ezekiel, who exerted a great influence on the exiles. After some time, due to the conditions of Persian tolerance and even well-being in which the exiles began to live, many became accustomed in that land and did not want to return to Jerusalem, even with the permission of Cyrus.

Likewise, the theme ‘idolatry’ is repeated in Isa. 59: 9-15 (practiced there in the land of Israel, not among the wicked of Babylon), and Isa. 65: 1-7; 11-12, probably addressed to the Jews before the captivity in Babylon. And in Isa. 66: 1-5, the prophecy seems to be addressed to post-exilic Jews from the time of the building of the second temple to the Jews of the time of Christ’s coming, when the fear of falling back into idolatry, and consequently suffering with the wrath of God, led them (especially the

priests and teachers of the Law, as it was in the time of Jesus) to the opposite pole, religiosity, where the minutiae of the Law were observed (Matt. 23: 23-24) and where the physical temple was more valued than their inner temple.

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

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

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

Isaiah was the first prophet to speak about the coming of the Messiah. Some references can be seen in relation to this: Isa. 2: 1-5; Isa. 4: 2; Isa. 7: 14; Isa. 9: 1-7; Isa. 11: 1-5; Isa. 16: 5; Isa. 41: 1-29, especially verses 2 and 25; Isa. 42: 1-9; Isa. 44: 26; Isa. 44: 28; Isa. 45: 1; Isa. 45: 13; Isa. 48: 14-15; Isa. 49: 1-7 with special focus on v. 7; Isa. 50: 1-11, with special focus on v. 10; Isa. 52: 13; Isa. 53: 1-12, with special focus on vs. 2 and 11; Isa. 59: 16-21; Isa. 63: 1-6.

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

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

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

Tânia Cristina

Notes:

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

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Source of research:

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

Volumes 1 and 2 of this book:

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/thebookofprophetisaiah1.pdf>
<https://www.searaagape.com.br/thebookofprophetisaiah2.pdf>

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Chapter 56

The call of the Gentiles – v. 1-8

• Isa. 56: 1-8: “Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. Happy is the mortal who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil [NIV: Blessed is the man who does this, the man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil]. Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from his people’; and do not let the eunuch say, ‘I am just a dry tree’. For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument [NIV: a memorial] and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples (Matt. 21: 13). Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.”

In these verses the Lord speaks to keep the practice of justice and to do what is right, for the kingdom of the Messiah is coming. Happy is the man that keeps the commandments of the Lord; He will honor him for this. He is not demanding anything beyond what they can fulfill, beyond what has been said through other prophets: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Am. 5: 24) ... “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6: 8).

God is no respecter of persons. The grace that is promised here is for all, Jews and Gentiles alike. Even eunuchs who come to God will be accepted and the Lord will honor their faith and their faithfulness. All those whom He has already separated to His will come to His House, to the Temple, and it will be a house of prayer for all nations, confirming the prayer that Solomon said when he consecrated the first temple (2 Chr. 6: 32-33; 1 Kin. 8: 41-43; 1 Kin. 9: 3). God makes it clear to the people that returned from the Babylonian captivity, which He gathered from all the places to which they were dispersed: ‘I will gather others to them besides those already gathered’ and this speaks of the conversion of the Gentiles. The Gentiles who turn to Him will participate in His salvation. We can see that in the OT itself, at the time of Esther and Mordecai, some people joined the Jews when they learned of the edict of Ahasuerus (Est. 8: 9-12) authorizing the Jews to defend themselves of the attack against their lives in all provinces of the Persian Empire on the thirteenth day of Adar: “In every province and in every city, wherever the king’s command and his edict came, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a festival and a holiday. Furthermore, many of the peoples of the country professed to be Jews, because the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them [NIV: and many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them]” (Est. 8: 17). The prophet Zechariah also wrote about it: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, the inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Come, let us go to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going.’ Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the Lord. Thus says the

Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (Zech. 8: 20-23), showing that soon after the rebuilding of the temple, many Gentiles accepted Judaism. It would happen much more after the coming of Jesus, when the gospel preached by Him would draw the people to God.

When Isaiah speaks in the name of the Lord, ‘for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance [NIV: my righteousness] be revealed’, salvation through the Messiah is more than clear. For them, this prophecy would still take seven hundred years to manifest, but for God, who is timeless and eternal, the birth of Jesus was very close to happening.

‘To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument [NIV: a memorial] and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off’ – that means that even those who were forbidden by the law of Moses to attend solemn assemblies (Deut. 23: 1), by the law of Christ would be free to participate in the blessing of salvation brought to all true believers. The dignity of these believers would be even greater than that of the Jews of the Old Covenant, for the name of Jesus on their foreheads would have great value before the spiritual world (‘an everlasting name that shall not be cut off’). The name of Jesus is eternal and the seal of His lordship upon us (His blood on our forehead) never goes out. They were the reward for Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. The worship of these foreigners to the Living God would be joyfully accepted by Him.

God’s accusation against the wicked – v. 9-12.

- Isa. 56: 9-12: “All you wild animals, all you wild animals in the forest, come to devour! Israel’s sentinels [NIV: watchmen] are blind, they are all without knowledge; they are all silent dogs that cannot bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber [NIV: Israel’s watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep]. The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough. The shepherds also have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, to their own gain, one and all. ‘Come’, they say, ‘let us get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink. And tomorrow will be like today, great beyond measure’ [NIV: even far better].”

When the prophet speaks about calling the wild animals and the animals in the forest to eat, he refers to the destruction of the leaders by wicked nations, that is, the priests and the Levites (‘sentinels’ or ‘watchmen’ of Israel), who pastured themselves and forgot the flock, for besides unbelievers, they were lazy. More than lazy, they sought only the advantages of the priesthood without, however, performing it correctly; they were insatiable (Matt. 23: 14; 23-28). When we read the book of the prophet Malachi, where he speaks to the priests, we can already see that both the people and the leaders had grown cold again in faith and in the covenant with God. And it would also extend to the Intertestamental Period, where the Sadducees and rabbis arose, creating their own doctrines which was above the Scriptures, bringing great problems at the time of the birth of Jesus and throughout His ministry, when Judaism was already divided into many sects fighting against each other.

We need to understand that this prophecy of Isaiah is being delivered to the Jews in the time of the Assyrians, before the Babylonian captivity, and would happen to them if they neglected the prophetic warning from God. Unbelief took hold of the people, the prophets, the priests, and the kings.

Chapter 57

Israel's idolatry is condemned – v. 1-13.

• Isa. 57: 1-13: “The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous are taken away from calamity [NIV: The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away to be spared from evil], and they enter into peace; those who walk uprightly will rest on their couches [NIV: Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death]. But as for you, come here, you children of a sorceress, you offspring of an adulterer and a whore. Whom are you mocking? Against whom do you open your mouth wide and stick out your tongue? Are you not children of transgression, the offspring of deceit [NIV: Whom are you mocking? At whom do you sneer and stick out your tongue? Are you not a brood of rebels, the offspring of liars?]

—You that burn with lust among the oaks, under every green tree; you that slaughter your children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks? Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion [NIV: *The idols* among the smooth stones of the ravines are your portion]; they, they, are your lot; to them you have poured out a drink offering, you have brought a grain offering. Shall I be appeased for these things? Upon a high and lofty mountain you have set your bed, and there you went up to offer sacrifice. Behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your symbol [NIV: Behind your doors and your doorposts you have put your pagan symbols]; for, in deserting me, you have uncovered your bed, you have gone up to it, you have made it wide; and you have made a bargain for yourself with them, you have loved their bed, you have gazed on their nakedness. You journeyed to Molech [*Milcom or Malcam; Ammonite god worshiped with the sacrifice of children; he was called king by his worshipers*] with oil, and multiplied your perfumes; you sent your envoys far away, and sent down even to Sheol [NIV: you sent your ambassadors (or ‘idols’) far way; you descended to the grave itself]. You grew weary from your many wanderings, but you did not say, ‘It is useless’ [NIV: It is hopeless]. You found your desire rekindled, and so you did not weaken [NIV: You found renewal of your strength, and so you did not faint]. Whom did you dread and fear so that you lied, and did not remember me or give me a thought? Have I not kept silent and closed my eyes, and so you do not fear me? I will concede your righteousness and your works, but they will not help you. When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you! The wind will carry them off, a breath will take them away. But whoever takes refuge in me shall possess the land and inherit my holy mountain.”

The Lord is speaking to His people about how angry He already is with the idolatry they practice. He compares these acts with that of a prostitute, and calls the worshipers of idols adulterers. In the first verse, He speaks about the righteous whom He protects, bringing them to Him so they do not suffer with the judgment He will shed on the wicked. On their deathbed they will rest until the day of resurrection, when they will have their reward. Then He turns to the worshipers of false gods. God calls the idolaters the ‘children of a sorceress, offspring of an adulterer and a whore’, for they cannot be considered of the seed of Abraham. God is already tired of the mockery of His own people who provoke Him by placing idols on altars in the clefts of rocks or under great trees (2 Kin. 17: 10), offering them sacrifices. Or they make their altars in an open place on the hills (‘high places’), and there they indulge in idolatrous worship as an impudent adulteress who does not care if her husband will see her or not. Or else, they sacrifice in the valleys, as they used to do in the valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem, where people burned the corpses of criminals. Josiah, for example, burned the bones of the idolatrous

priests of the time of Jeroboam (2 Kin. 23: 15-20; 1 Kin. 12: 28-32; 1 Kin. 13: 2), because in the same valley were also offered human sacrifices to Molech, the god of the Ammonites (2 Kin. 17: 17; 31; 2 Kin. 23: 10; 2 Chr. 28: 2-3; 2 Chr. 33: 6-7; Jer. 19: 1-6), or Chemosh (Moabite god), worshiped with the sacrifice of children. The meaning of 'Hinnom' is unknown; some scholars suggest 'Ben Hinnom', son of Hinnom [because of the Greek term for the Valley: Geenna – ge (valley of) hinnōm (Hinnom)], hinting that it is a proper name (2 Chr. 28: 3; 2 Kin. 23: 10 – 'the valley of Ben-hinnom', that is, the 'Valley of the sons of Hinnom'). In Jer. 7: 32; Jer. 19: 6 the name is altered by the prophet to 'valley of slaughter.' It's also called 'Valley of Topheth or Tophet ('place of fire, burning place' or 'roasting place') by the Canaanites (Jer. 7: 31-32; Jer. 19: 12); in Hebrew: 'place of flame or annoyance', 'furnace.' The smooth stones of the brooks were vaulted stones that they used to make shade, or were already dark vaults on rocks, suitable for idolatrous sacrifices. Here in this text of Isaiah, 'the king' refers to Molech, Milcom or Malcam, the Ammonite god worship with the sacrifice of children; he was called 'king' by his worshipers. Kings of Judah offered their own children as a sacrifice to these strange gods, provoking the wrath of God (Ahaz and Manasseh).

Behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your symbol [NIV: your pagan symbols] – where pagans placed their household gods, protectors of their houses, in the same way as the Mezuzah (Deut. 6: 9; Deut. 11: 20) was given to be placed on the doorposts with the word of God so that they always kept it in the memory.

'You have uncovered your bed, you have gone up to it, you have made it wide; and you have made a bargain for yourself with them, you have loved their bed, you have gazed on their nakedness' – it means the multiplication of gods and altars, bring them into their lives and worshipping them. 'Uncovered your bed' – He compares all these behaviors to that of a prostitute, for the covenant with the idols is a violation of their covenant with God (Ex. 19: 5-8; Ex. 23: 32).

'You journeyed to Molech [*Milcom or Malcam; Ammonite god worshiped with the sacrifice of children; he was called king by his worshipers*] with oil [NIV: olive oil], and multiplied your perfumes' – refers to the idol they came to worship, perfumed with oil, as prostitutes bring presents to their lovers to obtain advantages (Hos. 12: 1; Ezek. 16: 33). In Am. 5: 26, the idol (Sakkuth) is also called 'king.'

'You sent your envoys far away, and sent down even to Sheol [NIV: you sent your ambassadors (or 'idols') far way; you descended to the grave itself; Sheol means: grave, depths, dust, death]' – when the prophet speaks of 'ambassadors' or 'envoys', he refers to the idols that the people bring to the surrounding nations in search of new idols or to corrupt other peoples with their idols, leading many people to spiritual death because of idolatry.

'You grew weary from your many wanderings, but you did not say, 'It is useless' [NIV: It is hopeless]. You found your desire rekindled, and so you did not weaken [NIV: You found renewal of your strength, and so you did not faint]' – the devotion to these idols is such that people spare no effort to carry out their worship. They get tired on the walk, but renew their strength to get to the place where they must offer the sacrifices. Or, this phrase refers to the spiritual journey of these people in the search for strange gods (Jer. 2: 23-24), of which they do not give up (Jer. 2: 25; Jer. 18: 12). Their diligence is useless, for they are being deceived. It is the same diligence mentioned in Isa. 44: 12, when he speaks of the artisan who makes the idol and who does not eat or drink and even faints, but does not give up until the work of sculpture is finished.

Because of all stubbornness, rebellion and irreverence, God will not hear their cry in the day of trouble. His wrath will be violent and sudden, and the idols will be consumed.

Message of peace for the repentant – v. 14-19.

- Isa. 57: 14-19: “It shall be said, ‘Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people’s way’ [NIV: Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people]. For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I will not continually accuse, nor will I always be angry; for then the spirits would grow faint before me, even the souls that I have made [NIV: the breath of the man I have created]. Because of their wicked covetousness I was angry; I struck them, I hid and was angry; but they kept turning back to their own ways. I have seen their ways, but I will heal them; I will lead them and repay them with comfort, creating for their mourners the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord; and I will heal them [NIV: creating praise on the lips of their mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to those far and near, says the Lord; and I will heal them].”

The Lord first spoke of the idolatry of Israel and reproved it, but His disposition is always to have mercy on those who repent of their error. Therefore, the text appears in sequence, and the word seems to be addressed to one who can make the spiritual path of this sinful people straight, namely, prophets and priests, beginning with themselves, straightening their own spiritual life, remaking their covenant with God, and afterwards, showing to the people the right way before the Lord. He says, ‘remove every obstruction from my people’s way’ [NIV: Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people], that is, superstition, idolatry, and wickedness.

The prophecy seems to be directed to the people who are still in Israel, for they could not go up to the ‘high places’ to render idolatrous worship, nor offer sacrifices under terebinths or oaks, being in captivity in a strange land. Therefore, it is presumed that all these practices were being carried out in Israel itself.

The root of idolatry in the heart of this people needed to be plucked out. It was present even before their departure from Egypt; it was an old thing, and God knew it. So much that the captivity occurred because of the sins of the nation, among them, idolatry. Just as John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, the Lord speaks to those who have the power today to minister His word and teach the truth to the people and rebuke those who are in error to repent and be saved.

God said that He dwells in the high and holy place, and also in the repentant hearts and humble of spirit that fear His name. To these ones He renews and gives strength to resume their walk with Him, overcoming the temptations of the flesh and overthrowing the barriers of darkness. He acknowledges that He was angry with His people, but this wrath will not last forever. For those who have been humbled under the hand of God and who weep for their sins and those of others, He will come with mercy and comfort. And the fruit of this repentance will be peace; a peace that can only come from God, not from men. This peace is reserved for His people (‘to those near’) and for the Gentiles (‘to those far’).

God treats His children in the way they behave before Him: “To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty” (Ps. 18: 25-27 – NIV). Even Jesus behaved this way. He showed mercy and compassion for the repentant sinner, but made

His authority very clear with the haughty and proud teachers of the law, who were trying to hinder His doctrine and His mission by turning the people away from the truth of the gospel. By dying on the cross, He left the way open for all those who feel the need for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. But those who insist on their wicked ways, He allows them to follow their free will because the day of reckoning will come.

There is no peace for the wicked – v. 20-21.

- Isa. 57: 20-21 (cf. Isa. 48: 22): “But the wicked are like the tossing sea that cannot keep still; its waters toss up mire and mud. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.”

Their minds are restless, always anxious and worried with their own lusts and passions, with guilt and the fear of divine vengeance. Their bad conscience torments them, and therefore they never find rest. Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit: “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things” (Gal. 5: 22-23). It is resulting of a surrender that brings us to harmony of purpose with Him and makes us desire what He desires; it is the certainty that everything is resolved because He is God. Peace makes us look like Jesus, for we come to see that with Him within us nothing more threatens us.

In the beatitudes Jesus said: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” To there be peace in our soul it’s necessary to uproot the other nature in us (the nature of the devil in our flesh) and cultivate Jesus in our hearts. Making peace is to stand on God’s side. The peacemakers are called children of God, for they resemble Him. To bring peace to someone, we must conquer, first of all, the peace within our own being, that is, to be harmonized with the divine plan for us. It means no more fights between our flesh, our spirit and the Holy Spirit. In a way, it is something that arises from the meekness, from the fact of giving ourselves entirely to the mold of the Lord in us.

Chapter 58

True fasting – v. 1-4.

- Isa. 58: 1-4: “Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins [KJV: Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins]. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God [NIV: They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them]. ‘Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?’ [KJV: Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?] Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers [NIV: Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers]. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.”



The Lord says that He is willing to use all diligence and severity to rebuke the hypocrites. He says to the prophet, ‘Shout out’ or ‘Cry aloud’ (KJV); in Hebrew, ‘with the throat’ (Garown, ‘throat’ – Strong #1627), that is, with a full voice, not just from the lips (1 Sam. 1: 13). He should speak loud enough to get attention. God was asking him to announce the transgression of His people. Transgression (KJV; in Hebrew, pesha’ – Strong #6588) means: a revolt (national, moral or religious): rebellion, sin, trespass (an offense); disobedience; act or effect of transgress; go beyond limits; pass through; not to observe, not to respect (laws or regulations); to infringe. As always, they were more concerned with the outward appearance, with the religiosity, but their interior did not follow their acts, that is, there was no devotion; the heart, indeed, was far from the Lord, His commandments were being fulfilled as a lifeless ritual.

‘Lift up your voice like a trumpet!’ – In this phrase, the word trumpet, in Hebrew, refers to the ram’s horn (Shophar שׁוֹפָר – Strong #7782, so as to give a very clear sound).

‘Day after day’ or ‘daily’ (KJV) in Hebrew versions is ‘yowm’ (Strong #3117, meaning day). This text follows chapter 57, which is addressed to the people who are still in Israel, for they could not go up to the hills (‘the high places’) to render idolatrous worship, nor offer sacrifices under the terebinths or oaks, being in captivity in a foreign land. Therefore, it is presumed that all these practices, including fasting, were being carried out in Israel itself. It does not refer to the Jews in the captivity in Babylon.

The people in question seemed to take pleasure in going to the temple, offering sacrifices, hearing the word of God and seeking to know what His will was, but they did not put into practice the guidelines that were given through the prophets. Thus, we may think that the phrase above, ‘Yet day after day they seek me’, means: ‘Even though they continue in sin, with double religious practice, they still seek me all day, day after day’ (the Lord was speaking).

However, they still argued with God: why He took no pleasure in them, why so many words of prophetic warning, why such heavy words if they were doing everything right, and still afflicted their souls with fasting? ‘Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice? [KJV: Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?]

The verb ‘to afflict’ used in Lev. 16: 29 for the day of fasting (‘Ye shall afflict your souls’ – KJV, ASV; or ‘You must deny yourselves’ – NRSV; NIV) in Hebrew is: ‘anah (Strong #6031), which means: look down or intimidate, frighten; to depress (literally or figuratively), to subdue, to demean, to humiliate, to humiliate oneself, to degrade, to afflict, affliction, to grieve, to punish oneself, gentleness, to hurt, to submit, to weaken. The word ‘anah (Strong #6031) gives rise to the other: ‘anav (Strong # 6035, Num. 12: 3): meek, depressed (figuratively) in the mind (gentle, meek) or in circumstances (needy, holy, virtuous): humble, lowly, meek, poor.

But God answers: “Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers [NIV: Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers].”

This means that, although they abstained from material (bodily) food, the sinful inclinations of the soul continued; they did what pleased their soul, and did not fail to earn their money, for their servants continued to work for them, and the money of the loans continued to come to their pockets, even with interest (usury).

But Isaiah writes God’s reasons about their fast. It was not to seek Him. In addition to taking care of their own interests, they fasted “only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high” (Isa. 58: 4).

This means that instead of seeking God on this day of fasting and showing compassion for the fellow man, they were engaged in debating ideas, oppressing the weakest (servants and debtors, for example), fighting with them and even physically hurting them; all for ostentation. That way, their prayers would not be heard.

In fact, fasting is an abstinence of something we like, and apparently we miss, not only in terms of food, but also certain ‘nice’ habits that serves as food for our flesh: slander, gossip, envy, consumerism, cigarettes, beverages, certain radio and television programs, sex etc. It concerns to the abstinence of something that has already become a habit, especially food, and that moves us away from communion with the Lord. Unfortunately, many people repeat what our brothers of the past did, as described by the prophets; they fast for other reasons than the proximity to God. They end up availing themselves of fasting for dieting, to gain blessings etc. During the period in which we abstain from any food, we should read the Word, pray, seek spiritual revelation and ‘disconnect’ from the worldly things in order to be at God’s throne.

Fasting is to sanctify the flesh and put it under the dominion of the Holy Spirit; only so, the person becomes spiritually stronger; in other words, fasting is to break the barriers of the flesh: “Then they said to him, ‘John’s disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink’. Jesus said to them, ‘You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days’” (Lk. 5: 33-35). Hence, Jesus told the Pharisees that His disciples did not need to fast like the others while He was personally with them because the light of the Spirit was there overcoming the flesh, but when He was gone, they would have to seek it for themselves through the Counselor that He would leave with them.

Examples of fasting in the bible:

Many servants of God in the bible fasted in difficult times of their lives to receive God’s direction, revelation, and deliverance: Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai to receive the commandments of God (Ex. 24: 18 – the first tablets of the Law; Ex 34: 28 – the second tablets of the Law). Elijah walked forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb, where he hid in a cave and heard the voice of God (1 Kin. 19: 8-9). Esther fasted for three days before going to the presence of King Ahasuerus to plead for her life and that of her people (Est. 4: 16-17; Est. 5: 1). Nehemiah also fasted and prayed to God when he learned of the destruction of Jerusalem (Neh. 1: 4). Ezra fasted at the River Ahava asking for God’s help on his journey to Jerusalem to minister in the temple that had been built (Ezr. 8: 21-23). Daniel fasted for twenty-one days until he received the revelation of a vision which he had had and which involved great conflict (Dan. 10: 1-3; 13), for it spoke of far-off times and mighty kingdoms to come. Jesus was the greatest example, when He stayed in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights fasting and being tempted by Satan.

In Zechariah we also have an interesting comment about the purpose of fasting, showing us that the purpose of fasting is not to mortify the flesh to gain blessings, much less to demand something from God, however, to approach Him and enliven Him in us:

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

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

Fasts mentioned above:

- Four month (2 Kin. 25: 3 – the city of Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians).
- Fifth month (2 Kin. 25: 8 – the temple was burned).
- Seventh month (Jer. 41: 1 – Gedaliah was killed). Gedaliah (Jer. 40: 5), son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, was whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the towns of Judah. This fasting is not to be confused with the fasting of Atonement (Ex. 30: 10; Lev. 16: 29-34; Lev. 23: 26-32), ‘Yom Kippur.’
- Tenth month (2 Kin. 25: 1; Ezek. 24: 1 – when Babylonian army besieged the city).

This prophecy of Zechariah is addressed to the Jews who returned from captivity, and continued with the fasts which they had instituted themselves. However (Zech. 7: 3-

5), the motivation did not seem to be only to please God and seek Him, but seek their own interests; therefore, the Lord asked: “When you fasted and lamented in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted?” (Zech. 7: 5b). Much probably, they were doing what they did before they went into captivity. Then He used the prophet to tell them what He expected of them: “These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord” (Zech. 8: 16-17).

Fasting that pleases God and its reward – v. 5-12.

- Isa. 58: 5-12: “Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke [NIV: to untie the cords of the yoke], to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? [NIV: Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?] Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator [NIV: your righteousness, or ‘your righteous One’] shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, [NIV: If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk] if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom [NIV: your night] be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in [NIV: Repairer of Broken Walls, Repairer of Streets with Dwellings].”

God was saying that He had not planned the day of Atonement (fasting) to let man be without strength, unhappy, weeping and mourning – Isa. 58: 5: “Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?”

He explains what kind of fast would be pleasing to God: to loose the bonds of injustice, to untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to break every yoke; to share the bread with the hungry, to provide shelter to the poor wanderer, to clothe the naked and not to refuse help to others; to stop with the threats and accusations (the pointing finger and malicious talk), to give up selfishness, to offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted; to forgive the neighbor’s offenses and to forgive their financial debts as well. In short, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur – Lev. 23: 26-28) would be a day of begging God’s forgiveness for their sins, seeking His mercy, and showing compassion for all men, releasing them of slavery (physical and spiritual), supplying their souls in every way and not hiding from those who asked for help; above all, to practice justice, leaving aside the accusations, the false mouth, full of insult and that caused wounds of all kinds. They should also end the cruel oppression of usury (an interest-bearing loan) and extortion. This new practice was a way of showing that there was a real change in their souls.

Just a parenthesis here to explain certain things:

In the NT the loans in Israel did not have a commercial nature, but charitable, not granted to allow a merchant to establish and expand his business, but to sustain a peasant in times of poverty. In the NT this meaning for loan is different. The debtors (parable of the dishonest steward, Lk. 16: 1-8) were tenants (people who rent something from someone) who paid in cash or were merchants who had received goods on credit.

The word usury had not the same meaning of today, used for exorbitant profit. In the Old Testament this practice was prohibited so that there was not exploitation against brothers, taking advantage of the misfortune of the compatriot (Ex. 22: 25-27; Lev. 25: 35-37; Deut. 23: 19-20; Deut. 24: 10-13). However, it was allowed to charge interest of foreigners (Deut. 23: 20).

Pledge: It was used for a temporary loan, in the mortgage of a property or on bail of a financier (Ex. 22: 26; Deut. 24: 10-13). In cases where there was no guarantee for the debt, the debtors could be sold as slaves (Neh. 5: 5).

Thus, if they followed the law given by God, which benefited one another in the financial field, not the one they later did for their own benefit, they would receive some 'advantages' from the Lord: their light (the presence of God in them, with sincerity, truth, boldness, and authority) would break forth like the dawn, or when the sun ends in the darkness of the night or crosses a cloud after the rain, showing that even in the midst of difficulties, they would receive the blessings from above and would be victorious over adversity. With us it is the same thing: the presence of God in us breaks the difficulties and impediments in our way. The healing they needed would come quickly. Their justice would go before them, that is, the fame of their righteousness would be an open path ahead of them for any kind of relationship or business transaction because everyone would know that they were trustworthy. The dignity, honor, and power of God's provision would be like an army to their rearguard so that no one cheated them or betrayed them by the backs. God would keep them. The testimony of their goodness would appear before God and men. Also, if they used their mouth in the right way, if they did not threaten anyone, if they did not cheat in business or lie for selfish profit and if they benefited the less privileged, then the truth and approval of God would prevail, for where there is truth there is the presence of the Spirit of God, who brings freedom. Under clarity and truth, nothing is hidden and there is no mistrust. Adversity turns into prosperity.

The Lord promised that if they did things the right way, He would be their guide, like a shepherd who goes ahead of his flock and leads his sheep to places where there is grass and pasture, not to a dry desert, where they have nothing to eat. Even during difficult times, He would give them an escape and they would not feel want. And this promise to be their guide is continuous, not temporary. In arid places (scarcity, need and sterility) there is not enough food to accumulate fat in the body; the person who spends a lot of time in these conditions is only 'skin and bones', as we use to say, and then even his bones weaken. Hence, God was comforting them in this sense so that they would not live anxious about material things as their ancestors in the desert complained so much with Moses. The bible says that their feet did not become swollen, neither their garments aged, nor did their shoes wear out (Neh. 9: 21; Deut. 8: 4; 14-16; Deut. 29: 5). The Lord would strengthen their bones and would make them a source of life, by the word of faith that would spring up from their lips and would put the power of God into action. Did He not open a spring of water in the wilderness to quench Hagar's thirst when she was fleeing from Sarah (Gen. 16: 7; 14)? And did He not give water to her and Ishmael when they were sent away from Abraham's camp (Gen. 21: 16; 17: 19)? When the blessing of God is present, the believer's life is always fruitful like a watered

garden, for even though he has few material resources, God can give him an incredible capacity of administering what the person has in his hands, and nothing is lacking.

The Lord also promises to their offspring the ability to repair ruined cities with walls destroyed, as happened to the very city of Jerusalem after the exile. The walls were built with whole stones and gravel, even under the enemy's mockery, but they remained standing; and centuries later they were able to redo them better. Many other cities of Judah once destroyed were recovered even before the time of the gospel arrived. More than building the ancient material ruins of cities, here is a promise of spiritual rebuilding of the church of Jerusalem in the times of the Messiah through the apostles, where 'ruined cities' or 'ancient ruins' are the symbol of people destroyed by false religious doctrines and devoid of the presence of the Living God, of faith and hope of salvation. The good traditions left, that is, 'the foundations of many generations' will be erected again, for they are the foundations laid by God for mankind, His immutable laws that keep man on the path of truth. Being a 'repairer of the breach' or 'Repairer of Broken Walls' is not just about keeping their fortified cities in good condition, but restoring the lives of those who are straying from the word of God and letting the enemy come in to destroy everything. It means to give a word of comfort to the afflicted so that they do not lose faith and can be able to raise their self-esteem in the midst of trials, when the pessimists around them try to destroy them or make them give up fighting and achieve their goals. Being 'the restorer of streets to live in' or 'Repairer of Streets with Dwellings' is to have the ability to put on the right path the people go astray or who are lost, people who do not know what to do or where to go, in the physical, emotional and spiritual sense. It is by the Spirit of God that this gift is obtained, because His word brings with it the justice for any situation and therefore freedom, removing doubts and confusions from the darkness that misleads people.

The observance of the Sabbath – v. 13-14

- Isa. 58: 13-14: "If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs [NIV: If you keep your feet breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words]; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

In Lev. 23: 30-32; Lev. 16: 29-34 and Num. 29: 7, the Fast of Atonement is closely related to the Sabbath; just as the Sabbath is mentioned together with the solemn feasts of the Lord (Lev. 23: 2-3; Ex. 23: 12). In Lev. 16: 31 (in relation to the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur), for example, it is written: "It is a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall deny yourselves; it is a statute forever," where the use of the word Sabbath was to denote a solemn day of rest, not so much a celebration. In this verse, the word 'sabbath', in Hebrew, is 'shabbat' – Strong #7676, meaning 'intermission.' And the word 'rest' is 'shabbathon' – Strong #7677, derived from shabbath, meaning 'a sabbatism' or 'special holiday.' This means that Yom Kippur would not necessarily be celebrated on Saturday (like the Sabbath), but it would be like a Sabbath.

The Lord left for His people the Sabbath day not as a burden or an obligation, but as a way of resting in Him on this day to receive from Him instruction, renewal of their strength, and learning to have with Him the intimacy that was not present in pagan peoples. It was a day of separation from worldly things to remember the spiritual things.

The failure of the Jews to obey this commandment was one of the causes of being led into captivity (2 Chr. 36: 21; Jer. 25: 11-12; Jer. 29: 10; Dan. 9: 2), for the Sabbath was not just a day of rest in the week, as it also represented the Sabbatical Year or Sabbath of rest, that is, the rest of the land every seven years (Lev. 25: 2-4; Ex. 23: 10-11) for the land to rest and to be productive again. This was a way to honor the Lord. As, however, they failed to do that over the centuries, God condemned them and removed all Sabbaths of rest at once. The land would be asleep during the Babylonian captivity (Lev. 26: 34-35; 43), seventy years. That is why Nehemiah (Neh. 13: 15-22) made a point of reestablishing the observance of the Sabbath, when the city was rebuilt, so that they would continue under the grace of God.

Sabbath comes from the Hebrew, Shabbat, which means: 'rest, cessation, interruption.' The Lord set aside a day of the week for us to rest from our workaday activities, to restore our soul in contact with Him. God has given us this day for us to have the opportunity to enjoy some of the best and most important realities of life, and not that it was a day of prohibition. In this day of rest, without worrying about to work to accumulate wealth, we can contact not only with God to hear His voice, but also to contact the family and friends, giving value to true friendship and healthy relationships where He also wants to participate. It is also a day when we separate ourselves from the noise of civilization to be in contact with nature where God can also manifest Himself to us and teach us important lessons. For us Christians, Sunday was set apart as a day of consecration to God. This does not mean that we should only talk with Him on Sunday, but it should be a special day, when hearing His voice means to receive His direction for our new week and to give Him the fruit of the week that was gone, thanking Him for His help. We should give rest to our land, our soul, periodically, as it was prescribed in the Law, after a period of spiritual struggle so that our soul can be restored because of the exhaustion it suffered. It means to give rest to our 'inner land' and move away from everything that does not please the Lord, in order to be in the altar in intimacy with His Spirit, receiving His comfort, His guidance and His strength. However, the word Shabbat has a deeper meaning than just a physical rest. It means that, whatever the day of the week we separate to God, we must rest in Him of what we cannot do; so, in certain situations in our lives, we shall live a time of Shabbat, waiting in the deliverance and salvation of the Lord.

Chapter 59

Confession of the sins of the nation – v. 1-2.

- Isa. 59: 1-2: “See, the Lord’s hand [NIV: the arm of the Lord] is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”

The prophet begins chapter 59 saying that God is not with the hand unable to save neither His ear is deaf so that He cannot hear the prayer of His people, but as their sins separate them from Him, there is no answer to their prayers. God hides His face from them, for the prayers seem to be loaded with ulterior motives or they are praying something else that does not matter so much to Him, more than a request for forgiveness. So, Isaiah shows them their sins so they can understand why God does not listen to their prayers.

Murder, theft, falsehood, injustice, cruelty – v. 3-8.

- Isa. 59: 3-8: “For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness. No one brings suit justly, no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, conceiving mischief and begetting iniquity [NIV: No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speaks lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil]. They hatch adders’ eggs, and weave the spider’s web; whoever eats their eggs dies, and the crushed egg hatches out a viper. Their webs cannot serve as clothing; they cannot cover themselves with what they make. Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, desolation and destruction are in their highways. The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths. Their roads they have made crooked; no one who walks in them knows peace.”

One of the first sins denounced here by the prophet is murder and perversity, possibly on the part of those who were in the leadership of the nation and killed those who opposed their evil intentions or who publicly accused them. They were guilty, perhaps, of the death of many innocent people in Israel. Along with this came the wicked words that came from their lips, lying or twisting the truth for their own benefit. Religious leaders were also guilty, and the words they uttered were against the will of God. After this, the judges also participated in these perversities, failing to judge all the causes with justice, because in them there was no integrity. The lie seemed to be more convenient for them. When the bible says, ‘No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity’ also makes us think that it was not only in the secular or civil ambit that this occurred, but makes us think that someone was also lacking to claim for justice before God as an intercessor. Since there were no people willing to be instruments of God, He couldn’t act against such errors and violence. It seemed that the king, the princes, officers, counselors, and magistrates committed all kinds of fraud and went unpunished. ‘Conceiving mischief and begetting iniquity’ or ‘they conceive trouble and give birth to evil’ means that not only their thoughts were evil, but they also managed to carry out what they had planned. Just as the snake has poison on its tongue, the speeches and advices of these wicked ones everywhere were like poison, and the eggs (the result of this evil), after being hatched, gave birth to another little poisonous being, that is, after a long time of being rethought, their impure plans were achieved. ‘Weaving the spider’s web’ means setting traps to catch by surprise the naive or those who seem

to agree with them, but on the inside they think otherwise. For fear of betrayal, they use trickery to catch the ‘false friends.’ However, the Lord says that their plots are useless and cannot cover up those who project them (‘webs cannot serve as clothing’). Sooner or later, their evil deeds and their acts of violence will be discovered. These wicked always choose the wrong way and everything they touch ends up being ruined and destroyed. They do not know the way of peace, for they live in strife and injustice; they complicate what is simple and lead others with them into the ways of error.

The sad reality – v. 9-15.

• Isa. 59: 9-15: “Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us; we wait for light, and lo! there is darkness; and for brightness, but we walk in gloom [NIV: in deep shadows]. We grope like the blind along a wall, groping like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among the vigorous as though we were dead [NIV: among the strong we are like dead]. We all growl like bears; like doves we moan mournfully. We wait for justice, but there is none; for salvation [NIV: deliverance], but it is far from us. For our transgressions [NIV: offenses] before you are many, and our sins testify against us. Our transgressions [NIV: offenses] indeed are with us, and we know our iniquities: transgressing, and denying the Lord, and turning away from following our God, talking oppression and revolt, conceiving lying words and uttering them from the heart [NIV: rebellion and treachery against the Lord, turning our backs on our God, fomenting oppression and revolt, uttering lies our hearts have conceived]. Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands at a distance; for truth stumbles in the public square, and uprightness [NIV: honesty] cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and whoever turns from evil is despoiled [NIV: Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey]. The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.”

If there is no fair trial there is no deliverance. If there is no repentance or confession of sins before God, His righteousness does not come. More than repentance, it is necessary a change of attitude, a change of ways. The people do not seem to be willing to this. They wait for the light, but there is only darkness in their minds. They no longer know how to get out of the traps they themselves created, for they are trapped in the clutches of the spiritual enemy and do not even know it. They seem blindly groping the walls, for their eyes do not see the right way because they have rejected the word of God. They growl like bears with their voices, contending and displaying power, but within they moan like defenseless doves. It seems that salvation is far away from them. They need deliverance, but they do not know how to find it. The prophet Isaiah, attending the court, for according to Jewish tradition he was of royal blood, knew more than anyone what was going on inside there; so he says in the first person of plural: ‘For our transgressions before you are many, and our sins testify against us.’ This is not just out of empathy with the people of Judah, but it conveys something closer to him inside the palace where he knew the people. It should be a great effort for him to stand in integrity before God, separated by Him to be His mouth there, seeing so many wrong things. He goes on saying that he knows the sins of the lie, of twisting justice, of rebelling against God and opting for idols, the sins of fomenting oppression and acts of betrayal and rebellion. He walks down the streets and sees no more truth, no justice, no honesty, for the people with evil rulers follow their example. Whoever tries to deviate from evil is marked, ridiculed and risked of being killed. The Lord has seen all this; so He disapproves them. A God of justice cannot be happy with injustice. And Isaiah seems to speak not only about his time, where he lived all these situations, but relating to the near future (a few decades later, less than a hundred years), about the kings and

people of the court who would soon follow, the rulers who would reign in Jerusalem long before the invasion of the city by Nebuchadnezzar.

This prophecy does not refer to exiles as many people think. It relates to a time before the captivity and the invasion of the city of Zion, where it was practiced there in the land of Israel, not among the wicked of Babylon.

Salvation only in God – v. 16-19.

• Isa. 59: 16-19: “He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory [NIV: so his own arm worked salvation for him], and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle [NIV: and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak]. According to their deeds, so will he repay; wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render requital [NIV: According to what they have done, so will he repay wrath to his enemies and retribution to his foes; he will repay the islands their due]. So those in the west shall fear the name of the Lord, and those in the east, his glory; for he will come like a pent-up stream that the wind of the Lord drives on [in Hebrew: When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will put him to flight].”



It is as if Isaiah came out of his reverie and his meditation on the sins of the nation, wrapping him in darkness as well, and suddenly received from God comfort and escape from everything he was seeing, that is, he received the revelation of the Messiah as a man of war, dressing in zeal for the name and holiness of God and preparing to avenge His people from what bound them in the chains of sin and darkness.

“He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory [NIV: so his own arm worked salvation for him], and his righteousness upheld him” – this reminds us much of Jesus when, in His suffering on the cross, He saw no one who could help or intercede for Him to deliver Him from that suffering, but He knew that salvation would come from the Father and His Spirit in Him, the Son, and that in the power of this same Spirit He would be able to fulfill His mission as Redeemer. At the same time He suffered there, He was the only savior mankind had. Likewise, the people that Isaiah was speaking of did not have an

intercessor to help him too, but God Himself. That is why Paul wrote to believers how to put on the armor of God. The justice accomplished on the cross, freeing us from the accusations of the enemy, is the breastplate that protects our feelings and our heart from all that is not born of God's love. Jesus received a spear in His chest so that our heart was protected by His love and His righteousness, for He cared about our emotional pains. He received the anguish, the suffering, the weeping and all kinds of flaming arrows of the evil one in his heart so that ours could be free to love and enter the presence of God, stripped, naked, without fantasies, without lies, but with honesty and the sincerity of a child of God, confessing to Him our weaknesses and sins without fear of punishment, for the punishment that brings us peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. The coming of the Messiah would bring God's vengeance upon the adversaries of His people, and He shows Isaiah that He is present as the living God, fearsome in His wrath. Between this prophecy and the coming of Jesus there were many wars and many human instruments of God (like Cyrus, for example) to accomplish the Lord's vengeance against the enemies of Israel. Much blood was shed, and God avenged Himself in the wicked, showing His sovereignty over the gods of the heathen nations. This was a preparation for the coming of Christ, which no one knew when it would take place. However, He would bring a powerful move worldwide and, together with Him, a new time, a new dispensation for mankind: "for he will come like a pent-up stream that the wind of the Lord drives on." [Hebr.: "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will put him to flight"] The Jews kept within them the physical image of the Messiah as that of a warrior, coming to deliver His people from all oppression. Jesus, the Messiah came in human form, as expected by the Jews, but brought a new way of waging war, which they did not grasp or accept.

In addition to the figure of Cyrus already discussed in earlier chapters, the Anointed Conqueror will be a king to rule over Jews and Gentiles, executing God's vengeance against His enemies, getting dressed in the armor of salvation (Isa. 59: 16-21) and completely defeating His enemies, thus redeeming His people. In chapter 63: 1-6, the Anointed Conqueror, using appropriate garments, makes revenge and redemption. In his person, this Messianic conqueror is not so different from the king and the Servant. He has the same spiritual gifts and is a man among men. But he shows two other facets about himself. **First**, he is described as **the conqueror of Edom** (Is 63: 1), a task that was accomplished by any other Israelite king but David: Num. 24: 17-19; 1 Chr. 18: 11-12; 2 Sam. 8: 13-14; Ps. 60 – When David fought against the Syrians of Mesopotamia (River Euphrates – 1 Chr. 18: 3) and the Arameans of Zobah, and Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt – cf. Ps. 108: 6-13. Here, we can see the identity of the Anointed Conqueror with the Davidic Messiah.

Second, he wears the garments of salvation and revenge, with which YHWH Himself will clothe (Isa. 59: 16-21). In Isa. 61: 1-3 we can see another characteristic of the Messiah, who is **someone endowed with the Spirit and the Word**:

- Isa. 61: 1-3: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory." Jesus took on this prophecy, as it is written in Lk. 4: 18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has

sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

The covenant of the Redeemer – v. 20-21

- Isa. 59: 20-21: "And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the Lord. And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children [NIV: or from the mouths of their descendants], says the Lord, from now on and forever."

The Lord says that the Redeemer will come to Zion and all the Jews who converts (who repent of their sins), as if to comfort the prophet by the so bad sight he had. But He also makes with Isaiah, here placed as a symbol of the Lord's prophets on the earth, a covenant that all the words that he said, moved by the Spirit of God, will never fall to the ground; on the contrary, they will always be in his mouth and in the mouth of his descendants.

Chapter 60

The glory of Zion – v. 1-22.

- Isa. 60: 1-5: “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea [NIV: the wealth of the seas] shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations [the riches of the nations] shall come to you.”



Here the Lord gives a word of strength and encouragement to Jerusalem, alluding to the coming of the Messiah, who will fill it with glory with His presence and will bring salvation to it. The light indicates a time of joy and prosperity, at the same time the understanding and revelation of God. Christ came as the light of the world in a spiritual way. In the Intertestamental Period the world was in great spiritual darkness, including Judea, for several nations dominated there and brought a great influence of Greek culture with all its idolatry. Also in God’s period of silence, which lasted four hundred years, there were no prophets sent by Him to straighten the path of His people, for they returned to the level of rebellion they had before the Babylonian exile, and in addition, many new religious doctrines of Sadducees and other streams of Judaism arose at that time. There was a cooling in spiritual things even in those who were priests. But the prophecy of Isaiah says that for this land of Israel, the Messiah would bring light; and this light would lighten the Gentile nations which walked in darkness. Nations and kings would hear of the news of a spiritual awakening in Israel. Even Jews from other parts of the world would return to their homeland (‘your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms’). This would be a source of joy for Jerusalem. ‘The abundance of the sea’ or ‘the wealth of the seas’ refers to the

Gentile nations who were far from Israel, who would trade again with Israel, and this would bring riches to Jerusalem and Judah.

• Isa. 60: 6-9: “A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord [NIV: Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord]. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall be acceptable on my altar, and I will glorify my glorious house [NIV: All Kedar’s flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple]. Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows [NIV: to their nests]? For the coastlands shall wait for me, the ships of Tarshish [*trading ships or ships of refining or mining*] first, to bring your children from far away, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the Lord your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you.”

The first peoples described above are the ancestors of Esau, half-brothers of Ishmael (for they are children of Abraham and Keturah his concubine) and related to Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah, later opposing the people of Israel on several occasions. This meant a restitution of God in regard to the past affronts and discords between Israel and these peoples, who would come to Jerusalem with their present offspring to magnify it with their gifts because of the light of the Messiah.



Descendants of Ham and Shem: Sheba (grandson of Abraham and Keturah) and Seba (descendant of Cush)

Abraham and Keturah (1 Chr 1: 32; Gen. 25: 1-4) begat Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan begat Sheba and Dedan (these latter two are also names mentioned in the bible as sons of Raamah, descended from Cush, son of Ham, son of Noah – 1 Chr. 1: 9; Gen. 10: 1-32). The sons of Midian were: Ephah, Ephher, Hanoah, Abida and Eldaah. Sheba, grandson of Abraham and Keturah (1 Chr 1: 32) is also described in Gen. 25: 3. From Sheba came its queen, bringing great riches to Solomon (2 Chr. 9: 1-12; 1 Kin. 10: 1-13). In the early centuries AD, Sheba maintained the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions, particularly Ethiopian Christian. Much probably, the location of Sheba was to the south of Arabia, keeping intimate relations with the people of Seba, a descendant of Cush, in the region of Ethiopia.

Midian gave origin to the Midianites, who were related to the Ishmaelites (Gen. 28: 9; Gen. 37: 28; 36) when Joseph was sold to Egypt, and in Judg. 8: 24; 26 when they were defeated by Gideon. Moses married Zipporah, a Midianite, when he fled from Pharaoh; and his father-in-law was Jethro or Reuel (Ex. 2: 15; 21; Ex. 3: 1; Num. 10: 29). In the time of the judges, God delivered His people from the Midianites through Gideon (Judg. 6 – 8; Judg. 9: 17). Here it is reported that the Midianites rode on camels of the Amalekites (Amalek was the grandson of Esau – Gen. 36: 12; 1 Chr. 1: 36) and other eastern peoples (Judg. 6: 5; Judg. 7: 12; Judg. 8: 26). This is the earliest reference to the use of camels in large numbers in the art of war. The gold and the main commodities were brought on camels, which implies here the arrival of several nations to Christ. All nations will honor Jerusalem and the God of Israel with what they can.

Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, is cited together with the other eleven brothers (1 Chr. 1: 29-31; Gen. 25: 12-18; Gen. 28: 9), princes of the Arab nations: Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. Ishmael also had a daughter named Mahalath (Gen 28: 9), who married Esau. Nebaioth was the ancestor of an Arab tribe who later gave birth to the Nabataeans. Nebaioth (Nbayowth or Nbayoth – Strong #5032) means fructification, fecundity.

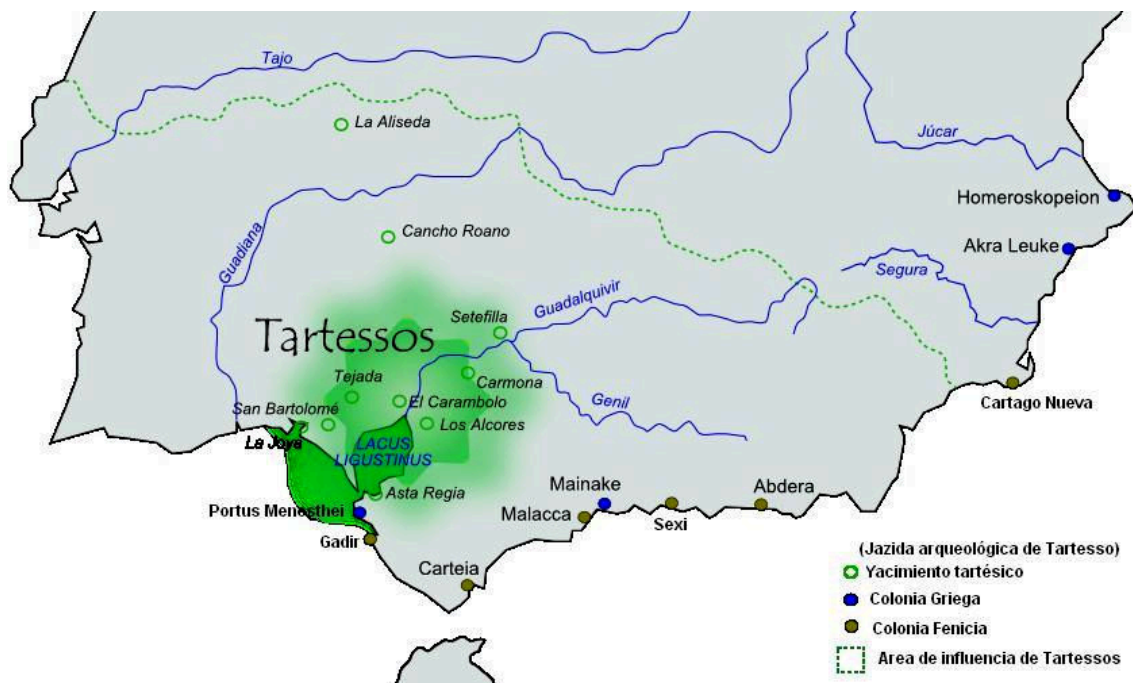


Kedar (as described in Isa. 21:16) was one of the sons of Ishmael (Gen. 25:13; 1 Chr. 1: 29) and brother of Nebaioth. This tribe was composed of Bedouins who lived in

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’ was their flocks of sheep (Isa. 60: 7), goats and she-goats. In Song 1: 5 there is a reference to the tents of Kedar, whose tents were generally made of black goat skins. Ps. 120: 5 also mentions this tribe. In addition to their flocks, this nomadic tribe was endowed with skillful archers. Kedar, in Hebrew, means ‘obscure’ or ‘black’ (related to the skin or tent). In this verse of Isaiah 60 the bible says: “All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall be acceptable on my altar, and I will glorify my glorious house [NIV: All Kedar’s flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple],” which means that many of these people would bring their animals as a pleasing sacrifice to God at His altar in Jerusalem.

‘Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows [NIV: to their nests]?’ – the cloud and doves here are a metaphor of a great number or the speed with which the people will come to Jerusalem, attracted by the new doctrine of Christ (Isa. 49: 8-13).

As for the term ‘ships of Tarshish’, we can translate it by ‘ships of refining or mining’, equipped for transporting molten ore (load of gold, silver), hard wood, jewelry, ivory and varieties of monkeys (1 Kin. 9: 26-28; 1 Kin. 10: 22 – The word translated as peafowl or peacocks – NRSV – can refer to baboons). NIV puts a note about this: ‘ships of Tarshish’ or ‘trading ships.’ The prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 23: 1; 14) also mentions the ships of Tarshish in relation to their trade with Tyre. The correct location of Tarshish, where there was a colony of Tyre, is still unknown, and may refer to a port from the Indian Ocean to Carthage (in Africa) or a Phoenician port in Spain.



Location of Tarshish, south of Spain – Wikipedia.org

According to the Easton’s Bible Dictionary, the word, anglicized as ‘tarshish’, is of Sanskrit origin (Sanskrit is the ancestral language of India) or Aryan origin (relative to the ancient Iranian peoples), and means ‘the coast of the sea.’ According to the Lexicon Strong’s Concordance (tarshiysh – Strong #8659; #8658) may refer to the region of

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

In 1 Kings 9: 26 the bible says: "King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber, which is near Elath [NIV: Elath] on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom." It also mentions the alliance between Solomon and the king of Tyre, using these ships for commerce: "For the king's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram [NIV: Hiram]; once every three years the ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks" (2 Chr. 9: 21). These same ships were used by Jehoshaphat, but were wrecked: "Jehoshaphat made ships of the Tarshish type [NIV: a fleet of trading ships; in Hebrew: ships of Tarshish] to go to Ophir for gold; but they did not go, for the ships were wrecked at Ezion-geber" (1 Kin. 22: 48); "Then Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, 'Because you have joined with Ahaziah, the Lord will destroy what you have made'. And the ships were wrecked and were not able to go to Tarshish" (2 Chr. 20: 37).

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



Image above: Fertile Crescent – Egypt, Israel, Phoenicia and Mesopotamia. Places with much gold: Ophir, Sheba and Raamah

The current prophecy of Isaiah says that ‘the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from far away, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the Lord your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you.’

The use of gold was common among the Hebrews and among the peoples of Ancient times (1 Chr 22: 14; 2 Chr 1: 15; 1 Chr. 29: 1-9; 2 Chr. 9: 9; Dan. 3: 1, Nah. 2: 9). Several chambers of the temple and of the ornaments and vessels were covered with this precious metal (Ex. 36: 34-38; 1 Kin. 7: 48-50). Gold, in the bible, often refers to things that were placed in the tabernacle or temple, precious spoils of war or tributes to be paid to an empire. Therefore, it gives us the idea of something extremely precious, something more directly separated for God or very important for a nation, like a ransom, for example. It is also a symbol of God’s glory.

Some places in Ancient times were known for the abundance of gold they contained: Parvaim (2 Chr. 3: 6), Ophir (Job 22: 24; Job 28: 16; 1 Chr. 29: 4), Sheba (2 Chr. 9: 1; 9; Ezek. 27: 22) and Raamah (Ezek. 27: 22), these last three places located in southwest of Saudi Arabia. As for the term ‘Ophir’, other scholars prefer to read uphaz (Uphaz) instead of üphîr or ‘Owphiyr (Ophir – Strong #211), because of the similarity of the Hebrew characters for z and r. Instead of a locality, Uphaz or Ophir may have been a technical term in the sense of ‘refined gold’ [1 Kin. 10: 18: müphāz; Isa. 13: 12: mippāz, similar to the definition of ‘pure gold’ (2 Chr. 9: 17: zāhābh tāhôr; zāhābh – Strong #2091; tāhôr – Strong #2889)]. Ophir was the son of Joktan, the son of Eber, a descendant of Shem, son of Noah (1 Chr. 1: 19-23; Gen. 10: 25-29). As for Parvaim, it is an unidentified locality.

The prophecy of Isaiah does not mention only gold as a gift to be brought to Jerusalem; it also mentions silver. Silver (Hebrew, Keseph – Strong # 3701) is the second of noble metals, after gold. The refining process can mean obedience to God. It was the most available metal in Palestine, as well as in Assyria and Babylon and was the most frequently used. Keseph is the Hebrew word for ‘silver’ (Isa. 60: 9) and for ‘money’ (Gen. 17: 13). Silver is a symbol of redemption and obedience to God, leading to sanctification.

Isaiah (Isa. 60: 6) also mentions frankincense: “A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.”

The incense that Isaiah speaks of here is the ‘olibanum’, also known as frankincense, an aromatic resin widely used in perfumery and manufacturing of incense. It is obtained from African and Asian trees (Arabia and India), genus *Boswellia*. Although it was re-introduced in Europe by the Franks its name ‘frankincense’ is derived from the old French ‘franc encens’, which means ‘high quality incense’. On the other hand, ‘olibanum’ is derived from the Arab: al-lubán (‘the milk’), with reference to the milky juice that drips after the incision in the bark of frankincense tree. In Hebrew, the word used is bownah or u·lbne [לבונה = frankincense or olibanum, according to the Concordant Version of the Old Testament (CVOT)] or lbonah, that, in turn, is derived from laban or laben, as Laban (in Gen. 49: 12), which means white (לבנה). Thus, it became known as olibanum for its whiteness or because of its white smoke that comes from the combustion of the resin. The sap of the tree dries up and gives rise to the resin. Although the resin is yellow and has bitter and spicy taste, it is quite fragrant. Among the four tree species of the genus *Boswellia*, from the Burseraceae Family, from which the sap and resin of the incense are extracted, the species ‘sacra’ (*Boswellia sacra*) is the most commonly used. The others are: *B. frereana*, *B. serrata* (in India) and *B.*

papyrifera. Each species produces a slightly different type of resin, mainly because of differences in soil and climate. The trees of the species *Boswellia sacra* are most commonly used for their ability to grow even in seemingly unsuitable environments, such as solid rock. Trees begin to produce resin when they are eight to ten years old. Generally the most opaque resins are of better quality. A very thin resin is produced in Somalia. Due to the overexploitation of these trees by modern civilization, they are in the process of decline; besides burning, deforestation for pasture and agriculture, and beetle attacks. The best trees produce seeds that germinate only 16% when cultivated. The remaining seeds of uncultivated trees germinate in more than 80%. Incense has been marketed in the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa and Somalia for more than 5000 years.



Flowers and branches of the *Boswellia sacra* tree



Frankincense of Yemen

In Ex. 30: 7-8, the Lord commanded Aaron to burn the incense in the morning and in the evening, as well as on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16: 12-13). Incense is mentioned in some passages of the OT in relation to the priesthood (provoking the wrath of God when it was offered to other gods): Ex. 30: 1; 6-9; Ex. 30: 34-38; 2 Chr. 29: 11; Isa. 65: 3; Jer. 44: 8. There are also some references to incense as the symbol of the prayer of the children of God (Ps. 141: 2; Rev. 5: 8; Rev. 8: 3-4), as well as a manifestation of the intercession of Christ for us. In Lk. 1: 8-11 (the birth of John the Baptist is announced to the priest Zechariah), the incense is mentioned in relation to the worship in the temple. During the first four centuries of the Christian church there is no evidence of the use of incense in Christian worship.

Thus, by examining the text of Isaiah 60: 6, people from afar would come to worship the Lord in the temple and pray to Him in that place: people from Arabia, Africa, and the European continent. And He would be favorable to them.

• Isa. 60: 10-12: “Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you [NIV: Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you]; for in my wrath I struck you down, but in my favor I have had mercy on you [*Jerusalem*]. Your gates shall always be open; day and night they shall not be shut, so that nations shall bring you their wealth, with their kings led in procession. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste.”

These verses may refer to Cyrus and his successors (Darius I, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, Darius II) who helped the Jews in the building of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, and provided what was necessary for the work: Ezr. 1: 1-11; Ezr. 3: 7 – help of the Sidonians and Tyrians; Ezr. 5: 13-16; Ezr. 6: 3-5; Ezr. 6: 6-12; Ezr. 7: 12-22; Ezr. 7: 26-28; Ezr. 8: 36; Neh. 2: 5-9; Neh. 7: 70-73; Neh. 13: 8-9. Many foreigners, however, tried to hinder the work of building the temple and the city of Jerusalem in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (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), but God used even Gentile kings to thwart their plans, proclaiming laws that ordered the destruction of the rebels to the royal decree (as the decree of Darius I – Ezr. 6: 1-15; and Artaxerxes – Ezr. 7: 1-6; 11-16; 21; 24-28). Indeed, many powerful men of various nations had reverence and even fear of the God of Israel after the deliverance of His people from Babylon and of what He had already accomplished through the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and the city walls, even with the interference of some governors as Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (Neh. 2: 10; 19). Therefore, fear was also one of the factors that contributed to gentile kings and subjects submitting and even converting to the God of Israel (Zech. 14: 16-19). These verses also cover the foreign kings who contributed to Jerusalem in the time of Christ and the pagans converted to His gospel.

Sanballat – this name is of Babylonian origin, Sin-uballit, that is, ‘Sin (the moon-god) gave life.’ In Neh. 2: 10; 19 and Neh. 13: 28 he is called the Horonite, which probably denotes that he had come from Beth-horon [or Beth Horon], about twenty-nine kilometers north-west of Jerusalem, in the land of Ephraim (cf. Josh. 10: 10-11). He was one of Nehemiah’s main opponents. Some scrolls found says that Sanballat was governor of Samaria in 407 BC, which makes us think that around 445 or 443 BC when Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, he aspired to this post of government, not only over Samaria but also over Judea. It is impossible to say if he was a descendant of an Israelite family who had not been taken into captivity in Assyria by Sargon II in 722 BC or if he was a descendant from one of the peoples whom the Assyrian kings brought into Palestine to repopulate the land that was without its population. His religion was probably mixed (2 Kin. 17: 33), though he placed YHWH first, and thus

had won the sympathy even of the high priest Eliashib, whose daughter he finally married (Neh. 13: 28). Tobiah, also mentioned in Neh. 13: 4, probably married another daughter of Eliashib.

- Isa. 60: 13-14: “The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the plane, and the pine [NIV: the pine, the fir and the cypress together; KJV: the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box], to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will glorify where my feet rest. The descendants of those who oppressed you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”

Isaiah uses these three trees again (cf. Isa. 41: 19) to describe the blessings of God on His people and His city. Compared with the original Hebrew, the better translation would be: ‘the fir tree, the pine tree, and the boxwood.’ The fir tree, the pine tree and cypress 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.



Cypress (Genus Pinus)



Italian Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens* L.)



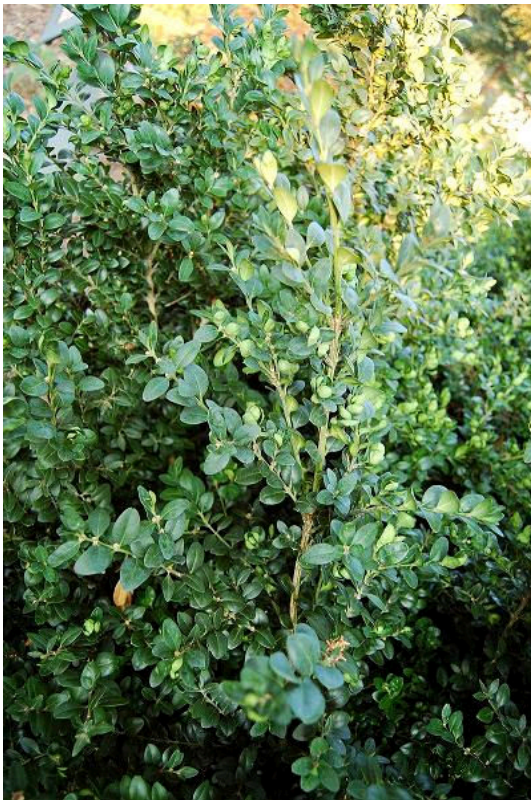
Italian Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens* L.)



Pine Trees



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



Box tree (*Buxus sempervirens*) / Box tree (*Buxus sempervirens* – fruit)

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 (it includes Israel), from southern England to the north of Morocco, and east through the northern Mediterranean region to Turkey.



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

Although not described openly here, the cedar of Lebanon is a symbol of this nation and the fertility of its land. The cedar of Lebanon is a majestic conifer of durable wood, which can reach forty meters high and 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), haughtiness, hardness, inflexibility (Ps. 29: 5). Therefore, all the qualities above, present in the kings and nobles of other lands, would come to Jerusalem to worship the Lord in His temple. The offspring of all those who scorned Jerusalem for its destruction will also be called by God to come and acknowledge that God is able to rebuild and restore that which has been destroyed, especially to benefit His people.



Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*)

If we interpret this from the spiritual point of view, considering Zion as the symbol of the Church of Christ, then the Jews and Romans, among other peoples who persecuted the Early Church and the first Christian churches erected in the nations around Israel, will come to recognize the lordship of Jesus over all peoples, and His position as head of His church on earth, the only King and God. Perhaps we can make a comparison with what is promised to the church of Philadelphia in Rev. 3: 9: “I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying – I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.”

- Isa. 60: 15: “Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic forever, a joy from age to age.”

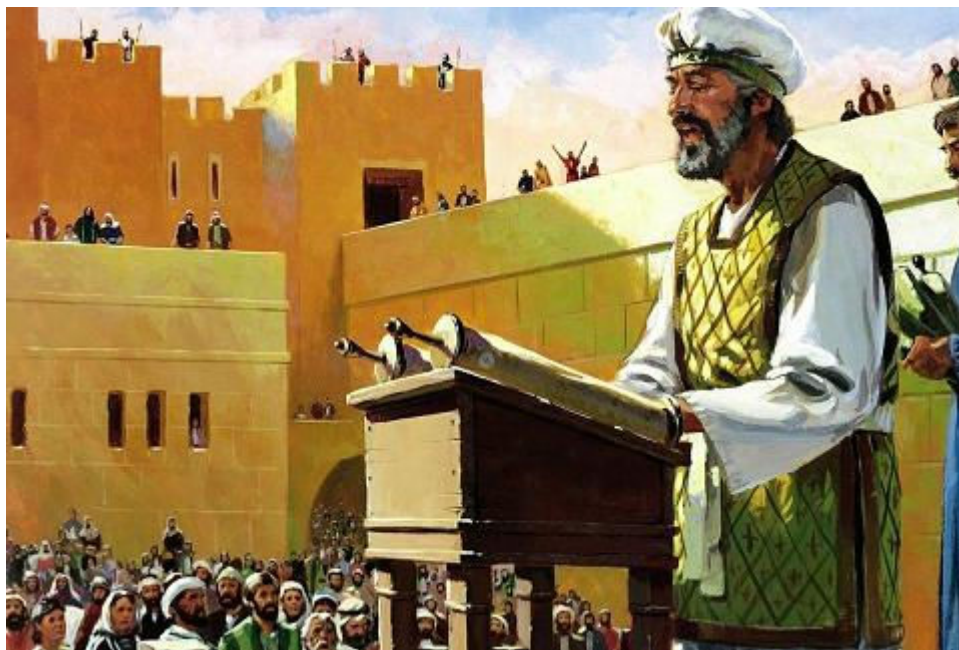
This is understandable when one thinks of the city of Jerusalem after the destruction of the Babylonians and of what Jeremiah wrote in Lam. 1: 4, for example: “The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to the festivals; all her gates are desolate, her priests groan; her young girls grieve, and her lot is bitter [NIV: and she is in bitter anguish].”

The city was burned and desolate, with the few inhabitants left in Judah by Nebuchadnezzar to cultivate the land. Because there were no conditions to live there, there would be no conditions for commerce as well, and therefore no caravans would pass through Jerusalem. It seemed that God had forsaken them, but He was only performing His discipline and punishment upon them for their sins, until they were ready again to re-establish the covenant of faithfulness with Him. Since God doesn't stay angry forever, the restoration would come also to Jerusalem and its inhabitants, reversing their picture of desolation and the mockery by their enemies. Jerusalem would

be inhabited once again, and remembered from generation to generation as the holy city. This remains to this day, despite all the difficulties Jerusalem has gone through, and because of all peoples (therefore, their religions) who divide the space among them within it.

- Isa. 60: 16: “You shall suck the milk of nations, you shall suck the breasts of kings; and you shall know that I, the Lord, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob [KJV: Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles [Gowdy – Strong 1471, meaning: gentiles, nations, peoples, heathen], and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob].”

We have mentioned in previous prophecies that the coming of the Messiah would be a new time for Israel, as a new creation of God, as if He were forming a new earth again, without the stains of the idolatry of His people, and of so many other sins that brought them destruction. In this way, we can compare the rebuilt Jerusalem after the return of the exiles and, especially after the coming of Jesus, with a newborn city, in need of milk, instead of solid food, in order to grow under other standards. However, before we talk about the spiritual things, let us reason in a material way. We may ask: “How could the Gentiles supply this ‘milk’ to Jerusalem?”



Ezra

They had nothing to offer spiritually, for they were heathen, but based on the next verse of Isaiah, we can see here a correlation with Cyrus and the Persian rulers who followed, supplying the exiles, the cities of Judah and Jerusalem, with goods, livestock, and voluntary gifts not only for rebuilding the temple (Ezra 1: 6-11) but also with basic things to rebuild their homes and lives. It was commented that in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah the Persian kings who followed Cyrus supplied the Jews in all that they asked to erect the temple, since Cyrus to Darius I, and the city walls in the time of Artaxerxes I. If we think of the emotional conditions of those who have returned from captivity, we may assume that they were unmotivated, demoralized, and afraid, so God raised up His prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage them (Ezr. 5: 1-2; Ezr. 3: 3;

Neh. 2: 17-18; Zech. 1: 1-3; Hag. 1: 1-4; 8; 12-15; Hag. 2: 6-9). With the power of the Spirit they were able to rebuild the altar, the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The faith of Ezra and Nehemiah was a great point of support for them, just as the riches ('milk') of Persia gave the material strength for them to rise.

Now, if we think of the spiritual side of all this and carry this verse to the times of the gospel, the Gentiles only contributed to the Jews (in relation to this verse in Isa. 60: 16) with their enthusiasm to accept the new doctrine of Jesus, preached by His apostles in Jerusalem. So, we can say that both the Jews there and the Gentiles newly convert fed on the spiritual milk of the word of God in order to assimilate the new faith:

- 1 Cor. 3: 2-3a: "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh."

- 1 Pet. 2: 2-3: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk (in Greek: gala – Strong g#1051), so that by it you may grow into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."

- Heb. 5: 12-14 (For the Hebrew Christians): "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil."

It is interesting to notice that the Christian church described in Acts 2: 42-47; Acts 4: 32-37; Acts 5: 1-11; Acts 6: 1-7, distributing its possessions among the needy and breaking the bread from house to house, gradually became impoverished, largely due to the persecution suffered by the disciples by civil rulers and even by traditional Jews. The new believers sold what they had and fled, losing their property and possessions. The church at Jerusalem, in particular, suffered greatly from the shortage of supplies; therefore, Paul sent financial help to the brethren by collecting money among the Greeks (Macedonia, Achaia, and Philippi, for example – Rom. 15: 26-27; 1 Cor. 16: 1-4; 2 Cor. 8: 1-4; 2 Cor. 9: 1-5; Acts 11: 27-30). But we can also notice, reading the bible, that the Gentiles who began to contribute to the Christian church were not the rich Gentiles who suddenly decided to contribute to the new doctrine of Jesus, but they were the Gentiles, not so rich, who converted to Christianity and began to offer for the strengthening and maintenance of the church.

The bible says that Barnabas and Paul spent one year in Antioch of Syria establishing and strengthening the Christian church, and there, for the first time, the disciples came to be called Christians – Acts 11: 26. In those days (Acts 11: 27-30) the prophet Agabus predicted a period of famine not only in Judea, but in most of the nations, which happened in the days of the reign of Emperor Claudius. Therefore the disciples sent financial help to the brothers in Jerusalem through Paul and Barnabas (Acts 11: 30).

Other passages that confirm the help of the Gentiles to the church:

- The text of 2 Cor. 8: 1-15 speaks of the offerings of the churches of Macedonia to the poor of Judea. Even though they had few financial conditions (2 Cor. 8: 2), they offered to their brethren with great generosity (cf. Rom. 15: 25-26). It seems to be a situation different from that reported in Acts 11: 27-30, about the period of starvation in the time of Claudius.

- The centurion Cornelius also seems to have been a Gentile who contributed to the newborn church (Acts 10: 4; 31), and he himself came to be a Christian.

- Paul also mentions the Philippians, who sustained him when he was in prison (Phil. 1: 5-7; Phil. 4: 15-16).

- Paul adopted the practice of financial assistance to the church in Jerusalem, teaching his co-workers and disciples to do the same (Acts 24: 17). And this practice was seen by him as a sign of union between the converted Jews and the gentile part of the church of Christ: Rom. 15: 25-27; 1 Cor. 16: 1-4; 2 Cor. 9: 1-15; Gal. 2: 10.

This is what is written in the bible. Apocryphal books are of little use to confirm the participation of wealthy Gentiles who offered without becoming members of the Christian church.

- Isa. 60: 17: “Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your taskmaster [NIV: I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler].”

This is a figurative way of referring to the furniture and utensils of the temple that were stolen by the Babylonians, and now, after the captivity, they would be returned to the House of God. He was raising righteous and peaceful rulers like Zerubbabel and Nehemiah to rule over His people, as well as priests (Ezra and Joshua, for example) to begin again to teach the word of God to those who returned from exile.

‘Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron’ may also be a figurative language referring to the replacement of material things by the spiritual ones, or the change of dispensation from OT to NT.

In this verse, metals and materials of nature are quoted on an increasing scale of values, comparing them with each other (bronze, of less value, for gold, of greater value; iron, of lesser value, for silver, of greater value; etc.).

We might say that for bronze, symbol of God’s judgment and judgment on sin, the Lord would bring gold, symbol of His glory and of things precious to Him, as repentant hearts and a clean soul. For iron, symbol of the strength of the flesh to carry out its sanctification, trying to obey the law, the Lord would bring obedience to Him, leading to sanctification and redemption (silver) in the strength of His Spirit (Zech. 4: 6). For wood, symbol of carnal nature trying to rule man, He would bring the bronze, now symbolizing the repentance of man and his sacrifice of total surrender on the altar of the Lord to be changed according to the holy will of God. And in the place of stone, symbolizing the rustic way of building the inner temple and the material things of a man’s life, God would bring the strength (iron) and authority of His Spirit so that whatever was built that was valuable would no longer perish or be lost.

- Isa. 60: 18: “Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.”

In the first place it is a promise of peace and security after the period of destruction by the Babylonians; a promise of rest and material tranquility so that they would come back to believe in God and be spiritually prepared for the coming of the Messiah. Now they will look at the reconstructed walls and remember the salvation that God has given them, and will feel safe from the enemies; they will look to the gates of the city and will sing of joy for the protection of the city of David, just as in the past the gates were places of thanksgiving (Ps. 9: 14; Ps. 24: 7; Ps. 100: 4). The name ‘Judah’ (Yehüdâ, in Hebrew) means ‘praised, celebrated, commemorated in praise (ydh) to the Lord’ [Gn 29: 35b: ““This time I will praise the Lord”; therefore she (*Leah*) named him Judah; then she ceased bearing”].

But there is also a spiritual message in all of this for us. When the Lord enters our lives and sets us free from the bondage of Satan, His Spirit helps us to build the broken walls of our soul, the gaps of sin and ignorance where the enemy has come in and destroyed. Now, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can have the chance to rebuild our walls through the blood of Jesus by forgiving and justifying us, and removing all charges against us; therefore, closing our spiritual gaps. Then we begin to understand that we have a protector, a Savior, and that no violence from the darkness will strike us again, nor will there be desolate or abandoned areas in our lives. Our needs will be filled by the love of the Lord. We look at the walls of our soul and we can call it Salvation, that is, Yeshua (ישוע), the Hebrew name of Jesus. The word 'salvation' (in Hebrew, ישועה) 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`ah (the meaning of the name 'Jesus' – Matt. 1: 21; Lk. 1: 31). The Hebrew word yeshu`ah (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`ah) 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`ah) 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`ah), 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. The word yshuw`ah (or yeshu`ah) means: 'something saved' that is, 'deliverance'; therefore, aid, victory, prosperity, deliverance, health, help, to save, to protect, to guard, to preserve (health), welfare. The word yshuw`ah is linked to the word yasha`, which is a primitive root whose meaning is: to be open, wide (spacious) or free, and consequently, to be safe, free; or succor (or come to the aid of), to avenge, to defend, to deliver or deliverer, to help, to preserve, to rescue, to bring or to have salvation, to save (or savior), to get victory. Yshuw`ah (or yeshu`ah) is word derived from Yhowshuwa` (Strong #3091; Jehoshua; Joshua, יהושע; Joshua means YHWH saved, transliterated into Greek as Iēsoûs (Ἰησοῦς), Jesus (Strong # g2424) – Matt. 1: 21; Lk. 1: 31.

We call our walls Salvation, for Jesus is our shield; and the doors of our soul are called praise, for while we praise the Lord, He makes war for us; or then, by knowing how to exercise properly the spiritual authority we receive from Him, we overcome the trials and can praise His name for the achievements He has given us. Generally, gates are symbols of power and authority against the advance of the enemy; they are also symbol of divine protection ("For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat" – Ps. 147: 13-14), as well as new opportunities given by Him for us to know more about what is reserved for us, for example, His kingdom (Matt. 25: 34: "Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'"; Ps. 24: 9: "Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in"); or else to let enter the blessings He poured out upon our lives: Isa. 26: 2-3: "Open the gates, so that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in."

- Isa. 60: 19-20: “The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself [NIV: Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more]; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.”

For the Jews of that time this prophecy was the announcement of the coming of the Messiah, with a spiritual light greater than the sun or the moon and a constant brightness, and bringing the dignity and honor of His presence to His people in a physical way, and so perceptible and glorious as He appeared in Sinai to their ancestors. The presence of the Lord would bring the hope of salvation and eternal life; therefore, there was no need for mourning.

These verses are also a prophecy about the spiritual New Jerusalem; just to compare with Rev. 21: 23; Rev. 22: 5, when Jesus will fill all the things and the soul of all His children with His presence.

- Isa. 60: 21-22: “Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever. They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified. The least of them shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the Lord; in its time I will accomplish it quickly [The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the Lord; in its time I will do this swiftly].”

When Isaiah speaks here about all Jews being righteous, it means their conversion to Christ and therefore be justified by His blood. Following the truth of the Lord and walking in it, their descendants will possess the earth, that is, they will spread the new doctrine everywhere, beginning with the land of Israel, gaining lives for Him, and they too will inherit the kingdom of God. To these converts, the Lord calls them shoots planted by Him, by the seed of His word that was preached and by His ultimate sacrifice on the cross. And this calling did not come by the hands of men, but by the Holy Spirit, so He says it was ‘the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified’ (Isa. 60: 21 cf. Isa. 29: 23; Isa. 49: 3). No one would boast over this feat, for these shoots would be the firstfruits of Jesus’ work on earth. We may think that these first shoots were the apostles, and after them, all who believed in Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria through their preaching. And the Lord Himself added lives to His new church (Acts 1: 8; Acts 2: 41; 47b; Acts 5: 12-16; Acts 8: 4-6; 12; Acts 8: 14-17; Acts 9: 31; Acts 10: 1-2; 22; 33; 44-48; Acts 11: 19-21; Acts 12: 24; Acts 13: 47-49).

Chapter 61

The good news of salvation – v. 1-3.

- Isa. 61: 1-3: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed [NIV: the poor], to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners [Septuagint, ‘the blind’]; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland [NIV: a crown of beauty] instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit [NIV: a spirit of despair]. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.”

Prophet Isaiah speaks in the name of Jesus, the only one who has received this empowerment from the Father.

When we talked about the characteristics of the Messiah, some of them were more important, and ordinary people personified here on earth the true Messiah to come. The characteristics were: the suffering Servant (sometimes represented by the prophet himself in his arduous mission in the midst of that unbelieving people) and the anointed conqueror (prefigured in Cyrus or David), that is, a king who will come to rule over Jews and Gentiles, executing God’s vengeance on His enemies, clothing Himself with the armor of salvation (Isa. 59: 16-21) and defeating them completely, redeeming His people. In chapter 63: 1-6 this messianic conqueror is a man among men, showing equally the qualities of the king and the Servant, with the same spiritual gifts of them. He also shows himself as the conqueror of Edom, a task that was accomplished only through David: Num. 24: 17-19 (the ‘star of Jacob’ refers to David); 1 Chr. 18: 11-12; 2 Sam. 8: 13-14; Ps. 60 (When he fought against the Arameans of Mesopotamia – 1 Chr. 18: 3 – and the Arameans of Zobah, and when Joab returned and defeated twelve thousand Edomites in the valley of Salt) cf. Ps. 108: 6-13. As we have seen in other chapters of Isaiah, the anointed conqueror can be prefigured in Cyrus or in David.

Here in Isa. 61: 1-3 we can see another characteristic of the Messiah, who is someone endowed with the Spirit and the Word. Jesus took on this prophecy, as it is written in Lk. 4: 18-19: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then, Jesus, the Messiah would come with the assistance of the Spirit of the Lord, i.e., anointed by the Spirit of God whom He calls ‘Lord’, cf. Ps. 110 and Matt. 22: 44: “The Lord said to my Lord (in Psalm 110, this word is written in lowercase, although with the same meaning): ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.’” His mission would be to preach good news to the poor in spirit, who would need to strengthen themselves with the word of God, that is, the gospel, whose meaning is ‘good news’ or ‘good message’ (euaggelion, Greek, ευαγγελιον). This mission also involved to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn and to put on those who mourn in Zion a crown instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; so that they may be called oaks of righteousness, planted by the Lord for his glory.

‘The brokenhearted’ – refers to those who are aware of their sin and feel touched by it, that is, those who are under a spirit of repentance and need God’s forgiveness to heal their inner wounds.

‘To proclaim liberty to the captives’ – those who are bound in the lies of Satan because of sin and who need to know the truth to attain deliverance (Jn. 8: 31-36). The good news brought by the Messiah was that the bondage in sin ended because Jesus had come.

‘To proclaim release to the prisoners [NIV: release from darkness for the prisoners; Septuagint, ‘the blind’]’ – which includes the liberation not only of the captivity of sin but the opening of the understanding (‘recovery of sight for the blind’ – Lk. 4: 18) of those who did not know which way to go, for the enemy blinded them with their darkness of lies, stealing from them the hope of salvation and preventing them from positioning themselves on earth in relation to the decisions to be made in their own lives. The lack of understanding in a particular subject or the lack of revelation from God where we need it is a kind of captivity, and we need to be delivered from it. In the same way that Hosea wrote: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4: 6a), Isaiah repeats the same thought in other words: “Therefore my people go into exile without knowledge [NIV: for the lack of understanding]” (Isa. 5: 13a). Hence, it is written in Prov. 11: 9: “With their mouths the godless would destroy their neighbors, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.” This concerns the knowledge we have of His will for us through His word, which gives us the spiritual discernment to follow by one side or the other, escaping unharmed from the sophistries of the enemy. It is also concerns the knowledge of ourselves, of how much we have already been worked by the Lord in a certain area of our lives, so that we may be freed from false accusations and affronts. Knowing what God has for us, being aware of what He is doing for us, there is nothing that can deceive us. Jesus came to bring this clarity, because His Spirit within us illuminates our actions and our thoughts.

‘To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor’ or ‘the acceptable year of the LORD’ – meaning that Jesus would come to announce to them a new dispensation, a time (‘the year’) when God would show favor with man, desiring to pour out His goodness to all those who wanted salvation (2 Cor. 6: 2) and true deliverance. They would cease to be the property of Satan and would again be the property of the Lord, of their Maker. Perhaps a parallel can be drawn between this phrase and the year of the jubilee in Israel, which occurred every fifty years, when the captives were freed and the lands returned to the power of their former possessor (Lev. 25: 8-13; 28; 32).

‘The day of vengeance of our God’ – the day that God chose to make the final judgment over evil, defeating the enemies of His people once and for all, at His second coming (2 The. 1: 7-9; Rev. 20: 10; 14-15).

‘To comfort all who mourn’ – Jesus came to bring comfort to those who weep for their separation from God because of sin, for the injustices of the world and for their suffering due to the natural difficulties of life. And His consolation is something palpable and present, not just a promise of consolation in the distant future (in the spiritual New Jerusalem – Matt. 5: 4), as Jesus brought comfort to Martha and Mary by the death of Lazarus, resurrecting him from the dead; brought consolation to Jairus for the death of his little daughter, resurrecting her; to the widow of Nain, for the death of her only son, resurrecting him; brought consolation to the sinful woman who anointed His feet, forgiving her; to the Syrophenician woman who was desperate because of her demon-possessed daughter, freeing the girl from the demon that tormented her; and so many other cases. Likewise, He brings comfort to us when we no longer endure the distress and external oppression, when we are in urgent need of financial help, or when

we are sick and need help. He often uses human bodies as an instrument of His comfort. Consolation is not always a word that quiets the fears. Sometimes consolation needs to be something palpable, natural, physical, that comes to quiet the afflicted soul. The resurrections of the dead performed by Jesus and mentioned above are an example of this.

‘To provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland [NIV: a crown of beauty] instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit [NIV: a spirit of despair]. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory’ – this promise cannot only be used as a consolation to the exiles who were still weeping for the destruction of their city or who still waited the coming of the Messiah to be saved and to know the truth of God; this is a promise to the people of the past and to the church of today, the spiritual Zion of God, who mourns and grieves for some kind of loss: loss of faith, hope, anointing, loss of deep communion with God, loss of the freedom to preach His word freely, for it was hindered by the enemy. The Lord promises to remove the ashes of mourning and put on the head of His warriors a crown of joy, because there is always an escape, there is always a solution, there is always a deliverance. He will exchange the mourning for the oil of gladness, for His kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14: 17). Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22).

He is going to give a mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit [NIV: a spirit of despair] – this means that the anguish can be removed when we put our faith into action, cry out to God and see His answer in a cause that seemed impossible, and this leads us to thank Him, for we received solution to our problem. That is why the apostle Peter said, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5: 6-7).

In Phil. 4: 6-7, Paul wrote: “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Our God is a God of justice, a God of the present, of today, who provides what we need for every day of our lives, in all areas of it. What we need to develop, in order to see our blessing materialized, is precisely the faith; faith combined with perseverance, because the kingdom of heaven is taken by force, and the forceful men lay hold of it (Matt. 11: 12). Often, having faith in something that we have never have or seen before is a great effort, but the bible also says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11: 6: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him”).

In short, God has not changed. He did not change His written laws in the OT just because Jesus came. Jesus came and fulfilled the law, but He did not abolish it. In Him the prophecies about the redemption of Israel through the Messiah were fulfilled. He opened to us the spiritual reality, that is, it gave us an awareness of the need for salvation of our soul and made us understand who our true enemy is. But He did not cease to act on earth, in matter. The word of God is still alive. Jesus is God, and therefore is capable of performing all kinds of miracles in all areas of our lives. If you have difficulty to understand this, just believe. Nothing will get ‘postponed to the New Jerusalem.’ The righteousness that we often would like to see on earth will be done, yes, by Him. There in the New Jerusalem the fulfillment of the whole Word of God will be complete, but His righteousness, His miracles, His reward for us is done here on earth too. In other words: here we conquer the pearls. There, we will receive the crown,

complete and adorned with the pearls that we have conquered here, in life. That is why we pass through the tests of enhancement.

‘They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory’ – the Lord shows the reason for the transformation mentioned above: He crowns the mourners, anoints them with oil of gladness and puts on them a mantle of praise for them to be called ‘oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.’ The oak is a tree of the genus *Quercus*, which has twenty-four species in Palestine; so it is difficult to determine which species belong to Hebrew words like ‘allâ, ’allôn (or ’allown) and ’elâ. The latter seems to be the most used in the bible (’elâ). The Hebrew term ’asherâ was translated (according to the Septuagint, ‘alsos’) as ‘wood’, ‘grove’ or an idolatrous ‘high place’ (Ex. 34: 13; Deut. 16: 21; 2 Kin.17: 16), thinking that it was about oak woods. But current researchers say the reference here is not to a tree, but to an image or Asherah pole, the pagan goddess of fertility and love.

The oak was the favorite tree under whose shade the Israelites sat (1 Kin. 13: 14) or buried their dead (Gen. 35: 8; 1 Chr. 10: 12). Its wood, though hard, was not employed in construction. It was used in the making of oars (Ezek. 27: 6) and graven images (Isa. 44: 14-15). Bashan was a region full of oaks (Isa. 2: 13; Ezek. 27: 6; Zech. 11: 2). ‘The Amorite was as strong as oaks’ (Am. 2: 9). Some species are perennially green, but most change leaves annually (Isa. 6: 13). It is a vigorous, hardwood tree that lives many centuries. Therefore, it symbolizes power, strength, longevity, stability and determination; and this is what the Lord expects of those whom He redeems and blesses: that they be steadfast in the practice of righteousness; remain rooted in the kingdom of God to show His presence before the wicked and irreverent and before the unstable, who for whatever reason return to sin because they don’t want to pay the price of holiness and the realization of their dreams.

The future blessing of Israel – v. 4-9.

- Isa. 61: 4-9: “They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines [NIV: foreigners will work your fields and vineyards]; but you shall be called priests of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory. Because their shame was double, and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot, therefore they shall possess a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs [NIV: Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs]. For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense [NIV: In my faithfulness I will reward them], and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.”

Here, the promises are made to the Jews returned from captivity and that reestablished in their own land again, but we will see later that, most likely, this prophecy extended to the times of the gospel, when the new dispensation became spiritual. Perhaps it can be applied to the believers of our generation.

It is promised that their houses will be rebuilt, their cities will be lifted from the ruins they have long been in, and they will rebuild their homes and their lands again. They came from exile and rebuilt.

‘Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines [NIV: foreigners will work your fields and vineyards]’ – this happened, in part, when they returned from captivity and had help from some peoples by order of Cyrus (Ezr. 1: 4; 6) and probably from the inhabitants of Mesopotamia and Assyria who had been sent to Palestine to collaborate with the Jews, or peoples of other lands who settled in Israel after their exile, and now would willingly assist the Jews with their flocks and their vineyards. Certainly, the Jews, felt privileged after their return, for they now knew how to value freedom and their property, and valued their belief in the living God, no longer in idols. Although they had rebuilt their houses and the temple, these constructions were quite inferior to those that they had before being captive, nevertheless, it was reason of jubilation for those who lost everything. They had again their portion of land, the land of Israel, and they were no more strangers in it as they were in Babylon.

Isaiah’s promise to them was a state of enduring joy, much more enduring than the captivity in Babylon. However, this joy did not last as long as it was thought (at least in the material field) because they had peace during the rule of the Persian Empire, but soon after, with the Greek rule of Alexander the Great and his generals, Israel changed hands several times: first, under Ptolemaic rule (the Egyptians), then under Seleucid rule (the Syrians), Maccabean revolt in a transition to the Hasmonean period and that in no way brought joy or peace to the nation; only wars, revolutions, deaths and more destruction and internal divisions in the civil and religious ambit until the Roman dominion and the birth of Christ. Therefore, I said before that this prophecy was more directed to believers, more specifically, to the spiritual part of the church, because the material part, physical, of the new converts was also very ravaged, persecuted, and their joy, short-lived. What has lasted to this day is the hope that salvation will be completed at the second coming of Christ, as well as the full realization of His righteousness. I am not saying that the prophet or that God were lying; only that this part of the prophecy of Isaiah comes to have a quite different nature from the initial prophecies, already showing that from the return of the Jews from exile God was and would be dealing with humanity in other terms.

‘But you shall be called priests of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory’ – when God delivered Israel from Egypt, He separated them to Him (“You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine” – Lev. 20: 26) and called them a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19: 6: “but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites”), meaning in a broad sense that through them His laws would be known among the nations, and they would bring other peoples to God, as a priest makes the connection between God and the people, and between the people and God. For believers in the NT, this law continues to be valid, taking into account that the Church of Christ is the spiritual Israel of God: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2: 9).

This means that after the exile, the position of the Jews as mediators between God and the Gentiles would return to be as planned in the beginning by Him.

‘Because their shame was double, and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot, therefore they shall possess a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs [NIV: Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs]’ – in the place of the shame they had lived in

captivity (and even before, because of God's judgments against the idolatry of His people), they would have double honor, as well as the rejoicing of owning the land of Canaan again. Here comes back the commentary above on the 'everlasting joy', which became something spiritual for those who understood the plan of God through Jesus. In spite of external circumstances, believers would know the meaning of the joy of salvation and the eternal companionship of the Holy Spirit. What had been stolen from them would be restored twice as much ("a double portion") by the Lord, the same word (in English) used in Isa. 40: 2: "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."

In Isa. 40: 2 the word 'double' in Hebrew is: *kephel* (Strong #3718), which means: a duplicate, double.

In Isa. 61: 7 the Hebrew word is: *mishneh* (Strong #4932), which means, a repetition, i.e. a duplicate (copy of a document), or a double (in amount); by implication, a secondary position, copy, double, next, second (order), twice, twice as much.

Although it is about the same thing, we may even try to explain the difference of words in the following way: in Isa. 40: 2, double (or a duplicate) would be God's amount of punishment in doubled measure to the amount of their sins.

And in Isa. 61: 7, double would correspond to a repetition, a copy of what they had with God at the beginning, before they began to sin and worship images (as the tablets of the Law were written a second time to remake the covenant). It would be a covenant that was being redone between them and God; or then, a double portion (like Elisha's anointing in relation to Elijah) as a way to compensate for a loss, a need, or a desire for something that was achieved with much dedication and effort.

In the law of Moses it is written:

Ex. 22: 1; 4; 9: "When someone steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, the thief shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. The thief shall make restitution, but if unable to do so, shall be sold for the theft... When the animal, whether ox or donkey or sheep, is found alive in the thief's possession, the thief shall pay double... In any case of disputed ownership involving ox, donkey, sheep, clothing, or any other loss, of which one party says, 'This is mine', the case of both parties shall come before God; the one whom God condemns shall pay double to the other."

Thus, this would be a double reward for them for all the theft and shame they suffered at the hands of the Babylonians, as a cause in justice, where it's paid the indemnity for the moral damages suffered by the victim, that is, the litigant who first entered the legal request. The double wealth they would receive would be not only the position of children of God, but the blessing of the firstborn ("Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son'" – Ex. 4: 22), who received the double portion of the father's inheritance, in relation to the other children (Deut. 21: 17).

'For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations (*in KJV: Gentiles; in Hebrew, gowy, – Strong 1471, i.e., Gentiles, nations, peoples*), and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed' – they would be recognized by the Gentiles as the chosen people of God.

Zion thanks God for His return – v. 10-11.

• Isa. 61: 10-11: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels [NIV: I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels]. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.”

Isaiah speaks here in the name of the Jewish church of that age post-exile, blessed by the Lord and conscious of salvation and separation for Him; for us, is the church of Christ, covered by His blood (salvation) and justified from her sin (robe of righteousness), just as the bridegroom (Jesus) adorns his head and the bride (the church) adorns herself with her jewels. Just as the privilege of priesthood is restored to the church, at the same time the prophet compares the joy of the Lord’s return to Zion with a wedding feast, where He is the high priest (‘as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland’ or ‘as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest’), and the Jewish church is the bride.

The verb ‘to deck’ (KJV; NRSV; ‘to adorn’, in NIV), in relation to the bridegroom, in Hebrew is kahan (Strong #3547), which means to mediate in religious services; to officiate as a priest; figuratively, to put on regalia: deck, decorate, be a priest, do the office of a priest, perform the office of a priest, minister in the priest’s office. Thus the priestly turban speaks in favor of the priesthood position of the church of Christ, taking His living word to the four corners of the earth, as it is also seen in the next verse: “For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.” This is spoken in relation to messianic times. Those who are saved (redeemed by His righteousness) will praise His name.

Chapter 62

Zion's new name – v. 1-12.

• Isa. 62: 1-5: “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch [NIV: For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will nor remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch]. The nations shall see your vindication [NIV: righteousness], and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty [KJV: a crown of glory] in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married [NIV: No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah (it means ‘My delight is in her’), and your land Beulah (it means ‘married’); for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married]. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder [NIV: your sons; KJV: thy sons] marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.”

Most likely it was Isaiah crying out to the Lord for His righteousness, delivering Jerusalem and its people from the Babylonians and making the Jews return in honor to their city. The salvation of the Lord will cause the city to be seen again as protected and blessed by His God, like a burning torch before all peoples. Kings and nations will see God’s favor upon Jerusalem, and it will be called by a new name which the Lord Himself will give to it. He will call it ‘My Delight Is in Her’ [Hephzibah], showing its condition as the beloved of God; and ‘Beulah’ [married] because it will no longer be a forsaken and desolate city; its children (inhabitants) shall return and dwell therein. Jerusalem will have a better fame than it has now.

Beulah is a proper name that derives from the Hebrew word be’ulah (בְּעוּלָה), Strong’s #1166, meaning ‘married’ or ‘owned as a wife’. The word be’ulah is a passive participle (i.e., a verb form that has no subject) of the verb ‘baal’ or ‘ba’al’ (בָּעַל), which means ‘to have dominion over’, ‘to be a husband’, ‘to own’, ‘to have as a wife’, hence, be’ulah = married, wife, owned as a wife. The noun ‘baal’ was the name that women used for their husbands: lord, owner, master, husband, which later came to be confused with the proper name of Baal, god of the Canaanites and Phoenicians.

‘Hephzibah’ in the NIV means ‘my delight is in her’, in transliterated Hebrew: Chephtsi-bah, חֶפְצִי-בָּהּ – Strong’s #2657, ‘my delight is in her’. Hephzibah is also a feminine proper name.

‘A crown of glory’ expresses the dignity it will have before God.

‘In the hand of the Lord’ means that it will be preserved and defended by Him.

‘A royal diadem’ symbolizes the royalty of Jerusalem, made to be the capital of Judah, and the place where the king and the high priest were God’s instruments to defend His people physically and enlighten them spiritually. The increase of its offspring also extends to the times of the gospel, when the people of all lands came to Jerusalem, not only for religious festivals, but to hear the words of Jesus and to see His miracles; and even later, when the Early Church began to make converts among Jews and Gentiles. And the ‘sons of Jerusalem’ will be faithful to it, because they will love it.

‘As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you’ – here Jerusalem appears as the bride, and God as the bridegroom rejoices with her.

• Isa. 62: 6-9: “Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest [NIV: I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest], and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned throughout the earth. The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink the wine for which you have labored; but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather it shall drink it in my holy courts.”

The prophet speaks in the name of God, saying that He Himself placed watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem, figuratively showing that He Himself would raise up prophets, intercessors and priests who would teach the people to cry out before Him always for its deliverance and its restoration, until it is again renowned throughout the earth again, and they would spread the news of its salvation and the Lord's favor toward the city, driving away all the enemies. They would remind the Lord day and night of the promises He had already made concerning the salvation of the daughter of Zion. The promise is from God Himself, as an oath that He will no longer deliver its grain (food) into the hands of foreigners, as it was with the Babylonians and others before them; neither will He give again the fruit of its vineyards to these strangers. But what belongs to Jerusalem will be its and of its children; they will praise the name of the Lord for His abundance and prosperity, and will take their offering of food to the temple of the Lord as gratitude.

With the spiritual Jerusalem (the Church) it is the same thing: Jesus is the protective wall of His church; and its ministers, prophets and intercessors are those on the walls (as Habakkuk in the OT), in close proximity to the Lord, to intercede for its holiness and give it the warning from Him so that the church always finds the favor of God and follow His direction. The intercession and preaching of the Word are the two main foundations of the church, and must be continually exercised, day and night, in times of joy and times of trial (2 Tim. 4: 2: ‘In season and out of season’ or ‘whether the time is favorable or unfavorable’), so that the eyes of the Lord are continually upon it, and people may be gathered for Him.

• Isa. 62: 10-12: “Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples. The Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘See, your salvation comes [NIV: your Savior comes]; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him’ [NIV: his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him; KJV: his reward is with him, and his work before him]. They shall be called, ‘The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord’; and you shall be called, ‘Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken’ [NIV: and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted].”

The first sentence: ‘Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples’ can be compared with Isa. 49: 22: ‘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.’ God promises (Isa. 49: 22) that even the Jews who were taken during the invasion of the city or who were born during the exile will come back to it; and the Gentiles that it has never seen will come for the sake of the Lord, for He Himself will call them. But in Isa. 62: 10-12 the allusion to the coming of the Messiah seems clearer, as well as the prophetic calling to be with the heart prepared for Him, that is, to remove impediments

in His way, whether in the hearts of the Jews or the Gentiles. He will come bringing salvation (Zech. 9: 9) and, together with Him, will come His reward and His recompense (cf. Isa. 40: 10). Reward means: reward for valuable services, prize, honor and glory; and this refers to Jesus' great service on the cross. The people converted to Jesus are His reward (and His recompense) and the confirmation of His glory. In Hebrew, the word for 'reward' is *sakar* (Strong #7939), meaning: payment of contract; concretely, salary, fare, maintenance; by implication, compensation, benefit, reward, recompense. Then the bible says: "They shall be called, 'The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord'; and you shall be called, 'Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken' [NIV: and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted]."

'Redeemed' (Hebrew, *ga'al*, Strong #1350) is a primitive root meaning '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, in Hebrew, *Goel* (*go'el* or *gho'el*), comes from the verb *ga'al* ('redeem'), 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). The kinsman-redeemer of Ruth and Naomi was Boaz. In relation to Israel, the idea of ransom (Kinsman-Redeemer) is also used in reference to God and the redemption made by Him:

- Ex. 6: 6-8: "Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will **redeem** you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.'"

- Job 19: 25: "For I know that my **Redeemer** lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth."

- Ps. 19: 14: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my **redeemer**."

- Ps. 69: 18: "Draw near to me, **redeem** me, set me free because of my enemies."

- 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."

In these passages, God is the closest relative of Israel appearing to bring the nation back to His family, since the people had no conditions to do this for themselves.

The word 'redeemer' is also used as a prediction of the coming of the Messiah (Isa. 59: 20: "And he will come to Zion as **Redeemer**, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the Lord"). Christ is our close relative who came to buy us back to the family of God. In the NT, this concept is revealed in the several synonyms of 'to redeem', which convey the idea of paying a ransom, making an acquisition or recover what was lost.

'You shall be called, 'Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken' [NIV: and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted]' – after the deliverance from captivity, Zion will no longer be a deserted, forsaken city, for the Lord will bring its rebuilding and repopulation, not only with the return of the exiles, but with Gentiles

who will draw near to it. With the salvation brought by the Messiah, the glory of Jerusalem will be even greater because of Him, for His fame will come to the farthest nations.

Chapter 63

God's day of vengeance and redemption – v. 1-6.

- Isa. 63: 1-6: “‘Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson? Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in his great might?’ ‘It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save’. ‘Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?’ ‘I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their juice spattered on my garments, and stained all my robes [NIV: their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing]. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year for my redeeming work had come [NIV: and the year of my redemption has come]. I looked, but there was no helper; I stared, but there was no one to sustain me; so my own arm brought me victory, and my wrath sustained me (cf. Isa. 59: 16-17). I trampled down peoples in my anger, I crushed them in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth’ [NIV: I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground].”

The prophet again shows that YHWH is present as the living God. He is fearsome in His wrath (Isa. 63: 1-6), but bends over in kindness toward His people, showing them mercy, restoring His comfort in them and delighting in Zion (Isa. 66: 2; 13).

In the first place, the prophet asks a question of God in his visions, in the name of many nations: who is this one who comes from Edom to Jerusalem after avenging His people, in robes dyed red, in a robe of splendor and marches in the greatness of his strength? Edom is placed here and in Isaiah 34: 1-17 as the symbol of all God's enemies, as the symbol of all nations that have sinned against Him, but is also related to the destruction of its own land, if we compare with the prophecy of Obadiah (Obad. 1-14). Then He Himself answers the prophet, ‘It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save.’ He is about to accomplish the salvation of His people, and salvation is the result of His righteousness.



Bozrah or Botsra or Botzrah (Hebrew: בֹּצְרָה, botsrâh) was the capital of the people of Edom, and whose king was Jobab (Gen. 36: 33; 1 Chr. 1: 44). Esau or Edom (Gen. 36: 19) was Jacob's brother, and lived in Seir a mountain previously belonging to Seir the Horite (Gen. 36: 8-9; Gen. 36: 20); therefore, Edom is often called Seir. Ishmael son of Abraham and Hagar had twelve sons (who were the princes of the Arab nations) and a daughter named Mahalath (Gen 28: 9), who married Esau (or Edom). Nebaioth, Ishmael's firstborn, was the ancestor of an Arab tribe who later gave birth to the Nabataeans. Nebaioth (Nbayowth or Nbayoth – Strong #5032) means fructification, fecundity. These peoples (descendants of Ishmael and Esau) were people related to the descendants of Isaac, son of Abraham, later opposing the people of Israel on several occasions. Their names appear in Isa. 60: 6-9, which means a restitution from God in regard to the past affronts and discords between Israel and these peoples, who would come to Jerusalem with their present offspring to magnify it with their gifts because of the light of the Messiah, or at least to hear Him (Mk. 3: 8: "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"). The descendants of the Edomites spread through the lands adjacent to the Red Sea, going north where they also entered into territorial clashes with the Philistines, eventually settling down in the valley of Aqaba where they founded two very important cities on the incense route: Bozrah and Petra. Bozrah means 'sheepfold', indicating that it was a city of shepherds in the southeast of the Dead Sea in the land of Edom. Today it is a small city in Jordan in the state of Tafilah, called Buseirah (Bouseira or Busairah).

In Isa. 21: 11-12 (Dumah) and Isa. 34: 1-17, a prophecy was also written about the conquest of Edom (cf. Jer. 49: 7-22; Ezek. 25: 12-14; Ezek. 35: 1-15; Am. 1: 11-12; Obad. 1: 14; Mal. 1: 2-5), probably by the Assyrians around the 8th century BC. Assyrian inscriptions show that Edom became a vassal state of Assyria in 736 BC in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC). Babylon conquered it later, and the other prophets also prophesied about it. The prophets Amos and Jeremiah predicted the destruction of Bozrah (capital of Edom), which may be by Nebuchadnezzar in 581 BC or by the Persians in 539 BC. In the third century BC it was dominated by the Nabataeans (one of the Arab tribes), who ended up pushing the inhabitants of Edom to the south of Judea, later called Idumea. Judas Maccabeus subdued them (2nd century BC), and John Hyrcanus I (2nd – 1st century BC) forced them to be circumcised in order to be incorporated by the Jewish people. The people of Edom were definitely destroyed by Titus in 70 AD.

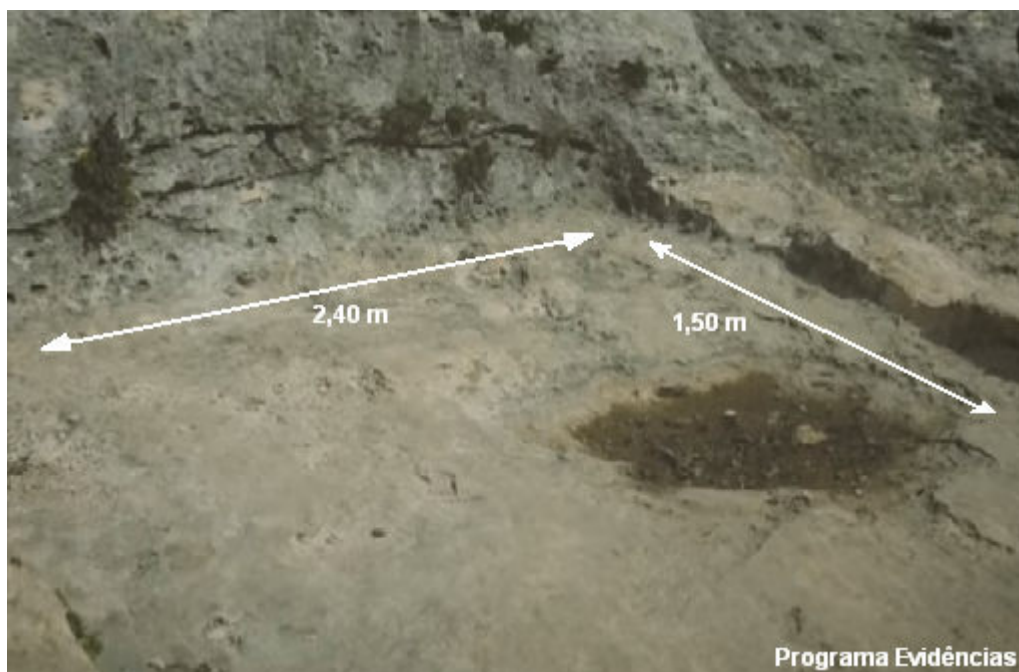
As I wrote in chapters 21 and 34, it is somewhat difficult to make a temporal correlation between those prophecy and the Historical events of that time, for it is not known to what oppressor the prophet referred to, if Assyria or Babylon.

Returning to Isaiah 63, the prophet asks another question, 'Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?'

And the Lord answers that He trod the winepress alone and no one was by His side to help Him. The metaphor is appropriate, since the region around Bozrah was rich in vineyards. He continues, "I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their juice spattered on my garments, and stained all my robes [NIV: their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing]. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year for my redeeming work had come [NIV: and the year of my redemption has come]. I looked, but there was no helper; I stared, but there was no one to sustain me; so my own arm brought me victory, and my wrath sustained me (cf. Isa. 59: 16-17). I trampled down peoples in my anger, I crushed them in my wrath, and I poured out their

lifeblood on the earth' [NIV: I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground]."

'To tread the winepress' is a metaphor for treading or destroying the enemies of His people as a form of revenge.



In the figure above we see a winepress of Ancient times (this one dates from about 2,000 years). It was a kind of shallow cistern carved in the rock, with the dimension of approximately 2.40m x 1.50 m and usually surrounded with wooden posts with wooden beams on the ceiling, where ropes were tied and hung from them. Those who trod out

the grapes at the winepresses held on the ropes to do it. The freshly squeezed grape juice (the new wine, as they called it) ran through a channel and was stored in deeper holes dug in the rock, like caves. The men went down by a ladder and started collecting grape juice in vats. The upper part of the winepress, where the grapes were trodden, was called gath; and the smallest at the bottom, Yéqev or Yeqavím (plural). In Joel 3: 13 the word ‘vats’ is written in our translations.



Then, God says that the year of His redeeming work is come [NIV: and the year of my redemption has come], referring to the time of the Lord’s grace.

In Isa. 59: 16-19 it is written: “He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory [NIV: so his own arm worked salvation for him], and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle [NIV: and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak]. According to their deeds, so will he repay; wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render requital [NIV: According to what they have done, so will he repay wrath to his enemies and retribution to his foes; he will repay the islands their due]. So those in the west shall fear the name of the Lord, and those in the east, his glory; for he will come like a pent-up stream that the wind of the Lord drives on [in Hebrew: When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will put him to flight].”

Isaiah received the revelation of the Messiah as a man of war, clothing Himself with zeal by the name and holiness of God (armor), and disposing Himself to avenge His people from what bound them in the chains of sin and darkness. The Messiah saw that there was no one to help Him and His own arm brought Him salvation, and His own righteousness sustained Him. God shows to Isaiah that He is present as the living God and is fearsome in His wrath. He puts on the garments of salvation and revenge to deliver His people (Isa. 59: 16-21).

We have seen that the coming of the Messiah would bring divine vengeance upon the adversaries of the Jews. But between these prophecies (Isa. 59 and Isa. 63) and the coming of Jesus there were many wars and many human instruments of God to carry out the vengeance of the Lord against the enemies of Israel. Much blood was shed ('their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing') and God indeed avenged Himself on the wicked, showing His sovereignty over the gods of the heathen nations. This was a preparation for the coming of Christ, which no one knew when it would take place. When we talked about the characteristics of the Messiah, some of them were more important, and ordinary people personified here on earth the true Messiah to come. The characteristics were: the suffering Servant (sometimes represented by the prophet himself in his arduous mission in the midst of that unbelieving people) and the anointed conqueror (prefigured by Cyrus or David), that is, a king who will come to rule over Jews and Gentiles, executing God's vengeance on His enemies, clothing the armor of salvation (Isa. 59: 16-21) and defeating them completely, redeeming His people.

In chapter 63: 1-6 this messianic conqueror is a man among men, showing equally the qualities of the king and the Servant, with the same spiritual gifts of them. He also shows himself as the conqueror of Edom, a task that was accomplished through David: Num. 24: 17-19 (the 'star of Jacob' refers to David); 1 Chr. 18: 11-12; 2 Sam. 8: 13-14; Ps. 60 (When he fought against the Aramaeans of Mesopotamia – 1 Chr. 18: 3 – and the Aramaeans of Zobah, and when Joab returned and defeated twelve thousand Edomites in the valley of Salt) cf. Ps. 108: 6-13. Here, we can see the identity of the Anointed Conqueror with the Davidic Messiah. The Jews kept in mind the physical image of the Messiah as a warrior, coming to deliver His people from all oppression. However, He would come bringing a powerful move worldwide, and together with Him a new time, a new dispensation for mankind. Jesus, the Messiah came in human form, as expected by the Jews, but brought a new way of waging war, which they neither grasped nor accepted.

Thus, God shows the destruction of the Edomites here, but He does not make clear the human character used for this destruction ('their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing'), although in the spiritual ambit we know it is about Jesus (cf. Isa. 53: on the cross His blood was shed to propitiate the wrath of God). Howsoever, God shows that He does not need human help to carry out deliverance.

The figure of a drunken man, staggering, shows how bewildered the enemies of the people of God will become with the vengeance of the Lord ("In my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground" – Isa. 63: 6).

Praise and prayer (The last prayer of the prophet) – v. 7-14.

- Isa. 63: 7-14: "I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, because of all that the Lord has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, 'Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely'; and he became their savior in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them [NIV: In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them]; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit [NIV: Holy Spirit]; therefore he became their enemy; he himself fought against them. Then they remembered the days of old, of Moses his servant. Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? [NIV: Where is he who brought them through the sea with the shepherd of his flock?] Where is the one

who put within them his holy spirit [NIV: Holy Spirit], who caused his glorious arm to march at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert [NIV: in open country], they did not stumble. Like cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of the Lord gave them rest. Thus you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.”

From here there is a prayer of the prophet until the end of chapter 64, in which he begins to mention the great goodness that God had shown toward the Jews, and so that His name was a glorious name. Thus, Isaiah encourages them to remember the benefits of God in the past to strengthen their faith in the present and to be sure of the deliverance from that same God. The scattered Jews could believe in Him. He mentions God’s relationship with Israel in the early days of its existence, when He brought them out of Egypt and made a covenant with them and said that they would not lie to Him, that is, they would not betray Him. He knew that they would exchange Him for other gods, but here He speaks as if He were a man like them, who expected gratitude in exchange for His benevolence. Even disappointed with them, He saved them.

‘The angel of his presence’ (‘of his presence’, literally, ‘of His face’, that is, that stands before God continually; in the Hebrew: ‘Paniym, Strong #6440) is the same that the expression commonly seen in the bible in other passages of the OT, ‘the Angel of the Lord’, referring to Jesus. He appeared to Moses in the bush, as well as led them through the wilderness and saved them from many things. ‘In all their distress he too was distressed’ – shows that He suffered their afflictions, and much more on the cross, so that salvation might be complete and eternal.

Then the people remembered the days of Moses and wondered if the same God who delivered their ancestors can do the same now.

‘Who caused his glorious arm to march at the right hand of Moses’ – the Angel of the Lord was at the right hand of Moses doing the miracles. Moses was only His instrument, but the glorious or mighty arm was God’s.

‘Who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert [NIV: in open country], they did not stumble. Like cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of the Lord gave them rest. Thus you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name’ – God guided them as a skilful rider leads his horse on an open plain so that it does not stumble. His name was famous among the nations for having divided the Red Sea for them to pass. God led His people to places of rest, like the animals descend from the mountains to the plain on order to rest. Canaan was a resting place for them.

The prophet’s prayer and complaint – v. 15-19.

- Isa. 63: 15-19: “Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The yearning of your heart and your compassion? They are withheld from me [NIV: Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us]. For you are our father [NIV: Father], though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our father [NIV: Father]; our Redeemer from of old is your name. Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage. Your holy people took possession for a little while; but now our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary [NIV: For a little while your people possessed your holy place, but now our enemies have trampled down your sanctuary]. We have long been like those whom you do not rule, like those not called by your name [NIV: We are yours from old; but you

have not ruled over them, they have not been called by your name; or ‘we are like those you have never ruled, like those never called by your name’].”

The prophet argues with God extolling His goodness and at the same time asking what the reason for His separation from them. He calls Him the Father and the Redeemer, but acknowledges that their hearts are hardened, so they do not feel His presence. Isaiah suffers for the state of his people and asks the Lord how long He will keep away. He asks Him to come back to them again. Abraham is already dead and unaware of the current condition of his descendants. But from ancient times God was their Redeemer, and their true Father. And now, they are willing to trust Him entirely. He refers to the Temple now destroyed and tells God that the time His servants possessed Him was very short in comparison to His promise. He also says that the time they possessed the land of Canaan was very short too.

‘We are like those you have never ruled, like those never called by your name’ – this denotes the separation and lack of intimacy with God that they feel, as if they had never been His people, but like the wicked, who were not called by His name.

Chapter 64

The prophet's prayer continues, calling for the majestic presence of God – v. 1-5.

- Isa. 64: 1-5: “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. [NIV: But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved?]”

The prophet continues his prayer, crying out to God to come down as in the past, tearing the heavens, shaking the mountains in His presence, and boiling the waters with the heat of His fire, that His name may be recognized and feared by His adversaries. Again, he acknowledges the awesome deeds done by the Lord for his ancestors and says that he has never seen such a God who works for those who wait on Him. The Lord goes out with joy to meet those who do the deeds of righteousness gladly, and those who always remember Him. Isaiah ends this part of the prayer by acknowledging that He was angry because they sinned and continued to sin for a long time. How, then, would they be saved?

Isaiah confesses their sins and complains about their afflictions – v. 6-12.

- Isa. 64: 6-12: “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity [NIV: for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins]. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people. Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful house, where our ancestors praised you, has been burned by fire, and all our pleasant places have become ruins [NIV: and all that we treasured lies in ruins]. After all this, will you restrain yourself, O Lord? Will you keep silent, and punish us so severely?”

The prophet confesses his sins and complains of his afflictions. He intercedes for him and for the nation, saying that they are unclean in spirit and in soul, and human righteousness is unclean, serves for nothing; it cannot free them. He feels wilted and lifeless like a dry leaf, and his sins are like a wind that takes them away from the truth of the Lord. He remembers again that God is their Father, the father of Israel, the potter who molds them like clay, and they are the work of His hands. What they are going through is the result of God's molding so that they will remain as He desires. He asks for mercy; asks Him not to be so enraged, nor to remember their sins forever. Isaiah asks God to consider what is happening: the cities of Judah in ruins, Jerusalem destroyed and burned; and the temple no longer exists, for it has been reduced to ashes. Everything that was precious to them was ruined. Would God remain impassive in face of all these calamities? Would He punish them beyond measure? It was unbearable for

him to see all this. Although Isaiah was describing their anguish and the ruin of their land as exalting the enemy's destructive power, he knew in his heart that the Lord was stronger than the evidence and could reverse all this in due time.

Chapter 65

Judgment and salvation – v. 1-7.

• Isa. 65: 1-7: “I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am’, to a nation that did not call on my name. I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks; who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine’s flesh, with broth of abominable things in their vessels [NIV: who sit among the graves and spend their nights keeping secret vigil; who eat the flesh of pigs, and whose pots hold broth of unclean meat]; who say, ‘Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.’ These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day long. See, it is written before me: I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their laps their iniquities and their ancestors’ iniquities together, says the Lord; because they offered incense on the mountains and reviled me on the hills, I will measure into their laps full payment for their actions.”

God declares to the prophet that he is calling a people who did not know His name before, but will come to know, because His Israelite people provoked Him too much with their works of idolatry. What Isaiah was saying seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus was really a bold and unpopular statement, as the apostle Paul said [Rom. 10: 3; Rom. 10: 19 (cf. Deut. 32: 21); Rom. 10: 20-21; 1 Cor. 10: 22]. However, the whole nation will not be destroyed and rejected; there will still be some remnants that will be saved (Isa. 65: 8-16).

‘I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am’, to a nation that did not call on my name’ – This verse speaks clearly about the calling of the Gentiles, who will convert to Jesus in the times of the Gospel, for they will have a heart more open to His doctrine and will not come to question Him as the Jews constantly did, trying to justify themselves when they quoted the Scriptures. The first sentence means, more specifically, that God has decided to manifest to them, to become accessible to them, the Gentiles. Isaiah had said to the Lord in his prayer (Isa. 63: 19): ‘we have long been like those whom you do not rule, like those not called by your name’, that is, those who did not call themselves by the name of Israel, whom the Lord called Jeshurun, my beloved, my Servant. We saw in Isa. 63: 19 that this phrase of the prophet denotes the separation and lack of intimacy with God that they felt, as if they had never been His people, but like the wicked, which were not called by His name. The God of Israel now turned to the Gentiles, who would be called by His name, by the name of Jesus, by the name of Christ, Christians.

‘I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices’ – this shows God’s attempts to call His people on order to help them, bless them, lead them by the correct path. Even so, with the prophetic exhortations and with God’s own hand extended to them, the Jews rejected the Lord, so they are being rejected: by rebellion, stubbornness, by the idolatry with which they irritate God.

‘A people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks’ – the Lord says that the provocation is opened before His face, without realizing His omnipresence and omniscience. They sacrificed in the gardens dedicated to idols; and did it continually on brick altars, when the Lord had told Moses what kind of altar He wanted His people to make: “You need make for me only

an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your offerings of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. But if you make for me an altar of stone, do not build it of hewn stones; for if you use a chisel upon it you profane it. You shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it” (Ex 20: 24-26).



The altar of rough stones

He did not want hewn stones because it was the custom of the idolatrous people to handle iron tools, and superstitions of the idols were inscribed on them, such as the cuneiform inscriptions of Babylon and the Canaanites, who laid flat roofs with bricks in their houses, and altars there, where they burned incense to the sun (2 Kin. 23: 12; Jer. 19: 13). In the time of Moses, Israel only used bronze instruments and tools. The handling of iron tools and weapons only occurred in the reign of David, who imported the technique from the Philistines.

One did not ascend by steps so that the nakedness of the priests would not be exposed. Hence, in Ex. 27: 1-8 and Ex. 38: 1-7 the bible describes the altar of burnt offerings of acacia wood and overlaid with bronze, five cubits long, five cubits wide and three cubits high (about 2.5 meters x 2.5 meters x 1.5 meter), with horns (edges lifted) in each corner, that served to tie the animals of the sacrifice. But later, in the temple of Solomon, the bible describes the bronze altar where the burnt offerings were made with other measures: 9 meters long, 9 meters wide and 4.5 meters high (2 Chr. 4: 1). So, yes, it was necessary to use a stair or ramp to climb up to it. Most likely it was a stair, since Ezekiel mentions steps in the description of the altar of the temple which he visualized (Ezek. 43: 13-17); and he, as priest, remembered the first temple. The steps were facing east. As for the precaution of the nakedness of the priest not to be exposed, it was because of his sacred office, so as not to arouse in anyone any kind of feeling contrary

to reverence for the Lord, if his garments were swayed in the wind or, if the steps were at a greater distance from each other, which would force him to take great steps; so the body parts would be exposed. The linen tunics were long and loose, from the waist down. Therefore, the Lord told Moses that the Levites should wear linen undergarments, which stretched from the waist to the knees (Ex. 39: 28; Ex. 28: 42-43; Lev. 16: 4). The undergarments were hidden by the tunic. It is interesting that linen undergarments were only permitted at the time to the priests, not to the men of the people.



‘Who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places’ or ‘who sit among the graves and spend their nights keeping secret vigil’ – In the graves they consulted demons, or familiar spirits through the mediums (Isa. 8: 19; 1 Sam. 28: 7-8; 14-15), what was forbidden by the Lord from the beginning (Deut. 18: 11-12). ‘Secret places’ were where pagans worshiped their idols, and often slept in these ‘consecrated places’ for divine communications in their dreams.

‘Who eat swine’s flesh, with broth of abominable things in their vessels [NIV: who eat the flesh of pigs, and whose pots hold broth of unclean meat]’ cf. Isa. 66: 17 – God had given the Israelites certain dietary rules; among them, it was forbidden to eat pig’s meat (Lev. 11: 7; Deut. 14: 8), which pagan people constantly did. Now His own rebellious people followed these rules and this was abominable to Him. Swine were first used in sacrifices. The image of idolatrous abominations was the most repugnant sin in the eyes of God and the most prevalent in Isaiah’s day, though Israel practiced idolatry in all ages.

‘Who say, ‘Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you’ – the people lived on rituals and, therefore, they found themselves holier than other non-Jewish people, but they were rituals which the Lord had not ordained. However, the Lord disliked all of them and now said: ‘These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day long.’ Hypocrisy mixed with the pride of both the people and the priests made their sacrifices with animals and their incense offerings repugnant to the Lord, even though they were made within the temple. They performed a double worship.

It is interesting that when we go to KJV there is a comment after the verse above “Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day”. It is written: ‘nose’ or ‘anger.’ In Hebrew, nostrils expire the smoke of the Lord’s wrath (Ps. 18: 8).

The word ‘nose’ in Hebrew is 'aph (Strong #639), which means: the nose or the nostril; the face of a person; forehead, face, countenance; anger, the outward manifestation of rapid breathing in passion, or anger. It comes from the primitive root: 'anaph (Strong #599), which means: to breathe hard, to breathe deeply, that is, enraged; be angry; displeased. Thus the verse expresses the strong breath of God as an expression of His wrath or indignation over all that.

- Isa. 65: 6-7: “See, it is written before me: I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their laps their iniquities and their ancestors’ iniquities together, says the Lord; because they offered incense on the mountains and reviled me on the hills, I will measure into their laps full payment for their actions.”

The Lord says He is not oblivious to these things. They are written before Him as the chronicles of kings were recorded. He remembers their sins and will punish them. And He will punish them not only for their sins, but for the sins of their ancestors, for they have done the same thing: ‘because they offered incense on the mountains and reviled me on the hills.’ Sins continued (Isa. 57: 7; Hosea 4: 13; Ezek. 18: 1-32; Ezek. 20: 27-28), and they would have to be cleansed to the end.

A faithful remnant will be saved – v. 8-10.

- Isa. 65: 8-10: “Thus says the Lord: As the wine is found in the cluster, and they say, ‘Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it’, so I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all. I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah inheritors of my mountains; my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall settle there. Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me.”

Here the Lord makes the distinction between those of Israel who love God (Isa. 65: 8 cf. Isa. 66: 5) and those who disobey Him. The word ‘wine’ in verse 8 refers to new wine. The term ‘new wine’ or ‘must’ (Hebrew, *tirôsh*; Strong #8492) means: must or fresh grape-juice (as just squeezed out); by implication (rarely) fermented wine: (new, sweet) wine, and represents the first juices that flow before and soon after the winepress being trodden. After being trod into the winepress, the grapes poured their juice into a vat. That juice was called ‘new wine’ – and the Jews drank it in that state (Before the fermentation was finished). This word never refers to the fermented beverage, but always to the unfermented product of the vine, such as the juice still in the bunch of grapes (Isa. 65: 8), or the sweet juice of freshly harvested grapes (Deut. 11: 14; Prov. 3: 10, 11: 24). *Tirôsh* (שׁוֹרִישׁ) appears 37 times in the Old Testament.

These grapes in the cluster represented the Jews who remained faithful to God, the good grapes, the fruitful vineyard. This answer comforts the prophet in his prayer from the previous chapter, pleading God’s covenant with the descendants of Abraham.

‘So I will do for my servants’ sake’ – this refers to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the patriarchs of that people; or, then, all His anointed ones from the past, who did His will and stood firm in His word.

‘I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah inheritors of my mountains’ – ‘I will bring forth descendants from Jacob’ refers to the faithful remnant of the Jews; ‘and from Judah inheritors of my mountains’ refers to Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of the tribe of Judah, the legal heir of all the things and persons of the Father (Heb. 1: 2), of whom we are co-heirs of the kingdom of God (Rom. 8: 17). He, the heir,

shall possess the mountains. ‘My mountains’ represent the mountains of Judea, or more specifically, the hills of Jerusalem, where Mount Zion and the temple stand. We have seen in other chapters of Isaiah that the reign of the Messiah would bring many people to mount Zion (Isa. 2: 2). The offspring (or seeds) are those who become servants of God, through the power of His grace, and serve Him joyfully and willingly.

‘My chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall settle there’ – ‘My chosen’, that is, the elect of God according to election of grace, the Israel of God, who will possess the Holy Land (Rom. 9: 29; Rom 11: 4-5).



Mount Zion



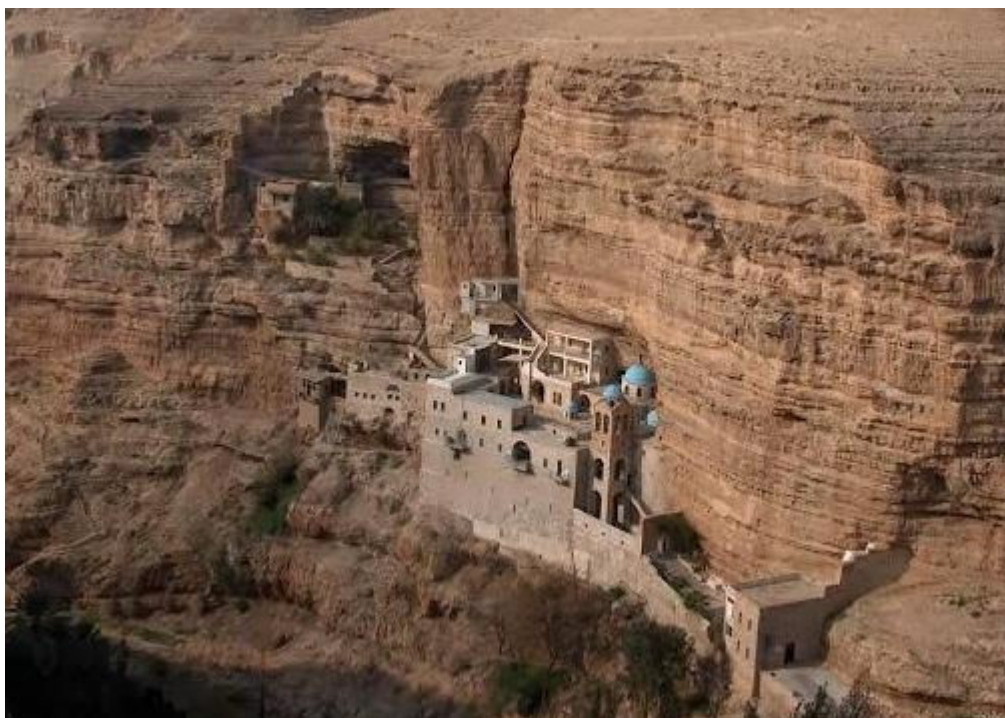
Plain of Sharon

‘Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me’ – Sharon is the largest coastal plain in the northern part of Palestine at the edge of the Mediterranean, south of Mount Carmel. It lies between the extensive swamps of the lower course of River Zarqa (Nahr az-Zarqa or Nahal Taninim) to the north (it marks the southern edge of Mount Carmel), and the valley of Aijalon and Joppa in the south, that is, till Yarkon River, the northern limit of Tel Aviv. Zarqa river (in Arabic: Nahr az-Zarqā, ‘the blue river’, where nahr means river and zarqa’ means blue); is commonly identified with the biblical Jabbok River (Nahal Yabok; today it’s highly polluted). The Yarkon River is the natural limit between Sharon and Philistia. The length of the Plain of Sharon is fifty miles from north to south, and its breadth is nine or ten miles from east to west. Thousands of years ago, the streams partially excavated a longitudinal ditch on the east side toward the Jordan River, and the valleys of that ditch tended to be marshy. So, as for human occupation, it is only on the southern border of Sharon that the land was more suitable for settlement, being clear that most of Sharon was never colonized by the Israelites. For a long time it remained a desert (Isa. 33: 9) and only used as pasture (1 Chr. 5: 16; Isa. 65: 10). In biblical times the northern area was densely covered with oak trees (*Quercus infectoria*), being today one of the richest agricultural districts of Israel planted with orange groves. There was no fertility in the swampy region.

Achor was a valley east of Israel, on the west side of the Jordan River and a little north of the Dead Sea (in the plains of Jericho), where Achan was stoned and burned with his family and possessions in the time of Joshua for having stolen the spoil of Jericho, which was forbidden to the Israelites (Josh. 7: 20-21; 24-26). Achan means ‘to trouble, troublemaker’, and derives from Achor or Achar, in Hebrew, also derived from the verb = cākhar = to trouble, to afflict, to grieve. Therefore, Achar (‘ākhar) means man of tribulation, man of affliction. This means that what has caused a calamity will become joy and prosperity for the people who seek God.



The valley of Achor in the Wadi Qelt in Israel



Details of Saint George Monastery

The valley of Achor (Josh 7: 24-26; Isa. 65: 10; Hos. 2: 25), on the border of Judah (Josh. 15: 7), is probably the Wadi Qelt, located 1.6 km south of Jericho. We can see today in this Wadi a Byzantine Christian monastery called Saint George Monastery, built in 340 CE and destroyed by the Persians in 614 CE (the Sassanian dynasty: 224–651). It was rebuilt and abandoned in the 12th century and finally rebuilt and inhabited by Greek-Orthodox monks in the 19th century. Its name in Arabic is Mar Jaras.

Judgments on the wicked and blessings upon those who belong to God – v. 11-16.

- Isa. 65: 11-16: “But you who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny; I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer, when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my sight, and chose what I did not delight in. Therefore thus says the Lord God: My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart, and shall wail for anguish of spirit. You shall leave your name to my chosen to use as a curse, and the Lord God will put you to death; but to his servants he will give a different name. Then whoever invokes a blessing in the land shall bless by the God of faithfulness [NIV: the God of truth], and whoever takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of faithfulness [NIV: the God of truth]; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my sight.”

- Isa. 65: 11-12: “But you who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny; I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer, when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my sight, and chose what I did not delight in” – the goddess Fortune was a Babylonian deity; the god Destiny [in Hebrew, the word used is Mniy, transliterated as Minni] is a pagan god, responsible by the fate, and acted through numbers, like a game of chance or

a numbers game. A glass containing a mixture of wine and honey was placed for him, especially in Egypt, on the last day of the year.

Zion was the holy mountain of the Lord, and the people had forgotten it because of foreign gods. Therefore, the Lord was angry and had already decreed their destruction. Just as they had bowed down to idols, they would bow down to the slaughter. What they had done brought no pleasure to God.

- Isa. 65: 13-14: “Therefore thus says the Lord God: My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart, and shall wail for anguish of spirit” – the faithful, who have always had their consolation and full satisfaction in God, will be blessed, but the wicked will be deprived of all that they need, and they will cry and howl in their distress. No one knows when this prophecy was fulfilled. One can think of an apocalyptic content in it, or it may be a question of the spiritual justice brought by the Messiah at His first coming, or else a judgment of God that happens in the life of the wicked on earth, causing them to experience some kind of trial for their wicked acts.

- Isa. 65: 15-16: “You shall leave your name to my chosen to use as a curse, and the Lord God will put you to death; but to his servants he will give a different name. Then whoever invokes a blessing in the land shall bless by the God of faithfulness [NIV: the God of truth], and whoever takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of faithfulness [NIV: the God of truth]; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my sight” – this means that to be called a ‘Jew’ would be shameful, as a curse, for it would remind everyone of God’s rejection because of the infidelity and wickedness of the unbelieving Jews, while the God-fearing Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah would be called in the same way as the Gentiles, namely, Christians, the new name of the children of the dispensation of God’s grace (Acts 11: 26).

‘Then whoever invokes a blessing in the land shall bless by the God of faithfulness [NIV: the God of truth]’ – it means the very name of the Messiah; therefore, all of them would be blessed in the name of Jesus, the God of truth, not in the name of other gods, for God was faithful to His promises (Jn. 1: 17; 2 Cor. 1: 19-20; Rev. 3: 14).

New heavens and a new earth– v. 17-25.

- Isa. 65: 17-25: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed [NIV: he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed, or ‘the sinner who reaches a hundred will be considered accursed’]. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity [NIV: or bear children doomed for misfortune]; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.”

- Isa. 65: 17-18: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight” – the age of the Messiah could be compared to the creation of new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65: 17 cf. Isa. 51: 16). There will be no remembrance of past things because the new dispensation will be glorious. The church will be renewed, as if dwelling in a new world. And what the Lord has created for His people, His chosen ones, is joy and delight. The Messiah and His chosen ones will inherit the renewed earth, just as it will be with us after the second coming of Christ (Isa. 51: 16; Isa. 66: 22; Ezek. 21: 27; Ps. 37: 11; 2 Pet. 3: 13; Heb. 12: 26-28, Rev. 7: 17; Rev. 21: 1; 4-5).

- Isa. 65: 19-20: “I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed [NIV: he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed, or ‘the sinner who reaches a hundred will be considered accursed’]” – the cry of oppression will no longer be heard before the throne of God for those who have been delivered by the blood of His Son, for now they will have another owner; they no longer have to suffer the oppression of the enemy. The Messiah will bring longevity and forgiveness; more than this, eternal life, because in His eyes life and death have a new meaning. His will shall always prevail over all who bear His seal; and His blessing upon them prolongs their physical days and gives eternal life to soul and spirit. Even falling into sin, man always has the chance to be cleansed and to resume his fellowship with God through the forgiveness of Jesus. Those who are under His blessing no longer live under a curse. In the spiritual New Jerusalem everything will be new and the promises to the physical body contained in this verse will be fully fulfilled (Rev. 7: 17; Rev. 21: 4-5).

- Isa. 65: 21-23: “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity [NIV: or bear children doomed for misfortune]; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord – and their descendants as well” – the Lord promises once more the longevity of His people, as well as righteousness in regard to their work (Isa. 62: 9; Deut. 28: 12), removing robbery and bringing forth fruitfulness and prosperity in all that they do. This not only concerns the spiritual area, but the material area as well. The offspring of the righteous will also be blessed.

- Isa. 65: 24-25: “Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear (cf. Isa. 58: 9). The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord” (cf. Isa. 11: 6-9) – both in the OT and in the NT, God makes it clear that He is attentive to the sincere prayer of His children. And here in Isaiah, He says that before they cry, He will answer them (Dan. 9: 20-21). This is what Jesus said in the NT: the Father knows what we need before we ask Him, and knows that we need all material things on earth to live well (Matt. 6: 8; 32-33); therefore, He says to put His kingdom first and all things will be added to us. When we think of His things in the first place, we open the communication with His throne totally, and He, who sees everything, supplies us even with what we are not asking for.

‘But the serpent—its food shall be dust’ – the curse will remain in the serpent (Gen. 3: 14; Mic. 7: 17), that is, not in the animal itself but in what it symbolizes.

‘The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox’ – there will be no competition or quarrel in the kingdom of God, nor thirst for conquest or power struggle. The strong and the weak, the most impulsive or assertive, will live on equal terms with the meek and the quietest. There will be peace and concordance.

‘They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord’ – there shall be no destruction in the temple of the Lord, in the midst of His church. Although He planned so for the messianic age, this peace remained only for a time within His own newborn church (cf. Acts 20: 29-31; 1 Cor. 3: 3; 1 Cor. 4: 6-7; 1 Cor. 5: 6-7; 1 Cor. 11: 18-19), who suffered severe persecution by Romans and other peoples for many years, and to this day faces fights. But the word of God remains: “But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 24: 13). And in the eternity, when we are in our heavenly abode, all things shall be made new, and the saints of the Most High shall possess the kingdom (Dan. 7: 18). Out of the New Jerusalem shall be all who are not according to the peace and love of God: Rev. 21: 8; Rev. 22: 15; Prov. 6: 16-19.

Chapter 66

God is served with the spirit, not with ceremonial – v. 1-5.

- Isa. 66: 1-5: “Thus says the Lord: Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool (cf. Ps. 11: 4; Ps. 103: 19; Matt. 5: 34-35; Matt. 23: 22; Acts 7: 49-50); what is the house that you would build for me, and what is my resting place? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word (cf. Isa. 57: 15). Whoever slaughters an ox is like one who kills a human being; whoever sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever presents a grain offering, like one who offers swine’s blood; whoever makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and in their abominations they take delight; I also will choose to mock them [NIV: so I also will chose harsh treatment for them], and bring upon them what they fear; because, when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my sight, and chose what did not please me. Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word: Your own people who hate you and reject you for my name’s sake have said, ‘Let the Lord be glorified, so that we may see your joy’; but it is they who shall be put to shame.”

This prophecy seems to have been addressed to post-exile Jews from the time of the building of the second temple to the Jews of the time of Christ’s coming, when the fear of falling back into idolatry, and consequently suffering with the wrath of God, led them, especially the priests and teachers of the Law (as it was in the time of Jesus), to the opposite pole, religiosity, where the minutiae of the Law were observed (Matt. 23: 23-24) and where the physical temple was more valued than their inner temple. The Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3: 17) and made the world and all things; so He asks what kind of house someone could build for Him (1 Kin. 8: 27; 29). He would not fit into a temple built by human hands, much less dwell inside an idol. He was already preparing His people for another kind of thought: with the coming of the Messiah, the body of man would be His sanctuary. Jesus would come to teach this (Jn. 2: 19). God said to whom He would look: to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembled at His word, that is, those who had reverence for His person. That is why He abominated the sacrifices and rituals that were being made in His own House and looked like idolatrous sacrifices, for the heart of the worshipers was no longer in God. In Prov. 15: 8 it is written: “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.” His own people seemed impious, they did what thought best, and liked what they were doing. Therefore, He would treat them harshly and bring upon them what they feared most: to hear the truth and the rebuke of God; moreover, to suffer with His wrath, having to humble himself before Him again. They also feared losing the respectability they had from the people by the fact of being religious leaders. Through His prophets He cried out, but no one paid attention or answered. They did not want to listen to Him. What they did was bad, and He had no pleasure in it. The hypocrisy of the rituals was abominable. Jesus would unmask them in public, and they would lose their status. This is exactly why they handed Jesus over to Pilate, out of envy of His respect by the people and His simple and clear doctrine (Matt. 27: 18; Mk. 15: 10).

In the next part of the prophecy, He addressed the God-fearing Jews who, because of His name, were despised by their brethren and even expelled from their company, and mocked by the religious ones, who arrogantly told the Lord to show His glory. So

God said that these ones would be ashamed. Thus He encourages the faithful to stand firm in Him, for He Himself will destroy their enemies.

The birth of the Church – v. 6-14.

• Isa. 66: 6-14: “Listen, an uproar from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the Lord, dealing retribution to his enemies! Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? [NIV: Can a country be born in a day?] Shall a nation be delivered in one moment? Yet as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children. Shall I open the womb and not deliver? says the Lord; shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb? says your God. Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her—that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom [NIV: and delight in her overflowing abundance]. For thus says the Lord: I will extend prosperity [NIV: peace] to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bodies shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies.”

In fact, this whole prophecy (Isa. 66: 1-24) refers once more to the messianic age, when Jesus would have to come to install a new dispensation and a new Church, abolishing the dead rituals mentioned above, and that for God they already resembled idolatry because of the hypocrisy with which they were made by the Jews of that time (Sadducees, Pharisees, and Scribes).

We can see that, first, Isaiah talks about the birth of a son (‘Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son’), and then he speaks of children (‘Yet as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children’). The comparison to a pregnant woman who gives birth unexpectedly concerns Zion, Jerusalem, and this suggests a great and sudden salvation for the people of God. It is a reference to the coming of the Messiah, who came suddenly and different from what was expected by the Jews, without they had to do anything extraordinary; therefore, the verse says that there were no birth pangs, that is, the child was born before there were pains (‘Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son’). There were no wars or deaths for the Messiah to be born. He came in the manner planned by God, and quietly.

Jesus began His ministry at the age of thirty (Lk. 3: 23) and, until then, He was unknown to the Jews as the human incarnation of the Messiah. He preached, healed, performed miracles, and entered into doctrinal clashes with the legalists, the teachers of the Law. However, it was on the cross, when He said, “It is finished” (Jn. 19: 30) that the work with the salvation of that people was completed and broken once and for all the enmity between God and men, and between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2: 14-16; Heb. 9: 14-15; 28). God’s vengeance against His enemies was being completed there. The bible says: “From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon... Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 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; 50-54).



Therefore, the prophet says, “Listen, an uproar from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the Lord, dealing retribution to his enemies!” The bible says that Jesus cried with a loud voice. When He surrendered His life to the Father and the curtain of the temple was torn, it was like the voice of God screaming fiercely from the temple against the spiritual enemies of His people that separated them from truth and salvation. The priests who were in the temple and saw the curtain being torn in a supernatural way, not human, surely screamed in fear, and ran away from there, and their cries of dread could also be heard from afar.

The earthquake and the darkness must have frightened many people, so Isaiah says it was heard an uproar coming from the city, which makes us think of something abrupt, frightening, like a sound of destruction and people running from one place to another because they had never seen anything like that, in addition to the strange sound that must have come from the temple at the time the curtain of the sanctuary was torn, not by human hands. The dispensation of the Old Testament was finished at that time and the dispensation of the New Testament began. God was extinguishing the hypocrisy and pride of the ancient priesthood and the ancient religious practice of His people.



In the same way that Jerusalem saw the birth of a son, the Messiah, she also gave birth to her children before her pain came, that is, the forty days that Jesus appeared to the apostles after His death and resurrection (Acts 1: 3-5; 8) were quiet days, preparatory to the birth of His Church, which occurred ten days later at Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 1-2; 5-6; 9-11; 32-33; 37-41). That is why three thousand Jews of the Diaspora, converted on the same day, were a nation of believers born in one day, born for salvation and a new life in Christ. This explains the words of Isaiah: “Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? [NIV: Can a country be born in a day?] Shall a nation be delivered in one moment? Yet as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children.” After the healing of the paralytic at the temple gate called Beautiful, two thousand people were converted through the words of Peter (Acts 3: 11-26; Acts 4: 4).

Isaiah goes on saying, “Shall I open the womb and not deliver? says the Lord; shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb? says your God.” This means that the church in

Jerusalem has not stopped making new converts. The bible says that the Lord added day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2: 47; Acts 5: 14; 16).

Then the prophet says, “Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her – that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom [NIV: and delight in her overflowing abundance]. For thus says the Lord: I will extend prosperity [NIV: peace] to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bodies shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies.”

Many verses from the Acts of the Apostles testify to the prophesied words, for Jesus’ word through them was the consolation and abundance that supplied many needy souls, so there was peace and joy in the newborn church, despite the persecution begun by Saul of Tarsus; and this peace (Acts 9: 31) and this grace (Acts 4: 33; Acts 11: 23) poured out freely upon the people increased the number of people gathered to the church (Acts 6: 1; Acts 9: 31; Acts 9: 33-35; Acts 9: 42; Acts 11: 21; Acts 11: 26). Even priests obeyed the new faith (Acts 6: 7). Also in other cities where the gospel was preached there was joy because of salvation: Acts 8: 4-8 (Philip in Samaria); Acts 8: 12; 17; Acts 11: 19 (Jews of Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch); Acts 8: 39. Because of the power of the Holy Spirit and the determination of the Lord’s apostles, the word of God spread (Acts 6: 7; Acts 12: 24) and continued to be preached fearlessly (Acts 4: 10-12; 19-20; 29-31; 33; Acts 5: 29; 38-39). Like a river, the doctrine of Jesus also spread to the Gentiles: Acts 8: 26-40; Acts 10: 44-48; Acts 11: 20; Acts 11: 26.

The Jews saw all the wonders of God in Jerusalem, beginning with the ministry of Jesus, and those who received Him with an open heart also rejoiced in the great transformation that took place in the midst of His people. Jerusalem had the privilege of seeing the salvation of God before any city in the world, and this was a reason for rejoicing: “You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bodies shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies.”

All who opposed the Church of Christ fell, from the Jews who rejected Jesus to the oppressive Gentiles. He continues to do this to all who oppose the holy walk of His servants: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Matt. 16: 18).

Severe judgments against the wicked – v. 15-17.

- Isa. 66: 15-17: “For the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to pay back his anger in fury, and his rebuke in flames of fire. For by fire will the Lord execute judgment, and by his sword, on all flesh; and those slain by the Lord shall be many [NIV: For with fire will and with his sword the Lord execute judgment upon all men; and many will be those slain by the Lord]. Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following the one in the center, eating the flesh of pigs, vermin, and rodents, shall come to an end together, says the Lord [NIV: Those who consecrate and purify themselves to go into the gardens following the one in the midst of (or ‘gardens behind one of your temples’) those who eat the flesh of pigs and rats and other abominable things – they will meet their end together, declares the Lord].”

Fire, chariots, whirlwind, and sword are symbols of God's judgment over those who reject His correction and despise Him. He comes into judgment against the wicked in the way that He wants, whether by using human armies on earth, whether by calamities of nature or any other form. He always performs His justice and His judgment, even though we do not understand His methods. The bible says that He withholds His fury, is slow to anger, but when He arises against something, no one can stop Him. Here, the prophecy of Isa. 65: 11-15 seems to be repeated, about hypocrisy, idolatry, and double worship by those who claimed to be Jews.

The Gentiles will be a holy church – v. 18-23.

- Isa. 66: 18-23: “For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. From them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Put [NRSV; NIV: ‘the Lybians’; KJV: ‘Pul’], and Lud [NIV: ‘Lydians’]—which draw the bow [NIV: famous as archers]—to Tubal and Javan [NIV: ‘Greece’], to the coastlands far away [NIV: to the distant islands] that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations. They shall bring all your kindred [NIV: They will bring all your brothers] from all the nations as an offering to the Lord, on horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and on mules, and on dromedaries [NIV: on horses, chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels], to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, just as the Israelites bring a grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord [NIV: in ceremonially clean vessels]. And I will also take some of them as priests and as Levites, says the Lord. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord.”

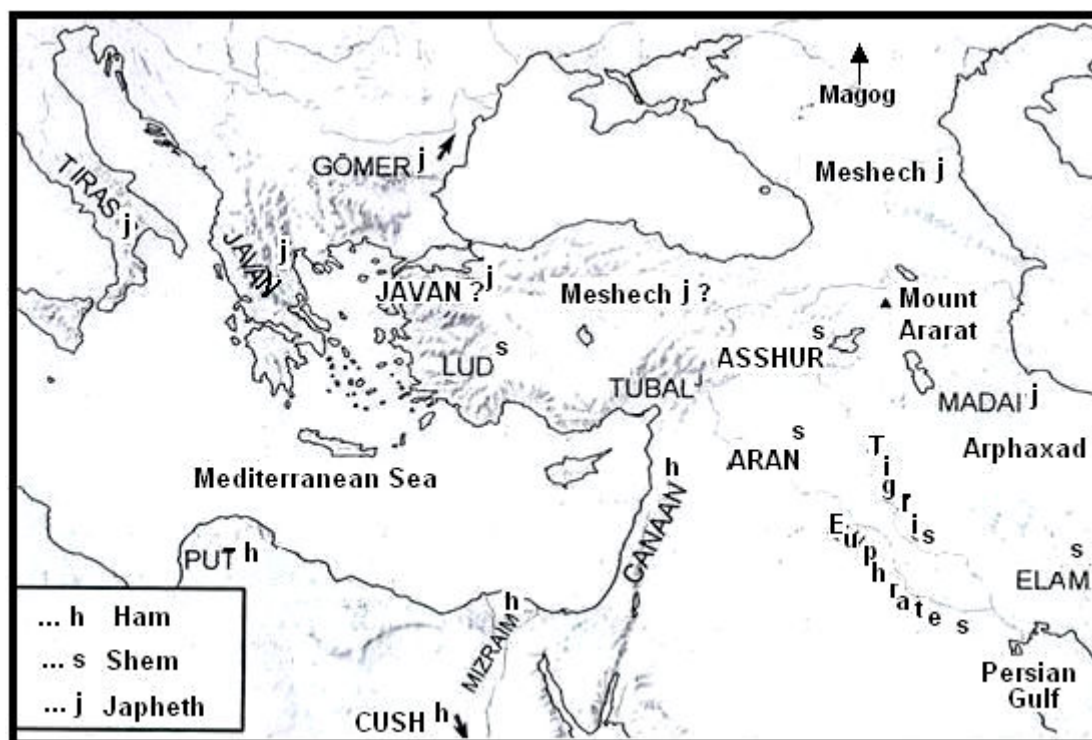
- Isa. 66: 18: “For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory” – God was talking to Israel, especially the rebellious and stubborn, who refused to listen to Him. He would now come to gather all the gentile nations of several tongues to contemplate what He was able to do. They would know His presence, and this would be revealed by His own Spirit, inwardly, in every heart that heard the words of the gospel. In other words, the Gentiles would be participants in that glory too.

- Isa. 66: 19: “I will set a sign among them. From them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Put [NRSV; NIV: ‘the Lybians’; KJV: ‘Pul’], and Lud [NIV: ‘Lydians’]—which draw the bow [NIV: famous as archers]—to Tubal and Javan [NIV: ‘Greece’], to the coastlands far away [NIV: to the distant islands] that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nation” – this sign was Jesus, for He Himself said, “The kingdom of God is within you.” In His presence as man He showed how to take possession of the kingdom of God; He manifested that kingdom in Himself, not only in words, but in attitudes. He set the example so we could follow Him, and did what none of us could do: to die on the cross as a propitiation for our sins. He alone could overcome death, the eternal separation from God.

‘From them I will send survivors to the nations’ or ‘I will send some of those who survive to the nations’ (NIV) – It may mean His apostles or all the remnant Jews of that time who even returning to their dwellings in other lands, as seen in Acts 2: 9 -11, could carry the good news of Salvation. But here, in particular, He mentions some nations: Tarshish, Put [in NRSV; NIV: ‘the Lybians’; KJV: ‘Pul’], Lud [NIV: ‘Lydians’], Tubal

and Javan [NIV: 'Greece'], to the coastlands far away [NIV: to the distant islands], such as Italy (Rome and nations of the East, for example).

As we saw earlier in the other prophecies of Isaiah, Tarshish could correspond to both the region of India and the present Spain. Above, the prophet quotes also Libya (Pul or Put), Lydia (Lud, present western region of Turkey), Greece (Javan) and Tubal. Pul or Put was a descendant of Ham son of Noah. Lud was a descendant of Shem son of Noah. Tarshish, Javan, and Tubal were the descendants of Japheth, the third son of Noah, the father of the Indo-European peoples. Javan can be identified with Greece.



As for Tubal, it is often quoted in the bible along with Meshech and Magog, other descendants of Japheth. In Ezek. 38: 1-3, for example, these nations are described together: “The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince [in the Septuagint, ‘prince of Rosh’ or ‘Rhos’] of Meshech and Tubal [In modern Russian, Moscow and Tobolsk]; prophesy against him and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshek and Tubal [Magog was Gog’s original kingdom, though he acquired also Meshech and Tubal, so as to be called their chief prince].’”

Tobolsk is a city in Russia, and was the former capital of Siberia (a vast region of Russia and northern Kazakhstan).



Thus, we saw in Acts 2: 9-11 that the Jews present at the feast of Pentecost and who were converted were: Parthians (Parthia was the northeastern region of present-day Iran), Medes (from Media, northwest of present-day Iran), Elamites (Elam was the southwest region of present-day Iran), residents of Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), Cappadocia (in present-day Turkey), Pontus (Northeastern Turkey), Asia (also called Anatolia, present-day Turkey), Phrygia (central Turkey), Pamphylia (in southern Turkey), Egypt and parts of Libya (north of Africa), Cyrene (an ancient Greek colony in present-day Libya), Romans, Cretans (Crete, Greek island in Aegean Sea) and Arabs. Parthia, Media, Elam, and Mesopotamia were in the East, in the ancient region of Assyria, Babylon and Persia, today Iran and Iraq. Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia Minor (where the seven churches were), Phrygia and Pamphylia, all regions of present-day Turkey, were evangelized by the apostle Paul and his collaborators, such as Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, among others. As for Rome, one does not know who actually started the church there, but Peter and Paul came to that city.





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

Let us see the nations evangelized by the apostles of the Lord (all but John were martyred):

- Simon Peter took the word to the believers of Rome, along with John Mark (the evangelist, son of Mary – Acts 12: 25; Acts 13: 13; Acts 15: 37-40; Col. 4: 10; 2 Tim. 4: 11; Philemon 24; 1 Pet. 5: 13). Peter died crucified upside down in Rome around 65 or 68 AD.

- John Mark (author of the second gospel) took the gospel to Alexandria in Egypt and died dragged by horses in Alexandria (Roman Empire) in 70-80 AD.

- James (the greater), brother of the apostle John, son of Zebedee, was beheaded by King Herod Agrippa in 44 AD in Jerusalem.

- Philip (apostle of Jesus) preached the gospel in Palestine, Greece and Asia Minor, where the wife of a Roman proconsul was converted. There, he died crucified and then stoned, in the year 80 AD, at Hierapolis in Phrygia, by order of the proconsul.

- Andrew, Peter's brother, is considered the founder of the Church in Byzantium (Constantinople and now Istanbul), where the Emperor Constantine ruled later, establishing the Roman Apostolic Catholic Church. He was crucified in Greece (Roman dominion) in an X-shaped cross.

- Paul of Tarsus took the gospel to all Asia Minor, Syria, Cyprus, Macedonia and also to Rome, where he died. The bible says that at the beginning of his conversion he also took the gospel to Arabia (Gal 1: 17); not Saudi Arabia today, on the Arabian Peninsula, but Arabia Petraea (in Latin) or Petrea, Arabian Province or simply Arabia, which included the Nabataean kingdom in Jordan, the Sinai Peninsula and the Northwest of the Arabian Peninsula. Later it was incorporated by the Roman Empire in 106 AD in the reign of Trajan. He was beheaded in Rome (for being a Roman citizen, otherwise he would suffer another kind of death).

- Matthias: chosen to take the place of Judas Iscariot. Died burned at the stake, no one knows where.

- Luke (physician and evangelist): died at Thebes in Boeotia (prefecture of Greece) at the age of 84; it is not known if he was martyred. Probably, he evangelized some regions of Greece.

- Thomas: was probably the most active of the apostles in the east of Syria, preaching to India, where he died pierced by spears.

- Bartholomew (also known as Nathanael) preached in India with Thomas, returning to Armenia, Ethiopia and southern Arabia. According to reports, he was skinned alive and died in Albanopolis (modern Derbent, north of Azerbaijan), in Caucasus Mountains (between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea), near the region of Meshech and Tubal, at the behest of the governor.

- Judas Thaddaeus (apostle of Jesus): he devoted himself to preaching the gospel in Judea, Samaria, Mesopotamia (today, region of Iraq) and Persia. Ancient traditions state that he was martyred in Persia, at the behest of the pagan priests of Zoroaster, and was beheaded along with Simon the Zealot (apostle of Jesus), who also preached in that region. Simon was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the Sun god.

- Matthew: ministered in Persia (now Iran) and Ethiopia. It is not known if he was martyred (stabbed to death in Ethiopia).

- James, the less (son of Alphaeus), apostle of Jesus: ministered in Syria, where he probably died stoned.

- John (apostle of Jesus): the only one that was not martyred. He was exiled to the island of Patmos, in the eastern Aegean Sea, during the persecution of the Roman Emperor Domitian, around 90 AD. There, he wrote the Book of Revelation. He died of natural death at Ephesus, 98 or 100 AD, when he was 94 years old, after being released from prison in the government of Nerva, Roman emperor. An ancient Latin tradition states that he escaped without getting burned, after having been thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. This would have happened in Rome. He exercised jurisdiction over the churches of Asia Minor.

- James, the Just or the Righteous, writer of the Epistle of James, first bishop of Jerusalem and half-brother of Jesus (Mk. 6: 3; Gal. 1: 19), stayed in Jerusalem, where he evangelized and was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and then stoned; it is unclear whether by traditional Jews.

- Isa. 66: 20-22: “They shall bring all your kindred [NIV: They will bring all your brothers] from all the nations as an offering to the Lord, on horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and on mules, and on dromedaries [NIV: on horses, chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels], to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, just as the Israelites bring a grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord [NIV: in ceremonially clean vessels]. And I will also take some of them as priests and as Levites, says the Lord. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain” – somehow, at some of the important feasts, these converts came to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. He says some of them would be priests. We have seen that even though the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant was abolished Jesus’ disciples and apostles continued the priesthood that He began. In Acts 6: 7 it is written that even ancient Jewish priests obeyed the new faith, and logically assumed the new priesthood. Paul’s disciples such as Timothy and Titus were also bishops in Christian churches. Luke does not seem to have taken the leadership of any church, but he took the gospel to the regions of Greece. The apostle John also had leadership over the churches of Asia Minor, especially that of Ephesus. The new heavens and the new earth as we have seen in Isa. 65: 17-18 reflect the state of the Church that was created by Jesus. True believers

would leave a lasting offspring in the faith, and their names would always be written in the Lamb's book of life.

- Isa. 66: 23: "From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord" – it is logical that Christians did not follow the traditional Jewish customs, although some festivals of the OT were still followed at the beginning of the church: Passover (Jn. 2: 13; 23, Jn. 6: 4; Jn. 11: 55; Matt. 26: 2; Mk. 14: 1; Lk. 22: 1; Acts 12: 3; Acts 20: 6), New Year (Jn. 5: 1), Tabernacles (Jn. 7: 2; 37 cf. Lev. 23: 36; Num. 29: 12; Neh. 8: 14-18), Pentecost (Acts 2: 1; Acts 20: 16; 1 Cor. 16: 8), Day of Atonement (Acts 27: 9, here called the Day of Fasting). But the New Moon was no longer celebrated (from month to month), nor was the Sabbath maintained, but replaced by Sunday on the 4th century. What the prophecy meant was that the NT Church would always worship the Lord, day after day, week after week, month after month. Worship and prayer became part of the routine of believers; as the apostle Paul said, always living by the Spirit (Gal. 5: 16) and praying in the Spirit all the time (Eph. 6: 18).

The eternal punishment of the wicked – v. 24.

- Isa. 66: 24: "And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh [NIV: they will loathsome to all mankind]."

The Lord had shown the joy of the faithful within His church, and now shows the destiny of the wicked, that is, besides a continuous torment of the conscience, preventing their rest in God and accusing them always, this figure of speech was used by Jesus to designate hell, eternal death (Mk. 9: 44; Rev. 14: 10).

Volumes 1 and 2 of this book:

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