

HISTORY OF SALVATION

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HISTORY OF SALVATION

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INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

The word "history" is familiar to us: a continuous methodical record of important or public events; the study of past events, especially of human affairs; past events; those connected with a person or thing. History relates to time. It is essentially to do with human beings. It refers to the past in relation to the present. However, God himself is outside space and time. He is eternal. He is eternally, without beginning or end without a "history". So, the history of salvation relates to man and the created world. It looks at things from our angle. It is our discovery of God who is, who was, and who will be. Or rather, it is God who reveals himself to us in time and space. It is the gradual revelation of God as One and Three that takes place in human history.

What do we mean by "history of salvation"?

"It is a history that unfolds within the earthly history of humanity, beginning with the first Adam, through the revelation of the second Adam, Jesus Christ (cf. I Cor. 15:45), and ending with the ultimate fulfilment of the history of the world in God, when He will be 'all in all' (I Cor 15:28).

[...] The history of salvation is synthesized in the fundamental observation of God's great intervention in the history of humankind. This intervention reaches its culmination in the Paschal Mystery - the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ to heaven- and is completed at Pentecost, with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. This history, while it reveals the redemptive will of God, also reveals *the mission of the Church*. It is the history of every individual and the entire human family, created in the beginning and then re-created in Christ and in the Church. [...]

The history of salvation continues to offer new inspiration for interpreting the history of humanity. Because of this, numerous contemporary thinkers and historians are also interested in the history of salvation. It is, in fact, the most stimulating of themes. All of the questions raised by the Second Vatican Council are reducible, finally, to this theme.¹

The history of salvation not only addresses the question of human history but also confronts *the problem of the meaning of man's existence*. As a result, it is both *history* and *metaphysics*. It could be said that it is the *most integral* form of theology, the theology of all the encounters between God and the world. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, is nothing other than a contemporary presentation of this great theme."²

Revelation³

"By natural reason man can know God with certainty, on the basis of his works. But there is another order of knowledge, which man cannot possibly arrive at by his own powers: the order of divine Revelation (Dei Filius DS 3015). Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and given himself to man. This he does by revealing the mystery, his plan of loving goodness, formed from all eternity in Christ, for the benefit of all men. God has fully revealed this plan by sending us his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit".⁴

¹ See e.g., *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 1, 2, 3, 4, 10. Basic key Creation-Fall-Redemption.

² JPII, *Crossing...*, p. 58, ## 2, 4 - p. 59.

³ See CCC: Part One The Profession of Faith; Section One 'I believe' - 'We believe'; Chapter Two God comes to meet man.

⁴ CCC, 50.

"It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will. His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature' (DV 2; Eph 1:9; 2:18; 2 Pt 1:4)."⁵

"God, who 'dwells in unapproachable light', wants to communicate his own divine life to the men he freely created, in order to adopt them as his sons in his only-begotten Son (I Tim 6:16; cf. Eph 1:4-5). By revealing himself God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity."⁶

"The divine plan of Revelation is realised simultaneously 'by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other' (DV 2) and shed light on each other. It involves a specific divine pedagogy: God communicates himself to man gradually. He prepares him to welcome by stages the supernatural Revelation that is to culminate in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ [...]"⁷

The history of God's relationship with man and the world is not simply that of sharing his life with us; it reveals itself as a salvation history.

The reader of the Bible is never far from the word 'salvation' from the first to the last page. At the basis of every notion of 'salvation' one always finds an essentially human experience - the existence of evil in the world, i.e., something to be saved from. This evil, which has affected man from the beginning, takes many forms, physical and moral. So, salvation is an idea present in almost all religions: a God who saves those who are faithful to him has a central position in the main world religions. It relates to the fundamental problem of evil, which is why our grasp of the concept of salvation is also important for our apostolate now.

Holy Scripture is really a message of salvation. It is not a philosophy or an ideology, or a gnosis. God reveals himself as Saviour, and shows us his plan of salvation. In the OT this divine revelation is gradual and incomplete; in the NT it finds its fullness; and it involves all the great themes which concern men in all epochs -God, World and Man.

What is the origin and what is the purpose of God's salvific plan? We need to remember that the biblical notion of "time" is not cyclic, is not based on a regular pattern of seasons and historical events (which is the Greek idea). No; the Bible time is "linear", it is made up of a series of events all of which are directed to the supreme goal of history and which originate in the creative act of God.

Sin

If we have a 'God who saves', the starting point is in the evident existence of something we all experience, viz., the physical and moral wretchedness that marks man's life in his present situation. Biblical history bears witness to this unhappy human condition. But biblical cosmology and anthropology are grounded on two great principles -the essential goodness of all creation, and the fact that the human being is a unity of body and soul, each supportive of the other.

To explain the human condition Greek thought had recourse to a kind of "metaphysical fall" which happened before time began; spiritual souls have fallen prisoner to the material body -so, a dualist philosophy, basically.

Biblical revelation, on the other hand, places the origin of our sad situation in something that happens within time and history, a defection for which the first representatives of mankind were directly responsible and whose consequences affect all their descendants.

⁵ CCC, 51.

⁶ CCC, 52.

⁷ CCC, 53.

This radical, voluntary disaster committed at the dawn of history and one in which all mankind mysteriously shares, lies at the core of the biblical notion of *salvation*. Cut off from God by sin, man goes from bad to worse in every direction - in his relationships with visible and tangible creation (cf. Gen. 3:17-19), with his fellows (cf. Gen. 3:12) and even within himself: he has become unbalanced (cf. Gen. 3:10). The biblical account of the original fall (cf. Gen. 3) is a wonderful summary of the evils which then (and now) affect mankind.

There are two aspects to God's salvation plan -collective and personal: the "biblical man" is a person in the midst of a people. Also, the salvation looked forward to in the OT was almost exclusively seen in natural not supernatural terms; but liberation from sin was not forgotten; it can be clearly seen the servant of Yahweh in the Book of Isaiah (chapter 53). When 'salvation' comes in the NT it is fuller and more perfect than expected. Thus, the evils whose disappearance was so desired and the good things for which man yearned were in the OT mainly "natural" good and evil things; but God's saving plan goes much further and higher: it gives man entry to the mystery of God's inner life.

Stages in God's plan of salvation.

The revelation and realisation of the divine plan of salvation have as their protagonist *Jesus Christ*. They show that human history is oriented towards a goal which is at the end of time, when Christ returns in glory. So, in broad outline we could say that these are the stages of the history of salvation between Creation and the Second Coming of the Lord:

- the Protoevangelium
- the Covenant with Noah
- the election of Abraham
- the Exodus from Egypt with Moses
- the Covenant of Sinai
- the promise of a Messiah of David's line
- the Exile or Captivity in Babylon
- the Incarnation of the Redeemer
- the Church
- the Parousia of the Lord, and all that it brings

Salvation: Christianity and other religions

Buddhists, Gnostics, Neo-Platonists and Stoics all work towards a liberation which is within the reach of man's natural powers. A purifying asceticism, ritual practices, arcane knowledge, etc., are examples of other things people do to try to free their souls. The salvation that Scripture proposes, on the other hand, is beyond man's natural powers: it is an unmerited gift from God, although it is true that man can (and should) freely cooperate with the saving grace he is offered.

Christian salvation is available to everyone, whereas the liberation other religious beliefs offer is achievable only by a privileged few who are capable of intellectual contemplation (neo-Platonists) or who are able to divest themselves of everything in order to enter "Nirvana" (Buddhists).

Thus, for these extrabiblical religions, salvation comes about outside history -as one might expect: a liberation achieved within the frontiers of this world, so earthly and temporal, in the midst of the events of history, would be self-contradictory and absurd. If the cause of man's current condition is "matter", then to seek "liberation", salvation, must necessarily involve "escaping" from this material, physical, historical world.

In *biblical revelation*, on the other hand, history is not rejected: it is caught up in and it plays a key role in the divine salvific plan. It is perhaps this key feature that distinguishes "Christian salvation" from any other religion. In effect, God brings about in the heart of history the conditions which will allow the whole man to be saved -body and soul, individual and society. In this way, *time* and *history* will be present in the restoration of man, in the same sort of way as they were present in his original fall (Rom 8:19-23).

As JP II states: "*In Christianity time has a fundamental importance. Within the dimension of time the world was created; within it the history of salvation unfolds, finding its culmination in the 'fullness of time' of the Incarnation, and its goal in the glorious return of the Son of God at the end of time. In Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, time becomes a dimension of God, who is himself eternal. With the coming of Christ there begin 'the last days' (cf. Heb 1:2), the 'last hour' (cf. I Jn 2:18), and the time of the Church, which will last until the Parousia.*"⁸

Jesus Christ

"...The Church likewise believes that the key, the centre and the purpose of the whole of man's history is to be found in its Lord and Master."⁹

"After God had spoken many times and in various ways through the prophets, 'in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son' (Heb 1:1-2). For he sent his Son, the eternal Word who enlightens all men, to dwell among men and to tell them about the inner life of God. Hence, Jesus Christ, sent as 'a man among men,' 'speaks the words of God' (Jn 3:34), and accomplishes the saving work which the Father gave him to do (cf. Jn 5:36; 17:4). As a result, he himself -to see whom is to see the Father (cf. Jn 14:9)- completed and perfected Revelation and confirmed it with divine guarantees. He did this by the total fact of his presence and self-manifestation -by words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by his death and resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth. He revealed that God was with us, to deliver us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to eternal life.

"The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ (cf. I Tim 6:14 ad Tit 2:13)."¹⁰

The time of the Church

" God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations. Therefore, Christ the Lord, in whom the entire Revelation of the most high God is summed up (cf. II Cor 1:20; 3:16-4:6) commanded the apostles to preach the Gospel, which had been promised beforehand by the prophets and which he fulfilled in his own person and promulgated with his own lips. In preaching the Gospel they were to communicate the gifts of God to all men. This Gospel was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline. This was faithfully done: it was done by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received - whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit; it was done by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing.

⁸ JP II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* on preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, 10-10-1994, n.10.

⁹ Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n 10.

¹⁰ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum*, n. 4.

"In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them 'their own position of teaching authority.' This sacred Tradition, then, and the sacred Scripture of both Testaments, are like a mirror, in which the Church, during its earthly pilgrim journey here on earth, contemplates God, from whom she receives everything, until such time as she is brought to see him face to face as he really is (cf. Jn 3:2)."¹¹

Some sources:

J.M. Casciaro & J.M. Monforte, *God, the World and Man in the message of the Bible*, Four Courts Press, Dublin 1996, pp. 312-314.

Recommended readings:

Vat II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum*, 18-11-65.

CCC 65-66, 74-79.

John Paul II, *Crossing the threshold of hope*, pp. 50-68; 69-76.

J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, pp. 97-99.

¹¹ Vat II, DV, Chapter II The transmission of Divine Revelation, n. 7.

Bible Chronology of the Old Testament

The following chronological list is adapted from The Chronological Bible. Its purpose is to help you develop an overall understanding of the order of the major people and events of the Bible. The dates are disputed here and there, but overall, they can give you a reference in time and order.

<p>The Pre-existent Christ Creation Satan cast out of heaven Six days of creation Garden of Eden Fall of Adam and Eve Expulsion from Eden Cain kills Abel Noah is born The Flood</p>	<p>John 1 Gen. 1:1 Isaiah 14:12-17 Gen. 1:3-26 Gen. 2:8-17 Gen. 3:1-7 Gen. 3:21-24 Gen. 4 Gen. 5:28-29 Gen. 7:10-24</p>	<p>From the Creation to the Flood</p>
<p>The Tower of Babel Abram (Abraham) is born Job Abram becomes Abraham Birth of Isaac, then Jacob, then Joseph</p>	<p>Gen. 11 Gen. 11:27 Job 1 Genesis 17 Genesis 21-30</p>	<p>The Flood to the Patriarchs</p>
<p>Joseph sold into slavery to Egypt Famine and move of Hebrews to Egypt The Hebrew population grows Their bondage and oppression Moses is born</p>	<p>Genesis 27- 28 Gen. 41 Genesis 47:27 Exodus 8 Exodus 6:20</p>	<p>The Patriarchs to the Exodus 1606 - 1462 B. C.</p>
<p>The 10 plagues against Egypt The Hebrews are freed then pursued Crossing the Red Sea Receiving the 10 Commandments Israel wanders in the desert for 40 years</p>	<p>Exodus 7 - 11 Exodus 12 Exodus 13 - 15 Exodus 20 Numbers 14</p>	<p>The Exodus to Entering Canaan 1462 - 1422 B.C.</p>
<p>The conquest and division of Canaan Israel becomes a world power Samson is born Saul becomes first King</p>	<p>Joshua 6 - 12 1200 - 750 B. C. Judges 13 1 Samuel 9</p>	<p>Canaan to the Reign of King Saul 1422 - 1065 B. C.</p>
<p>David and Goliath David becomes King David with Bathsheba Absalom's rebellion David prepares temple materials</p>	<p>1 Samuel 17 2 Samuel 5 2 Samuel 11 2 Samuel 12 1 Chronicles 22</p>	<p>The Reign of King David 1025 - 985 B. C.</p>

Solomon becomes King Solomon asks God for wisdom The building of the Temple Solomon's downfall	1 Kings 1 1 Kings 3 1 Kings 6 1 Kings 11	The Reign of King Solomon 985 - 945 B. C.
The nation of Israel divided into two: Israel to the north and Judah to the south. This period was full of judges, not kings, who ruled each realm. Many of the judges were evil. Other gods were worshiped occasionally. During this time Elijah has his ministry. Hosea preached. Jonah dealt with Ninevah. Rome was founded. The temple was restored.		The Divided Kingdom (Israel and Judah) From Solomon to the Fall of Israel 945 - 586 B. C.
Both Israel and Judah fall to foreign powers. Micah prophesies. Isaiah is martyred. Jeremiah is born. Daniel is born. Zephaniah prophesies. Ezekiel is born. Jeremiah preaches.		The Fall of Israel to the Fall of Judah 721 - 586 B. C.
Ezekiel prophesies as Jerusalem falls Nebuchadnezzar's image Daniel's vision of the four beasts Daniel's vision of the 70 weeks Fall of Babylon to Persians	Ezekiel 33 Daniel 3 Daniel 7 Daniel 9 Isaiah 13, Jer. 25	Israel is taken into Captivity 586 - 516 B.C.
Dedication of the Temple Deliverance of the Jews Ezra prepares to return to Jerusalem Building of the wall of Jerusalem Malachi's Prophecies	Ezra 6 Esther 8 Ezra 7 Nehemiah 2 Malachi	The Restoration from Captivity 516 -400 B. C.
Greece is the world power from Rome is the world power from God does not speak for about 400 years	333 - 63 B. C. 63 B. C. - 476 A.D.	Time Between the Testaments 400 B. C. - 5. A.D.

II. THE BEGINNINGS

"God, who creates and conserves all things by his Word, provides men with constant evidence of himself in created realities. And furthermore, wishing to open up the way to heavenly salvation, he manifested himself to our first parents from the very beginning.' (DV 3; cf. Jn 1:3; Rom 1:19-20) He invited them to intimate communion with himself and clothed them with resplendent grace and justice."¹²

In this class we will look at the beginnings: the initial covenant with Adam and Eve (the Protoevangelium), and the covenant with Noah. It is covered in the first 11 chapters of the Book of Genesis (in fact Gen 1:1-11:26), which deal with the Creation and the first stage of humanity, which one could almost call pre-history. It can be divided as follows:

- 1:1-2:25. At 2:4, the first account of the creation of the world and of man (the Priestly - composed later, more "systematic" and "theological", it refers to God as Elohim; since it points out the Sabbath, it is considered more "cultic") passes to the second account of the creation of Adam and Eve and their first descendants (the Yahwist -it refers to God as Yahweh- text which is generally considered the older of the two) . The book of Genesis begins with the teaching that God created the world, the heavens and the earth, and that on the earth he created man with whom he entered in communication from the very first moment.
- 3:1-4:26. It continues recounting how man, at the beginning of his history, disobeyed his Creator and, as a consequence, evil entered into human history. Here is the account of the Fall and original sin, together with the sin of Cain who slew his brother Abel.
- 5:1-6:8. Here we meet the descendants of Adam until Noah. With God's blessing mankind had been growing on the face of the earth, but, at the same time, evil had also been on the increase till God can bear it no longer.
- 6:9-8:22. Here the descendants of Noah are introduced in the time of the Flood with which God punished mankind, preserving Noah and his family as a remnant.
- 9:1-17. God establishes a covenant with Noah, the sign of which is the rainbow. There then follows the story of Noah's drunkenness (vv. 18-29).
- 10:1-32. This chapter gives the list of the descendants of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham and Japheth, as the origin of all peoples. From the sons of Noah onwards the earth is re-populated.
- 11:1-9. However, the problem of man's pride is not overcome, and he attempts to "make a name for himself" (cf. v. 4), by building the tower of Babel. For this act, mankind is divided and dispersed throughout the world.
- 11:10-26. This passage focuses on Shem and his descendants from whom comes Terah, the father of Abraham.

This is not a Scriptural subject, but an overview of the history of salvation, so we cannot go into all the questions raised by the texts of the first chapters of the book of Genesis. However, a few points of the CCC could help us:

¹² CCC, 54.

"Creation is the foundation of 'all God's saving plans', the 'beginning of the history of salvation' (GCD 51) that culminates in Christ. Conversely, the mystery of Christ casts conclusive light on the mystery of creation and reveals the end for which 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth': from the beginning, God envisaged the glory of the new creation in Christ (Gen. 1:1; cf. Rom 8:18-23)."¹³

"Catechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that men of all times have asked themselves: (cf. NA 2) 'Where do we come from?' 'Where are we going?' 'What is our origin?' 'What is our end?' 'Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going?' The two questions, the first about the origin and the second about the end, are inseparable. They are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions."¹⁴

"...the revelation of creation is inseparable from the revelation and forging of the covenant of the one God with his People. Creation is revealed as the first step towards this covenant, the first and universal witness to God's all-powerful love (cf. Gen. 15:5; Jer 33:19-26). And so, the truth of creation is also expressed with growing vigour in the message of the prophets, the prayer of the psalms and the liturgy, and in the wisdom sayings of the Chosen People (cf. Is 44:24; Ps 104; Prov 8:22-31)."¹⁵

"Among all the Scriptural texts about creation, the first three chapters of Genesis occupy a unique place. From a literary standpoint these texts may have had diverse sources. The inspired authors have placed them at the beginning of Scripture to express in their solemn language the truths of creation -its origin and its end in God, its order and goodness, the vocation of man, and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation. Read in the light of Christ, within the unity of Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the Church, these texts remain the principal source for catechesis on the mysteries of the 'beginning': creation, fall, and promise of salvation."¹⁶

The creation of man

"Of all visible creatures only man is 'able to know and love his creator' (GS 12). He is 'the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake' (GS 24), and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity:..."¹⁷

"Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a *person*, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead."¹⁸

"The first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him, in a state that would be surpassed only by the glory of the new creation in Christ."¹⁹

"The Church, interpreting the symbolism of biblical language in an authentic way, in the light of the New Testament and Tradition, teaches that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in an original 'state of holiness and justice' (Trent DS 1511). This grace of original holiness was 'to share in ...divine life' (LG 2)."²⁰

¹³ CCC, 280.

¹⁴ CCC, 282.

¹⁵ CCC 288.

¹⁶ CCC, 289.

¹⁷ CCC, 356.

¹⁸ CCC, 357.

¹⁹ CCC, 374.

²⁰ CCC, 375.

"This entire harmony of original justice, foreseen for man in God's plan, will be lost by the sin of our first parents."²¹

Hence the need for a restoration, a redemption, a salvation.

Original sin - an essential truth of the faith

"The doctrine of original sin is, so to speak, the 'reverse side' of the Good News that Jesus is the Saviour of all men, that all need salvation and that salvation is offered to all through Christ. [...]"²²

"The account of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place *at the beginning of the history of man* (GS 13). [...]"²³

"Man [...] *disobeyed* God's command. This is what man's first sin consisted of (cf. Gen 3:1-11; Rom 5:19). [...]"²⁴

"In that sin man *preferred* himself to God and by that very act scorned him. [...]"²⁵

"The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination (cf. Gen 3:7-16). Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and hostile to man (cf. Gen 3:17,19). Because of man, creation is now subject 'to its bondage to decay' (Rom 8:21). Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for this disobedience will come true: man will 'return to the ground' (Gen 3:19; cf. 2:17), for out of it he was taken. *Death makes its entrance into human history* (cf. Rom 5:12).²⁶

"After that first sin, the world is virtually inundated by sin. There is Cain's murder of his brother Abel and the universal corruption which follows in the wake of sin. Likewise, sin frequently manifests itself in the history of Israel, especially as infidelity to the God of the Covenant, as transgression of the Law of Moses. [...]"²⁷

But the Covenant and the Law have yet to be established. First comes the "Protoevangelium", the promise of a saviour.

"[...] 'After the fall, [God] buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption; and he has never ceased to show his solicitude for the human race. For he wishes to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation by patience in well-doing' (DV 7; cf. Gen 3:15; Rom 2:6-7)

Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship

you did not abandon him to the power of death...

Again and again you offered a covenant to man (EP IV)."²⁸

"After his fall, man was not abandoned by God. On the contrary, God calls him and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and his restoration from his fall (Gen 3:9,15). This passage in

²¹ CCC, 379.

²² CCC, 389.

²³ CCC, 390.

²⁴ CCC, 397.

²⁵ CCC, 398.

²⁶ CCC, 400.

²⁷ CCC, 401.

²⁸ CCC, 55.

Genesis is called the *Protoevangelium* ('first gospel'): the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the Woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers. "Again and again you offered a covenant to man and...taught him to hope for salvation" (EP IV)."²⁹

"After the unity of the human race was shattered by sin God at once sought to save humanity part by part. The covenant with Noah after the flood gives expression to the principle of the divine economy toward the 'nations', in other words, towards men grouped 'in their lands, each with [its] own language, by their families, in their nations' (Gen 10:5; cf. 9:9-10; 10:20-31)"³⁰

"The covenant with Noah remains in force during the times of the Gentiles, until the universal proclamation of the Gospel (Gen 9:16; Lk 21:24; DV 3). The Bible venerates several great figures among the Gentiles: Abel the just, the king-priest Melchisedek -a figure of Christ- and the upright 'Noah [prior to Abraham], Daniel, and Job [a foreigner, not descended from Abraham]' (cf. Gen 14:18; Heb 7:3; Ezek 14:14). Scripture thus expresses the heights of sanctity that can be reached by those who live according to the covenant of Noah, waiting for Christ to 'gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad' (Jn 11:52)"³¹

Recommended readings:

CCC 54-59; 279-421

A. Fuentes, *A Guide to the Bible*, Dublin 1987, pp. 25-36.

²⁹ CCC, 410.

³⁰ CCC, 56.

³¹ CCC, 58.

III. THE TIME OF ISRAEL

After the fall and the saving of Noah and the first covenant with him, the first real stage in the implementation of our salvation was the election of Abraham as the father of a chosen people. This "election" shows us the way God works when he sets about saving man, and the response he desires and expects from him. From Abraham onwards, the events of human history are integrated with the *historia salutis*: they show us God's attitude and man's. So, this election must not be lost sight of if God's plan for man is to be understood. Yet man resists grace and fails to respond to God's generosity: he complains when he sees someone else being the beneficiary, he grows proud, and acts as if it were all his own doing.

In this class we will be considering the events related in chapters 12-50 of the book of Genesis. There we find the history of the patriarchs, the fathers of the people of Israel, the fathers also of their faith, especially Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and his sons (in particular Joseph).

Scholars are agreed that there is what is called a "patriarchal cycle", a special historical genre which is different from modern historiography. Patriarchal history is, in the first place, a *family history*, which gathers up the memories of forebears -Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph in this case. It is also a *popular history*, with lots of personal anecdotes about people and colourful details, unconcerned about trying to set the life of the Patriarchs into the framework of world history. And finally it is a *religious history*, which brings in God at key points and depicts events as providential. This "theological" approach often buries, silences, the action of secondary causes.

Also, the way it selects, explains and links facts in keeping with a "religious thesis" which wants to stress that there *is only one God*, who has chosen *a people* and has given that people *a land* as an inheritance. This God is Yahweh, this people Israel, this land Canaan.

So, chapters 12-50 of the book of Genesis in their own way tell the story and give a valid account of the origins and wanderings of the forebears of Israel, and of its geographical and ethnic ambience and its moral and religious lifestyle.

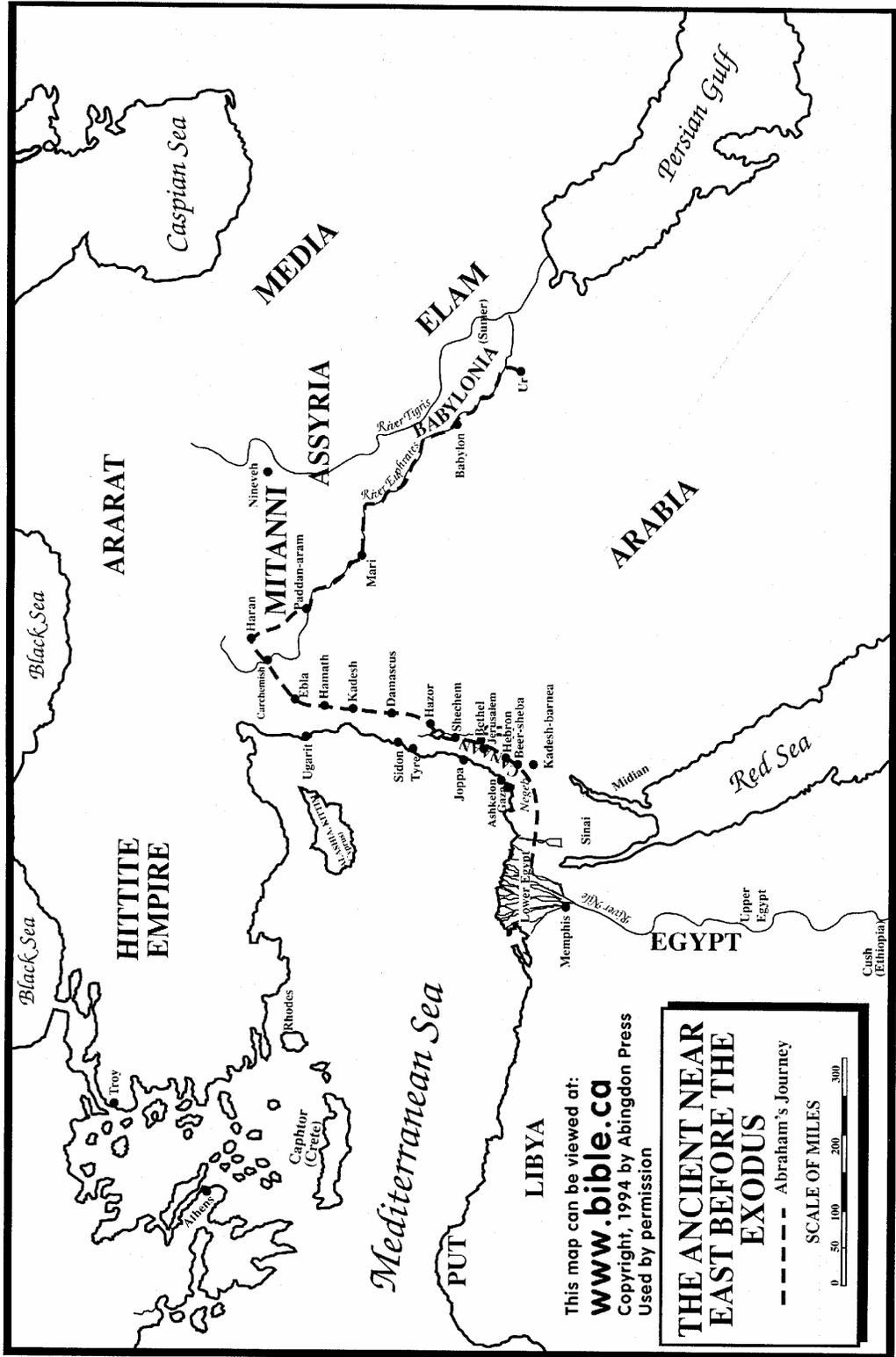
Basic facts in this stage of the patriarchs.

After the fall of our first parents, God announced that a Saviour would redeem mankind from the power of Satan. The first step towards the fulfilment of this promise was God's choice of Abraham, whose faith would make him the father of a great people. God tells Abraham, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" (Gen 12:1-2).

So, around the year 1850 [2000?] B.C. a man by the name of Abram, the son of polytheist parents, a shepherd living in Ur of the Chaldees, moved with his family to go to a new land, Canaan.

The Eastern Mediterranean was the centre of civilisation at the time of Abraham's migration. In other parts of Europe the Early Bronze Age had just begun, the Stone Age was ending. In Britain Stonehenge was being built; in Germany they were using wooden ploughs. However, in the fertile crescent, the Pharaohs had sat upon the throne for 1000 years already, the Phoenicians had wealthy seaports on the Mediterranean coast, and in Mesopotamia, between the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates, was a kingdom which held in tribute all the smaller kingdoms from the Persian gulf to the source of the Euphrates. The pyramids of Egypt and the massive temples of Mesopotamia had stood for centuries, and for 2000 years, farms and plantations had been exporting corn, vegetables and fruits from the artificially irrigated valleys of the major rivers of the region, the Nile, Euphrates and Tigris. Literature and learning were flourishing, especially in Egypt. To a large extent peace and prosperity seemed to reign.

ABRAHAM'S JOURNEY (2000 BC)



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THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST BEFORE THE EXODUS
 --- Abraham's Journey
 SCALE OF MILES
 0 50 100 200 300

Around the year 3000 BC (very roughly) the nomadic tribes of Semitic stock surged northwards into the surrounding kingdoms. The rich lands of the fertile crescent were too great a temptation to the nomads of the desert for ever threatened by drought. For two centuries there was a great Semitic expansion. The Akkad empire was de stabilised, and at the time of the birth of Abram, Mesopotamia presented a mosaic of little states without political unity, though of a similar cultural level.

Abraham, you may recall, is heir to the blessings of Noah, through his genealogical link with Shem. The origin of the Hebrew people is linked to the semi-nomadic tribes that inhabited Mesopotamia in 2000-1500 BC in the regions of Ur and Haran. The link is Abraham, whose vocation and religious experiences constitute the historical basis of the providential mission of the chosen people in the history of salvation. The fact that his personal and family connections are with Aramaic and Canaanite tribes also points to his mission as the father of all believers.

What sort of place was Ur? Perhaps we have some idea of mud huts. Excavations since 1920s have revealed a complex city of bricks with treasures such as the wrought swords of kings, the bronze helmets of soldiers, a golden goblet of great beauty. What Abram left behind was all the comfort and luxury of the town, the fine carved furniture, the silk hangings, the embroidered garments, jewels and perfumes, and an impressive bureaucracy. He also left behind him a religion of a multiplicity of gods with human sacrifices in their honour. In the burial grounds of Ur, archeologists found with the bodies of kings, covered with pearls and gold, 25, 50, 74 sacrificed servants. Among them are men and women, officers, domestics, even a muleteer with his beasts. There is no sign of violence, rather poison seems to have been used. In this context one can see the significance of the sacrifice of Isaac, and the substitution of a ram for a man in sacrifice.

How do the patriarchs fit into the history of salvation?

In the Protoevangelium a future salvation is promised to Adam and Eve after the original sin. Later, after the flood, Noah is guarantee a new order in the world. There follows the divine promise to the patriarch Abraham, which is renewed to his descendants Isaac and Jacob and which extends to all their descendants. This promise has to do, immediately, with their obtaining the country where the Patriarchs lived (the Promised Land), but it involves much more than that: it means there is a special, unique, relationship between Israel and the "God of the fathers". For Yahweh has called Abraham to perform a special mission, and this calling prefigures the election of Israel. It is Yahweh who has made Israel a people, his people; thus his people is chosen gratuitously, in keeping with a loving design conceived as far back as the Creation and one which stays operative despite the infidelities of men.

The *promise* and the *election* are underwritten by a *covenant*. From the beginning there is an implicit covenant with Adam. This is made explicit with Noah, Abraham and, later, with Moses, i.e., with the whole people through Moses. In the Patriarchs we see the pattern of Promise, Election and Covenant. Later with Moses the element of Law is also added.

To the Patriarchs God manifests his on-going design. He chooses out a particular line and keeps to this election, but it is not to the natural heir that he gives his blessing (e.g., Ishmael, Esau or Reuben): at each stage God designates his chosen one -Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. God then makes promises to the ones he has chosen.

To promise means to pledge to a person both one's strength and one's fidelity, proclaiming that one is sure of the future and sure of oneself; it also elicits from the other person commitment of heart and generosity of faith. For God promising already means giving, since he can never fail and never deceive. His promise inspires a faith capable of hope that the gift will come. In Israel the promises God made to Abraham are the key to a history of salvation, which is about the fulfilment of God's prophecies and oaths. The divine promises are irrevocable, even though the infidelities of Israel will entail some hold-ups on the way. The promises God made to Abraham are:

- a multitude of descendants
- God will provide for those descendants in a special way
- the possession of the land of Canaan
- victory over their enemies
- all nations will be blessed in him and in his descendants.

The fundamental promise, the ground of many future promises, is to be found in Genesis 12:1-3. Here the author continues the *historia salutis* sketched out in the first 11 chapters of Genesis, but from a new vantage point. In Gen. 3:15 (the Protoevangelium) God's saving design is seen to apply to the entire world; now, while not losing that universal perspective, it anchors itself at a particular point in time on a human family which is privileged to be the object of unmerited election -the family and line of Abraham. The choice of Abraham, his calling, uproots him from his fatherland and kinsfolk, to make him the father of a great people and the instrument of God's blessing on all the nations of the earth. And Abraham's faith, trust and submission to God make him a model for all future generations.

"...The text dealing with the vocation of Abraham is a key passage in the whole theology of biblical and world history:

Now Yahweh said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." (Gen. 12:1-3)

This promise is repeated a number of times, the most solemn instance being that in the passage about the sacrifice of Isaac, his son :

And the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says Yahweh, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves because you have obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:15-18).

By this solemn oath Yahweh confirms his promise to Abraham as a reward for his heroic obedience.

The covenant with Abraham (a name which means "father of a multitude"), renewed with Isaac and Jacob, is personal and individual; later on God will make it again with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai, with Moses acting as their representative. These covenants were sealed with the blood of animals, symbolising the definitive covenant which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, will seal with his own blood, when he gives himself up on the cross to redeem mankind eternally (cf. Heb 9:12)

God's pact with Abraham is the first stage in this definitive Covenant. Hence the extraordinary importance of Abraham in the history of salvation, and his particular place in Scripture and in the Church's liturgy: the Canticle of Zechariah (Lk 1:72-73), the Canticle of Mary (Lk 1:54-55), the Roman Canon, the Easter Vigil, Funeral Masses (and marriage texts?).

The covenant with Abraham is, meanwhile, renewed with his son Isaac, when God intervenes in favour of Isaac at the time of his meeting with Abimelech:

And Yahweh appeared to him, and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your

descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and I will give to your descendants all these lands, and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves: because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, and my laws." (Gen. 26:2-5)

From Isaac the promise passes (like a family inheritance) to Jacob, even though Jacob had been away from Canaan for 20 years, and his life has been marked by a certain degree of profanity. Would God still be faithful to his promises after all that time, and to someone like Jacob? Of course he was, and the promise passed from Jacob to his sons, who will come to form the people of God. In the vision of Jacob's ladder we have another instance of divine intervention:

And behold, Yahweh stood above it and said, "I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth[...]" (Gen. 28:13-14).

Some sources:

J.M. Casciaro & J.M. Monforte, *God, the World and Man in the message of the Bible*, Four Courts Press, Dublin 1996, pp. 316-317.

A. Fuentes, *Guide to the Bible*, pp. 36-39:

Recommended readings:

CCC 59-61; 144-147; 705-706.

J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, pp. 98-100.

Exodus.

Like his forebears, Abraham and Isaac, Jacob led a semi-nomadic existence in Canaan. He was forced by a severe famine to emigrate with his entire family to Egypt, where they settled, as part of the migrations of peoples around the year 1720 BC.

This can fit into what profane history tells us about the movement into Egypt of the Hyksos, nomadic pastoral peoples who came from desert areas and other zones near the Middle East. Demographic pressure, and other things brought them to Egypt around the middle of the 17th century BC. At that time the country had a centralised government and when that government fell the invaders found it easy to make themselves masters of the situation.

Over the next more than 400 years the sacred text tells us nothing about the stay of the descendants of Jacob in Egypt. God makes no new revelation during the period. All we know is that by the end of it the Hebrews had become a numerous, strong, hardworking people; so much so that the Egyptians, growing afraid of them, forced them into slavery; their lives "became bitter with hard service...; in all their work they made them serve with vigour" (Ex 1:13-14)

How they came to be in Egypt we find in the later chapters of Genesis (37-50) which tell the story of Joseph being sold into slavery, etc. Jacob, after wrestling with the Lord had been renamed Israel (Gen 32:22-32), thus giving the chosen people their name. He had twelve sons who were to be the fathers of the Twelve Tribes of Israel; Joseph was his favourite, neither the eldest (Reuben) nor the youngest (Benjamin), resented by his brothers as "the dreamer". The story is well-known and we won't go over it here except to say that God used a famine to lead the sons of Jacob to Egypt. Before his death Jacob (Israel) named Joseph as his successor. He solemnly blessed all his children in a suitably patriarchal fashion in which each of the twelve tribes was later to recognise its origin and read its destiny, with the most outstanding glories promised to Judah (Gen 49). Joseph ruled the clan after him, and lived, in peace and prosperity, to see his children and great grand-children. He died at the age of 110. His last words bring the book of Genesis to a close:

"I am about to die; but God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." (Gen 50:24).

But God was a long time in bringing this to fulfilment. Many generations passed:

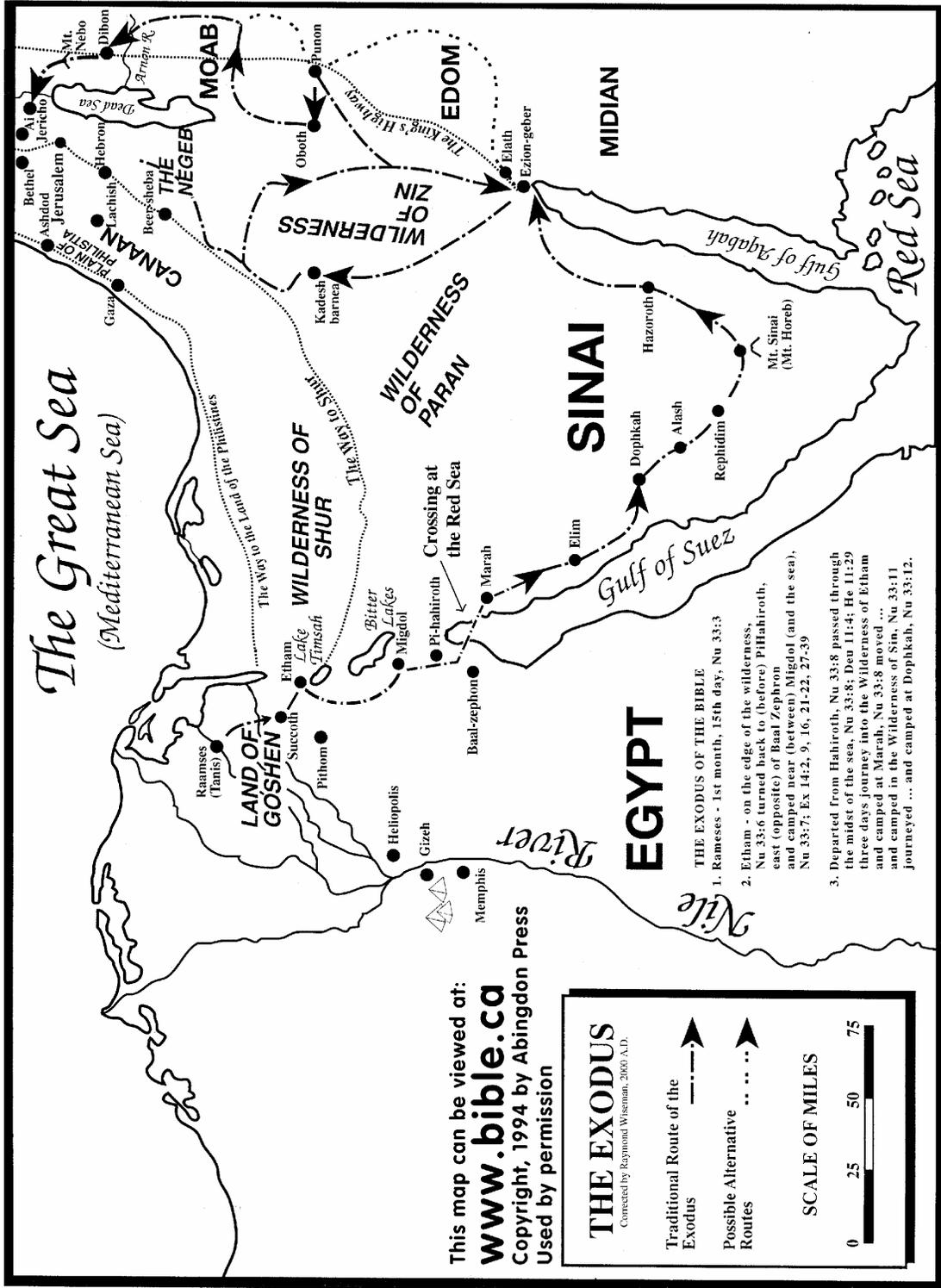
"But the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them" (Ex 1:7).

When the ancient Egyptian empire was on the wane (a slow process, over four centuries) a foreign "barbarian" dynasty took over, retaining in place most of the political institutions of the empire. It was at this time that the Israelites were able to prosper (alongside other groupings of immigrants). This situation held good until there came the Egyptian independence movement which led to the expulsion of the Hyksos and the establishment of a new Egyptian empire on the banks of the Nile. Rameses II was the key figure in this period, ruling 1290-1224 BC.

The Israelites were settled in "the land of Goshen", "the country of Rameses", or "the fields of Tanis", according to various texts in the Bible. The pasture lands there made it possible to raise abundant livestock, and crops must have grown with little trouble around their camps. Half nomad, half settled, they seem to have had a pleasant life. However, Exodus tells us:

"Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." (Ex 1:8)

THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT (1500 BC)



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Abruptly everything was changed and the services rendered by the great Vizier were no longer a protection for his descendants. Their rapid increase in numbers alarmed the Egyptians and the persecution began. And in any case they had collaborated with the Hyksos, and so would be out of favour with the new regime.

At first the persecution took the moderate form of a labour conscription. Great building operations were always going on in the land of the Nile. Many foreigners -Babylonians, Trojans, black Africans- served the Pharaohs as manual labourers. In that there was humiliation and fatigue, but several decades later, matters got worse and the Egyptians set about eliminating alien elements. This is where Moses appears.

The subject of Moses and the Exodus is of particular interest for its theological and salvific message; it is based on a definite *historical event*.

The book of Exodus (=leaving) is a continuation of Genesis; the fact that it takes its name from the Israelites' going out of Egypt shows the importance of this episode in the life of Israel: now, after many long years of apparent silence on God's part, he keeps faith with his promises to the forefathers, the patriarchs, and comes to their rescue to free them from the slavery imposed on them by Pharaoh. As he explains to Moses:

"I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their suffering, and I have come to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians." (Ex 3:7-8)

Moses

Although Moses was brought up in the Egyptian court, he retains the faith of his forefathers and is ready to profess that faith and defend his people even at the cost of life if necessary. He is faithful. He has to take flight and he receives a very specific call from God while he is in exile.

Moses was providentially groomed with excellent human upbringing, exceptionally good education, a great familiarity with Egyptian liturgy and temples and a close relationship with his father-in-law (a priest of a Midianite shrine) -all things which equipped Moses for his mission as a liberator, lawgiver and religious leader of Israel.

He flees from Egypt and reaches the Sinai desert where he took up work with Jethro, the priest of Midian. The Midianites were one of the nomad clans or peoples of the extreme north of Arabia. The mission Moses receives is a demanding one and it will involve all his time, for the rest of his life. His faith will often be tested. The mission comes in chapter 3 of the book of Exodus in the passage of the burning bush and the theophany that there takes place.

In this passage (read for yourselves) the theological idea of divine transcendence is to the fore. Here we see how for the ancient Hebrews "holiness" was the feature of the Godhead, just as "immortality" was for the Greeks. The idea of holiness in the OT always implies purity, separateness and transcendence. Here Moses must not approach until he takes off his shoes. It is a holy place.

God reveals himself as the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of the Patriarchs. He then tells Moses of his plan to set his people free and to establish them in Canaan. Moses argues that he cannot fulfil the mission; God responds by comforting and encouraging him (Ex 3). However, before Moses accepts the divine assignment, he asks how he should reply when the sons of Israel want to know the name of the one who sent him. It is at this point that God reveals his name, Yahweh, a mark of God's special favour to his people because thereby he is probably revealing his inner life (Ex 3:13-15). Traditional

Jewish and Christian exegesis has inclined towards seeing here a categorical statement: "I am he who gives being".

God is thus revealing his own inner life, and creating a new situation in his dealings with man. That new relationship marks the beginning of the cancellation of the debt of original sin. A first stage was the promise to and covenant with Abraham. Now, on Sinai, with Moses alone in the first place, a new stage of the Covenant begins through the revelation of God's inner life. This revelation calls for a response on man's part. It means keeping the Covenant and being obliged to meet certain rules in keeping with the pact - rendering cult and keeping a moral law. From this moment onwards, mankind must conform to something God wants which will be manifested later -the natural moral law, made specific in a clear, concrete manner in the Mosaic Law.

Moses shows his faith and accepts everything the Lord tells him. He is, moreover, a humble man who does not overrate his virtues, for he is very conscious of his limitation -that he found it difficult to speak, he even stuttered (Ex 4:10-12). Once again God assures him. Moses puts all his trust in the word of God, as Abraham had done previously. He immediately gives up his comfortable secure life in the land of Midian, and returns to Egypt to set free the suffering Hebrew people, and lead them to the land of Canaan.

The promises made to Abraham and his descendants about possessing the land of Canaan are about to be fulfilled. Many centuries have passed, but God has not forgotten the "promise" he made to the patriarchs. Yahweh warns Moses about the difficulties that lie ahead, but he promises to come to his aid. God goes on to work great wonders to influence Pharaoh's thinking. This sets the scene for the Exodus and the establishment of Israel as the people of God.

At this stage Israel is an ethnic community and a monotheistic religious community. The various tribes of Israel will become *Qahal Yahweh*, the people of God. The term *qahal* will be translated into the Greek of the Septuagint as *ekklesia*, a profane name used by the Greeks to designate the assembly of the *demos*; it is the *ekklesia tou Theou* or an assembly of the people for religious purposes. It prepares the way for the new people of God which will be called the Church.

At the Easter Vigil, the first reading is of the creation, the second the sacrifice of Isaac and the promise to Abraham; the third, one which may never be omitted, relates the Exodus of the descendants of Israel from Egypt and the passing through the Red Sea.

The Exodus, along with Creation and the election of Abraham, is one of the key events in the religious belief of Israel. At this point begins the history proper of the Chosen People. Prior to this they weren't a people, but simply a whole collection of clans in the midst of an Egyptian population. From now on God is clearly the *saviour* of his people.

The two key events are the Passover and the Covenant. The first, the Passover, was celebrated immediately prior to the escape: it is the "passing over" of Yahweh, who wipes out the Egyptians and protects the Hebrews. The second is the Covenant on Sinai, this time with the whole people. Once the Hebrews are in the desert Yahweh makes a covenant with them, a pact involving moral commitments. These events are sealed with a rite of "blood" and a "banquet" rite and they enshrine a divine message which will find its fulfilment in the New Testament, in Jesus Christ.

The Passover

The Passover: Greek *pascha* (Septuagint), Aramaic *pashâ*, and the Hebrew *pesaj*. It refers to the passing over of the Lord, provoked by Pharaoh's hardness of heart. The Passover rite consisted of the sacrifice of a lamb, whose blood was then sprinkled in the jambs and lintels of the doors of the Hebrews' homes. This was the sign which would save them -"the blood of the lamb". Further details of the rite were spelt out in later Mosaic legislation. Sometimes the word is used to refer to the lamb itself. In the NT the Passover is this rite and also Christ himself, "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7). At

other times the word refers to the whole series of spectacular events during the escape from Egypt -the celebration of the pasch, the passing over of Yahweh, and the crossing of the Red Sea.

The liberation from Egypt is a "type" of the liberation or Redemption brought about by the messiah. True liberation is that brought about by the "new Passover" with the death of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. The Passover will become the basic religious rite of Israel, around which all the ancient Hebrew liturgy turned. And later, the "paschal mystery" will be the centre of all Christian liturgy: the passion, death and resurrection of Christ will form the core of the new economy of salvation.

The Covenant

Israel is in the OT "the people of the Covenant", which basically means the Covenant made at Sinai. The Church is the people of the New Covenant, founded by Jesus Christ.

The pages of the OT are full of pacts between people. A covenant certainly linked those who were party to it; they became one family, joined to others as by blood ties. But it also had generally a wider meaning, even though it created a bond of mutual belonging between the parties. In the case of Yahweh and Israel the relationships that were established are religious and bring with them requirements which go beyond religion -moral demands, in the first place, and then social and political commitments (though always in a predominantly religious context).

As regards ceremonies that accompanied covenants in general there were oaths (Ezek 17:18), shaking hands (2 Kg 10:15), interchange of gifts (1 Sam 18:4), covenants of salt (that the pact will endure) (2 Chron 13:5); it was common to cut up the carcasses of animal victims and walk between them, accepting the same fate as the victim if one proved unfaithful (Jer 34:18). The rite of blood was very common. The view was that blood was the seat of life; blood was poured on the altar and sprinkled on the parties to indicate the living bond now established between them (cf Ex 24:3-8; Gen 15:9). However, the most common ceremony of all was the sacrificial *banquet*. By sharing in the same meal, people established a close relationship with one another; it was considered to be real treachery to break an alliance sealed by this type of ceremony. And so the Psalmist exclaims: "Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me" (Ps 40:10). Christ expresses the same idea at the Last Supper, referring to Judas (Jn 13:18). Then there was also the custom of setting up a memorial of the covenant, by planting a tree or building an altar, etc. In the case of Noah the covenant was signed with the rainbow; with Abraham the sign was circumcision.

The covenant made between God and the people through Moses is described in detail in chapters 19-24 of Exodus. The scene was Mount Sinai, identified with present-day Gebel Musa, an imposing hill that dominates the plain of Er-Raha in the south of the Sinai peninsula.

As Deut 7:7ff points out, the merits of the people of Israel did not provoke this divine initiative: it came entirely from God's love and from his fidelity to his promises. Moreover, the Covenant was not forced on the Jews; God respects their freedom; he desires their free co-operation.

There is one statement which sums up the whole point of God's Covenant with Israel:

"I will be your God and you will be my people" (Lev 26:12).

The Covenant makes Israel the people of Yahweh and it makes Yahweh the God of that people. As far as God is concerned, the Covenant implies that he is present, that he protects the Jews and gives them a land and promulgates a Law that they have to keep. God desires to be present among them in a special way.

He gives his people a law which will act as their religious and moral guide and he promises them a country of their own (Ex 23:30-31). For its part, Israel must be faithful to the Covenant, obeying the law that Yahweh has given it; therefore, the Covenant is not just something one signs and seals and puts away; it is something ethical and religious that one has to practise; one has to stay completely true to God's will,

as expressed in the Decalogue. The Code of the Covenant (Ex 20:22-23:33) contains a number of disciplinary regulations to do with civil and penal law, but the main thing about the Decalogue (Ex 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-22) is that it acts as the basis of monotheism and morality and therefore is a key feature of the religion of the Israelites.

It is important that the covenant with the people of Israel marks the beginning of the salvation for the rest of mankind.

In brief we can say that the book of Exodus is a symbol of what the New Test. will teach:

- Red Sea (Ex 14): Baptism.
- Manna (Ex 16): Eucharist.
- Rock (Ex 17): Jesus.
- Blood of the animals (Ex 24): blood of Jesus.
- Bronze serpent (Num 21): penitence and the Cross.

The Leviticus

The people of Israel, however, were not only to behave in a certain moral way they were to be holy, like the Lord their God. The book of Leviticus begins with the second year of the exodus from Egypt. It breaks the historical account and focuses instead on one of the tribes of Israel in particular, that of Levi, on the priests of that tribe and their duties in regard to divine worship, especially the different sacrifices that should be offered. The Hebrews are already in the middle of the wilderness. While in the book of Exodus the Tent³² already featured with its altars and regulations about worship, Leviticus is like a textbook for the liturgy.

To understand Leviticus properly one must bear in mind two basic reference points:

- that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is infinitely holy, inaccessible to man, transcendent (Ex 19:21);
- that despite this he dwells in the midst of his people (Lev 23:32; 26:12) Therefore, he asks of them, not only reverence, love and adoration, but also a holiness of life which enables them to live as his true children forever in his presence (Lev 11:44; 19:2, etc.)

Worship and holiness are the two main concerns of the book of Leviticus.

As regards holiness Leviticus 17-26 spells out the way in which members of the people of God should relate to each other. If they keep the rules contained therein, they are promised peace even in this life (26:3-13), which will take various forms -God's sending rain at the right time, abundant harvests, peace and security, punishment of one's enemies, having many children, being on good terms with God, etc.

The fundamental rule is contained in Lev 19: 1-2:

³² Tent of Meeting or of the Covenant: regarded as the dwelling-place of the Lord, before the Temple of Jerusalem came to be. It was where God communicated with Moses and the people of Israel during the years in the wilderness. It was a huge portable temple made from acacia wood, overlaid with gold (cf. Ex 25: 10-12). The inside of this Tabernacle was divided into two parts by a veil; the inner chamber was the "most holy place" or "holy of holies", where the ark of the Covenant containing the tablets of the Law and the manna were kept, and later Aaron's rod as well.

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy'".

In this book it is important to understand the notion of sacrifice, present in all religions as an aspect of worship of God. If man had not sinned, the only sacrifice he would have needed to offer God would have been that of doing his work well and looking after his family. But by sinning man became unworthy and led all his descendants into a state of alienation from God. He could not offer himself as a pure victim: he was not acceptable.

This meant that he needed someone to purify him and reconcile him with his creator, someone whose merit at least balanced out the blame he had earned through sinning. That someone was to be Christ. However, until the expected saviour came, God wanted man to offer him worship as his infinite majesty demanded; by doing so, man would be publicly recognising his dependence on his creator. God therefore accepted the symbol of the blood of the animals sacrificed to him, and the other bloodless sacrifices. These had their significance, but they were incapable of justifying or redeeming man. They were of use as a way of honouring God and of keeping Israel away from the idolatry practised by its neighbours, and of expressing faith in the one true God.

Clearly the sacrifices offered by the patriarchs up to the time of the Law of Sinai and from then up to the Messiah, were only symbols of Jesus Christ's own sacrifice as a spotless victim acceptable to God, Because he was both God and man, only Christ could offer himself to God and restore man to righteousness and to friendship with God. The law points to Christ, as St Paul says to the Romans: "Christ is the end [purpose] of the law" (Rom 10:4). Christian sacrifice will have all the elements of Levitical sacrifice, but with an essential difference: Christ himself is the centre of it. St Augustine says: "in the victims of those animals which the Jews offered to God lies the prophecy of that victim still to come, which Christ offered to the Father in the great sacrifice of the Cross."

Leviticus in the light of the NT:

Heb 8-10 compares between sacrifices of OT and that of Christ, especially the solemn sacrifice of Day of Atonement/Expiation (Yôm Kippur) as laid down in Leviticus 16. Similarly there is a section in Hebrews showing how Christ is High Priest, far superior to those of OT (Heb 4 and 7). Purity and holiness are stressed, as they are in Leviticus, but not simply a ritual purity, but one that comes from the heart.

Similarly the concept of holiness is enriched in the NT, with the Incarnate Word as the model for our holiness, and he has given himself for us to sanctify us:

"...Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as 'alone holy', loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her; he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God." (Vat II, *Lumen gentium*, n. 39)

Moses, figure of Christ:

Mt 2:15 :	["Out of Egypt have I called my son"]
Mt. 4:2 : Ex 24:18	[40 days in desert: 40 years in desert & days on Sinai]
Mt. 5:1 : Ex 19-20	[Beatitudes on mountain: Law on Sinai]
Mt. 17:1-8 : Ex 34:29-35	[Transfiguration: Moses face glowing]

Some sources:

J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, pp. 100-101.

A. Fuentes, *A Guide to the Bible*, p. 39.

H Daniel-Rops, *Israel and the Ancient World*.

Recommended readings:

CCC: 62-63, 203- 213, 1334; 1409-1410, 2807-2815.

The Promised Land.

The book of Numbers

After the Book of Leviticus the next book of the Pentateuch³³ is called the book of Numbers. It gets this name in the Septuagint, around the second century BC, from the two census of the people that are referred to in the text. Among the Jews it is called *Bemidbar* (=in the desert, in the wilderness) from the words of the first verse. The book deals in fact with the years of wanderings of the people of Israel in the wilderness where God spoke to them.

The book can be divided into 4 parts:

1:1 - 10:10 : In Sinai. This deals with the time of the people in the desert of Sinai from the second year after their escape from Egypt. Israel is presented as a holy people. Its holiness comes from God, not from its own merits. Of the twelve tribes, that of Levi occupies a special place, because of its responsibilities in the worship of God. Because of the closeness of the Israelites to God, who dwells in their midst, they needed a high degree of legal purity. The regulations governing this are laid down from chapter 5 onwards.

10:11 - 20:21 : The journey through the wilderness to Kadesh. Kadesh is situated between the deserts of Paran and Zin. The Lord leads them in the form of a cloud, but once they arrive they begin to rebel. Here they experience the bitterness of divine punishment, the efficacy of Moses' intercession, and the mercy of God who pardons time and time again. Often the scenes are not without humour (e.g., Num 11:1-23). Moses uses the stay at Kadesh to reconnoitre the land of Canaan [giants] and to promulgate a series of laws to clarify the basis of Moses' and Aaron's authority. We also read of the people's refusal to enter the Promised land, and then of their failure when they decide to do so without relying on God. They are forced to backtrack and their entry into Canaan is delayed for a further 38 years. They were led back to the wilderness by Moses. They will remain there for 40 years, a year for each day the explorers were in the Promised land. Most of those who set out from Egypt will not live to enter Canaan. Num. 20:8 Moses doubted the power of God striking the rock with the staff. God told him that neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised land.

20:22 - 21:35: Between Kadesh and Moab. There are various stages of the journey, where Israel experiences God's punishment and his mercy. Mercy predominates especially when he grants them their first victories over their enemies. This section also deals with the death of Aaron, the constant complaints of the people, the scene of the bronze serpent, etc.

22:1 - 36:13 : On the plains of Moab. This is the last long-term stay before they enter the Promised land. Here God grants them victory over a number of the tribes in Transjordan. Here we have the oracles of the prophet Balaam, a foreign seer. Almost at the gates of Canaan the people of Israel have met their last obstacle, Balak, king of Moab, who tries to get Balaam to put a curse on the Israelites. Instead he blesses them three times. The third and most significant blessing is in Num 24:17:

"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: a star shall come forth from out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel".

In general, this part of the book is looking forward to the time when Israel will enter the land of Canaan.

³³ The first five books of the Bible, from Greek meaning "five boxes" -a reference to the boxes in which the scroll of the Law were kept. The Jews refer to these books as "hat Tōrah" (the Law), distinguishing them from the rest of (what we call) the OT: the "Nebîm" (=the Prophets) and the Ketûbîm (=the Writings).

In the book of Numbers, we see the people tempted by discouragement and rebellion against God. The desert is traditionally a place of temptation, but it is here also seen as the place of God's mercy and forgiveness, of his fidelity in spite of the infidelities of the people. God is a God in the midst of his people; he leads them where he chooses even if at times they do not understand. In the desert God purifies his people through successive trials: exterior difficulties which normally cause them to rebel and complain. Punishment follows which purifies them and leads them to conversion. The people that will enter the Promised Land will be a renewed and purified people.

The book of Numbers speaks of hope for a better situation (the establishment of the Kingdom of God); the trials and infidelities of the people, their service of God in worship; but above all it speaks of God's mercy, constantly calling to conversion, in spite of human resistance.

On the plains of Moab, God charges Moses -who is approaching death- with the task of proclaiming once more the Law he received on Mount Sinai. This is contained in the fifth and final book of the Pentateuch, called in Hebrew, *Elleh ha-debarrim* ("These are the words"), and in the Christian Bible Deuteronomy ("the second law"). Moses is to address a new generation of Israelites, who would have been under 20 when the Exodus began. By proclaiming the Law again, Yahweh is saying that his Covenant with Israel is for all generations, both present and future: it is an everlasting covenant.

The book takes the form of three discourses pronounced by Moses:

i) 1:5 - 4:43: An introduction that stresses that God in his providence is constantly watching over his people, but Yahweh requires of Israel strict fidelity to the Alliance: to adore the one true God as promised in Sinai.

ii) 4:44 - 28:68: There is a repetition of the Ten Commandments, followed by a call to profess faith in and be faithful to the one true God: the *Shemá*:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and of your gates" (6:4-9).

Chapters 12-28 contain the Deuteronomical Code or Covenant of Moab: a series of liturgical, civil and criminal laws all deriving from the fact that Israel is the people chosen by God to carry out his promises.

iii) 28:69 - 30:20: An exhortation to obedience to Yahweh, recognising and appreciating the gifts he has given, continuing the Covenant.

iv) 31:1 - 34:12: An account of the last days of Moses' life and his death on Mount Nebo, mourned for 30 days by the children of Israel on the plains of Moab, together with the choice of Joshua as his successor.

Deuteronomy is considered as marking the high point of OT religion. Here we find generous devotion to God in terms of love, and the loving benevolence of God towards his people. The *Shemá* contains the two basic principles of this book:

1) Monotheism: Israel has to believe in the one true God.

2) The worship given must be to love him above all else.

This is the summary of true religion quoted by Our Lord when he promulgated the law of love of God (Mt. 22:37).

The establishment of Israel in the land of Canaan

Joshua was the person designated by Moses to succeed him in governing Israel. To him he passed on all his authority, except his priestly powers which went to Eleazar (cf Num. 27:18-23; Deut. 31:14-23; 34:9). It was Joshua who led the Hebrews to victory over the Amelekites while Moses remained in prayer (Ex. 17:8-16). He had been one of the scouts to reconnoitre Canaan (Num. 13:8). He and one other, who had not complained against the Lord, were the only ones over the age of 20 when the Hebrews left Egypt who lived to enter the Promised Land. He was a great warrior, a man of unshakeable faith, and ever-obedient to God's commands. It was he who led Israel into the land of Canaan.

What was the state of the world at the time? We are talking about the years around 1200 BC when Israel entered Canaan. The kingdom of Troy was coming to an end; the Homeric heroes of Greece, Achilles, Agamemnon and Odysseus were entering the scene. It was a good time for an invasion. Egypt was weak and had lost its influence there. Canaan was torn by internal feuds between the innumerable petty kingdoms and principalities of its city-states. Native princes could do what they liked, having their own armies. The commissioners of the Pharaohs were corrupt, interested only in squeezing more taxes and using mercenaries to plunder defenceless towns and villages. Canaan was poorer than it had been in an earlier age.

Canaan is not a very large country. North to south it extends for less than 200 miles. In the north it is bounded by the Anti-Lebanon range, from which extends, like a wedge, the great Hermon "massif", reaching a height of 6,200 feet and snow-covered in winter. Towards the south, the plains of Palestine stretch without a break into the solitude of Tih. Not including Transjordan, Canaan covers some 9,000 square miles. From the sea to the desert is only around 60 miles, even less in the north. It is a part of the slender horn of the fertile crescent. However, in this small space, nature has revealed herself in the most varying aspects. A plain (the Plain of Sharon), high hills that are called mountains (the Mountains of Judah: Ephraim, Garizim, Thabor), a gorge penetrating the bowels of the earth (the level of the Dead Sea is 1300 feet below sea-level, and its depth 2640), a high glacier with an abrupt drop, in four parallel bands running from north to south, with variations in soil and climate creating subtle differences. The land is beautiful, but not necessarily rich. Scripture calls it a land "flowing with milk and honey". However, if it were true then, there has been a retrogression since. Certainly, it was more wooded in the past, which would have helped retain the water that is inevitably a problem. The summer is hot, between 23-45°C; the winter can be cold. Where water suffices, the earth lends itself readily to cultivation, and even today can be fertile, but in many areas water is scarce. Although an agricultural land, in which Israel abandoned tents for houses, Canaan still remained a pastoral country. While cattle were rare, sheep, goats and asses were plentiful.

Joshua

You can read the story of Joshua leading the people of Israel into Canaan for yourselves: the crossing of the Jordan (3), the entry into Jericho with the help of Rahab the harlot (2:1-21; 6:1-26). The renewal of the practice of circumcision as a sign of belonging to Israel (5:2-7). At the end of chapter 8 (vv. 30-35) we find the reminder of the covenant with the Lord on Mount Ebal, to the east of the plain of Shechem.

After reporting further victories and explaining the distribution of territory among the tribes, the book of Joshua gives an account of an address to the people at Shechem on the subject of fidelity to God's Law (chapter 24: read):

And Joshua said to the people, "Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; and to

Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Se'ir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it; and afterwards I brought you out. Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. And when they cried to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did to Egypt; and you lived in the wilderness a long time." (24:2-7)

The protective hand of God, his providence, was also to be seen in the conquest of Canaan:

Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived in the other side of the Jordan [...] And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho [...] I gave you a land on which you had not laboured, and cities which you had not built and you dwell therein; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive yards which you did not plant. (24:8-13)

This simple outline of the facts shows that Israel could not recognise or adore any god other than Yahweh:

Now therefore fear Yahweh, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve Yahweh. (24:14)

Joshua then exhorts the people to decide once and for all whether it is for or against Yahweh:

And if you be unwilling to serve Yahweh, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh. (24:15)

The people decide in favour of Yahweh (vv. 16-18). And Joshua realises that God can never be served as he deserves, for he is a holy God and a jealous God who punishes sin severely (vv. 19-24). The pact is followed by a new promulgation of statutes and ordinances, and as a memorial of the solemn occasion, Joshua took up a stone and set it up under the oak tree at that holy place:

And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us; for it has heard all the words of Yahweh which he spoke to us; therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God." (24:27)

This memorial ritually ratifies the renewal of the Covenant. Joshua embodies in a way the unity of Israel, whom God has brought into the Promised Land, as he said he would. For the people of God he stands as a model of docility. His victories prove that God is on his chosen people's side. Even his name (*Yehoshu'a* = Yahweh saves) fits in with biblical tradition. It shows that he has a part in what is a divine activity, which the Bible portrays as a kind of liberation. God uses Joshua to set his people free from their enemies. There will be further liberations until he sends another Joshua, his Son Jesus.

The book of Judges is the continuation of the book of Joshua. It takes its name from the men whom God raised up to govern Israel for almost two centuries from the death of Joshua to the birth of Samuel, around 1050 BC. The "judges" were 'liberators, saviours': they were people (included one woman, Deborah) who were seasoned warriors, sometimes chosen directly by God, sometimes by the people, who were given the mission to protect Israel from attacks by its enemies and to take possession of the territory marked out for them. Once peace reigned, their task was to administer justice. Normally their authority did not extend to the whole people but to single tribes or groups of tribes. Hence one can find a number of Judges contemporary to each other.

Among the Judges we find: Deborah and Barak who battled against the Canaanites; Jephtah (Ammonites); Gideon (Midianites) [Judges 7: God "prunes" Gideon's army]; then comes Samson, who is not really a judge leading the people, but he represents the great strength of Yahweh.

After Joshua's death things did not work out as the people had expected. God did not simply remove the other people in the land. Israel had to fight for possession, and Israel began to renege on its part of the covenant by failing to destroy the altars erected to the Baals (a name common to all the local Phoenician gods. It simply means 'lord', and is used to refer to idols). At that time and in the Eastern culture to have faith meant to carry out some external rites. Since at times the people lacked strong leadership, it was easy for them to fall into polytheism being unfaithful to the covenant. God had pity on the people and sent them the Judges, but, as soon as a Judge died the people reverted to idolatry (fornication = idolatry). The Judge has to lead two battles: spiritual and physical. The basic theme of the book is that infidelity leads to defeat, while repentance leads to liberation; just as sin leads to punishment, and confession to forgiveness. This was how the Alliance made at Sinai worked out in practice: Yahweh is protective of Israel as long as she stays faithful to her commitments, and he punishes her when she violates them.

Some sources:

J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, p. 102.

A. Fuentes, *A Guide to the Bible*, pp. 52-3, 61-63.

W. Keller, *The Bible as History*, London 1969, pp. 155 et seq.

H. Daniel-Rops, *Israel and the Ancient World*, pp. 98-104.

The Monarchy.

The main purpose of I and II Samuel is to provide a history of the foundation of the kingdom of Israel and the settlement of the throne on David and his line. At the end of the book of Judges (21:25), there is a sense that a monarchy is the only way out of the situation of strife and anarchy that was besetting Israel. The Israelites had to face the threat posed by the Philistines, but they were not united among themselves. Samuel, who is regarded as the last of the Judges, was the man chosen by God to bring about this unification, by making Saul the first king of Israel.

The birth of Samuel and the canticle of his mother Hannah is well known (I Sam 1-2). Even better known is the call of Samuel (I Sam 3). Later he was to become the next Judge of Israel. In I Sam 8-15 the establishment of the monarchy is described with the anointing of Saul as king.

When the Israelites reach the Promised Land they begin to be influenced by the nations around them and want to have a king of their own. The Lord regards this wish as a rejection of his sovereignty. Samuel the prophet, on God's behalf, points out to them the disadvantages of kingship, since God is the ruler over Israel, but the people insist. God then tells Samuel to grant their request with a king of God's choosing. Right through the *historia salutis* we see God acting with total authority and sovereignty, with a freedom which is conditioned by no one. God chooses whom he wills. The initiative is always his; it is he who decides who to call or to choose to co-operate with him in his plans: Noah, Abraham, Moses; now Saul (who belongs to the least important tribe of Israel -Benjamin- and the least important family of that tribe: I Sam 9:21), then David (the most forgotten and least of the sons of Jesse: I Sam 16:12), later the apostles, St Paul, and so on.

Saul is anointed (I Sam 10:1), a ceremony with religious character accompanied by the outpouring of the Spirit. The king is now Yahweh's anointed, he is a sacred person and therefore no one can touch him (cf. David's attitude towards Saul who was pursuing him). God blesses him with victory. However, Yahweh rejects Saul because he transgresses his commandments (e.g. he took to himself priestly functions, and did not obey the Lord's commands in battle and with regard to booty). While God may choose an individual, irrespective of his or her merits, he then expects that person to remain true to their commitment and the graces received.

At God's wish David is secretly anointed and Saul, in his jealousy, does everything he can to kill him (I Sam 16 - II Sam 1). David has to remain a fugitive until Saul and his son Jonathan are killed in battle against the Philistines. He was to become king over Israel with his capital in Jerusalem. The narrative (II Sam 2-20) then centres on David: civil war; the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem, which becomes the capital; the messianic promise that an eternal throne will be given to one of David's lineage (II Sam 7:12 et seq.). The sin of David (a sin of passion, not one against the Covenant) is narrated in II Sam 11:4 et seq.: his adultery with Bathsheba and his arranging of her husband, Uriah's death in battle. God punishes his sin, but there is a strong theme of hope of pardon running through the narrative. God allowed David, whose life had been so upright, to sin so gravely in order to show his mercy and forgiveness. The ultimate expression of this pardon is the messiahship of a descendent of David. After his fall David changes completely and remains contrite till his death.

David stands out as the founder of the united, independent Israelite nation. Although this situation does not survive long beyond the life of David and his son Solomon, David is still always seen by the Israelites as the ideal king. The person and times of David come to be idealised. Hence the close connection between David and the messianic king, the saviour who will restore the fortunes of Israel. David's "last words", his testament (like Jacob, Moses and Joshua) are recorded in II Sam 23:1-7. There he recalls the messianic promise of the prophet Nathan to do with the plan to build a temple to Yahweh (a "house") and God's promise to raise up the future Messiah from his line (his "house"):

THE UNITED KINGDOMS OF DAVID AND SOLOMON (1000 BC)



When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son [...] I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever. (II Sam 7:12-16)

The NT repeatedly makes reference to this prophecy (cf. Lk 1:32-33; Acts 2:30; II Cor 6:18; Heb 1:5), and the Fathers see it as referring to Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah: chosen to bring salvation to all, he was persecuted by those of his own house; although he was humiliated he pardoned and atoned for the behaviour of those who ill-treated him; in his meekness he did not rebel but rather acted with infinite patience. Here one can see the parallels between David and the Christ.

The idea of Yahweh's kingship and power will continue to attach to every rite which makes the anointed person sacred (cf. I Sam 26:9-23; 19:22). "Anointed" is equivalent to Messiah. To show the dependence on God, the throne of the Israelite king will be called "the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh" or simply "throne of Yahweh" (I Chron 28:5; 29:23) The Psalms that were probably sung at enthronement ceremonies refer clearly to God's kingship, a kingship which the new king shares:

I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill (Ps 2:6)

Yahweh receives as his own son the one who is king over Zion (Ps 72:1-2, 18). And the throne of Jerusalem becomes the royal throne of Yahweh over Israel (I Chron 28:5; 29:23; II Chron 9:8). In the Temple of Solomon the Ark of the Covenant was regarded as the throne and seat of God.

The books of Kings cover the history of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel from the death of David (c. 970 BC) to the Babylonian exile. They run in parallel with the books of I and II Chronicles. This period covers the reign of Solomon and the building of the Temple, the dwelling place of God in the midst of his people, and also the split of the kingdom in two: Judah and Israel.

The rulers are assessed in terms of adherence -or not- to the Covenant. For instance, while Solomon begins well building the Temple, etc., his foreign wives (1000 of them) influence him to worship their gods, Molech and Ashtoreth (I Kg 11:5). He neglects the worship of Yahweh, in spite of the Temple he had built in Jerusalem. After Solomon's death the kingdom is split into two with distinct political and religious systems. Two, tribes stay in the south (Judah and Benjamin) under Rehoboam ; the remaining ten form a separate kingdom (Israel) in the north under Jeroboam. Jerusalem, the dwelling place of the Lord is neglected. Instead of concentrating on the Temple, the kings in this period establish rival shrines at Bethel and Dan in the north, and are neglectful of their duty to suppress the "high places" where sacrifice is offered to Baal in contravention of the Covenant.

I Kg 14-22 relates the parallel histories of the two kingdoms. In chapter 17 the prophet Elijah appears to preach a message of strict fidelity to Yahweh. His name means "My God is Yahweh", which describes his mission as well. He is the greatest of the non-writer prophets. There is the wonderful scene of his challenge to the prophets of Baal (I Kg 18:24 et seq.) and the experience on Mount Horeb (I Kg 19), where earlier symbols of God's presence -the hurricane, earthquake and fire- give way to the "still small voice" of a gentle breeze, symbolising that God is pure spirit, and his goodness and mercy invite but never force man to respond.

Other prophets of this period are: Amos (Fuentes, pp. 128-9), Hosea (Fuentes, pp. 129-30), Isaiah (Fuentes, pp. 106-112) and Micah (Fuentes, pp. 130-131), until the fall of the kingdom of Israel (721 BC). Then you also have Jeremiah (Fuentes, pp. 112-116), Zephaniah (Fuentes, p. 131), Nahum (Fuentes, pp. 131-2), and Habakkuk (Fuentes, p. 132) between the fall of the kingdom of the north and that of the south in 587 BC. Broadly speaking, the prophets who appear in the Bible can be divided into 3 main groups:

a) the sons of prophets: men who chose this way of life, underwent a form of training, fostering popular fervour and defending the Covenant.

b) false prophets: who claimed to prophesy in Yahweh's name, but tailored their message to suit the people and often took issue with the true prophets.

c) prophets called by God. Men called to proclaim a message communicated to them by God. God's spokesmen, lending their mouths to transmit the message in an unadulterated form. There are certain characteristic features of a true prophet:

-Vocation from God who confirms that he wants to use him as an instrument.

-He speaks in God's name.

-He acts as a judge of the people in the light of the Covenant, denouncing infidelities, and constantly calling to conversion.

-He predicts divine retribution, and is not afraid of being unpopular.

-He gives a vision of hope, foretelling a time when salvation will be granted to those who remain faithful, the "remnant" (see A. Fuentes, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-4), pointing to the Messianic times.

Samaritans

Chapters 1-25 of II Kings deal with the wars between the two kingdoms and the attacks from outside. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, fell to the Assyrians in 721 BC. Some few years later the area that had been the kingdom of the north (Israel) was planted with non-Israelite farmers, shepherds, etc. Initially these people were pagan, but later came to mix their traditions with the worship of Yahweh. Later still, they gave up their idolatrous practices and worshipped only Yahweh, like the Jews. However, they soon developed marked differences from the Jews, such as only recognising the books of the Pentateuch, on the grounds that the other books were inventions of the Jews after their return from exile. Later the dispute centred on where to worship Yahweh. The Samaritans said Mount Garizim, following the patriarchs, while the Jews regarded Jerusalem as the only valid site (Jn 4:20). Later after the fall of Samaria, Judah also became an Assyrian vassal. From then on the text deals with the history of Judah until the fall of Jerusalem in 587. The reason for the fall first of Samaria and then of Judah is that the people and their kings were not faithful to the Covenant. Yahweh is not at fault: he kept his word; it is Israel who has been faithless. Hezekiah and Josiah, kings of Judah attempt religious reforms, but Josiah's example is not followed by his successors.

Josiah ruled the Kingdom of the South from 640 to 609 BC. The people had fallen into the idolatry of the Phoenicians and Canaanite cults. The year 622 BC marks the beginning of the restoration of the Temple, now purified of the objects of pagan worship brought in by the previous two kings (Manasseh and Amon) (cf. II Chron 34:3). Hilkiah, the high priest somehow found "the book of the law", perhaps containing the greater part of the Book of Deuteronomy. Josiah uses this book to set about some reforms in line with Deuteronomy 12-26. That is:

- Absolute monotheism; no worship of Gentile gods, particularly heavenly bodies.
- Extirpation of sacred prostitution.
- Condemnation of magic.
- There is to be only one Holy Place.
- The renewal of the Covenant and the observance of the Law

THE DIVIDED KINGDOMS (900 - 722 BC)



Josiah then renews the Covenant of Sinai:

Then the king sent, and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were gathered to him. And the king went up to the house of Yahweh, and with him all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests and the prophets, all the people, both small and great; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of Yahweh. (II Kg 23:1-2)

The following verse tells us of the attitude of the king:

And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before Yahweh, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book; and all the people joined in the covenant. (II Kg 23:3)

However, the descendants of Josiah were not faithful to Yahweh and the Covenant and punishment is visited on them in the destruction of Jerusalem.

First Israel, then Judah were brought into exile, to bewail their misfortune in a foreign land, left only with the memories of the land of their inheritance and all too conscious of their sins: they had abandoned Yahweh and his Covenant for the worship of foreign gods. Exile will prove to be a good opportunity for Israel to reflect on the causes of its humiliation and to expiate its sin by sincere repentance. Exile, then, acts as a medicinal cure.

Some sources:

J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, pp. 102-105, 106.

A. Fuentes, *A Guide to the Bible*, pp. 70 et seq.

Casciaro-Monforte, *God, the world...*, pp. 370 et seq. 381 et seq.

Exile and restoration.

The calamity that the chosen people were to undergo was the overthrow of the two kingdoms by the Assyrians and the deportation of the people into exile. This was the instrument chosen by God to purify the people.

In the northern kingdom the death of king Jeroboam II in 747 BC marks the beginning of the end. There was a period of anarchy in the kingdom during which Menahem made himself king at Samaria (II Kg. 15:19). In 745 BC a former soldier named Pul ascended the throne of Assyria and became known as Tiglath-Pileser III. He was the first of a succession of tyrants who conquered what was to be so far the greatest empire of the Ancient East, stretching right down to Egypt. At first the northern kingdom submitted voluntarily (Menahem paid tribute), later (under Hoshea) to be overrun militarily, with Samaria falling in 721 BC (II Kg. 17:6):

"Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria [...]. And this was so because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel..." (II Kg. 17:5-8).

The same fate was awaiting the southern kingdom of Judah., but it was not to come till later. It was about the turn of the 6th century BC, the Neo-Babylonians and the Medes had divided the Assyrian empire between them, and it began with Judah refusing to pay tribute. In 598 BC the king of Judah, Jehoiakim rebelled against the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (II Kg. 24:1). While Nebuchadnezzar was on his way to deal with the problem, the king of Judah died and was succeeded by his 18 year-old son, Jehoiachin:

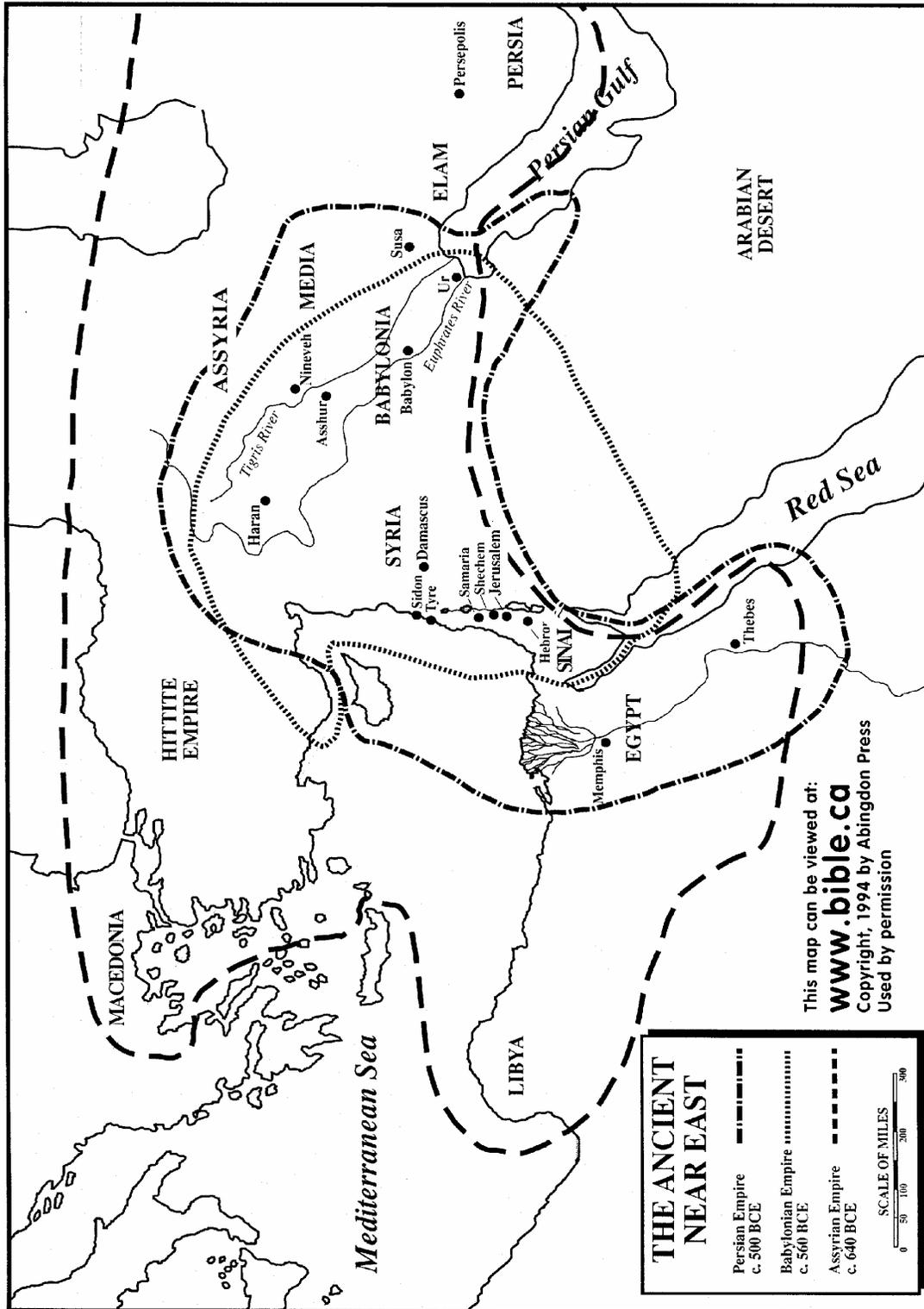
"...and he reigned three months in Jerusalem [...] And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to the city, while his servants were besieging it [...] He carried away all Jerusalem [...] And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon". (II Kg. 24:8-15)

In 597 BC, the king of Judah and all his family and the nobles were deported to Babylon as prisoners, (among whom was the prophet Ezekiel). Resistance to the Babylonians was not entirely quelled and in 588 BC Nebuchadnezzar returned to Judah to finish the job. Jerusalem held out for 18 months, but eventually fell and was sacked and the royal palace and Temple burnt. So the land of Judah became a Babylonian province and the royal house of David which had reigned for 400 years was erased. There were still pockets of resistance, resulting in a further deportation, while others escaped to Egypt, among them Jeremiah. The Babylonians set about depopulating Judah, making a clean sweep. As Jeremiah had prophesied:

"Behold, says the Lord, [...] I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant". (Jer 34:22)

This period of exile, which lasts until 538 BC, proves to be a period of purification for the Chosen People, who respond with a remarkable effort of fidelity. The rites of worship are strictly observed: circumcision, Sabbath rest, commemoration of the Passover. The priests no longer had a temple to minister in, but they formed synagogues and taught the people the religion of their forefathers, and jurists and scribes arose to form the people in the Law. In exile the Chosen People recognised the punishment of their faults. While the northern kingdom was merged into Mesopotamia, the remnant of Judah stayed faithful.

PERSIAN, BABYLONIAN, ASSYRIAN EMPIRE



The prophets spoke of the "remnant" of Israel that would achieve salvation. There was always a sense of hope. Prior to the exile the prophets had spoken of two types of "remnant: the *historical* one, that fraction of the people who survive a calamity which befalls Israel because of its pact with Yahweh: and the *eschatological* remnant, referring to that part of the people who will in the last times benefit from salvation. This is called the "holy" remnant (cf. Mic 5:6ff; Is 4:4; Jer 23:3).

After the exile we find a third idea: that of the *faithful remnant*, a portion of the people which is considered to be the heir and depository of the promises, a religiously fervent part pleasing to Yahweh. This is "my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Is 49:3). From this Israel a unique, exceptional person will emerge -the *Servant of Yahweh*, who by his death will accomplish the mission entrusted to this "remnant".

Jeremiah had foretold this repentance, and Isaiah explained that it was because Yahweh had given his people a special destiny: to be his witness, his servant, with a divine mission. They would not perish because in them alone was deposited the doctrine of the one true God.

The most remarkable guide of the Israelites in this period was Ezekiel. His prophetic task was to lead his compatriots back to right thinking. In exile he became the preacher of consolation, reminding the people of their past greatness, and of the divine promises made to their forefathers, that still held good. He kept alive the national consciousness, and the awareness of the promises.

While not belittling past faults (in fact, he continually called them to mind), he stressed not sin, but redemption.

"Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (Ezek. 18:23)

He becomes the great prophet of hope, telling the exiles of God's determination to set them free and bring them home. He looks forward to the time when the New Covenant will be made, in the kingdom of the Messiah to come:

"They shall dwell in the land where your fathers dwelt that I gave to my servant Jacob; they and their children and their children's children shall dwell there for ever; and David my servant shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore." (Ezek. 37:25-28)

The prophet emphasises that Yahweh is not confined to Jerusalem or even Palestine: his power extends as far as Babylon and to the ends of the earth. His majesty is infinite, his presence universal. Thanks to his omnipotence and infinite love, he will once more show mercy to his people and by a totally gratuitous act he will work their conversion. What seems so difficult, even impossible, will soon become a reality, as shown in the symbolic vision of the bare bones which are clothed again with flesh and changed back into men, symbolising the people of Israel becoming a nation again (as well as the resurrection of the body). Nothing is impossible to God (Ezek. 3:7-14).

Ezekiel devotes a whole chapter (Ezek. 18) to the question of personal responsibility, and he reverts to it constantly. Until this point people took it as normal for a whole city or nation to be punished collectively, or for the sins of parents to be visited on their children. Ezekiel teaches that a man's salvation or condemnation depends on him alone, on his personal attitude to God, that is, his response to the grace he has been given. To each person God gives his love, and offers the opportunity of salvation. Since man is responsible for his actions, he must suffer the consequences of his unfaithfulness, although -even in exile- he can recover lost grace by being converted, which is the true purpose of any punishment God metes out:

"But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of his transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness which he has done he shall live." (Ezek. 18:21-22)

The salvation offered is still envisaged in quite earthly terms, but it is personal salvation, not just that of a whole people.

Ezekiel's work did much to regroup the exiles around the priests and the Law; it revived their religion, making it more interior and personal; it gave new hope to those who stayed faithful to Yahweh, and a vision of the future in which God himself will be the guide of his people through the shepherd he will send, the Messiah:

"As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places....I myself will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring home the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice." (Ezek. 34:12-16)

Also of significance in this regard are chapters 40-66 of the Book of Isaiah (Yesá yāhû = Yahweh as salvation), known as "The Book of the Consolation of Israel". Obviously here we enter into a question of authorship/prophecy. Isaiah was born around 700 BC, the exile took place 587-538 BC. Some authors attribute these chapters to a disciple of the prophet who was steeped in Isaiah's teaching and tradition. Certainly these chapters consist of oracles on liberation from Babylon (40-48), and on messianic liberation (49-55). Of particular importance are the 4 poems on the Servant of Yahweh (42:1-7; 49:1-9; 50:4-11; 52:13 - 53:12). The remaining chapters contain a series of prophecies which extend the "Book of Consolation" although they also include a series of instructions to the returned exiles.

The period of exile is a time of hope, perhaps reflected in the stories that abound about this period, as gathered in the books of Tobit, Judith and Esther. Probably written after the exile, they relate stories that perhaps were told among the Jews as their hopes grew. The book of Esther and that of the prophet Daniel (to be seen later) relate to the time when the Persians were masters of the empire.

In 612 BC Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire fell, and the Medes shared the empire with the Babylonians. These latter, ruling from Mesopotamia, had then gone on to suppress Judah and capture Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar in 598 BC. However, their dominance was to end soon after with the rise of the Persians under Cyrus. In 550 BC he captured Ecbatana, the capital of the kingdom of the Medes. The Babylonian empire formed an alliance with Lydia in Asia Minor and Sparta, but Cyrus was soon to capture Lydia and Babylonia lay before him. Here we can situate the story of Belshazzar's feast (Dan. 5):

"[...] And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL and PARSIN. This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to Medes and Persians." (Dan. 5:25-28)

In 539 BC Cyrus attacked and the Babylonian army was defeated. A year later 538 BC, Cyrus entered the city of Babylon. There was no slaughter or humiliation. The reign of Cyrus was marked by tolerance, including religious tolerance. He restored the former gods to their shrines, but his tolerance was to the advantage of the Jews:

"In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices are offered and burnt offerings are brought; in height it shall be sixty cubits and its breadth sixty cubits, with three courses of great stones and one course of timber; let the cost be paid from the

royal treasury. And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the house of God." (Ezra 6:3-5)

This meant permission to return to Jerusalem with reparation. In the spring of 537 BC, while many Jews chose to stay in Babylon, a long caravan (Ezra 2:64-67 speaks of 42,360) set out on the trail of some 800 miles to the land promised to their forefathers.

The rebuilding of the Temple took time, especially due to the fierce opposition from the Samaritans, who resented the fact that they were excluded from the building task. The work was re-started in 520 BC, and was especially encouraged by Cyrus' successor king Darius. It was completed in 515 BC, although the walls of Jerusalem took longer to be completed. However, the new Temple was significantly different. The builders retained the general appearance, the two courts, and the Holy of Holies, but it was empty. The Ark of the Covenant was no more; it had been burnt in the destruction of the temple(?). Nevertheless, this is significant. The Jews were not to put their trust upon a memory of the past, but on the future Messiah who would bring salvation.

Over the period from the fall of Samaria, an interesting development had taken place in the Chosen People's perception of itself. In II Kg 16:6 the sons of Israel or the Israelites are described as "Jews" for the first time in the Bible. When the northern kingdom collapses and its 10 tribes are deported, only the tribe of Judah (with parts of the tribes of Simeon and Benjamin) remains. Later, when the southern kingdom falls and after the Babylonian exile, only a remnant of the tribe of Judah return to their homeland. The kingdom of Israel was never to revive. From this point onwards the name Judea refers to the main part of Palestine, and the Israelites are described as Jews.

At the same time we have the Jews of the Diaspora (Greek meaning dispersion), those who stayed in foreign lands after the exile, or who were imprisoned later and led as captives to foreign territories. They come to have a significance later.

ibid., p. 244: It was probably an influential Jew who remained behind in the court of the Persian king Artaxerxes who formulated the decree referred to in Ezra 7:12-26, permitting Jews living in exile in Babylon to establish themselves in Judea. This decree established the Mosaic law as the civil law of Judea, from this point onwards obligatory on all inhabitants of Israel. Even though the Jews were subject to another ruler, they had rights such as they had never dreamed of obtaining. This is the start of what is called Judaism.

Ezra the scribe was authorised in 458 BC to implement this decree. "Scribe" is the term used from the time of the exile, and especially after Ezra himself, to describe a Jew well-versed in the Law of Yahweh, later called "doctors of the Law". In the absence of prophets, these men devoted themselves professionally to the interpretation of the Scriptures, forming a body of experts. They were also given the title of *Rab* (=Master, Rabbi) or *Rabban* (my or our master). Ezra was to re-establish the Law of Moses as the King's Law among the people at Jerusalem. He promulgated the Law; the people did penance and confessed their sins (Ezra 8:1-9,37), and Ezra established a covenant to which all the people subscribed (Ezra 10).

Some years later, in 445 BC, Nehemiah, King Artaxerxes' governor obtained permission for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the city was repopulated. He then spared no effort to improve the economic position of the Jews, and direct them towards religious and moral purity, with trust in God and understanding of weaknesses.

Under the influence of Ezra and Nehemiah the people began to adopt a new, more religious lifestyle. Daily life became imbued with greater optimism and hope. They came to realise better what God's election of them meant -holiness, an upright life, constant recourse to God; national sovereignty no longer took on such importance.

During this period certain institutions, which possibly originated in the period of exile, developed. The more important ones were the Synagogue (from Greek *sinagogé*, meaning assembly, meeting), where the Jews gathered for prayer and religious instruction; and the Sanhedrin, which originally had a religious function but soon came to take over civil affairs, such as the administration of justice, for which it became exclusively responsible.

Some sources:

J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, pp. 105-106.

W. Keller, *The Bible as History*, London 1969, p. 240, p. 277 et seq.

H. Daniel-Rops, *Israel and the Ancient World*, pp. 214 et seq.

A. Fuentes, *A Guide to the Bible*, p. 102 et seq.

Palestine under Greek and Roman domination.

For two centuries the Persians were the liege lords of Jerusalem where the High Priest was effectively head over Israel together with the Sanhedrin. The history of Palestine seems to have suffered no violent variations over that period. The Bible makes no mention of it, neither have archaeological findings produced anything significant. If anything the evidence is of a people living a simple and somewhat poor existence.

In the 4th century BC the centre of political power gradually shifted from the "Fertile Crescent" to the West. The prelude to this development, which was of decisive importance for the whole world, had been two famous battles in the previous century, in both of which the Greeks called a halt to any further Persian advance. At Marathon in 491 BC they defeated the Persian armies of Darius I. At Salamis, off Athens, they smashed the Persian fleet 11 years later in 480 BC.

"After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came from Kittim [Greece], had defeated Darius, king of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king. (He had previously become king of Greece.) He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth." (I Macc. 1:1-2)

Scripture is silent on how the Greeks' campaigns progressed over the 150 years from 480 BC. The narrative is only taken up again at the start of the Maccabean wars, early in the 1st century BC. In the meantime, Alexander overthrew the Persian domination in Palestine around 333 BC. Jerusalem and the province of Judah seem to have submitted to their new masters without resistance. Life in Palestine appears to have been influenced only by the Torah, the Law of God.

Alexander the Great died in Babylon on campaign in 323 BC:

"[Alexander] fell sick and perceived that he was dying. So he summoned his most honoured officers, who had been brought up with him from youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive. And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died. Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place. They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their sons after them for many years; and they caused many evils on the earth." (I Macc. 1:5-9)

Following his death two main dynasties established themselves in the territories of his huge empire -the Ptolemies, who controlled Egypt, and also Palestine up to 200 BC; and the Seleucids, who took over large parts of the Middle East, moved into Palestine around 200 BC.

The Ptolemy kingdom was founded by Ptolemy I, the son of a Macedonian nobleman. A loyal general in Alexander's army, he was made satrap (like a viceroy, a provincial governor) of Egypt on Alexander's death, assuming the title of king in 304 when he annexed Cyprus, Palestine and the Lebanon. In 285 BC he abdicated in favour of his son Ptolemy II Philadelphos, who became involved in a struggle with the Seleucid kings. His court at Alexandria was famed for its Hellenistic culture and learning. Greek was the language of learning and commerce, and also the language of many thousands of Israelites throughout the empire. His son Ptolemy III Euergetes, extended the empire into Persia. However, the kingdom began to decline under Ptolemy IV Philopator, who was a bad administrator and led a dissolute life.

From the time of Alexander onwards Greek culture had been spreading throughout the Middle East. A product of this cultural development was the *Septuagint*, a Greek translation of the Scriptures made over a period of time by some 70 Hebrew scholars. There had arisen a generation for whom Hebrew was no

longer the mother tongue; they could no longer follow the sacred texts in the synagogue services. It is the most original important version of the original texts, and when seen together with other Hebrew or Aramaic texts gives an idea of the interpretation given at the time. The scholars seem to have been Jews of the Diaspora living in Alexandria (Egypt), and the version was produced in the course of the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. Now the texts of the Scriptures, previously limited to one nation, became available and intelligible for people of other tongues and races.

Judah's attachment to the Ptolemies lasted over 100 years. Then the Seleucids of Antioch began to force their way southwards. In 195 (197?) BC after a victory over Ptolemy V at the sources of the Jordan, the Seleucid king, Antiochus III, the Great, took over Palestine, and Judah once more came under a new sovereignty. At first the Seleucid rulers were tolerant of the political and religious culture of their dominions, but things changed when Antiochus IV Epiphanes (=the Illustrious) came to power in 175 BC (?), and Palestine became the scene of persecution and war. Antiochus was determined to impose Hellenic religion and civilisation in Palestine as elsewhere. This was anathema to the Jews who at this time were quite faithful to the Covenant.

I and II Maccabees gives a detailed account (overlapping at times) of the struggle in Palestine up to the death of Simon, the last of the Maccabee brothers in 134 BC. The first areas of dispute concerned the sacking of the High Priest, with a Hellenizer replacing him, who then went on to build a "gymnasium" near the Temple in Jerusalem where games would take place involving nudity with Jews trying to hide their circumcision, the very sign of the Covenant (I Macc. 1:11-15; II Macc. 4:7-17). Worse was to come:

"After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned [...] and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all the utensils. [...] (I Macc. 1:20-21) He took the holy vessels with his polluted hands, and swept away with profane hands the votive offerings which other kings had made to enhance the glory and honour of the place. (II Macc. 5:16)

Israel had suffered much in her history, but when the worship of Zeus ("the abomination of desolation" prophesied in Dan 11:31) was set up in the Temple of Yahweh, and the death penalty was imposed for taking part in any Jewish religious ceremonies, offering the traditional sacrifices, keeping the Sabbath, reading the Torah, or circumcising infants, then the humiliation was completed. The walls of the city were pulled down, and a Greek citadel built beside the Temple. There were, of course, Jews who conformed as happens in times of religious persecution; nevertheless:

"...many in Israel stood firm... They chose to die rather than be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die." (I Macc. 1:62-63)

Some, rather than violate the Law, rediscovered for themselves the old patriarchal ideal, and fled into the wilderness, with their flocks and their herds; they were called the Hassidim, "the pious", and, with others, formed a united resistance movement.

Mattathias proclaimed a holy war. Jewish armed resistance operated from the wilderness with great success under the successive leadership of three of Mattathias' sons -Judas Maccabeus, Jonathan and Simon. When Simon died he was succeeded by his son John Hyrcanus, who became the founder of the Hasmonean dynasty. The meaning of "Hasmonean" is unclear. Flavius Josephus calls Mattathias the son of Hasmoneus, a name which he also applies to Simon. It may have been another surname of Judas or else the name of some ancestor or even of a people or a region. The name is important because it was used to describe the dynasty from John Hyrcanus onwards.

The message of the books of Maccabees is fundamentally a religious one:

- God always watches over his own;
- Israel always wins victory over its enemies when it stays true to the Covenant.

The success of the Jewish campaigns is due to God's protection, but Israel must rely totally on fidelity to the Covenant. There are a number of other important doctrinal teachings to be found especially in II Macc. (creation from nothing, faith in the resurrection, atonement beyond the grave and purgatory, prayer for the dead, etc.). The lessons are also edifying: humility which leads the protagonists to trust in God; their fortitude in defending their faith; their patience in dealing with obstacles to observance of the Law; their piety, seen in their prayer for their dead comrades.

Eventually peace was re-established under Antiochus V Eupator, the offending decrees were rescinded, liberty of worship was guaranteed, and the religious community at Jerusalem recognised (I Macc. 6). The struggle continued until 142 BC, with Syria finally granting them political freedom as well (I Macc. 15). After the death of Simon in 134 BC, his son John Hyrcanus (d. 104 BC), combined spiritual and political leadership, as High Priest as well. His son Aristobulus I (d. 103 BC) presumptuously took to himself the title of king as well as High Priest, and over the years the territories were increased until they almost reached the limits of the former kingdoms of Israel and Judah. However, the Seleucids were in decline and Rome was expanding. Pompey, the Roman general, marched through the kingdom of the Seleucids into Palestine. After a 3 months' siege Roman legions entered Jerusalem in 63 BC, and Judah became a Roman province.

There was a sense that the above had all been predicted, prophesied. Apocalyptic literature covers certain trends of thought from 5th century BC to the 2nd century AD., especially in apocryphal writings of the OT period (e.g., the Book of Enoch, the Ascension of Moses, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, etc.), even though the adjective itself refers to St John's work also known as Revelation. It usually deals with unknown topics, such as the announcement of the last times or religious eschatology. The message is one of hope, seen in a future divine salvific intervention, although it is generally mixed with cosmic catastrophes, and the participation of angels. With their visions, the prophets seek the conversion of their audience. In these writings one finds persons of Sacred History and heavenly beings speaking and acting with more or less oblique reference to contemporary events. They announce upheavals which will bring liberation and victory to Israel. Their revelations are presented as visions in which the following feature regularly: stars, meteorological phenomena, cosmic upsets, numbers, strange animals, colours, parts of the human body, weapons, clothes, etc. These symbols are expressed in an obscure, enigmatic language, hidden to most people. Apocalyptic writings flourish especially in times of crisis and persecution. For example, at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (168-164 BC), the invasion of Pompey (63 BC), or the first Judaic War (66-70 AD).

A basic theme of apocalyptic writings is the struggle of the powers of evil against God; in this strife the just will suffer. The eschatological battle ends with the complete victory for God; thus the present age will come to an end and there will be a future age or the Kingdom of God. The end of this age or the present world goes hand in hand with a final catastrophe. There will be a final reckoning, to judge and punish the unjust and reward the just who will live eternally.

The book of Daniel is an example of this kind of writing. Daniel had been taken into exile in Babylon as a child in 605 BC. His success was to be his wisdom and his gift of interpreting dreams. In chapter 2 he predicts the four successive kingdoms which will precede the coming of the Messiah: the Babylonian (gold), that of the Medes and Persians (silver), the Greek (bronze) and that of iron (the Ptolemy kingdom). The main meaning of this is that the kingdom of God inaugurated by the Messiah (cf. Mt. 4:17) will oppose the various kingdoms which are the personification of the kingdom of Satan. This kingdom of God, which is the Church, according to the interpretation of St Augustine, is symbolised by the stone "which was cut out by no human hand ... and smote the image" (Dan 2:34-35). Beginning in a small, insignificant way, the Church will spread all over the world, thanks to the power of God who sustains it.

Chapters 7-12 of the book of Daniel relate 4 prophetic apocalyptic visions, which symbolise and describe very accurately the sufferings that the people of God will have to endure before the coming of the Messiah, and the establishment of the Church.

The entire book derived from one main teaching -the God of Israel, the one true, all-knowing and almighty God, the sovereign Master of human affairs, is the King of kings and the Lord of heaven and earth, who in his infinite wisdom and power governs the course of human history, saving those who are faithful to him and overthrowing kings who try to frustrate his plans. Any resistance offered him ends in war and destruction; whereas obedience and faithfulness to his laws will always, despite the difficulties that will arise, lead to victory and eventual peace. Should God on occasions allow the just man to be persecuted, it is only to test his faithfulness and reward him for his good works. Daniel is distressed to see Israelites suffering in exile, but his sadness is mitigated not so much by the memory of past glory but by the hope of a much more secure future.

The messianic kingdom, imperceptible at first, will in time spread all over the world. It will be a spiritual kingdom based on peace and justice and acknowledgement of the one true God. The prophecy of Daniel marks a significant point in the history of God's interventions in the world prior to the time of the Messiah. New horizons are opened up, a future history is predicted in which the kingdom of God (the Church) will spread, during its earthly phase, to all peoples and become in effect the stage prior to the final, definitive heavenly stage, which will last for ever.

New horizons were also opened up between 1947 and 1953 with the discovery of what are called the Dead Sea scrolls. The story is one of detective workThe existence of these important documents was uncovered by a Bedouin looking for a lost sheep in a cave about 12 km from Jericho, to the West of the Dead Sea, and the whole collection was found in the caves of Khirbeth Qumran and Wadi Murabba'at in the following years. The total number of manuscripts (papyri and leather) amounts to over 400, including 100 Biblical manuscripts. At Qumran they date from about 200 BC to AD 68; while at Wadi Murabba'at they go up to AD 132-135. Apart from the Book of Esther every book of the OT is represented (though not necessarily complete) The best known is the complete scroll of the Book of Isaiah, copied about 100 BC.

To estimate the importance of this discovery it is necessary to remember that the oldest text of the Bible which we possess in the Hebrew language -the so called Massoretic Text (Massora = tradition), which is the work of rabbinical scribes- dates from no earlier than the 9th-10th century AD. The chief sources for our version of the scriptures are the Septuagint, the Greek translation, and the Vulgate, the Latin translation of St. Jerome (4th century AD). With the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls we have a Hebrew text of the Bible 1000 years older than what was previously available. The remarkable and wonderful fact is that the ancient scroll of Isaiah has 63 chapters, and agrees with what we have been using all along.

Some sources:

W. Keller, *The Bible as History*, London 1969, p. 309 et seq.

A. Fuentes, *A Guide to the Bible*, p. 94 et seq.

H. Daniel-Rops, *Israel and the Ancient World*, p. 251 et seq.

A. Fuentes, *A Guide to the Bible*, p. 96 et seq.

J.M.Casciaro - J.M.Monforte, *Jesucristo, Salvador de la humanidad, Panorama Bíblico de la Salvación*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1996, pp. 100 et seq

Old Testament Timeline

4004 B.C.

Creation of Adam/Eve

Based on Archbishop Ussher's (died 1656 A.D.) chronology Adam was created in 4004 B.C.

The Hebrew Calendar begins its count of years with what is believed to be the first year of creation. Year 1 on the Hebrew calendar equates to 3761 B.C. The year 2005 A.D. is year 5765/5766 according to the Hebrew Calendar (this calendar system changes years in the Fall, around our months of September/October). !

2348 B.C.

Noah's Flood

1996 to 1690
B.C.

Period of the Patriarchs

Time span from the birth of Abram (Abraham) to the death of Jacob (Israel).

1491 B.C.

The Exodus

God through Moses frees Israelites from Egyptian slavery.

1451 B.C.

Joshua leads Israelites into the Promised Land.

1410 to 1050
B.C.

Period of the Judges in Israel.

c. 1050 to 930
B.C.

Israel's First Kings

Period of King Saul, King David and King Solomon.

c. 960 B.C.

Solomon's Temple Built in Jerusalem

928 B.C.

Division of the Kingdom

After the death of Solomon the united Hebrew (Israel) kingdom was divided into two separate nations **Israel**: Composed of ten of Israel's tribes and often referred to as the *Northern Ten Tribes of Israel*. The capital city is Samaria. The [kings of Israel](#) are descendents of Jeroboam, the first king of the northern ten tribes.

Judah: Composed of two of the tribes of Israel, Judah and Benjamin, plus the priestly tribe of Levi. Jerusalem is the capital. The [kings of Judah](#) are descendents of King David and Solomon.

928 to 722 B.C.	Period of the Kings of Israel (10 Tribes of Israel) From King Jeroboam I to King Hoshea.
928 to 587 B.C.	Period of the Kings of Judah From King Rehoboam to King Zedekiah (Mattariah).
884 to 612 B.C.	Period when Assyria has World-ruling Empire.
840 to 400 B.C.	Period of the "minor" Prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, etc.).
721 B.C.	Fall of Israel Assyria completes its conquest of the northern 10 tribes of Israel and their capital city of Samaria.
612 to 539 B.C.	Period when Neo-Babylonian Empire Ruled the World
585 B.C.	Destruction of Solomon's Temple Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple (known as the <i>first</i> temple) are destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar.
	The total destruction of the temple was completed on the 10th of Ab (Hebrew Month) which equates to Wednesday, August 6th 585 B.C.
536 to 331 B.C.	Period when Persian (<i>Medo-Persian</i>) Empire Ruled World
515 B.C.	Jerusalem's Temple Rebuilt The rebuilding of Jerusalem's (Solomon's) temple was completed. This is commonly referred to as the <i>second</i> temple.
63 B.C.	Roman troops, led by Pompeius, occupy Palestine (Judea).
37 B.C.	Herod the Great is appointed ruler of Judea by Rome.

IV. THE TIME OF JESUS CHRIST

The land of Jesus.

What was Judah like in the period leading up to the coming of the Saviour? Politically it was under foreign control, but had succeeded in preserving enough freedom to be able to exercise its faith (apart from the earlier period of persecution). Judaism was a close alliance of race and religion, of civil and religious legislation in a single code, by the exercise of a single authority, in the hands of the High Priest. This was the people's point of reference in times of trouble; and the men who administered the system took on more and more importance. They were essentially the Priests and the Scribes, the men of the worship, and the men of the Law.

The priestly class was limited. In the most ancient times, all the descendants of Levi were priests, but later, after the exile, only the descendants of Aaron were priests. Divided into 24 sections or divisions, the priests were responsible for the Temple functions in turn, each for a week (cf. Zechariah : Lk 1: 5-9). As for the Levites, they were confined to the part of Temple servants: guards, doorkeepers, musicians, etc.

There was a whole little religious world whose life was connected with the Temple, and centred around it. The minute ritual, the daily sacrifices, the great feasts, all occupied about 20,000 people. Their functions were paid for out of the enormous funds contributed by the whole of Judah. Their number, function and the money they handled meant they had considerable influence.

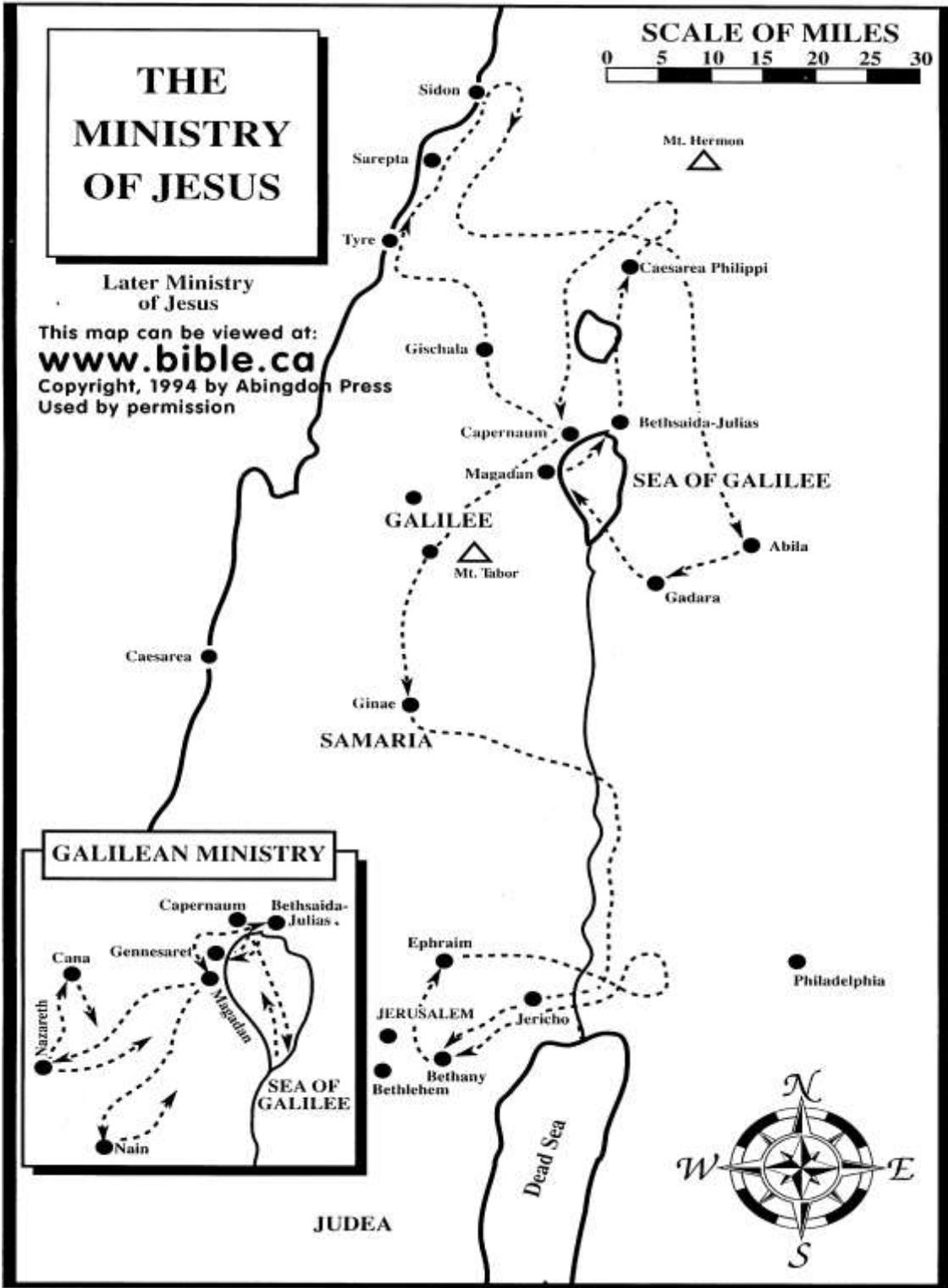
At their head, the High Priest alone had full powers. He alone could enter the Holy of Holies, and perform the most solemn sacrifices. Since the community was based on religion, he was at the same time the political chief, and it was not too surprising when the Hasmoneans made themselves kings as well.

Foreign masters of Israel took all this into account. When, from the time of Herod onwards, the High Priests, in principle appointed for life, were frequently proclaimed and deposed by the Romans (cf. Caiaphas-in-law/Annas-deposed by the Romans), they still chose from among the very few families who provided them. The priestly caste was in a sense, the core of Judah, and its domination seems to have been unquestioned.

In practice, things were not so straightforward. As the Torah, the Law, came to take on the centre of all civil life and regulate justice, those who knew it best grew in power. These were the Scribes, the Doctors of the Law. They taught the text, but also commented on it and extended its application. It was by and through them that the Law was made the foundation of religious life. They had more immediate contact with the people through the synagogues, and all had, more or less, schools about them to which the people came in crowds. If the priestly caste was focused on ritual, the Scribes certainly had an intellectually and spiritually higher conception of religion, but both groups attached too much importance to the letter.

These two groups sat together somewhat uneasily in the supreme counsel of the community, the Sanhedrin. It had originally been purely priestly, but over the centuries the Doctors of the Law, by reason of their juridical and religious knowledge, had gained great influence. The traditional number of members was 70 (hence the claim to date back to Moses). Presided over by the High Priest, it was at once a supreme court, a theological arena, and a counsel of government.

Within this structure there were parties, the most famous being the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees were lovers of security, very strict in applying the Law; patriots, but with a desire not to rock the boat and so suspicious of any too vigorous resistance to the powers that be. In religious matters they were



close to the priests, and favoured ritual and tradition. The Law, and nothing but the Law! Later dogmatic developments (i.e., after the Torah) were suspect to them; worse still, speculations bearing on the after life and the resurrection of the dead. There was little fire or enthusiasm among them, but rather more cynicism and pragmatism. Their influence on the people was not strong, their links with the priestly aristocracy were; they were not over concerned about the coming of the Messiah.

The Pharisees have traditionally had a bad press as hypocrites and whited sepulchres (Mt. 24:14), but this needs to be put into perspective. They were certainly devout, descended from the Hassidim, who had been a force of national resistance during the persecutions. They had adopted an attitude of hostile reserve towards the Hasmonians, and had distanced themselves somewhat, hence receiving the name Pharisees ("separate"). At times they had been persecuted, since their influence among the people was great and possibly threatening. They were committed, but intolerant and not inclined to find ways of working together with others. In politics they were nationalist and opposed to foreigners. They did not advocate resistance by force, but were entirely devoted to the Law; not like the Sadducees to the letter of the law, the Pharisees were constantly commenting on, reflecting on and enriching the Law -with more precepts. They knew the Torah as well as the best, but also claimed to live it better than the best. Not all Scribes were Pharisees, but all Pharisees were Scribes. From the Law and the Prophets they had drawn logical conclusions relating to individual retribution, life after death, and the resurrection of the body. Theirs was a small party -perhaps 6,000- but they were recruited from all levels of society, and so a ferment.

There were, however, offshoots of this strong party of Pharisees, reflecting differing religious and political nuances. The most curious grouping was that of the Zealots, Pharisees in doctrine, but in politics much more violent. The term was used originally to designate those Jews who were zealous observers of the Law and enemies of foreign domination. Later, by the time of Christ, it was used to describe a revolutionary political faction whose main feature was open resistance to the Romans (Acts 5:37) Flavius Josephus tells us they were also called *sicarii*, because they used to carry a little *sicca* (=dagger). As revolutionaries, they opposed the established powers, acknowledging no master but God; as terrorists they had no hesitation to kill those whom they considered traitors to the Jewish cause. They were in large part responsible for the Roman backlash that led to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.

The Essenes, on the other hand, were a more religious grouping, resembling a religious order, with superiors, vows -including celibacy, "novitiate", sharing goods in common, living in communities. They surpassed the Pharisees in rigour, keeping the Sabbath in a total fashion and multiplying their ablutions. In doctrine too they differed from official Judaism: e.g., they practised no animal sacrifice, inner religion being the one thing necessary.

Without going so far there were others who placed themselves, temporarily or definitely, in a similar situation: Nazirs or Nazirites (like Samson in the time of the Judges). They consecrated themselves to God -for periods of at least a month- making three vows: not to cut their hair, not to drink wine, and not to approach women.

Another grouping of the time, though not religious were the Herodians. they were the followers of the policies of Herod and his dynasty. They were favourable to the Roman occupation from which they benefited. That they should have been in league with the Pharisees to trap Our Lord is extraordinary (cf. Mt. 22:15-21)

And what was life under the Romans like? Much of the influence of the Greeks remained. Greek was the language which united the subjects of the Empire in the East. In Transjordan there were out and out Greek cities. The "Ten Cities" (Decapolis) mentioned in the Gospels (Mt. 4:25; Mk 5:20) took Athens as their model, with temples to Zeus and Artemis, theatres, stadiums, gymnasiums, and baths. Caesarea, the seat of Pilate's government, Tiberias, Caesarea Philippi, and Jericho were all Greek in architecture and customs. Only the smaller towns and villages had retained all their Jewishness. It was in these genuinely Jewish communities that Jesus lived and worked; he is only reported as having been in the area of the predominantly Greek cities (Mk 7:31). Those disciples who came from Greek cities, or centres of trade and

commerce would have spoken Greek, e.g. Philip who was approached by some Greeks wishing to speak to Jesus. For this reason it is not surprising that the New Testament writings should have been put down in Greek, while the everyday language of Jesus and his followers would have been Aramaic, and the liturgical language of the Jews, Hebrew.

As for the general political situation at the time: all Palestine was under the control of the Romans. King Herod the Great ruled Judea from 37 BC to AD 4. In fact he was not a Jew himself, but of Idumaeen stock, descended from Esau. Through political astuteness he got himself made absolute monarch (under the Romans) of Judea and, at its high point, his rule extended over most of the territory of the ancient kingdom of David. After him Palestine was divided under three governors who reported directly to Rome. All three were his sons: Archelaus was ethnarch of Judea and Samaria, until he was deposed by the Emperor Augustus in AD 6, and Judea became a Roman province controlled by a procurator appointed by Rome. Herod Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea, and Philip tetrarch of Gaulinitis, Trachonitis and Ituraea. These last two held power for a long time.

Some sources:

H. Daniel-Rops, *Israel and the Ancient World*, p. 270.

W. Keller, *The Bible as History*, London 1969, p. 327.

Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, on preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000³⁴: "Speaking of the birth of the Son of God, Saint Paul places this event in the 'fullness of time' (cf. Gal 4:4). *Time is indeed fulfilled by the very fact that God, in the Incarnation, came down into human history.*"

n. 5: "... References to Christ are found [...] in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, a work compiled in Rome between the years 93 and 94 by the historian Flavius Josephus, and especially in the *Annals* of Tacitus, written between the years 115 and 120, where, reporting the burning of Rome in the years

64, falsely attributed by Nero to the Christians, the historian makes an explicit reference to Christ 'executed by order of the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius'. Suetonius too, in his biography of the Emperor Claudius, written around 121, informs us that the Jews were expelled from Rome because 'under the instigation of a certain Chrestus they stirred up frequent riots'. This passage is generally interpreted as referring to Jesus Christ, who had become a source of contention within Jewish circles in Rome. Also of importance as proof of the rapid spread of Christianity is the testimony of Pliny the Younger, the Governor of Bithynia, who reported to the Emperor Trajan, between the years 111 and 113, that a large number of people was accustomed to gather 'on a designated day, before dawn, to sing in alternating choirs a hymn to Christ as to a God'.

"But the great event which non-Christian historians merely mention in passing takes on its full significance in the writings of the New Testament. These writings, although documents of faith, are no less reliable as historical testimonies, if we consider their references as a whole."

Year of Birth: 6 BC: It was Dionysius Exiguus (Denis the Exact!), a monk who died in AD 556, who fixed the birth of Jesus Christ as the centre of the history of mankind; using such historical information as was available to him, he placed our Lord's birth in the year 753 (ab Urbe condita) and made the following year AD 1. This is what we follow today even though it is inaccurate.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was born "in the days of Herod the king" (Mt. 2:1; cf. Lk 1:5). Flavius Josephus says Herod died in the year 750 AUC. Herod did not die immediately on Christ's birth. When he became ill, he moved to Jericho, where he stayed for 6 months before dying, yet the Magi find him still in Jerusalem (Mt. 2:3). Herod ordered the slaughter of children under two, calculating safely that Jesus would have been less, perhaps one year old or so.

So, the date provided by Denis the Precise needs to be brought forward. The very latest date for the birth of Christ was 748 AUC, equivalent to 6 BC in our way of reckoning the years; the very earliest date would be 746 AUC (8 BC).

Beginning of his public ministry: AD 27: The dating here is linked with the preaching of St John the Baptist and the baptism of Our Lord by John in the Jordan. St Luke says John began to preach "in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas" (Lk 3:1-2) -pretty tight dating. The 15th year of Tiberius' reign (associated with Augustus in the governing of the Eastern provinces in 765 AUC or AD 12) would be 780 AUC or AD 27, making Jesus around 32 at the time. Pilate took up his appointment as procurator in 770 AUC (AD 26), so it could not be sooner. Lk 3:23: "Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about 30 years of age"; Jn 2:20: "The Jews then said, 'It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in

³⁴ 10-11-1994, n. 9.

3 days?"". This conversation took place at the Passover of the first year of his public ministry. Flavius Josephus says the rebuilding of the Temple began in 20-19 BC. If we then add 46 it takes us to AD 26-27, so the public ministry of Our Lord could not have begun before AD 25-26.

Length of public ministry: It is not expressly stated by the evangelists, but St John gives enough information, by referring to 3 specific Passovers (Jn 2:13-23; 6:4; 11:55, etc.). This gives us 2 full years, plus the months elapsing between Jesus' baptism and the first Passover.

However, John 5:1 refers to "*the*" or "*a* feast of the Jews". If this is another Passover we would have to add another year to the public ministry. Looking at the supposed dates for the baptism of Our Lord and for his death, it would seem that it is more probable that the public ministry lasted 3 years and a few months.

Date of Jesus' death: We know that Our Lord's death took place on a Friday (cf. Mt. 27:62; Mk. 15:42; Lk 23:54; Jn 19:21), in the Hebrew month of Nisan. As regards the day it was either 14 or 15 Nisan, and the year was probably AD 30, in which year 14 Nisan fell on a Friday. As to whether it was 14 or 15 Nisan, the evangelists do not leave it very clear. The Synoptics give conflicting information, but imply that Jesus died on the Passover day itself; John's account implies that Jesus celebrated the Passover meal one day early. At the same time the actions of Simon of Cyrene (Mk 15:21: returning from the fields) and Joseph of Arimathea (Mk 15:46: buys a sheet) lead one to say that it could not have been the day of the Passover.

To us it may seem incredible, but at that time it was not possible to establish the calendar with the same degree of accuracy as today. This led to a certain elasticity in coincidence between the day of the month and the day of the week. The Sadducees would avoid 15 Nisan falling on a Friday, and would make it fall on a Sabbath. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were quite meticulous in celebrating the Passover on whichever day of the week it fell.

Jesus celebrated his Last Supper on the night of Thursday-Friday, and died on the Friday. For the Pharisees (and most of the people) this would have been 15 Nisan, and the Day of the Passover. For the Sadducees (and so for the leading priests), this Friday was 14 Nisan and the following day, a Sabbath, was the Passover. The Synoptics follow the Pharisee calculation; St John looks to the chief priests, but implicitly indicates that Jesus was following the Pharisees' computation.

Jesus the Prophet

The word '*Christ*' comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Messiah*, which means 'anointed'. It became the name proper to Jesus only because he accomplished perfectly the divine mission that '*Christ*' signifies. In effect, in Israel those consecrated to God for a mission that he gave were anointed in his name. This was the case for kings, for priests and, in rare cases, for prophets. This had to be the case all the more so for the Messiah whom God would send to inaugurate his kingdom definitively. It was necessary that the Messiah be anointed by the Spirit of the Lord at once as king and priest, and also as prophet. Jesus fulfilled the messianic hope of Israel in his threefold office of priest, prophet and king.³⁵

"In many and various ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1-2).

A prophet is someone who speaks to men words which God has personally revealed to him for passing on to others. There were many prophets in the OT, and the Messiah himself was also foretold as a great Prophet, e.g. Deut 18:18:

"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him".

³⁵ CCC 436.

Jesus' contemporaries were expecting a Messiah who would also be "the Prophet" (cf. Jn 1:21,25), and he did in fact apply to himself Isaiah's words: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Is 61:1-2; cf. Lk 4:18-19). Jesus proclaims the Gospel, the Good News, of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mk 1:15).

Jesus as Master

Jesus is, then, Prophet. He is the Envoy sent by the Father to bring men the Word of God; his teaching therefore has divine authority; the Father himself requires us to listen to the word of Jesus (cf. Mt. 17:5). But Christ is more than Prophet; he is the Master, i.e., he who teaches on his own authority (Mt. 7:29): thus he is acknowledged and called Master by his disciples, and he accepts this title; he is not one master among many, but the absolute and only Master of the NT: "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am" (Jn 13:13). This personal authority with which he teaches, which the evangelists themselves bear witness to, made them "surprised to see him teaching everywhere and at all times, teaching in a manner and with an authority previously unknown"³⁶; it comes across very strongly in the words "but I tell you" (cf. Mt. 5:22; Jn 8:51; etc.). And when Jesus quotes passages from the OT, not only does he expound his teaching in the light of the sacred text but he also, and in a particular way, explains the sacred text in the light of himself.

The supreme and definitive character of Jesus' teachings derives from the fact that he is God-Man; this makes his human words to be in the fullest sense human words of God. St Thomas Aquinas says: "in Christo Deus docet immediate". Jesus does not only teach the truth; he is the Truth (cf. Jn 14:6). He is the Master who teaches and the Truth that is taught. And this takes place not just through words, but through everything he does "by his words and deeds (*verba et gesta*)" (Vat II DV, 2).

It follows that Christ has to be accepted as a teacher on a different level from all others; strictly speaking, he is the only teacher: "you are not to be called rabbi; for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren" (Mt. 23:8). He is a rabbi, a teacher who calls to himself a group of disciples who learn from him and then in their turn go out to proclaim his teachings. The authority of Christ the Teacher and the consistency and persuasiveness of his teachings is explained by the fact that his words, his parables and his arguments are inseparable from his life and his very being.

Jesus and the Kingdom

The kingly divinity of Christ was already proclaimed in the OT (cf. Ps 2:6; Is 9:6; 11:1-9; Dan 7:14; Mic 4:7; etc.) and equiparated to the status of Shepherd of the people, a people who are regarded as his flock (cf. Is 4:9-11; Ps 78:52; Mic 2:12-13; Jer 3:15; etc.). The angel also proclaimed it to Mary at the Annunciation:

"He will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:32-33)

Jesus' contemporaries were familiar with the idea of the Messiah as King. The Magi on their arrival in Jerusalem asked, "Where is he who has been born the king of the Jews" (Mt. 2:2); and Nathaniel, recognising Jesus as the Messiah, says, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (Jn 1:49).

In fact, it was precisely because so many Jews had such a material and earthbound idea of the Messianic Kingdom, that Jesus did not make much reference to his kingship; for example, when the people in their amazement over the multiplication of the loaves, wanted to proclaim him king, he "withdrew from

³⁶ JPII, *Catechesi tradendae*, n. 7.

them" (cf. Jn 6:15). But at a particularly solemn juncture, replying to Pilate's question, he affirmed, "You say that I am a king" (Jn 18:37). In the NT we find many other evidences of Christ's kingship, especially in the statement that Christ is the Lord (cf. Acts 2:36; Phil 2:11; Rom 10:9; I Cor 12:3; etc.). Finally, St John, in the Book of Revelation, sees Jesus in glory wearing a robe of royalty: "On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:16).

Jesus and the Law

Christ exercises his royal function in the establishing of his kingdom through actions proper to the Lord -gathering his people together and establishing the laws of the kingdom, whose supreme judge he declares himself to be. Christ is our Lawgiver. The Gospels tell us that he laid down laws -e.g., in the Sermon on the Mount; by instituting the Church and the sacraments; and by promulgating the New Law of love (cf. Jn 13:34-35). He is the "new lawgiver" who abrogated the Mosaic Law and established an "eternal law and a new testament". Christ is also our Judge, who will come to judge the living and the dead. He taught that "the Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son" (Jn 5:22)

JPII, Address, 30-9-87: "Since the power of judgement is profoundly united to the will to salvation, as can be inferred from the Gospel, it is a new revelation of the God of the Alliance *who comes* towards men as the Immanuel, to *free us from the slavery* of evil. It is the Christian revelation of the God who is Love". He establishes a new Kingdom, and begins his preaching proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom of God, which is essentially spiritual, in men's hearts: "the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:21); but insofar as it is made up of men, it is also something visible, a people: it is the Church, which makes its way on earth towards the eschatological fullness of the Kingdom at the end of time.³⁷ The Kingdom is a present reality and a future hope.

Jesus and the Temple

Jesus venerated the Temple by going up to it for the Jewish feasts of pilgrimage, and with a jealous love he loved this dwelling of God among men. The Temple prefigures his own mystery. When he announces its destruction, it is a manifestation of his own execution and of the entry into a new age in the history of salvation, when his Body would be the definitive Temple.³⁸

If the Law and the Jerusalem Temple could be occasions of opposition to Jesus by Israel's religious authorities, his role in the redemption of sins, the divine work *par excellence*, was the true stumbling-block for them (cf. Lk 2:34; 20:17-18; Ps 118:22).³⁹

Indeed, Jesus scandalised the Pharisees by eating with tax collectors and sinners (Lk 5:30), and above all because he identified his merciful conduct towards sinners with God's own attitude toward them. Only the divine identity of Jesus' person can justify so absolute a claim as "He who is not with me is against me" (Mt. 12:30); and his saying that there was in him "something greater than Jonah,... greater than Solomon" (Mt. 12:41-42), something "greater than the Temple" (Mt. 12:6).

The Temple of Jerusalem was the earthly figure or representation of the throne of God in heaven. From the Tent of Meeting in the desert, it had indicated the presence of God in the midst of his people (Ex 40:34-38). When Solomon celebrated the dedication of the Temple centuries later, the cloud descended resting on the sacred building (2 Kg 8:10-11). However the true Temple of God, where he dwells among us is the sacred Humanity of the Incarnate Word. The human body of Jesus is the reality of which the Temple in Jerusalem was but an anticipated figure. The humanity of Jesus is therefore greater than the Temple to the extent that the reality is superior to the image that represents it.

³⁷ cf. Vat II LG, 3 & 9.

³⁸ CCC 593.

³⁹ CCC 587.

Jesus, Son of Man and Servant of Yahweh

"Son of Man" (cf. Mt. 8:20). This is one of the expressions used to designate the Messiah in the OT. The title appears for the first time in Dan 7:13:

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him".

Until Our Lord's preaching it was not understood in all its depth. It could simply mean "man"; or, because of the reference to Daniel's vision it makes the connection with glorious figure mentioned there and the suffering figure of the Servant foretold by Isaiah, particularly when Jesus goes on to say "the Son of Man will suffer at their hands" (Mt. 17:12). The title "Son of Man" was less associated with the Jewish hopes for an earthly Messiah, which is probably why Jesus preferred to use it to refer to himself, while avoiding certain nationalistic connotations implied by other titles. It was a way of referring to his messianic mission without linking it to political interpretations. After the resurrection the Apostles came to understand that "Son of Man" was equivalent to "Son of God".

Although a reading of the OT passage in Isaiah on the Servant of Yahweh does not by itself reveal the suffering Servant as the King-Messiah, the NT makes it clear that he is the same Jesus Christ (cf., e.g., Mt 27:29-31; Jn 12:38; Acts 8:32-33). The passage of Our Lord's baptism and the words from heaven: "This is my Son, my (or the) beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17; and also the Transfiguration, Mt. 17:5) seems to be reminiscent of the suffering Servant of Is 42:1: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights".

The miracles of the Messiah

The revelation made by Jesus was carried out in words and deeds.

Jesus accompanies his words with many 'mighty works and wonders and signs', which manifest that the kingdom is present in him and attest that he was the promised Messiah (Acts 2:22; cf. Lk 7:18-23).⁴⁰

The signs worked by Jesus attest that the Father has sent him. They invite belief in him. To those who turn to him in faith, he grants what they ask. So miracles strengthen faith in the One who does his Father's works; they bear witness that he is the Son of God. [...] ⁴¹

By freeing some individuals from the earthly evils of hunger, injustice, illness and death, Jesus performed messianic signs. Nevertheless he did not come to abolish all evils here below, but to free men from the greatest slavery, sin, which thwarts them in their vocation as God's sons and causes all forms of human bondage.⁴²

⁴⁰ CCC 547.

⁴¹ CCC 548.

⁴² CCC 549.

Recommended readings:

CCC 577-586.

Some sources:

cf. also J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, pp. 110-115.

Navarre Bible, *St Mark*, pp. 45-51.

F. Ocariz, L.F. Mateo-Seco, J.A. Riestra, *The Mystery of Jesus Christ*, Four Courts Press, Dublin 1994, pp. 142 et seq.

Jesus, Mediator of a new Covenant.

Christ is the Good Shepherd who gives his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:1-21). In him is our salvation (cf. Acts 4:12). Salvation comes to us from Jesus Christ, not only through his example, not only through his word, but also and primarily through his own life, through his death and resurrection. His sufferings have reconciled us to God, setting us free from the power of the devil, from sin and from death. By this “dying for us”, Jesus fulfils “what was spoken by the prophets” (cf. Lk 24:25-27).

Theology sees Christ’s death set in a religious context, which considers the relationships between God, who is holy, and man, who is a sinner. It is the context of salvation, the history of salvation. In other words, this death is directly connected to human sin (cf. Rom 5:12-17), and to reconciliation with God (cf. II Cor 5:18-19). The NT vigorously and persistently draws our attention to the fact that Christ’s death is a true sacrifice, that is, a supreme act of worship to be rendered to God alone. And it sets this sacrifice against the background of the OT sacrifices; but it is much greater than they were, as reality is so much greater than figure (cf. Heb 9:9-14). At the same time it is seen as a new Covenant against the background of the OT covenants, and greater than them too. According to the NT, Christ’s death is closely connected to 3 key sacrifices of the OT :

-the sacrifice of the Covenant (Ex 24:4-8);

-that of the Passover lamb (Ex 12:1-14, 21-27, 46-47);

-and that of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:1-34).

Christ’s death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ (Jn 1:29; cf. 8:34-36; I Cor 5:7; I Pet 1:19) and the *sacrifice of the new Covenant*, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the ‘blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Mt. 26:28; cf. Ex 24:8; Lev 16:15-16; I Cor 11:25).⁴³

Reference to the sacrifice of the Covenant is to be found in the words Our Lord says over the cup, calling his blood the “blood of the covenant” (cf. Mt. 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20). St Paul reminds us of this when he passes on the tradition he has received about the Eucharist (cf. I Cor 11:23-27). That is why Hebrews stresses so much that Christ is the mediator of a New Testament, a new Covenant, a new Alliance with the Lord (cf. Heb 7:22), that is, of a new and everlasting covenant.

The Passover and the sacrifice of the paschal lamb are referred to by the Baptist when he introduces Our Lord as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). The Last Supper takes place in an obvious Passover setting, and the evangelists emphasise this, pointing to Christ’s death as a sacrifice which seals the new Covenant. The words used at the institution of the Eucharist also allude to the Passover sacrifice, when they include the instruction to renew the sacrifice of the bread and wine as a “memorial” of Our Lord’s death (cf. I Cor 11:24, 26), thereby connecting it with an essential feature of the Jewish Passover -the fact that it is a commemoration of God’s liberation of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt (cf. Ex 12:14). In St John there are many allusions linking Christ’s death to the Passover sacrifice -for example, when he calls attention to the fact that “they did not break his legs”, thereby fulfilling the regulation that not a bone be broken of the Passover lamb (cf. Jn 19:33-36; Ex 12:46; Num 9:12). Also the Lamb (sacrificed and glorified) in the Book of Revelation is evocative of the Passover lamb (cf. Rev 5:6, 9; 12:4; 15:3). And St Paul, in a clear reference to the Passover meal, exhorts the faithful of Corinth to get rid of the old leaven and become “a new lump”, that is, “unleavened because Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed” (I Cor 5:7).

⁴³ CCC 613.

The sacrifice on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), for the blotting out of the faults of the people, was a particularly solemn one. This was the only day in the year when the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood of sacrificial victims on the Propitiatory, set upon the Ark of the Covenant (cf. Lev 16:1-34). The Letter to the Hebrews makes a lengthy comparison between this sacrifice and the death of Christ and his entry into the sanctuary (cf. Heb 9:1-7). St John is probably referring to this sacrifice when he says of Christ that he is "the expiation for our sins" (I Jn 2:2) and that God "sent his Son to be the expiation of our sins" (I Jn 4:10), and when he says that "the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin" (I Jn 1:7). The propitiatory character of Christ's death is spelt out particularly clearly in Rom 3:23-25:

"since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."

The NT also contains numerous references to Christ's death being a sacrifice, without their being necessarily allusions to the three types of sacrifice mentioned before. The entire NT is imbued with the idea that Christ's life and death has a sacrificial meaning. This comes across very clearly in the songs of the Servant of Yahweh, which are echoed, e.g., in the hymn in Phil 2:5-11. Jesus "emptied himself unto death" out of obedience, because the father had commanded him to give up his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:18; 14:31). St Paul repeatedly says that Christ gave his life for us, out of love for us: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25); "he died for all" (II Cor 5:14); one died for all (cf. Rom 5:6, 8; 9:32; 14:15; I Cor 11:24; Gal 2:20; I Tim 2:6; Tit 2:14); "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:2). In Hebrews, Christ's death, of greater value than all sacrifices, replaces them; it, on its own, suffices to purify the consciences of all men (cf. Heb 9:11-28).

The Fathers of the Church also depict Christ's death as a sacrifice (e.g. the Paschal Homilies of Melitus of Sardis in 2nd century), often using quite technical, exact sacrificial terminology (e.g., Origen, St Basil, St Gregory of Nyssa, St Augustine).

"Jesus' violent death was not the result of chance in an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, but is part of the mystery of God's plan, as St Peter explains to the Jews of Jerusalem in his first sermon on Pentecost: 'This Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God' (Acts 2:23). This biblical language does not mean that those who handed him over were merely passive players in a scenario written in advance by God (cf. Acts 3:13)".⁴⁴

"The Scriptures had foretold this divine plan of salvation through the putting to death of 'the righteous one, my Servant' as a mystery of universal redemption, that is, as the ransom that would free men from the slavery of sin. Citing a confession of faith that he himself had 'received', St Paul professes that 'Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the scriptures*.' In particular Jesus' redemptive death fulfils Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant. Indeed Jesus himself explained the meaning of his life and death in the light of God's suffering Servant (Mt 20:28). After his Resurrection he gave this interpretation of the Scriptures to the disciples at Emmaus, and then to the apostles."⁴⁵

The Christian understanding of the salvific value of Christ's Passion and Death has been summarised by Vat II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,

"As an innocent lamb [Jesus Christ] merited life for us by his blood which he freely shed. In him God reconciled us to himself and to one another, freeing us from the bondage of the devil and of sin, so that each one of us could say with the apostle: the Son of God 'loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20). By suffering for us he not only gave us an

⁴⁴ CCC 599.

⁴⁵ CCC 601.

example so that we might follow in his footsteps, but he also opened up a way. If we follow this path, life and death are made holy and acquire a new meaning".⁴⁶

Jesus' whole life is a sacrificial offering for our sins; but, in his Passion and Death this offering reaches its high point.

"This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices. First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience."⁴⁷

"[...] No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons, and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice *for all*".⁴⁸

The Resurrection

"Christ's Resurrection is *the fulfilment of the promises* both of the OT and of Jesus himself during his earthly life. [...]"⁴⁹

Romans 4:25 gives the key to the theology of divine salvation in Christ:

"[Jesus our Lord] was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification".

The Passion-Death-Resurrection of Jesus form a unity, the saving act which the Church calls the "Paschal Mystery".

The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life. This new life is above all *justification* that reinstates us in God's grace, 'so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life' (Rom 6:4; cf. 4:25). Justification consists in both victory over death caused by sin and a new participation in grace. It brings about *filial adoption* so that men become Christ's brethren, as Jesus himself called his disciples after his Resurrection: 'Go and tell my brethren' (Mt 28:10). We are brethren not by nature, but by the gift of grace, because that adoptive filiation gains us a real share in the life of the only Son, which was fully revealed in his Resurrection".⁵⁰

"Finally, Christ's Resurrection -and the risen Christ himself- is the principle source of *our future resurrection*: 'Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep... For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive' (I Cor 15:20-22). The risen Christ lives in the hearts of his faithful while they await that fulfilment. In Christ, Christians 'have tasted... the powers of the age to come' (Heb 6:5) and their lives are swept up by Christ into the heart of divine life, so that they may 'live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised' (II Cor 5:15).⁵¹

⁴⁶ *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22.

⁴⁷ CCC 614.

⁴⁸ CCC 616.

⁴⁹ CCC 652.

⁵⁰ CCC 654.

⁵¹ CCC 655.

The appearances of the Risen One.

"Everything that happened during those Paschal days involves each of the apostles -and Peter in particular- in the building of the new era begun on Easter morning. As witnesses of the Risen One, they remain the foundation stones of his Church. The faith of the first community of believers is based on the witness of concrete men known to the Christians and for the most part still living among them. Peter and the Twelve are the primary 'witnesses to his Resurrection', but they are not the only ones - Paul speaks clearly of more than five hundred persons to whom Jesus appeared on a single occasion and also of James and of all the apostles.⁵²

His last appearance to his disciples was on the occasion of his Ascension into heaven. Jesus is not just a man to be admired who has left us the most relevant example of what human existence should be: Jesus Christ is the cause of our salvation. In his Ascension into heaven we see the exaltation of his humanity to a state of heavenly glory. He is the first-fruits and the anticipation of our future glorification.

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32). The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven, and indeed begins it. Jesus Christ, the one high priest of the new and eternal Covenant "entered, not into a sanctuary made by human hands... but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf." (Heb 9:24). There Christ permanently exercises his priesthood, for he "always lives to make intercession" for "those who draw near to God through him" (Heb 7:25). As "high priest of the good things to come" (Heb 9:11) he is the centre and the principal actor in the liturgy that honours the Father in heaven.

There is a sense of a promise and a taste of future fulfilment.⁵³

Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father's glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever.⁵⁴

Jesus Christ, having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵

The Ascension also marks the giving of a clear mandate to the Church to carry on Christ's mission of salvation:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."(Mt 28:18-20)

Here Christ passes on to the Apostles and their successors the power to baptise, that is, to receive people into the Church, thereby opening up for them the way to personal salvation. The mission which the Church is definitively given here at the end of St Matthew's Gospel is one of continuing the work of Christ -teaching men and women the truths concerning God and the duty incumbent on them to identify with these truths, to make them their own by having constant recourse to the grace of the sacraments. This mission will endure until the end of time and, to enable it to do this work, the risen Christ promises to stay with the Church and never leave it. When Sacred Scripture says that God is with someone, this means that that person will be successful in everything he undertakes. Therefore, the Church, helped in this way by the presence of its divine Founder, can be confident of never failing to fulfil its mission down the centuries until the end of time.⁵⁶

⁵² CCC 642.

⁵³ CCC 662.

⁵⁴ CCC 666.

⁵⁵ CCC 667.

⁵⁶ Navarre Bible, *St Matthew*, 28:18-20, footnote.

Recommended readings:

CCC 577-586.

Some sources:

F. Ocáriz, L.F. Mateo-Seco, J.A. Riestra, *The Mystery of Jesus Christ*, Four Courts Press, Dublin 1994, pp. 218 et seq.

V. THE TIME OF THE CHURCH

The birth of the Church.

Pentecost

On the day of Pentecost when the seven weeks of Easter had come to an end, Christ's Passover is fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, manifested, given and communicated as a divine person: of his fullness, Christ, the Lord, pours out the Spirit in abundance.⁵⁷

[...] By his coming, which never ceases, the Holy Spirit causes the world to enter into the 'last days', the time of the Church, the Kingdom already inherited though not yet consummated.⁵⁸

The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This joint mission henceforth brings Christ's faithful to share in his communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit *prepares* men and goes out to them with his grace, in order to draw them to Christ. The Spirit *manifests* the risen Lord to them, recalls his word to them and opens their minds to the understanding of his death and Resurrection. He *makes present* the mystery of Christ, supremely in the Eucharist, in order to reconcile them, to *bring them into communion* with God, that they may 'bear much fruit'.⁵⁹

Thus the Church's mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but its sacrament: in her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity.⁶⁰

The Roman Empire in the First Century

The birth and early development of Christianity took place within the political and cultural framework of the Roman empire. It is true that pagan Rome persecuted the Christians for three centuries; but it would be wrong to see the empire as only a negative factor in the spread of the Gospel. Rome had imposed unity on the Greco-Latin world; this meant that over a huge area, under a single supreme authority, peace and order reigned. This situation lasted until well into the third century and good communications among the various parts of the empire made it easy for ideas to circulate. The Roman roads and the sea-routes of the Mediterranean provided channels for the Gospel to spread over the whole Mediterranean area.

The Empire in which the first Christian "apostles" worked was a vast state whose 40 provinces took in roughly all Europe west of the Rhine and south of the Danube, with the island of Britain, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Arabia and Egypt, and then from Egypt along the north coast of Africa to the Atlantic. These provinces differed greatly in their history and their character, and in the way Roman power "romanised" them. In Greece and Asia there were peoples culturally superior to the Romans. In Syria and especially in Egypt there was a civilisation older even than the Greek, although now "hellenised"; in Gaul the Celts had their own civilisation, etc.

⁵⁷ CCC 731.

⁵⁸ CCC 732.

⁵⁹ CCC 737.

⁶⁰ CCC 738.

Rome had, however, shown a unique capacity for combining diversity in union, a political flexibility always ready to find new relationships on which to build alliances.

There was a common language in the empire -based on Greek, at first, and then on Greek and Latin, later. This made it easier for people to communicate and understand each other. Paganism was in crisis and many spiritually sensitive people were searching for religious truth and so receptive to the message of the Gospel.

There were roughly three main religious influences abroad in the Empire at the time of the birth of Christianity:

- all the religions associated with the culture of classical antiquity, of Greece and of Rome:

- the religions which originated in the pre-Roman culture of the Empire, e.g., Celtic religions in the West, and the ancient religions of the East;

- the religion of the Jewish people, which although one of the latter, is a religion apart, demanding special treatment.

The first of these, paganism, in its many varied forms was the practice of the majority within the Empire. There was the old paganism: animistic, anthropomorphic. This had developed into a system of naturalistic gods who were conceived as having human form, and among whom there was a hierarchy, and with each god, demi-god, and hero went an appropriate myth and due worship. A particular aspect of Roman religion was its domestic character. The family itself was a sacred thing. The strength of this family element was shown in the cult of the dead.

However, with the growth of the philosophers the inevitable antagonism between Greek religion and Greek intelligence had begun to show. Side by side with the ancient public religions, there began to appear new secret cults, open only to the initiated, in which the dissatisfaction with the older cults' puerility was manifest.

At the same time there had been the criticism of the new moral philosophy according to which belief in gods was futile, a waste of life, the greatest of follies. This scepticism emptied many religious practices of anything but a sense of civic duty. There was no speculation as to the nature of the gods. Cicero described religion as the science of ritual. Religion was something to be used, empty of any spiritual meaning, a legal requirement, a political tool, in which Rome and the Emperor gained divine status. Certainly there was no element of holiness and sanctity in this ritual to the gods, nor did true adoration or love find a place.

The Church in Jerusalem

Acts 1:15 tells us of an initial group of believers "about 120 persons", who, after Our Lord's Ascension, "devoted themselves to prayer" (v. 14), awaiting in the upper room in Jerusalem the coming of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost "about 3,000 were added to their number" (Acts 2:41). Scripture goes on to tell us something of their lives:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

Later in Acts we read the following:

"Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need." (Acts 4:32-35)

And the general situation is described as follows:

"And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but people held them in high honour. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed." (Acts 5:12b-16)

And about the time of the ordination of the first deacons we read:

"Now in these days when the disciples were increasing [...] And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:1a, 7)

Relations with the authorities

"A disciple is not above his teacher" (Mt 10:24), Jesus had told his disciples. The Sanhedrin declared Jesus a criminal to be punished by death for claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God. It was only logical for the Jewish authorities to be hostile to his apostles, when they proclaimed that Jesus had risen and confirmed their preaching by various public miracles. The Sanhedrin tried to silence them, but Peter replied to the High Priest, "we must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). The Apostles were put under the lash, but neither threat nor punishment could silence them, and they left rejoicing "that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour" for the name of Jesus. The death by stoning of St Stephen the deacon marked the beginning of severe persecution of Jesus' disciples. The split between Christianity and Judaism grew steadily deeper and more overt.

"Hebrews" and "Hellenists"

The issue of the universality of redemption was a problematic one. It was difficult for many Jewish Christians, attached as they were to their old traditions, to understand how Gentiles could be members of the Church and inheritors of the promises. They felt that for Gentile converts to have access to salvation they needed at the very least to be circumcised and to keep the regulations of the Law of Moses. Understandably this disturbed Christians of Gentile background, so the Church was forced to examine the whole question of the relationship between the old law and the new law, and to affirm unequivocally the Church's independence of the Synagogue. To discuss these fundamental problems the so-called 'council' of Jerusalem met in AD 49. At this assembly Paul and Barnabas spoke on behalf of the churches of Gentile background and bore witness to the wonders God had worked among them. Peter once again spoke with authority in favour of Christians' freedom regarding Jewish legal observances. On the proposal of James, bishop of Jerusalem, the council agreed not to lay any unnecessary burdens on Gentile converts: they should only have to obey a few simple rules: keep away from fornication and, as regards the old law, abstain from meat which was strangled or had been sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:1-33), thus definitively solving the question of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Jewish Christians in Palestine still followed their own style for a while, but they were a minority within the Christian Church ever more widespread throughout the Gentile world.

Some sources:

cf. also J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, pp. 115-116.

J. Orlandis, *A Short History of the Catholic Church*, Four Courts Press, Dublin 1993, p. 15.

P Hughes, *A History of the Church, vol. I*, London 1961, pp. 1-, 8, 12 et seq.

The setting up of Christian communities outside Jerusalem.

In contrast with the national character of the Jewish religion, the catholicity of Christianity soon expressed itself. Disciples of Jesus, in flight from Jerusalem, as a result of the persecution that began after the martyrdom of St Stephen, ("everyone except the apostles fled to the country districts of Judaea and Samaria" Acts 8:1) reached Antioch in Syria, one of the great cities of the East. We know from the activity of Saul that they were also present in Damascus. Some of these Christians were Hellenists, with an outlook more open than that of the Palestinian Jews, and they began to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles as well:

"Those who had escaped during the persecution that happened because of Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, but they usually proclaimed the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch where they started preaching to the Greeks, proclaiming the Good News of the Lord Jesus to them as well. The Lord helped them, and a great number believed and were converted to the Lord." (Acts 11:18b-21 Jer)

In cosmopolitan Antioch, the universality of the Church became patent; and it was there, for the first time, that Christ's followers were called Christians (Acts 11:26).

In Antioch the Gospel was proclaimed not only to Jews and proselytes. The Hellenist Jews who come from Jerusalem preach the Gospel to everyone and anyone. The mission at Antioch played an important part in the spread of Christianity. Evangelization of non-Jews becomes the norm, not just something that happens in a few isolated cases. Nor is it limited to "God-fearers"; it extends to all the Gentiles. This is a first stage where the centre of gravity of the Church begins to move from Jerusalem to Antioch, as a springboard for the evangelization of the pagan world.⁶¹

This universality of the redemption and of the Church of Jesus Christ was formally confirmed by a miraculous event in which the Apostle Peter was the protagonist. The extraordinary signs surrounding the conversion of Cornelius, a centurion at Caesarea, and his family, cleared up any doubts Peter had on this subject; as he put it, "Truly I perceive that God shows no particularity, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). The news that Peter had given baptism to uncircumcised Gentiles caused a stir among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Peter was required to report his experience in great detail before they were ready to change their minds and relinquish their deeply held prejudices. They began to realise that the redemption brought by Christ was universal: the Church was open to everyone: "When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life'" (Acts 11:18). Also significant is the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch: a disciple of Christ, moved by the Spirit, promptly obeys his command, preaches basing himself on the Scriptures and administers baptism. It is like a summary of the missionary activity of the early Church.

The great promoters of the spread of Christianity were the Apostles, acting in obedience to Christ's commandment to proclaim the Gospel to all the nations. Acts tells us of Philip the deacon who preached in Samaria (8:5) Due to lack of historical documents it is difficult to find out much about the missionary activity of most of the Apostles. We know that Peter, on leaving Palestine where he preached in Lydda, Jaffa, Caesarea, etc., made Antioch his base (where there was already an important Christian community). It is possible that he also lived in Corinth for a while, but his final base was Rome, where he was the first bishop. In Rome he suffered martyrdom under the Emperor Nero around 64 or 65 AD. John the Apostle, the Evangelist, stayed for a long time in Palestine, later moving to Ephesus. Very early traditions speak of James the Greater in Spain, of Thomas in India, of Mark the Evangelist in Alexandria, etc.

⁶¹ Navarre Bible, *Acts of the Apostles*, 11:19-30, footnote.

The work of the Apostles does not complete the picture of the spread of Christianity in the ancient world. For the most part, the bearers of the first tidings of the Gospel must have been ordinary, humble people. Generalising, one could say that in the first centuries Christianity was to be found more in the cities than among the rural communities. By the time the Church obtained its freedom, in the fourth century, Christianity was already deeply rooted in many parts of the Near East, such as Syria, Asia Minor and Armenia; and in the West in Rome and its surrounding area and in Latin Africa. There was also a considerable presence in the Nile valley and in various parts of Italy, Spain and Gaul. St Alban, the first British martyr died around 304 AD, so Christianity arrived here before St Augustine of Canterbury in 597AD.

But there were also very serious obstacles in the way of people embracing the Christian faith. For Christians of Jewish background it meant breaking with their community of origin -which now regarded them as deserters and traitors. Gentile converts, especially those belonging to the upper classes, encountered similar difficulties: their faith did not allow them to take part in a series of traditional pagan religious practices involving the worship of Rome and the emperor, yet these practices were part and parcel of a citizen's everyday life and were a conventional sign of loyalty to the empire. Hence the accusation so often levelled against the Christians that they were "atheists". This was a reason why they were threatened with persecution and martyrdom -a threat which hung over them for centuries and meant that to become a Christian involved taking risks; and demanded a high degree of moral courage.

The first Christians in Rome

We do not know anything about the first Christian community in Rome or how it came to be founded. The tradition is that it was founded by St Peter, which does not mean that no other Christians arrived there before him, or that there had not been conversions there of pagans or of Jewish residents.⁶²

It has been calculated that in Nero's times the city of Rome had around a million inhabitants. On the day of Pentecost Acts 2:10 tells us there were visitors from Rome in Jerusalem; perhaps some of them converted that day (cf. Acts 2:41). It is also known that Rome had a Jewish community of some 50,000 with 13 synagogues. The historian Suetonius in his *Vita Claudii* says that in the reign of that emperor (AD 41-54) the Jews were expelled from the city because "under the instigation of a certain Chrestus they stirred up frequent riots". That is how Aquila and Priscilla found themselves in Corinth where they met St Paul; but they were Christians already at that point (Acts 18:2). Similarly, at the end of his epistle to the Romans Paul greets Andronicus and Junias who became Christians before him, i.e., before AD 38.⁶³

While there were very probably Christians in Rome before, the foundation of the Church as a body was due to St Peter. The unanimous tradition concerning St Peter's stay in Rome focuses on two pieces of information: that Peter arrived in Rome during the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54) [Eusebius the historian], and that he spent 25 years preaching in Rome [*Catalogus libri Pontificalis*]. Certainly St Paul writes to the Church in Rome (around AD 58) as to an already flourishing community (cf. Rom 1:8; 16:16).

It was probably made up of Christians coming from a Jewish background as well as Gentile converts. St Paul in his letter makes several references to Judaism and the books of the OT (e.g., Rom 3:10-18): he recalls the call of Abraham (Rom 4), and the history of Israel (Rom 9-11). However, he also speaks in the epistle very directly to those (possibly more numerous) who do not belong to the Israelites according to the flesh (Rom 4:11-12; 9:3; 10:1), and tells them not to think themselves better than the Jews (Rom 11:20, 24). Indeed towards the end of his letter he makes an appeal for unity:

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in

⁶² Navarre Bible, *Acts of the Apostles*, 28:15, footnote.

⁶³ Navarre Bible, *Romans and Galatians*, Introd.

order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy." (Rom 15:7-9a)

Some sources:

J. Orlandis, *A Short History of the Catholic Church*, pp. 12 et seq.:

St Paul and the preaching to the Gentiles.

Of all the Apostles we know most about St Paul, who was not one of the Twelve, thanks to the accounts in the Acts of the Apostles and the important body of Pauline letters. He was the Apostle of the Gentiles, *par excellence*, and his missionary journeys brought the Gospel to Asia Minor and Greece, where he founded and directed many churches. Taken prisoner in Jerusalem, his long captivity gave him the opportunity to bear witness to Christ before the Sanhedrin, the Roman Governors of Judaea and King Agrippa II. After being brought to Rome he was set free by Caesar's courts. Imprisoned for a second time, he was tried again and condemned to a martyr's death in Rome.

Gospel preached by St Paul

St Paul's theology is not always easy to grasp as St Peter warns in his second epistle:

"And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures." (II Pet 3:15-16)

We will now briefly look at some of the basic ideas underpinning the teaching of St Paul:

1. Human life without Christ: St Paul is keen to point out what man's life would be and is without redemption:

a) Sin: a fundamental starting point for St Paul is that the work of Christ, Christianity, is redemption, liberation from sin.

b) The flesh: following the OT tradition, the flesh is opposed to the spirit, all that brings man down, including his feelings, instincts, sentiments and passions which rebel against his intelligence and will. The flesh is an ally of sin, though not the same thing.

c) Death: the punishment for sin. Man without Christ is a slave of sin, betrayed by the flesh and destined to death.

d) The Law: also an ally of sin, because although it points out the good, it does not contain the grace to help man avoid evil. It is simply knowledge of sin.

e) Unredeemed mankind: man by himself, without Christ, is radically incapable of freeing himself from the miserable state he is in because of original sin, and his own personal sins.

2. Salvation in Christ: the insistent teaching of the apostle is that Christ is the Saviour of mankind.

a) The salvific "mystery": The "Gospel" of St Paul is above all a salvific or soteriological message, i.e., the revelation and putting into effect of God's plan or design for the salvation of mankind. He speaks of the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the Gospel, the mystery of God, the mystery of his will, the mystery of faith or simply, the mystery. It is the divine plan of salvation for all mankind, regardless of people or race, conceived by God from eternity, but only now (in apostolic times) revealed, although it had been foretold in the OT. While begun in this world, it will only reach its fullness in the world to come. It is the plan of divine Wisdom: that all things should be reconciled with God in Christ. This reconciliation is

achieved through the Body of Christ which is the Church, the instrument chosen to bring about salvation. It is the "instaurare omnia in Christo" (Eph 1:10):

"For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9-10)

The "recapitulation" of all things in Christ (making Christ *head* -caput- of all things) is a new, and deeper way of expressing the divine salvific plan. This is most evident in St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, where his teaching on salvation, Christ and the Church find their fullest expression.

b) The divinity of Christ: Jesus is the only one who could bring this plan of salvation to completion and that is why he was sent into the world. Jesus is the Lord, the Son of God.

c) The Incarnation of the Son: the mystery of salvation is pure mercy on God's part, and pure love. There are no other reasons for the Incarnation than God's love for us, to redeem us as God and man. The total victory and liberation has been possible because Jesus is God and man.

d) Theology of the Death of Christ. Here the message is quite simple: Christ died to save us from our sins; through his blood we have been redeemed. The death of Christ has been the perfect reparation for sin.

e) Theology of the Resurrection of Christ. The historical event of the glorious resurrection of Our Lord from the dead is the proof of what Jesus did and said of himself. It is a crucial point in our faith in Christ; it is the start of the glorification and exaltation of the Humanity of Christ.

3. The Church: Of all the inspired writers of the NT, St Paul is the one who speaks most of the Church and its mysterious nature. He speaks of it as the Mystical Body of Christ, and as such a unity and united. The Church is the People of God, the true Israel and inheritor of the promise made to the Patriarchs: a holy people, a chosen people. The Church is also the universal instrument of salvation. Christ is the Saviour of mankind, and the Church, his Body, is the sacrament and instrument of this salvation.

The Letters of St Paul

Navarre Bible, *Romans and Galatians*, Introd., p. 19 et seq.: The order in which we usually find St Paul's letters in the NT is artificial, putting together the letters to communities and then those to individuals. The chronological order is different, and as follows:

- The Letters to the Thessalonians, written from Corinth in the years 50-52 (i.e., around 20 years after the death of Jesus), are the oldest writings of the NT, given that Matthew in Aramaic has not come down to us. They deal fundamentally with the Second Coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead.

-The Great Epistles come next: Galatians, I and II Corinthians, and Romans, written between spring 53 and spring 58. Galatians deals with the freedom Christians have regarding the fulfilment of the Mosaic Law and the traditions of the scribes, i.e., the question of the Judaizers. The Letters to the Corinthians cover the unity of the Church and of the Christians. St Paul also deals with moral questions, the Eucharist, the Resurrection. He speaks with the authority of an Apostle and the affection of a father.

Romans: the longest of Paul's letters, it covers the principal points of doctrine and the redeeming work of Christ, covering much the same topics as Galatians, but more deeply. Romans is the most profound of the Apostles letters, the backbone of his other epistles.

-The Captivity Letters: These date from Paul's first house arrest in Rome, probably 61-63 AD. These epistles are: Philemon, in which he touches on the equality of all in Christ. Philippians, containing the important "Christological hymn" (Phil 2:6-11). Colossians, where the Apostle tackles the problems for

the faith caused by Eastern Gnosticism. Paul writes in depth on the mystery of Christ's being, as well as moral and disciplinary matters. Ephesians: this letter marks a climax in St Paul's spiritual and doctrinal discussion of the mystery of Christ's nature and personality; the meaning of Redemption; and the theology of the Church.

-The Pastoral Letters: The two letters to Timothy and the one to Titus are given this general title. Written between 65 and 66 or 67 (depending on the date of his martyrdom), these epistles serve to guide and help the two disciples in their work as Paul's assistants in the pastoral government of various churches. Here he is concerned about ecclesial order (hierarchy) and discipline, which were taking shape at the time. Paul's main concern here is the consolidation of those churches already founded. The epistles contain both theological concepts and practical advice.

-Letter to the Hebrews: no longer unanimously attributed to St Paul, it is at least of his "parentage". Probably written around 65 AD, it seems to be addressed in the first instance to a group of Christians of Jewish origin, perhaps containing a large number of convert priests and Levites. It focuses on the Temple, and the Priesthood and Sacrifice of Christ.

Geographical situation and background of the pauline communities

Thessalonica, now known as Salonika, was a flourishing centre of trade in St Paul's time, one of the most important cities of Macedonia. It was a typical pagan city, basically ignorant of religious truth. St Paul preached first to the Jewish community there.

Galatia was an inland region of Asia Minor, surrounding present day Ankara. The Galatians were of Celtic stock, descended from people who had migrated there in the 3rd century BC. Many of them were shepherds, honest, upright people, warm and affectionate. Paul made contact with them on his first missionary journey.

Corinth was one of the most important commercial cities of the ancient world. Situated in a privileged position it boasted two ports. It was an obligatory stop on the journey between Asia and Italy. It was a port city with a cosmopolitan population representing many different religions, but with the problems associated with ports -including moral decadence. Among the problems the first Christians there faced was the worship of Aphrodite and the thousand "priestesses" dedicated to the goddess, who practised so-called "sacred prostitution".

The Christian community at Philippi was made up mainly of retired legionaries, who had been assigned lands and employment by a grateful Empire. Retired army men had settled there with their families; their background gave them a sense of discipline, loyalty and dedication, proud of their Roman citizenship. The Jewish community, on the other hand, would have been small, not even enjoying a synagogue.

The Christian community at Colossae had been founded by Epaphras, a disciple of St Paul. The motive for St Paul's letter to them was that they had been affected by early instances of Persian and Mesopotamian Gnosticism that had come via Jewish travellers. Thus they were infected by dualistic ideas.

In the time of St Paul Ephesus was the leading city of Asia Minor, close to the Aegean Sea. From ancient times the religious allegiance of the city was given to the eastern goddess of fertility, Artemis for the Greeks (Diana for the Romans) with a magnificent temple in her honour. The city was also famous for magic and occultism and its inhabitants were notoriously superstitious.

The consolidation of the early Church

In its expansion in the ancient world Christianity adapted itself to the institutions and lifestyle of Roman society. Wherever it went, classical Rome, by policy, promoted city life: municipalities and colonies developed over all the provinces of the empire. Christianity was born in this historical context, and

it was in the cities that the first Christian communities established themselves, as local churches. Their surroundings were pagan and hostile -which had the effect of giving them greater internal cohesion and made for solidarity among their members. Yet these churches were not isolated nuclei: there was a real communion and communication among the churches, and they all had a keen sense of being components of one and the same universal Church.

Many of the churches of the first century were founded by Apostles, and as long as these Apostles lived they remained under their authority, being managed by a "college" of presbyters (priests or "elders") who were in charge of their liturgical life and good order. As the Apostles died, monarchical local episcopacy -which had been introduced from the very start of some churches- became the general system. The bishop ('inspector', 'superintendent') was the head of the church, the shepherd of the faithful, and, as successor of the Apostles, he had the fullness of the priesthood and the authority necessary for governing the community.

One of the principal ways of governing and instructing the Church was through the preaching of the bishop. Doctrine was all-important. To keep it pure and unalloyed is a chief function of the Church, to pass on what she has received from the Master. The bishop's teaching was given to the general body of the faithful in the weekly assembly, held every first day of the week, at which the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist was offered and the whole Church received the sacrament. The sermons or instruction were preceded by the reading from the books of the OT and NT. There was also systematic instruction given to the newly converted in preparation for baptism, the catechumenate followed by the mystagogical catechesis after baptism during the Easter ceremonies.

Recommended readings:

Some sources:

cf. also J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, pp. 116-117.

Navarre Bible, *Romans and Galatians*, Introd., p. 29 et seq.

J. Orlandis, *A Short History of the Catholic Church*, p. 19.

P. Hughes, *A Popular History of the Church*, London 1947, p. 17.

Other developments of the Church during the apostolic age.

The Church, from the first moment it is revealed to us in the NT, is organised in a multitude of "churches", one church to each city. In each church there are two groups, the clergy, who preside over its affairs, offer the sacrifice, administer the sacraments, explain the teaching, etc., and the laity. This arrangement is established everywhere, with a uniform regularity that derives, obviously, from something that is not just chance. All is according to some single primitive pattern -the fundamental structure of the Church.

The clergy are chosen for their position by the whole local church from among the *virii probati*, and they receive their spiritual powers by a ritual (the imposition of hands) from others who have already received these powers and the power to communicate them. There are 3 main degrees among the clergy. Each church is presided over by a single bishop (from the end of the first century at any rate). (Before then it is likely that the churches were ruled by colleges of 'bishops', under the surveillance of the Apostles.) The bishop is assisted by priests, for the spiritual administration, and deacons, whose main work is the care of the Church's property, distribution of alms, assistance of its poor, its widows and its orphans.

The various churches founded by an Apostle possessed an obvious unity in their relation to the common founder. For most of the affairs of life they were self-sufficing although communication between them was good (e.g., 'sharing' letters). Christians, members of one or other of the local churches, felt themselves to be, and were in fact, members of the great Church of which these were all cells, the "Catholic Church" as St Ignatius of Antioch called it around 107, in a phrase that has lasted. All were united in belief, in ritual, and in regulations that governed their daily life.

From very early on the Church at Rome had a pre-eminent place among the churches, as seen by Pope St Clement I intervening in the affairs of the Church at Corinth around the year 90, and a few years later St Ignatius of Antioch acknowledging her special place in his famous letters to the Churches.

Among the early Churches were those connected with the Apostle John, e.g., the seven referred to by him in the *Apocalypse* or *Book of Revelation*: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Rev 1:11). Ephesus, as we have already seen, was a commercial centre of considerable importance where the goddess Artemis, or Diana, was worshipped. Evangelised by Paul, according to tradition the Apostle John went to live in Ephesus, probably around the year 67 and possibly taking the Blessed Virgin with him. The Church at Ephesus is praised in the Apocalypse for its endurance and for the resistance it has shown to false apostles, especially the Nicolaitans, a heretical sect difficult to identify, but who seem to have been arguing in favour of some degree of compromise with idolatry and pagan lifestyles. Smyrna was also a port, renowned for its loyalty to Rome and its ritual worship of the emperor, where the Christians had to endure persecution and deprivation for their faith. They also had to bear with the lies spread by certain Jews, who accused them of being agitators against the civil authorities and against pagans in general. Pergamum was known for its temples, including the first in Asia to the "divine Augustus" and "divine Rome". It was a place of pilgrimage where sick people flocked to the temple of Aesculapius, the god of health and miracles. As the name might imply, the city was noted for its great library and for its manufacture of parchment. Thyatira was the least important of the seven Churches mentioned. It was known for smelting, weaving and dyeing. It had many craft guilds which organised festivities in honour of the gods, which posed problems for the Christians who felt obliged to take part. Sardis was an important hub in the highway system. It was famous for its acropolis, which was located in an unassailable position. The inhabitants of the city have been described by secular writers as an immoral, licentious people. Philadelphia, in the province of Lydia, served as the gateway to all Phrygia. There was a sizeable and influential Jewish community there, many of whom would later become converts and

recognise the Church. Laodicea was a city on the border of Phrygia. The Church there is mentioned by St Paul when he suggests to the Colossians that they exchange their letter for the one he sent to the Laodiceans (cf. Col 4:16). There was no persecution of the Church here and the Christians were in a comfortable position. The prosperity the city enjoyed, with its flourishing trade and textile industry, may have contributed to the laxity and lukewarmness that the Church there is accused of. The presence of hot springs close to the city may account for the reference to tepidity and lukewarmness. Just as Israel had tended to become forgetful of Yahweh when living was easy so these early Christians are warned of the consequences of adopting an easy-going lifestyle.

From this we can see that the first Christians had to deal with problems and live and extend the faith in environments that were far from suited to the task. Nevertheless, they rose to the challenge aided by the Holy Spirit.

Judeo-Christianity

At the same time there were reasons for the loss of Jewish influence within the Church at large.

While externally she had to endure the test of persecution; internally, the Church had to face the defence of the truth against ideologies which sought to undermine the basic dogmas of the Christian faith. One of these early heresies -the name given to these currents of ideas- was an heretical Judeo-Christianity, which denied the divinity of Christ and the redemptive effectiveness of his death: according to its followers, the messianic mission of Jesus consisted in bringing Judaism to perfection by complete observance of the Mosaic Law.

Christianity spread slowly and steadily, once "the days of Pentecost were accomplished". As it spread outwards, the Jewish nucleus from whose activities all this had sprung began to lose its importance. The divisions between those who wished to impose the whole Jewish Law on all Christians and those who, following St Paul, denied that this had any binding force, had already weakened Jewish Christianity when the Jewish War of 69-70 and the consequent destruction of the Temple, destroyed its material *raison d'être*. The Jewish Church had already shrunk to a handful of believers when, 60 years later, Hadrian's repression of the last Jewish revolt and the establishment on the ruins of the Holy City of the new town Aelia, into which no Jew might enter, destroyed it altogether as a church.

Some sources:

J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, pp. 117-121.

P. Hughes, *A Popular History of the Church*, London 1947, p. 15 et seq.

J. Orlandis, *A Short History of the Catholic Church*, p. 22.

Navarre Bible, *Revelation*.

The Church following the apostolic and sub-apostolic age.

"Christ is the light of humanity; and it is, accordingly, the heart-felt desire of this sacred Council, being gathered together in the Holy Spirit, that, by proclaiming his Gospel to every creature, it may bring to all men that light of Christ which shines out visibly from the Church" (LG 1). These words open the Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. By choosing this starting point, the Council demonstrates that the article of faith about the Church depends entirely on the article concerning Christ Jesus. The Church has no other light than Christ's; according to a favourite image of the Church Fathers, the Church is like the moon, all its light reflected from the sun.⁶⁴

The article concerning the Church also depends entirely on the article about the Holy Spirit, which immediately precedes it. 'Indeed, having shown that the Spirit is the source and giver of all holiness, we now confess that it is he who has endowed the Church with holiness' (Rom. Cat.) The Church is, in a phrase used by the Fathers, the place 'where the Spirit flourishes' (St Hippolytus).⁶⁵

"The eternal Father, in accordance with the utterly gratuitous and mysterious design of his wisdom and goodness, created the whole universe, and chose to raise up men to share in his own divine life" (LG 2), to which he calls all men in his Son. "The Father determined to call together in a holy Church those who should believe in Christ" (LG 2) This 'family of God' is gradually formed and takes shape during the stages of human history, in keeping with the Father's plan. In fact, "already present in figure at the beginning of the world, this Church was prepared in marvellous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and the old Alliance. Established in this last age of the world, and made manifest in the outpouring of the Spirit, it will be brought to glorious completion at the end of time" (LG 2).⁶⁶

The Church - prepared in the Old Covenant

The gathering together of the People of God began at the moment when sin destroyed the communion of men with God, and that of men among themselves. The gathering together of the Church is, as it were, God's reaction to the chaos provoked by sin. This reunification is achieved secretly in the heart of all peoples: "In every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable" to God.⁶⁷

The remote preparation for this gathering together of the People of God begins when he calls Abraham and promises that he will become the father of a great people. Its immediate preparation begins with Israel's election as the People of God. By this election, Israel is to be the sign of the future gathering of All nations. But the prophets accuse Israel of breaking the covenant and behaving like a prostitute. They announce a new and eternal covenant. "Christ instituted this New Covenant."⁶⁸

The Church - instituted by Christ Jesus

It was the Son's task to accomplish the Father's plan of salvation in the fullness of time. Its accomplishment was the reason for his being sent. "The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures." To fulfill the Father's will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church "is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery."⁶⁹

⁶⁴ CCC 748.

⁶⁵ CCC 749.

⁶⁶ CCC 759.

⁶⁷ CCC 761.

⁶⁸ CCC 762.

⁶⁹ CCC 763.

"This Kingdom shines out before men in the word, in the works and in the presence of Christ." To welcome Jesus' word is to welcome "the Kingdom itself." The seed and beginning of the Kingdom are the "little flock" of those whom Jesus came to gather around him, the flock whose shepherd he is. They form Jesus' true family. To those whom he thus gathered around him, he taught a new "way of acting" and a prayer of their own.⁷⁰

The Lord Jesus endowed his community with a structure that will remain until the Kingdom is fully achieved. Before all else there is the choice of the Twelve with Peter as their head. Representing the twelve tribes of Israel, they are the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem. The Twelve and the other disciples share in Christ's mission and his power, but also in his lot. By all his actions, Christ prepares and builds his Church.⁷¹

The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. "The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus." "For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the 'wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.'" As Eve was formed from the sleeping Adam's side, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross.⁷²

The Church - revealed by the Holy Spirit

"When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church" (LG 4). Then "the Church was openly displayed to the crowds and the spread of the Gospel among the nations, through preaching, was begun" (AG 4). As the 'convocation' of all men for salvation, the Church in her very nature is missionary, sent by Christ to all the nations to make disciples of them.

The Church - mystery of men's union with God.⁷³

It is in the Church that Christ fulfils and reveals his own mystery as the purpose of God's plan: 'to unite all things in him' (Eph 1:10). St Paul calls the nuptial union of Christ and the Church 'a great mystery' (Eph 5:32). Because she is united to Christ as to her bridegroom, she becomes a mystery in her turn. [...]⁷⁴

The universal sacrament of salvation

"The Church, in Christ, is like a sacrament - a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men" (LG 1). The Church's first purpose is to be the sacrament of the *inner union of men with God*. Because men's communion with one another is rooted in that union with God, the Church is also the sacrament of the *unity of the human race*. In her, this unity is already begun, since she gathers men "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues" (Rev 7:9); at the same time, the Church is the 'sign and instrument' of the full realisation of the unity yet to come.⁷⁵

As sacrament, the Church is Christ's instrument. "She is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all", "the universal sacrament of salvation", by which Christ is "at once manifesting and actualising the mystery of God's love for men" (LG 9, 48; GS 45) [...]⁷⁶

⁷⁰ CCC 764.

⁷¹ CCC 765.

⁷² CCC 766.

⁷³ CCC 767.

⁷⁴ CCC 772.

⁷⁵ CCC 775.

⁷⁶ CCC 776.

...[T]he Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race: "All men are called to belong to the new People of God. This People, therefore, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God's will may be fulfilled: he made human nature one in the beginning and has decreed that all his children who were scattered should be finally gathered together as one... The character of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself whereby the Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods, under Christ the Head in the unity of his Spirit" (LG 13).⁷⁷

Mission - a requirement of the Church's catholicity

The missionary mandate. "Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation', the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men"(AG 1) [...] ⁷⁸

The origin and purpose of mission. The Lord's missionary mandate is ultimately grounded in the eternal love of the Most Holy Trinity: "The Church on earth is by her nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, she has as her origin the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (AG 2). The ultimate purpose of mission is none other than to make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of love (JPII, RM 23)⁷⁹

The Church - perfected in glory

"The Church... will receive her perfection only in the glory of heaven" (LG 48), at the time of Christ's glorious return. Until that day, "the Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world's persecutions and God's consolations" (St Augustine). Here below she knows that she is in exile far from the Lord, and longs for the full coming of the Kingdom, when she will "be united in glory with her king" (LG 5). The Church, and through her the world, will not be perfected in glory without great trials. Only then will "all the just from the time of Adam, from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect,... be gathered together in the universal Church in the Father's presence" (LG 2).⁸⁰

Some sources:

J. Monforte, *Getting to know the Bible*, Scepter 1998, pp. 118-121.

⁷⁷ CCC 831.

⁷⁸ CCC 849.

⁷⁹ CCC 850.

⁸⁰ CCC 769.

