

Salvation History series -

Fr. Camisius



SALVATION HISTORY SERIES

(to Help Meditative Reading of the Bible)

BOOK I

THE WHOLE STORY IN A NUT-SHELL



Fr. Canisius, C. M. I.

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SALVATION HISTORY

The Origins

Man has found it a problem to trace his own origin and the origin of the world around him. The origin of the man we see before us can be traced to his parents; that of his parents, in like manner, to their own parents; and that of these again, to their parents and so on. But where will this process end? Where did the first parents - the very first human couple - come from? What precisely was there in the very beginning?

In answer to these questions, some thought of the theory of evolution. The first human couple did not appear all of a sudden. At first, there existed only some coarse, inorganic matter. That coarse stuff evolved itself into various kinds of solids such as gold, bronze and iron. Thousands of years passed by in this process of constant evolution until a transition was made into some matter with movement in itself such as grass, plants and trees. The process continued and gave rise to sensitive life in its lowest form which gradually evolved itself into higher forms of sensitive beings such as worms, frogs, rats, rabbits, monkeys and apes. From the apes, gradually after thousands of years of evolution, came forth man. The origin of man and all that we see around us has, therefore, to be traced to some

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inorgaonic, formless, chaotic matter. But where did this chaotic matter originate from? Is it possible that life be evolved from lifeless matter? Is it possible that from an irrational animal an intenlligent one come forth? All these are problems which all the philosophers and scientists together have not been able to solve to the satisfaction of all even to this day. Hence thinking man is led to the spontaneous prayer: "Lead kindly light!"

The Revelation

And the Supreme Intellect which is, in fact, responsible for this wonderful universe, did not keep its origin a secret from man. From the very beginning, he himsel spoke to man and disclosed to him the mystery of the universe and the grandiose plan underlying it. Man is created by *God*, and everything else was created by the same *God for man*. The motive underlying man's creation was *God's love for man*. "I have loved you with an everlasting love." (Jer. 31, 3).

The revelation of God's plan began as soon as man began to exist. It progressed as man's capacity to grasp it devoloped, until at last it reached its completion when God sent his own Son to narrate "the mysteries hidden for centuries." (Col. 1, 26). St. Paul wrote to the Hebrews: "In many and various ways God spoke, of old, to our fathers by the Prophets; but in these last days, he has spoken to us in the Son..." (Heb. 1, 1.).

Moses and the Pentateuch

The great Prophet of God, Moses, before his death, sometime in the second half of the 13th century B. C.,

left a record of the main deposit of revelation he had received and that of the events in which he himself played the principal part, as the leader of God's People Israel. Whether he left this record in writing or in oral form we do not know today. It is however certain that the record Moses left became the nucleus of what we now call the Pentateuch, a single, massive, but unified historical and theological work.

The four Documents

The nucleus left by Moses was handed down from generation to generation, but in various forms. For example, the fundamental facts of the pre-historic times, namely, that God created man according to his image and likeness, that the woman was equal in nature and dignity to man, that all the other things were created for the service of man etc., were explained in the course of centuries by various teachers of different centres - Jerusalem, Samaria, Babylon - in their own way so as to accommodate themselves to the culture and capacity of the people whom they had to instruct. Thus arose the various editions of the nucleus left by Moses (just as the same Gospel of Christ was handed down to us under four different forms by the four Evangelists.). The present Pentateuch is a kind of *harmony* (just like the Gospel Harmony), made out of four such documents now known as the Elohist, the Jahwistic, the Priestly and the Deuteronomistic Documents.

The Creation account in the Pentateuch

The compiler of the Pentateuch begins the account of creation with the Priestly and completes it with the

Jahwistic Documents. The Priestly Document presents the creation of the universe under the form of meditation points for the seven days of the week. It looks at the creation and divides it into 8 parts: 1. *the light* that strikes the eyes first; 2. *the firmament* that serves as a separation between the heavens and the earth; 3. *upon the earth below*, the collection of the waters on the one hand and the dry land on the other; 4. *upon the dry land*, in its turn, the grass, plants and trees; 5. *upon the firmament*, its wonderful ornamentation: the sun, moon and the stars; 6. *in the waters*, the fishes and *in the air*, the birds; 7. *upon the earth* again, the cattle, reptiles and wild animals; and lastly, 8. *man*, the crown of creation. These eight main items which one clearly notices in the nature that surrounds us, are conveniently distributed, for man's meditation, over the six days of the week. (Read carefully Gen. 1-2, 4.). The seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, is set apart for restful contemplation of the whole at one look, in humble gratitude for God the Creator.

The author of this Document has an idea to drive in: that God is all-powerful (*He said* and it was *made* His very word is creative); that everything comes from God by creation (the heaven, the earth, the sun, moon and the stars, the grass, plants and trees, the cattle, reptiles and wild animals, the fishes and the birds - all); that all things were made for man ("let us make man to *rule*.."); that man is constituted by God the *lord* of the rest of the creation ("..fill the earth, subdue it, rule over the earth."); that therefore idolatry is illogical and that man must meditate upon the world before him which is an open book of meditation,

and raising his heart to the Creator of all, ought to thank him for his undeserved love and generous gifts.

The foregoing account (Gen. 1, 1 - 2, 4) of the Priestly tradition is complete as regards the fundamental ideas handed down by Moses but its style is rather heavy, graphic and philosophical. The compiler seems to have wished to bring the theology of creation into clearer light which he finds very well done in the Jahwistic Document (Gen. 2, 4 - 25). The Jahwist is very lively in his description of creation. He makes use of figures and symbols familiar to his audience, in order to bring home to them the ideas in a striking way. His disciples were not philosophers or theologians. It would be useless to put these truths before the simple folk in dry philosophical or technical terminology. So he is teaching them, as any skilled catechist of our day would talk to his ordinary students, adapting himself to their capacity of understanding by means of figures and symbols, stories, fables and legends. The literary analysis of these records is highly interesting, but now our concern is the theology they contain.

Theology Of Creation

Man was created by God in his own image and likeness, that is to say, as his own child, and for that reason man was given by God dominion over the rest of the creation - the birds of the air, the beasts of the earth and the fishes of the water. He was also given a companion like himself, namely, the woman. God gave him, moreover, all that could make him happy upon earth - harmony of his lower faculties with the higher ones and the subordination of all to his will;

fruits to eat, water to drink, a paradise of pleasure to live in. He received also frequent loving visits from God. He held familiar intercourses with his Creator. He enjoyed immunity from pain, sickness and death. In short, the whole creation was at the service of man.

However, God demanded from him perfect submission of his will to that of God. The child must obey the Father. God's will was to be the norm by which man should discern what was good from what was evil. The moment he would arrogate to himself the right of judging good and evil as his own fancy or any other creature would suggest to him, he would lose all the privileges that were granted to him, namely, the Paradise of pleasure, immunity from pain, sickness and death, submission of all his lower powers to his will and finally his familiarity with God.

The Tempter

While man lived in this state of perfect happiness, there appeared on the scene the enemy of mankind, the devil*, under the guise of a serpent. He suggested to Eve that there lurked some suspicious motive under the command God had given them. The eating of the fruit

* * *The devil:* The Story of the devil is not given in the Bible. We find however the mention of a battle in Apoc. 12, 4-10, in which the Great Dragon is thrust down by Michael from heaven. The Jews were familiar with the story as narrated in the Apocrypha "Adam and Eve". To a question of Adam why satan was fostering malicious hatred for man, the devil answered that, he was expelled from heaven by Michael because he refused to adore man the image of God.

was forbidden them (This was God's precept: "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat, for on the day you eat of it, you shall most surely die." - Gen. 2, 17), precisely because by eating it they would become equal to God, which certainly God does not like! The woman began to reflect. And, as the Sacred author puts it, she looked again on the forbidden fruit. It seemed indeed attractive. The more she looked at it, the more enticing it became, until at last the attraction grew irresistible. She plucked it, ate it and gave a part of it to her husband, who too ate it, not to offend his wife.

The great tragedy

Thus was broken God's first covenant with man. The consequence was terrible. Man felt a sudden shock - the rebellion of his senses against his will. He tried hard to control his movements, but in vain. He sought to hide the shame by covering his body with fig-leaves. Then came the thought of the next visit of God. And a tremendous fear shook him from head to foot. To avoid God's sight, he hid himself among the trees.

Now God appears on the scene. The Father comes in search of his wayward child and tries to move him to repentance by the question: "Adam, (that was the name of the first man) where are you? (Gen. 3, 9). He convinces Adam that his ungrateful transgression of the covenant was his own deliberate making and that he had honoured his wife more than his God. Justice demanded punishment. Adam was therefore, condemned to labour, pain and death. He was driven away from

the Paradise of pleasure to a land full of thorns and thistles, where he was to earn his livelihood by tilling the ground with hard labour.

The woman had her special share in the punishment, for having been the cause of man's fall. She should remain ever after under man's dominion. Although she would dislike this subjection, she will have, all the same, a vehement attraction for him, together with the feeling that she is weak and incomplete without him. The pains of childbirth will be hard to bear; all the same, the pleasures associated with it will urge her to seek after it, again and again.

The Future Triumph

In this moment of gloom and complete disaster, God was merciful. He turned to the enemy, the father of lies, the treacherous murderer of man and pronounced a curse upon him. More than that, God will take the side of the woman and wreak vengeance on the infernal serpent: "I shall place enmities between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. You shall crush his heel and he shall crush your head." (Gen. 3, 15) (This promise, in fact, was the nucleus of a series of prophecies to follow, regarding the *Seed of the woman* under whose leadership the human race would crush the head of the serpent and carry off the final victory.)

Misery consequent upon sin

Thence began a continuous warfare between man and the devil - man already debilitated by a tremendous fall and the devil infuriated by a terrible humiliation.

Man's intellect was obscured and will weakened. He felt a rebellion in himself - between the spirit* and the flesh**. His weakened will found it hard to keep in check the rebelling flesh. His neighbour who spurns the Creator's law would advice him to give up the struggle and enjoy freely the pleasures that are at hand, as the generality did. The devil, cunning as he was, would now side with the flesh, now side with the world,*** and would appear in the guise of an all-wise and sympathetic friend with treacherous whispers and suggestions to trap man unawares, as he had done in Paradise.

St. Paul's description of the fallen man's struggle against the flesh is classical: "I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh...I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? (Rom. 7, 18-25). St. Peter could find no better description of the devil's treacherous tactics than the following: "Your adversary the devil roams about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he should devour" (1 Pet. 5, 8).

* *The spirit* is the higher faculty in man which seeks to obey the law of God, in view of eternal happiness, in the future life.

** *The flesh* is taken to mean the sum - total of those tendencies in man which drag him to unlawful pleasures.

*** *There is category of men* who spurn the Creator's law (which promises enternal happiness in the future world), and run after what, here and now, pleases them. This category is often designated by the word: *world*, in the Bible.

The one Consolation

In this sad plight, man would have one consolation. Almighty God, although greatly offended by the sin of man, has still deigned to look upon him with pity. God is definitely on his side. God will lead him to final victory through the Promised Seed of the woman. But where can man find this Promised Saviour? When will the Saviour come? "Rain down, you heavens, the Just One we long for!" (Isias 45, 8), man would cry in the anguish of his soul, from the depth of his misery.

Sin upon sin

The march of mankind, as it happened, was marked everywhere with sin and iniquity. An envious Cain would proceed to murder his innocent brother (Gen. 4. 9). A revengeful Lamech would take pride in his seventy-sevenfold vengeance (Gen. 4, 24). Everywhere it was the story of the just being made victims of the fury of the wicked, and of the spirit of man being overpowered by his flesh.

There were, however, rare exceptions like the instance of Enoch who in the face of the treachery of his enemies chose to walk with God as his close friend. Enoch was so pleasing to God that he was directly taken by God from the midst of a seducing generation (Gen. 5, 24).

The Deluge

Man's iniquity increased with such rapidity that soon the whole human race was turned into a mass of corruption before the Lord. The tragedy was so

great that God spoke these distressing words to Noe: "I repent of having created man" (Gen. 6, 6). Noe was the only man who was found to be just before God at that time. God let loose a devastating flood - the Deluge - and destroyed the whole mankind except Noe and his family.

The Remnant

From the three sons of Noe - Sem, Cham and Japhet - Sem is singled out as the forebear of the blessings to come: "*Blessed by the Lord my Lord be Sem; and let Canaan, be his slave. God enlarge Japhet, and let him live in the tents of Sem.*" (Gen. 9, 26). Thenceforward, Sem's family was looked upon as the family of the expected Saviour who would come to lift up the struggling man and crush the head of the serpent.

Abraham, the Semite

Sem's children increased and multiplied. Ten leading names of his line are pointed out by the Sacred Writer until we come to Abraham the son of Thare who lived in the town of Ur, about 1900 B. C. This individual is picked up by God from an idolatrous nation and brought to Haran first and then to Canaan (Palestine) where God makes a covenant with him.

Covenant with Abraham

God will make Abraham the father of a numerous progeny - of a great nation. He will give him and his posterity the land of Canaan as their possession. In his seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed. In other words, God will see that the Seed

of the woman who will lead mankind to final victory over the devil comes *from Abraham*. Abraham, on his part, was to walk before God and be perfect. He himself and every male child in his house were to be circumcised in perpetual memory of this Covenant. To seal this great contract, Abraham was asked to bring a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtle dove and a pigeon, to cut these animals (except the birds) into two and to lay each half over against the other, so that through the interspace the Convanter could pass, as was the custom of those days. Abraham now falls into a deep sleep and he sees a smoking fire and a flaming torch passing between those pieces. The Convenant was thus sealed for ever. (Gen. 15-17).

Canaan becomes "the Promised Land"

Thenceforth, Abraham lived in Canaan, in the Valley of Mambre as in his own land. Although God had promised numerous children *to Abraham*, his wife Sara was barren. So he took his handmaid Agar too, as his lawful wife from whom was born Ismael. Before long, however, Sara herself, because of special divine providence, bore him a son, Isaac.

God's References

God made it clear that his promises to Abraham's posterity were to pass *through Isaac* and not through Ismael*, the first born, the son of the handmaid. God repeated

* *Ismael* was subsequently sent away from Abraham's family to the wilderness in the South where he became the father of the people known after his name, the Ismaelites.

his promises to Isaac. Isaac had two sons through Rebecca, namely, Esau and Jacob. Here again, although the firstborn was Esau,* God made it clear that it was *through Jacob* that the promises made to Abraham and Isaac were to pass to posterity.

Jacob and his sons

Jacob, surnamed *Israel* by God, had 12 sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Juda, Issachar, Zabulon, Dan, Nephthali, Gad, Asher, Joseph and Benjamin. With the descendants of these twelve sons of Israel God entered into a new Covenant on Mount Sinai. It is a long story.

Israel Leaves Canaan

Jacob and his sons had to leave Canaan and go to Egypt, because of a prolonged famine in Canaan. The King of Egypt received them with all kindness because it was Joseph, the son of Israel, who had in fact, by a special providence of God, saved Egypt from famine and held at that time the first place after Pharaoh (that was the official name of the kings of Egypt) in the kingdom. Pharaoh made generous grants to Jacob and his family and placed at their disposal the fertile region of Goshen. This happened in about 1700 B. C.

Jacob's Prophecy in Egypt: The Saviour will come from Juda

Jacob died in Egypt in good old age. Before his death, Jacob called his sons to his side and blessed

* *Esau* separated himself from Jacob and dwelt in the South and became the father of the Edomites.

them. While he blessed them, under God's inspiration, he left to them a great prophecy which indicated in unmistakable terms that the expected Saviour was to come from *the family of Juda*: "Juda, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Juda is a lion's whelp;...The sceptre shall not depart from Juda, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until *he comes to whom it belongs*; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." (Gen. 49, 8-10).

Israel, a big nation in Egypt

As time went on, the family of Israel increased and multiplied so that, after 400 years, they became a big nation. The Pharaoh of that time was afraid that the Israelites would overpower the Egyptians.

Israel Persecuted

The Egyptians therefore, took measures to prevent Israel's growth and to enslave them. The cry of this afflicted people rose to God.

God's answer

And God came down to help them. For this mission, he chose Moses and his brother Aaron from the tribe of Levi to act as his representatives. These went to the King of Egypt and told him that the God of Israel commanded him to allow the people to go to the land which had been promised to them through their forefathers. Pharaoh's answer was a flat denial and the menace

to afflict them all the more. God sent plague after plague to punish the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. But Pharaoh kept on hardening his heart ever more and more. After the ninth plague, God was determined to send a last one which was the most terrible of all, namely, the massacre of all the firstborn of Egypt except those of Israel.

The Pasch

On the 14th day of the month of Nisan, Israel was instructed by God to sacrifice a lamb and to sprinkle its blood on the doorposts and the lintel of their houses, so that their houses might be spared from the sword of the avenging angel. This lamb that was sacrificed in order to save the firstborns of Israel from the hands of the avenging angel who passed from house to house, was known as *the Paschal Lamb*, the Lamb of the Passage. This happened in about 1250 B. C.

The Firstborns of Israel belong to God

In memory of this event, it was a law among Israel that all their firstborns should belong to God because they had been saved from death by God through the blood of the Paschal Lamb. This Paschal Lamb was intended by God as *a type of the Saviour to come*. The Saviour would be immolated for our salvation, so that by being sprinkled with his blood we might be saved from the avenging angel of God's justice, who passes from individual to individual, killing those who remain partisans or possessions of the devil.

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The Paschal Meal

While the Egyptians with their King were weeping and lamenting over their dead, the Lord commanded the Israelites to make haste and eat the Paschal Lamb together with some unleavened bread—unleavened, because they had no time to have the flour fermented—, bitter herbs—in memory of the bitter afflictions they were subjected to in Egypt—, fruit-juice and wine, as their viaticum. They were expected to begin the long journey in all haste, that very night. The memory of this Paschal meal was celebrated afterwards every year, and it was at this Paschal meal that the Saviour—the real Paschal Lamb—instituted the Sacrament of Love so that we may make our own journey through this vale of tears without feeling tired or hungry, towards heaven, our Promised Land.

Pharao follows Israel

Having hastily eaten the Paschal Meal, Israel began the historic march. By the time they reached the Red Sea, Pharao collected his army and pursued them, fully determined to exterminate them. But the Lord was on the side of Israel. A marvelous cloud hid God's people from the sight of the Egyptians and served at the same time as a column of light to show Israel the way.

Passage of the Red sea

And, when they reached the shore of the Red Sea, Moses stretched out his hand over the waters as commanded by the Lord, and the waters parted

and the people passed to the other shore. The waters remained all the while on both sides as two high walls. The Egyptians closely followed Israel. But as soon as Israel reached the other shore, the waters joined, swallowing up the whole Egyptian army. Israel was thus liberated from Egypt by "*the God of their Fathers*", with a strong hand. Out of gratitude for such unspeakable kindness, Moses and the people sang a hymn to the Lord. Miriam too, the sister of Moses, and other women sang and danced expressing their joy at the triumph of the Lord.

Through the Desert

Then began the tedious journey through the desert. The problem of water and food for such a huge multitude travelling through the barren desert was solved by the power of the Almighty that produced for them water from the rock, rained for them Manna from heaven and brought for them quails from the sea.

By the time Israel reached the foot of Mt. Sinai, there was no one among the Israelites who was not convinced of the almighty power and condescending affection of Yahweh,* the God of their Fathers.

Covenant on Mt. Sinai

On the 50th day after the Pasch, Yahweh spoke to the whole multitude from the mountain-top. He entered into a solemn covenant with the people: "If you will...keep my covenant, then...you shall

* "Yahweh" was the proper name of God as revealed to Moses.

become my special possession." (Exod. 19, 5). The people answered together: "Whatever the Lord has said we will do" (Exod: 19, 8). Then came an enumeration of the Lord's commandments. But, as the Lord spoke the mountain trembled; clouds of smoke came out of it; there was lightning accompanied by terrible shock and thundering. And the people was struck with fear at the awful majesty of the Lord. They stood far off, saying to Moses: "Speak thou to us...If the Lord speak to us, we shall die." (Exod. 20, 19) Moses then ascended into the mountain and the Lord handed down to the people through Moses two tablets of stone on which the commandments were inscribed. The covenant was at last sealed with the blood of sacrificed animals, by the sprinkling of it on the Altar (which represented God) and upon the people. That was *the blood of the testament*. Thus Israel became the people of Yahweh and Yahweh the King of Israel.

God's Government

Once God was accepted as King, by the people, he began to govern them, travelling with them and fixing his camp in their midst in order to direct them and administer justice to them. Israel became "the People of God". Laws both cultic and civil were given through the Mediator, Moses, who freely entered into the Tent of the Lord, conversed with him, came back with his instructions and decisions and communicated them to the people.

Cultic Laws

Among the laws concerning Divine Cult, we find instructions with minute details about the construction of

the Tent reserved for the Lord, about an Ark which was to be kept in the Holiest Place, with the greatest reverence—that being the representing sign of the Lord,—about his Courtiers — the ministers who were to serve the Lord in his Sanctuary in the name of the people — and about the Offerings that were to be brought to the Lord (Exod: 25-31; Lev. 9, 22-18; 1-7 etc.); and about the Feasts to be celebrated (Lev. 23).

Moral and Civil Laws

The remaining part of the legislation was an elaboration of the Decalogue (the ten commandments) comprising the moral, the civil and the penal laws. (Exod: 21-23; Lev. 19-20 etc).

God travels with Israel

From Mount Sinai (after a stay of about one year) the journey continued, with God in the midst of his people. Wherever they sojourned, the Lord remained in his Tent surrounded by the tents of the people according to their tribes. The Lord's presence in his Tent was indicated by a white cloud which covered the Tent.

Murmurings of the discontented

As the Lord increased his favours to man, the devil multiplied his cunning devices to destroy man by inducing him to transgress the Lord's commandments. The devil would never approach man in person but always in disguise, siding now with the flesh, now with the world. *Complaints* about food and murmuring about the leaders,

often through the instigation of the rabble that was among them, were a common feature of the sojourn in the wilderness. In punishment for their ungrateful and stiff-necked behaviour, the Lord destroyed many through fire, pestilence and war, and prolonged the sojourn in the desert by 40 years. Moses himself, although most intimate in his relations with God became all the same guilty of having doubted in the mercy of the Lord towards the ungrateful people. The punishment was that he would not step into Canaan - the land to which he was leading the people.

In the Plains of Moab

At the end of 40 years, the people reached the plains of Moab, where Moses, the Great Leader, was to end his days. Before his death, on Mt. Nebo, Moses recounted the whole story to the people exclaiming: "What great nation has a god close at hand as the Lord our God is close to us..!" (Deut. 4, 7). He gives them detailed instructions as to how they are to take possession of the Promised Land when God will have introduced them into it. He spoke to them of *the Great Prophet* who would come to them one day. (Det. 18, 15). Another indication about the expected Seed of the woman!

Balaam's Prophecy

While Israel was in the plains of Moab, Balaam the pagan prophet looked at them from the mountains of Moab and prophesied: "I see him but not now; I behold him but not nigh: *a Star shall come forth out of Jacob* and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the

rehead of Moab." (Num. 24, 17). Yes, this was the favoured people from whom will come the Saviour of the world who will crush the head of the serpent.

Josue leads Israel into Canaan

At last, the people enters the Promised land in about 1210 B. C., under the leadership of Josue whom God himself appointed as the successor of Moses. At first they camped in Gilgal, near Jericho. The land was inhabited by seven nations: *the Amorite, the Pherizzite, the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Girgashite, the Hevite and the Jebusite.*

The Conquest

Israel had to conquer these nations in order to possess the land. But they were not to be afraid. The Lord would be with them. And in fact, nation after nation fell before them, when they fought the Lord's battles. But here too the infernal enemy was on the alert. God had given the people strict orders to destroy without any mercy everyone and everything that they found on the conquered ground, because association with the enemy or with the things that belonged to them was bound to alienate them sooner or later from Yahweh their God. But the people often failed to adhere to these directions. Now *an individual* would secretly pick up some precious object from the enemy's possessions now *the Elders* and Chiefs would spare, out of compassion, a part of the original inhabitants now someone would give his daughter in marriage to them and vice versa. By this

attitude they brought upon themselves untold misery as foretold by the Lord.

Division of the Land and a scolding from the Lord

When the land was conquered to a large extent, Josue divided it among the 12 tribes, namely, among the descendants of the 12 sons of Jacob. About this time, God sent them an angel in order to call them to repentance and to put them on their guard in future. The angel said: "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land which I swore to your fathers....But you have not obeyed my command. What is this you have done? So now I say I will not drive them (the enemies) out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you and their gods shall be a snare to you." (Judges, 2, 1-2) The people understood their folly. They lifted up their voice and wept bitterly.

Josue's death

Now Josue was nearing his death. He had already set up the Ark in Shilo. Before his death he gathered the people around him and made them renew their covenant with the Lord. (Josue 24, 1-28)

Judges in Israel

After Josue's death Israel had to suffer constantly from the neighbouring nations who wanted to lord it over them. They were tossed about by the Canaanites, the King of Mesopotamia, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Midianites and the Philistines. God raised up leaders from the

different tribes as occasions demanded. These leaders were known as Judges. Such were Deborah, Gedeon, Jephthe and Samson.

Tough Fight with the Philistines

At the time of Heli the High Priest who lived in Shilo, the Philistines were so powerful that Israel lost ground and were on the point of utter ruin. At this juncture they sought the help of God and brought the Ark from Shilo into the battlefield in order to kindle the fire of national spirit and zeal for the name of Yahweh in the soldiers. But in the fight that followed the Ark was captured by the Philistines. However, soon, by God's obvious intervention, the Philistines were forced to send it back to the Israelites. It was kept thereafter, in the house of Abinadab, in Kiriathjearim.

Israel asks for a King

Samuel the last of the Judges, was approached in his old age by the people, with the request to constitute for them a King. Samuel referred the matter to God in prayer. The answer was in the affirmative but heart-rending at the same time. "Hearken to the voice of the people..... for they have not rejected you but they have rejected me from being king over them." (1 Samuel, 8, 7).

Saul the First King

Thus Israel came to have kings who governed them from about 1030 B. C. The first king was Saul. He was,

at first faithful to God but he became in the course of time, big in his own conceit. God asked Saul to destroy completely the land of Amalek without sparing anyone or anything. But Saul honoured more the advice of the people and spared the king of Amalek and the best of its sheep and oxen. And the Lord said to Samuel: "I repent that I have made Saul king." (1 Sam, 15, 10) Saul's plea that the animals were spared for being sacrificed to the Lord was met with the following retort: "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15, 22). Samuel's words that follow describe how often, God's advances to man meet with black ingratitude. "When you were little in your own eyes did not the Lord make you the head of the tribes of Israel?.....Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord?.....Because you have rejected the word of the Lord he has also rejected you from being king." (I Sam 15, 17-23).

David, the Second King

Having rejected Saul, God gave the kingdom to a boy who, at the time, was feeding the sheep of his father. This boy is King David, the son of Jesse of Bethlehem - a king who has been described as a man according to the heart of God. Even this king happened to displease the Lord. In his weakness, he gave way to the inordinate promptings of his flesh, committed adultery, adding to it even murder. What more! He did not think of the guilt of his action until God sent Nathan the Prophet to place before him the ugliness of his crime. Once he had a glimpse into the depth of his folly he repented and humbled himself to such an extent that he has been considered ever since the best example of a truly repentant

sinner. The psalm "Miserere" which king David composed, is nothing but the outpouring of a heart broken with genuine remorse. The high ambition of this great king and humble servant of God, was to build a fitting Temple for the Lord. He brought the Ark with great solemnity from Kiriathjearim and kept it in Jerusalem, his own city. God was so much pleased with King David's humility and his attachment to God that he swore with an oath that his kingdom would last for ever, that *the expected Saviur would come from his own family.*

Solomon

The building of the Temple, however, was reserved to David's son and successor, Solomon. The Lord was pleased at first with Solomon and gave him surpassing wisdom and enormous wealth. However, Solomon succumbed to the allurements of his flesh and gradually sought to please his pagan wives more than his God.

Division of the Kingdom

After Solomon, the kingdom was split, in 937 B. C., into two - the northern kingdom known as the Kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom known as the Kingdom of Juda. During this period most of the kings lost sight of God's Law and some of them introduced even idol-cult into the kingdom, under the influence of the pagan kings with whom, against the express warnings of the Lord, they entered into marriage relations for the sake of political security. Even the best among the few good kings fell victims to the subtle enemy and became objects of reproof from the Lord. For example, Josaphat, otherwise a good king of Juda, is reproved by

the Lord for having made himself a partner in trade with the self-seeking Ochosias the then king of Israel. (2 Paralip. 20, 35-37).

The Prophets

To draw the attention of these kings and their people to the Law of God and his warnings, God raised in Israel some men who are known as Prophets. The Prophets like Elias and Eliseus have done much in this line; but they have not left anything in writing. Others like Isaias, Jeremias, Ezechiel and Daniel have left a good deal in writing. These are called the Major or Greater Prophets in comparison with the 12 others who are called Minor or Lesser Prophets.

The Prophets had to suffer much at the hands of the kings and the people of the times, because the message they brought was not often welcome to the kings or the people. What they had to announce was often God's punishment to the kings and to the nation at large. Jeremias was asked by the Lord to stand in the courtyard of the Temple and to proclaim: "Do not trust in these deceptive words: This is the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord ... When I spoke to you persistently you did not listen and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I willcast you out of my sight". (Jer. 7, 4-15). Ezechiel had to announce to the kings the following terrible message: "Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick

you have not heald, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the wild beasts" (Ezechiel: 34, 2-5). All the same, the Prophets were the bearers of most consoling messages too. They point out to the future days when tears will be wiped out, the days when the Saviour will appear in the midst of Israel. They give greater details about *the person of the expected Saviour* and the circumstances of his advent. Isaias calls him *a shoot from the stock of Jesse*. (Js. 11, 1). He foretells that the Saviour will *be born of a Virgin*: "Behold a Virgin shall bear a son and she shall call *his name Emmanuel*." (Is. 11, 14) The prophecy of David in Ps. 21, concerning the sufferings of the Saviour is more elaborately dealt with in the Second Book of Isaias, where the Saviour is described as the suffering *Servant of the Lord* (Is. 53). Jeremias tells us that the reign of the Messiah will be one founded on love when *the Law* will be written not on tablets of stone but *on the walls of each one's heart*. (Jer. 31, 33). Micheas foretells that the Saviour *will be born in Bethlehem*. (Mich, 5, 2).

Destruction of the Kingdoms

The infidelity of the kings to the Law of God and their disregard for the salutary warnings of the Prophets, finally brought about the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians in 721 B. C., and that of the Southern Kingdom by the Babylonian king Nebuchodonosor in 587 B. C. Many Jews were taken captives to Assyria and Babylon. Some fled to Egypt for safety.

Israel in Exile

Israel in their dispersion, shed bitter tears over their past infidelity towards God and the calamities that accompanied it. If hitherto they were over-confident in the Lord, now they became rather desperate. The Temple which they thought to be indestructible is now a heap of ruins. God who, in spite of terrible reverses, continued to be present with them, seems now to have abandoned them. Their kings and their glory are now mere dreams of the past. To the world they were an object of derision. They were, indeed, humiliated to the extreme and terribly frustrated.

The ray of hope

One thought, however, gave them a ray of hope in this time of distress. Through Osee the Prophet, God had made it clear that his relation with Israel was not merely that of a king with his people, not merely that of a friend with his friend but that of a *bridegroom with his bride*, a relation which will never be broken, an indissoluble union, because of which, God owed it to himself not to abandon Israel even though the latter should be guilty of the ugliest infidelity.

Thirst for the Saviour

Bitter experience had taught them, by this time, that it was impossible for man to remain uniformly faithful to all the detailed regulations of the God of holiness. Even the holiest individual in Israel had proved a miserable failure at moments of weakness. As long as they were surrounded by the ever-vigilant

enemies - the world, flesh and the devil - they could not think of better prospects. The only hope was in the advent of the Saviour who will gather them together, teach them, train them and lead them through the real path of victory. O how they thirsted for the Saviour!

Now come the Prophets of the Exile with their consoling message about the Saviour. Ezechiel described the happy times that were in store for Israel. Before long they will be brought to life again. (Ez. 37, 1-14) Daniel described the Saviour as the Son of Man who would appear among the clouds to wreak vengeance on the enemies of the people of God. They had not to wait long. Great things will happen before the lapse of "70 weeks" (of years). (Dan. 7, 13; 9, 20-24).

Return to Jerusalem

Soon Israel began to hear the name of Cyrus. That was a name which reminded them of the prophecies of Isaias (Is, 45, 1-6) who had foretold that Cyrus the Persian would humble the Babylonians and show kindness to Israel. And Cyrus did come. He entered Babylon as a conqueror. He was all benignity towards Israel. He allowed them and helped them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of their God, in 538 B. C. And a good number returned under the leadership of Sheshbazzar.

Restoration of the Temple

However, serious work of rebuilding the Temple could not begin before 520 B. C. Then, being urged

and encouraged by the Prophets Aggeus and Zacharias, the people, under the leadership of Zorobabel the high Commissioner and Josue, the High Priest, worked hard and completed the work in 515, in spite of the strong opposition from the Samaritans. This the prophets said would be the Temple in which the Saviour would enter. The daily sacrifices were resumed under the guidance of Esdras the great Scribe who came from Babylon in 458 B. C. Even then, there were sad infidelities among the people because of association and intermarriages with the pagans.

Reform of Nehemias

Nehemias (445 B. C.) came from Persia to bring in a complete restoration. He was struck by the corruption that existed even among the priests. To get a glimpse of the sad state to which the priests had drifted at this time, it is enough to read the Prophecy of Malachias: "O Priests, who despise my name! You say: how have we despised thy name? By offering polluted food upon my altar. And you say: how have we polluted it?...When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that no evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that no evil? Present that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favour?...Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors that you might not kindle fire upon my altar, in vain! I have no pleasure in you... and I will not accept an offering from your hand. For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations." (Mal. 1, 6-11).

Nehemias did much by keeping alive the dying faith and warming up of the tepid life of both the priests and their flock.

Greek Overlordship

The Persian protection was a great help for the faith of Israel to strike new roots. But in 332 B. C., Alexander the great overcame the Persians. Alexander himself and his first successors were even more favourable to the Jews* than the Persians. But Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175 - 163 B. C.) of the Seleucid dynasty proved to be a great danger to the Jewish faith. He was anxious to spread Greek culture throughout his kingdom. The people in general resented. But there were many among them, even from the priestly ranks, who welcomed the Greek initiative.

The Macchabean Revolt

The result was rebellion of the more pious, (Hasidim) for religious freedom under the leadership of the priest Mathathias and his sons, Judas, Jonathan and Simon of the family of Hasmoni who were eventually known as the Macchabees. By manifest help from God, in 164 B. C. the Temple was restored to the faithful Yahwists. Gradually however, the Macchabees were taken up with greed for power and political glory. They reserved for themselves the kingship and High-Priesthood of the nation. The result was the formation of a strong sect called the "*Pharisees*" who stood for purity of religious

* *Israel*, after their return from the Exile, began to be called "*Jews*" (Judaeus=dwellers of the land of Juda).

practices against the "*Sadducees*" who sought to be aristocratic, rather than religious-minded. Another sect known as the *Essenes* broke off from the Temple and the "wicked priests" to live in the desert a life of piety, preparing themselves for the advent of the "*Teacher of Rightneusness*" and *the True Light* that will illumine all men. These opposing forces among the people and the quarrels among the rival claimants for the throne, made it necessary to call the Roman General Pompey for help in 68 B. C.

Roman Overlordship

The tactful Romans, under the plea of offering protection, brought the Jews under their rule in 63 B. C. In 37 B. C., the Roman Senate and the Triumvirs established Herod son of Antipater an Idumaeen Chief, the King of Judea.

Wisdom Teachers—Prayer for the Saviour

The foregoing epoch in the history of Israel is one of such confusion that the just hungered and *thirsted for the Saviour* who alone would bring in order and lasting peace. Helplessness to cope with the ever-changing circumstances, made the wise—the Teachers in Israel—to sit and reflect. Men like the Ecclesiastes would conclude that everything under the sun is "vanity and vanity of vanities." (Eccles, 13, 8). Others took care to collect wise sayings of the Wisdom-teachers of Israel and their sane principles of conduct in volumes like that of the Ecclesiasticus, the Proverbs and the Book of Wisdom.

Others still put in writing the edifying episodes from the period of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities of Israel. Thus we have the Books of Tobias, Judith and Esther. The Book of Job and that of the Canticle of Canticles and the Collection of the Psalms too are other examples of the efforts of the Teachers in Israel, to keep alive among their brethren faith in God and make them adhere to wisdom and righteousness, in trying circumstances. *They looked for the Saviour.* They sighed; they wept and they prayed day and night.

And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us!

And, when the fulness of time came - when human misery reached the bottom of its abyss and the cry of human helplessness pierced the heavens, the Lord remembered his mercy and rained down the Expected of the ages. And He was not simply the Seed of the Woman but at the same time, the Son of God. He was born of Mary the Virgin, of the family of David, of the root of Jesse, in Bethlehem the city of David, *but in* a forlorn cave - a veritable "Servant of the Lord", suffering for the sins of his brethren from the very moment of his birth. At his birth the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest and good hope to men on earth" (Lk. 2, 14). At the same time, he addressed his Father as follows: "Behold I come to do thy will, O God! (Heb. 10-7)"

But His own received him not

Because of his humble birth he was not recognized by his own people. "The Messiah suffering was a

strange idea to digest even for the Apostles, in spite of very clear prophecies about it in the Scriptures. Their eyes were held and they could not enter into the meaning of the divine oracles.

Recognition

However, he was recognized at first sight, by John the Baptist who introduced him to others as "the Lamb of God" (allusion to the Paschal Lamb) who takes away the sins of the world (John 1, 36); by Nathanael as "the Son of God and King of Israel" (the title of the Saviour in the prophecies) (John. 2, 49); by the Samaritan woman as "the Messiah" (John. 4, 30); not to speak of the testimony coming from others who lived long with him, such as the testimony from Peter: "Thou art the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16, 17); and from Thomas: "My Lord and my God. (John. 20, 23). Yes, he was the Word that became flesh and fixed his tent among us.

His Own Testimony

He revealed his identity as "the Seed of the Woman" by addressing his Mother "Woman" at the miracle scene in Cana and on Calvary (John. 2, 4; 19, 26). If, on the way through the desert, the presence of the Lord signified by the white cloud, was considered by Moses a nearness to God which no other nation could think of, what would the same Moses say of this nearness of God who became man and lived in our midst as one of us! St. Paul summarized this fact as follows: God as he is, he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant and humbled himself and became

obedient unto death, even the death on a cross (Phil 2, 7). As the Saviour himself said, he came "to serve and not to be served unto and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mt. 20, 28).

His life and work in brief

He lived in Nazareth for about 30 years, then came to the Jordan to be baptised by John and then began a life of preaching, teaching and doing good to others through the length and breadth of Palestine, having fixed Jerusalem and Capharneum as the main centres of his activities. He had many disciples. From them, he chose the 12 Apostles whom he taught in a special way and to whom he gave this mission: "Go forth to every part of the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk. 16, 15)*

The priests and pharisees and the elders of the people took the Saviour for their adversary and delivered him to the death of the cross. His dying lips were heard to plead from the Cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Lk. 23, 34). And he died the death of a criminal. But he rose from the dead on the third day and appeared in his glorified body to his disciples and, having lived with them, consoled them and taught them for forty days, ascended to the Father in heaven from where, on the tenth day, he sent down the Holy Spirit who confirmed the Apostles in their faith.

* The Saviour's life and work may be found sufficiently elaborated in the historical and geographical background in Book III of this series.

The Saviour did all this in view of the accomplishment of his great plan: to gather the scattered Israel and *with them* and *through them*, the whole mankind, and thus lead the whole world triumphantly to the Father, having "*crushed*" *under foot* the arch-enemy, the devil. This purpose is clearly stated in the following words: "that all may be one, as thou Father in me and I in Thee. . . . that they also may be one in us." (John 17, 21)*

On the eve of his death the Saviour had made it clear that he offered himself as the "Paschal Lamb" to be immolated, so that by his blood man might be spared from the death he deserved for his sins and that he might participate in the newness of life which the Saviour received in his glorious resurrection. And this is the New Covenant of God with man, sealed with the blood of his Only-begotten Son, on the cross on Mount Calvary.

Behold the Paschal Mystery or the Mystery of Christ, who died for our sins and rose up for our newness of life and ascended to the Father and therefrom feeds us with his Body and Blood and sends down his Spirit to guide us. This whole mystery is re-presented to us in the Holy Liturgy - the Sacrifice of the Altar.

And the Apostles went out to make their proclamation everywhere, and the Lord worked with them

* **This plan of salvation** and the way it was worked out are dealt with in Book IV of this series, under the title: "The Design of the Saviour".

and confirmed their words by the miracles that followed
(Mk. 16, 20).

This is the whole story in a nut-shell. The same
will be seen expanded with details from the sources,
in Book No. II of this series.

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