

PROPHETS

Introduction

We have already met three Prophets that appeared in the Historical Books: Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. There were many more prophets in Israel. They were personages inspired by God to preach to the People, to remind them about the Law, to denounce their sins, the abuses of the kings. They are normal people, of any trade or condition that suddenly feel called by God for that ministry: to denounce the sins of the people, tell them about the punishments that their infidelities can bring to them. They are solitary, exceptional people, called to a very hard life, full of persecutions, often times confronting even kings, the priests and the powerful. We find in them the faith of Israel in its purist form and in their writings (gathered almost always by their disciples) some of the most beautiful and sublime texts of the whole Old Testament.

ISAIAH

Introduction

The book of Isaiah

With the name of Isaiah we have a collection of prophetic writings that actually have several authors. Looking at close range we distinguish three parts: Isaiah I, from 1–39; Isaiah II, “The Book of Consolation,” from 40–45; Isaiah III, from 56–66.

The prophet Isaiah

Born towards the year 760, he received his prophetic vocation in 739; he lived in an agitated and decisive time, with the destruction of the Northern kingdom and the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib. In his prophesy he announces the arrival of a savior, a new just king that will heal the wounds of Israel and will conduct them in the path of the Lord. This announcement, that made reference to the successor of the impious king Ahaz, gives wings to Isaiah for dreaming about a future time of peace and blessing, expressed in marvelous poetic images, and that was taken later on as announcement about the future Messiah, the definitive Savior of Israel.

ISAIAH I

Vocation of Isaiah

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

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

4At the sound of their voices the foundations of the threshold shook and the Temple was filled with smoke. 5I said:

—Poor me! I am doomed!
For I am a man of unclean lips
living among a people of unclean lips,

and yet I have seen the King,
Yahweh Sabaoth.

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

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

8Then I heard the voice of the Lord:

—Whom shall I send?
And who will go for us?
I answered:
—Here I am. Send me!

BOOK ABOUT IMMANUEL

Second advice: the sign of Immanuel

7 10Once again Yahweh addressed Ahaz:

11—Ask for a sign from Yahweh your God, let it come either from the deepest depths or from the heights of heaven.

12But Ahaz answered:

—I will not ask, I will not put Yahweh to the test.

13Then Isaiah said:

—Now listen, descendants of David.

Have you not been satisfied trying the patience of people, that you also try the patience of my God?
14Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign:

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

Messianic prophesy

9 1The people who walk in darkness
have seen a great light.
A light has dawned
on those who live in the land
of the shadow of death.

2You have enlarged the nation;
you have increased their joy.

They rejoice before you,
as people rejoice at harvest time
as they rejoice in dividing the spoil.

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

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

5For a child is born to us,
a son is given us;
the royal ornament is laid upon his shoulder,
and his name is proclaimed:
"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

6To the increase of his powerful rule
in peace, there will be no end.
Vast will be his dominion,
he will reign on David's throne
and over all his kingdom,
to establish and uphold it
with justice and righteousness
from this time onward and forever.
The zealous love of Yahweh Sabaoth
will do this.

Messianic peace

11 1From the stump of Jesse a shoot will come forth;
from his roots a branch will grow and bear fruit.

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

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

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

5Justice will be the girdle of his waist,
truth the girdle of his loins.

6The wolf will dwell with the lamb,

the leopard will rest beside the kid,
the calf and the lion cub will feed together
and a little child will lead them.

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

Like cattle, the lion will eat hay.

8By the cobra's den the infant will play.

The child will put his hand
into the viper's lair.

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

Return to Zion

35 1Let the wilderness and the arid land rejoice,
the desert be glad and blossom.

2Covered with flowers,
it sings and shouts with joy,
adorned with the splendor of Lebanon,
the magnificence of Carmel and Sharon.

They, my people, see the glory of Yahweh,
the majesty of our God.

3Give vigor to weary hands
and strength to enfeebled knees.

4Say to those who are afraid:

“Have courage, do not fear.

See, your God comes, demanding justice.

He is the God who rewards,
the God who comes to save you.”

5Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unsealed.

6Then will the lame leap as a hart
and the tongue of the dumb sing and shout.

For water will break out in the wilderness
and streams gush forth from the desert.

7The thirsty ground will become a pool,
the arid land springs of water.

In the haunts where once reptiles lay,
grass will grow with reeds and rushes.

8There will be a highway
which will be called The Way of Holiness;
no one unclean will pass over it

nor any wicked fool stray there.
9No lion will be found there
nor any beast of prey.
Only the redeemed will walk there.
10For the ransomed of Yahweh will return:
with everlasting joy upon their heads,
they will come to Zion singing,
gladness and joy marching with them,
while sorrow and sighing flee away.

ISAIAH II

Introduction

In this book appears the mysterious figure of the “Servant of Yahweh,” a personage chosen by God for the salvation of the people; this person does not have regal attributes, neither power, but it is the “suffering servant,” who takes upon himself the sins of the people and suffers for them. In this mysterious figure the Church has seen the announcement of Jesus that will not be a triumphant King Messiah, but the one who will give his life until death for the salvation of all.

The Good News

401Be comforted, my people,
be strengthened, says your God.
2Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, proclaim to her
that her time of bondage is at an end,
that her guilt has been paid for,
that from the hand of Yahweh
she has received double punishment
for all her iniquity.
3A voice cries:
—In the wilderness prepare the way for Yahweh.
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
4Every valley will be raised up;
every mountain and hill will be laid low.
The stumbling blocks shall become level
and the rugged places smooth.
5The glory of Yahweh will be revealed,
and all mortals together will see it;
for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.”
6A voice says: ‘Cry.’
and I say: ‘What shall I cry?’
All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty as the flower of the field.
10Here comes your God with might;

his strong arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and here before him is his booty.
1 Like a shepherd he tends his flock:
he gathers the lambs in his arms,
he carries them in his bosom,
gently leading those that are with young.

First servant song: God presents his servant

42 1 Here is my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight.
I have put my spirit upon him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
2 He does not shout or raise his voice
proclamations are not heard in the streets.
3 A broken reed he will not crush,
nor will he snuff out the light
of the wavering wick.
He will make justice appear in truth.
4 He will not waver or be broken
until he has established
justice on earth;
the islands are waiting for his law.

5 Thus says God, Yahweh,
who created the heavens
and stretched them out,
who spread the earth
and all that comes from it,
who gives life and breath
to those who walk on it:
6 I, Yahweh,
have called you for the sake of justice;
I will hold your hand
to make you firm;
I will make you as a covenant to the people,
and as a light to the nations,
7 to open eyes that do not see,
to free captives from prison,
to bring out to light
those who sit in darkness.
8 I am Yahweh, that is my name,
I will not give my glory to another;
or my praise to graven images.

9See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things do I declare:
before they spring forth I tell you of them.

Second servant song: the mission

49 1Listen to me, O islands,
pay attention, peoples from distant lands.
Yahweh called me from my mother's womb;
he pronounced my name before I was born.
2He made my mouth like a sharpened sword.
He hid me in the shadow of his hand.
He made me into a polished arrow
set apart in his quiver.
3He said to me: You are Israel, my servant,
Through you I will be known.
4'I have labored in vain,' I thought
and spent my strength for nothing.
Yet what is due me was in the hand of Yahweh,
and my reward was with my God.
I am important in the sight of Yahweh,
and my God is my strength.
5And now Yahweh has spoken,
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
to gather Israel to him.
6He said: 'It is not enough
that you be my servant,
to restore the tribes of Jacob,
to bring back the remnant of Israel.
I will make you the light of the nations,
that my salvation will reach
to the ends of the earth.

Third servant song: suffering and trust

50 4The Lord Yahweh has taught me
so I speak as his disciple
and I know how to sustain the weary.
Morning after morning he wakes me up
to hear, to listen like a disciple.
5The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear.

I have not rebelled,
nor have I withdrawn.
6I offered my back to those who strike me,
my cheeks to those who pulled my beard;
neither did I shield my face
from blows, spittle and disgrace.
7I have not despaired,
for the Lord Yahweh comes to my help.
So, like a flint I set my face,
knowing that I will not be disgraced.
8He who avenges me is near.
Who then will accuse me?
Let us confront each other.
Who is now my accuser?
Let him approach.
9If the Lord Yahweh is my help,
who will condemn me?
All of them will wear out like cloth;
the moth will devour them.

Fourth servant song: passion and glory

52 13It is now when my servant will succeed;
he will be exalted and highly praised.
14Just as many have been horrified
at his disfigured appearance:
'Is this a man? He does not look like one,'
15so will nations be astounded,
kings will stand speechless,
for they will see something never told,
they will witness something never heard of.

53 1Who could believe what we have heard,
and to whom has Yahweh revealed his feat?
2Like a root out of dry ground,
like a sapling he grew up before us,
with nothing attractive in his appearance,
no beauty, no majesty.
3He was despised and rejected,
a man of sorrows familiar with grief,
a man from whom people hide their face,
spurned and considered of no account.
4Yet ours were the sorrows he bore,

ours were the sufferings he endured,
although we considered him as one
punished by God, stricken and brought low.
5Destroyed because of our sins,
he was crushed for our wickedness.
Through his punishment we are made whole;
by his wounds we are healed.
6Like sheep we had all gone astray,
each following his own way;
but Yahweh laid upon him all our guilt.
7He was harshly treated,
but unresisting and silent, he humbly submitted.
Like a lamb led to the slaughter
or a sheep before the shearer
he did not open his mouth.
8He was taken away to detention and judgment—
what an unthinkable fate!
He was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for his people's sin.
9They made his tomb with the wicked,
they put him in the graveyard of the oppressors,
though he had done no violence nor spoken in deceit.
10Yet it was the will of Yahweh to crush him with grief.
When he makes himself an offering for sin,
he will have a long life and see his descendants.
Through him the will of Yahweh is done.
11For the anguish he suffered,
he will see the light and obtain perfect knowledge.
My just servant will justify the multitude;
he will bear and take away their guilt.
12Therefore I will give him his portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong.
For he surrendered himself to death
and was even counted among the wicked,
bearing the sins of the multitude
and interceding for sinners.

ISAIAH III

Introduction

We practically know nothing about this prophet whom we call Isaiah III; it is not even clear that the following chapters belong to the same one author. The core message seems to come from a prophet that acts shortly after the restoration of Judah, amidst the poverty and disillusionment of the returning exiles. It is obvious that he imitates Isaiah II. Characteristic of this collection is its eschatological character that is looking towards a definitive future.

The light of the New Jerusalem

60 1 Arise, shine, for your light has come.
The Glory of Yahweh rises upon you.
2 Night still covers the earth
and gloomy clouds veil the peoples,
but Yahweh now rises
and over you his glory appears.
3 Nations will come to your light
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
4 Lift up your eyes round about and see:
they are all gathered and come to you,
your sons from afar,
your daughters tenderly carried.
5 This sight will make your face radiant,
your heart throbbing and full;
the riches of the sea will be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations will come to you.
6 A flood of camels will cover you,
caravans from Midian and Ephah.
Those from Sheba will come,
bringing with them gold and incense,
all singing in praise of Yahweh.

Mission of the prophet

61 1 The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me,
because Yahweh has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up broken hearts,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
freedom to those languishing in prison;
2 to announce the year of Yahweh's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to give comfort to all who grieve;
3 (to comfort those who mourn in Zion)
and give them a garland instead of ashes,
oil of gladness instead of mourning,
and festal clothes instead of despair.

New creation

65 17I now create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind again.

18Be glad forever and rejoice in what I create; for I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight. 19I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people.

The sound of distress and the voice of weeping will not be heard in it any more.

20You will no longer know of dead children or of adults who do not live out a lifetime. One who reaches a hundred years will have died a mere youth, but one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

JEREMIAH

Introduction

The prophet Jeremiah

Few personalities from the Old Testament are better known and close to us than the prophet Jeremiah, born at Anatot, a town of the tribe of Benjamin, in the middle of the VII century B.C.

First of all, because we know quite well that part of history when he lived, thanks to the biblical documents, together with extra biblical writings of that time (see 2K 22–25). And also because a great part of the book of Jeremiah is autobiographical, written perhaps by his disciple and secretary Baruc.

We can follow the tragic and touching itinerary of Jeremiah: his vocation in the year 627, the first prophetic activity addressing the destroyed Northern Kingdom, the youthful dreams. After a time of silence (622–609), the great tragedy of Josiah and the terrible revelation of the “Northern threat”. From there the scorn of the people because the threats do not come thru, the retrenchment and isolation of a bitter prophet, the insults and, finally, the open persecution. His vocation becomes unbearable and he needs the consolation of God. Finally all his threatening oracles begin to take place.

The prophet tries to gather a group of Jews so that sacred history would continue in Palestine; he is taken by force to Egypt where he pronounces his last oracles. He ends as an anti-Moses, that is, doing backwards the road of liberation, loosing the institutions and the Promised Land, returning to Egypt, where the name of the Lord is no longer invoked. The prophet runs this path in a passionate way. He feels torn between solidarity with his people and the word of God, between obedience to the divine mission and solidarity with his suffering people. His life and passion seem in many aspects an anticipation of the one like Christ.

The book of Jeremiah

Regarding the materials, usually three groups are distinguishable: the first one formed by the original oracles of the prophet and his confessions. The second comprises the biographical narrations, where there are also oracles of the prophet. The third is formed by Jeremiah's discourses.

It was necessary, often times, to reestablish the order or point out the interruptions in the presentation, to make the text more legible.

Jeremiah stands out for his capacity to create images. He stands also by his lyricism and for his intense emotions.

1 1These are the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiyah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. 2The word of Yahweh came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah. 3It came again during the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah. In the fifth month of that year, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were taken into exile.

Vocation and first oracle

4A word of Yahweh came to me:

5—Even before I formed you in the womb I have known you; even before you were born I had set you apart, and appointed you a prophet to the nations!

6I said:

—Ah, Lord Yahweh! I do not know how to speak; I am still young!

7But Yahweh replied:

—Do not say; ‘I am still young’, for now you will go whatever be the mission I am entrusting to you, and you will speak of whatever I command you to say. 8Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you to protect you—it is Yahweh who speaks!

9Then Yahweh stretched out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me:

—Now I have put my words in your mouth. 10See! Today I give you authority over nations and over kingdoms to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

11A word of Yahweh came to me again:

—Jeremiah what do you see?

I said:

—I see the branch of a watching tree.

12And Yahweh said to me:

—You are right. I too am watching to fulfill my word. 13The word of Yahweh came to me a second time:

—What do you see?

I replied:

—I see a boiling caldron coming from the north and it is tilted towards this direction.

Then Yahweh said to me:

14—From the north disaster will boil down on all the people of this land. 15I am calling all the kingdoms of the north—it is Yahweh who speaks.

Each of them will come and encamp
at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem;
against all its surrounding walls
and against all the cities of Judah.

16I will pass judgment on my people
because of the evil they do in forsaking me;
they have burned incense to foreign gods
and worshipped gods their hands have made.

17But you, get ready for action;
stand up and say to them all
that I command you.

Be not scared of them
or I will scare you in their presence!

18See, I will make you a fortified city,
a pillar of iron with walls of bronze,
against all the nations,
against the kings and princes of Judah,
against the priests and the people of the land.

19They will fight against you
but shall not overcome you,
for I am with you to rescue you
—it is Yahweh who speaks.

Sermon on the temple

7 1These words were spoken by Yahweh, to Jeremiah:

—2Stand at the gate of Yahweh’s house and proclaim this in a loud voice: Listen to what Yahweh says, all you people of Judah (who enter these gates to worship Yahweh). 3Yahweh the God of Israel says this:

Amend your ways
and your deeds
and I will stay with you in this place.

4Rely not on empty words
such as: ‘Look, the Temple of Yahweh!
The Temple of Yahweh!
This is the Temple of Yahweh!’

5It is far better for you
to amend your ways
and act justly with all.

6Do not abuse the stranger,
orphan or widow
or shed innocent blood in this place
or follow false gods to your own ruin.

7Then I will stay with you
in this place,
in the land I gave to your ancestors
in times past and forever.

8But you trust in deceptive
and useless words.

9You steal, kill,
take the wife of your neighbor;
you swear falsely,
worship Baal
and follow foreign gods who are not yours.

10Then, after doing
all these horrible things,
you come and stand before me
in this temple that bears my Name
and say, ‘Now we are safe.’

11Is this house on which rests my Name
a den of thieves? I have seen this myself
—it is Yahweh who speaks.

At the potter's house

18 ¹This is the word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah:

²—Go down to the potter's house and there you will hear what I have to say.

³So I went to the potter's house and found him working at the wheel.

⁴But the pot he was working on was spoiled in his hands, so he reworked it all over again into another pot that suits his desire.

⁵Meanwhile Yahweh sent me his word:

⁶—People of Israel, can I not do with you what this potter does? As clay in the potter's hand so are you in my hands.

⁷At times I warn a nation or a kingdom that I will uproot or destroy it. ⁸But if they change their ways, I then relent and refrain from doing the harm I had intended to do.

⁹At other times I declare that a nation or kingdom will be built up and planted ¹⁰but then they do what displeases me and do not listen to me, so I decide to reverse the good deeds that I intend to do.

¹¹And Yahweh added:

—Now tell the people of Judah and to those who live in Jerusalem:

Yahweh says to you,

'Listen, I am planning to destroy you;

I am hatching a devastating plot against you!

Turn from your evil ways;

rectify your conduct and your deeds.'

The broken jar

19 ¹This was an order of Yahweh to Jeremiah:

—Go and buy a jar from the potter. Take with you some elders of the people and a few senior priests, ²and go out to the valley of Ben-Hinnom at the entrance to the Potsherd Gate. Proclaim there what I tell you.

¹⁰Then, you shall break the jar before the people who have accompanied you ¹¹and you will tell them that I, Yahweh the God of hosts, will smash the people of this city like the shattered jar of the potter which is beyond repair.

¹⁴Then Jeremiah left Topheth where Yahweh had sent him to prophesy, and stood in the porch of the House of Yahweh. There he told all the people:

¹⁵—Listen to the word of Yahweh, God of Israel: I am about to bring on this city and the towns surrounding the disaster that I have already foretold, because they are a stiff-necked people and will not listen to me.

Jeremiah's confessions

20 7Yahweh, you have seduced me
and I let myself be seduced.
You have taken me by force and prevailed.
I have become a laughingstock all day long;
they all make fun of me,
8for every time I speak
I have to shout, "Violence! Devastation!"
Yahweh's word has brought me
insult and derision all day long.
9So I decided to forget about him
and speak no more in his name.
But his word in my heart becomes like a fire
burning deep within my bones.
I try so hard to hold it in,
but I cannot do it.
10I hear many people whispering,
'Terror is all around!
Denounce him! Yes, denounce him!'
All my friends watch me to see if I will slip:
'Perhaps he can be deceived,' they say;
'then we can get the better of him
and have our revenge.'
11But Yahweh, a mighty warrior, is with me.
My persecutors will stumble and not prevail;
that failure will be their shame
and their disgrace will never be forgotten.
12Yahweh, God of hosts, you test the just
and probe the heart and mind.
Let me see your revenge on them,
for to you I have entrusted my cause.
13Sing to Yahweh! Praise Yahweh and say:
he has rescued the poor
from the clutches of the wicked!

JEREMIAH'S BIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS

Jeremiah, judged and released

26 1At the beginning of the reign of Judah's king Jehoiakim son of Josiah, the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah: 2Yahweh says this:

—Stand in the courtyard of Yahweh's House and say to all who come from the towns of Judah to worship in Yahweh's house—all that I command you to say; do not omit anything! 3Perhaps they will listen to you. Perhaps

each one will turn from his wicked ways. Then I will change my mind and forget the destruction that I have planned to inflict on them because of their wicked deeds.

4Tell them: This is what Yahweh says:

—You have not obeyed me and you have failed to walk according to my Law which I have set before you. 5You have not heeded my servants, the prophets, whom I have persistently sent to you. If you stubbornly close your ears to them, 6I will treat this House of mine as I treated the sanctuary of Shiloh and let all the nations see that Jerusalem is a cursed city.

7The priests, the prophets and all the people heard what Jeremiah said in Yahweh's House. 8When Jeremiah finished saying all that Yahweh had commanded, he was besieged by the priests and prophets saying:

—You are bound to die! 9How dare you speak in Yahweh's Name telling us that this House will be treated like Shiloh and this city is to become a deserted ruin.

And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the House of Yahweh.

10Upon hearing this, the leaders of Judah came up from the king's palace to the House of Yahweh and took their place at the entrance of the New Gate. 11Then the priests and the prophets said to the leaders of the people:

—This man must die for he has spoken against the city as you have heard with your own ears!

12Jeremiah replied:

—I have been sent by Yahweh to prophesy against this House and this city all that you have heard. 13Hence, reform your ways and your deeds and obey Yahweh your God that he may change his mind and not bring upon you the destruction he had intended.

14As for me I am in your hands; do with me whatever you consider just and right. 15But know that I am innocent and if you take my life you commit a crime that is a curse on yourselves, on the city and the people. In truth it was Yahweh who sent me to say all that I said in your hearing.

16Then the leaders, backed by the people, said to the priests and the prophets:

—This man does not deserve death; he spoke to us in the Name of Yahweh.

24As for Jeremiah he was befriended by Ahikam, son of Shaphan, and was not handed over to those who wanted him put to death.

Restoration oracle

30 1This is another word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh:

2Yahweh, God of Israel says:

—Write in a book all that I have communicated to you, 3for the days are coming when I shall bring my captive people Israel and Judah back to the land I gave to their ancestors as their inheritance.

EZEKIEL

Introduction

His life

We do not know the date of his birth. Being from a priestly family, he surely received his formation in the Temple, where he most probably officiated until the time of the Exile. In Exile he receives the prophetic vocation,

making him a kind of a younger brother to Jeremiah: both are the interpreters of tragedy, in the Motherland and in Exile.

His activity is divided into two stages by a violent break. The first stage lasts about seven years, until the fall of Jerusalem. His job there is to systematically destroy the false hope. The fall of Jerusalem seals the validity of his prophecies. A time of forced silence follows. The prophet begins the second stage: while undermining all hope in human powers, he asserts the judgment of God in History. Only afterwards begins to appear a new hope, founded only in the grace and fidelity of God.

His work

The same happens here as with the other prophets: the book of Ezekiel is not fully the work of Ezekiel. Firstly, because his literary activity is oral, made for recitation, divulged by the prophet and his disciples. What today we know as the book of Ezekiel is the work of his school.

Reading this book we should discover above all the dynamism of a divine action that, through the deserved cross of the people, a pure gift of resurrection will follow.

Theophany

1 1On the fifth day of the fourth month of the thirtieth year when I was with the exiles by the river Kebar, the heavens opened and I had visions from Yahweh.

2On the fifth of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiakin).

Vocation

2 1He said to me:

—Son of man, stand up for I am about to speak to you.

2A spirit came upon me as he spoke and kept me standing and then I heard him speak:

3—Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a people who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have sinned against me to this day. 4Now I am sending you to these defiant and stubborn people to tell them ‘this is the Lord Yahweh’s word.’ 5So, whether they listen or not this set of rebels will know there is a prophet among them. 6But you, son of man, do not fear them or what they say, for they will be as thorns for you and you will be sitting on a nest of scorpions. Don’t be afraid of their words when you are facing this set of rebels. 7Tell them what I say whether they choose to listen or not, for they are rebels. 8Listen then, son of man, to what I say and don’t be a rebel among rebels. Open your mouth and take in what I’m about to say.

9I looked and saw a hand stretched out in front of me holding a scroll. 10He unrolled it before me; on both sides were written lamentations, groanings and woes.

The prophet as sentinel

3 16After seven days the word of Yahweh came to me:

17—Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the House of Israel. With the word you hear from my mouth you will warn them in my name. 18When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ if you do not speak to warn the wicked man to give up his evil ways and so live, he shall die for his sin, and I will hold you responsible for his death. 19But if you have warned the wicked man and he has not given up his wickedness and evil ways, he shall die for his sin but you will save yourself. 20When the righteous man turns from what is good to do evil I shall put

an obstacle in his path: he shall die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. His good deeds will not be remembered and I shall hold you responsible for his death. 21But when you have warned the righteous man to keep him from sinning and he has not sinned, he will live for sure for he was warned and you will save your life.

Punishment and reconciliation

36 16The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms:

17—Son of man, when Israel occupied her own land she defiled it by her way of life and her actions. To me her conduct was like the uncleanness of a woman in her period.

18I poured out my fury on them because of the blood they shed in the land and because they defiled it with their filthy idols. 19Then I scattered them among the nations and dispersed them in other lands. I judged them according to their conduct and their actions.

20But when they were brought to other nations, my holy Name was profaned because others said of them: ‘The people of Yahweh had to be exiled from his land!’ 21Then I was concerned for my holy Name, profaned by Israel among the nations where she had been dispersed. Now you shall say to the people of Israel:

22—It is not for your sake that I am about to act, but because of my holy Name that you have profaned in the places where you have gone. 23I will make known the holiness of my great Name, profaned among the nations because of you, and they will know that I am Yahweh when I show them my holiness among you.

24—For I will gather you from all the nations and bring you back to your own land. 25Then I shall pour pure water over you and you shall be made clean—cleansed from the defilement of all your idols. 26I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I shall remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27I shall put my spirit within you and move you to follow my decrees and keep my laws. 28You will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you shall be my people and I will be your God.

29—I will free you from all your uncleanness. I shall summon the wheat and make it plentiful and so keep famine away from you. 30I shall see that the fruits of the earth and the produce of the fields are plentiful and that you no longer suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. 31Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked actions and loathe yourselves for the sins you committed and for your detestable practices. 32I want you to know that it is not for your sake I am doing this, word of Yahweh. Be ashamed and humbled because of your conduct, Israel!

The bones and the spirit

37 1The hand of Yahweh was upon me. He brought me out and led me in spirit to the middle of the valley which was full of bones. 2He made me walk to and fro among them and I could see there was a great number of them on the ground all along the valley and that they were very dry.

3Yahweh said to me:

—Son of man, can these bones live again?

I said:

—Lord Yahweh, only you know that.

4He then said:

—Speak on my behalf concerning these bones; say to them:

Dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh! 5Yahweh says: I am going to put spirit in you and make you live. 6I shall put sinews on you and make flesh grow on you; I shall cover you with skin and give you my spirit, that you may live. And you will know that I am Yahweh.

7I prophesied as I had been commanded and then there was a noise and commotion; the bones joined together. 8I looked and saw that they had sinews, that flesh was growing on them and that he was covering them with skin. But there was no spirit in them.

9So Yahweh said to me:

—Speak on my behalf and call on the Spirit, son of man! Say to the Spirit: This is the word of Yahweh: Spirit, come from the four winds. Breathe into these dead bones and let them live!

10I prophesied as he had commanded me and breath entered them; they came alive, standing on their feet—a great, immense army!

11He then said to me:

—Son of man, these bones are all Israel. They keep saying: ‘Our bones are dry, hope has gone, it is the end of us.’ 12So prophesy! Say to them: This is what Yahweh says: I am going to open your tombs; I shall bring you out of your tombs, my people, and lead you back to the land of Israel. 13You will know that I am Yahweh, O my people! when I open your graves and bring you out of your graves, 14when I put my spirit in you and you live. I shall settle you in your land and you will know that I, Yahweh, have done what I said I would do.

DANIEL

Introduction

The book

What we read today in the book of Daniel is a complex work, set aside by itself in the Old Testament.

Beginning with the language in which the book is written: some chapters are written imitating the classic Hebrew; other in Aramaic, and others in Greek.

The distribution of forms and themes does not coincide with the division of languages.

Data

We could date the book between the years 167 and 164 B.C.

It is impossible to decide if all the legendary materials belonged since the beginning to Daniel or if it had been gathered around the hero. In any case, the Babylonian ambiance is fictitious; the author does not show special interest in the historical precision in these writings.

Apocalypses

The book of Daniel is a book all by itself in the Old Testament.

It has not entered as a prophetic book; it is part of the “writings,” a looser and more welcoming concept. But in the Greek and Latin bibles and in Christian tradition, Daniel is one of the four major prophets.

The apocalyptic literature is heir to prophesy.

Apocalypses is presented as a revelation of God, made to a chosen person, about history and its unraveling. It is intended for the community during a time of crisis, to re-ignite hope.

God is the one who reveals, but through dreams and prophetic visions. The visions are explained by an angel.

The theme is history and its unraveling.

It is a past history that arrives to the present and that through the genre’s fiction presents as future events, foretold by the seer.

It is about the definitive and universal establishment of the kingdom by the Lord of History.

The style uses allegory as basic procedure.

Pseudonymia: the author, faithful to the fiction of foretelling history, has to attribute his work to a great figure of the past. It seems that our author has chosen one of the personages quoted by Ezekiel.

DANIEL'S HISTORY

Daniel in the Babylonian court

1 1In the third year of Jehoiakim's reign as king of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem. 2The Lord delivered into his hands King Jehoiakim of Judah, and some of the vessels from the temple of God as well. These he carried off to the land of Shinar and placed in the treasure house of his god.

3King Nebuchadnezzar ordered his chief eunuch Ashpenaz to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility: 4young men without physical defect, handsome, intelligent and wise, well-informed, quick to learn and understand, and suitable for service in the king's palace. They were to be taught the language and literature of the Chaldeans. 5They were allotted a daily portion of food and wine from the king's table and were to be trained for three years, after which they were to enter the king's service.

6Among these were young men of Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

7To these four youths God gave wisdom and proficiency in literature, and to Daniel the gift of interpreting visions and dreams.

8At the end of the period set by the king for the youths' training, the chief eunuch presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 9The king talked with them and found none to equal Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These four became members of the king's court. 10In any matter of wisdom and discernment about which the king consulted, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar

2 1In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he had a series of troubling dreams which rendered him sleepless. 2The king summoned magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and Chaldean diviners to interpret his dreams. When they arrived and stood in his presence, 3the king said:

—I had a terrible dream and I want to know its meaning.

4The Chaldeans answered in Aramaic:

—Live forever, O King! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give you its meaning.

5But the king replied:

—You have to tell me the dream and interpret it, too. That is my decision. If you won't do it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses razed to the ground. 6But if you can tell me the dream and its meaning, I will give you presents and reward you with great honor.

7The Chaldeans exclaimed:

—No one on earth can do what your majesty asks. Never has any king, however great and mighty, asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter or diviner. 8What the king demands is too difficult. No one can tell him that except the gods who do not live among mortals.

9This made the king so furious that he ordered all the wise men of Babylon executed. 10Upon issuance of the decree to put the wise men to death, a search was also made for Daniel and his companions to have them killed.

24After this Daniel went to Arioch, the commander appointed by the king to execute the wise men of Babylon. Daniel said to him:

—Do not execute the wise men yet. Bring me to the king, and I will interpret his dreams.

25At once Arioch took Daniel to the king and said:

—Here is a man found among the Judean captives who says he can interpret the king's dream.

26The king asked Daniel, who had been named Beltheshazzar:

—Can you tell me what my dream was and what it means?

27Daniel answered:

—No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can interpret the king's dream. 28But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future. I will tell you the dream and visions you had.

29As you lay in bed, O King, your thoughts turned to the future, and he who reveals mysteries showed you what is to happen. 30This mystery has been revealed to me not because I am wiser than anybody else but so that you may know what it means and what went on in your mind.

31In your vision you saw a statue—very large, very bright, terrible to look at. 32Its head was of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. 34As you watched, a rock cut from a mountain but not by human hands, struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, smashing them. 35All at once the iron, clay, bronze, silver and gold crumbled into pieces as fine as chaff on the threshing floor in summer. The wind swept them off and not a trace was left. But the rock that struck the statue became a great mountain that filled the whole earth.

36That was the dream. Now the interpretation. 37You, O king, are king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given dominion, strength, power and glory, 38and into whose hand he has placed humankind, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, making you ruler over them. You are that head of gold.

39After you, another kingdom inferior to yours will rise. Then a third kingdom of bronze will rule the whole world. 40Last shall be a fourth kingdom strong as iron and just as iron breaks and crushes everything else, so will it break and smash all the others. 41The partly-clay and partly-iron feet and toes mean that it will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron, just as you saw iron mixed with clay. 42And as the toes were partly iron and partly clay, the kingdom will be partly strong and partly weak. 43Just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, the people will be a mixture but will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

44In the time of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom never to be destroyed or delivered up to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and put an end to them. And it will endure forever. 45This is the meaning of your vision of a rock cut from a mountain not by human hands, the rock which struck the statue and broke into pieces the iron, bronze, clay, silver and gold. The great God has shown the king what will happen in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation reliable.

46King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and ordered that oblation and incense be offered to him.

47The king said to Daniel:

—Surely your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings and the revealer of mysteries. That is why you were able to reveal this mystery.

48The king gave Daniel a high position and showered gifts on him. He made him governor of the entire province of Babylon and in charge of all its wise men. 49At Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators of the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the king's court.

The golden statue

3 1King Nebuchadnezzar had a golden statue, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, erected on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

3All those summoned came together for the dedication and stood before the statue set up by King Nebuchadnezzar. 4There a herald proclaimed aloud:

—Nations and peoples of every language, you are hereby commanded 5to fall down and worship the golden statue as soon as you hear the music played on the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all other instruments. 6Whoever fails to do this will at once be thrown into a burning furnace.

8It was then that Chaldean diviners came to the king accusing the Jews. 9They said to King Nebuchadnezzar:

—Live forever, O king! 10You issued a decree that upon hearing the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and other musical instruments, everyone must fall down and worship the golden statue, 11and whoever failed to do so was to be thrown into a burning furnace. 12There are some Jews, those whom you appointed administrators of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who gave no heed to your order. They would not serve your gods or worship the golden image you set up.

16Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered:

—King Nebuchadnezzar, we need not defend ourselves before you on this matter. 17If you order us to be thrown into the furnace, the God we serve will rescue us. 18But even if he won't, we would like you to know, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden statue you have set up.

19Nebuchadnezzar's face reddened with fury as he looked at Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual 20and commanded some of his strongest soldiers to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the burning furnace.

21At once they were bound and thrown into the furnace, with their hats, shoes and garments on, 22for the king's order was very urgent. So fierce was the fire in the furnace that it devoured even the men who threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into it. 23The three, bound fast, fell into the midst of the blazing furnace.

The text in italics is originally written in Greek. Azariah's "Penitential Prayer" is written following the style and with the thematic of Psalm 51, that you can read in the book of Psalms in this Bible. And the "Canticle of the Three Youth" gets its inspiration from Psalms 136 and 148 that can also be read in the book of Psalms.

Azariah's penitential prayer

24They walked in the midst of the flames, singing to God and praising the Lord.

25Azariah stood up in the midst of the fire and prayed aloud:

*26Blessed and worthy of praise are you,
O Lord God of our fathers!
your name is glorious forever!*

Canticle of the three youth

49But the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace beside Azariah and his companions; he drove the flames of the fire outside the furnace, and blew upon them, 50in the middle of the furnace, a coolness like that of wind and dew, so that the fire did not touch them or cause them pain or trouble them.

51Then the three began singing together, glorifying and blessing God within the furnace, and saying:

52—*Blessed are you, Lord, God of our fathers,
be praised and exalted for ever.
Blessed is your holy and glorious name,
celebrated and exalted for ever.*

Confession of Nebuchadnezzar

91Then King Nebuchadnezzar suddenly rose up in great amazement and asked his counselors:

—Did we not throw three men bound into the fire?

They answered:

—Certainly.

92The king said:

—But I can see four men walking about freely through the fire without suffering any harm, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.

93Nebuchadnezzar approached the mouth of the blazing furnace and said:

—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here.

So they came out from the midst of the fire.

94The officials, prefects, governors and counselors of the king drew near to examine them: the fire had no effect on their bodies, their hair was not singed, their trousers were not burned, and they did not even have the smell of smoke.

95Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed:

—Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who sent his angel to free his servants who, trusting in him, disobeyed the king's order and preferred to give their bodies to the fire rather than serve and worship any other god but their God.

96I give this command, therefore: From every race, nation and language, anyone who speaks irreverently of the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be cut into pieces and his house shall be destroyed, for there is no other god who can save like this.

97And the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

The banquet of Belshazzar

5 1King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for his nobles, a thousand of them attended and he drank wine with them. 2Under the influence of wine, he ordered that the gold and silver vessels his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem be brought in so that he and his nobles, his wives and concubines might drink from them. 3The gold and silver vessels taken from God's temple were brought in, and the king and his nobles, his wives and concubines drank from them. 4While they drank wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze and iron, of wood and stone.

5Suddenly a man's fingers appeared opposite the lampstand and wrote on the plastered wall of the king's palace. Watching the hand as it wrote, the king turned pale. 6So terrified was he that his knees knocked and his legs gave way.

7He shouted, calling for his enchanters and Chaldean diviners:

—Whoever reads this writing and tells me its meaning will be clothed in purple, wear a gold chain around his neck, and be made the third highest ruler in my kingdom.

8All the king's wise men came, but none could read the writing or tell its meaning. 9King Belshazzar became very frightened and his face grew even more pale. His nobles were likewise terrified and confused.

10Hearing the troubled voices of the king and his nobles, the queen entered the banquet hall and said:

—Live forever, O king! Do not be alarmed and become pale. 11In your kingdom is a man who has the spirit of the holy gods. He was found to have discernment and god-like wisdom during your father's lifetime. He was in fact appointed chief of the magicians, enchanters and diviners by your father King Nebuchadnezzar. 12This man Daniel, whom the king called Beltheshazzar, knew how to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel and he will tell you what the writing means.

13Daniel was brought in and questioned by the king.

—Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father brought from Judah? 14I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods, that you have insight and extraordinary wisdom. 15Wise men and enchanters were brought here, but none of them could read this writing and tell its meaning. 16I have heard that you can interpret dreams and solve problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple, wear a gold chain around your neck, and be appointed third in rank in my kingdom.

17Daniel replied:

—You may keep your gifts or give them to someone else. Just the same I will read and interpret the writing for you.

24So he sent the hand that wrote the inscription 25which read MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. And these words mean: 26MENE, God has numbered the days of your reign and put an end to it; 27TEKEL, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; 28PARSIN, your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

29On Belshazzar's order, Daniel was clothed in purple, given a gold chain to wear around his neck, and proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

30That very night, however, the Chaldean king Belshazzar was slain.

6 1Darius the Mede, at the age of sixty-two, took over the kingdom.

Daniel In the lion's den

2Darius appointed one hundred and twenty satraps throughout the whole kingdom. They were made accountable to three administrators, one of whom was Daniel. This was to ensure that no loss or harm should come to the king. 3Because of the extraordinary spirit residing in him, Daniel excelled above all the other administrators and satraps, so that the king planned to give him authority over the entire kingdom.

4This provoked envy among the administrators and satraps, who tried to find grounds for filing charges against Daniel as regard his performance of official duties. But he was so trustworthy that neither corruption nor negligence could be found in him. 5Finally the men decided: 'We will never find any grounds for charges against this man Daniel except in something that has to do with the law of his God.'

11There the men spying on him found Daniel kneeling in prayer and asking God for help. 12So they went to the king and reminded him about the prohibition:

—O king, did you not publish a decree that anyone who prays or makes petition to any god or man except to you would be thrown into the lions' den?

The king answered:

—Yes, and the decree stands, in accordance with Medo-Persian laws which cannot be altered or annulled.

13Then they said:

—But the Jewish exile Daniel pays no attention to you and to your decree. Three times a day he still prays to some god other than you.

14Greatly aggrieved at what he heard, the king decided to help Daniel. He made every effort till sundown to save him.

15But the men kept coming to him and insisting:

—Remember, O king, that under the Medo-Persian laws every decree or prohibition issued by the king is irrevocable.

16The king, therefore, could not help giving the order that Daniel be brought and thrown into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel:

—May your God, whom you serve faithfully, save you.

17A stone was placed at the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with that of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might remain unchanged. 18Then the king returned to his palace and spent a sleepless night, refusing food and entertainment. 19Very early next morning, he rose and hurried to the lions' den. 20As he came near he called in an anguished voice:

—Daniel, servant of the living God, did your God whom you serve faithfully save you from the lions?

21Daniel answered:

—Live forever, O king! 22My God sent his angel who closed the lions' mouths so that they did not hurt me. God did that because I am innocent in his sight. Neither have I wronged you, O king.

23The king felt very glad and ordered Daniel released from the lions' den. No wound was found on him for he had trusted in his God. 24At the king's order, the men who had accused Daniel were thrown into the lions' den, together with their wives and children. No sooner had they reached the floor of the den than the lions lunged at them and tore them to pieces.

25King Darius wrote to the nations, to peoples of every language:

—'Peace to you all! 26I decree that throughout my kingdom people should reverence and fear the God of Daniel.

For he is the living God,
and forever he endures;
his kingdom will not be crushed,
his dominion will never cease.
27He rescues and he delivers;
he performs signs and wonders
And he came to Daniel's rescue
saving him from the lions' tooth and claw.'

28Daniel greatly prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.