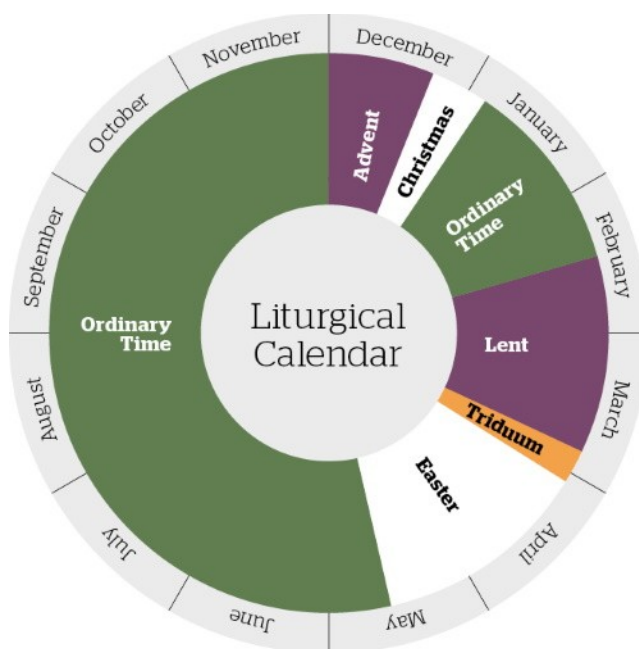


## Liturgical Reflections, 2019

The title “Liturgical Reflections 2019” is a kind of misnomer. Reason? As will all other related documents, the new one begins a month beforehand, calendar-wise as commonly understood. Nevertheless, for the sake of convenience, the current naming will be maintained as it had been since these postings came into existence.

This time around the excerpts are taken from the first readings.

Sometimes excerpts relative to the scriptural passages are lifted from documents currently posted on this homepage. They are noted accordingly. Also, some of these remarks are altered—perhaps enhanced is a better word—because a new reading of the same biblical texts is bound to produce fresh insights.



### 2 December, First Sunday of Advent

***14) "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15) In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16) In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness." Jeremiah 33.14-16***

**The exclamation “behold” or *hineh* is a good way to start of a new liturgical season, something akin to John the Baptist (he’ll appear later) who upon seeing Jesus for the first time exclaims, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” [Jn 1.29].**

The purpose of *hineh* is to introduce three references to days, each of which go unspecified but have the sense of coming in the near future. Also they convey a sense of being present already...not in the sense of fullness but partially and with full knowledge that this partialness is essentially the same. The first set of “days” which are coming is followed by a phrase common in Jeremiah as well as other prophets, “says the Lord.” This divine saying and the not-yet-presence of days is the bridge between fullness and partiality. As for the promise, the noun is *davar* which means word-as-expression, a theme permeating the Book of Jeremiah and is akin to the Greek *logos*. *Qum* is the verb used with *davar*, essentially as to rise up. The idea is that this *davar* from the Lord will rise up almost in an organic fashion for the houses of Israel and Judah.

The second “days” is when the Lord will make spring forth a righteous Branch, the verb *tsamach* being the root for the noun *Tsemach*. In other words, the action and completion are one and the same both now and in the “days.” This Branch comes from King David, archetype for all Israel’s kings, the standard by which they are to be judged. Because this Branch is righteous (*tsedaqah*), he will do justice and righteousness (*mishpat* and *tsedeqah*)...extend what’s natural to him...to the land, *‘erets* meaning more than the physical earth but synonymous with the people Israel.

The third “days” deals with the salvation of Judah, *yashah* being the verbal root for the proper name Jesus. Simultaneous with this *yashah* is that Jerusalem and hence the temple there as intimated will dwell securely, the preposition *l-* or “to” prefaced to the noun *betach* or trust.

The concluding sentence speaks of “it” which can refer to Israel, Judah and Jerusalem, all having one name where the Lord is associated with righteousness, *tsedeqah* as is the case with the Branch.<sup>1</sup> Note, however, that this righteousness is collective, belonging to all three and hence designated as “our.”

## **8 December, Immaculate Conception**

**9) But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10) And he said, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." 11) He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12) The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." 13) Then the Lord**

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<sup>1</sup>Israelites had a single kingdom during the reigns of Solomon and David. The southern region came to be called Judah which consisted of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. Jerusalem was their capital.

***God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." 14) The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. 15) I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Genesis 3.9-15***

The following is taken from **Notations on the Book of Genesis**, also on this homepage.

Here the title "Lord God" vis-a-vis the man, especially in light of the previous verse, assumes a kind of ominous picture of God, almost as a giant compared with the two humans. His act of calling (*qara'*) gives a new sense to this verb which earlier was used to bring various parts of creation into existence. *Qara'* has a negative connotation here, on the threshold of issuing a sentence for the trespass committed by the man and woman. Note that God directs *qara'* to the man as opposed to his wife. The verb also connotes the real reason for God walking in the garden although not necessarily bound up with it or God having apparently perceived something awry in the garden. "Where are you" is poignant in that God knows the man's whereabouts but asks the question in order to elicit a response.

Sound (*gol*): more specifically as "voice;" cf. vs..... 8 where it was associated with God's walking in the garden. In the same verse uses *ruach* for "cool of the day," so perhaps this sound/voice is a type of wind/spirit which as noted there is an alternate translation of this noun.

Fear and nakedness (*haram*, verb) go hand in hand, the former being triggered by the divine *gol*. cf. vs..... 1 for an alternate use of *haram*: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made." In a sense the hiding which followed fear and the realization of being naked bring out a parallel between the man and the serpent's "subtle" nature. Similarly, nakedness is often associated with vulnerability and a desire to be concealed.

The same verb *chava'* (to hide) is used as in vs..... 8.

In vs..... 11 the Lord God asks two questions in rapid succession, almost as if to catch the man off guard and get to the truth of the matter. naked or *harom* as noted earlier. Here the Lord God employs a rhetorical question ("Who told you...?") as though a third person were present with the man in the garden. Perhaps the intent is to have the man respond in just as quick succession as God did to him. Secondly the Lord God asks the man about eating from the tree. Both he and the man realize the situation, namely, man's nakedness as a sign of having trespassed the commandment.

In vs..... 12 we have the immediate response by the man to the Lord God, that is, a response to the two rhetorically-based questions of the previous verse. The man is accurate here: it was the woman (vs..... 6) whom the serpent tempted to eat of the tree's fruit. However, he

made a mistake, a kind of insult, to the Lord God which consists in the words “whom you gave to be with me.”

Note the similarity in sound between the two words, woman and which: ‘*ishah* and ‘*asher*, which heightens the man’s attempt to shift blame away from himself.

In vs..... 13 the Lord God addresses the woman after having spoken with the man in vs..... 11, the second time in the form of a question which does not intimate a divine lack of knowledge about the situation but to elicit a freely given response. The Lord God has taken the man at his word, that is, that the woman gave him the tree’s fruit to eat. The woman rightly says that the serpent had beguiled (*nasha*’) him, a verb which also connotes lifting up and taking away, the only Old Testament use of the term. “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” [2 Cor 11.3]. The Greek equivalent to *nasha*’ here is *exapatao*, the preposition *ex* (from, out of) prefixed to the verb as an intensification of its meaning.

The tone of vs..... 13 hearkens back to the dialogue between the serpent and woman earlier in chapter three. Such beguiling took place in the context of having one’s eyes opened, being like God and knowing good and evil. Contrast the deception of this serpent (*nachash*) with the same bronze (*nachsheth*) serpent noted in the context of 3.1, that is, from Num 21.9. The latter gives life: “So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live” [vs..... 9].

The beginning of a sentence pronounced against the serpent (vs..... 14) continues through the next verse and takes the form of a divine curse (‘*arar*). “Come now, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me” [Num 22.6]. Thus ‘*arar* is somewhat akin to casting a spell. It is used in conjunction with the preposition *min* (*m-*) or to signify separating from, an intensification of the curse.

In the verse at hand, the divine curse is with respect to two types of animals, tame and wild: 1) cattle or *behemah*, a term which includes (domestic) beasts of burden in general. “The herds of cattle are my lord’s” [Gen 47.18]. Mention of cattle can be taken in the context of a nomadic or semi-nomadic audience which puts great importance on these animals. 2) wild animals or literally, “animals of the field” (*sadeh*). “All that moves in the field is mine” [Ps 50.10]. Perhaps the wildness of these animals anticipates what lies in store for the man and woman outside the tame nature of the garden of Eden.

Belly (*gachon*), the only other reference being Lev 11.42: “Whatever goes on its belly and whatever goes on all fours or whatever has many feet, all the swarming things that swarm upon the earth, you shall not eat; for they are an abomination.” Since the serpent is presumably a snake and crawls upon the ground, God bids it to eat dust (*haphar*) for the duration of its lifetime. This noun usually refers to fine dust blown by the wind. “I beat them fine as dust before the wind; I cast them out like the mire of the streets” [Ps 18.42].

*Haphar* is not to be confused with ‘*adam* (man) created in the divine image and likeness, ‘*adam* being associated with the red color of the earth.

In vs..... 13 the Lord Got puts enmity (‘*eyvah*) not only between the man and woman but in their future offspring or seed (*zereh*). Such enmity is strong, the alternate meaning of which is “enemy.” For another reference with the same connotation in the verse at hand, cf. Num 35.21: “in enmity he struck him down with his hand so that he died.” It is interesting to note that *zereh* as seed here applies to both man and the beast, this term usually being applied to the male (i.e., a mammal as opposed to a reptile) reproductive act.

Bruise (*shuph*), the verbal root of which suggests a gaping upon or laying in wait to make an attack. “If I say, ‘Let only darkness cover me and the light about me be night’” [Ps 139.11]. That is to say, darkness lays in wait for the psalmist much like the serpent. The enmity which God brings to the fore is between the serpent and woman as opposed to one between the woman and man. This act of bruising the woman’s head implies that the serpent lies in wait, for example, in a tree as opposed to laying on the ground. The woman’s bruising of the serpent’s heal, most likely its tail, can intimate that this heal is hanging from the tree. As for the Book of Revelation, it speaks of the hostility originating in the Garden of Eden in terms of the serpent/dragon (*drakon*) who pursued the woman after she gave birth to a child, 12.13-7.

## **9 December, Second Sunday of Advent**

***1) Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. 2) Put on the robe of the righteousness from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. 3) For God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven. 4) For your name will forever be called by God, "Peace of righteousness and glory of godliness." 5) Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height and look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east, at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. 6) For they went forth from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. 7) For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up to make level ground so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. 8) The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. 9) For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory with the mercy and righteousness that come from him. Baruch 5.1-9***

*Stole* or garment also can mean equipment, armament as well as any type of dress. It seems to apply to an article of clothing that covers the body in its entirety something akin to a raincoat and is a good noun for the oppressive weight of sorrow and affliction, *penthos* and *kakoseos*, also as mourning and oppression. It weighs down Jerusalem abandoned of her

people because according to the **RSV**, Baruch seems to have been written during the Babylonian captivity. And so Jerusalem is personified and is to do three things. Note that the first two verbs are the same, *enduo* (to put on) which is opposite of the just noted *ekduo* or to put off. *Periballo* is used with the third, literally to cast around:

1) Beauty or *euprepeia* which also means comeliness and is from or alternately as beside (*para*) God.

2) Robe or *diplois* of righteousness, this being literally a double cloak.

3) Diadem or *mitra*, also as headband which belongs to glory of the Everlasting or *Aionios* which is the adjective of the noun *aion* (forever) of vs..... 4 also as a period, age, generation or posterity.

Jerusalem is to resist the all too natural temptation of throwing off the yoke of captivity, for that would bring automatic ruin. Instead, she is to wait for God to show his splendor (*lamprotes* also as brilliancy, magnificence) which is not just applicable to herself or Babylon but everywhere. Her new twofold name (peace of righteousness and glory of godliness) is given only when she's devoid of inhabitants, for if they were present, the Lord would be unable to bestow it by reason of their being hard of heart. That hardness is in the process of being softened in their exile.

Jerusalem is to arise—that is, clothed with the three things noted above and with her new twofold name—and look eastward, the verb being *periblepo* or to gaze all around (*peri-*) in that direction. Her children will be seen coming from the east or from Babylon. Note that while vs..... 5 has Jerusalem's *periblepo* from the east, she is to see her children also from the west, *eido* being the more common verb. Perhaps those from the west are some who managed to escape being exiled and managed to sustain themselves for the duration.

The way this gathering takes place—from both east and west—is by the word or *rhema* of the Holy One, a noun meaning that which is uttered compared with *logos*, word as expression. This *rhema* is bound up with God remembering his exiled people. vs..... 6 says that the people had been led into exile without mentioning the Babylonians who did this. However, God will return them carried in glory (*doxa*) which is equivalent to a royal throne. In order to make this return happen as swiftly and as safely (*asphalos* as in vs..... 7, literally as without falling down) as possible, the Lord will level mountains and hills as well as filling up valleys, a theme reminiscent of Is 40.4: “Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low.” This, of course, is quoted in Lk 3.4 concerning John the Baptist's preaching of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, along the way trees will provide shade as God leads Israel with joy, mercy and righteousness which come from him, *para* being used once again or beside him.

**16 December, Third Sunday of Advent**

**14) Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15) The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more. 16) On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. 17) The Lord, your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing 18) as on a day of festival. "I will remove disaster from you so that you will not bear reproach for it. Zephaniah 3.14-18**

This passage contains four verbs of exultation, all similar yet with differences:

1) *Ranan* or to sing aloud which connotes emitting a tremulous or strident sound though not especially articulate.

2) *Ruah* or to shout which can apply to sound a trumpet as an alarm.

3) *Samach* or to rejoice, also as to be merry.

4) *Halaz* or to exult which sometimes applies to doing it in the bad sense.

The first as well as third and fourth apply to daughter of Zion whereas the second to Israel, one and the same with different names. The reason: the Lord has removed both judgments and her enemies, the two verbs being *sur* and *panah*. The first involves a turning aside as well as withdrawing whereas the second means to turn away or remove. What brings this about seems to be a sudden realization that the Lord as King of Israel is in the midst of his people. *Qerev* refers to that which is interior or in the middle from which his influence radiates outward as it reduces and then eliminates fear. Note that this *qerev* is associated with the daughter of Zion, Israel and daughter of Jerusalem compared with Zion. All are the same though with subtle distinctions as the four verbs above.

Also this divine *qerev* is associated with "that day" which is similar to the notion of a *kairos* event, almost always not a day commonly understood but a special occasion outside our common way of thinking. On it any fear will be dispelled because this second *qerev* has the Lord depicted as a warrior bestowing victory.

The Lord-as-warrior will do the following four:

1) Give victory or *yashah* which fundamentally means aid or set free and is the verbal root for the proper name Jesus.

2) Rejoice or *sus* in the sense of being glad along with *simchach*, the verbal root of *samach* or #3 above.

3) Renew or *charash*, fundamentally as to plow or to be deaf, dumb, silent. It's used here with *'ahavah* or love.

4) Exult over or *gyl*, also as to tremble as well as to go in a circle such as in in dance. The noun *rinah* or loud singing can apply to either joy or a mournful cry.

All four take place on a day of festival, *mohed* implying a set time; compare with “that day” of vs..... 6, the two being similar. It’s associated with the participle *yagah* or to be sorrowful which the RSV deems as “obscure.” The cause rests in the fact that the Lord is removing disaster from upon Israel, *cherpah*, contempt or scorn. Note the three occasion of the preposition *hal-*, “upon:” will rejoice, will exult and will remove disaster, all in the future compared with the present tense of the Lord being in her midst, *qerev*. This implies that while already *qerev*, it will require time for realizing this.

## 23 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent

***1) Now you are walled about with a wall; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike upon the cheek the ruler of Israel. 2) But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. 3) Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. 4) And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. Micah 5.1-4***

The RSV notes that the opening words are “obscure,” possibly a scribal error or the like. Regardless, the scene is one where “you” or the “daughter of Zion” [4.13] is encircled and about to be captured and then enslaved. Amid this impending crisis the Lord singles out Bethlehem called *tsahyr* or small in the sense of being mean or despised, the least place from which one would expect a ruler to come. Further mystery is thrown upon this unknown individual by pretty much calling him eternal which in the context at hand means his lineage goes back to King David. David is the gold standard for all Israel’s kings yet completely unknown by anyone there right now. This verse is quoted in Mt 2.6 with respect to the birth of Jesus, interestingly by the wise men to the chief priests and scribes connected with King Herod.

In light of the opening words of the daughter of Zion being besieged, vs..... 3 has this mysterious future ruler from Bethlehem give up the people until a certain time. That is, the time when Israel’s encirclement seen as a mother in travail has given birth, this part difficult to comprehend. There seems to be a connection between the siege and future return of the people, most likely to Babylon.

vs..... 4 has the yet-to-be-named ruler stand (*hamad*, also as to remain, endure) as well as to feed his flock, this being wrapped up in the verb *rahah*. In other words, he’ll assume the familiar role of shepherd. Such a position has two characteristics: in the strength of the Lord and in the majesty of his name, *hoz* and *ga’on*, might or power and magnificence as well as pride, arrogance. Both will result in the people dwelling in security which is rendered



by the verb *yashav*, to sit down as well as to abide. While in this restful security, the ruler from obscure Bethlehem will be great throughout the entire world, *'erets* being used. This noun is associated often with the nation of Israel, and with this in mind, Israel extending all over under the leadership of her new king.

## 25 December, Christmas

**1) For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until her vindication goes forth as brightness and her salvation as a burning torch. 2) The nations shall see your vindication and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give. 3) You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. 4) You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. 5) For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. Isaiah 62.1-5 (Gospel for Vigil Mass)**

This excerpt begins with the Lord's concern for Zion where he refuses to keep silent and be at rest, *chashah* and *shaqat* which entails a period of waiting for the appropriate time to take action. The former implies being still and the latter, to be quiet as well as secure. Both are dependent upon the small word "until" or *had*, suggestive of that time frame with regard to waiting. That is to say, he waits until both Zion's vindication or *tsedaqah* (also as righteousness) and salvation or *yeshuah* go forth. Each will have its respective luminosity: the first will have brightness, *nogah* also as shining splendor and the latter as a burning torch, *lapyd* which implies being a lamp.

Note that the nations will see the vindication and glory of Zion, the just mentioned brightness and burning torch providing the light without which nobody could see. Here's another of *tsedaqah* along with glory or *kavod*. As for this new name, no details are given which for now keeps both the nations and Israel in suspense awaiting the Lord to give it. That means everyone's attention will be focused upon his mouth; in other words, everyone will be disposed to listen, something sorely lacking in Israel's history which has been documented so well, notably by the prophets.

Everyone is awaiting with great suspense the Lord to speak or to know the new name he will bestow upon Zion. Actually it will be two names in exchange for the former shameful two which will be revealed shortly.

The Lord now begins to unfold this new name which is preceded by the following two:

1) Crown of beauty and royal diadem or *hatarah* and *tsphyrah* are found together in 28.5 only here both are located in God's hand.

2) No longer will Zion be called Forsaken. This will not be the formal title suggesting a profound humiliation before everyone or *Hazuwah*. The verbal root of this noun means to leave in the sense of to desert.

The land or 'erets (synonymous with the people Israel) won't be called by a second formal name, Desolate or *Shemamah* which implies being laid waste; also as astonishment. To counter these two formal titles, Israel will assume two others, My delight and Married, *Chephets* and *Behulah*. The former implies inclining as to be favorable and the latter, to have dominion over as well as to take a wife. Both are borne out by use of their respective verbal roots being used in the same verse, delight and to be married.

The title Married relative to 'erets follows the example of a young man marrying a virgin, this correspondence between the Lord and Zion demonstrated by "for" and "as." *Sus* is the verb for rejoice which suggests the image of leaping up and down out of joy. Such joy is emphasized by the preposition *hal-* or upon with respect to the bride and "you."

### 30 December, Holy Family

***11) Listen to me your father, O children and act accordingly, that you may be kept in safety. 2) For the Lord honored the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. 3) Whoever honors his father atones for sins, 4) and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. 5) Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard. 6) Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother...12) O son, help your father in his old age and do not grieve him as long as he lives; 13) even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him. 14) For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you. Sirach 3.1-6 & 12-14***

The opening verse of this passage draws a direct correspondence between hearing and doing. The former comes from one's father, head of the household, and doing in accord with what he says, this resulting in being kept safe, *zozo* also as to save or to rescue. The basis for such parental authority derives from the Lord who honors the role of a father, *doxazo* being the verb which also means to think, imagine or to hold an opinion. Second to the father is, of course, the mother whose right (*krisis*: also as judgment) the Lord confirms over her children, the verb being *stereo* also as to make firm, solid.

Being aware of this twofold authority over him, the child is to honor his father and glorify his mother, *timao* and *doxazo* (just noted). *Timao* is bound up with *exilaskomai* or to make

propitiation (for sins) whereas *doxazo* is connected with *apothemaurizo*, to hold or store up, the word “treasures” being included in the verb.

vs..... 5 uses *timao* again, this time with respect to the father which more or less directly has a role in propagating children and the hearing of prayers. Such prayers seem connected intimately with the birth of children, for a father wishes to see his name carried on not just through his sons but those coming after.

*Doxazo* or to glorify is found in vs..... 6 with regard to the father, this verb pertaining to the mother as in vs..... 5 and here resulting in the son having a long life. Just as important is the mother who comes next. Here she has a direct connection with the Lord, if you will, by reason of the son obeying the Lord, the verb *eisakoueo* literally as to listen-into, *eis-*. Such listening-into has a direct affect on the mother, that is, it serves to refresh her, *anapauro* which also means to rest or to come to a halt.

vs..... 12 shows a direct appeal by the Lord to the son which corresponds to his relationship with the Lord. In old age the father requires filial support, the verb *antilambano* which means literally to receive instead, to take part in a thing which here obviously is the mother. The remaining three verses continue with exhortations to the son to be of assistance to his father who might be trying by reason of senility. Chief among such help is forbearance and kindness, *suggnome* and *eleemosune*. The former means a feeling with (*sug-*) which is ready to offer excuses where they might be required whereas the latter involves pity or mercy.

The instructions just offered to a son with regard to his parents are meant to fortify him well in advance when they will require help...not just in their declining years but at present when honoring them will prepare the son for future trials.

## **1 January, Mother of God**

***22) The Lord said to Moses, 23) "Say to Aaron and his sons, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, 24) The Lord bless you and keep you: 25) The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you: 26) The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. 27) "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them." Numbers 6.22-27***

This is one of the most recognizable passages of the Bible, so common that initially it doesn't seem worth expanding upon. However, it's within a common mode of expression found throughout many books, notably when a prophetic utterance is being communicated. The passage begins with the Lord speaking to Moses, the verb *davar* meaning to speak in the sense of giving expression and therefore not unlike the Greek *logos* (*Logos* = Jesus Christ with St. John's Gospel). The Lord “expresses” to Moses along with the untranslated ‘*amar*

or to speak in the usual way we speak with each other. So *davar* becomes ‘*amar* in order that it may be heard more readily, Aaron and his sons being the recipients. Thus it reads literally, “The Lord spoke to Moses saying.”

vs..... 23 has Moses *davar* what the Lord had *davar* followed by ‘*amar* as in the previous verse. In sum, they are to transmit the divine *davar* through the mediation of Moses and make it a blessing for the people. *Barak* is the verb which originally meant to bow down and give reverence. In this way the Israelites may grasp more fully the original *davar* from the Lord mediated first by Moses and then his brother Aaron and his sons.

This *davar-to-barak* unfolds in a string of five ways:

- 1) A keeping or *shamar* which is a keeping watch and found often in Ps 119 concerning the Law or Torah.
- 2) The Lord’s face to shine or ‘*or* which intimates the process of becoming bright or leading to the giving of light.
- 3) Being gracious or *chanan*, to incline favorably towards.
- 4) Lifting up of the Lord’s countenance, the same face as in #2, the same face as giving light.
- 5) Giving peace or literally, giving *shalom*, wholeness or completeness.

Once the Lord’s name is put upon the Israelites, the Lord will bless them, the second instance of *barak*. Note the similarity of *sum* and *shem*, put and place, the two working together as one and thus completing the first *barak*.

## 6 January, Epiphany

***1) Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 2) For behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. 3) And nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising. 4) Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms. 5) Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. 6) A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. Isaiah 60.1-6***

The divine injunction to arise and shine (*qum* and ‘*or*) fittingly come after the misdeeds detailed in the previous chapter. The noun ‘*or* or light (cf. 59.9) is the same spelling as its verbal root. Such light is similar yet different from the Lord’s glory or *kavod* which fundamentally connotes heaviness. Note that both *qum* and ‘*or* are not separated by the

conjunctive *v-* usually translated as “and,” they being taken as pretty much one and the same. The verb “has risen” or *zarach* pertains to the Lord, that his glory has happened already, and that the people are to respond by *qum* and ‘*or*.

Behold or *hineh* serves to contrast the light and the arising of vs..... 1 with darkness and thick darkness, *choshek* and *haraphel*. The former often pertains to misery and adversity whereas the latter suggests the Lord’s presence as in Ex 20.21: “Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.” Both are to take place in the indefinite future compared with the past-ness of light in the previous verse. Also both are to cover the earth and peoples, *kasah* also as to put on as with clothing thereby making the earth and inhabitants invisible.

The conjunctive *v-* or but in vs..... 2 is important, leading from a picture of gloom to the Lord who will arise upon the people, *zarach* (cf. vs..... 1) after which his glory or *kavod* (cf. vs..... 1) will be visible upon the people. Both *zarach* and *kavod* are noted in vs..... 1 with regard to Israel (not mentioned explicitly) whereas in vs..... 2 they are spelled out more or with regard to the nations (*ham*), those who are not of Israel and who will behold this sight.

*Goy* is the noun for nations; compare with *ham* in the previous verse for peoples. The former is intended more to set off Israel from others whereas the latter is on the positive side, members of a particular national grouping. As for light and brightness or ‘*or* and *nogah* to which kings of the *goy* will come, the former is a more common noun whereas the latter connotes splendor. *Nogah* is associated with *zerach* or rising and is the only use of this term in the Bible; derived from *zarach* as in vs..... 2 which connotes scattering or diffusion.

vs..... 4 is reminiscent of 49.18: “Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall put them all on as an ornament, you shall bind them on as a bride does.” *Nasa’* or lift up come after the *qum* and *zarach* of vs..... 1 though it is more active and has the sense of elevating, if you will. Such lifting up to see implies that the people had their eyes downcast, were too absorbed by their sins as recounted in Chapter Fifty-Nine. The scene for this can be on the walls of Jerusalem.

*Qavats* (to grasp, to take by the hand) is the verb for gather and is applied specifically to sons and daughters of those within...not physically, but as part of the nation of Israel, those who have been taken captive and remain in exile. The arms carrying the daughters are not specified, that is, they could belong to those who had taken them captive and now are returning them, being captive in turn.

In vs..... 4 the Lord bids the people to lift up their eyes and see whereas in vs..... 5 they actually are seeing which makes the radiant or *nahar*, a verb which fundamentally means to flow as a river. Such being radiance follows seeing and issues from it. With that in mind, mention of the sea’s abundance (*hamon* connotes ‘tumult) as coming to the people makes

sense as well as the wealth or *chayl* of the nations, this noun also as power or host in the sense of a military force.

In vs..... 6 as well as in the next few verses several places are mentioned starting with Midian and Ephah to the south, the latter being the only mention in Isaiah. Sheba is also to the south in Arabia. The gifts of gold and frankincense are not as important as these people coming (to Jerusalem's temple) not just for praising the Lord but for proclaiming it. The verb is *basar* and similar to *euaggelizo* with regard to the Gospel. It has as its object praise *tehilah* also as to give glory or acknowledge one's renown. As for the two gifts, automatically they bring to mind similar gifts brought by the magi to Jesus shortly after his birth (cf. Mt 2.11),

### 13 January, Baptism of the Lord

***1) Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. 2) He will not cry or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street; 3) a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 4) He will not fail or be discouraged until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. 5) Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: 6) "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, 7) to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. Isaiah 42: 1-7***

vs.....s. 1-4 parallel Mt 12.18-21 which varies in certain places: "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud nor will any one hear his voice in the streets; he will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick till he brings justice to victory; and in his name will the Gentiles hope."

The previous chapter is set against the background of victories by King Cyrus of Persia whom the Lord has chosen (cf. 44.28). Perhaps those whom the Lord addressed there eventually came around to consider the servant (this being the first of four servant songs) as he. The Lord introduces this *heved* (also commonly as a slave) with the expected *hineh* or behold. It's designed to get one's attention and doesn't give his name which makes him all the more mysterious and perhaps confused with Cyrus. The Lord both upholds and delights in his *heved*, *tamak* and *ratsah*, the latter associated with the Lord's soul (*nephesh* or inmost being) and hence a tad closer to him than the former which means to hold fast or to support. As for *ratsah*, it suggests a spontaneous delight.

*Ruach* or the well-known noun for spirit is the direct result of this taking delight and has a special purpose, namely, justice (*mishpat*), not just for Israel but for all nations. The verb *yatsa'* and is suggestive of issuing forth, not just simply bestowing. In other words, it is a fitting verb to show the relationship between *ruach* and *mishpat* as a flowing-forth.

vs..... 2 pertains to the unnamed *heved*, the description of whom is not what anyone would expect of a savior, just the opposite. A comparison may be drawn with the personification of wisdom in Prov 9.14-16: "She sits at the door of her house, she takes a seat on the high places of the town, calling to those who pass by...Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" Note that wisdom does not leave her house but bids passers-by to turn in which parallels the *heved* in his activity.

The two examples of dying or near death with regard to a bruised reed and wick in vs..... 3 echo strongly among the people listening here, especially in light of the meekness of the servant presented at the outset of this new chapter. This is the second time the Lord is mentioned as bringing forth justice (*yatsa'* and *mishpat* in vs..... 1) but with the added feature of doing it faithfully or '*emeth*, literally "to (*l-*) justice."

*Kahah* and *ratsats* or (not) fail and be discouraged. The former suggests being feeble as well as dim: "Let his right eye be utterly blinded" [Zech 11.17]! As for the latter, it suggests being oppressed. Both will not stop in the Lord's way to establish (*sum*, to place or set up) justice or *mishpat* which is noted in vs..... 3. The verse at hand has the first reference to coastlands since 41.1, the place to which the Israelites had fled before the advance of King Cyrus. Now that that crisis is over, people there are waiting for the Lord's law or *torah*, the verb being *yachal* which connotes trust and found next in 51.5, a similar context though the verb is different: "the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope."

After having spoken of his servant, the Lord turns attention to himself as indicated by *koah-* or thus which is relative to four powers belonging to him alone: created, stretched, spread forth and gives breath. The first or *bara'* hearkens back to the first act in Genesis. The second or *natah* refers to extending the *bara'*, making them reach to all four corners of the earth not unlike a tent. The third or *raqah* is the verbal root for firmament as in Gen 1.6. The fourth or *neshamah* intimates the mortality of a living creature compared with the more spiritual nature of *ruach* or spirit in which the people are to walk...be breathed along in it, as it were.

After the brief introduction of the previous verse where the Lord refreshes the memory of his people as to his role in their lives, he says simply, '*any YHWH* or "I am the Lord." Such words should suffice to get and keep their attention. vs..... 5 consists of three five parts which are connected: righteousness, taken, kept, covenant and light or *tsedeq*, *chazaq* (with reference to right hand), *natsar* , covenant (*beryth*) and '*or*. Note the distinction between

people and nations, *ham* and *goy*. The former refers to Israel as a people and the latter to non-Israelites (that is, everyone else in the world).

vs..... 7 continues with three actions after the five of the previous verse and has a distinction between those in a dungeon and those in darkness, *masger* and *beyth kele'*, the latter reading literally as house of detention. It's more confining in that it is associated with darkness, *choshek* as noted in 60.2 in the passage for 6 January, Epiphany.

## 20 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Please note: The Isaiah excerpt is taken from **Notations on the Book of Isaiah** also posted on this homepage. Also, for some reason or other, I had mistaken a reading from Sirach for this Sunday. Instead of deleting it, I decided to post it after the following.

***1) For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until her vindication goes forth as brightness and her salvation as a burning torch. 2) The nations shall see your vindication and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give. 3) You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. 4) You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. Isaiah 62.1-4***

vs..... 1: For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until her vindication goes forth as brightness and her salvation as a burning torch.

Note the two verbs, "keep silent" (*chashah* cf. 57.11) and "rest" or *shaqat* (cf. 32.17), both of which the Lord will not do. Both are dependent upon the small word "until" or *had*. That is to say, until first her "vindication" or *tsedaqah* (cf. 61.11) "goes forth" (*yatsa'*, cf. 61.11) followed by "salvation" or *yeshuah* (cf. 60.18).

To the former belongs "brightness" *nogah* (cf. 60.19) while the latter isn't explicitly mentioned as going forth but is a burning "torch" or *lapyd*. "On that day I will make the clans of Judah...like a flaming torch among sheaves" [Zech 12.6].

vs..... 2: The nations shall see your vindication and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give.

Another mention of *goy* and *tsedaqah* as in the previous verse with the addition of kings seeing (*yare'*, cf. 59.15) Israel's "glory" or *kavod* (cf. 61.6).

As for this new "name" (*shem*, cf. 59.19), no details are given which for now keeps both the nations and Israel in suspense.

vs..... 3: You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.



The pair “crown of beauty and royal diadem” *hatarah* and *tsphyrah* are found together in 28.5 only here both are located in God’s hand.

vs..... 4: You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married.

Note the contrast between the two pairs: “Forsaken (*Hazuvah*; cf. 6.12) and Desolate” (*Shemamah*; cf. 49.19) vs..... “My delight (*Chephets*; cf. 58.13) and Married (*Behulah*).” *Behulah* derives from the verb *bahal* as in 54.5.

## Sirach

4) *When a sieve is shaken, the refuse remains; so a man's filth remains in his thoughts.* 5) *The kiln tests the potter's vessels; so the test of a man is in his reasoning.* 6) *The fruit discloses the cultivation of a tree; so the expression of a thought discloses the cultivation of a man's mind.* 7) *Do not praise a man before you hear him reason, for this is the test of men.* Sirach 27.4-7

Today marks a return to Ordinary Time which normally isn’t associated with a particular block of time-as-*kairos* or time-as-special-event, if you will such as the recent Christmas season. And so “ordinary” as *ordo* suggests, is a right-order or succession which here recounts events in the life of Jesus Christ as well as his overall teaching. It’s duration varies from year to year which this around is longer than usual, running through 3 March, Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Always the Second Sunday is noted, not the First which doesn’t seem to have a designation.

We have three images of devices used for a kind of purification:

1) *Koskinon* or sieve is a kind of netted device we associate often with straining desirable material from water such as gold nuggets. Here it’s presented as catching refuse, a way to purify the liquid allowing the refuse to remain, *korpia* being the noun which translates as filth or more vividly, dung. Another word is used for this dung, *skubalon* which applies to any kind of filth. Then we have thoughts *logismos* which can have a negative meaning in the sense of coming up with all sorts of calculations or cunning ideas run wild and set to no good purpose. So if this filth remains in one’s thoughts, the resulting odor can’t help but be noticed and give warning for others to stay away.

2) The same applies to a *kaminos* or kiln used either for smelting or baking and here is in reference to making pottery. Although it’s in conjunction with the same point the author’s trying to make, a *kaminos* is a more desirable image than what was just presented. There the sifting applies *logismos* whereas here it’s *dialogosmos* with the preposition *dia-* being prefaced to the root signifying that such *logismoi* are more intense, going-through, if you will.

3) This third image is more positive, *georgion*, cultivation of a fruit tree or husbandry which implies attention on a regular basis during the growing season with the intent of

harvesting fruit. The verb *phaino* or to disclose has to do with appearance, of watching the fruit mature until it's ready for harvest. Such attentiveness or *phaino* applies (literally) to the *logos* or expression of a conceit in one's heart (*kardia*), *enthuema*. This can be rendered variously as thought, argument or some kind of rhetorical device. Thus it ties in with *logismos* and *dialogismos*, all three intimating deviousness that must be eliminated.

This excerpt concludes with a warning. No praise is to be meted out for a person's reason or *logismos* which here can be taken with a more positive though cautionary sense. When it's manifested by the way one speaks, it is a test, *peirasmos* also being a temptation.

### 27 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

**1) And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. 2) And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3) And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4) And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Ma-aseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Misha-el, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand. 5) And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood. 6) And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God; and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. 7) Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Ma-aseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law while the people remained in their places. 8) And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. 9) And Nehemiah who was the governor and Ezra the priest and scribe and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. 10) Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."**

#### **Nehemiah 8.2-10**

All the people of Israel (plural) gathered as one man (singular) at a predetermined spot and asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the book of the *Torah* of Moses. Note the similarity

between *sapher* and *sepher* (the verbal root, fundamentally as to write), scribe and book, that Ezra and the book or *Torah* are one and the same entity. It's as though Ezra-as-*sapher* were the *sepher* itself mirroring the people as one man. Since *Torah* is attributed to Moses, we could say it's as though Moses himself were present. In other words, three unities, if you will, are assembled to form a more comprehensive unity. Such is a way of defining the nation of Israel.

Although we have all the people as an assembly or *qahal*—this term usually associated with a solemn religious gathering as the one at hand—vs..... 2 singles out those “who could understand” (*byn*: to separate, distinguish). This is coupled with the ability to hear or to pay attention. In other words, there must have been some persons who could not *byn* and by reason of this, are omitted from the *qahal*.

Ezra-the-*sapher* now began to read before the people, *qara'* more as to cry or to shout out literally “in (*b-*) it” or in the *sepher*. It was no small matter to engage in this *qara'* from sunrise until midday or until the hottest part of the day when people returned to rest. A second time we have mention of those persons who could understand (*byn*), their attentiveness and readiness to hear signified by their ears which are focused upon Ezra. Despite this marathon reading, Ezra-as-*sapher* didn't grow weary because he was one with the *sepher* from which he had been reading. Along with him on a raised platform are six notable people on his right and seven on his left.

vs..... 5 describes Ezra as opening the *sepher* (yet another identity between him and the book) while everyone looked on. Surely he took his time, making as much of the situation as he could by slow, dramatic gestures. Jesus must have thought of this, he being the divine *Logos* reading the *logos* of Isaiah, in the synagogue at Nazareth: “And there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written (etc.)” [Lk 4.17]. Jesus' listeners stood with the same wrapped attention as the *qahal* before Ezra had stood.

vs..... 6 has Ezra blessing the Lord to which everyone responded “amen,” a sign of agreement. Apparently this happened before the reading after which a great silence descended upon everyone. Compare their reaction with those in the synagogue after Jesus had read from Isaiah: “And all spoke well of him and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.” However, when Jesus went on further, the people changed their mind and attempted to assault him.

Ezra had a group of educated people present ready to help the people understand the *Torah*, *byn* used in a narrower or as we'd say, a more technical sense than as above. These learned men associated of Ezra similarly read or *qara'* (cried out again) from Torah literally “with interpretation” or *parash*, here a participle meaning to make distinct or to declare.

Furthermore, Ezra's associates imparted sense to the text for a greater understanding or *byn* of what they had heard. The text reads literally "they placed understanding or *sekel* (also as prudence, insight)." Referring to Jesus one more time, his disciples couldn't help but recall this incident after the road to Emmaus encounter. "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" [Lk 24.27]. Again, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road while he opened to us the scriptures" [vs..... 32]?

### 3 February, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

***14) Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 5) "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations"...117) But you, gird up your loins; arise and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. 18) And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests and the people of the land. 19) They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you." Jeremiah 1.4-5 & 17-19***

Please note: the following is lifted from **Expansions on the Book of Jeremiah**, also on this homepage.

This book opens prophetically and significantly with the noun *davar* or word-as-expression which will play an important role throughout the ensuing fifty-two chapters. Here the plural form belongs to Jeremiah who is author of all that follows. His background is described briefly as coming from a priestly class; other than that no further information is provided. For a prophet—and this would hold true if we could walk right up and ask him—any background or personal information is purely irrelevant. Like all those who came before, his attention is fixed wholly upon the Lord and what's required of him. This makes Jeremiah more or less oblivious to earthly concerns, one reason why people—especially those in authority—tend to loathe him. In fact, the Lord warns him about this straightaway just as he had done with the other prophets.

vs..... 2 forms one sentence with the book's first verse and is significant insofar as the *davar* of the Lord came to Jeremiah. If it weren't for this singular divine *davar*, the prophet's own *davar* which is plural would be of no value. The next two verses are careful to mention three kings of Judah which incarnates what the Lord wishes to *davar*. First in line is Josiah, thirteen years into his reign, a significant amount of time, and an auspicious moment for Jeremiah to get his career off the ground. As for this king, "he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" and most importantly of all, "walked in all the way of David his Father,

and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” [2Kg 22.2]. For all kings David is something like the gold standard by whom they are measured.

The second king is Jehoiakim, quite another story, who like many of his predecessors “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord according to all that his fathers had done” [2Kg 24.9]. He set the stage, if you will, for King Nebuchadnezzar to lay siege to Jerusalem. However, Second Kings concludes on an upbeat note, that is, Jehoiakim was treated royally by his captives. Despite any hesitations as to his character, one has to overlook an individual case, for it turned out to forebode well for the Israelite captives.

Finally we have Zedekiah who like Jehoiakim, “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” [2Kg 24.19]. His actions again provoked King Nebuchadnezzar who not only besieged Jerusalem but took him and the survivors captive. However, the Babylonians slew his sons and then blinded him, leaving him to linger on with bitter memories.

Against this eventful background vs..... 4 has Jeremiah speaking about the *davar* of the Lord coming to him. It begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “now” and serves to show the connection between two events. How and under what circumstances the *davar* came to him aren’t given. Still, Jeremiah had to be disposed to receive it which means he had a readiness to listen. As for the context, Israel was going through considerable political upheaval, especially the undoing of what King Josiah had accomplished, which must have shaken Jeremiah considerably. On the other hand, it was a perfect time for this divine *davar* to kick in and define his mission.

vs..... 5 spells out both the personal and communal nature of this *davar* with regard to appointing Jeremiah a prophet, *nave’* being one especially attuned to expressing the Lord’s *davar* which is *natan*, the common verb to give. Note that Israel isn’t specified but nations or *goy*...in other words, all peoples. This mission is in the Lord’s mind before he had formed Jeremiah, *yatsar* as a potter fashions clay into a pot or the like. “For he is the one who formed all things” [10.16]. Furthermore, the Lord had consecrated him, *qadash* as to be holy or to set apart. “Prepare war against her” [6.4]. Jeremiah may have had an inkling of this throughout his life or perhaps up to this point but was unable to articulate it adequately. Therefore he had been uneasy, in a state of waiting.

vs..... 17 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “but” with the Lord telling Jeremiah what to do in light of the disaster at hand. When the enemy is encamped outside city walls, it won’t as yet breach the walls but is on the verge of doing so. Girding up his loins is equivalent to tightening one’s belt for intense action ahead, this followed by *qum* or arise which implies suddenness or springing into action. “Arise and save us” [2.27]!

Once so prepared, Jeremiah is to *davar* all that the Lord had said to him. Then he gives a warning, a threat of sorts...not to be dismayed by whatever the people throw at him, the verb being *chatat* fundamentally as to be broken down with fear. “Learn not the way of the

nations nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens” [10.2]. If Jeremiah succumbs to this *chatat*, the Lord will *chatat* him in return.

In response to the hostile forces which will take up their position outside Jerusalem and other towns, the Lord will fortify Jeremiah not so much against them but against Israel, implying that this will happen before the invasion. So to his own people it seems that the prophet is on the enemy’s side. That is to say, Jeremiah will become both a fortified city, iron pillar and bronze wall:

- 1) *Mivtsar* is a noun also as stronghold. “Assemble and let us go into the fortified cities[4.5]!
- 2) *Hamud* or pillar. “For thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the pillars” [27.19].
- 3) *Chomah* or wall. “And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze” [15.20].

All three are to be done against the entire land, officials and priests. In sum, every inhabitant of Israel is included, a task no one could undertake unless with divine assistance...and a lot of it. Even though Jeremiah’s own people will fight against him, the Lord will do it for him, *lacham*. “They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you” [15.20]. In addition to the Lord doing the heavy lifting, he will save Jeremiah, *natsal* meaning to snatch as in vs..... 7. And so Jeremiah faced a threat on two fronts: an enemy from without and one from within, the latter which will prove to be the more treacherous.

Thus the opening chapter has the call of Jeremiah to be a prophet followed by an impending invasion from the north which results from Israel’s apostasy. The real battle is not against them—for they are divine agents, if you will—but against Israel. And so Jeremiah is left with the prospect of being a one man army of sorts against his own people. Nothing is said of how he feels about all this which is secondary to the story but certainly we are left wondering.

## **10 February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

***1) In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. 2) Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3) And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4) And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5) And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" 6) Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7) And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and***

***your sin forgiven." 8) And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." Isaiah 6.1-8***

The following is excerpted from Expansions on the Book of Isaiah, also on this homepage.

vs..... 1: In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple.

At the very beginning of his prophecy Isaiah mentions King Uzziah who had reigned for fifty-two years. So between that opening verse until now Isaiah was unfolding the content of his *chazon* or vision. Now he shifts gears, if you will, speaking of his own divine commission. Chances are that if Isaiah hadn't decided to take this wise approach the people would have killed him on the spot for what he had presented to them thus far. Although Isaiah clearly speaks here of his *chazon*, this word is found one other time, 29.7, "a vision of the night." You'd think it would occur frequently but then again, the entire book of Isaiah may be taken as a *chazon*. What Isaiah "saw" (the common verb *ra'ah*, cf. 5.12) takes place in the Jerusalem temple though that location isn't specified. Apparently he is there all alone because nothing is said of other people being present to witness the dramatic contents of Chapter Six. Despite the Lord being way up on a throne within the temple ('high and lifted up' or *rum* and *nasa'*, 2.17 & 3.7), the rest of the building was filled with his "train" or *shul* which also means the hem of a garment. The image is rather unusual, either a garment or its hem filling the temple. If the latter is taken, we can say that Isaiah got lost in the folds of this garment. "Make pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn around the hem of the robe (i.e., the priestly ephod) with gold bells between them" [Ex 29.32].

vs..... 2: Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

Although the Lord is upon this throne which is both high and lifted up, the seraphim were "above" him, *mimahal* also suggestive of being upon. Certainly the temple was full...bursting at the seams...allowing no one to enter. The next reference to "seraphim" (*saraph*) is vs..... 6 and is derived from a verbal root meaning to burn, to consume. *Saraph* also applies to the fiery serpents which afflicted the Israelites in the Sinai desert. "The Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died" [Num 21.6]. In order to cure them, Moses fashioned a bronze seraph and mounted it on a pole. Those who looked at it were cured. With this in mind, we could say that the seraphim above the Lord were of this bronze color. Nothing is said as to the number of seraphim present above the Lord although Isaiah could make out clearly that each had three pairs of wings, two of which to cover himself and one to fly. Presumably the first two pairs were kept in their place out of fear and reverence even though while flying.

vs..... 3: And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

*Qara'* (cf. 4.5) is the common verb for "called" which must have been quite noisy because the temple was filled with a large number of seraphim. As noted in vs..... 1, all were

above the Lord meaning that they were doing this not in his sight. *Qadosh* or “holy” is the familiar cry uttered three times which means one seraph spoke first followed by another and so on, echoing back and forth. There must have been pauses between each set as represented by the noun *selah* used often in the Psalter, a kind of pause or break with liturgical connotations as when singing the Psalms. Most likely the seraphim observed a *selah* of sorts in order to maintain a rhythmic balance to their recitation. The “glory” or *kavod* (cf. 4.5) which fills the earth certainly is present, although the harsh words of last two chapters applies to those who were blind to it.

vs..... 4: And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

Note the singular of the seraph of the one “who called,” perhaps the leader of this chorus, if you will, who began the threefold call of *qadosh*. His voice was louder than all the others, causing the temple’s “foundations” to shake, the noun being ‘*amah* which commonly refers to a unit of measurement, that is, a cubit. It occurs frequently throughout Ezekiel with regard to the temple’s measurements. In the verse at hand, ‘*amah* is joined with *saph* or “threshold” which also means a basin. “Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe” [Ex 12.22]. Surely Isaiah thought of this while in the temple, of how Moses prepared the people for the first Passover, he being safe within the temple with the Lord and his heavenly attendants. Those outside heard the commotion and saw the smoke but nothing else, perhaps recalling how the Lord appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai. Here the temple is called “house” (*bayth*) which is filled with smoke which hearkens back to 4.5: “a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night.”

vs..... 5: And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

‘*Oy* or “woe” is similar to *hoy* of 5.18 and several subsequent verses, here coupled with the preposition *l-* or literally, “woe to me.” Isaiah speaks like this despite having been privy to that *chazon* or “vision” with which this book begins. Despite knowing the Lord’s dismay over the people’s behavior, this verse reveals that for the first time Isaiah actually beholds the Lord. *Damah* is the verb for “lost” which fundamentally means to be reduced to silence as well as come to an end. “Kir in Moab is ruined, destroyed in a night” [15.1]! As soon as Isaiah utters these words he adds that his lips are “unclean” or *tame*,’ (the verb has the same transliteration) an adjective found next in 35.8: “The unclean will not journey on it (way of holiness).” *Tame*’ often relates to the nature of sacrifice and is found abundantly in the Book of Leviticus. Isaiah refers to his lips implying that he is unclean when speaking about his experience. Although not mentioned explicitly, it would be no surprise if Isaiah also considered his sight as unclean, that is, with regard to his *chazon*. If that weren’t bad enough, he laments that he is living not just with people of the same unclean lips but in their very “midst” or *betok*. And so Isaiah claims that he has seen the Lord with the seraphim in attendance. However, he hadn’t aligned this seeing (again, the common verb *ra’ah*) with his *chazon* or vision which belonged to another order of seeing.



vs..... 6: Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

As noted in vs..... 2, the seraphim were stationed above the Lord who was enjoying this triple *qadosh*. Then on his own, a seraph flew down—dove down, if you will—to Isaiah with lightning speed. But before approaching Isaiah, the seraph went over to the altar to take a “burning coal” or *ritspah*, the only use of this noun in the Bible. It is closely related to *retseph*, a stone on a hearth on which food was baked. A sacrifice must have taken place or was being prepared in the temple for this coal to be ignited. Presumably no one was in the temple except Isaiah, but anyone outside who might have heard the approach of the seraphim vacated the area as quickly as possible, knowing that something was about to transpire.

vs..... 7: And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven."

The verb for “touched” is *nagah* (cf. 8.8) which also means to draw near or to approached. “The choicest vines which once reached Jazer and spread toward the desert” [16.8]. In the verse at hand, *nagah* is used with the preposition *hal* which reads literally, “upon my mouth,” the same as with “upon your lips.” The two verbs *sur* and *kaphar* are similar in this context. The former as “taken away” (cf. 3.4) and the latter intimates making atonement, the two with respect to guilt and sin respectively. “Until your dying day this sin will not be atoned” [22.14]. *Chata'th* (cf. 27.9) is the noun for “sin.”

vs..... 8: And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

As soon as the Lord begins to speak, the triple *qadosh* falls silent immediately. Of course, the Lord was fully aware that the seraph had approached Isaiah and by his divine authority, removed his guilt and sin without burning him with the coal from the altar. Then the Lord ask rhetorically, “Whom shall I send (etc.)?” Without hesitation Isaiah steps forward even though he doesn’t know where he will go nor what he is to do. However, he had a clue about it from the *chazon* which began back in Chapter One, not an enviable mission.

17 February, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**5) Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, whose heart turns away from the Lord. 6) He is like a shrub in the desert and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. 7) "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. 8) He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the**

*stream and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." Jeremiah 17.5-8*

This excerpt consists of two parts: the one relative to the text at hand lifted from **Expansions on the Book of Jeremiah and Notations on the Psalter**. The second is included because much of the first ties in with it. Both documents are posted on this homepage.

vs..... 5 begins with "Thus says the Lord" and runs through vs..... 8, the previous verses being in prose form. The prose form resumes with vs..... 19 and runs to the end of the chapter. A footnote in the **RSV** says that vs.....s. 5-8 "probably are the source of Ps 1." in light of this, that psalm is included for comparison:

- 1) Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked  
nor stands in the way of sinners  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
- 2) but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.
- 3) He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers.
- 4) The wicked are not so  
but are like chaff which the wind drives away.
- 5) Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
- 6) for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Instead of Psalm One beginning with "Blessed is the man" we have in vs..... 5 "cursed is the man," 'arar (cf. 11.3). The reason for such a condemnation is that Judah puts her trust in human strength signified by "arm," a sure-fire way to make one's heart (*lev*, cf. vs..... 1) turn away or *sur* (cf. 15.5). vs..... 6 likens a man to a desert shrub in place of a tree by streams of water, for he can't see any good (*tov*). "Salt land" or 'erets (cf. 16.17) is the opposite of land normally perceived as the place where Israel dwells

vs..... 7 makes a transition from this bleak picture and is more in line with Psalm One by calling a man blessed or *barak* (cf. 4.2); however, the psalm uses 'ashry (happy) instead. Such blessedness rests in trusting (*batach*, cf. vs..... 7 but not noted there) the Lord. Continuing into vs..... 8, it likens this man to a tree planted (*shatal* as in Ps 1.3) by water which shields him from a drought. *Da'ag* is the verb to be anxious as well as fearful. "I am afraid of the Jews who have deserted to the Chaldeans" [38.19]. *Shatal* is the verb for planted as in Ps

1.3. The imagery here is reminiscent of Rev 22.1-2: “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit.”

*Excerpt with regard to Psalm One*

vs..... 1: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

The Psalter begins on a negative note, that is, it stress what blessedness is not, namely, it is not an association with wicked persons. A more abridged way of putting this is it is not walking, standing nor sitting with them. Blessed is the very first word, and according to good scriptural and patristic tradition, the first word sets the tone for the entire document. This key word is ‘*ashry*; it is closely associated with two other words in vs..... 1, the man (*ha’ysh*) and which (‘*asher*). ‘*Ashry* derives from the Hebrew verbal root ‘*ashar* whose fundamental meaning is straightness which makes sense in the direction-towards-which the psalmist defines blessedness. Note that the relative pronoun, ‘*asher* is derived from this root, signifying a transitional state; it is associated with man, ‘*ysh*. Thus blessedness is an integral component of our human constitution. In light of these observations, we may say that to be ‘*ashry* implies being in a state of transition, of moving forward, of not standing still. Such blessedness is like that relative pronoun, ‘*asher*, signifying continuous alteration. Immediate there comes to mind the Beatitudes, for example, Mt 5.3-11, where we may substitute ‘*ashry* for the more prosaic Greek *makarios*. The characteristics which Jesus mentions fit in well with this “transitional” nature of ‘*ashry*: poor, mourn, meek, righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, those who are persecuted. While essential for Christian living, it is also liberating to realize the transitional or provisional nature of the virtues.

vs..... 2: But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. Such law or *torah* is defined by avoiding the three groups of wicked, sinners and scoffers of vs..... 1. We may transfer the forward motion of ‘*ashry* to this delight or *chaphats* which implies a bending towards the object of one’s desire. Delight and *torah* are integrally united, and the words of Isaiah apply to this man or ‘*ysh* who so inclines himself to the Law: “but you shall be called My delight is in her (*chephtsy-bah*)...for the Lord delights in you (*chaphets bak*)” [62.4]. Furthermore, this ‘*ysh* meditates on the *torah*, *hagah*, literally, to murmur, as in Jos 1.8: “This book of the law...*torah*...shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night.” This verse is similar to the Psalm’s mention of “day and night.” Such murmuring seems to have an affinity with that realm of our awareness, always present, which gives rise to thoughts and dreams. We catch a glimpse of it when falling asleep, that is, when our minds murmur over the day’s events, a process which apparently carries over into dreams. Contrast this Psalm’s use of *hagah* with one found in Ps 2.1: “Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain?”

vs..... 3: He is like a tree planted by streams of water which gives it fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

Note this situation of being planted, that is, its permanency, next to streams which by their very nature are in movement. Such streams or *palgy* connote the idea of dividing, of making their way through a given area whose task with respect to this tree is that it may have “fruit in its season.” Note the Septuagint use for season, *kairos*, which connotes a specific time. Compare this verse with Rev 22.1: “Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Later in vs..... 5 it reads, “And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light.” I.e., this river does away with the need to “meditate on his law day and night,” the previous verse, for such day and night pertains to the temporal realm. In all that he does, he prospers. Such prospering is akin to the putting forth of fruit. The righteous person’s activity flows from that meditating on the Law or *Torah*. Keep in mind the image mentioned above of the stationary tree by flowing streams; the notion is that such doing takes place in a stable location and is more akin to the putting forth of fruit, a stationary act. All this is in contrast to the wicked who “are like chaff which the wind drives away” [vs..... 4] or those who attempt to force, as it were, the ripening of fruit outside the correct season or *kairos*.

vs..... 5: Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

Such standing or *qum* implies the inverse of that “tree planted by streams of water,” for *qum* is more suggestive of rising which in the context of this Psalm pertains to something planted. Perhaps the root of such wicked persons lies in the fact that they do not remain stationary as mentioned just above.

vs..... 6: For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. This way or *derek* is upward or the direction in which the fruit of the righteous reaches. The growth of such fruit depends upon the Lord’s knowing and is in stark contrast to the “downward” *derek* of the wicked. Thus Psalm One concludes with a fuller understanding of that blessedness or *‘ashry*, awareness of being known by God.

## 24 February, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

**1) Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibe-ah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?" 2) So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, with three thousand chosen men of Israel, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. 3) And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachi'ah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness; and when he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, 4) David sent out spies and learned of a certainty that Saul had come. 5) Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped; and David saw the place**

*where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army; Saul was lying within the encampment while the army was encamped around him. 6) Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab's brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah, "Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you." 7) So David and Abishai went to the army by night; and there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the army lay around him. 8) Then said Abishai to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day; now therefore let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice." 9) But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" 10) And David said, "As the Lord lives, the Lord will smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall go down into battle and perish. 11) The Lord forbid that I should put forth my hand against the Lord's anointed; but take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go." 12) So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head; and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake; for they were all asleep because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them. 13) Then David went over to the other side and stood afar off on the top of the mountain, with a great space between them; 14) and David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" Then Abner answered, "Who are you that calls to the king?" 15) And David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your Lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your Lord. 16) This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your Lord, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head." 17) Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my Lord, O king." 18) And he said, "Why does my Lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What guilt is on my hands? 19) Now therefore let my Lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering; but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' 20) Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord; for the king of Israel has come out to seek my life like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains." 21) Then Saul said, "I have done wrong; return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm because my life was precious in your eyes this day; behold, I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly." 22) And David made answer, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and fetch it. 23) The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put forth my hand against the Lord's anointed. First Samuel 26.2-13 & 22-23*

From **Expansions on First Book of Samuel** also posted on this homepage. Although today's excerpt consists of some verses which have been omitted, all from vs..... 1 through vs..... 23. Also the notations relative to these verses are posted simply for consistency.

vs..... 1: Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?"

The familiar connective *w-* as "then" gets this new chapter off to a quick start by returning to the familiar yet now wearisome struggle between Saul and David. Apparently the Ziphites, last mentioned in 23.19, hadn't lost interest in David or more specifically, of receiving some kind of recompense from Saul for their information.

vs..... 2: So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, with three thousand chosen men of Israel, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph.

Saul took the Ziphites at their word, for this verse begins with yet another instance of *qum* (cf. 25.42) as indicative of taking action. In this instance, the *qum* of Saul must have been painful and wearisome, again on the hunt for David. Now Saul takes a more substantial force of "chosen" men, that is, men whom he could rely upon and not desert to David's side. In the meanwhile Saul certainly heard of Nabal's fate and wondered if the same might be in store for him.

vs..... 3: And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness; and when he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness,

Saul learned about what happened to Nabal and that many of his servants had joined David. As for Hachilah, David had encamped there earlier (cf. 23.10) which is why Saul wanted to do the same, one less place of refuge for David. Obviously David has scouts following Saul's movements who were less flexible than the loosely organized men under David's command. Thus he was able to detect any movement by Saul as when he left Hachilah for the wilderness or desert.

vs..... 4: David sent out spies and learned of a certainty that Saul had come.

We have here mention of "spies" or *ragal*, the verbal root for *regel* or "feet" (cf. 23.22). "But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel" [2Sam 13.10]. The words "of a certainty" are rendered as *'el-nakon* or something like "to that which is certain" or *kun* (cf. 23.23).

vs..... 5: Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped; and David saw the place where Saul lay with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army; Saul was lying within the encampment while the army was encamped around him. As with most examples, this instance of *qum* signifies not literal rising but preparing oneself (cf. vs..... 2).

Note two uses of *maqom* ("place," cf. 21.2). We have no information as to how David sneaked into this "encampment" or *mahgal* which applies to a fortification constructed of

wagons brought together or piled together noted in 17.20. Mention of the army about Saul only heightens this drama.

vs..... 6: Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Joab's brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah, "Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you."

Presumably Ahimelech and Abishai were trusted men whom David asked to accompany him into the midst of Saul's encampment. Only Abishai agreed whereas we have no response from Ahimelech. Later Abishai, along with Joab, is responsible for killing Abner, now Saul's commander of the army.

vs..... 7: So David and Abishai went to the army by night; and there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the army lay around him.

When David saw Saul's spear nearby surely he was reminded of the two times Saul had tried to kill him, perhaps that very weapon. To slay Saul with that spear would have been sweet revenge for David, but he refused. At the same time he couldn't help but gaze at Saul's entire army helpless before him.

vs..... 8: Then said Abishai to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day; now therefore let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice."

*Sagar* is the verb for "given into (your) hand" noted last in 23.20 as "surrender." Abishai couldn't resist slaying Saul with the very spear he had attempted to slay David. Although in the next verse David doesn't concur, surely he was tempted to allow Abishai to do this.

vs..... 9: But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?"

*Shachat* translates as "destroy" noted last in 14.32, a powerful verb meaning to annihilate and connotes acting wickedly. David reminds Abishai that Saul is the "anointed" of the Lord or *mashyach* as he had done in another incident in 24.6.

*Naqah* means "be guiltless" as well as to be pure or innocent. "Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression" [Ps 19.13]. Earlier Samuel had anointed David so he was naturally cautious of causing harm to Saul. If he allowed Abishai to kill Saul, what could prevent him or someone else to kill David on some later occasion?

vs..... 10: And David said, "As the Lord lives, the Lord will smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall go down into battle and perish.

*Nagaph* is the verb for "smite" noted last in 25.38 and connotes being driven out. David knows that Saul will perish as a result of his attitude, most likely at the hands of the Philistines who were a constant threat to Israel.

vs..... 11: The Lord forbid that I should put forth my hand against the Lord's anointed; but take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go.”

*Chalylah* is the word for “forbid” noted last in 24.6 and expressive of David’s fear of harming Saul which, as pointed out in the previous verse, can apply to himself. However, David is keen on taking Saul’s spear which he must have valued as much as the sword of Goliath.

vs..... 12: So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head; and they went away. No man saw it or knew it nor did any awake; for they were all asleep because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them.

*Tardemah* is the noun for “deep sleep,” the same noun used when the Lord took a rib from Adam’s side to fashion a woman. “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man” [Gen 2.21]. In the verse at hand, *naphal* is the verb for “had fallen” which adds to the profound nature of this sleep, as though being unconscious.

vs..... 13: Then David went over to the other side and stood afar off on the top of the mountain with a great space between them;

Because of the *tardemah* or “deep sleep” the Lord made to fall upon Saul and his troops David could make his way at a leisurely pace to the mountain. Before he cried out from this safe distance he must have taken in the sight of an entire army encamped with the intent of coming after him, the campfires flickering in the darkness.

vs..... 14: and David called to the army and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, “Will you not answer, Abner?” Then Abner answered, “Who are you that calls to the king?”

Now at a safe distance David called out to the men below in Saul’s camp signalling out Abner, Saul’s commander, who was responsible for his master’s safety. David couldn’t have done this while everyone was in that *tardemah* which means the Lord lifted it in exchange for a normal sleep so they could be roused by David.

vs..... 15: And David said to Abner, “Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your Lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your Lord.

David addresses Abner instead of Saul. He wishes to intimidate Saul indirectly by saying that Abner failed to protect his king. It was embarrassing enough for Abner as well as Saul to hear this, let alone the regular troops whose confidence in their leaders was shaken. *Shachat* is the verb for “destroy” noted last in vs..... 9.

vs..... 16: This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, you deserve to die because you have not kept watch over your Lord, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head.

*Davar* is the noun for “thing” found last in 25.36. “Deserve to die” is rendered literally in Hebrew as “sons of death.” Although Abner is chiefly responsible for protecting Saul, in a way he can’t be blamed because that “deep sleep” of vs..... 12 had fallen upon



everyone. They must have felt it coming on and probably tried to resist but were unable since it came directly from the Lord. Abner knew that Saul's spear was the same in two attempts to kill David and wished he could have used it for the same purpose.

vs..... 17: Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my Lord, O king."

*Nakar* is the verb for "recognized" which has multiple meanings such as to estrange, to look at something, to know how (cf. 23.7 as 'has given'). Indeed, this question by Saul was one of recognition and estrangement at the same time.

vs..... 18: And he said, "Why does my Lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What guilt is on my hands?"

Although we don't hear about it, Abner and especially the soldiers in his command, could not but help David speaking aloud like this, a voice in the darkness, which made it all the heavier. Chances are many soldiers were seeking ways to desert Saul and come over to David's side. In fact, David may have returned with some in his company. *Radaph* is the verb for "pursue" (cf. 25.29), and *rahah* is the noun for "guilt" usually translated as "evil" (cf. 35.29).

vs..... 19: Now therefore let my Lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering; but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.'

David calls himself a "servant" or *heved* (cf. 25.10) not so much for the sake of Saul but for those soldier in the camp that they recognize what he is doing. *Suth* is the verb for "stirred up" which also means to instigate or to stimulate. First David wisely attributes the difficulty to the Lord and then to men, careful to omit Saul. This would give Saul time to reflect on his actions and make him look bad before his army. As for *suth*, cf. 1KG 21.25: "There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab whom Jezebel his wife incited." David proposes an "offering" or *minchah* (cf. 10.27) which isn't specified but most likely an animal sacrifice. The verb *ruach* (verbal root for spirit) translates as "accept" but fundamentally means to smell. I.e., the Lord will smell David's proposed offering. "And the Lord smelled as sweet savour" [Gen 8.21]. In contrast to the Lord whom David posits as possibly stirring up Saul against him are men whom David wishes to be "cursed" (*arar*, cf. 14.28). So without mentioning Saul by name, David includes him as well as those in his service such as Abner. *Garash* is the verb for "driven out" which connotes plundering or spoiling. "Behold, a people has come out of Egypt...perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out" [Num 22.11]. Should this occur through human means, David will "have no share" in the Lord's heritage, the verb being *saphach* (cf. 2.36). The noun for "heritage" is *nachalah* (cf. 10.1). To serve other gods is the ultimate rejection by men which is the exact opposite of *nachalah*.

vs..... 20: Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord; for the king of Israel has come out to seek my life like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains.”

Perhaps David had in mind the Lord’s words to Cain just after he slew his brother, Abel: “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground” [Gen 4.10]. In the verse at hand, David’s blood would be “from the presence of th Lord” or literally “from before the face of the Lord.” Instead of the English “partridge” the Hebrew text has “flea” as in 24.14. There is an advantage of being a flea, however, for it is so small and easily can get lost in the mountains just as David has been doing while staying one step ahead of Saul. However, Saul deserves some credit, if you will, for his single-minded determination.

vs..... 21: Then Saul said, “I have done wrong; return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm because my life was precious in your eyes this day; behold, I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly.” Saul repents just as he had done in his last encounter in the cave, but David is fully aware that it is insincere. His words “my son” must have galled David to a certain degree. *Chata’* (cf. 19.4) is the verb for “have done wrong” often translated as to sin and literally as to miss the mark. *Rahah* is the verb for “do (you) harm” noted last in 25.34. *Nephesh* translates as “life” and more accurately means “soul” (cf. 25.29) which Saul calls “precious” or *yaqar* (verb, cf. 18.30). Saul also accuses himself of having “played the fool,” *sakal* connoting a certain wickedness instead of ignorance. “But now, O Lord, I pray, take away the iniquity of your servant; for I have done very foolishly” [2Sam 24.10]. He also claims to have “erred” or *shagah* where in 21.14 it is rendered as “is mad.” Saul goes to the extreme here for the verb *ravah* (cf. 2.3) means to increase coupled with the adverb *me’od* or “excessively” (cf. 25.15).

vs..... 22: And David made answer, “Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and fetch it.

David used Saul’s spear, perhaps the very one he attempted to kill David on two occasions, as a taunt which must have embarrassed Saul exceedingly. At the same time Saul was relieved that the distance between them both was too great for David to cast it at him.

vs..... 23: The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put forth my hand against the Lord's anointed.

The verb *shuv* means “rewards” and more usually refers to turning back as noted last in 15.11. In the verse at hand it refers to a person’s “righteousness” and “faithfulness” or *tsadaqah* (cf. 12.7) and *‘emunah* (the only occurrence in First Samuel). “A God of truth without iniquity” [Dt 32.4]. The two verbs *shalach* and *bo’* (cf. 24.19 and 25.26) are rendered literally as “I will (not) go to send” with reference to David’s hand “against” (b-, in) the “anointed” (*mashyach*, cf. vs..... 9). After all, David was *mashyach* by Samuel but thus far known to a few people such as his family.

**3 March, Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**4) When a sieve is shaken, the refuse remains; so a man's filth remains in his thoughts. 5) The kiln tests the potter's vessels; so the test of a man is in his reasoning. 6) The fruit discloses the cultivation of a tree; so the expression of a thought discloses the cultivation of a man's mind. 7) Do not praise a man before you hear him reason, for this is the test of men. Sirach 27.4-7**

We have three vivid images presented here along with the similarity of one noun and two verbs in different contexts: *seisma*, *dokimazo* and *ekphaino* (sifting, to test and to disclose). Each is pertains to a sieve, kiln and fruit.

The first is with regard to the thoughts a person entertains but is too embarrassed to admit for obvious reasons. The sieve refers to our conscience though it's not mentioned and whose shaking or *seisma* sifts refuse (*kopria* also as dung) which remains. The verb *diameno* or to remain has the preposition *dia* or through prefaced to it, indicative of a more permanent presence. Corresponding to this dung we have *skubalon*, similar to *kopria* but more a general term as filth. *Logismos* or thought implies calculation, reckoning, and thus can refer to what's plotted out with care. While generally neutral, *logismos* can have a somewhat shady implication as in the case at hand.

The second image is that of a kiln or *kaminos* used both for baking as well as for smelting metals where the verb *dokimazo* means a testing (also to prove) with regard to any vessels the potter puts into them. *Peirasmos* or test (also as temptation) resembles the sieve where fire is not mentioned but certainly implied. As for the kiln, its analogous to our reasoning or *dialogismos*, *logismos* or thought, but with the preposition *dia* (through) prefaced to it. In other words, the *dia* helps to make *logismos* more intense.

The third image is fruit and discloses how the tree which bore it has been cultivated. *Ekphaino* is the verb, literally to shine-from. Corresponding to this fruit is the expression (*logos* also as word) of a thought or *enthumema* which also means reasoning, device or argument. The sense is something that arises in (*en-*) the heart (*thumos*: also as mind, spirit) or one's inmost being. Compare with *kardia* used heart as mind.

The three examples with regard to testing a person's intent are to be taken into consideration when praising someone whom you must hear out or hear him reason, the noun *logismos* again. Thus the inward workings of a sieve, kiln and fruit on a tree need to become manifest before praise is given. And so this excerpt concludes in a matter-of-fact way with "this is the test (*peirasmos*) of men," *peirasmos* as connected with the second image, a kiln.

**6 March, Ash Wednesday**

**12) "Yet even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning; 13) and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and repents of evil. 14) Who knows whether he will not turn and repent and leave a blessing behind him, a cereal offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God? 15) Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; 16) gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. 17) Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, "Spare thy people, O Lord, and make not thy heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, `Where is their God?'" 18) Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people. Joel 2.12-18**

There's a definite sense of immediacy as well as urgency conveyed by *vegan-hatah* or "yet even now" when the Lord asks his people to return (*shuv*: connotes restoration) to him. This *shuv* involves four things: one's heart, fasting, weeping and mourning. As for the heart (*lev*), it's to be rent, *qarah* implying a violent cutting or tearing.

*Shuv* or return, the promise of restoration, is offered a second time with the same urgency introduced by *vegan-hatah*. There's a kind of desperation on the Lord's part for this twofold *shuv*. That is to say, he puts right out there the fact that he's gracious, merciful, slow to anger, has steadfast love and repents of evil: *chanan*, *rachum*, *'erek* and *chesed*. Actually the last or *chesed* can sum up the other three, it being similar to the New Testament *agape* by reason of being eager and ardent.

Despite this, the possibility that those to whom the Lord is speaking may not accept, hence vs..... 14 beginning with "who knows?" Here *shuv* is used for the third time along with *nacham* or repent, also as to take vengeance, to comfort. If a person follows through on both, he'll make an offering as well as leave a blessing.

vs..... 15 shifts gears to the urgency of this *shuv*, putting it more not so much as a command but something to be done in common with everyone else. This communal effort prospect makes it easier for those unwilling to follow through. From vs..... 15 through vs..... 17 we have eight pressing commands:

- 1) Blow a trumpet in Zion, the verb *taqah* also as to strike.
- 2) Sanctify a fast, *qadash* or to make holy in the sense of setting apart.
- 3) Call a solemn assembly, *hatsarah* used for the keeping of festivals.
- 4) Gather the people, *'asaph*.
- 5) Sanctify the congregation: second use of *qadash* with respect to *qahal*, a more solemn and inclusive gathering compared with *hatsarah*.
- 6) Assemble the elders, *qavats* implying going out to collect them.

7) Gather the children: second use of *'asaph*.

8) Bridegroom and bride to leave their respective chambers, implying those newly married.

Once all eight have been accomplished with great speed and urgency, the priests are to weep or *bakah* in a specified location, that is, between the vestibule and altar within the temple. It's the best possible place for both people and the Lord to utter their distress and be heard. Such weeping leads to imploring the Lord to spare his people, *chus* meaning to have compassion which reflects the fourfold character of divine graciousness, mercy, slowness to anger and steadfast love mentioned above. Also the priests are to beg the Lord not to make his heritage a reproach or *cherpah* or an object of scorn as well as a byword or *mashal*, also a proverb, something easy to remember and either say or sing aloud literally "in (*b-*) the nations."

This dramatic picture concludes with the priests putting a rhetorical question to the Lord in an attempt almost to shame him, to put his reputation on the line. Why should they say "among (again, *b-* or in) the nations, "Where is their God?" Note two words referring to those who are not Israelites: *goy* and *ham*, people and nation. The former is more specific in drawing this comparison whereas the latter is a more general term.

### **10 March, First Sunday of Lent**

***4) Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. 5) "And you shall make response before the Lord your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty and populous. 6) And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us and laid upon us hard bondage. 7) Then we cried to the Lord the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression; 8) and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; 9) and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10) And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground which you, O Lord, have given me.' And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God. Deuteronomy 26.4-10***

This excerpt is an interesting choice at the beginning of Lent, for usually we expect one dealing with fasting and renunciation. Instead, we have the theme of exile, prosperity and a return to one's homeland which is quite refreshing as well as encouraging.

The context is a liturgical setting for presenting first fruits of the harvest. The person doing it is to address the Lord, putting himself in humble terms, that is, as a wandering Aramean in reference to Jacob's wanderings. This wandering came to an end with his going to Egypt

at the invitation of his son Joseph who had become second after Pharaoh. Note that such a going isn't intended to be permanent, *gur* being the verb for sojourned. However, it turned out in the long run to be a sojourn lasting well over four hundred years. With time, Jacob's descendants multiplied and prospered, a fact often overlooked due to their harsh treatment under the Pharaoh associated with the Exodus. The text skips over this, wanting to get to that event.

Under the unnamed pharaoh we read about in Exodus, the Egyptians treated the Israelites harshly and afflicted them, the two similar sounding verbs being *rasah* and *hanah*. It took a collective crying out or *tsahaq* to the Lord to change the situation who here is identified as associated with the fathers. Since Jacob is one of the three chief patriarchs (Abraham and Isaac being the others), the people must have asked for his intercession as well. What about Joseph? After all, he was the one responsible for setting this whole thing in motion. While perhaps grateful for bringing Jacob to safety, some may have kept a certain grudge, this being easy to see in hindsight.

In response to Israel's collective *tsahaq*, the Lord both heard and saw their affliction, toil and oppression which leaves open the possibility that before such a heart-felt *tsahaq* he had been unaware of all three. Anyway, it led to him bringing Israel from Egypt with the following: mighty hand, outstretched arm, great terror, signs and wonders. This was enough to include the plagues, crossing of the Red Sea and forty years of wandering. All were well known to the people, so much so that in this liturgical context it wouldn't be proper to recount. That would be for another time.

vs..... 9 first has the Lord bringing the people into "this place" or Canaan. Perhaps mentioning that ancient name for what's now Israel was inappropriate, so it's left as such. However, this bringing is followed by a giving which didn't come easy and with full fidelity to the Lord. That time was marked by continuous strife and worship of the Canaanite deities which angered the Lord.

After having given this snapshot of Israel's redemptive history in a rather formulaic manner, the person bringing his offering places it before the Lord and engages in worship. Most likely this was collective, including a bunch of those who had made similar offerings. So the point of all this is to keep alive memory of the past with a view of handing it over to the next generation.

## **17 March, Second Sunday of Lent**

***5) And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6) And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. 7) And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of***

*the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." 8) But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9) He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove and a young pigeon." 10) And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11) And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12) As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him...17) When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18) On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates. Genesis 15.5-12 & 17-18*

The following is excerpted from **Notes on the Book of Genesis**, also on this homepage.

vs..... 5: outside (*chuts*): as opposed to being inside which in this instance probably refers to a tent. In other words, the divine word/vision was uttered within Abram's tent. "And the Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud; and the pillar of cloud stood by the door of the tent" [Dt 31.15].

-Count (*saphar*): the fundamental meaning of this verb is to write. "My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe (noun)" [Ps 45.1]. It is almost as though Abram were bidden to write down on a tablet the multitude of stars. The same applies to the number of his descendants or *zereh*; cf. 9.9 where the alternate meaning of this word is noted as seed.

vs..... 6: believed (*'aman*): the first use of this word in the sense of faith. Abram's act of faith took place outside the tent, not inside, and during the night because only then were the stars visible for Abram to count.

-Reckoned (*chashav*): alternately as to be accounted, to invent, to think. "Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy" [Job 13.24]? The object of the verb is righteousness or *tsedaqah*. For a New Testament development on this theme, cf. Chapter Four of Romans. The Greek translation (cf. Rom 4.32) has the words *logizomai* (*chashav*) which implies taking into account and deliberation and *dikaiousune* (*tsedaqah*). vs..... 24 develops the notion of *logizomai* in light of faith in Jesus Christ "who was raised for our justification (*dikaiousune*)."

Compare the righteousness of Abram with Noah: "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation" [7.1].

vs..... 7: This verse hearkens back to 11.31 when Terah, Abram's father, took him and Lot from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land of Canaan in order to settle in Haran. No mention is made there of the Lord's involvement in the migration. Perhaps vs..... 7 is a revelation to Abram that the Lord had been active in this process and that Abram was unaware of it.

-possess (*yarash*): Note the two uses of the same word in the following: "You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey" [Lev 20.24]. This verb is the root for heir. In this verse the first word for land is *'adamah*; the second has *'eret*. The Lord first gives Abram the land who must then possess it. The next

verse (8) has Abram asking for a sign to know (*yadah*) about this possession. Here he posits a question which may be compared with a lack of questioning when asked to leave his native home in 12.1.

vs..... 9: The form of knowledge, as it were, which God gives to Abram is in terms of five animals for a sacrifice: heifer, she-goat, ram, turtledove and a young pigeon.

vs..... 10: Abram brought these five offerings to (*l-*) the Lord. No specific place is given but keep in mind when God began speaking with Abram in a vision (vs..... 1) and outside (the tent?, vs..... 5). As commented with respect to the latter, Abram is bidden to count the stars which means this divine communication was at night and when (presumably) Abram brings the five sacrifices. However, cf. vs..... 12 which says “As the sun was going down...”  
-cut (*batar*) them in two (*batok*): this verb applies to sacrifices and can also mean a section or part of a land as in Sg 2.17: “Be like a gazelle or a young stag upon rugged mountains.” Note that the RSV has a footnote here, “the meaning of the Hebrew word is unknown.”  
-and laid each half over against the other: the Hebrew text literally reads, “and gave man his cutting against his neighbor.”  
-Abram does not divide or *batar* the birds (turtledove and young pigeon) in two, only the heifer, she-goat and ram.

vs..... 11: birds of prey (*hayt*): as in Is 46.11, “Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country.” The verbal root refers to any violent onrush as in 1 Sam 25.14: “And he railed at them.”

vs..... 12: The sun was going down or *bo'*; this verb is often employed in the context of sunset as in Jdg 19.14: “The sun went down on them near Gibeah.” *Bo'* commonly means to enter, to come, to bring.

-deep sleep (*tardemah*): as used in 2.21, “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.” cf. remarks there regarding the verbal root *radam* (to sleep or to snore heavily). Both verses use the verb *naphal* (to fall). In both cases the LXX has for *tardemah* the Greek word *ekstasis* which can translate as ecstasy. As noted with respect to vs..... 10, the divine command to prepare the sacrifice can be taken as occurring at night whereas vs..... 12 implies daylight, i.e., “the sun was going down.”

-*naphal* is used a second time in vs..... 12 with respect to two states concerning Abram, the first being *tardemah*:

1) dread (*eymah*): as in Hab 1.7, “Dread and terrible are they; their justice and dignity proceed from themselves.” The same word can apply to idols: “For it is a land of images, and they are mad over idols.”

2) great darkness (*chashekah*): usually in the negative sense as in Is 8.22: “And they will look to the earth but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish.” In the verse at hand, this term can apply to God’s presence as in Dt 5.23: “And when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness.”



vs..... 17: the second reference to sunset, the first being vs..... 12 ('as the sun was going down') or when Abram was overcome with that deep sleep. That is to say, the words addressed to him by God occurred in this special condition reminiscent of when God caused the same deep sleep to fall upon Adam in order to create Eve.

-dark (*halatah*): the only other three references are Ezk 12.6, 7, 12 which refer to Ezekiel going into (symbolic) exile: "I went forth in the dark, carrying my outfit upon my shoulder in their sight" [vs..... 6]. This term implies not just darkness but one which is thick and impenetrable.

-smoking fire pot (*tanur*): more specifically, oven, furnace. "You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear" [Ps 21.9].

-flaming torch (*lapyd*): "His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches" [Dan 10.6].

-Both the fire pot and torch passed between the sacrificial pieces or *gezer*: from a verbal root meaning to cut, to divide and which alternately means to decree. "To him who divided the Red Sea in sunder, for his steadfast love endures forever" [Ps 136.13].

The images presented in the last two verses may be taken to prophesy Israel's crossing of the Red Sea. "And the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them" in preparation for the Exodus, Ex 14.19. This concluding verse to Chapter Fifteen is made all the more pertinent by vs..... 19's references to two rivers, that of Egypt and the Euphrates. The ten peoples mentioned in vs.....s. 19-20 live in between these two rivers. cf. 1 Kg 4.21 as reference to King Solomon's domain: "Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt." The promise to inherit this region is given in Dt 11.24: "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; your territory shall be from the wilderness and Lebanon, and from the River, the river Euphrates to the western sea."

## 24 March, Third Sunday of Lent

**1) Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Mid'an; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2) And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. 3) And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." 4) When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." 5) Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6) And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7) Then the Lord said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of**

*their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, 8) and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perzzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites...13) Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14) God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15) God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, '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, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Exodus 3.1-8 & 13-15*

Since this is a lengthy passage which includes the important revelation of the Lord's name, an excerpt dealing with that section is included (that is, vs.....s. 13-15). It comes from **Expansions on the Book of Exodus**, also on this homepage.

“Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you'” [vs..... 13]. Moses obviously poses the most direct question to the Lord he can muster. Although the Lord identified himself as “God of your fathers” in vs..... 6, Moses wondered and did so with legitimacy whether the people would recognize the Lord as such. The reason for hesitancy is that the text is completely silent as to how (or even, if) the Israelites kept alive their monotheistic faith for so long, and that in the most sophisticated and polytheistic country of its time. Moses rightly proposed “and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’” which means from first hand experience the Israelites had a tenuous grasp of the situation. Such questioning is a preface of sorts to a major revelation of God which follows next.

“God said to Moses, ‘I am who am’” [vs..... 14] which transliterates as ‘*ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh*. These words are amazing at how open the Lord is, not at all afraid to reveal himself in a matter-of-fact manner. The first and second words mean “existed” or “was,” the first person singular imperfect form, and can be translated in as “I will (shall) be.” While interpretation of this has been debated and continues to be so, it might be helpful to focus on the connective or relative pronoun “who,” ‘*asher*, which bridges the gap between the two “existings.” By its very nature, a relative pronoun connects two distinct elements. At the same time it represents a transition, essential to go from Point A to Point B, while not attracting attention to itself...almost shy, if such a way of putting it is appropriate. With this in mind, the quicker the relative pronoun makes the transition, the better, and less attention is drawn to it. However, the first half (in this case ‘*ehyeh*) could never make the switch to the other side, as it were, without intervention from the relative pronoun ‘*asher*. Interestingly, the verbal root means to be straight, to prosper, be happy. It is the opening word of the Psalter: “Happy is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked” where the adjective for “happy” is ‘*esher*. With this in mind, blessedness can be described as

something you can't quite get your hands upon (you'd ruin it otherwise) because it's too slippery, goes by you too quickly. The reason? Your attention prefers to focus less upon the middle in favor of Point A and Point B. But once you've put attention on the middle...the *'asher...* you have the best of both A and B. Such is the composition of God's name, a wise decision on his part and shorted to the familiar YHWH, four letters suggestive of breathing and therefore of life itself. As for the Lord communicating this to Moses, you can't help but see how excited he is, almost unable to contain himself to show off this name. For Moses' part, he deserves special credit for having taken all this in stride. The Lord abbreviates *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* with the words "Say to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" That is to say, "*'ehyeh* has sent me" ... *'ehyeh* without the connective pronoun *'asher*. That leaves the divine essence out of the picture which might appear defective. However, at this stage of first revelation the Israelites weren't in a position to grasp theological subtleties.

vs..... 15 has the Lord refining his (abbreviated) name of *'ehyeh* in more familiar terms immediately after *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, that is, he being the God of Israel's fathers specified as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Note that the Lord identifies himself with each patriarch individually, not collectively, a way of drilling in the fact that indeed he means business. Hopefully this would arouse first their curiosity and then their allegiance to Moses. Looking back upon encounters all three patriarchs had with the Lord shows that no such name as the one revealed to Moses had been given. Now it is time to take it one crucial step further and see if Moses could have the Israelites put two and two together, the divine name and the Lord of their forefathers' memory. The *'ehyeh* part can wait until Mount Horeb. The next part of the divine commission to Moses is "this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." Note the distinction: the Lord's name is forever or for all eternity with this eternity mirrored in human history, "generations" (the Hebrew text reads literally 'to generation generation'). That means starting with Moses and the Israelites currently in Egypt the Lord's name will be imparted. Once imbued with it, they will pass it on to the next generation or those who will be born in the Sinai wilderness. In a sense, the second generation is more difficult to train because they are one step removed from the initial impulse. That's why forty years in the desert is necessary for appreciation of the divine *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*. Once that second generation has had time to reflect upon it, they were in a stronger position, even more than the first generation, to impart it to the third and so forth or those who would reside in the land of Canaan.