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ISAIAH THE ESSENE



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CODED MESSAGES

Niels Peter Lemche proposed in 1993 the idea of an Old Testament composed in the Hellenistic age¹. According to Russell Gmirkin², the first real evidence of Yahwistic monotheism is the Pentateuch, authored in Hebrew and immediately translated into Greek around 270 BCE in Alexandria. Yonatan Adler³ has shown that there is no trace of widely practiced monotheistic Judaism before the mid-2nd century BCE.

In this paper, it is not my intention to meticulously explain why I accept their unconventional theses. My purpose is to adopt them as research hypotheses and apply them to the interpretation of biblical texts. If they prove productive, allowing me to provide an explanation coherent and comprehensive, or at least preferable to current exegeses, then it will not be preposterous to assume them as reliable.

The authors of the Pentateuch were a group of intellectuals who, having received the order to prepare for the library of Alexandria a work that reflected Jewish culture and history, set to work with the ambitious intent of painting a picture, however arbitrary, capable of standing up to the prestige of Greek culture, which threatened the survival of Jewish traditions. We have very few historical documents from the period when Judaea was under the Ptolemies of Egypt. The only certain thing is that the High Priests (whose Yahwism is unknown if it continued to be tainted by traditional polytheistic hues) obtained administrative and political positions from the Ptolemies that, while increasing their power and wealth, also hobbled their role as defenders of the unique Jewish cultural world. In order not to jeopardize the new socio-economic position gained, the hierocratic apparatus of Jerusalem avoided coming into conflict with the new rulers, showing a willingness to compromise.

The intellectuals who penned the Pentateuch maintained an opposite attitude. By attributing the fruit of their inventions to an ancient mythical figure, Moses, they exalted ancestral culture above even Greek culture, which would do no more than draw from it.

The new Yahwistic monotheistic group was desperately dinky. Therefore, the message of the Pentateuch had to be spread among the population with shorter and more incisive texts

¹ The Old Testament - a Hellenistic Book? January 1993, *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 7(2):163-193.

² *Berosus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch*, New York-London, T&T Clark, 2006) - *Plato and the Creation of the Hebrew Bible*, New York-London, Routledge, 2017 - *Plato's Timaeus and the Biblical Creation Accounts: Cosmic Monotheism and Terrestrial Polytheism in the Primordial History*, London-New York, Routledge, 2022.

³ *The Origins of Judaism: An Archaeological-Historical Reappraisal*, Yale University Press, 2022 - *Between Yahwism and Judaism: Judean Cult and Culture during the Early Hellenistic Period (332–175 BCE)*, Cambridge University Press, 2025.

in which YHWH alternated enticing promises with terrible threats to gain the loyalty of Israel, presented as the object of an unexpected divine choice that elevated it to the rank of chosen and beloved people. This is what the prophets were for.

Their works fall within the period from around 270 BCE to 165 BCE, the established date of the composition of Daniel. The Sirach, which completed its work around 175 BCE, shows knowledge of the twelve minor prophets (49:10), Isaiah (48:23-25), Jeremiah (49:6-7), and Ezekiel (49:8-9). Daniel, composed a few years later, is missing from the list.

The task of the prophets was exceedingly risky. Their moral admonitions disturbed those who calmly minded their own business without much scruple. This category included religious authorities and prominent individuals who feared losing the favor and financial support of the Greek rulers due to discussions about the chosen people and the consequent condemnation of pagan nations. Precisely because of the objective difficulties in which they were called to operate, the prophets were later attributed a violent death, practically martyrdom, in the apocryphal *Vitae Prophetarum*. This is a well-established topos in the New Testament: Matthew 23:37: ³⁷*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!* [NRSV]. Luke 13:33-34: ³³*Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.* ³⁴*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!* Acts 7:52: ⁵²*Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers.*

Fortunately for those directly involved, things did not go at all like that: there is no historical record of a violent death for any of them, and furthermore, none of them predicted it. It cannot even be said that they miraculously escaped ambushes and attacks. If they died of natural causes, the explanation is simple: they took the necessary precautions. First of all, the true author of a prophecy was careful not to brag about it. To lend it credibility, and to live peacefully, it was more convenient to attribute it to a figure who lived centuries earlier, as the authors of the Pentateuch had done, who, however, made the unforgivable mistake of having the supposed author, Moses, describe his own death (Deuteronomy 34:5): ⁵*Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command.*

Once the prophecy was placed in a specific period of the past, everything was adjusted accordingly to make it plausible. Instead of openly hurling their fiery invectives against figures, social groups, and peoples of their time, the prophets preferred to join the fray only after disguising them as puppets of the quintana. A disguise that completely escaped the actual targets, but was secretly revealed to the adherents gathered in clandestine groups. A commendable device.

And yet, as usual, the fruit of their personal and/or collective inventiveness was attributed to a precise and peremptory command from God Himself, thus concealing the certainly not condemnable fear of having to kick off unseasonably. The order to speak in code is given by YHWH Himself to Isaiah in the famous vision (6:1.8-13):

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" ⁹And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' ¹⁰Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed." ¹¹Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; ¹²until the Lord sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. ¹³Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

Isaiah thus ends up attributing to God the hardening of the hearts of sinners, whereas it is actually the logical consequence of the prophet's deliberate choice to speak and write in such an abstruse manner that, by not reaching the sinner, the message remains ineffective.

As one might expect, the supposed order to use a code is itself expressed in code, otherwise the game would end before it even begins. The proven fact is that the true meaning of Isaiah's words took centuries, if not millennia, to be fully understood.

Verses 9 and 10 impose that the message should not be grasped by those who are subject to the irrevocable divine curse. At this point, Isaiah's mission might seem like an inconclusive assault on windmills, if God did not indicate the congregation of the faithful (the stump), whose eyes, thanks to the esoteric explanations of the prophet, will be able to see and understand the meaning hidden "under the veil of the strange verses⁴."

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, in homage to the prohibition against leaking esoteric doctrines⁵, nicknames⁶ and other expedients are often used, including cryptography (Cryptic A,

⁴ Inferno, IX, 63.

⁵ 1QS IX 16-17: *(The Master) must hide the teaching of the Law from unjust people, but will impart true knowledge and sound judgment to those who have chosen the Way [the Essene Community].*

⁶ Matthew A. Collins, *The Use of Sobriquets in the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls*, London 2011.

Cryptic B (4Q362 and 4Q363). Even in the Gospels, the understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom is reserved for the faithful disciples of Jesus⁷.

In chapter 29, Isaiah reaffirms his concept using a speaking image: the sealed book.

¹¹The vision of all this has become for you like the words of a sealed document. If it is given to those who can read, with the command, "Read this," they say, "We cannot, for it is sealed." ¹²And if it is given to those who cannot read, saying, "Read this," they say, "We cannot read." ¹⁷Shall not Lebanon in a very little while become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be regarded as a forest? ¹⁸On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. ¹⁹The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. ²⁰For the tyrant shall be no more, and the scoffer shall cease to be; all those alert to do evil shall be cut off.

The prophets will make known to the poor and humble the correct interpretation of the words of the sealed book, and the awakening of the lowest will be the first step towards the end of the oppression carried out by the proud⁸.

The sealed book is also encountered in Daniel 12:4: *⁴But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be running back and forth, and evil shall increase."*

Let's make a list (limited to single pagan peoples and certainly not exhaustive) of the targets against which the prophets love to fire blank shots.

Isaiah lashes out at Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Edom, Tyre, Damascus, and (in chapter 18) even the land beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.

In chapter 25, Jeremiah, for his part, puts everything in one pot⁹. Later (chapters 46-51), he attacks in detail Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, the tribe of Kedar,

⁷ Mark 4:11-12 *¹¹And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; ¹²in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.*

⁸ Richard A. Horsley, *The Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins*, Minneapolis 2010.

⁹ 25:17-26: *¹⁷So I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me drink it: ¹⁸Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, an object of hissing and of cursing, as they are today; ¹⁹Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his officials, and all his people; ²⁰all the mixed people; all the kings of the land of Uz; all the kings of the land of the Philistines - Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod; ²¹Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites; ²²all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastland across the sea; ²³Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who have shaven temples; ²⁴all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed peoples that live in the desert; ²⁵all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of Media; ²⁶all the kings of the north, far and near, one after another, and all the kingdoms of the world that are on the face of the earth. And after them the king of Sheshach shall drink.*

Hazor, Elam, and finally Babylon. It is not surprising that the prophet spares Assyria, a declining power in his (supposed) times.

Ezekiel targets Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre (with an attached lengthy lament), Sidon, Egypt (with a lament for the deceased pharaoh), concluding with the mysterious kingdom of Magog, on whose throne sits Gog.

Daniel swims against the tide: his sole butt is the Seleucid king Antiochus IV, indicated with the image of the little horn.

The minor prophets mostly stay within limited bounds. In Hosea, Jonah, Micah, Habakkuk, Haggai, and Malachi, oracles against foreign peoples are absent. Jonah, in fact, foreshadows the conversion of the Ninevites.

Amos prophesies against Aram, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab; Joel against all nations; Obadiah against Edom and all nations; Nahum against Assyria; Zephaniah against Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria.

Zechariah, besides predicting the ruin of Damascus, Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, and Lebanon, dares inflame, unique among the prophets, the Jews (as God's armed wing) against the Greeks¹⁰. Urging the Jews to revolt against the rulers of the time might seem a reckless gesture to us. But even the so-called Zechariah takes his nice precautions: the warlike appeal is put in the mouth of a supposed prophet active in Jerusalem from 520 to 518 BCE, thus in a protected epoch.

With innate impetuous vehemence, under the shield of proven ingenious stratagems, the prophets savaged scot-free the dominant hierarchy of the temple and its false prophets:

Isaiah 28:7-8: *⁷These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine, they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in giving judgment. ⁸All tables are covered with filthy vomit; no place is clean.*

Jeremiah 5:30-31: *³⁰An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: ³¹the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule as the prophets direct; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?*

¹⁰ 9:13-17: *¹³For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will arouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword. ¹⁴Then the Lord will appear over them, and his arrow go forth like lightning; the Lord God will sound the trumpet and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south. ¹⁵The Lord of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour and tread down the slingers; they shall drink their blood like wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar. ¹⁶On that day the Lord their God will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. ¹⁷For what goodness and beauty are his! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.*

Jeremiah 23:11: ¹¹Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their wickedness, says the Lord.

Jeremiah 26:11: ¹¹Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears."

Ezekiel 22:26-28: ²⁶Its priests have done violence to my teaching and have profaned my holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. ²⁷Its officials within it are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. ²⁸Its prophets have smeared whitewash on their behalf, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, "Thus says the Lord God," when the Lord has not spoken.

Consequently, the temple is desecrated:

Jeremiah 7:8-11.30: ⁸Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are safe!" - only to go on doing all these abominations? ¹¹Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? You know, I too am watching, says the Lord. ³⁰For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the Lord; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it.

Jeremiah 23:11: ¹¹Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their wickedness, says the Lord.

Ezekiel 8:5-12: ⁵Then God said to me, "O mortal, lift up your eyes now in the direction of the north." So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and there, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy. ⁶He said to me, "Mortal, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? Yet you will see still greater abominations." ⁷And he brought me to the entrance of the court; I looked, and there was a hole in the wall. ⁸Then he said to me, "Mortal, dig through the wall;" and when I dug through the wall, there was an entrance. ⁹He said to me, "Go in, and see the vile abominations that they are committing here." ¹⁰So I went in and looked; there, portrayed on the wall all around, were all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome animals, and all the idols of the house of Israel. ¹¹Before them stood seventy of the elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the fragrant cloud of incense was ascending. ¹²Then he said to me, "Mortal, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of images? For they say, 'The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.'"

Hosea 6:9: ⁹As robbers lie in wait for someone, so the priests are banded together; they murder on the road to Shechem; they commit a monstrous crime.

Micah 3:5: ⁵Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry 'Peace' when they have something to eat, but declare war against those who put nothing into their mouths.

Malachi 2:11: ¹¹Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

Zechariah 13:2-4: ²On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more; and also I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit. ³And if any prophets appear again, their fathers and mothers who bore them will say to them, 'You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the Lord'; and their fathers and their mothers who bore them shall pierce them through when they prophesy. ⁴On that day the prophets will be ashamed, every one, of their visions when they prophesy; they will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive.

The continuous interventions of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel against idolatry and the spread of new deities clearly indicate that even in Hellenistic times the extensive practice of monotheism was still a pious desire envisioned by a sparse minority.

Isaiah 2:6.8.17.20: ⁶For you have forsaken the ways of your people, O house of Jacob. Indeed they are full of diviners from the east and of soothsayers like the Philistines, and they clasp hand with foreigners. ⁸Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made. ¹⁷The haughtiness of people shall be humbled, and the pride of everyone shall be brought low; and the Lord alone will be exalted on that day. ²⁰On that day people will throw away to the moles and to the bats their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship.

Daniel uses the term 'idol' only four times and always within chapter 14, in reference to the god Bel. Nonetheless, the most famous prophetic idol is his "abomination that desolates," the statue of a pagan god placed by Antiochus IV in the temple. 9:27: ²⁷He [Antiochus IV] shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator." 11:31: ³¹Forces sent by him shall occupy and profane the temple and fortress. They shall abolish the regular burnt offering and set up the abomination that makes desolate. 12:11: ¹¹From the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred ninety days.

In the minor prophets, the polemic against idols is consistent only in Hosea (5 occurrences). Sporadic (2 occurrences) in Amos, Micah, and Habakkuk. Only one occurrence in Jonah and Zechariah. Absent in Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Malachi.

Another theme that is currently relevant and that we can also read in a different light is that of social injustice, which the prophets share with the Enochian movement. In 1 Enoch, the rich are understood as wicked and rigorously condemned for the exploitation of the poor¹¹.

The Prophets are no less.

Isaiah 10:1-2: ¹*Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, ²to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey!*

Isaiah 25:4: ⁴*For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.*

Jeremiah 20:13: ¹³*Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.*

Jeremiah 22:3: ³*Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.*

¹¹ 1 Enoch 94:7-11: ⁷Woe to those who build their houses with sin; for from all their foundations shall they be overthrown, and by the sword shall they fall. And those who acquire gold and silver in judgement suddenly shall perish. ⁸Woe to you, ye rich, for ye have trusted in your riches, and from your riches shall ye depart, because ye have not remembered the Most High in the days of your riches. ⁹Ye have committed blasphemy and unrighteousness, and have become ready for the day of slaughter, and the day of darkness and the day of the great judgement. ¹⁰Thus I speak and declare unto you: He who hath created you will overthrow you, And for your fall there shall be no compassion, and your Creator will rejoice at your destruction. ¹¹and your righteous ones in those days shall be a reproach to the sinners and the godless. 96:5-8: ⁵Woe to you who devour the finest of the wheat, and drink wine in large bowls, and tread under foot the lowly with your might. ⁶Woe to you who drink water from every fountain, for suddenly shall ye be consumed and wither away, because ye have forsaken the fountain of life. ⁷Woe to you who work unrighteousness and deceit and blasphemy: it shall be a memorial against you for evil. ⁸Woe to you, ye mighty, who with might oppress the righteous; for the day of your destruction is coming. 97:7-10: ⁷Woe to you, ye sinners, who live on the mid ocean and on the dry land, whose remembrance is evil against you. ⁸Woe to you who acquire silver and gold in unrighteousness and say: "We have become rich with riches and have possessions; and have acquired everything we have desired. ⁹And now let us do what we purposed: for we have gathered silver, and many are the husbandmen in our houses. And our granaries are (brim) full as with water, ¹⁰Yea and like water your lies shall flow away; for your riches shall not abide but speedily ascend from you; for ye have acquired it all in unrighteousness, and ye shall be given over to a great curse. 98:11-12: ¹¹Woe to you, ye obstinate of heart, who work wickedness and eat blood. Whence have ye good things to eat and to drink and to be filled? From all the good things which the Lord the Most High has placed in abundance on the earth; therefore ye shall have no peace. ¹²Woe to you who love the deeds of unrighteousness: wherefore do ye hope for good hap unto yourselves? know that ye shall be delivered into the hands of the righteous, and they shall cut off your necks and slay you, and have no mercy upon you. Woe to you who rejoice in the tribulation of the righteous; for no grave shall be dug for you. Woe to you who set at nought the words of the righteous; for ye shall have no hope of life. Woe to you who write down lying and godless words; for they write down their lies that men may hear them and act godlessly towards (their) neighbour. Therefore they shall have no peace but die a sudden death. 99:13: ¹³Woe to you who build your houses through the grievous toil of others, And all their building materials are the bricks and stones of sin; I tell you ye shall have no peace.

Jeremiah 5:28: ²⁸*They know no limits in deeds of wickedness; they do not judge with justice the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy.*

Ezekiel 22:25.29: ²⁵*Its princes within it are like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured human lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows within it.*
²⁹*The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the alien without redress.*

Ezekiel 22:7.12: ⁷*Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the alien residing within you suffers extortion; the orphan and the widow are wronged in you.* ¹²*In you, they take bribes to shed blood; you take both advance interest and accrued interest, and make gain of your neighbours by extortion; and you have forgotten me, says the Lord God.*

The polemic against the rapacious exploiters, absent in Daniel, but well attested in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, assumes, as we will see, a capital importance in the final editing of Isaiah¹².

Evidently, in Hellenistic times, wealth was distributed damned unequally. Those who had good relations with the rulers enriched themselves by victimizing the subordinate classes with impunity. 1 Enoch and the prophets stand up as defenders of the poor, to whom they direct a promise of redemption: YHWH will take care of *His people of the poor* (Isaiah 3:15 - 49:13), overturning with His omnipotence the yoke of the oppressors. The rich, in accordance with 1 Enoch, are identified by Isaiah (53:9) as the wicked, the enemies of God, the children of evil: *They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth*¹³.

As already mentioned, the Yahwist group was small, almost negligible, lacking visibility and power. Nevertheless, it felt like the chosen part of Israel, the remnant that YHWH had reserved and that would some day build the new kingdom, with a renewed and even more splendid Jerusalem at its center, admired and respected even by the heathens. The theme of the "holy seed" (Isaiah 6:13), the remnant, is developed, as we will see, especially by the final redactor of Isaiah, but it is not absent in other prophets.

Jeremiah 23:3: ³*Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.*

Jeremiah 31:7: ⁷*For thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel."*

¹² Among the minor prophets, the theme is particularly present in Amos. (2:7; 5:11-12; 8:4, 6 -), Abakkuk (2:6-12), Zephaniah (2:2, 3:12), Malachi (3:5), Zechariah (7:10).

¹³ In Hebrew, the terms for 'rich' and 'wicked' consist of the same consonants arranged in a different order.

Jeremiah 50:20: ²⁰*In those days and at that time, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and none shall be found; for I will pardon the remnant that I have spared.*

Ezekiel 6:8-9: ⁸*But I will spare some. Some of you shall escape the sword among the nations and be scattered through the countries. ⁹Those of you who escape shall remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, how I was crushed by their wanton heart that turned away from me, and their wanton eyes that turned after their idols. Then they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations.*

Ezekiel 11:16-20: ¹⁶*Therefore say: Thus says the Lord God: Though I removed them far away among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a little while in the countries where they have gone. ¹⁷Therefore say: Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. ¹⁸When they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. ¹⁹I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*

Micah 2:12: ¹²*I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the survivors of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture; it will resound with people.*

Micah 4:6: ⁶*On that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted.*

Micah 5:3.7: ³*Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son¹⁴, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. ⁷Then the remnant of Jacob, surrounded by many peoples, shall be like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, which do not depend upon people or wait for any mortal.*

Micah 7:18: ¹⁸*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency.*

Zephaniah 3:12-13: ¹²*For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord —¹³the remnant of Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.*

¹⁴ It means, in tune with Isaiah: until Jerusalem gives birth to the child who is the remnant of Israel, the elected minority, the future Yahad. This term, initially an adverb ("together"), was later used in Hebrew as a masculine noun ("community").

Pushing back the composition of the prophetic books by centuries allowed their true authors to develop a hidden code beneath the events described (and time and again totally invented). As susceptible of secret meanings, the focal points of the story became the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonian exile, the empty land, the return of the exiles, the reconstruction of the temple.

Jeremiah alludes repeatedly to an 'empty', desolate land. 4:7: *⁷A lion has gone up from its thicket, a destroyer of nations has set out; he has gone out from his place to make your land a waste; your cities will be ruins without inhabitant.* 7:34: *³⁴And I will bring to an end the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of the bride and bridegroom in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for the land shall become a waste.* 13:19: *¹⁹The towns of the Negeb are shut up with no one to open them; all Judah is taken into exile, wholly taken into exile.* 25:11: *¹¹This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.* 34:22: *²²I am going to command, says the Lord, and will bring them back to this city; and they will fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire. The towns of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant.*

The return of the exiles never occurred. They were a distinct minority, belonging to the upper class, who in Babylon, both under the Babylonians and under the Persians, managed to integrate excellently and had no interest in returning to Judaea. Therefore, the return from exile is a falsehood¹⁵.

It was perhaps initially created by the pro-Persian propagandists of monotheistic Yahwism in order to claim rights over the possession of the land where it was said to flow with milk and honey, but which held no attraction for the true exiles. Or the myth was invented anew by the prophets themselves to develop their secret code.

The Tanakh preserves the departure and return figures. Jeremiah 52:30 is succinct: *³⁰In the twenty-third year of Nebuchadrezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took into exile of the Judeans seven hundred forty-five persons; all the persons were four thousand six hundred.* Regarding the entirety of the repatriated exiles, Ezra (2:64-67) reveals unsuspected accounting skills: *⁶⁴The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, ⁶⁵besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred male and female singers. ⁶⁶They had seven hundred and*

¹⁵ The current reconstruction of the past that emphasizes the total exile and the 'empty' land is a theological and ideological construction. So Ehud Ben Zvi, "Inclusion in and Exclusion from Israel as Conveyed by the Use of the Term 'Israel' in Postmonarchic Biblical Texts", in Steven W. Holloway and Lowell K. Handy, eds., *The Pitcher is Broken. Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström*, Sheffield 1995, p. 104. Note that Jeremiah invites to collaborate with the victors: *But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare* (29:7). This speech would make little sense if Jews were treated as slaves. See Abba Solomon Eban, *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews*, New York 1984, p. 69. The author's thesis is confirmed by the nearly 200 cuneiform tablets exhibited in the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem (February 2015). I refer to the exhibition catalogue: Filip Vukosavovic, *By the Rivers of Babylon: The Story of the Babylonian Exile*, Jerusalem 2015.

thirty-six horses, two hundred and forty-five mules, ⁶⁷four hundred and thirty-five camels, and six thousand seven hundred and twenty donkeys.

Under the veil of exile and return, the initiates were revealed what was concealed in those distant events of heavily manipulated history. The destruction of Jerusalem alludes to the harsh punishment that still hangs over the unfaithful people today. Babylon, the city of evil, antithetical to the new Jerusalem, indicates the condition of sin and total opposition to God. The return is the conversion to pure Yahwism (Hosea 6:1 *¹Come, let us return to the Lord -* Malachi 3:7 *⁷Return to me, and I will return to you.*). The way opened in the desert represents the spiritual path available within the holy remnant of Israel, the community of the chosen. In chapters 30-33, Jeremiah predicts the return after 70 years of exile in Babylon¹⁶ (thus, metaphorically, after a long stay in disbelief and evil) and a new covenant (obviously between YHWH and the faithful remnant). When Haggai and Zechariah work for the reconstruction of the temple, the sense is that the desecrated temple of Jerusalem must be reconsecrated and officiated by the priests of the chosen remnant of Israel.

These coded messages eluded the authorities, allowing the small flock to expand and find an ever-growing following among the multitude of the poor and oppressed, for whom hope in redemption and liberation could become the main reason for life.

¹⁶ 70 symbolically indicates a very high number. See Matthew 18:21-22.

A POEM FOR THE YAHAD

The Jewish ruling class maintained its grip on power even when Judaea passed from the Ptolemies of Egypt to the Seleucids of Syria. In fact, then the process of Hellenization accelerated. Jerusalem obtained the status of a Greek polis with the flattering name of Antioch of Jerusalem. At the foot of the citadel (Akra), a gymnasium was built where wealthy youth and health-conscious priests displayed their muscles in the nude and showcased the adoption of a Greek lifestyle, which often extended to their clothing¹⁷. Many resorted to surgery to hide their circumcision. Even high priests took on Greek names (Honio -> Menelaus, Jeshua -> Jason). The position of high priest was practically auctioned off for enormous sums. Jason (175 BCE) paid a total of 590 talents to remove the position from his brother Honias III. Three years later, Menelaus, offering King Antiochus IV not just a few coins but an additional 300 talents, snatched the position away.

Meanwhile, especially among the discontented lower clergy and the rural population, the ideas of the prophets gained ground, and the chosen remnant grew quietly. The civil war within Judaea erupted when the Hellenizers accepted the placement in the temple of the "abomination that desolates". For the hierocratic regime, this was not new; it had previously turned a blind eye to avoid antagonizing the Greek rulers¹⁸, but this time the lower strata took it as a pretext for armed struggle, also justified by the intensifying socio-economic crisis. The priest Mattathias and his children, the Maccabees¹⁹, led the insurgents. The civil war ended with the victory of the anti-Hellenists. Judaea had the more or less autonomous government of the Hasmoneans (another name for the Maccabees) under the shadow of the Seleucid kingdom.

¹⁷ Zephaniah 1:8: ⁸*And on the day of the Lord's sacrifice I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who dress themselves in foreign attire.*

¹⁸ Moreover, there is no shortage of biblical texts that support the survival of the myth of divine council. See E. Theodore Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, Chico 1980, and Ellen White, *Yahweh's Council: Its Structure and Membership*, Tübingen 2014.

¹⁹ In Hebrew, *makabim* means "the hammers, the hammerers." I think that the nickname *makabi* was given to Judas drawing inspiration from Jeremiah 51:20-23: ²⁰*You are my hammer [war club], my weapon of battle: with you I smash nations; with you I destroy kingdoms;* ²¹*with you I smash the horse and its rider; with you I smash the chariot and the charioteer;* ²²*with you I smash man and woman; with you I smash the old man and the boy; with you I smash the young man and the girl;* ²³*with you I smash shepherds and their flocks; with you I smash farmers and their teams; with you I smash governors and deputies.* Here, God addresses Babylon, an instrument of war in His hands. It is not unjustified to suppose that Judas, God's warrior, felt invested with a similar mission that authorized him to strike down enemies with heinous massacres: 1 Macc. 5:28.35: ²⁸*Then Judas and his army quickly turned back by the wilderness road to Bozrah, and he took the town and killed every male by the edge of the sword; then he seized all its spoils and burned it with fire.* ³⁵*Next he turned aside to Maapha and fought against it and took it, and he killed every male in it, plundered it, and burned it with fire.*

For the anti-Hellenistic militias, the illusion didn't last long. The new leaders, while forcibly imposing the practice of the Law of Moses, were seduced by the sirens of Hellenism and, above all, did nothing to improve the conditions of the destitute, whom they abandoned to their fate. Exploitation became intolerable, and a new political-religious class (the Hasmoneans were both political leaders and high priests) imposed on the defenseless masses a yoke not different from the previous one²⁰, yet more unbearable, because it came from a faction that hypocritically presented itself as a pious executor of Mosaic religious norms. Obviously, religion served political power as an effective instrument of governance.

This time, taking the baton from the community gathered around the anti-Greek prophets was the Essene Yahad, an even more tiny group, well organized into clusters spread across Judaea. The most notable is Qumran, near which the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. The Essenes took up the tradition of the prophets. They transcribed their books, commented on them, but did not create new ones. At most, they reworked them, as is the case with the Book of Jeremiah, of which there are two versions in Hebrew at Qumran. My contention is that the already existing Book of Isaiah underwent within the Essene context a final editing that deeply reshaped it to align with the beliefs, ideals, and expectations of the Yahad. In the definitive version the community of the pure is displayed with a doctrinal richness that conjures the self-representation of the Essene Yahad²¹.

Let us then start from the wee privileged remnant that has structured itself into an exclusive and combative community. At 6:13, the Yahad identifies itself with the faithful remnant and with the survivors of Israel: *¹³Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.* 10:20-22: *²⁰On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on the one who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. ²¹A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. ²²For though your people Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.* 37:31-32: *³¹The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; ³²for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

²⁰ A considerable portion of the state budget was absorbed, starting from John Hyrcanus, by expenses for mercenary troops, deemed essential for defense and conquest wars and reliable for the repression of internal revolts.

²¹ The final editing of Isaiah occurring in the 2nd century BCE can be inferred from the presence of vicarious atonement in chapter 53. This doctrine appears only in Isaiah and in 2 Maccabees (a text placed at the end of the 2nd century BCE). It is absent from other biblical texts as well as from Enochic literature, while it reappears in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 8:3-4, 1QS 9:4). I had previously mentioned a pervasive Essene final editing of the Book of Isaiah in my *You Are Gods: At the Origins of Christianity*, academia.edu 2017, pp. 110-111.

The Yahad, now a negligible minority, will soon multiply miraculously. 60:21-22: ²¹*Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever. They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified.* ²²*The least of them shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the Lord; in its time I will accomplish it quickly.*

In chapter 4, due to the parallelism²² in the two members of verse 2, the sprout is identified with "the survivors of Israel" (that is, as seen, with the Yahad, whose members did not hesitate to call themselves "the Saints," vs. 3). The new Jerusalem will be their future residence.

4:2-3: ²*On that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel.* ³*Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem,*

As we now know, the sprout is the Yahad. In the first part of chapters 11 and 61, its program is laid out. 61:1-4: ¹*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;* ²*to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;* ³*to provide for those who mourn in Zion - to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.* ⁴*They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.*

It is a program of social redemption (1-3) and moral reconstruction (vs 4), culminating in the establishment of a kingdom of justice (5-11). Note that in verse 6, the members will be called priests, as in Qumran²³.

²² Isaiah 45:7: *I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things.* In this verse, a controversy of Isaiah against the Iranian dualistic conception is intended to be seen. The prophet would oppose to it God as the sole author of everything. I propose a different interpretation of the verse. Taking into account the technique of parallelism, light and darkness correspond to good and misfortune. They are simply two metaphors, widely used even in everyday language, that anticipate the concepts of prosperity and misfortune. The Essene Scroll of War will use the same images to contrast the righteous with the wicked. Moreover, these metaphors recur in Isaiah in various contexts: 5:20 ²⁰*Ah, you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!* 9:2 ²*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined.* 42:16 ¹⁶*I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them.* 50:10 ¹⁰*Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant, who walks in darkness and has no light, yet trusts in the name of the Lord and relies upon his God?* 58:10 ¹⁰*If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.* 59:9 ⁹*Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us; we wait for light, and lo! there is darkness; and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.* The cosmological discourse is found instead in 48:13: ¹³*My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they stand at attention.*

²³ In 62:12, two titles of the Yahad: *They shall be called, The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord.* The Qumranites referred to themselves as "the Saints" (qdoshim).

11:1-9: ¹A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. ²The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. ³His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; ⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. ⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. ⁹They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Verses 61:1 ¹The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me and 11:2 ²The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him reaffirm the presence of God in the Yahad and thus its divinization. This concept is reiterated elsewhere almost in the same words: 32:15 ¹⁵Finally, a spirit from on high will be infused in us. 44:3: ³I will pour out my spirit upon your descendants. And at 59:20-21: ²⁰And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the Lord. ²¹And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says the Lord, from now on and forever.

Returning to chapter 11, in verse 4 the rod of his mouth and the breath of his lips indicate the effective power of God's word expressed through the Community. In verses 10 and 12, this is referred to as a banner for the peoples (Gentiles), that is, a sign through which God has chosen to manifest Himself: ¹⁰On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious. ¹²He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

The same concept is expressed at 49:6 ⁶He says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." And at 49:22: ²²Thus says the Lord God: I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.

Indeed, the Yahad can be a light to the nations only as the Kavod, the glory of God, shines in it, just as in the cloud of the Exodus (chapter 40, verses 34, 36-37), once again indicating His presence.

The sprout, the shoot is the new child of the plant. Thus, the transition from the image of the sprout to that of the child, the newborn, is wholly natural to indicate the advent of the Yahad, the new Israel, the true child of Jerusalem.

Chapter 66 emphatically returns to the figure of childbirth to express the sudden creation of the Yahad, birthed from Zion, thus demonstrating her spiritual fertility even in a period of moral abjection. It should be remembered that it is said of Jerusalem that God has placed His dwelling in her and is therefore present with His spirit. Jerusalem is metaphorically referred to elsewhere as a "young woman" (37:22) to signify that she is of childbearing age and thus capable of metaphorically giving birth. It is noteworthy that it is first said of Zion that she has given birth to a male (verse 7), then that she has borne children (verse 8). In both cases, it concerns the Yahad²⁴.

At this point, it is not difficult to understand that, in chapter 7, the virgin who will conceive and bear the child (Emmanuel, "God with us") is the same Jerusalem, and the child is obviously the Yahad. 7:13-14: ¹³*Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.*

The Emmanuel (that is, the Yahad) will be a sign for Israel, as is clearly reiterated at 8:16-18: ¹⁶*Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples. ¹⁷I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. ¹⁸See, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.*

By "children," it refers to the disciples, the members of the Yahad, made by the Lord signs and omens for Israel/Jacob, to whom God has hidden His face, that is, to whom He no longer communicates His grace as He has repudiated them for their abominable conduct.

In chapter 9, the theological awareness of the Yahad reaches its peak: (9:2-7): ²*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. ³You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. ⁴For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will*

²⁴ I refer to Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, Lisle 2023, pp. 100-101. For him the child, the son of Jerusalem, is the faithful remnant that in the 8th century BCE, at the time of King Ahaz, gathered around the prophet Isaiah.

establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The people who walked in darkness are the masses oppressed by the impious and hypocritical Hasmonean tyranny. The great light indicates the rising of the Yahad through which God acts to liberate the oppressed. In verse 6, the newborn child again points to the rising of the Yahad, whose attributes are enumerated, which may seem hyperbolic, but are not, if one thinks that the Yahad is practically the presence of God on earth (Emmanuel) in the form of a community: *⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.*

These verses clearly denote that the Essene community, as an instrument of God, felt in some way a participant in His divinity and power. We are at the doctrine of theosis, the divinization, which is moreover clearly expressed at Qumran in the *Hymn of Self-Glorification: Who is like me among the angels?*²⁵ (4Q471b 5).

Now let's move on to chapter 43:18-22: *¹⁸Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. ¹⁹I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. ²⁰The wild animals will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, ²¹the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise. ²²Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel!*

The renewal occurs with God creating a new subject, the community of the elect that will inhabit the new Jerusalem. The new thing that sprouts is the Yahad in formation, not coincidentally called elsewhere "sprout." The usual image (verse 19) of the road in the desert hints at the self-designation of the Yahad: the WAY. In verse 20, my people, my elect refer to the poor in general and specifically to the members of the Yahad (the Poor).

43:22-28 ²²Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel! ²³You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honoured me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, or wearied you with frankincense. ²⁴You have not bought me sweet cane with money, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities. ²⁵I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. ²⁶Accuse me, let us go to trial; set forth your case, so that

²⁵ According to Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, the Jewish people (particularly the faithful community and its representatives) participate in a certain sense of divinity. Fletcher-Louis has developed this thesis in foundational works such as *All the Glory of Adam* and the *Jesus Monotheism* project.

you may be proved right. ²⁷Your first ancestor sinned, and your interpreters transgressed against me. ²⁸Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary, I delivered Jacob to utter destruction, and Israel to reviling.

Here, Jacob and Israel are the anti-Yahad Jews. God will forgive the sins of Israel (43:25), meaning that He will not annihilate it forever, but from a small remnant He will create a new Israel, the Yahad, which will also include the conversion of the wayward Jewish brothers in its program. On the other hand, Christians will later consider themselves the true Israel (*the Israel of God*, Galatians 6:16).

At 44:1-2 (as well as at 49:6), Jacob is called "my servant," but there Jacob refers to the true Israel: the Yahad²⁶. In fact, at 44:2, the image of the generation of the Yahad takes the form of a child, which is also present, as seen, elsewhere: ²Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you from the womb. At 44:5, the chosen servant (the Yahad) can rightly bear the name of Israel, the true Israel: (44:1-5) ¹But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! ²Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you: Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. ³For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring. ⁴They shall spring up like a green tamarisk, like willows by flowing streams. ⁵This one will say, "I am the Lord's," another will be called by the name of Jacob, yet another will write on the hand, "The Lord's," and adopt the name of Israel.

In chapter 65, there is a clear contrast between the true Israel (the Yahad) (verses 9, 10) and those who, though Jews, oppose it (11-15): ⁹I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah inheritors of my mountains; my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall settle there. ¹⁰Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me. ¹¹But you who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny; ¹²I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer, when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my sight, and chose what I did not delight in. ¹³Therefore thus says the Lord God: My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; ¹⁴my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart, and shall wail for anguish of spirit.

²⁶ Consequently, the Suffering Servant is the Yahad. Each member of the Community can logically identify with him, primarily the Master of Justice. "The boundaries between the individual and the community appear fluid; the exemplary individual embodies the community and this in turn can be represented by an ideal individual figure" (Martin Hengel with Daniel P. Bailey, "The Effective History of Isaiah 53 in the Pre-Christian Period", in Bernd Janowski e Peter Stuhlmacher, eds., *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Period*", Grand Rapids 2004, p. 145).

From the context of the various passages cited, it can be inferred that the terms Jacob and Israel are used by Isaiah, perhaps with intentional ambiguity, to indicate now the Yahad, now the unfaithful people of Israel.

In chapter 49, Isaiah offers an overall picture of the Yahad. In verses 1 and 5, he resumes the image of the Yahad as the privileged son of Jerusalem, predestined for its mission of salvation for Israel even before birth. Verse 2 clarifies that the task of the Yahad is not to take up arms. God will act in it through the weapon of the word (as already stated at 11:4). In verse 3, the glory of God is manifested in (or upon) the Yahad: this concept of manifested glory (see the Gospel of John, 17:1-5, where it concerns Jesus) inevitably refers to the idea of theosis. In verses 8 and 9, the mission of the Yahad is outlined as a new covenant to resurrect Israel, a mission that benefits the people of God, the poor (verse 13). The task of the Poor in the strict sense (the members of the Yahad) is to be God's instrument for the redemption of all the poor (including non-believers).

In the new Jerusalem, the Yahad will establish the kingdom of social justice.

49:1-13: ¹Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. ²He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. ³And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." ⁴But I said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God." ⁵And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honoured in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength - ⁶he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." ⁷Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you." ⁸Thus says the Lord: In a time of favour I have answered you, on a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages; ⁹saying to the prisoners, "Come out," to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves." They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture; ¹⁰they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. ¹¹And I will turn all my mountains into a road, and my highways shall be raised up. ¹²Lo, these shall come from far away, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene. ¹³Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O

mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

At 49:16-26, the description of the new Jerusalem is presented, which will be the driving center of the new Davidic kingdom²⁷: ¹⁶See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. ¹⁷Your builders outdo your destroyers, and those who laid you waste go away from you. ¹⁸Lift up your eyes all around and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall put all of them on like an ornament, and like a bride you shall bind them on. ¹⁹Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land - surely now you will be too crowded for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. ²⁰The children born in the time of your bereavement will yet say in your hearing: "The place is too crowded for me; make room for me to settle." ²¹Then you will say in your heart, "Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away - so who has reared these? I was left all alone - where then have these come from?" ²²Thus says the Lord God: I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. ²³Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame. ²⁴Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? ²⁵But thus says the Lord: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued; for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children. ²⁶I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the Lord your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

At 65:17-25, the description of the New Jerusalem is resumed, where the Yahad will be settled: ¹⁷For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. ¹⁸But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. ¹⁹I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. ²⁰No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. ²¹They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²²They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. ²³They shall not labour in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord - and their descendants as well. ²⁴Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking

²⁷ Already at 14:32, Isaiah had expressed the idea that the Yahad will dwell in the new Jerusalem: ³²What will one answer the messengers of the nation? "The Lord has founded Zion, and the needy among his people will find refuge in her."

I will hear. ²⁵The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent - its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord²⁸.

²⁸ A similar concept is already in Ezekiel 17:22-24: ²²Thus says the Lord God: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. ²³On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind. ²⁴All the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord. I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken; I will accomplish it. The tall, humiliated tree and the withered green tree are the impious and arrogant Jews.

Yet another passage about the bright future of the new Israel (61:5-11): ⁵*Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines; ⁶but you shall be called priests of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory. ⁷Because their shame was double, and dishonour was proclaimed as their lot, therefore they shall possess a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs. ⁸For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. ¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.*

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