



WINFRIED BALKE

# WEEK BY WEEK

INSIGHTS INTO THE RICHES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to extend my thanks to Karl-Hans Fuchs for his encouragement in editing this English version of the book.

I am especially thankful to Dr. Wayne Becker for his thorough proof-reading. Without his manifold corrections and suggestions, his patience and his compassion, a text would likely have been published that would have been understandable but with occasional wording identifiable as that of a non-native speaker and without its pleasing readability.

# Preface

"That which God loves, I want to love as well!"

With these simple words a certain very involved leader of one of the larger Free-Churches of Germany answered the question of why he was willing to invest so much of himself in Israel. Winfried Balke's simple answer at that time impressed me for many years. Both of us could recognize jointly how the blessings that God allowed to rain upon our Assembly came from varied sources: It was the love for the biblical Word of God, and a willingness and openness to the activity of the Holy Spirit, as well as being inwardly firmly committed to God's beloved Nation - the Jews.

No one will be able to understand the history of this World or that of the Christian Church, or even that of the local Church, who ignores God's inextinguishable faithfulness and love for Israel. God's heart moves with a love that touches both Jews and Christians. The ingathering of a people from the Diaspora evolves in parallel with the ingathering of those who confess Jesus as Lord and follow Him. Nowadays we also speak of the "Ecumenicalism of the Heart". Yes, God leads people together who belong together. At the same time it seems significant to me that what is important in this place is not a bi-lateral kindness, but rather a kind of common fate, which Christians and Jews share. Both live off the love and election of the Grace of God.

Nowadays there are many Christians who possess a certain sympathy for Israel (an "Israel-Sympathy") They invest themselves on behalf of the Jewish people. Some of them

are even quite zealous. Yet one could get the impression that they are partly also somewhat blind to the rough reality of history, in which the people of Israel found themselves in all those centuries and still find themselves even today. In Winfried Balke I see and esteem highly a clarity of understanding and also determination. His love of God is seen not only in enthusiasm, but rather at the same time also in determined action. He invests himself intensively with the people of Israel and has supported them in many ways. He promotes contacts with Jews and seeks them out, and above all he deals intensively with the Old Testament Scriptures.

From his exegesis of the biblical texts that follow the weekly "Haftarah"-Readings, we can learn a lot about Judaism. It often seems that we are looking more accurately at the Jewish roots that underlie Christianity (Romans 11:18). The author regards biblical texts from both the Jewish and the Christian perspectives - "with both eyes" so to speak. Some of his remarks refer also to the current situation of Israel. Even if a reader does not accept his exegesis of specific details, he might nonetheless be motivated to do further research on his own. Throughout, the book resonates with a love of God for His Chosen Nation of the Jews. At the same time, God's love flashes forth anew, as is seen in Jesus and is open to all men.

My desire is that this book may not only lead to a blessed time of devotion, but also to a new and deeper understanding of God's history of salvation that is well founded both biblically and historically. It is my prayer that by means of this exegesis the love of God and of His People, the Jews, may be newly aroused in the hearts of the readers of this book and may lead to resolute action.

Dr. Heinrich Christian Rust  
Pastor of the Church of Peace of Braunschweig

# Introduction

## The purpose of this book

It's important to read the Bible daily. But to be maximally fruitful, we ought not to content ourselves with a few verses, but rather to read longer passages, also even whole chapters. It is a special blessing to focus on a certain text in prayer, with a sincere heartfelt desire to receive from it specific guidance for one's own life of faith and spiritual growth.

But here's an important question: Do we devote ourselves to the first two-thirds of the Bible just as intensely and joyfully as to the latter third? Do we discover the treasure of the so-called Old Testament as the guiding principle of our daily life, as Paul instructs us in 2 Timothy 3:16-17<sup>1</sup> "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"? We're not likely to do so if we:

- regard whole passages of the Old Testament as historically interesting, yet without relevance to our Christian life;
- pick out a few favourite passages;
- attribute the statements of the O.T. primarily to ourselves without asking what the words, addressed originally to Israel, may have to say about our relation to the Jewish people and the present-day State of Israel.



Oh how little connection our worship services, prayer meetings and Christian celebrations of feasts have with our spiritual roots! It's sad - maybe even frightening - to observe how Christianity simply runs alongside Judaism, usually without establishing any concrete connections. We celebrate Easter and fail to remind ourselves of what happened at Passover; we celebrate Pentecost fifty days after the Feast of Resurrection, yet do not see any connection between it and the Jewish Feast of Weeks, Shavuot, which is intended to remind us of the giving of the Torah at Sinai; we read in the Bible about the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, and about the Feast of Tabernacles, and all too often we regard these celebration as "something for the Jews", with little realization of their relevance for us. We seem not to notice that our Lord Jesus celebrated the Feast of Dedication of the Temple (John 10:22) and we don't pay much attention to the fact that the Feast of Chanukah is still celebrated today. Now and then one can even hear the question being asked: "How do the Jews celebrate Christmas?" What an important difference it would make in our preaching and teaching if we were to emphasize the connections between the Jewish and the Christian Faiths!

I know from my own experience, that it can be a great help if we are willing to relate our own reading of the Scriptures to that of the Jewish People, at least in part.. In the synagogues, the whole Torah (the five Books of Moses) is read through once a year, with several chapters being read, rather chanted, each week. The liturgical reading in the Synagogue from the Books of Moses is called Parascha. To complete and deepen the reading, a passage from the Prophetic Writings or from the historical books of the Bible, the so-called Haftarah<sup>2</sup>, is added. The selection may be a little surprising for us -- our division of these books into chapters was undertaken only later- some chapters that we might find more "central" according to Christian

understanding may be missing, some readings seem to deal with completely diverse ideas and do not cover just one major topic. But this is exactly what makes it challenging. As far as I am concerned, it motivated me to work out for myself which "sermon" is somehow contained in a particular Haftarah. And what I noticed was, that without this more intensive Bible study I would have passed over the verses many times quickly and superficially. It is my hope that the following interpretations will also be a help to others and will lead to an enrichment of understanding.

I find it also helpful to know that the Hebrew name of Jesus is Jeshua which in fact is a proclamation: it means salvation!

## **A Few Practical Tips**

A few comments regarding the Jewish calendar are likely to be helpful for the practical use of this book:

The Jewish calendar (as fixed by Hillel, 330-365 C.E.) is adjusted to the cycle of the moon and not to the solar year, as the Gregorian calendar is. The cycle of the moon is about 29 1/2 days, so the months have either 29 or 30 (never 31) days. The Jewish year therefore consists of 354 days, which makes it 10-11 days shorter than the solar year.

As a result, the Jewish feasts would move forward every year by 11 days, were a special adjustment not made. This was necessary precisely because the feasts are connected with phases in agriculture and seasonal happenings in nature. For instance, the Lord ordained that the "Feast of Weeks" (Shavuot) was to be celebrated as the "Feast of the Firstfruits of the Wheat-Harvest" (Exodus 34:22), which links the feast firmly to the harvest season. Similarly, Succoth (the Feast of Ingathering or, literally, the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths) must not be moved in time, since it is to be celebrated "after you have gathered the produce of



your threshing floor and your wine-press"" (Deut.16:13). And as to the Feast of Passover, it is written: "Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover of the LORD your God" (Deut. 16:1). "Abib" means "Spring". In order for Passover to be celebrated in spring each year, a leap year is installed according to a certain rhythm, which contains an additional month (the second Adar). As a result, the Jewish calendar does not correspond directly with our calendar, which means that a certain weekly portion of the Bible cannot be attributed every year to the same date on our calendar.

Furthermore, the Jewish year does not start in January, but rather in autumn, with the feast called "Rosh Hashanah" (the "head", or "top" of the year). The reading in this book entitled "Week no.1" applies to this beginning of the year. According to Jewish tradition each weekly section possesses a Hebrew name, which we have not included here in general. In some sections, however, we have inserted the Hebrew term in form of a footnote, since a certain portion of the Bible cannot be ascribed each year to the same week especially toward the end of the Jewish year.. In connection with important feasts or dates of remembrance there are additional Haftarat. A few examples of such are added at the end of this book.

Two important remarks should be added here:

From the weekly Haftarah only a few verses are actually cited for each interpretation, which makes it is especially important to read the whole biblical text previously.

And keep in mind that the interpretations compiled here can only supply preliminary thoughts which should be examined along with the Scriptures, with the hope that it will stimulate a deeper Bible study of one's own. I would be most happy if there would grow from these studies a more

intensive relationship between the roots of our faith and the faith of our Jewish brethren.

Winfried Balke

Summer 2014

---

<sup>1</sup> All quotations according to the New International Version unless mentioned otherwise

<sup>2</sup> „Haftarah“ means something like „conclusion, ending“. The plural form is “Haftarot”.

# Table of Contents

## Haftarot concerning Genesis

- 1 Isaiah 42:5 - 43:10
- 2 Isaiah 54:1 - 55:5
- 3 Isaiah 40:27 - 41:16
- 4 2 Kings 4:1 - 37
- 5 1 Kings 1:1 - 31
- 6 Malachi 1:1 - 2:7
- 7 Hosea 12:13 - 14:10
- 8 Obadiah 1:1 - 21
- 9 Amos 2:6 - 3:8
- 10 1 Kings 3:15 - 4:1
- 11 Ezekiel 37:15 - 28
- 12 1 Kings 2:1 - 12

## Haftarot concerning Exodus

- 13 Isaiah 27:6 - 28:13 and 29:22 - 24
- 14 Ezekiel 28:25 - 29:21
- 15 Jeremiah 46:13 - 28
- 16 Judges 4:4 - 5:31
- 17 Isaiah 6:1 - 7:6 and 9:6 - 7
- 18 Jeremiah 34:8 - 22 and 33:25 - 26
- 19 1 Kings 5:12 - 6:13
- 20 Ezekiel 43:10 - 27
- 21 1 Kings 18:1 - 39
- 22 1 Kings 7:13 - 26

23 1 Kings 7:51 - 8:21

### **Haftarot concerning Leviticus**

24 Isaiah 43:21 - 44:23

25 Jeremiah 7:21 - 8:3 and 9:22 - 23

26 2 Samuel 6:1 - 7:17

27 2 Kings 4:42 - 5:19

28 2 Kings 7:3 - 20

29 Ezekiel 22:1 - 19

30 Amos 9:7 - 15

31 Ezekiel 44:15 - 31

32 Jeremiah 32:6 - 27

33 Jeremiah 16:19 - 17:14

### **Haftarot concerning Numbers**

34 Hosea 1:10 - 2:20

35 Judges 13:2 - 25

36 Zechariah 2:14 - 4:7

37 Joshua 2:1 - 24

38 1 Samuel 11:14 - 12:22

39 Judges 11:1 - 33

40 Micah 5:6 - 6:8

41 1 Kings 18:46 - 19:21

42a Jeremiah 1:1 - 2:3

42b Jeremiah 2:4 - 28

### **Haftarot concerning Deuteronomy**

43 Isaiah 1:1 - 27

44 Isaiah 40:1 - 26

45 Isaiah 49:14 - 51:3

46 Isaiah 54:11 - 55:5

47 Isaiah 51:12 - 52:12

48 Isaiah 54:1 - 10

49 Isaiah 60:1 - 22

50a Isaiah 61:10 - 63:9

50b Hosea 14:2 - 10; Joel 2:15 - 27; Micah 7:18 - 20

51 2 Samuel 22:1 - 51

52 Joshua 1:1 - 18

### **Some Haftarot concerning special occasions**

Rosh Hashana 1 Samuel 1:1 - 2:10

Yom Kippur Isaiah 57:14 - 58:14

Sukkot (eighth day) 1 Kings 8:54 - 66

Simchat Torah Joshua 1 (Week 52)

Chanukka Zechariah 2:14 - 4:7 (Week 36)

Shabbat Shekalim 2 Kings 11:17 - 12:17

Shabbat Sachor 1 Samuel 15:1 - 34

Shabbat Para Ezekiel 36:16 - 38

Shabbat Hagadol Malachi 3:4 - 4:6

Pessach (first day) Joshua 5:2 - 6:1,27

Shawuot (second day) Habakkuk 2:20 - 3:19

Tisha B'Av Jeremiah 8:13 - 9:24

## Week 1

# Isaiah 42:5 - 43:10

This week's portion of the Torah-Reading is Genesis 1:1 - 6:8. Here we find the great tension between the wonderful account of Creation and the declaration that "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth..." (Gen. 6:5). The Haftarah picks up a thread from here, in that it deals with God the Creator and His plan to raise up righteousness and to save His people

### 1) The Almighty One introduces Himself

*"This is what God says - He who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it" (Isaiah 42:5).*

*"I am the LORD, that is My name! I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols"(42.8).*

*"Sing to the LORD a new song, His praise from the ends of the earth..." (42,10).*

*"Let them give glory to the LORD and proclaim His praise in the islands."*

*"For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior..."(43:3).*

All honor is due to the almighty Creator of heaven and earth, to the Creator of all life, for what He did and what He is doing. His glory shall span the whole world. "From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised" (Ps. 113:3).



It is glorious to imagine how this One will be praised over all the Earth, with ever new songs and prayers, in a great number of languages! The riches of the songs will not be exhausted, when one day the Lamb of God will open the sealed Book and when the Lamb will stand on Mt. Zion together with the 144,000 (Rev.5:9 and Rev.14:3)! And His praise ought to receive new expression, again and again, in our hearts and upon our lips "...as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col.3:16). God will not share His glory with anyone, for He is a jealous God. He, the only living God, seeks "...the fruit of the lips, that confess His Name" (Hebr. 13:15).

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..." (Rom 1:20). Nevertheless, the Lord introduces Himself to us also by His Name. We remember that even before the Exodus from Egypt, when Moses could point to the God of the Jews' fathers as the One who had given the instructions, it was important for him to know His Name: "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is His name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, 'I am that I am...' (Ex:3:13-14) And then He goes on to underscore who He is: "...The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,...this is My Name forever..." (Ex.3:15). He has bound the sanctity of His Name firmly with the people of Israel. That is also why He is called *"the Holy One of Israel"*.

## **2) By means of His Ambassador He overcomes foes and darkness**

*"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open*

*eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness" (42:6-7).*

*"...He will triumph over his enemies" (42:13).*

*" I will lead the blind by ways they have not known...I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth..."(42:16).*

The one who does this, who opens blind eyes and sets prisoners free, can only be the Lord Yeshua (Yeshua is the Hebrew name of Jesus). He is ordained to be a light unto the nations. About Him the Heavenly Father says: "It is too small a thing for You to be My servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Is.49:6). Jesus Himself says this too: "I am the light of the world; whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

### **3) He fulfills His promises to Israel and creates something new**

*"See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you" (42:9).*

*"But now, this is what the Lord says - He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you...when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze...Since you are precious and honored in My sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life.'" (43:1-4)*

*"...I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west."(43:5)*

With these verses the Lord links up with ancient promises. For from the beginning God sided with the Jewish people. "Israel is my firstborn son" (Ex.4:22)...I will redeem you with an outstretched arm...I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God..." (Ex. 6:6-7). His divine love alone is the reason for the election: "The Lord did not set His affection and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you..." (Deut.7:7-8). In the verses from Isaiah this love is put in concrete terms with wonderful promises that at first sound strange: protection from utmost danger and the annihilation of whole nations for the sake of Israel.

Incidentally: the words: *"I have redeemed you, I have summoned you by name, you are Mine"* are surely familiar to us as a promise. As children of God we may also be certain that we are precious in the sight of our Creator and well loved. But we tend to forget only too easily that this is said first of all to Jacob who later got the name Israel (see Gen. 32:28). And it is only for this chosen people - not for the church and certainly not for an individual Christian - that this statement applies: *"people in exchange for your life"*.

We read again and again in the Scriptures that God destroyed nations, in order that His People Israel may take possession of the Promised Land. " I will drive out the nations before you and enlarge your territory..." (Ex. 34:24). Why was it thus? It is connected with the setting apart of Israel for the Lord: "...I have set you apart from the nations to be My own" (Lev. 20:26). Just as with the followers of Jesus, this "setting apart", or election, is connected with the turning from idols and worldly matters, so also Israel was

commanded to turn away from them. For the Land which was to be taken possession of was peopled with nations which served foreign gods and therewith were become enemies of God. "After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, 'The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness'. No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you" (Deut.9:4).

*"New things I declare. Before they spring into being I announce them to you".* The Almighty God informs us tiny creatures of that which is important for us, even in advance! "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets" (Am.3:7).

God has not only created the world once and for all, but His Creator-Power is continuously at work to give us new things, both large and small: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17). "But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." (2 Peter 3:13).

Our heavenly Father has also proclaimed the "*Light of the Nations*", Jeshua, as something new, both here in the text of Isaiah and also elsewhere in Isaiah - e.g., in Isa. 7:14: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel" and Isa. 9:6 "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be on His shoulders".

And the Lord not only confirms His promise to protect Israel - "*The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior He will stir up His zeal...and will triumph over His enemies*" (42:13) - but in addition He proclaims a new, indeed a mighty, historical change: the ingathering of the

people of Israel. "...I will bring your children from the east, and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back'. Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth!" (43:5-6).

The founding of the State of Israel in 1948 constituted an immense milestone in this development. Millions of Jews have returned into the Land since then. And there will yet follow millions more!

It is in this that God's faithfulness is demonstrated, in spite of man's disobedience. Of this too our portion of reading from Isaiah speaks: "Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was is not the LORD, against whom we have sinned?... (42:24) And then follow those wonderful words: "But now": "But now, this is what the Lord says - He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you...!' (43:1)

## Week 2

# Isaiah 54, 1 - 55, 5<sup>3</sup>

The Torah Portion for this week (Genesis 6:9 - 11:32) tells us, among other things, about the punishment of the Flood and of the "never again" promise that was built into the covenant with Noah. Similarly the Haftarah includes both short-term punishment and eternal grace.

### 1) Your husband

*"For your Maker is your husband - the Lord Almighty is His Name - the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth" (54:5)*

What a wonderful line-up of statements about the God who had chosen Israel!

HE is "...He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel..." (Isa.43:1). Already to Abram He had said: "...I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless. I will confirm My covenant between Me and you and will greatly increase your numbers" (Genesis 17:1-2). This covenant God confirmed to both Isaac and Jacob and he reminds us repeatedly, that this covenant will be eternally valid: "This is what the Lord says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar - the LORD Almighty is His name: 'Only when these decrees vanish from My sight', declares the LORD, 'will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before Me" (Jer. 31:35-36).



The measure of how closely the Almighty wants to be united with His people Israel is described wonderfully in the picture of the "husband". Similar pictures underline this too: "In that day, declares the LORD, you will call Me 'my husband',...I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord." (Hosea 2:16+19-20) Righteousness, justice, love, compassion and faithfulness for all eternity!

Israel is so near to the heart of the living God, that He has bound Himself to this people with the Holiness of His name. When Moses received the assignment to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, he was told to say to the people specifically: "...The LORD, the God of your fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has sent me to you. This is My name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation"(Ex. 3:15). Jesus recalls this when he says concerning the question of His resurrection: "...Have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'" (Mt. 22:31-32).

We believe in this eternal, unchangeable "God of Israel" (Mt. 15:31), the Holy One of Israel.

Thus we can join in with the song of the writer of the Psalms: "I will praise You with the harp for Your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praise to You with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel" (Ps.71:22). And the Jewish people too have every reason to rejoice: "Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you" (Isa. 12:6).

*"The LORD Almighty is His Name".* The LORD "Zebaoth". What do we read in the account of the birth of the Savior?

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God..." (Luke 2:13). And what was the objection that Jesus raised when speaking to one of His disciples, who wanted to defend Him with the sword, when He was taken prisoner? "Do you think I cannot call on My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mt. 26:53)

With this "LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel", whom David expressly refers to in the fight with Goliath (1 Sam. 17:45), Israel is safe and secure: "The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress" (Ps. 46:7). Why is it so? "The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of His delight..." (Isa. 5:7). The garden of His delight! Of Zion the LORD says: "...You will be called Hephzibah ("I delight in her"), and your land Be'ulah ("married" - literally: "one that has a husband or "lord"); for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married" (Isa. 62:4).

This has a wonderful consequence: "...The Lord has redeemed Jacob; He displays His glory in Israel" (Isa. 44:23)

## **2) The divine measurement of time "**

*"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer...Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed; yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed, says the LORD who has compassion on you." (54:7-10).*

The LORD is a just God. That is why He must punish us from time to time, "because the LORD disciplines those He loves,

and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son" (Heb. 12:6). But we experience this also: "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever" (Ps. 103:8-9). His purpose is to straighten us out, that we might reach the goal.

The tension between a short-term sadness and the occasion of everlasting joy is brought before us with a few words, so that we might gain the right perspective: "And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen!" (1 Pt. 5:10-11) Paul writes: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18)

With regard to the promised salvation this is what is written in Peter's letter: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold... - may be proved genuine and may result in praise..." (1 Pt. 1:6-7).

---

[3](#) See exegesis concerning weeks 46 + 48

## Week 3

# Isaiah 40: 27 - 41:16

The Torah Portion comprises Genesis 12 - 17, an account that includes the calling of Abram, the covenant with Abram, the changing of his name and the promises made to him. What then might be the connection with the prophetic text in the book of Isaiah? Just as Abram needed the promise "...Do not be afraid, I am your shield..." (Genesis 15: 1) to ensure that his service would be a blessing, in the same way -- and even more so -- Israel needs the encouragement of the LORD in her time of distress and captivity in order to hold fast to her calling to be an instrument of God.

### 1) Against Despondency

In this portion of Scripture it becomes clear that God knows very well about fearful hearts, for isn't He the One "...who knows the heart..." (Acts 15:8) and the "God of Knowledge" (1 Samuel 2:3).

*"Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the LORD, my cause is disregarded by my God?'" (40:27)* How many Jews there are, who, after the incomprehensible experiences of the Holocaust, cannot rid themselves of the tormenting question: Where was God at that time? O, that the miracle would happen that in spite of this, they may turn to the Holy One of Israel!

We can find three helps against discouragement in our text.

#### a) HE is eternally the same

*"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary..."(40:28)*

*"Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD - with the first of them and with the last - I am He." (41, 4)*

We recollect how God revealed Himself to Moses with the words: "...I AM who I AM..." or "I shall be that I shall be" in Hebrew: "ehyeh asher ehye" (Ex.3:14) "I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the LORD God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8)

Unchangeable is this LORD, "...who does not change like shifting shadows..." and of whom it can therefore be said in James 1:17: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...". When is it that there is no change in the shadow? When the sun stands in the zenith. God, "the Sun of righteousness" is every day afresh in the zenith of His power, in the zenith of His love!

What a precious perspective when we are about to be discouraged!

### **b) God has acted with power**

*"Who has stirred up one from the east, calling Him in righteousness to His service? He hands nations over to Him and subdues kings before Him....Who has done this and carried it through...?" (41:2 - 4)*

God appears to the 99 year old Abraham and says to him:

"I AM God Almighty", "El shaddai" in Hebrew, and promises to make this elderly man very, very fruitful. (Gen.17:1+6)

Everything was created by His Word (John 1:1-3). With ever new amazement we hear: "And the Word became flesh

and dwelt among us." Of this LORD Jesus we are told: "For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities..." (Col. 1:16). Therefore everything is subjected to Him. He "...is head over every power and authority" (Col. 2:10).

Based on this authority He sets up kings and removes them (Dan. 2:21), "...there is no authority except that which God has established..." (Rom. 13:1)

Therefore David can pray: "The LORD is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear?" (Ps. 27:1) And we can hold fast to Jesus Christ "...who has destroyed death..." (2 Tim.1:10). "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" (Rom. 8:35)

### **c) He also strengthens the one whom He has chosen**

*" HE gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (40:29-31).*

*"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (41:10).*

We human beings can and should help and encourage each other. "...each helps the other and says to his brother, ' Be strong! ´" (41:6). But in the end we urgently need the help of God. So the thought here in the text from Isaiah continues with the words: *"But you, O Israel,...do not fear, for I am with you!" (41:8+10)*



Jesus promises his disciples: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you..." (Acts 1:8). Therefore we may know: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power..."(2 Tim.1:7). We are sometimes in danger of forgetting this. That is why Paul continues in prayer that we may know "...His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength" (Eph. 1:19). "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who has called us..." (2 Pt. 1:3).

How gloriously is this precious "Yes" of our LORD repeated forcefully here in the words of Isaiah to those that belong to Him, in order to write it into our hearts and into the hearts of Israel: *"...I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee..."! (41:10, King James Version)*

## **2) For Israel this has special consequences**

### **a) The destruction of the enemies**

*"All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all" (41:11-12).*

What a mighty promise! When we consider how in our days the Jews and the State of Israel are being pressed hard from all sides, -- how Iran, Hamas, Hisbollah and Fatah want to extinguish Israel! Antisemitism breaks out again and again in Germany, Europe and many other lands. And lately even the "friends" of Israel, (such as the U.S.A.) are involved, when, for instance, they maintain that it isn't right that Israel build "settlements" in Judea and Samaria. To hear the

promise of God with this background can only cause us to be overwhelmed by amazement and worship. The enemies will not only be overcome, they will not only be made weak, no – they *"will be as nothing"*!

### **b) An instrument of God**

*"See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth. You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff." (41:15)*

People who are set against the Jews, will take up these verses gladly, as a "proof" that Israel is to blame for all the conflicts in the world and that it treats its Arabic neighbours disproportionately harshly or even brutally --something which, if examined conscientiously, turns out to be completely untenable. How then are we to understand the words "threshing sledge" and "crush them"?

We read in another place in the Old Testament that God uses Israel as His instrument against godless nations: "I will bend Judah as I bend My bow and fill it with Ephraim. I will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword" (Zech. 9:13). "I will take vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel; and they will deal with Edom in accordance with My anger and My wrath...(Ezek.25:14). Israel is being used as a tool, in order to assuage the fury of God. "You are My war club, My weapon for battle – with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms" (Jer. 51:20). The words with which this is being described may sound strange to our ears, but God's Word is after all "...sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit..." (Hebr. 4:12).

Since the LORD is interested in the building of His Kingdom and in the establishment of His honor, Israel is to serve Him

to "*thresh the mountains*", which represent spiritual strongholds. Interestingly, as we continue reading in the above cited chapter, Jeremiah 51, we encounter the threat of judgment against Babylon: "I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth, declares the LORD..." (Jer. 51:25): Do the "sons of Greece" (Zech.9:13) perhaps represent the champions of hellenism and humanism?

"The Light of Israel will become a fire, their Holy One a flame" (Isa.10:17).

## Week 4

# 2 Kings 4: 1-37

Just as in Genesis 18:22 (the Torah Portion for this week) Sarah experiences in her life a work of God that sets aside natural laws, so also the Shunemite woman, who is in the center of the Haftarah record, experiences in a mighty way the miracles of the LORD in her family.

### Tests of faith

From this account at the time of the prophet Elisha, we can learn a few things about tests of faith, which can happen to us too.

#### 1) "Is this a just God?"

*"The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, 'Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD; but now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves' (v. 1).*

Here we have a man who had been pious, belonged to the disciples of a prophet, evidently had been zealous in the study of the Torah, had listened intently to the words of his teacher with avid spiritual hunger - and then such a man as he... died. On top of all this, his death triggered a financial crisis. Although not voiced per se, a question arises: Is that a just God? Is there no reward for being pious?

Perhaps we have had a similar experience; perhaps we too have asked ourselves: Why is it that this good man, of all