

***Discerning the Signs of the Times with King David, Elijah, Mary,
Edith Stein, ETTY HILLESUM, and others***

David's prayer during flight from Absalom (2 Sam 15:23-29):

The whole countryside wept aloud as the troops marched by. The king crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the troops crossed by the road to the wilderness. Then Zadok appeared, with all the Levites carrying the Ark of the Covenant of God; and they set down the Ark of God until all the people had finished marching out of the city. Abiathar also came up. But the king said to Zadok, "Take the Ark of God back to the city. If I find favor with the Lord, the Lord will bring me back and let me see it and its abode. And if the Lord should say, 'I do not want you,' I am ready; let God do with me as God pleases." And the king said to the priest Zadok, "Do you understand? You return to the safety of the city with your two sons, your own son Ahimaaz and Abiathar's son Jonathan. Look, I shall linger in the steppes of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." Zadok and Abiathar brought the Ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they stayed there.

Elijah's encounter with God, "Why are you here?" (1 Kings 19:9-16):

There Elijah went into a cave, and there he spent the night. Then the word of the Lord came to him. He said to him, "Why are you here, Elijah?" He replied, "I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life." "Come out," He called, "and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And lo, the LORD passed by. There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks by the power of the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind—an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake—fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire—a soft murmuring sound (lit: the sound/voice of thin silence; *qol demamah daqqah*). When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his mantle about his face and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then a voice addressed him: "Why are you here, Elijah?" He answered, "I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and have put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life."

The Lord said to him, "Go back by the way you came, [and] on to the wilderness of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael as king of Aram.

Also anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah to succeed you as prophet.

Mary in discernment (finding Jesus in the Temple; Luke 2:46-51):

Luke 2:46 After three days Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

But ***they did not understand*** what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. ***His mother treasured all these things in her heart.***

Jacob discerning Joseph’s dreams (Gen 37:9-11):

He dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers, saying, “Look, I have had another dream: And this time, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” And when he told it to his father and brothers, his father berated him. “What,” he said to him, “is this dream you have dreamed? Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low to you to the ground?” So his brothers were wrought up at him, and ***his father kept the matter in mind*** (וַאֲבִי יַעֲקֹב שָׁמַר אֶת־הַדְּבָר).
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Etty Hillesum’s diary, An Interrupted Life

22 July 1942, 8:00 A.M. God give me strength, not only spiritual strength but physical strength as well... I am so terribly tired, my whole body aches, and I have no energy for today's work. I don't really believe in it, and if it goes on for long I shall probably end up completely worn out. Still, I am grateful to You for driving me from my peaceful desk into the midst of the cares and sufferings of this age...

As I walk through the streets I am forced to think a great deal about Your world. Think is not really the right word, it is more an attempt to plumb its mystery with a new sense. It often seems to me that I can already discern the beginning and the end of this one phase of history, already see it in perspective.

And I am deeply grateful to You for leaving me so free of bitterness and hate, with so much calm acceptance, which is not at all the same as defeatism, and also with some *understanding for our age*, strange though that may sound. One must understand one's age just as one understands one's contemporaries, for after all, it is of their making, it is what it is and must be understood as such, however perplexing it maybe.

11 July 1942, Saturday morning, eleven o'clock.

We must only speak about the ultimate and most serious things in life when the words well up inside us as simply and as naturally as water from a spring. ***And if God does not help me to go on, then I shall have to help God.*** The surface of the earth is gradually turning into one great prison camp, and soon there will be nobody left outside. The Jews here are telling each other lovely stories: they say that the Germans are burying us alive or exterminating us with gas. But what is the point of repeating such things, even if they should be true?

Edith Stein's letter to Pope Pius XI to which Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII, responded.

“As a child of the Jewish people who, by the grace of God, for the past eleven years has also been a child of the Catholic Church, I dare to speak to the Father of Christianity about that which oppresses millions of Germans. For weeks we have seen deeds perpetrated in Germany which mock any sense of justice and humanity, not to mention love of neighbor. For years the leaders of National Socialism have been preaching hatred of the Jews. Now that they have seized the power of government and armed their followers, among them proven criminal elements, this seed of hatred has germinated.

...but through boycott measures – by robbing people of their livelihood, civic honor and fatherland – it drives many to desperation; within the last week, through private reports I was informed of five cases of suicide as a consequence of these hostilities. I am convinced that this is a general condition which will claim many more victims. One may regret that these unhappy people do not have greater inner strength to bear their misfortune. But the responsibility must fall, after all, on those who brought them to this point and it also falls on those who keep silent in the face of such happenings.

Everything that happened and continues to happen on a daily basis originates with a government that calls itself ‘Christian.’ For weeks not only Jews but also thousands of faithful Catholics in Germany, and, I believe, all over the world, have been waiting and hoping for the Church of Christ to raise its voice to stop

this abuse of Christ's name. Is not this idolization of race and governmental power which is being pounded into the public consciousness by the radio open heresy? Isn't the effort to destroy Jewish blood an abuse of the holiest humanity of our Savior, of the most blessed Virgin and the apostles? Is not all this diametrically opposed to the conduct of our Lord and Savior, who, even on the cross, still prayed for his persecutors. And isn't this a black mark on the record of this Holy Year which was intended to be a year of peace and reconciliation?

We all, who are faithful children of the Church and who see the conditions in Germany with open eyes, fear the worst for the prestige of the Church, if the silence continues any longer. We are convinced that his silence will not be able in the long run to purchase peace with the present German government. For the time being, the fight against Catholicism will be conducted quietly and less brutally than against Jewry, but no less systematically. It won't take long before no Catholic will be able to hold office in Germany unless he dedicates himself unconditionally to the new course of action...." (Signed) Dr. Edith Stein

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letter to Reinhold Niebuhr (Bonhoeffer had come to Union Theological) July 1939:

"Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of the nation and thereby destroying our civilization," he had finally explained in a letter to Niebuhr. "I know which of these alternatives I must choose, but I cannot make that choice in security I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America."

I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people . . . Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security.