

Dr. Michael Karimattam

# JESUS CHRIST

## THE SOURCE OF OUR HOPE



*Translated by: Glorista Arakal SABS*

[www.mediahouse.online](http://www.mediahouse.online)

# JESUS CHRIST

## THE SOURCE OF OUR HOPE

Repeated Tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and changing climate are seen as signs of impending doom. We are witnessing water shortage all over the world. The water level is going down in the lakes and reservoirs; rivers are drying up; lands that were fertile are now becoming deserts. There was no need of a prophetic eye to see that a disaster is looming in the horizon. Where can we place our foot, when the very earth we stand on gives in? What is the future of the people who live in this universe? Science does not inspire much hope for the future.

It is in this situation that we turn to the Bible to find a ray of hope. The Bible sets forth a hope that is anchored in faith. The source of that faith is the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us, Jesus Christ who is the center and fulfillment of the history of salvation.

This book is prepared with the hope that the readers will be helped to attain this hope and courage. It is Jesus, the source of all our hope that gives us the guarantee. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore" (Rev 21, 1-3); "Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22, 20).



**Sr. Glorista Arackal SABS** belongs to the Tellicherry Province of the SABS Congregation. Studied in America for B.A & MA (History & Counseling) and did Clinical Pastoral Education upto Supervisory level. Returned to India and worked 15 years in the Bible Apostolate in Tellicherry. 8 years in a parish in USA, 5 years in Italy, and 7 years in the Generalate of the SABS Congregation. At present engaged in translation for the purpose of the congregation.



**Michael Karimattam**, a Catholic Priest, belonging to the Archdiocese of Tellicherry, Kerala, India. Born 1942; ordained priest, Rome 1968; holds a Licentiate in Theology from the Pontifical Urban University, Rome and a Doctorate in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome. Has served as one of the three Chief Editors of the POC Malayalam Bible; 15 years as Director, Bible Apostolate of Tellicherry; 4 years as Principal of Divine Bible College, Muringoor. Since 2002 teaches Scripture at the Marymatha Major Seminary, Trichur, India.

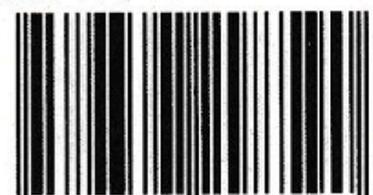
 **MEDIA HOUSE®**

375-A, Pocket 2,  
Mayur Vihar Phase-I, Delhi - 110 091  
Phone: 09555642600, 07599485900  
E-mail: books.mediahouse@gmail.com

[www.mediahouse.online](http://www.mediahouse.online)  
[www.facebook.com/mediahousebooks](http://www.facebook.com/mediahousebooks)

Price: ₹ 140/- US\$ 15

ISBN 978-93-87298-59-0



9 789387 298590 >

# **JESUS CHRIST**

THE SOURCE OF OUR HOPE



# **JESUS CHRIST**

**THE SOURCE OF OUR HOPE**

**Dr. Michael Karimattam**

**Translated by: Glorista Arakal SABS**



Media House<sup>®</sup>

2018



2018

## **JESUS CHRIST - The Source of our Hope**

By Dr. Michael Karimattam

Translated by: Glorista Arakal SABS

© Dr. Michael Karimattam

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without written permission from the publisher.

***Cover Design:*** Media House®

***Printed at :***

Jyoti Printers, C-12, Sector -8, Noida, U.P.

Ph: 0120-2424113/4/5

***Published by:*** Media House®

**Regd Office:**

375-A, Pocket 2, Mayur Vihar Phase-I, Delhi - 110 091

E-mail: [mediahousedelhi@gmail.com](mailto:mediahousedelhi@gmail.com)

**Admin Office:**

C-12, Sector 8, Noida, UP - 201301

Phone: 0120-4222346, 07599485900 , 09555642600

E-mail: [books.mediahouse@gmail.com](mailto:books.mediahouse@gmail.com)

Website: [www.mediahousebooks.com](http://www.mediahousebooks.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/mediahousebooks](http://www.facebook.com/mediahousebooks)

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	7
-------------------	---

## PART - I

### SALVATION HISTORY

Introduction.....	13
1. Primeval History (Origin) – B.C. 1850.....	18
2. History of the Patriarchs (B.C 185-1700) .....	22
3. Slavery and Exodus (B.C. 1750 – 1250) .....	30
4. Conquest and Settlement (B. C. 1250 - 1030) .....	38
5. Monarchy (B.C. 1030 – 587) .....	45
6. Babylonian Exile (B.C.587 – 538).....	58
7. Post Exilicperiod (B.C.538- A.D. 135) .....	66

## PART - II

### JESUS CHRIST THE SOURCE OF HOPE

Introduction.....	91
1. Hope Rooted in the Promises .....	93
2. Miracles, Rays of Hope .....	102
3. The Good News Tower of Hope .....	109
4. Death on the Cross and Resurrection.....	118
CONCLUSION.....	123



## INTRODUCTION

*“I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger.” (Jer 4, 23 – 26).*

This was the cry that rose from the heart of the Prophet Jeremiah who saw in a vision the disaster that was about to fall on his people whom he loved more than his own life. He saw a boiling pot tipping from the stove and the vision shocked him. With fear and trembling created by the vision, he started his prophetic mission. God had assured him of his safety through the vision of the branches of almond tree shaking in the wind. At the same time, he was told that disaster would certainly fall upon the people (Jer 1, 11-12).

As a horse rushing into the battle field, the leaders of the nation, blind to the signs of the time and filled with pride and over-confidence, rushed into disaster. If they were humble enough to listen to the Word of God and repent, they could avoid the disaster. The prophet was heartbroken seeing the blindness of the leaders and the helpless situation of the people. In desperation he cried out, “O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (Jer 9, 1). None of the lamentations, threats or exhortation of the Prophet Jeremiah bore fruit. In B.C. 587 everything came to a tragic end. The army of Babylon took over the land, destroyed

the city, burned down the Temple and enslaved the leaders and the people. The King and his officials were captured and made slaves. A great column of people moved east, as slaves, 2,500 Kilometers away in Babylon. These were the bitter consequence of not listening to the prophet.

But, that was not the end. The prophet, who prophesied doom, continued and communicated the message of consolation. “For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, . . . the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer 29, 10-11). “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel. . . I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish. . . “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” . . . “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate” (Jer 31, 23 -38; Eze 36, 25-29). “For behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Is 65, 17).

The 73 books of the Bible depict the ways God entered into the history of humanity or rather the ways God created the history. They depict how God became the Lord of the history of the human beings. A fraction of this history was presented through the life and experiences of the Prophet Jeremiah. The warnings communicated through Jeremiah are relevant at all times. The Babylonian captivity stands as a lesson to all who dare to ignore the signs of the time or break the laws and yet expect God to remain merciful.

The universal disaster Jeremiah predicted has become a reality today. Scientists have found out that the very structure of

the earth is undergoing changes. Repeated Tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and changing climate are signs of impending doom. We have witnessed water shortage all over the land. The water level is going down in the lakes and reservoirs; rivers are drying up in many parts of the country. Even Kerala that was supposed to be rich with water sources and rivers seems to experience a shortage of rain and there is a threat that Kerala will become a desert in the near future. But then came the flood that reminds of the deluge at the time of Noah, washing away homes and hops of millions of people. On the other side there is terrible shortage of water in many parts not only of India of the whole world. There was no need of a prophetic eye to see that a disaster is looming in the horizon. Where can we place our foot, when the very earth we stand on gives in? What is the future of the people who live in this universe? Science does not inspire much hope for the future.

It is in this situation that we turn to the Bible to find a ray of hope. There is one thing that give us hope and that is the unfailing love of God. “For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you” (Is 54, 10). It is this faith and trust in God that gave strength to the Psalmist. “Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult” (Ps. 46, 1-4).

The Bible sets forth a hope that is anchored in faith. The source of that faith is the Word of God that became flesh and dwelt among us, Jesus Christ who is the center and fulfillment of the salvation history, designed by God the Father, to save sinful humanity. The aim of this small book is to present an analysis of salvation history that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The book has two parts. The first part deals with a simple presentation of the salvation history described in the Bible. The second part

presents the source of our hope that is Jesus Christ and some suggestions to strengthen this hope.

When we are engulfed by darkness and feel that there is nothing to hope for, deep in our hearts we will hear a gentle voice from Jesus saying, “It is I; do not be afraid” (Jn 6,21). It is the voice of the One who calmed the roaring sea, healed the sick and brought the dead back to life. He is with us till the end of time. “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28, 20). “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Heb 12,1).

This book is prepared with the hope that the readers will be helped to attain this hope and courage. It is Jesus, the source of all our hope that gives us the guarantee. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth. . . ; Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. . . . He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more” (Rev 21, 1-3); “Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22, 20).

The English translation was prepared by Sr. Glorista SABS. Mons. Francis Duffy and Fr. Mathew Perumpally have gone through it and suggested various corrections. May God bless them for their hard work. A word of thanks also to Fr. Xavier Vadakekara OFM Cap, manager of Media Publications, Delhi and all his staff members for bringing out this English edition.

**PART - I**  
**SALVATION HISTORY**



# Introduction

The Bible depicts the love of God demonstrated through the Creation and in particular through His redemptive plan of. Creation took place by the Word of God that has neither beginning nor end. The same Word became man to save humanity that had moved away from God. The aim of the Incarnation is to reconcile humanity with God and to allow him to partake in the divinity of God. This is the story of Salvation God gives to humanity. Hence, Bible is called Salvation history. Salvation was the motivating factor for writing the Bible. "All these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20,31).

The Bible reveals that God desires to share his life with the humans. The very aim of creation was to allow the humanity to be with Him for all eternity. It was for this communion that God created human beings in His own image, as man and woman. Humanity should remain in union with God and have communion with each other. It was for this that God created man with the capacity to think and to make decisions freely.

The image and likeness of God in which man is created, (Gen 1, 26-28) the breath of God that gave life to him who was formed from the soil (Gen 2,7), the paradise in which the first man settled (Gen 2,15) all these point to the same truth. The fact that man was given dominion over all the animals and God prepared a paradise for him to stay points to the divine life in man. He was to be the visible representative of God on earth. But, man misused the freedom he was given and distorted the image of God in him. Through sin he was cut off from God and he was cast out of paradise.

However God did not abandon man who rejected the fountain of the living waters, and dug out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer 2, 13). A picture of God who goes after the man who rejected Him and moved away is presented in the Scriptures. The Bible depicts the picture of salvation history that essentially describes the relationship between God, who tries to attract man with an unending love, and man who moves away due to his arrogance created by ignorance. This history that starts in the creation ends with the advent of the new Creation that renews everything in the New Heaven and New Earth.

The fall of humanity became an obstacle in the plan of God who wanted man to enjoy eternal life with Him. Man lost the Divine life in him and was cast out of Paradise when he gave more importance to his ambitions than obeying and believing in God and acting according to His plan.

It was impossible for man, by himself, to restore his broken relationship with God. Hence God took the initiative to save man from his sinful condition, to forgive his sins and to heal his wounds. By the Holy Spirit, man will be purified of his sins (Eze 36, 25-28). The Paradise lost will be re-gained. Satan who stands against God and man will be defeated and eliminated. To accomplish this God came down from heaven and stood with man. By accepting the sinful human body, He defeated evil and purified human nature. Thus humanity will be freed from the slavery of sin and brought back to communion with God. This process is called salvation history and is presented in the Bible. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ... God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more,..." "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21, 1-5).

Salvation History in the Bible can be divided into three parts:

***1. Preparation; 2. Fulfillment; 3. Proclamation – culmination.***

The period from creation to the coming of Jesus Christ is called the phase of preparation. This is mainly known as the Old Testament times. The coming of Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Savior awaited by all the peoples, is a theme repeated many times in the Old Testament. There are many prophecies that deal with the coming of the Savior and it has been a major part of the teaching of the Bible. The short period that deals with the birth, activities, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is called the time of fulfillment. These are narrated in the gospels. The third period is from the glorification of Jesus to His second coming that is depicted in the 23 books of the NT that follow the gospels as the proclamation of the Good News of salvation to the ends of the earth.

The first period is called the time of the Old Testament; it is the time of expectation based on promises and prophecies. The third period is called the time of the Church or the New Israel; it is the time of proclamation of the Good News. The period between the two is the center of Salvation history, and Jesus Christ is the focal point. The main focus of the Old Testament history is the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The source of strength and courage for the third period is Jesus Christ. Drawing energy from Him, the Church proclaims the Good News to the ends of the earth. The end of salvation history marks the end of the universe. After that, there is no history, only the renewed universe and the resurrected people, and the eternal moment that manifest the Glory of God. There will be no more tears or pain. Man was created for this eternal happiness. The Bible assures that God will lead humanity to this eternal bliss, but only with their co-operation. Those who refuse to co-operate will be cut off forever (Rev 20, 8).

The time of preparation, the Old Testament time that deals mainly with the history of Israel can be divided into seven parts:

1. The primeval history - 1850
2. The Patriarchal history - 1950 – 1850
3. Slavery and Exodus - 1550 - 1250
4. Struggle for the Promised Land- 1250 – 1030
5. The time of Monarchy - 1030 – 587
  - a. Undivided Kingdom - 1030 – 930
  - b. Divided Kingdom - 930 – 731
  - c. Only Judah - 721 – 587
6. The Exile - 587 – 538
7. Post-Exilic Period - B.C. 538 – A.D. 135
  - a. Persian Rule - B.C.- 538 -332
  - b. Greek Rule - B.C.332 – 063
  - c. Roman Rule - B.C. 63 – A.D. 135

The history of Israel started with Abraham, the Father of faith. The time before Abraham is called primeval history. The period that deals with the rule of the Kings is divided into three parts. The period under Rome began when the Roman Consul, Pompey conquered Palestine in B.C. 63 and ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 135. With that Israel ceased to exist as a kingdom and all those who remained in Jerusalem were deported and auctioned out as slaves. The name of Jerusalem was changed to Eastern Capital (*EliaCapitolina*). Jews were forbidden to enter Jerusalem. The place of Israel in salvation history underwent radical changes.

It was during the time of the Roman Rule that the Christ Event, namely, the birth, ministry, death, resurrection and

exaltation of Jesus Christ that brought salvation to humanity took place. After the resurrection of Jesus, his disciples went all over the world to proclaim the Good News of salvation. Thus, the time of Roman Rule marked the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament; from Israel to the Church and from the Old Jerusalem to the New Jerusalem.

In the following chapters each period will be discussed in more detail. While doing so, the historical importance of the time and how Bible deals with that period will be explained and the parts of the Bible that originated during that period will be indicated.

# 1

## PRIMEVAL HISTORY (Origin) – B.C. 1850

The long period, from creation to the call of Abraham, is called the “history before history” or primeval history. Since there is no written document or any record that would help to determine the time, it is called history beyond history. At the same time, since it deals with the origin of creation, it is called history origins or primeval history.

Genesis chapters 1 to 11 deal with the origin of everything such as the universe, all the creatures, human beings, the evil, and also the need of salvation history. This part could be considered as the “introduction” to the entire Bible. It describes the creation of the universe, all the animals, man and woman, the aim of creation, the origin of sin, pain, death and the reasons for the suffering people endure. On a personal level, it deals with the basic issues of the identity of man, who I am, where did I come from and where am I going etc. and these issues are analyzed in the light of Divine revelation. The answers are not based on scientific or historical facts but on faith. These chapters present not a history proper, but the theology of history.

God created the universe and everything in it. The universe has a definite beginning and God created each and every being with a particular aim. Though man is part of the universe, he is different from all the other creatures. The statement that man was created in the image of God and it was God’s breath that gave him life highlights the differences. Hence man must act as the representative of God on the earth. The use of phrases such as “dominion”, “care taker of the garden” etc. points to this truth.

In these chapters we find various literary forms such as poetry, mythology, popular stories, genealogy and many others. These facts should be taken into account when one tries to interpret them. They are not eyewitness accounts but stories with meaning that should be viewed in the light of faith. The creation narrative reflects the influence of the mythological descriptions of creation that existed in the ancient Mesopotamia. We can see in them also the influence of the story of the formation of the people of Israel. Even when the mythological images are used, they would take a new meaning and nuance in the Bible.

The Primeval can be divided into six parts:

1. Creation – First Account - Gen 1,1-2,4
2. Creation - Second Account(man, woman, paradise) - Gen 2, 4 - 3
3. Fall of man - origin of evil - Gen 3,1 - 24
4. Growth of evil –Origin of civilization - Gen 4,1 - 6, 4
5. Flood - a new beginning - Gen 6,5 - 9,17
6. Origin of nations - Gen 9,18 - 11,32

In the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis we can see two creation stories that according to bible scholars derive from two different traditions. The first one (Gen 1,1-2,4a) comes from the Priestly tradition, and it is presented as hymn, praising the Creator, while the second one (Gen 2,4b-25) that came from the Yahwist tradition and uses the literary form of folklore. The story of fall that follows also comes from the Yahwist tradition. The history of Israel has influenced the narration of the creation of man, paradise, command, breaking of God's command, the loss of paradise and the origin of death.

Israel became a people at the foot of Mount Sinai through a Covenant with God. Their existence as a people of God was conditional, that means they would remain as the people of God

as long as they obey the precepts of the Covenant. If they broke the Covenant, they would lose their status as the People of God and they would be cast out of the Promised Land where they were privileged to experience the presence of God in their midst.

Those who broke the laws of the Covenant were cast out of the Promised Land. It was in the light of this experience that they wrote the second account of creation. The creation of man from the earth symbolized the formation of a people of God in the desert. The breath of God that gave life to man stands for the Covenant and its laws which are vital for the very existence of the people of God. In the same way, Paradise symbolized the Promised Land and the loss of Paradise stood for the Babylonian captivity. In short, the second creation account was made in the light of the Exodus event.

Salvation history presented in the primeval history can be summarized as follows. God created humans in His own image and likeness as man and woman and appointed them as representatives of God on earth. As long as they lived according to the will of God, they were living in Paradise, in communion with God. But when they succumbed to the temptation posed by Satan and broke the command of God, they became slaves to sin and, with that evil entered into the world; suffering and death became part of their lives.

However, God did not allow Satan to have the final word. God promised that He will put an end to evil and free humanity from the slavery of sin. This is called the protoevangelium or the first Gospel (Gen 3,15). Man, who was cast out of Paradise increased in numbers, established cities, started industries, and built a city that was filled with violence. As evil multiplied, God destroyed the world through a flood. Only Noah and his family, who remained just and faithful to God, were protected from the disaster. But, through a son of Noah, Ham Canaan), evil raised its ugly head in human life. Man who became so proud as to challenge God and try to build a tower that would reach

up to heaven. It was a sign of rejecting God. This brought to shattering unity and scattering people into various nations, speaking different languages that they could not understand each other anymore. Thus the primeval history ends by drawing a picture of humanity that was scattered all over the world.

The various accounts of genealogy trace the origin of all the peoples to a pair of parents, showing thereby that all the peoples belong to the same family and so they are brothers and sisters. At the same time it shows that the growth of evil did not mark the total elimination of good. Good and evil grow as two parallel lines. When the earth was destroyed by the flood, the family of Noah was saved. From among the scattered people special attention is focused on one person, namely Abram, the son of Terah. The next stage of Salvation history continues through him.

After the flood, God, acknowledging and accepting man's tendency to sin, assured protection through a covenant (Gen 9, 8 - 17). This is called the cosmic covenant, and is the first of many other covenants that would follow, culminating in the New Covenant, signed in the blood of the Son of God.

## 2

# HISTORY OF THE PATRIARCHS (B.C 185-1700)

The second part of Salvation history deals with the Fathers of faith and so it is also called the “History of the Patriarchs”. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his 12 sons are considered as the patriarchs and the period they lived was between B.C. 1850 and 1700. The Book of Genesis, Chapters 12 to 50 tell their history.

After the tower of Babel episode, the people were scattered to different parts of the world. From them God called one man and that marked a turning point in the history of salvation. From among the numerous families, God chose one family and they became the instrument of salvation for humanity. The history of the Patriarchs is presented as a family history.

The history of the Fathers that started with the call of Abraham from Haran in Mesopotamia ended with the death of Jacob in Egypt. As Joseph, a son of Jacob became the ruler of Egypt, the family history turned into a history of a people.

There is a dispute still going on among scholars as to whether the Patriarchs were historical figures or only eponymous ancestors namely, representatives of the tribes. However the majority opinion is in favor of considering them as historical persons. There is enough proof to show that there existed the places, cultures, incidents and laws in Mesopotamia during the second century B.C., that are similar to the accounts presented in the Bible. Though there are differences in details, basically those persons and incidents could be considered as historical.

The Patriarchs were nomads who went around searching for green meadows for their sheep. Their lives were connected with the people who migrated to the Middle Eastern parts during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. While other peoples considered their migrations as a search for better grazing field for their sheep, for the Patriarchs, especially Abraham, it was a response to the call of God. At the same time, it was an example of God entering into history and so it is part of salvation history.

The Bible narrates in detail the life of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph. But, only brief description could be found about the other Patriarchs. The story of Isaac is presented in relation to his Father, Abraham or son, Jacob. The history of the Patriarchs can be divided into three parts:

1. Abraham - Gen 12, 1 - 25, 18.
2. Isaac - Jacob - Gen 25, 19 - 36, 43.
3. Joseph - Gen 37, 1 - 50, 26.

While studying the history of the Patriarchs , we will focus our attention on the call they received from God, the commandments God gave them, the promises God made, their response must to God, their family relationships, conflicts and the way they dealt with them etc. Also, we will consider the revelation about God and His activities. Step by step, God revealed Himself in history and these revelations could be studied through historical events.

## **ABRAHAM**

The following events are included in the narration about Abraham, presented in Genesis 12,1 to 25, 8: Call and response (12,1-9); the promise in crisis (12,10-20); brotherly love (13,1 - 14,21); covenant (15,1-21); birth of Ishmael (16,1-16); again the covenant (17,1-27); visit from God (18,1-19,38); the promise in crisis again (20,1-18); heir to the promises (21, 1-34); test of faith (22,1-26); heir to the Promised Land (23,1-20); Children of Abraham & death of Abraham (24,1-25,8).

The call of Abraham is resented abruptly, without any preparation. As if out of the blue, God appeared to Abraham and asked him to leave his home and go to a land he would show him. This call was accompanied by promises of a land of his own, innumerable decedents and salvation to all. The ensuing events depict Abraham's response to this call and the fulfillment of the promises over the years. Abraham's response could be summarized in two words, faith and obedience and that of God as fidelity to the promises.

Through the sub plots of Hagar, Lot, Sodom-Gomorrhah, the faith of Abraham and faithfulness of God became clearer. At the same time these events point to the origin and mutual relationship of various peoples as well as their relationship to Abraham. To Abraham, who was a shepherd, God revealed Himself as a Shepherd and demonstrated the qualities of a Good Shepherd. Abraham was a nomad and wherever he went, he experienced the presence of God. He learned that it is God who protects and guides him at every moment of his life. He recognized that the crises he experienced in his life were tests of faith and so he submitted totally to the plan of God. Thus, Abraham became a model of faith and source of salvation for all the people (Gen 22, 16 - 18).

Ishmael and Isaac came together to bury their father, Abraham. Through this, the Bible teaches the need for unity and love between peoples. It was with the death of Sarah that Abraham acquired a plot in the Promised Land. The beginning of the fulfillment of the Promised Land for Israel began with the plot that contained the earthly remains of Sarah, the matriarch of faith. The eager and anxious waiting for entering the Promised Land, the wars waged to take possession of it, the joy of occupying it, and the pain and disappointment of losing it etc. are all parts of salvation history.

## ISAAC

The root meaning of the name Isaac is “he laughed”. Not only for his aged parents but for all the people he was a source of joy. The promise, “Through your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice” (Gen 22, 18) clarifies the meaning of this name. Isaac climbed the mountain, carrying the wood for the burnt offering. He was laid on the altar by his father, as a sacrificial lamb. Thus, Isaac became a symbol and prototype of Jesus who offered himself for the Redemption of humanity. The promises given to Abraham were repeated to Isaac (Gen 26, 2-5). Salvation history continued through Isaac.

## JACOB

Life of Jacob was filled with conflicts. The conflict with his brother started in the womb of his mother (Gen 25, 22-23) and continued all through his life. The paternal blessing and promise of salvation was fulfilled through Jacob, the younger son; just as it happened through, Isaac, the second son of Abraham. The Bible depicts the way the conflict started, developed and ended. All these show that salvation is a gratuitous gift God gives to humanity.

In the long history of Jacob two encounters with God deserve special attention. The first encounter took place when he was running away from home to Haran, fearing his brother (Gen 28, 10 -22). Filled with fatigue and fear and weighed down by guilt feeling, Jacob slept on the wayside. In the sleep, he saw the heaven open above him and God appearing to him, not to scold but to bless him and to assure him of divine protection. The promise given to Abraham and Isaac was repeated to Jacob, signifying that salvation history was to continue through Jacob. Here we see that God, going beyond the sin and human weakness, demonstrates his love and mercy.

The second encounter with God took place when Jacob was fleeing from his Father-in-law in Haran with two wives,

two concubines, 12 children born to them, and the wealth he accumulated there. He heard that his brother was coming with 400 people to face him and so he concluded that it was dangerous to return to the homeland. The agreement he made with his Father-in-law had blocked his way back to Haran. Looking for a way to escape, Jacob slept on the bank of river Jabbok. A stranger appeared and wrestled with him (Gen 32, 22-32). Here God startled the sleeping coward and strengthened him through a fight. With that Jacob earned the new name “Israel”.

With this, Jacob overcame fear and cowardice, and the constant tendency to run away from problems as God made him strong and courageous. He got reconciled with his brother and then went to Bethel. There he buried the idols brought from Haran and thus demonstrated his total fidelity to God. The history of salvation continues through his children.

## JOSEPH

Chapters 37 to 50 of the book of Genesis are set aside for narrating the story of Joseph. However before starting the detailed account of Joseph, the Bible speaks about the children of Esau (Gen 36), showing thereby that God does not reject anyone. Though the promises given to Abraham were fulfilled through Jacob and his sons, Esau and his children were not neglected. As many families and tribes they lived in a land of their own. Esau voluntarily left Canaan and settled in Zeir. When the children of Jacob lived as slaves in Egypt, the children of Esau lived in their own land as a royal family.

Right before starting the description of Joseph, there is an account of Judah and his two sons (Gen 38). Peres, born to Judah in his daughter-in-law, Tamar, became an ancestor of King David and the Messiah. These incidents show that God does not act according to the plan of man.

Jacob had 12 sons and a daughter. Of the 13 children Joseph was the most important person in salvation history. Hence more

space in the Bible is set aside for the narration about Joseph. The literary form used to present Joseph is that of a novella. The other Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had visions and received messages directly from God; no such incident appears in the history of Joseph. However, the Bible emphasizes that God was with him all through his life. Joseph was aware that it was God who guided him every moment of his life (Gen 45,5).

After many years of waiting, Jacob got a son in his beloved wife and that was Joseph. Jacob had a special love for Joseph that made his brothers hate Joseph and feel jealousy towards him. This alienation was aggravated as Joseph reported the misdeeds of his brothers to his father. Once Joseph had a dream in which he saw that his Father and brothers were bowing before him. This led to further animosity among the brothers. They wanted to do away with Joseph and a suitable situation was created by their Father, unknowingly. It was Jacob who sent Joseph to his brothers who were grazing the sheep in a distant place. The brothers used the opportunity to capture him and tried to kill him but Ruben saved his life. They threw him into a cistern. Judah suggested that Joseph could be sold as a slave. Thus the beloved son ended up in the hands of slave dealers. From a slave market in Egypt, Potiphar, a royal servant, bought him.

Within a short period, Joseph proved to be honest and talented with an admirable character. The master began to entrust him with more and more responsibilities. Finally, Joseph was appointed as the care taker of all the wealth of Potiphar. But, the good days did not last long. The wife of Potiphar began to love Joseph. Love turned into lust and one day she approached him and demanded that he lie with her. When Joseph refused, she was furious and decided to ruin him. Potiphar, who believed his wife, imprisoned Joseph, but God did not allow Joseph to perish in the prison.

The prison guard, who was aware of Joseph's innocence and good nature, allowed him freedom with various responsibilities in the prison. Joseph interpreted the dream of the other prisoners

and the dreams were fulfilled at the time Joseph predicted. Later, the Pharaoh came to know about the ability of Joseph to interpret dreams. Once he was called to the palace to interpret a dream the Pharaoh had. As Joseph was able to make suggestions to save the kingdom from disaster, the Pharaoh appointed him as the highest officer in the kingdom. Joseph was given all the authority needed to deal with future problems. Thus, the one who was sentenced to death by his brothers and sold as a slave became the highest officer in the land of Egypt. Joseph realized that he was able to carry out all the responsibilities entrusted to him because God was with him. He had a balanced and mature personality. He neither despaired at the face of suffering nor became proud of high positions. With a firm determination, he faced the temptations. He did not keep grudge against those who hurt him or take revenge when an opportune time came. He moved forward with a firm conviction that all that happened in his life was according to the will of God. When his brothers came to him, he received them and treated them with a kind and generous heart. Joseph was a model of believing in the providence of God and of forgiving love. He was also a prototype of Jesus who was rejected by his own people.

The Pharaoh who raised Joseph to the highest office in Egypt helped him to marry a daughter of a priest in Egypt. The two sons born of this marriage were accepted by Jacob as his own sons. In accordance with the invitation of Pharaoh, Joseph brought his father and brothers to Egypt and settled them in the fertile land of Goshen. Thus Israel settled in Egypt, away from the Promised Land. Before dying, Jacob blessed his sons and as a prophecy spoke of the things that were going to happen to his children (Gen 48-49). Jacob was buried in the cave of Machpelah, with his ancestors. The history of the Patriarchs concludes with the description of the death of Joseph. His body was kept in a casket after preparing it according to the custom in Egypt and then brought to the Promised Land to be buried with his ancestors.

The history of the Patriarchs is presented as a family history of four generations. All through the narration we can see conflict between the brothers. But, every conflict is solved amiably and the bond between them is re-established with more intimacy. Thus the history of the Patriarchs is the story of reconciliation and mutual love. The history began as a family story but it became a history of a people as they reached Egypt.

While depicting the formation of the people of Israel, the bible shows their relationship with the other peoples in the Middle East. Through the narratives about Noah as well as Abraham, and their descendants, the Bible teaches that all peoples are children of God and so they should not fight with each other but live in harmony.

The patriarchs were nomads having no place as their own. God appeared to them as a shepherd like themselves. As the shepherd who goes ahead searching for fertile grazing places, God guided them, protected them from enemies and walked in front of them like a Good Shepherd.

The God of the Patriarchs is the God of promises. Numerous Promises were made from the time Abraham was called (Gen 12, 1-3) to the moment they got ready to leave for Egypt (Gen 46,2-4). The Patriarchs, through their experiences, came to know that God is faithful in His promises. This conviction was passed from generation to generation and handed down as blessings. "The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth" (Gen 48, 15 - 16).

Next we examine what happened to the Israelites who migrated to Egypt. This is the next step in the history of Salvation, namely Exodus.

# 3

## SLAVERY AND EXODUS (B.C. 1750 – 1250)

The third stage in Salvation History is called Exodus or liberation from slavery. The four books of the Pentateuch, known as the books of Moses (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) deal with this period.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Jacob and his sons, who migrated to Egypt while Joseph was occupying the highest office in Egypt, were received with great honor and generosity. They were given the most fertile area in the country. At the time, Egypt was ruled by the Hyksos dynasty that came from the East and conquered Egypt. The kings who ruled were divided into various dynasties. Accordingly, the Hyksos were considered as the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> dynasties.

During the first half of the second century B.C., there were massive migrations to different parts of the world. The moves Abraham made from Ur to Haran and from Haran to Canaan were part of this migration. The start of this migration was in Mesopotamia. Many groups such as Indo-Europeans, Hurrians, and Amorites were involved this massive migration from place to place. The conquerors that came from the East and began to rule over Egypt were called the Hyksos, to designate their status as foreign chieftains. It was between 1800 and 1750 B.C. that they conquered Egypt. In 1750, they made Avaris their capital and began their rule in

Egypt. It was during this time that Joseph and later Jacob and family came and settled in Goshen. The then rulers of Egypt gave them a warm welcome as they too had come from the East.

The Egyptians were not happy with the rule of foreign kings. Paying tribute to the Hyksos, the Egyptian kings had established a kingdom in the south, centered on Thebes. During the first half of the 16th Century B.C., the opposition to the Hyksos gained strength. The last king of the 17th dynasty, Kamoses led a war against the Hyksos and won a partial victory. The next king, Ahmoses succeeded to defeat the Hyksos and started the 18th dynasty. This change in the ruling dynasty badly affected the Israelites who lived in Egypt.

The statement that “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” (Ex 1, 8) refers to this change. The new rulers hated the foreigners including the Israelites. A large group escaped to the East and Ahmoses followed them until Canaan and extended his rule to that area. It is with this background that we must understand Israel’s slavery in Egypt. For two centuries (1750-1550) the Israelites lived and flourished in Egypt. During the rule of Ramses II (1290-1224), the most powerful king of the 18th Dynasty, the oppression against the Israelites reached its climax. Probably it was during this time that the Israelites left Egypt under the leadership of Moses.

## **EXODUS**

The Exodus event had three stages: 1. Liberation from slavery. 2. Sinai Covenant. 3. Wandering in the desert. Under the leadership of Moses they started the journey through the desert with the hope of reaching Canaan, the Promised Land. But, before reaching the destination Moses died on Mount Nebo in Moab. With the description of the death of Moses, the 5th book of Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, ends.

## 1. Slavery and Liberation (Ex 1,1 – 18 – 27)

After describing briefly the way Jacob and his family reached Egypt as guests of Pharaoh, the sacred author narrates the severe oppression the descendants of Israel suffered in Egypt. The Egyptians felt threatened by the increasing number of Israelites and their strength and so they tried to suppress them in various ways. Finally they turned to genocide, by killing all the male babies born to Hebrew women (Ex 1,8 – 22). It was during this time that Moses, the future liberator of the Israelites, was born and was miraculously kept alive, in the palace as a prince (Ex 2,1-10). Moses, who saw the suffering of his people, tried to save them by killing the man who was beating a Jew. Fearing revenge from Pharaoh, Moses escaped into Median. There he worked for Jethro, a priest in the area, and married his daughter, Zipporah (Ex 2, 11-25).

Moses stayed with his Father-in-law and tended his sheep. One day, God appeared to him in a vision, revealed Himself as Yahweh, and entrusted him with the mission of liberating the people of Israel from the slavery in Egypt. He was to go back to Egypt and confront the Pharaoh and demand to free the Israelites. Aaron, the brother of Moses, was appointed as his spokesman (Ex 3,1-23). Moses returned to Egypt and communicated God's message to the Pharaoh but he did not care to heed the demand of God through Moses. Not only that, he decided to increase the suffering of the Hebrews (Ex 5, 1 – 6, 30).

One by one ten plagues fell on the Egyptians and finally the Pharaoh was forced to let Israel leave Egypt (Ex 7, 1-13,22). Shocked by the death of the first born, the Pharaoh allowed Israel to leave but in a few days he changed his mind and chased them with a huge army. Seeing the army approaching, the people got scared. God parted the Red Sea to make a passage for the people and as the last one stepped on the land the sea returned to the original state, killing all of the Pharaoh's army

that followed the Israelites (Ex 14). The people who crossed the sea miraculously sang praise and glory to God under the leadership of Moses and Miriam (Ex 15).

The people were happy to be liberated from Egypt but they had to endure the hardships of the desert. The Promised Land was still far away and the journey to reach it was difficult and challenging. They had to grow into becoming a people of God before entering the Promised Land. This growth took place through a long and difficult journey. This journey can be divided into two parts. The first part deals with the journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai where God made a covenant with the people. The second part deals with the journey from Mt. Sinai to the land of Canaan.

After crossing the sea they moved toward the mountain of God called Sinai or Horeb. On the way, they met with many crises, having no food or water and encountering people who came to attack them. Faced with these obstacles the people cried and complained against God and Moses. God heard their helpless cry and responded by giving them bread from heaven (Ex 16, 1-31) and water from the rocks (Ex 17, 1-7). God protected them from the enemies (Ex 16, 8-16) and appointed judges to help Moses (Ex 18, 1-27). God shielded them from the heat of the sun as a cloud and guided them with a pillar of cloud by the day and a pillar of fire in the night. Thus under the protective hands of God, they reached the foot of Mount Sinai.

## **2. Covenant at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19; Numbers 9)**

A group of people who were nothing but a band of slaves were raised to the status of a “priestly people” and also “the people of God”, through the Covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. This Covenant stands at the center of the history of salvation and also of the Old Testament. Through this covenant, God accepted Israel as his chosen people. The conditions to

remain as “the people of God” were made clear through the commandments and covenantal laws. People pledged to obey the precepts of the covenant of God and to remain faithful to God.

The Covenant God made with the people at Sinai had great importance for the salvation history and we can see it being explained in Exodus 19, 1 - 40, 34; Leviticus 1,1-27, 34; Numbers 1,1 - 10,10. The holiness and glory of God was revealed at Sinai and the people were awe struck at this vision (Ex 19, 1-25). God made the covenant with them on the basis of the Ten Commandments and other laws (Ex 20, 1 - 24, 11). God taught them through Moses the rubrics they should follow in worshipping Him and also how they should live as the people of God (Ex 24,12 - 31,18). Moses and the people obeyed those directives. They made all the instruments they needed for the worship. When the tent was raised, it was filled with the presence of God, manifested in a thick cloud (Ex 35, 3 - 40, 38).

In the midst of instructions and their execution, the first sin of Israel, idolatry and its punishment are described (Ex 32, 1 - 35, 2). With a mighty hand and out-stretched arm, God liberated the people and carried them safely as on the wings of an eagle. But, soon they forgot God who did all these for them and made a golden calf to worship. For this unfaithful act, God prepared to destroy them but Moses prayed and acted as the mediator for them. Accepting the intercessory prayer of Moses, God spared the people.

The entire book of Leviticus deals with the worship that should be offered to God and how they should prepare themselves for this. The book of Numbers deals with the preparation for the journey to the Promised Land (Num 1, 1 - 10, 10).

### **3. The Desert Experience (Num 10, 11 - Deut 34,12)**

The main theme of the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy is the journey Israel undertook through the desert from Sinai, the mountain of the Covenant, to the Promised Land. However, there is not much explanation of the actual journey. The sacred

author gives more importance to the positive and negative experiences of the people in their relationship to God. During the journey they faced various tests, temptations, and trials. The people failed to remain faithful while facing the temptations and God disciplined them through punishments. Lack of food and water and attack from enemies were tests they faced on the way. There were power struggles among the people; even his own brother and sister complained against Moses (Num 12, 1-16).

The people were afraid to fight to occupy the Promised Land (Num 13,1-14,45). Hence, they were punished for their lack of faith and were condemned to wander through the desert until all of that generation died. The book of Numbers ends with the description of the people arriving at the Eastern border of the Promised Land. This book was called “Numbers” because it reports two census, one in the beginning (1-4) and the other at the end (26-29).

The book of Deuteronomy tells basically what was narrated in the book of Numbers. The book is presented as a farewell discourse of Moses to the people of Israel who were encamped at the threshold of the Promised Land, the plane of Moab. Bible Scholars are of the opinion that the book was written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. However the book is presented as the last words of Moses who knew that he will not be allowed to enter the Promised Land but he warned them of the dangers and temptations they would face in the Promised Land, and the need to remain faithful to the laws he gave them.

The people must always remember the great things God has done for them; and faithfully observe the laws of the Covenant and the Commandments (Deut 1 - 11). Moses reminded them of the laws God gave them (12 - 26). In a very powerful language he enumerates the blessings they would receive if they obey the laws and the punishments they would suffer if they failed to follow the laws (27 - 28). The precepts of the Sinai Covenant were again repeated to implant them firmly in their hearts (29 - 30). Finally Moses appointed Joshua as his successor

and entrusted him with the responsibility of leading the people to the Promised Land. As Moses received the final directions from God (31, 9 - 23), he bid farewell to the people, blessing them and reciting the prophetic Psalm (32-33). The book of Deuteronomy concludes recording the death of Moses and praising his prophetic leadership (34).

The Pentateuch is an unfinished book. Before reaching the destination, the leader died. In fact all those who started the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land died on the way. It was a new generation, under a new leader, that entered and occupied the Promised Land. This teaches us a great lesson. Just as the people of Israel, we all are pilgrims, journeying toward the eternal abode, heaven. On the way, we too will encounter many temptations and we must overcome them. It is God who leads us and appoints leaders on the way. If we obey the commandments of God, we would reach our destination.

Exodus is the most important event in the Old Testament. It was through the Exodus event that the people experienced the power and love of Yahweh. Exodus was instrumental in forming them as the people of God. Every year the people recalled the Exodus event through the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and the Tents. Many of the Psalms recount the great things God performed during the Exodus and praise Him (Pss 78, 81, 105, 106, 114, 135, 136). During the times of disaster and national crises, they recalled the Exodus event and gained strength from it (e.g. Is 63, 11-14). The Prophets presented it as the ideal time in the life of the people of God (Amos 2, 10; Hos 2, 16-17; Jer 2, 1-13; Ez 16). During the Babylonian Captivity, citing the Exodus event, the prophets gave the people hope for a second return (Is 40 - 55).

The New Testament also gives much importance to the Exodus event. The Evangelists present the glorification of Jesus Christ through death and resurrection as a new Exodus (Lk 9, 31 -51. 12, 50; Jn 13, 1). Many of the practices and observances of the Church, Baptism, Holy Mass, Holy Thursday celebrations

(Passover), Pentecost, Priesthood, Sacrifice etc. could be explained only in the light of the Exodus event. The New Testament presents the Christian life as an exodus - leaving this world we go to the Father's House, through Baptism and death (1 Cor 10, 1-13; 2 Peter 1, 14-15).

The Exodus event has great importance in the life of society and individuals. It is the source of inspiration for many writers and also for the liberation movements. The Liberation Theology that focuses on the liberation of the Black people, Tribal people, women and anyone who is oppressed, demonstrates the contemporary significance of the Exodus event. Yahweh who guided the Exodus is the God of the oppressed, the God of liberation.

The liberation from the slavery in Egypt was mainly on political, social and economic spheres. But today we need liberation at a much deeper level, that is, a spiritual liberation. All the precepts of the Covenant point to this liberation. The liberation accomplished by Moses and even more fully by Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this liberation. Thus, Exodus points to the total liberation from the slavery to sin and death.

Through the Exodus event, God revealed Himself as Yahweh and proved to be stronger than all other gods. It was Yahweh who liberated Israel from slavery and led them to the Promised Land. The Sinai Covenant strengthened and sealed the relationship between God and the people. The Ark of the Covenant which contained the Ten Commandments, the written Word of God was the visible sign of God's presence. The Tent of meeting was filled with His presence. God guided the people during the day through a pillar of Cloud and at night through a pillar of fire and showed them the place of rest. Celebrations were only to help them deepen their relationship with God. In short, through the Exodus, Israel became the people of God. Next they needed a place to live as a people and the struggle to obtain that will be discussed in the next chapter.

# 4

## CONQUEST AND SETTLEMENT (B. C. 1250 - 1030).

One of the promises God gave to Abraham when he was called from Haran was the possession of a land of his own. The Pentateuch ends presenting the picture of Israel encamped at the threshold of the Promised Land. The next two books, Joshua and Judges describe the wars they waged to occupy the Promised Land and then to keep it in their possession.

### **Historical Back Ground - Migration of the Philistines**

It was during the middle of the 13th Century B.C. that the Israelites left Egypt and wandered through the desert, towards Canaan, the Promised Land. After the death of Moses, under the leadership of Joshua, they began the fight for the Promised Land. But at the same time another people, the Philistines, that were much more powerful than the Israelites, were trying to occupy Canaan.

During the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, those people started from the shores of the Aegean Sea, crossed the Mediterranean Sea and attacked Egypt. Since they came through the sea, historians called them sea-people. Though they were few in numbers, they had excellent weapons and a systematically trained army and so they were very powerful. It was soon after Israel left Egypt that they tried to dominate Egypt. But, Ramses III defeated them in 1190 turned them into mercenaries and settled them on their Eastern border, the south-eastern corner of Canaan. There they established three towns namely Gaza, Ashdod and Ashkelon. Soon they gained

freedom from Egypt and established two more towns, Ekron and Gath. Since they had five cities, they began to be known as the *Penta-polis*. Because the Philistines lived in Canaan, the land began to be known as Palestine.

The influence of the Philistines went beyond the five cities. They had their own powerful weapons bows and arrows as well as swords; they had horses and chariots, and local kings to lead them. During the first part of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, they began to invade all of Canaan and settle in the conquered areas. Hence conflicts between the Israelites and the Philistines became inevitable. The book of Judges presents these conflicts and wars. However, the historical background was not limited just to these conflicts. There were other elements that played a decisive role in shaping the history of Canaan.

## **Internal conflicts in Canaan**

Canaan was a land filled with small local rulers. The social set up was such that it was divided among the kings, lords and tenants. The local kings tried to keep a good relationship with Egypt. However, severe internal conflicts tore the land apart during the last part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

As the influence of Egypt weakened over Canaan, the local rulers started wars against each other to expand their kingdom. There was another element that also influenced the history of these kingdoms. In many places there were the nomads known as “Hapiru” or “Habiru” settled and they offered their services to the local kings as farmers and soldiers. It is possible that the forefathers of the Israelites once belonged to these people. Probably the term “Hebrews” came from the word “Habiru”.

While the rulers were fighting with each other, there were internal conflicts in many kingdoms. The farmers refused to accept their local kings. The mercenaries joined them. The local kings were in terror and sought the help of the Egyptians. Letters seeking the help of the Egyptians were found by archeologists in

the ancient city of El-Amarna. These internal conflicts created a favorable atmosphere for the Israelites who moved under the leadership of Joshua. Not only that, some of the local kings made a treaty with the Israelites (Joshua 9). It was under these complex set up that the Israelites tried to occupy the Promised Land.

## Joshua

The main theme of the book of Joshua is the wars Israel waged in order to occupy the Promised Land. Upon the death of Moses, Joshua took up the leadership. God assured him of His help and support. Chapters 1 to 5 describe the preparations for the war. Though he knew that he would have the help of God, Joshua did not neglect his duties as the commander-in-chief of the army. Spies were dispatched to observe and find out the situation of the enemy.

He prepared the people to be strong and efficient with his words of encouragement and assured them that it will be God who would wage the war for them. The many wars Israel waged are narrated in the chapters 5 to 12. The chapters 13 to 22 describe how the land was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel. Chapter 23 presents the farewell speech of Joshua. As Moses did, Joshua also reminded the people of the great things God had done for them and exhorted them about the importance of being faithful to God and keeping the commandments. The Sinai covenant was renewed at Shechem before the death of Joshua. The renewal of the Covenant and the death of Joshua are narrated in the last chapter, (24), of the book of Joshua.

## Judges

The people of Israel settled in the Promised Land, Canaan, under the leadership of Joshua. The tribes of Israel tried to keep the land as the precious gift of God and also to expand their territories. These events are recorded in the book of Judges. There were twelve leaders who are known as the Judges, namely Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah-Barak, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephtha, Ibzan, Elon,

Abdon, and Samson. Six of them are called great Judges and six minor Judges. The only woman judge, Deborah, was counted with her helper, Barak, and they are considered as one.

Though they are called Judges none of them, except Deborah, did any work of a judge. They were leaders chosen by God to protect the people of Israel from the hands of the enemies. The main enemy at the time was the Philistines. The rule of the Judges was not a permanent institution. They were charismatic leaders sent by God in times of Crises to protect Israel from the enemies. Soon after the crisis was over, they disappeared from the scene. The tribes of Israel settled in various parts of the land of Canaan. Each tribe was independent and self-sufficient. Only on rare occasions, to face some external crisis, did the tribes come together.

Eventually the Philistines got the upper hand in the wars and began to occupy more land. The tribes of Israel struggled to withstand their attacks. Only the miraculous strength of some leaders like Samson helped Israel to keep their land. But, resistance to the Philistines was a constant struggle for Israel. Such situations are depicted in the Book of Samuel, Chapters 1 to 8. The Philistine had strong and permanent leadership, excellent weapons and a well-trained army. The sporadic leadership of the Judges was inadequate to withstand the attack of the Philistines. It was under these circumstances that the people cried for a king. The history of the origin and development of the kingship is discussed in the next chapter.

## **Deuteronomistic History**

Though the books of Joshua and Judges are considered as historical books, they are not historical books in the ordinary sense. These two books form the first part of the deuteronomistic history that narrates history of Israel from the time of settlement in Canaan to the deportation and exile in Babylon, the history of five centuries, interpreted in the light of faith.

In 721 B.C., the northern kingdom, Israel, was attacked and destroyed by Assyria. The disciples of prophets, who witnessed the elimination of Israel, feared the same tragedy might befall the remaining tribe of Judah, which they wanted to avoid at any cost. The only chance of maintaining their freedom and independence was absolute fidelity to Yahweh and the Covenant. It was for this purpose the book of Deuteronomy was originally formed and written. Those who composed the first part of the book (Chapters 12 to 26) are called Deuteronomists, because they imbibe the spirit of the book of Deuteronomy and interpret the history of Israel according to that spirit. The manuscript that was prepared in Shechem was brought to Jerusalem and deposited in the treasury of the Temple. This original manuscript was later discovered during the time of King Josiah (2 Kings 22, 8-20) and it strengthened his resolve to carry on a religious reform Israel.

Those who gave leadership to the religious renewal during the time of King Josiah (B.C. 640 – 609) were the ones who were influenced by the spirit of Deuteronomy. They are often called the Deuteronomistic School. They were active also during the time of the Babylonian captivity (B.C. 587-538). Then they explained the reasons for being cast away from the Promised Land and gave instructions to avoid the repetition of such a tragedy. With this in mind, the sacred authors re-wrote the history of Israel. The introduction to this book is supposed to be the book of Deuteronomy as it is available today. The books of Joshua and Judges were the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of this history.

## **The Structure of the History of Deuteronomy**

1. The free choice of God
2. The Sin of the people – Infidelity to God
3. The punishment for sin

4. The repentance of the people
5. God forgives and saves again

This is a theological presentation of the history. It was God who took the initiative and chose Israel as His own people. Through the Covenant they were given a Land and protection. But covenant was not unconditional. The people broke the Covenant, by worshipping other gods. This invited punishment. The calamities they experienced such as natural disasters, famine, the attack of the enemies etc. were interpreted as punishments and disciplinary actions by God. The people repented and asked for forgiveness. God forgave them and restored their prosperity but they sinned again and again, and invited even more severe punishments. This cycle of sin – punishment – repentance - forgiveness – sin, continued till the Exile. The entire history from Joshua to the Exile is written with this particular scheme in view and that is called the Deuteronomistic history.

The fight to possess the Promised Land had not only a political and social, but also a spiritual dimension. In the promise given to Abraham, the Promised Land appears to be the land of Canaan. Over the years the concept of the Promised Land took on new meanings under further revelation of God's promises. The teachings of the Prophets further clarified it. Finally the concept of the Promised Land received its full meaning in the person and teachings of Jesus, who called it as the "Kingdom of God. It becomes visible and operative in the persons and societies that totally surrender to the will of God. The Promised Land becomes a synonym for the Rule of God. The life and miracles of Jesus manifested its presence; his teaching explained its nature and conditions for entering it.

Joshua who led the people of God into Canaan was a prototype and symbol of Jesus Christ who led the faithful to the Kingdom of God, and established the Kingdom of God on earth. Salvation history reached its culmination and fulfillment

in Jesus Christ. All those who helped the people of God, Israel, (Judges and Kings) to remain in the Promised Land and to resist the enemies were one way or the other represented by Jesus the Savior of humanity. Just as the Promised Land represented the Kingdom of God, the enemies represented the power of evil. Ultimately the main theme is to fight against evil.

## God the Warrior

As salvation history advanced, we can notice a growth in the understanding of the people about God. This growth is visible in the God-experience of the people narrated in the bible. The God of the Patriarchs was a Shepherd. The God who led the Exodus event was a powerful Liberator, protector and leader. During the time of the conquest, God appeared as Lord of the armies. It was Yahweh who led the wars to occupy the Promised Land. Before the Israelites took up the arms the walls of Jericho came down; the enemies were terror stricken; kingdoms surrendered to them. In the fights against evil, it is God who leads the fight. What they experienced through the Exodus event became clearer during the fight against the enemies to occupy the Promised Land.

The Ark of the Covenant had gone before the people as a sign of God's presence with them. It was God who went ahead of them to dry the river Jordan and to pull down the walls of Jericho. However, as they settled in the Promised Land, the Ark of the Covenant and the Tent of meeting were also settled in a particular place, and often changed its location. It was in Gilgal (Joshua 4); Shechem (Joshua 24); Shiloh (1 Sam 1); Bethshemesh (1 Sam 6m 13-21); and Kariyatharim (1 Sam 7,1). People went to these places in pilgrimage. This caused the origin and development of the belief that God's presence was restricted to a certain place, a belief that had severe consequences in the history of Israel.

# 5

## MONARCHY (B.C. 1030 – 587)

Israel was nothing but slaves in Egypt. The Almighty God liberated them from slavery and made them His own through a Covenant at Mount Sinai. After wandering through the wilderness, they occupied and settled in the land of Canaan. In the course of time with God's help they became a mighty kingdom and came under monarchic rule. The history of monarchy in Israel is narrated in six books of the bible, namely, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, and 1-2 Chronicles. The period of monarchy in Israel can be divided into three parts:

1. The undivided Kingdom - B.C. 1030 - 931
2. Divided Kingdom - B. C. 931 - 721
3. Judah alone - B.C. 721 - 587

The monarchy lasted from the first King, Saul, to the last King, Zedekiah, for about 450 years. In B.C.587 Babylon Conquered Jerusalem, and deported the king and most of the population to the far away Babylon. With that the rule of kings came to an end.

### **The beginning of the monarchy- historical background**

The people of Israel, who entered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, could not immediately occupy the entire land. During the next 150, they had to wage many wars to keep the land they occupied. The Judges were temporary, charismatic

leaders who helped Israel to resist the enemy. However, it was insufficient to repel the persistent attack from the Philistines who had become very powerful. Finally Israel had to submit to the supremacy of the Philistines,

Since the Philistines owned all the iron, the Israelites could not make any weapons. They had to depend on the Philistines to get even the instruments to cultivate their land. When Saul went to fight against the Philistines, only he and his son, Jonathan had weapons of iron (1 Sam 13, 22). To face the well-trained, Philistine army, all that Israel had was a group of untrained men carrying sticks and wooden spears.

During the time of Samuel who was the last of the Judges, the Philistine threat became acute. In the battle of Aphek, the priest leaders, Hophni and Phinehas were killed. The Ark of the Covenant that was brought to the battle field was captured by the Philistines. Hearing this, the elderly priest, Eli, fell down, broke his neck and died (1 Sam 4, 1 - 8). Shiloh, the center of worship for the Israelites, was destroyed. To overcome the crisis, Israel fought under the leadership of Samuel but could not win against the Philistines. The people decided that to fight against the powerful Philistines, they needed a king.

Samuel was old and his sons were irresponsible and incompetent leaders. Under these circumstances, Samuel could not resist the cry of the people for a king in Israel (1 Sam 8). According to the direction he received from Yahweh, Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel.

## **A. The undivided Kingdom (B.C. 1030 - 931)**

As instructed by God, Samuel chose Saul as king of Israel (1 Sam 9, 15-16) and the election was confirmed by God (1 Sam 10, 20-21). Samuel anointed Saul as king (1 Sam 9, 26-27) and the people accepted him (1 Sam 10, 21). Thus monarchic rule began in Israel. He proved his ability through the victory he won over the Philistines in the many battles he led (1 Sam 11).

However, Samuel rejected him because he failed to obey all the directions of God and in his place David was anointed as king (1 Sam 13, 16). Saul remained as the king of Israel for twenty years (1030 – 1010). For various reasons, he could not attain complete victory over the Philistines. At the end, in a war against the Philistines, Saul and his son Jonathan were killed on the mountain of Gilboa.

With the death of Saul, Israel was again thrown into chaos. David dealt with the situation effectively and efficiently. At first, only the tribe of Judah supported him. But, through an effective political approach, he won the support of all the other 11 tribes. Thus for the first time in history, all the twelve tribes of Israel were united under one king. After gaining the internal unity and support, David turned his attention to subdue the Philistines and through strategic moves, he was able to eliminate the threat from them. He succeeded to occupy all the land that was promised to Abraham and ruled Israel for forty years (1010 - 970). It was the golden age of Israel. The empire was free from the attack of enemies. Its boundaries were secure and people enjoyed peace and prosperity.

The empire David established by the sword became more rich and glorious during the time of his son, Solomon. He was able to maintain good relationships with the neighboring countries through treaties and marriage contracts. The fact that the great empires of the Middle East Asia, Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria had become relatively weak helped David and Solomon to build an empire. Israel had become an empire that could stand on an equal footing with the other empires; so much so that Solomon was able to make a marriage contract with the Pharaoh of Egypt taking his daughter as wife.

## **B. Divided Kingdom (931 – 721)**

Israel had reached the zenith of its glory during the time of Solomon but after his death, the empire fell apart. People

felt over-burdened with heavy taxes, cruelty of the officials, and extreme luxury of the rulers. They approached the king seeking a break from heavy taxes and other oppressive structures. But the young king, Rehoboam, not only refused to grant the rightful request of the people but threatened to increase their burden: *“My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. And now, whereas my father laid upon you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions”* (1 Kings 12,10-11) This imprudent behavior of the King and his counselors led to the division of the kingdom into two.

Ten tribes separated and formed the Northern kingdom, Israel. Initially the capital was Shechem (1 Kg 12, 25), then Penuel (1 Kg 12,26) and later Tirsa (1 Kg 16,8) Finally the king of Israel, Omri bought the mountain of Samaria and built his capitol there. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin constituted the Southern Kingdom, Judah. They remained loyal to the descendants of King David and kept Jerusalem as their capitol. These two countries were in war against each other most of the time. Only on rare occasions did they live in peace and cooperation.

While Judah and Israel continued to decline through constant conflict, in the East, Assyria continued to grow as a mighty empire. They conquered all the neighboring countries and expanded their territory. Fearing inevitable defeat all the small kingdoms accepted their supremacy and agreed to pay tribute to Assyria. To deal with the threat from the East, Israel made a treaty with Syria. Many of the small kingdoms joined the treaty but Judah refused to join them. In 736, the combined army of Israel and Syria attacked Judah.

Fearing the mighty army marching against them, the king of Judah, Ahaz, sought the help of Assyria, as he did not believe the message God gave him through the prophet Isaiah (Is 7). The king of Assyria, Tiglath-pileser III, was pleased with the request of Judah and moved against Syria. The army of Syria and Israel withdrew from attacking Judah and tried to save themselves but

Assyria defeated both countries in B.C. 734. In 727, Tiglath-Pileser died and there was a civil war in Assyria. Thinking they would not come back, Israel declared independence and stopped paying tribute to Assyria. They sought the help of Egypt for eventual defense against Assyria. But the unexpected happened.

The new king of Assyria, Shalmaneser V suppressed the internal conflicts and became a powerful ruler. The Assyrian army moved west, no kingdom could stand against it. They set siege to Samaria. Before the conclusion of the war, Shalmaneser V died. Israel thought that they were saved but the next king Sargon II, strengthened the siege against Samaria and went into attack. Egypt did not come to help them.

In B.C. 721, Assyria destroyed the walls of Samaria and entered the city. Thousands were killed and others were taken as slaves and sent to various parts of Assyria. They were auctioned out in various slave markets. People from several parts of the Assyrian empire came and settled in Israel. The Israelites, who were not deported but allowed to remain in the land, entered into marriage contracts with the new immigrants who were all gentiles and thus a mixed race came into existence. They were known as Samaritans, after the name of their capitol.

### **C. Judah alone (B.C. 721 – 587)**

The Assyrian empire that had reached the peak of its glory during the time of Sargon II (B.C. 722-705) and Sennacherib (B.C. 705-681) slowly became a weak under incompetent kings. However, in the east, Elam, Media and Babylon continued to gain strength. This created a favorable atmosphere for Judah. Assyria had wiped out Israel and attacked Judah which survived giving tribute and preserving at least nominal freedom. During the time of King Josiah (B.C. 640-609), Judah became stronger and expanded its territories, taking advantage of the weaker stage of the great powers. People concluded that King Josiah was so successful only because he was faithful to the Lord and

conducted a strict religious renewal. But, this conviction was challenged in B.C. 609.

Babylon became a formidable power during the time of Nebopolasar (B.C. 620-605). Elam and Media surrendered to Babylon. In 612 Assyria was defeated in a decisive battle. To withstand the mighty power of Babylon, Assyria sought the help of Egypt. Seeing the threat in the growth of Babylon, Pharaoh Neco mobilized his army and moved north. King Josiah considered Egypt and Assyria as his enemies and assumed that the victory of Babylon would be advantageous to Judah. Disregarding the warnings of Pharaoh Neco, Josiah blocked the Egyptian army that was marching toward Assyria. In the battle of Megiddo, Josiah fell, creating again a crisis in Judah.

Egypt was not able to save Assyria. In Babylon, Nebopolasar was succeeded by an even more powerful emperor, Nebuchadnezzar (B.C. 605-562). In 605 the combined army of Egypt and Assyria met with the army of Babylon at the north-eastern border of Assyria, Carchemish. In the battle Babylon defeated Assyria and Egypt and became the sole power in the Middle East Asia. For the next twenty years Judah suffered repeated defeats.

Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and entered Jerusalem in B.C. 598. Because Judah agreed to pay a large amount as tribute, the army withdrew plundering the city and the Temple, taking many precious things. King Jehoiachin and more than ten thousand people were taken as prisoners (2 Kg 24, 8-17).

During the years that followed, there was civil war in Babylon. Many of the conquered countries declared independence and stopped paying tribute to Babylon. Jehoiachin tried to secure his position by making a treaty with Egypt. Within ten years the internal conflict was settled and the Babylonian army returned, not to defeat but to destroy and take revenge for the rebellion. After 18 months of siege the Babylonian army destroyed the

walls of Jerusalem and entered the city. They shattered the palaces and other buildings. The Temple was burned to ashes. There was a massive massacre. King Zedekiah tried to run away but he was captured in the desert. According to the Judgment pronounced by the king of Babylon, his eyes were plucked out and he was taken to Babylon in shackle with all the leaders of the time. A few ordinary people were left in the city. This marked the end of the rule of kings in Israel and the beginning of Babylon captivity.

## **Monarchy in Israel – an Evaluation**

Israel had altogether 41 kings and one queen between B.C. 1030 and 587. The rule of the undivided kingdom of Israel lasted for 100 years under Saul, David and Solomon. Then the kingdom was divided into Israel and Judah. In the Northern kingdom, Israel, there were 19 kings that included Jeroboam II who ruled for forty years and Zimri who ruled only for six days. Judah also had 19 kings and a queen, Athaliah.

The Bible presents an ambiguous picture of the rule of kings. Four books of the Bible, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings recorded the history of the time. This is the Deuteronomistic history of the monarchy in Israel. The person of the king and his rule are evaluated on the basis of their fidelity to the Covenant and its precepts. Accordingly, only David, Hezekiah and Josiah are considered as successful kings. Even they are not presented as perfect and the Bible has recorded also their failures. The remaining 38 kings failed in their responsibilities as they did not remain faithful to the commandments of Yahweh.

The history of the monarchy is presented in the books of 1-2 Chronicles also. It is called Chronicler's history. The activities of Ezra-Nehemiah who provided leadership after the Babylonian captivity is part of this history. Only the history of Judah is presented in this. The Greek translation, Septuagint, calls it "Paralipomena" meaning that it contains the details left out in the history of the books of Samuel and Kings. These

books deal with the Temple, Sacrifices, Jewish- festivals etc. It says nothing about the Northern Kingdom, Israel; the whole concentration is on Judah. The Chronicles present a faith based evaluation of the rule of Kings.

## **The Achievements of Monarchy**

The Monarchy in Israel played a decisive role in the history of salvation. It was with the emergence of the rule of kings that Israel became aware of their status and strength as a people. During the 100 years when they were united under one king, they became a mighty empire which deepened their awareness of being a people chosen by God. Unfortunately the Kingdom was divided and weakened later.

David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it the capital of the kingdom and that played an important role in laying the foundation for the empire he established. The Capital that belonged to no tribe but to the whole population became the symbol of unity. David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and Solomon built the Temple in the city, making Jerusalem the city of God. It was the political and religious capital of all the Jewish people, Israel. Eventually Jerusalem became the center of attraction not only for the Jews but also for all the people in the world. The concept of the “Heavenly Jerusalem” signifying Yahweh’s presence in the midst of the people was derived from the city of Jerusalem

With the advent of kingship, people of Israel got a visible and powerful leader. They were able to effectively resist the attack of the enemies. The territories were expanded and the kingdom enjoyed peace and security. They were able to occupy the Promised Land and enjoy the prosperity God gave them. The people of God attained a dignified position among the peoples of the world.

It is with the emergence of kingship that Israel obtained clarity regarding the expectations of the awaited Messiah. The

promise David received through the Prophet Nathan was one of the most important Messianic prophecies (2 Sam 7, 1-17). The classical age of the prophets arrived with the rule of kings in Israel. The prophets who did not record their messages, Nathan, Ahijah, Micaiah, Elijah and Elisha as well as the Major Prophets from Amos to Ezekiel came during the rule of the kings. Through the teachings of the prophets, people gained better insight and clearer revelations about the nature of God.

The formation of the Bible, the written word of God, started during the time of the kings. The information about the Patriarchs and Exodus events were handed down from generation to generation through oral tradition. Though a few things like the Ten Commandments were recorded about during the time of Moses and Joshua, the original written documents of the Bible come from the time of David and Solomon. The Yahwist (J) tradition that formulated the creation account, election of God and the Covenant with God came into existence during this period. This tradition tries to show that the Messianic Prophecy that was given to the Patriarchs and confirmed through the Covenant was partially fulfilled in King David. It is the history of Israel that is presented as Salvation History and the writing of that history began during the time of the kings.

After the division of the kingdom, the Northern kingdom, based on their God experience, formulated another version of Salvation History. It was known as the Elohist (E) tradition. According to Bible scholars, the original manuscript of this tradition was formulated during the time of Jeroboam II, in Shechem. This tradition gives importance to the Covenant at Sinai. The influences of both these traditions are visible in the books of Genesis, Exodus and Numbers. The third source behind the Pentateuch was the Deuteronomist (D) source and that also was formed during the monarchy. It began after the fall of Samaria and was completed during the Babylonian captivity. This tradition gives much importance to the interiority

of precepts of the Covenant. Thus, the kingship provided many valuable contributions to the history of Israel, Salvation history. However, there were many negative facts to the rule of kings.

## **Negative Elements of Monarchy**

Israel was a people that had given paramount importance to personal and social freedom. God liberated them from the slavery in Egypt and they did not want to subject themselves to any other power. Until the beginning of the monarchy, they had tribal autonomy and they enjoyed equal rights in everything. Tribal leaders were selected from the heads of the families and tribes. With the advent of monarchy, this social system underwent radical changes.

The tribe of the king became the most important tribe. A hierarchy of status emerged. People came to be divided into various classes. A high class of lords and royal servants came into existence. Slowly, the people were treated as slaves of the king and of those in the high classes. The king was the most important person in the whole country.

Until the arrival of monarchy, the people of Israel were guided by the precepts of the Sinai Covenant and the Ten commandments. Now, new laws were promulgated by then kings. These laws were not made for the welfare of the people but for the benefit of the kings and their officers. People had no participation in the making of the laws they were to obey. The tribal leaders used to meet at the city gate to settle disputes. People could approach them and settle their problems. But that set up was changed. The king appointed the judges, who began to pass judgments based on the bribe they received. Thus the ordinary people were denied justice. The innocent poor were punished for the crime they did not commit. The rich criminals got away free.

The Promised Land was divided among the families according to the number of people in the family and there was

no one without a piece of land. Land was a gift from God and that was not to be sold or bought. But, the sacredness of the land was lost with the arrival of monarchy. The land became a private property which could be sold and bought. The majority of the land became the property of a few rich. Thus, a large number of people lost their land and homes. When a few became rich, the vast majority of the population became poor and eventually slaves.

With the arrival of the royal rule, various jobs and positions came into existence. There was a great difference between the rulers and the subjects. The luxurious life of the king and their servants were supported by the taxes collected from the ordinary people. Heavy taxes became an unbearable burden for the poor. At the same time, the rich were exempted from paying taxes.

The royal household lived in extreme luxury for which the money and property were collected from the people. Those who were not able to pay the taxes or pay off their debts lost not only their property, but even their very freedom. They were auctioned in slave markets. Thus the warning of Samuel (1 Sam 8, 10-16) became a reality.

People had asked for a king to protect them from enemies. Saul and David tried to save the people from the enemies but eventually protection was only for the king. People were forced to go into war and fight to expand the territory of the kingdom. Wars became a means to exhibit the status of the king. In short, there was no protection for the life and property of the ordinary people.

There were radical changes in the religious sphere also. Formerly people believed that God dwelt in their midst and was accessible to all. But, during the monarchy, with the construction of the temple, God's presence was supposed to be limited to the Jerusalem temple. All the people had to come

to Jerusalem with offerings to obtain God's blessing. Sacrifices were offered only in the Jerusalem Temple. The Passover used to be celebrated in the family but that also was moved to Jerusalem. Slowly people became convinced that Yahweh had moved away from them.

A new line of thought developed that God's presence was only in the Jerusalem Temple. The essence of religious faith became the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the celebration of Festivals and for offering sacrifices. People began to think that they and the country would be safe because God was present in the Temple. An apparent sense of security prevailed in the people that as long as the religious functions and sacrifices continued in Jerusalem they would be safe. They believed that God will protect them even if the land was immersed in corruption and injustice. The observance of the laws of Yahweh was not given much importance. The fact that in B.C. 701 Sennacherib withdrew the siege and Jerusalem was saved miraculously, helped to confirm this false conviction. The people conveniently forgot the original condition of the Covenant that they would continue to be the people of God only as long as they observed the precepts of the Covenant.

The faith of Israel was rooted in justice but as the kingship advanced, there was no relationship between faith and justice in society. They thought that God will be pleased in the offerings he receives just like the kings, judges and the rich in the community. With this, the worship of Yahweh turned into idol worship. True worshippers try to operate according to the will of God while the idol worshippers think that they can force God to act according to their wish.

It was in this religious and social set up that the Prophets came with fiery words of threats and warnings. They called for a total change in the social and religious practices. "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5, 24); "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the

knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6, 6); “He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6, 8); “Seek justice, stop oppression” (Is 1,17). The prophets conveyed in no uncertain terms that the people would perish if they did not repent and return to the Lord. They were warned that they will be thrown out of the Promised Land and taken as slaves in a faraway land. But, neither the king nor the royal servants gave ear to such warnings and threats until they became a reality in B.C. 587. Judah went in exile and became captives in Babylon.

# 6

## BABYLONIAN EXILE (B.C.587 - 538)

The monarchy that lasted for about 450 years, ended in disaster. In B.C. 721, the Northern kingdom, Israel, consisting of ten tribes of Israel, disappeared from the world map. In B.C. 587, Judah, consisting of the other 2 tribes, suffered the same fate. The last of the kings, Zedekiah with blinded eyes and a chain on his neck walked in front of a large column of slaves, and it was the visible sign of this disaster. The freedom God granted them through Exodus was lost. They were cast out of the Promised Land that they occupied through a series of wars. The people were again in slavery. A cycle was completed.

Not only for Israel but also for Salvation history, the Babylonian exile had a decisive role to play. It paved the way for a crisis in faith and that forced the people to re-consider their convictions and to receive new revelations regarding their faith and their relationship to Yahweh. It was a period that invited people to a total repentance and return to the Lord.

### **Faith Crisis**

The people lost their freedom and they were cast out of the Promised Land. Not only the palaces but also the Temple, the permanent dwelling place of God, was burned to ashes. The city of God was destroyed. The book of Lamentation depicts the intensity of the grief caused by the devastation. Why did this happen? Why did god allow such a \tragedy? People asked. Many answers were given to these questions

Many of the people thought that God has abandoned them forever (Is 49,14). Some concluded that Yahweh punished those who broke the Covenant according the laws of the Covenant (Jer 34, 18). Some felt that they lost the status of the people of God because they did not listen to the warnings communicated through the Prophets and so now they suffered the punishments pronounced by the Prophets.

Some even concluded that they were chosen to bear the punishment for the sins the people of Israel committed over the generations: “This was for the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in the midst of her the blood of the righteous”(Lam 4,13); “Our ancestors sinned; they are no more, and we bear their iniquities” (Lam 5,7).

With all these came a devastating concept. At that time people had believed that each nation had its own god. The wars between nations were considered as wars fought between their gods. The powerful gods win the war and the weak will be defeated. Yahweh who defeated the mighty Pharaoh and liberated the people was considered as the most powerful of all gods. This faith was challenged through the Babylonian captivity.

The king of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, the city of God and the Temple which was supposed to be the house of God and the people of Yahweh were taken away as slaves. They wondered if this meant that the gods of Babylon were more powerful than the God of Israel. There were some who taught that their present misery was caused by the anger of the idols destroyed by King Josiah. Hence, should they worship the god of the Babylonians who proved to be stronger than Yahweh? This question threw them into a real faith crisis.

## **Yahweh Will Not Abandon**

God sent Prophets again to guide the people who were in a severe faith crisis. The Prophet Jeremiah, who tried to prepare them for the captivity, had explained its goal and meaning.

Captivity did not mean that God abandoned them but it was only a disciplinary action. The Prophet Jeremiah proclaimed that it was only a punishment for their sins and an invitation to repent and return to the Lord. “The plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me” (Jer 29, 11 – 13). The Prophet exhorted that the lawful punishment for breaking the precepts of the Covenant was not a rejection forever; in the place of the broken Covenant God will make an unbreakable, eternal Covenant with them (Jer 31, 23-37).

The same message was repeated by Ezekiel, the Prophet of captivity, (Ez 16, 59-63; 22-38). The dry bones have no hope of living again. In the same way, the people in exile thought that everything was over with them and they had no hope of living, just like the dry bones. But, God can gather them together and make them live again. It was this hope that was conveyed through the vision of the valley of dry bones (Ez 37, 1-14).

The one Prophet, who conveyed the message of hope more than any other is known as the Second Isaiah (Is 40 – 55). He is called the prophet of consolation, because it is with a call to consolation and comfort that he begins his message: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins”(Is 40:1-2) . He proclaimed to the people who lived in despair: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.” (Is 49, 15). All his words were rooted in the unfailing love of God and that gave a ray of hope to the people. “For a brief moment, I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. <sup>8</sup> In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says

the LORD, your Redeemer. This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you” (Is 54, 7-10).

## Personal Responsibility

The people who lived in captivity thought that they were suffering the punishment for the sins of their ancestors and fell into despair thinking that there would be no escape from their fate. The words of the prophets gave hope to those hopeless people. Until that time there was only a concept of corporate personality and collective responsibility for Israel, the people of God. They were convinced that the children will be punished for the sins of their parents. Such an idea is conveyed in the first commandment (Ex 20,5). The prophets changed this concept through their message during the captivity.

The Prophet Jeremiah, who prepared the people for the captivity, came out strongly against this collective guilt emphasizing personal responsibility of individuals. “In those days they shall no longer say: “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge” (Jer 31, 29-30). Ezekiel repeated it (Ez 18, 1-3). The author of Deuteronomy also gave importance to personal responsibility. “Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents; only for their own crimes may persons be put to death” (Deut 24, 16). The prophets taught that captivity was not the end but an opportunity for repentance and renewal. The exile should be considered not as a punishment for the sins of their ancestors but a call to live according to the Commandments of God.

## The Almighty God

The Exile was a time when Israel attained new revelations about Yahweh, the God of the Israelites. The prophets had taught that there is only one God and that is Yahweh and they believed that Yahweh was the most powerful God among many other gods but this concept was changed through the teachings of the Second Isaiah.

There is only one God. The gods worshiped by others are not God, but only idols created by human hands. Yahweh alone is God. He is the creator and protector of the universe. This faith was deepened during the period of captivity and it led to another revelation that Yahweh is not only the God of Israel but of all the people in the world. Yahweh does not reject anyone because all are His children. With this, Israel gained a new awareness regarding their mission in the world.

## Light of the World

If all the peoples of the world are equal then what is particular about Israel? The promise God gave to Abraham answered this question for them. “I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; ***and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed***” (Gen 12, 2-3). Israel was chosen as the people of God and a priestly people, not for themselves but for all the people in the world. They were called to be witnesses of the Almighty God before all the nations of the world.

It was during the captivity that they became aware of the deep meaning of the call of Abraham. “I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Gen 18,19). God told them through Isaiah, “Is it too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of

Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel?; *I will give you as a light to the nations*, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Is 49, 6). God’s election was not to make them rise above all other peoples but to carry on a mission and that was a responsibility God entrusted to the people of God.

## Relative Importance of Institutions

The people of Israel were called to be a holy and priestly people. They thought that they could fulfill their mission through the liturgical services prescribed by their religion. This conviction was crushed through the Babylonian captivity. The king and the priests were taken as captives, the palace and even the Temple were destroyed. The Temple became a heap of ashes. There were no more pilgrimages; no more sacrifices. All that they thought were essential to please God were eliminated. Through this, the exiled people came to a new awareness that the man-made institutions and practices have only relative importance. God is above all these.

The people in exile learned that they could experience God without the Temple. This conviction was confirmed by the Divine vision, Ezekiel received. “The word of the LORD came to the priest Ezekiel son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was on him there” (Ez 1,3). The people realized that God is above time and space.

They came to a rude awakening that they cannot please God through any man-made institutions and practices. The only thing that would please God is diligent observance of the laws of the Covenant. Without the king and the priest, the people as a community could offer priestly services. The main responsibility of the priests was being a mediator between the people and God. They were to communicate God’s message to the people and people’s prayers and petitions to God. Thus priests are called to become a source of Divine mercy. This is the meaning of being a priest.

This awareness led to a radical conversion of the people. Thus the life in exile provided the opportunity for a thorough renewal and repentance. What was initially considered as punishment and total rejection for the part of came to be understood as salvific act, turning the people's attention to the heart of the covenant, namely God's love and to their role as the light of the nations.

During the exile, the people of Israel became deeply aware of the plan of God and of their place in that plan. The history of Israel was analyzed in the light of the Covenant with God and it was recorded in writing. It was during this time, the sacred authors completed the books of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history. Seven books, namely from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, are included in this group. The authors of these books were disciples who had absorbed the spirit of prophets like Hosea, Jeremiah and other true prophets. With a slight change in the attitude, the priests also got involved in writing the history of Israel in the light of the Covenant.

The priests believed that it was idol worship and malpractices of worship that caused the people to become unfaithful and to sin against God. Hence, the Priestly school concentrated on correcting the mistakes and to offer a sacrifice that was acceptable to God. While the Deuteronomists gave importance to the love of God, the priests gave importance to the holiness of God. With this conviction they got involved in completing the Pentateuch. Though it was completed after the Exile, the starting of its composition was during the period of exile. The entire book of Leviticus was the contribution of the Priestly school. The influence of this tradition is visible also in the other four books namely 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah.

## **Liberation Imminent**

With the death of Nebuchadnezzar, (B.C. 562) the decline of the Babylonian Empire had started and it continued to weaken

during the next three kings, Evil Merodak (562-560), Nerrig Lassar (560-556) and Nabonides (556-539). At the same time, in the East, Persia began to gain strength. King Cyrus ((550-530) defeated all the neighboring countries. In 539, Babylon was captured by King Cyrus, and with that a new rule and a new culture emerged in the Middle East.

Babylon and Assyria saw other people as their enemies and so, after capturing a territory, the inhabitants were scattered all over the empire, denying them an opportunity for a comeback. Their policy was to wipe out the nations that were conquered. Cyrus, king of Persia had taken a different policy towards the countries he conquered. The Persians found security in a population that was content and happy. Hence, religious and cultural freedom was granted to all the people under them. The King issued an edict allowing freedom to those who were forced to go into exile and they were allowed to return to their countries of origin, if they wished to do so. This marked a turning point in Salvation History. The Prophet Isaiah II, who saw Cyrus as the servant of God and an instrument of Yahweh, proclaimed that the liberation of the people of God was at hand (Is 40,1-11; 45, 1-8).

# 7

## 7. POST EXILIC PERIOD (B.C.538- A.D. 135)

The seventh part of Salvation History that unfolded through the history of Israel is called the post-exilic period. This part covers the history of Israel from B.C. 538 to A.D. 135. In B.C. 538, the edict of King Cyrus granted the Israelites, who had been taken as captives to Babylon, freedom to return to Jerusalem. In A.D. 135, by the edict of the Roman Emperor, Hadrian, Jerusalem was made a colony of Rome and the Jews were forbidden to enter the city. This period can be divided into three parts:

- A. Persian Rule - B. C. 538 - 332
- B. Greek Rule - B. C. 332 - 063
- C. Roman Rule - B. C. 063 - A. D. 135

### **A. Persian Rule (B.C. 538 – 332)**

In B.C. 539, King Cyrus of Persia defeated Babylon and became the sole authority in the Middle East. Through an edict, he granted freedom to all those who lived in his empire to return to their places of origin if they wished to do so. The people were allowed to follow their own customs and practices in the religious and cultural spheres. According to the book of Chronicles (2 Ch 36, 22-23), Israel had total religious freedom. As long as the Persian rule continued they enjoyed this privilege. However, politically, Israel was under Persia until Alexander the Great conquered Palestine. After King Zedekiah, the last king

before the Babylonian captivity, Israel had no kings. They lived under the big powers that changed from time to time. However they had religious freedom.

## **Obstacles - difficulties**

Even though permission was given to return to the home land, many were reluctant to leave their homes in Babylon because during the 50 years of exile the deported Israelites, following the instructions of the Prophet Jeremiah and other leaders, had built houses, cultivated the land and got involved in various affairs of everyday life. The second generation in Babylon did not have the kind of attraction the first generation had towards the Promised Land. Many of the Israelites in Babylon preferred to remain there. Hence, the people who returned to Jerusalem were relatively few in number.

Those who returned to Jerusalem encountered much difficulty. They did not find the prosperity, peace and security promised by the prophets. Most of them did not get back their homes and properties. They had to struggle to make ends meet. The attempt to reconstruct the Temple got delayed for various reasons. The constant push from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah helped to continue the construction of the Temple. Finally when it was completed in B.C. 515, the elderly who had seen the Temple built by Solomon, were thoroughly disappointed. The new Temple was smaller and lacked the glorious look that the first Temple had. Continued dry seasons coupled with damage to the agricultural crop, made life miserable for the people. Taking advantage of the misery of the poor, a few became rich very fast. The majority of the people were thrown into utter poverty. It was under these conditions, that the Prophet Isaiah III (Is 56 – 66) came on the scene urging the people to execute justice. From the list of complaints people presented to Nehemiah (Neh 5, 1-5), it is evident that the call of Isaiah III fell on deaf ears.

## Religious Reform

During the second half of the fifth century, there began a strong movement for religious reform. It was spearheaded by Ezra, the scribe .Nehemiah, the representative of Persian emperor. The history of this period is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra is known as the Father of the Judaism. He arrived in Jerusalem with a group of people from the exile in Babylon. His sole interest and concern was reformation of the Jewish religion. “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7, 10).

The first task Ezra set for himself was to wipe out the malpractices that had crept into the Jewish religion during the period of exile and the years that followed. As a first step, he annulled the marriage contracts the Israelites entered with the gentiles (Ezra 9-10). He compelled them to divorce their gentile wives. Ezra firmly believed that it was due to contacts with the gentiles that many unholy practices had entered the Jewish religion and eventually caused the Babylonian captivity and all the other disasters that fell on Jerusalem. Hence Ezra opposed any kind of contact with the gentiles. He emphasized the faith that the Jews were a holy people and must stay away from all that is not holy and preserve their purity.

The second sphere of renewal was in the area of worship. It was during this time that the laws concerning sacrifices, celebrations of feasts, ritual purity etc., as they appear in the book of Leviticus today, were finally promulgated and enforced.

Another important accomplishment of the time was the re-organization of the books of the Bible. The formation of the books of Pentateuch was completed during this time. Most of the books of the Prophets also were collected and published under the leadership of Ezra. The written word of God was accepted as the criterion for life. It was concluded that God had

spoken through the prophets all that He wished to communicate and they could expect no more revelations. Hence all that they had to do was collect all the revelations received, study them and live according to those instructions.

Ezra was a priest and a lawyer. A group of priests joined him to support his movements. The origin of the Scribes of the New Testament times could be seen here. It was the priests who gave directions that covered every area of the everyday life of the people. In short, it was the time of the rule of the priests. Slowly prophets disappeared. The priests were not ready to accept any one who came up with a new revelation. Such persons were stamped as false prophets and eliminated. Zechariah 13, 1-6 is an example of the negative attitude they had to any new revelations or preaching of the prophets. Hence, the prophets who emerged at this time and during the later period presented their messages under false names. The Prophets Jonah and Daniel are examples of such a practice.

The Scribes and the priests gave utmost importance to the literal meaning of the laws and insisted on diligent observation of them. The spirit of the law and the love of God, taught by the Prophets and the Deuteronomistic tradition was neglected. Slowly this attitude gave rise to an institution that preserves only the shell of the religiosity, focusing only on the external practices. Even the worship became a mask or pretension. It was with this hypocrisy that Jesus got into conflict (Mt 23).

The priests and scribes considered themselves as holy people and looked down upon all others as sinners. All those who did not follow the letter of the law in all its details were considered as sinners. The religion took upon itself an attitude of intolerance. All the gentiles were believed to be condemned to eternal punishment. A “ghetto” mentality became prominent among the so called “religious” leaders. They neglected the missionary spirit, to be the light of the nations, they attained during the time of the exile in Babylon. The Jewish leaders no longer considered it as

their mission to communicate the love of God to all the peoples in the world. They shrank into their own small world.

## Wisdom Movement

The contact with other peoples, especially the Mesopotamian culture during the time of the Babylonian captivity, influenced the thinking pattern of the people of Israel. One of such influence can be seen in the emergence of intellectual groups. They were influenced by the attitudes and value system of the Babylonian, Assyrian and Persian cultures and their view of life. At the same time, the insights received from the teachings of the prophets, and the knowledge they gained from the experience and observance of the nature of human beings helped them to set a goal for life and to form a new life style.

The books of “Wisdom Literature” in the Bible, except the “Book of Wisdom of Solomon”, were written during this period. The Psalms were collected and formed into a book. The authors of the Wisdom literature had a particular view of life and that could be summarized as follows: God created man with a particular goal and God has shown the way to attain that goal through the observance of the “Torah” or laws. All those who live according to the revealed law would receive God’s blessing. The signs of blessing were wealth, health and long life. The authors of Wisdom formulated the way to attain these blessings as proverbs. They could be found in the books of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Proverbs and the so-called Wisdom Psalms.

These teachings considerably differ from the teachings of the Prophets. The Prophets exhorted to live according to the precepts of the Covenant, to abandon the way of corruption and to follow the way of justice. Their main goal was repentance and renewal of life. On the other hand, the authors of wisdom suggested the ways to succeed in life. This success mainly referred to material prosperity; because there was as yet no knowledge about a life after death.

The teaching of the “Wise men” was not always in congruence with the realities of life. Not all agreed that illness, short life and poverty were signs of sin and punishment from God. The theory of reward and punishment on this earth was challenged in the light of sheer human experience. It is the common experience that often the just suffer and the wicked thrive. The problem evil and the success of sinners remained a mystery and this was discussed in detail, which can be seen in two books, namely Job and Ecclesiastes (Qohelet), that appeared during this period. The book of “Job” that seeks the meaning of the suffering of the just and the book of “Ecclesiastes” that proposes the view that everything is vanity. The last protest against the religious authority came from Prophet Malachi, the last of the canonical prophets who severely criticized the attitude of the religious leaders that promoted literal observance of the law to obtain material wisdom. “Oh! That one among you would shut the temple gates to keep you from kindling fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept any sacrifice from your hands” (Mal 1, 10).

In short, the period of Persian Rule was a very important period in Salvation History. It promoted deep faith and a spiritual atmosphere. The Bible was formed and it became a guide to life. The identity of the Jews and the people of Israel gained clarity. As the external practices became more important, real spirituality was lost and hypocrisy developed. These tendencies reached its zenith during the New Testament times when Jesus Christ expressed his strong opposition to such attitudes.

## **B. Greek Rule (B. C. 332 – 63)**

After two centuries of Persian rule there Palestine came under Greek rule. In B.C. 332, Alexander the great conquered Palestine and Israel became a Greek colony. The Greek domination continued until B. C. 63, when Pompey, the Roman Consul, established dominion over Palestine. Just as in the

history of Israel, substantial changes took place in the Salvation History and new insights were gained during this time.

## Historical Background

Alexander the Great was born in B.C. 356 as the second son of Philip II, the king of Macedonia. He was educated under the great Greek Philosopher, Aristotle. Being aware of the richness of Greek culture, Alexander was determined to spread Greek philosophy and culture all over the world and thus unite the entire world under one culture. In 336, he became king and started his life as a conqueror. Within ten years he almost succeeded in achieving his goal.

Alexander set for himself as the first task to conquer Persia which was a constant threat to Macedonia. In 334 the army of Alexander moved toward Persia and in two years he succeeded in defeating them. The gate to the East was opened for the Greek Army and culture. What followed was a triumphal march of conquests. Most of the countries liberated from Persia, received Alexander with open arms. Those who opposed were defeated. In B.C. 332 the Jews surrendered to Alexander and the High Priest, Simon Justus welcomed him at the gate of Jerusalem and took him to the Jerusalem Temple. Pleased with their warm reception the young Emperor granted the Jews many privileges.

Egypt fell in 331 and after establishing the city of Alexandria in his own name, Alexander moved east. In 326, he reached the Indus Valley. Because the army refused to move forward, Alexander terminated his conquest and started his return trip. Emperor Alexander, who had conquered so many countries so easily, succumbed to fever in B.C. 322, at the age of 33 in Babylon.

## Influence of Greek Culture

Alexander the great passed like a lightning. But in 12 years, he had succeeded in making profound changes in the empire that included all of Asia Minor and extended to the East, as far

as the River Indus in India. The global map was re-constructed. New insights and directions were given to the people. The Greek language was commonly used for communication. Many imitated the Greek way of life in dressing, food habits, and entertainments. Alexander succeeded to change world history within a dozen years.

The Greek culture was not imposed upon the people. People were deeply impressed by the wonderful leadership qualities of Alexander and the discipline of the Greek army and attracted by their world vision and way of life. They accepted the Greek Culture with great enthusiasm, just as they received the Greek army, because they were convinced of the superiority of Greek culture.

Alexander had done many things to promote Greek Culture. He established Greek colonies in all the cities he conquered and settled some of his soldiers there. He accepted the youth, from the conquered land, into his army. In many cities, he established universities to promote Greek Philosophy and culture. Every city had gymnasiums, theatres and arenas. Sport competitions such as the Olympic Games became extremely popular. Greek dramas were staged in almost all the cities. Greek tragedies presented a new vision of life. Without any compulsion, people studied the Greek language. Following Greek culture was considered as a source of pride and a sign of higher culture.

After the death of Alexander, the four commanders of the army divided the empire among themselves. Egypt and part of Syria went to Ptolemy while Seleucus took the rest of Syria and the territory in the east. The western part of the vast empire was divided between Lysimachus and Cassander. Palestine came under Ptolemy who had a peaceful approach, allowing the people to follow their own faith and religion.

## **Influence of Greek culture in Israel**

Though all were allowed to follow their own faith and culture, many, including some of the Jewish leaders, preferred

to follow the Greek culture. Every sphere of life of the people was infiltrated by the Greek culture, philosophy and literature. With the advent of Greek rule, the borders of different countries disappeared. Anybody could live anywhere. In fact such migrations were encouraged in order to enhance a cultural unity. Alexander had invited many Jews to live in Alexandria, a city that was fast developing.

As a couple of generations passed, there were only very few who could speak and write their language, Hebrew. Greek had become so popular and became the language spoken the common people. It was in this context that the bible was translated into Greek. According to the tradition, it was Ptolemy II of Egypt who took the initiative and met the expenses for the Greek edition of the Bible. In the royal library at Alexandria there was a huge collection of books (200,000) but there was not a copy of the Holy Book of the Jews. Hence, the king wrote to the High Priest in Jerusalem requesting him to send scholars who had the knowledge and holiness to prepare a Greek edition of the Sacred Scripture.

Accordingly six scholars from each of the twelve tribes were chosen to go to Alexandria. Thus 72 (70) scholars came to Alexandria. Each of them was given a special room with all the facilities, but was not allowed to get out of the room before completing the translation of the entire bible. Miraculously each one of them completed the work in 70 days prepared the Greek translation of the Bible. When the translations were compared, all of them were exactly the same. This is the tradition behind the name Septuagint meaning seventy. Though this could be a mere legend, it is a fact that the Greek version of the Bible was formed in the second century B.C.

The influence of Greek culture was not limited to the translation of the Bible. The Greek Philosophy helped the development of scholars. They had substantial influence in

the spheres of thinking and creation of a new life style. The Jews voluntarily accepted all these. The priests and scribes were deeply influenced by the Greek culture and thought. A few conservatives feeling that the Greek influence would negatively affect their tradition and destroy their faith, strongly opposed the new move that could be called Hellenization. But, the influence of the Greek culture continued to infiltrate the daily lives of the people of Israel.

## **Forced Hellenization**

Until B.C. 200, Palestine was under Egypt. Antiochus III (223 – 187) of Syria defeated Egypt and annexed Palestine to Syria in B.C. 200 and it continued to be part of Syria until B.C. 63. Antiochus III and Seleucus IV (187 - 175) continued to practice religious tolerance as Alexander and Ptolemy had done. But, Antiochus IV (175-163) changed the policy.

Antiochus IV who had adopted the name “Ephiphanes” which means “God manifest”, imposed Greek culture upon the people. He compelled the people to consider him as god and demanded that they worship the Greek gods and goddesses. He placed the idols in the prayer houses and forced idol worship. In B.C. 167, a statue of Zeus was placed in the Jerusalem Temple and he sacrificed a pig. He forbade Jews from practicing their religious traditions and observing religious laws. Sabbath observance as well as circumcision was forbidden. People were compelled to eat pork and to sacrifice pigs on the altar. Those who refused were brutally tortured and murdered. Keeping a copy of the bible was a declared crime deserving capital punishment. Cartloads of copies of the bible were confiscated and burned in public places.

## **Faith Crisis – Response**

Forced Greek enculturation pushed the people into a faith crisis. Those who had accepted Greek culture

welcomed this new movement. Those who refused to obey were severely punished. Mothers who circumcised their children were hanged to death. Children who had been circumcised were hanged to death on their mothers' necks. The Jerusalem Temple was desecrated. Sacrifices stopped. Many fearing the punishment obeyed the royal laws. The very existence of the Jewish religion, the divine revelations as well as the faith and world vision that came through them faced the threat of extinction.

During this time of crisis certain literature came out encouraging people to sacrifice their lives for faith and to resist the forced Hellenization. The books of Daniel and Judith were written for this purpose. An elderly Jewish priest named Mattathias encouraged people to take up arms to fight against the persecution. With his five sons, he began the resistance movement (B.C.167) and many joined them. After the death of Mathathias, his son Judas Maccabeus took up the leadership (B.C.166-160). The struggle that started in 167 produced positive results in 164. The Syrian army was defeated. The Jerusalem Temple was purified and re-dedicated. To remember this memorable even a new feast, the Feast of Dedication, was started. The history of this period is narrated in in the two books of Maccabees.

Syria continued to attack Palestine. In one of such wars, in 160, Judas Maccabeus was killed. After Judas his brother Jonathan (160-143) and Simeon (143-134) took up the leadership. Both of them were High priests and leaders, towards the end of his rule Simeon proclaimed himself kin. After Simeon was killed in a conspiracy, his son, John Hircanus became the High Priest and king. Though the war with Syria continued, the Jews had religious freedom. Until Rome took over Palestine in B.C. 63, the following persons ruled as kings and high priests: Aristobulus I (104 -103); Alexander Janneus (103-76); and Aristobulus II (76 – 63).

## Religious Movements

In response to the religious persecution started by King Antiochus IV of Syria, three important religious movements were started namely writing of Apocalyptic Literature, emergence of Pharisees who strictly observed the religious laws and another group called Eseens who separated themselves from the world to follow a strict religious life.

## Apocalyptic Literature

During the rule of the Kings prophets and after the Babylonian Captivity, wise men deeply influenced the view of life and value system of the people of Israel. But the religious persecution started by Antiochus IV and the continuous defeats in wars, opened the way for another view of life. The kings failed to protect the people and to establish justice in the Land. The call to conversion by the Prophets and the establishment of the Kingdom of God failed to become a reality. The teaching of the “Wise men” that they could attain God’s blessing by obeying the rules, also did not bear fruit. In short, the people became convinced that, the individuals and society would not attain salvation through human efforts. This gave way to the rise of a faith that salvation would become possible only if God forcefully enters history to put an end to all evil and establish justice on earth. This conviction was the centre of the Apocalyptic Literature.

The beginning of this thought pattern could be seen in Isaiah (24-27); Jeremiah (4); Ezekiel (38-48); and Joel (2-3). This line of thought found maturity in the book of Daniel. During the inter-testamental period, that is Between the Old Testament times and New Testament times, a number of such books appeared. They were accepted neither by the Jews nor by the Christians as revealed books and part of the bible. Hence they are called Apocrypha or unauthentic. The apocalyptic literary form could be seen in many of them. The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Book of

Enoch, the Sibylline Oracles, The Book of Adam and Eve” are some of the OT apocryphal books.

The main teaching of these books could be summarized as follows. History is divided into two ages: this age (OlamHazzeh) and the age to come (OlamHabbah). The present age is totally corrupt and it is dominated by Satan. Neither the Kings, nor the Prophets, nor the Wise men were able to save it. Hence, God will enter into history and put an end to the present age in a cosmic cataclysm. This world will be destroyed and a new universe will be created and it will be called “The New Age”. This transformation is called the Eschaton, the last thing and the new age is called eschatological age.

No one knows when and how it will happen. But, God has revealed its nature to some people and they have recorded it. Since they reveal the hidden mysteries, they are called “Apocalyptic” which means “revelations”. Those books were discovered only recently and they were written in a language that is beyond human comprehension. To analyze them, one needs special grace from God. These books are written as revelations received by some famous people who lived in the past, at an unknown time. This is how the apocalyptic books were presented, but in reality, the authors were contemporaries. Names of the famous people were used as “Literary fiction” so that they will be accepted by the people. These books present past and present events as prophecies or predictions of things yet to happen.

The main goal of these books was to give hope to those who were in despair, due to religious persecution. Influence of this literary form can be seen in the New Testament also. The Eschatological discourses found in the Gospels such as Mark 13 and Mathew 24 are examples of this. The last book of the Bible, “Revelation” was written using this literary genre. Though new insights about God, universe, and history could be gained from the apocryphal books, one should

be very cautious in interpreting them because they often create illusions and misunderstandings, presenting personal imaginations as God's revelations.

## Pharisees

During the religious persecution of Antiochus IV, a group of Jews vowed to preserve their faith and to obey the rules diligently, at any cost. They were called "Pharisees". They called themselves, "Hassidim" which meant "holy" because they resolved to obey the Law of the Lord in its fullness. Since they were different from others in the matter of dress, observance of rules and regulations, practices and lifestyle, they were called Pharisees "Perushim" which meant set apart. In time "Perushim" became Pharisees in English.

They strictly observed all the written laws and their unwritten traditions. They were holy and were greatly honored during the New Testament times. But, the observance of the laws were often external practices and they were filled with pride that made them think of themselves as superior while others were looked down upon as sinners. Hence, they were severely criticized by Jesus. But not all Pharisees were hypocrites and there were many who became friends of Jesus and followed him. Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and Paul of Tarsus were Pharisees but friends and followers of Jesus.

## Essenes

This is a religious group that started at end of the second century or the beginning of the in the first century B.C. They were settled in Qumran, on the western banks of the Dead Sea and lived there until 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed their monastery. The scrolls found in 1947 in the caves on the hills of the banks of the Dead Sea give clear records about the Essenes, generally known as Qumran community from the name of the place where they were settled.

The Maccabean revolt had helped to gain freedom to live according to the religious laws. But the descendants of the Maccabees, after attaining freedom, became greedy for power. From the time Simeon made himself king and high priest, there were protest among their followers. A group from the Pharisees, who were vowed to follow rules and regulations faithfully, came out with strong protest. They felt that the laws and regulations, instituted by John Hyrchanus and Alexander Janneus, were against their faith and religious tradition. Finding it difficult to withstand the royal opposition, they withdrew to Qumran, at the western bank of the Dead Sea. A man whom the followers called the “Teacher of righteousness” provided leadership for this group.

The Maccabees were called Hasmoneans from the time of Simeon, the brother of Judas Maccabeus. The name was derived from their ancestor Hasmonius. They ruled for about 100 years. The Essenes refused to accept this royal family that had no relationship with King David. They were severely oppressed by the Hasmoneans. Finally, they withdrew into the desert, formed a religious community and settled in Qumran.

The Essenes called themselves “Community of the chosen” and the Anawim Yahweh”, meaning “Poor of Yahweh”. Diligently observing the laws, their main focus was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. The community spent long hours in prayer; they followed a very strict and ascetic life style. They took upon themselves, the duty of copying the Bible and preparing commentaries on each book of the bible. The Qumran community had a constitution and special laws to organize their daily life. They were very active and highly respected during the New Testament times. Their world vision, deep faith and prayer life had great influence in society.

The Roman army that destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. attacked and destroyed Qumran also. The monks, who had seen this danger, placed the scrolls of Scripture in huge jars of clay

and hid them in the caves on the mountain nearby. Accidentally, a shepherd boy found one of the jars in a cave in 1947. An ensuing search helped to discover more than 100 jars and thousands of scrolls. They provide detailed information about the Qumran community and their life style. The life and teaching of John the Baptist had much in common with this community and so there is a general assumption that he spent some time with these monks.

### **C. ROMAN RULE (B.C. 63 – A.D. 135)**

The last part of Salvation history that is connected with the history of Israel is the subject of study here. Israel came under the Roman rule as the Roman Consul Pompey conquered Palestine and annexed it to the Province of Syria. Over the years that followed, the people of Israel had a love-hate relationship with Rome. During their second war against Rome, Israel was totally defeated and destroyed. Jerusalem became a heap of Ashes and it was renamed “EliaCapitolina” meaning the “Eastern Capital”. In the place of the Jerusalem Temple, a temple was built in honor of Zeus and Emperor Hadrian. The Jews were forbidden to enter Jerusalem. With that, Israel lost its main part in the History of Salvation. The Vineyard was taken away from the unfaithful tenants and entrusted to another group. The last two hundred years of the dynamic history of Israel came to an end. That history is presented in a nutshell here below

### **PaxRomana**

The second half of the first century B.C., was filled with disturbance and civil war in Rome. The highest authorities in Rome, Julius Caesar and Pompey had a fight and in B.C. 48 in which Pompey was killed. After four years, in B.C. 44, Julius Caesar was killed by the Senators of Rome, accusing him of being an autocrat. A series of civil wars followed in Rome.

Octavian, son-in-law of Julius Caesar, and Mark Anthony, the commander in chief of the army, joined hands to fight

against the assassins of Caesar. After winning the war, Mark Anthony took charge of the eastern part of the empire, Syria, in B.C. 41 and Octavian ruled Rome, the western part of the empire. Shortly after this division they began to fight with each other. Cleopatra, queen of Egypt came for the aid of Mark Anthony. The armies of both sides met in Actium and in B.C. 31, Octavian's army defeated Mark Anthony's army. Mark Anthony committed suicide in Egypt and with that, the civil war ended. There was peace in the empire and it was called "Pax Romana".

The greatest Empire in the world came into existence. Its territory extended from England in the North to Egypt in the South, and from Euphrates in the East to the Atlantic Ocean in the West. The Roman high ways connected the various parts of the Empire. There were soldiers patrolling the highways to make sure that the roads were safe. A powerful navy protected the water ways. Though the official language of Rome was Latin, Greek was the common spoken language. There was peace and security during the rule of Octavian (B.C. 31 – A.D. 14). This Pax Romana prepared the way for the Apostles and missionaries for Evangelization. The Roman senate honored Octavian by bestowing on him the title of "Imperator" in B.C. 29 and "Augustus" in B.C. 27. Thus Octavian began to be known as Augustus Caesar. It was during his rule that Jesus, God Incarnate, was born in Bethlehem, Palestine, as a fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the Messiah.

## **The Rulers in Palestine**

The history of Palestine of this period was quite turbulent. As Palestine was captured by Pompey in B.C. 63, the rule of the Hasmoneans came to an end. For the next 20 years there were many conspiracies and fights for power. In B.C. 40, the Roman Senate approved Herod, son of Antipater, as the king of Palestine. A king without a kingdom, Herod had to wage wars to take possession of the area entrusted to him.

After three years of war, in B.C. 37, with the support of the Roman army, Herod managed to conquer all of Palestine. The enemies were eliminated. Herod proved to be a mighty and powerful king. He built cities such as Caesarea, and Sebaste and mighty forts such as Masada, Machaerus, and Herodion. The ruins of these cities and fortresses are silent the Jerusalem Temple starting the work in in B.C. 20. Herod died in B.C. 4. One or two years prior to that, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

After the death of Herod, the kingdom was divided into three. His son Archelaus ruled I dumea, Judea and Samaria. Another son, Antipas was given Galilee and Perea. Ituraea and Trachonitis, was given to the third son, Philip. All were given the title, "Tetrarch". Dissatisfied with that title, Archelaus went to Rome in A.D. 6, to demand the title of King. But the Roman senate, accepting a petition of the delegation that came from Jerusalem exiled him to Gaul, France and brought his territory directly under the Roman rule. A Roman Procurator was put in charge of that area. Until A.D. 66, when the Jews started a revolt, there were 14 Procurators. It was during the fifth Procurator, Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26-36) that Jesus Christ was crucified in Jerusalem.

Jesus grew up and spent most of his public life in Galilee, the area under Herod Antipas. John the Baptist publically accused Antipas of committing the sin of adultery by marrying the wife of his half-brother. Compelled by his wife, Herodias, Antipas beheaded John the Baptist. But then Jesus eh carpenter from Nazareth became very popular and Herod was afraid of another insurrection. He sent some Pharisees to Jesus to force him to get out of Galilee but Jesus refused and called him a "fox" (Lk 13, 31-33). Jesus continued to stay in Galilee. Just as Archelaus, Antipas also wanted the title of "King" and in A.D. 39 went to Rome with the request. The Roman Senate exiled him also. Philip lived in peace until he died in A.D. 34. It was during this time that the Christ event which divided the world history into

A.D. (Anno Domini – the year of the Lord) and B.C. (Before Christ) took place.

## The Christ Event

Herod the great was disturbed by the news that a child, the king of the Jews, was born in Bethlehem. He tried to kill him but could not find him and so ordered that all the male children of age two or below, to be killed (Mt 2,16), with the hope that the child who would be king will be eliminated. But, God saved the child by ordering his parents to take him to Egypt. King Herod died in B.C. 4 and so it is assumed that Jesus was born between B.C. 6 and 4. Until he reached the age of 30, Jesus lived in Nazareth and made a living working as a carpenter. During the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius Caesar (Lk 3,1), that is AD 28, Jesus received Baptism from John and started his public life in Galilee.

Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God they awaited for centuries has finally come and that he himself is the awaited Messiah. His words were supported by signs of miracles. Many believed him. The Jewish authority feared him and viewed him with suspicion and decided to do away with him. Jesus went around with his twelve disciples whom he called “Apostles” and preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God. His public life lasted only about three years and it ended during the Passover Feast in the month of April, in the year 30 A.D.

One of the twelve apostles of Jesus, Judas, betrayed him and helped the Jewish leaders to arrest him. The highest authority of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, went through a mock trial and condemned him to death. They accused him of blasphemy because Jesus confessed that He was the Son of God, equal to God. Since the Jews had no right to execute capital punishment, they handed him over to the Romans with the accusation that Jesus had instigated a revolt against Rome.

Pontius Pilate, the representative of Rome and Procurator of Palestine, put him on trial but could not find any crime

worthy of capital punishment. However, due to the pressure of the Jewish leadership, he condemned him to death on the Cross. Some of the followers of Jesus took down the body and buried him in a new tomb before the Sabbath began and then returned to their hiding place. All, even the apostles, thought that it was the end. But, a greater surprise awaited them.

Jesus was crucified and buried. Soldiers were appointed to guard the tomb. But, defeating death, Jesus rose from the dead. It was an event that turned upside down the world history. This marked the advent of a new beginning. After the resurrection, he appeared to the disciples for forty days and gave them necessary instructions before ascending into heaven or disappeared from their midst. In summary, this is the Christ event.

On the day of Pentecost, the day the Jews commemorate the Sinai Covenant, something totally strange happened. The disciples were all gathered in the upper room in fervent prayer. All on a sudden they heard the rush of a mighty wind and saw tongues of fire resting on the head of each one of them. With that, they were transformed into new beings. Their fears disappeared. With great courage and eloquence, they proclaimed that the Jesus whom the Jews crucified is truly the world awaited Messiah. He has risen from the dead and is one with God and still lives in our midst. All those who believe in him and receive Baptism in his name will be saved.

Miracles supported their words. Many believed this Good News and the number of followers increased rapidly. Within twenty years the Gospel was preached all over the then known world. Those who believed in him were called Christians. They lived in communities and communities were called "Church". The Apostles gave the necessary instructions to these Churches to continue in their faith. The Communities which the apostles could not visit personally were given instructions through letters and thus started the writing of the New Testament. By the end of the first century A.D., all 27 books of the New Testament were recorded.

## Revolts – Change of Guards

Palestine was not satisfied with the Roman rule. Those who followed the tradition of the Maccabees tried to drive away the Romans from their land. In connection with the census taken by the Romans in A.D. 6, Judas called The Galilean started a revolt against the Romans. The revolt was started stealing weapons from the fort of Seforis, the capital city of Antipas' Galilee. They claimed to be burning with zeal for the laws of the Covenant and so they were called Zealots. Though Judas and his followers were killed, the group continued to flourish. Slowly the number of Zealots increased and by the time that Jesus started his public life, they were active not only in Galilee but all through Palestine. Many saw a Zealot leader in John the Baptist who challenged Herod. Seeing the miracles that Jesus performed and the way he invited people for conversion, the Zealots tried to make him king (Jn 6, 14-15). It is possible that some of the Apostles of Jesus were Zealots. Though Jesus denounced terrorism and refused to take up arms, he was crucified because the Romans saw him as a leader of the Zealots. The two people crucified on either side of him were Zealots.

There were many who came claiming to be the awaited Messiah, but all of them were killed by the ruling authority. Still the Zealots continued to gain strength. In A.D. 66, they captured the power and took over the rule. The Roman army could not withstand. The people celebrated the victory but that did not last long.

Rome moved slowly but surely. Under the leadership of Vespasian, four legions, (about 60,000 soldiers) started a war in Galilee and by A.D 67 Rome re-captured all the forts and cities. In A.D. 69, they laid siege to Jerusalem. In 68, Emperor Nero committed suicide and a civil war broke out in Rome which lasted for two years. Three army commanders, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius one after the other seized the power but was killed by the next one. Finally the Eastern army acclaimed Vespasian as emperor.

Entrusting the siege of Jerusalem to his son, Titus, Vespasian returned to Rome.

After one and a half years' of siege, the Roman army entered the city of Jerusalem. Like the events B.C. 587, the destruction of the city by the Babylonian army, killing, looting and burning followed. The Zealots took refuge in the Temple. Though Titus had given specific orders not to touch the temple, someone set fire to it. This second Temple was built in B.C. 515 by those who returned from the Babylonian exile. Herod had started to renovate it in B.C.20, but the work was completed only in AD 64. It had become one of the world wonders. But, now it was turned to ashes. Thousands of Jews were taken as slaves and auctioned out in many slave markets.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews came together and organized a spiritual renewal under the leadership of the Pharisees and Scribes. The city of Jamnia, on the Mediterranean Sea coast, was the center of this renewal movement.

Until the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, Christians also used to go to the Temple. But the Jews strongly opposed the Christians after the destruction of the Temple. At first, Christianity was considered as a Schism which grew in the Jewish religion. The Jewish Christians used to go to the Temple and synagogues. But, rules were made forbidding them from entering the Jewish synagogues. The difference between the two groups became more evident.

In A.D. 130, the Jews in Palestine prepared for another revolt under the leadership of Simeon Bar Kosiba. Simeon had grown up under the influence of the old Zealots. The prophecy of Balaam, (Numbers 14, 17) depicts the Messiah as the "Star of Jacob". Rabbi Akiba, the most scholarly and well known rabbi of the time, proclaimed that Simeon was fulfilling the prophecy of Balaam and gave him the name "Bar Kokba" (Son of the Star).

After 5 years this revolt was brutally crushed. Simeon was killed. The Romans captured Jerusalem. Jews were auctioned off as slaves in Mamre and Gaza. Even the mount of the Temple was flattened and a Temple for Zeus was built in its place. Jews were forbidden from entering Jerusalem. The name of Jerusalem was changed to “EliaCapitolina”, the Eastern capital.

With these events Salvation history entered a new and definitive phase. Jews lost the status of a chosen people. In its place, a new community was formed in which people from all the nations and religions of the world are included - the Church of Christ. It is through them that Salvation history continues. The proclamation of the Good News that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ would continue until He returns again to renew everything. Until then the Church will continue the work of evangelization entrusted to her by her Lord Jesus Christ.

**PART - II**  
**JESUS CHRIST**  
**THE SOURCE OF HOPE**



# Introduction

God, in His providence, gave me the opportunity to live in the Retreat Center at Muringoor for some years. I had come there accepting the invitation to take up the responsibility of the Bible College, which was started in January 1998. I did have some prejudices about the retreat center and their operations, especially the loud singing and shouting, the many healings etc. But, after seeing what was happening there, my prejudices gave way to wonder and appreciation. Every week thousands of people come there from various parts of India, without any pre-registration to participate in the retreats. These weekly retreats are conducted in seven languages.

People come on Saturday afternoon and they would leave the next Saturday morning. Before the last person has left, people would start to come for the next week. This has been going on for years. I have observed the faces of the people coming and going. They often come with pain and anxiety. But, they return with heartfelt joy that is reflected on their faces. I asked myself: What is it that attracts them to the Divine? What transforms their pain into joy?

Seeking the answer, we do not have to go far. Just make a visit to the hall. We can hear the name of Jesus, rising from thousands of people. All kinds of patients are there. In the wards, on the side of the halls, there are people who are suffering from various illnesses. The number of patients usually surpasses the numbers in an ordinary hospital. The ones in the hall are there with broken hearts. They repeat the prayers resounding through the loud speakers. All pray crying out the name of Jesus. Jesus is the

hope for the broken hearted. They are not disappointed because Jesus is not an idea, a theory or a hero gone by. He still lives in our midst, listening to our prayers, wiping our tears and granting peace and joy to all those who call upon Him.

It is this faith that brings thousands to the Divine retreat Centre, every week. It is this faith that transforms their sadness into joy. It is this faith that helps them cast their cares upon the Lord and to find peace in their mind and heart. All have come to the realization that Jesus Christ still lives in their midst, in their hearts. I too am convinced of this from my experiences. This experience and conviction opened my eyes to the person of Jesus presented in the Gospels, revealing to me a new picture of the Lord

There is a truth that is revealed through the life, teachings, operations and above all the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus: **Jesus Christ is the hope for those who despair.** What is the nature of this hope? How does Jesus instill hope? What is the significance of the hope he gives? Answers for these questions in the light of the Gospels are presented in this second part of the book. The message of hope Jesus gives is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. Jesus and His Good News are the fulfillment of the promises given to the Patriarchs of the Old Testament. Hence, a brief history of hope that unfolded in the Old Testament was presented in the first part of this book. The second part shall concentrate on the life style of Jesus, his teachings, works, death and resurrection.

# 1

## HOPE ROOTED IN THE PROMISES

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”... “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4, 18-19.21). This was the policy statement Jesus made in the synagogue of his home town Nazareth. The summary of the hope that Jesus gives can be seen in these words. Jesus proclaimed that the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 61, 1-2) was fulfilled by his coming. Not only that, it points to the fulfillment of all the promises God made throughout the Old Testament. The Gospels depict Jesus as the fulfillment of History, a history of promises, waiting, partial fulfillment, broken promises and repeated promises.

The first promise given to humanity can be seen in Genesis 3, 15. This promise was given to man who had lost all hope, due to the broken relationship with God, with each other and even with one’s self. To Satan who caused man to sink in despair, God said, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen 3,15). God promised that He will come to the aid of the man who was dominated by sin and defeated in his fight with evil; ultimately man will be given victory. This promise, made in paradise was repeated after the deluge in a cosmic covenant that God made with Noah

and all the creatures. (Gen 9, 1-17). The primeval history ends with depicting a humanity shattered at the foot of the tower of Babel and scattered around the world, as they were not able to understand one another (Gen 11,1-9). However, at the end of this tragic story, there is a spark of hope in the mention of one man, Abram, son the Terah with whom God would start a new history (Gen 11, 31-32).

God made promises to Abraham who was called to leave his native place, home and people and go to a place that will be shown to him. “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 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 the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen 12, 1-3). These promises were again repeated through a Covenant and they were assured that they will be given a land of their own (Gen 13,14-17; 15,4-5;17,21; 17,4-8; 22,16-18). The promises given to Abraham became the source of hope for Israel. These promises were given as a heritage to the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Elders of the tribes. Thus, they saw God as the God of Promises and themselves as the inheritors of Promises (Gen 26, 24; 28, 13-16; 35,9-12). The promises take a definite shape, focusing on one tribe, the tribe of Judah in the form of a blessing on the Patriarch, Jacob: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, 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 49,10).

In the next stage of the history we see that the people, who were promised a land of their own, ended up in Egypt as slaves away from the Promised Land. Under cruel oppression the people cried out to the Lord. The Lord heard their cry (Ex 1, 12) and came down as a liberator for the slaves, to wipe away their tears, to give them a land of their own (Ex 3,7-8). God who is

faithful in His promises led them to the Promised Land. They saw the mighty hand of God. Slaves became free people. With new hope, they crossed the sea. Those who chased to eliminate them perished in the sea. After passing through the desert, they entered and occupied the Promised Land. At every phase of Salvation History, God repeated his promises and kept the hope of the people alive. The Covenant at Mt. Sinai (Ex 19) was a sure foundation for this hope based on God's irrevocable. "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (Ex 19,5-6).

Promises concerning a future king are seen in the prophetic oracles attributed to the pagan prophet Balaam who was invited by Balak, king of Moab. There are four such oracles and all of them sing the praises of people chosen by God. The third and fourth oracles speak clearly about a future king. "How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! Like valleys that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the LORD has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted: God brings him out of Egypt; he has as it were the horns of the wild ox, he shall eat up the nations his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces, and pierce them through with his arrows" (Num 24,5-8). "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth" (Num 24,17).

A prophecy attributed to Moses, promises a prophet whom God will send to guide the people in the right way: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren -- him you shall heed -- just as you

desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the LORD said to me, 'They have rightly said all that they have spoken. 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' (Dt 18,15-18). Originally this prophecy was a guarantee that there will be always in Israel a prophet like Moses to guide the people by revealing to them and teaching them the will of God. But in the course of time, when there was no more a prophet in Israel, this prophecy came to be understood as promise about a prophet whom God will send at the end of ages, to inaugurate a new age and so he came to be understood as the Eschatological Prophet.

The promise became more concrete during the reign of David as the king of Israel. God made a covenant with David and his family promising an everlasting kingdom and a son of him to be always on the throne: "Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 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 forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2Sam 7,11-14). This gave rise to the hope in a future king from the house of David, who was called the Messiah.

Almost all the prophets supported, encouraged and strengthened this hope in the coming of the Messiah through various prophecies. "He will be born of a virgin" (Is 7, 14). The prophets see a clear picture of the future Redeemer: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the

throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this” (Is 9,6-7). He will be a king filled with the spirit of God: “And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD” (Is 11,2).

The Prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, in the second half of 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. gave a more precise picture of future Messiah. “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days” (Mic 5,2). Bethlehem was the home town of David and so the Messiah will be born in that town as a son of David.

All the hopes and dreams of the people of Israel were shattered in the beginning of the sixth century BC when Babylon conquered and destroyed Jerusalem and took thousands of the people as captives. However, God did not leave them as orphans but sent mighty prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the so called Deutero Isaiah with even greater promises. Jeremiah spoke of a New Covenant that God would establish with them: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD;’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jer 31,31-34).

Ezekiel, a prophet of the exile, saw the return of the people from the exile as resurrection of the dead, as dry bones coming to life:”, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, says the LORD” (Ez 37,12-14). God will forgive all their sins and give them a new heart, enabling them to be obedient to the new covenant: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ez 36,25-27).

Another great prophet of the exile, who is generally called Deutero Isaiah, painted a totally new picture of the Messiah, as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. Chapter 40-55 of the book of Isaiah, characterized as Book of Consolation, is commonly attributed to a person different from Isaiah, the author of chapters 1-39. From this Book of Consolation bible scholars have identified four passages which are generally called the Servant Songs. They are Is 42,1-9; 49,1-6; 50, 4-11; 52,13-53,12). These songs depict the Messiah as the Servant of God, specially anointed by the Spirit and sent to proclaim the Good News, not only to the people of Israel, but to all the nations of the world. He will be gentle and patient, encouraging and strengthening the weak. He will take upon himself the sins and sufferings of the whole world and through his self-sacrifice will reconcile the world with God.

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations” (Is 42,1). He will console the afflicted and sustain the weary: “The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught” (Is 50,4). Even though the whole life and activity of the Servant would apparently end up as utter failure, God will raise him up and make him the instrument of redemption

“Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.... All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all... it was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand; he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities” (Is 53,1-11).

The people who returned from the Exile with great hopes, instilled by the prophets met with disappointment and distress.

Then came the prophet usually called Trito-Isaiah (Is 56-66) who called them to conversion and again promising a prophet who will be sent by God to establish justice on earth and give freedom for all bondage: "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 favor" (Is 61,1-2). It is the same prophet who promised that God will put an end to all evil and create everything new: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy" (Is 65,17-18).

The prophet Zechariah who came a few a few years later spoke of a great King coming to Jerusalem bringing peace: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech 9,9). In the first half of the second century BC, during the religious persecution by Antiochus IV came a great prophecy concerning the Redeemer as the Son of Man coming on the clouds: "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. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7, 13-14)

The expectations of the people of Israel were, however, were mostly limited to material wellbeing and prosperity. What they wanted was a Land of their own, material prosperity, health, peace in the kingdom, long life and many children. They nurtured these hopes in every Promise God made to them

(Lev 26; Dt 28; Is 35). Eventually these hopes began to become more spiritual. Forgiveness of sins, a life beyond death, an eschatological renewal of the universe etc. began to be part of their expectations. The Prophets were followed by mystics, wise men and Apocalyptic writers. Thus the people began to hope for a New Heaven and a New Earth. This hope also was rooted in the Promises of God

Even when new hopes emerged from the new Promises, the old expectations remained. By the time of the New Testament, we see a people who nurtured various kinds of expectations. Even those who accepted the hope for an age of forgiveness of sins, renewal of hearts and a new creation, dreamt of a day when the Kingdom of David will be re-established and they would enjoy political freedom, prosperity, long life and many children. There was an undying desire to enjoy material prosperity. At the same time the daily experiences and reality of the situation dimmed these hopes. Though they aspired for political freedom, they had to live under the Roman rule.

The majority of the people suffered from illness, poverty and starvation. These misfortunes were considered as a result of sin and so signs of sinners. All awaited a Messiah who will re-establish political freedom in Israel. They awaited a Messiah who will heal their illness, forgive their sins and teach them the law of the Lord. Above all, they expected a Savior who would free them from all their miseries. It was into them midst of such varied expectations and hopes that Jesus walked in as a fulfillment of all the Promises. He is the Messiah the Son of David the King; he is the Eschatological Prophet who ushered in the new age of redemption; he is the Servant of Yahweh, the Light of the Nations and the sacrificial victim who brought redemption and reconciliation with God; he is the Son of Man come down to save humanity. Above all, he is the Word of God Incarnate, the Son of God, who came to proclaim the Good News of God's unending Love.

## 2

# MIRACLES, RAYS OF HOPE

The Gospels that present the life and ministry of Jesus give great importance to the miracles he performed. Thousands of people were attracted to him because of the miracles. Jesus, however, did not perform miracles to attract popular attention but to manifest the compassion and mercy of God to the people who were suffering from various illnesses and were in deep despair because they felt that God had abandoned them. The miracles Jesus performed can be divided into four groups: 1. healing of the sick; 2. Casting out demons; 3. authority over nature; and 4. raising the dead to life.

### **a. Healing of the sick**

Most of the miracles Jesus performed were miraculous healing of the sick. Illnesses drain the energy of the people and eventually kill them. At a time when the Medical Science had not developed much, there were distorted understandings about illnesses and their causes. It was assumed that people got sick or suffered from handicaps because of their sins or the sins of their ancestors. Jesus was asked about a blind man if he was born blind due to his sin or the sins of his parents (Jn 9, 3). Many of the illnesses such as hysteria, epilepsy, blindness, deafness (Lk 11,14) physical handicaps(Lk 13,11), and even fever (Lk 4,38-39 - Jesus rebuked the fever) were considered as a result of demonic possession. Many illnesses such as paralysis and leprosy were considered as a sign of God's curse.

Such distorted views caused people to look down upon the sick and even to hate them. All the handicapped were considered

as impure and were not allowed to enter the Temple. Lepers were not allowed to enter the city or to walk through public places. Such social taboos made the condition of the sick pathetic not only physically but also spiritually and psychologically.

Those afflicted by any kind of illness or physical deformity were convinced that God had abandoned them. They felt that they were destined to carry the weight of the sin they committed knowingly or unknowingly and they could never attain liberation from them. This feeling flung them into despair. The Rabbis taught that the Lepers should be chased away, even by throwing stones at them. A woman suffering from bleeding had to be confined to the walls of an outhouse. Her presence and touch would make others impure. All that she touches and all those who touch her, the path she walks and the places where she sits would become impure. Thus, those who were suffering from any kind of sickness were further crushed by society. Jesus understood their pain and the depth of their suffering. He was moved with compassion for them.

Jesus did not consider the sick as impure or keep distance from them. He called them towards him, touched them and healed them. Jesus embraced the leper, touched the eyes of the blind, ears of the deaf, and tongue of the dumb and helped them to experience the compassionate love of God. It was such an attitude that made a leper to approach Jesus, disregarding all the social taboos, and Jesus touched and healed him. It was a sign of the way Jesus viewed the sick and their sickness.

Jesus did not approve the cause–effect connection that society made between sin and illness. The ones who were broken by guilt feeling were freed and strengthened by forgiving their sins. Thus, by restoring the people mentally and spiritually, Jesus led them to a new light of hope (Mk 2, 5-12). By his compassionate touch, the bent woman stood up. Freed from the weight of an inferiority complex and slavery, she stood straight and praised God (Lk 13,13). The man who was paralyzed for

38 years, upon hearing the word of Jesus, picked up his mat and walked away (Jn 9,17). The blind beggar at the gate of Jericho regained his sight and became a follower of Jesus (Lk 18,43). Those who gained the power to speak sang the praises of God.

The healings performed by Jesus gave strengthened the weak, restoring their health and social status. Jesus shed rays of hope to society and individuals by changing the attitude toward illnesses and healing the sick with a positive and loving touch. The woman who secretly touched the edge of Jesus' clothes and received instant healing was frightened when she realized that she was discovered. But Jesus did not reprimand her but praised her faith and sent her away in peace (Mk 5, 34). She was healed not only physically but also spiritually. By seeing the illnesses, not as a curse but as an opportunity to experience and express the glory of God, Jesus changed people's understanding and approach to illnesses. The sick are not cursed or abandoned by God but are objects of the special mercy and compassionate love of God. Those who were sick and came to Jesus experienced God's love through the healing touch of Jesus.

## **b. Exorcism**

The contemporaries of Jesus saw demonic possession as a grave disaster. The evil spirits enter human beings and make them sick, torture and finally destroy the person. People had an intense fear of Satan. Many of the illnesses were considered as possession by the evil spirit. According to the Synoptic Gospels, exorcising the devil was one of the important signs Jesus performed. Though they appear as a healing of the sick, a careful reading of the Gospel accounts would show that it has a much deeper meaning.

In the Gospel of Mark, the first miracle Jesus performed was casting out an evil spirit (Mk 1, 21-26). This is recorded in the context of a prayer service in a Synagogue on a Sabbath day. The possessed man had come to the Synagogue and was quite

silent, taking part in the services until Jesus began to speak. The screams and convulsion of the possessed show the power of the teaching of Jesus, and much more the authority of his person. The devil knows that Jesus is the Son of God and he does not hesitate to proclaim it publically. The question, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (Mk 1, 24), provides certain clear indications about Satan.

Satan is an organized power that keeps people as his slaves. Possession by the devil is not a physical or mental illness. It alienates a person from himself, from God and from others. Until Jesus encountered him, the possessed person sat in the Synagogue as a normal . At the sight of Jesus, he screamed. This had happened in all the cases of possession by Satan. It is a powerful force like the Roman Legion (Mk 5, 9), commander of an army and in charge of a country (Lk 11, 21). He claims authority over the whole world (Lk 4, 6). Jesus called him the power of the world (Jn 12, 31) and dark force (Lk 22, 53). He is a liar and father of lies who tries to imprison people in lies (Jn 8, 44). He will take away the Word of God from the hearts of people to prevent them from experiencing the conversion of hearts (Lk 8, 12). Satan tempts the disciples, misguides them and leads them to destruction (Lk 22, 31). Jesus called Satan a murderer (Jn 8, 44). Satan tried to tempt Jesus and create obstacles in establishing the Kingdom of God (Mk 1, 13; Mt 16, 23).

The Gospels depict the exorcism of the evil spirits as an encounter between Jesus and the powers of evil that control this world. The decisive confrontation took place during the temptation in the desert and that resulted in the defeat of Satan. The exorcisms of the evil spirits are presented as a continued attack on the kingdom of Satan. This gives a message of hope. With the coming of Jesus, Satan lost his power. Though he will continue to tempt people, those who remain with Jesus need not fear Satan. The Apostles were given total power over Satan

(Lk 10, 19). The disciples were called in order to send them out with authority to exorcise the evil spirits (Mk 3,15). Jesus cast out demons with the power of God and it was a sign that the Kingdom of God had been established above the kingdom of Satan (Lk 11, 20).

The exorcism of the devil should be understood in the light of qualities attributed to Satan: liar, deceiver who distorts the truth, one that takes away the Word of God from the hearts of human beings, enemy of the Word, organized force that keeps man as his slave, murderer, tempter, power of this world, dark force, evil force that demands the worship that is to be given only to God etc. It is through the knowledge of truth, proclaimed through evangelization that one becomes capable of recognizing Satan and his works and is enabled to reject him with all his forces in order to remain free as the children of God. The exorcisms Jesus performed helped to liberate people from the domain of fear and slavery. No more is Satan the authority of the world. The source of our hope is the knowledge that it is Jesus, not Satan, who has the authority over the world.

### **c. Victory over the powers of the Universe**

The earth quake of Latur, that took the lives of more than thirty thousand people, the Tornado in Orissa that made homeless more than 150,000 people, the Tsunami that drowned hundreds of thousands, the frequent tornados on the U.S. coasts, and as the latest disaster of the flood in Kerala that left more than half a million people homeless, are only a few examples of the power of nature that threatens human lives. In the face of such natural disasters, all the inventions of the human intellect become powerless. Hence, man's fear of natural disasters continues. Many false prophets have come on stage, announcing the end of the world. Under these circumstances, the victory of Jesus over the powers of nature becomes extremely significant.

The Sea of Galilee is a relatively small lake but the storms that churn its water are very powerful. The disciples of Jesus encountered such a storm and they cried out to Jesus who told them “Fear not”. Hearing his command the water became still. “And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mk 4,41). They realized that they would not have to fear even the powers of nature, when Jesus is with them. God created the universe by a word and it is the same Word that took flesh and became man in Jesus and so His word has power over every force of nature. He still asks each one of us when we doubt, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” (Mk 4, 40).

Jesus refused to comply with the temptation to turn stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger. But, he did not hesitate to multiply bread to satisfy the hunger of the multitude because he felt compassion for the people who were starving (Mk 8, 2-3). After instructing the disciples about the need to share, Jesus multiplied the limited amount of food they had at hand and satisfied the hunger of the people. He still lives among us as bread to satisfy the hungry. Jesus tells us in every Eucharistic celebration, “Take and eat, this is my body, broken for you”. Even when Jesus tells us not to become slaves to material goods, he does not ignore our needs. Changing water into wine and multiplying bread were signs of changing the forces of the universe to sustain human beings. At the same time it a sign of the new life Jesus gives us.

#### **d. Victory over death**

All of man’s hopes, searches, inventions, gains, loses and expectations are shattered upon hitting the ultimate reality of death. Death is seen as an insurmountable obstacle, an enemy that cannot be subdued and ultimately it is the source of all the fear human beings experience. So far, man has found no way to overcome death. Hence, death is seen as the final enemy of

hope. But, Jesus won victory over this enemy. The Gospels have recorded that Jesus restored life to three dead people: daughter of Jairus was raised to life minutes after her death (Mk 5, 21-42); the son of the widow of Nain was restored to life on the way to the burial ground (Lk 7, 11-17); Lazarus was brought back to life after he had spent three days in the tomb (Jn 11, 36-44). By these actions, Jesus demonstrated his victory over death. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.... But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live" (Jn 11, 21-25). Those who put their faith in the One who has the power to give eternal life, need not drop into despair.

The one who raised the dead is the Lord of life. Jesus Christ who won victory over death by his own death and resurrection on the third day is the source of hope for humanity. There is no need to worry about anything as He has the power over illness, poverty, hunger, death, Satan and the powers of nature. It is the conviction that Jesus has power over all the forces in heaven and earth (1 Cori 15, 50-57) that helps us to face everything with courage.

# 3

## THE GOOD NEWS TOWER OF HOPE

The miracles Jesus performed, providing health, food, light and life, were signs. They were rays of hope for humanity that was lost in darkness and was drowning in despair. The presence of the loving God who entered the history of humanity to save them from the slavery of sin was no more an expectation but a reality the people experienced. The teaching of Jesus clarified the meaning of the signs he performed. The depth and width of the miracles could be comprehended only when they are viewed in the light of the teaching of Christ.

### **a. Fulfillment of the Promises**

Jesus started his public ministry, announcing, “The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk 1, 15). It marked the fulfillment of the promises given not only to the Patriarchs but also for to all humanity. All the ancient religions had waited in anticipation for a Prophet, Wise man, or Savior who would give answers to all their questions and fulfill their hopes. The time of waiting for the Messiah was over. For the very thing the world waited for centuries, had become a reality with the coming of Jesus. Humanity waited for a total liberation and it has happened now. The Gospel of St. Mathew that presents Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecies confirms that the time of waiting has ended. If the birth of Jesus was a source of great joy, his words and deeds expressed the nature of that Good News. The Angels told the shepherds in the field, “Do not be afraid;

for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord” (Lk 2, 10).

The message of the Gospels can be summarized in one phrase, “Kingdom of God”. By defeating Satan who had established dominion over humanity, God establishes His kingdom. The characteristics of the kingdom of Satan were illness, poverty, starvation, cheating, slavery and death. On the other hand the Kingdom of God provided healing, justice, peace, joy, consolation, love and eternal life. To those who prayed, “Lead me from darkness to light”, Jesus responded, “I am the light of the world” (Jn 8, 12. 9, 5). The response to the ancient prayer, “Lead me from death to life”, is “I am the resurrection and life” (Jn 11, 25). Jesus again proclaimed, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14, 16). The reality presented as “the Kingdom of God” by the synoptic Gospels was explained as life, light and truth, by the fourth Gospel. The teaching about the Kingdom of God means God is the Lord of the universe and of the history. The focus is on the Rule of God. It is God who is the master of the universe and it is His will that is guiding the world’s course. The hope that was rooted in the Promises of God had become a reality with the coming of Jesus.

One of the promises given to Abraham was a “land of their own – The Promised Land”. The people of Israel thought that this promise was fulfilled when they occupied the land Canaan. But the Prophets declared that the real Promised Land was beyond Canaan. It is the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the hearts of all, society as well as individuals. What was fulfilled in Jesus was not the kingdom of David but the rule of God. For the Kingdom of God, there are no walls of cast and creed. It is the Kingdom of love to which all the people of the world are encouraged to enter. The promise given to Abraham, “Through your descendant, all the peoples will be blessed”, has become a reality in Jesus Christ.

## **b. The Values of the Kingdom of God**

The kingdom of God becomes a reality in the hearts of individuals as well as in the entire society leading to the transformation of the world on the level of values such as love, justice, peace and equality. All these values have their foundation in the revelation that God is the father and we His children.

### **I. God is the Loving Father**

The image of God that people kept in mind was that of a Judge who searches for all the sins of the people and judges them accordingly. People fell into despair because their entire efforts to stay away from sin did not bear fruit. No matter how they tried, they kept on committing mistakes and that caused them to fall into despair and aggravated the fear of God. Hence, they tried to please God by offering sacrifices and other pious activities. Such a view of God is seen also in many parts of the Old Testament.

The words and deeds of Jesus challenged and corrected such beliefs and attitudes. He taught that God is not a cruel judge but a loving Father. He is not waiting to punish the sinner but awaits his return to him. This truth is emphatically taught through several parables, such as the parable of the good shepherd searching for the lost sheep, the woman searching for the lost coin, and especially the parable of the father waiting for the lost son, usually known as the parable of prodigal son (Lk 15, 1-32). The Father is waiting for the return of his son who had misused all his inheritance. When he finally returned home, the father received him with great love and joy. There is no limit to the love of God the Father. The heavenly Father who rejoices in the repentance and return of the sinner, grants him unconditional forgiveness, and it is the source of hope for all those who are carrying the burden of sin.

God is not an idol that has no compassion but only looks at the offerings the devotee brings. God does not enslave humans and demand their service. Quite the contrary, Jesus taught that

God is the Father hears the cry of the poor and the oppressed. He is moved with compassion to those who cry out to Him. God is the loving Father who gives all that we need even before we ask for them (Lk 12, 22 – 30). There is no limit to His love and no condition for His forgiveness. Where the rule of God is established, all will be equal; all will have equal glory, equal rights and equal obligations. The hungry will be fed; the sinners will be forgiven and the sick will be healed. The happiness of the Father is the wellbeing of His children. The glory of the Father is in the growth of the children. Ultimately all are welcome to His house.

The words and activities of Jesus demonstrated the love and care of God the Father. “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples” (Jn 15, 8). “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15, 13). Jesus proclaimed that this love would give consolation, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11, 28). Jesus revealed the unending love and the unlimited mercy of God the Father. One who believes in this love and mercy has no reason to fear but becomes filled with love and hope.

## II. Brotherhood

God is the Father of all. If God is the Father of all, we all are brothers and sisters and so all are equal and we must share all that we have. The racial, social, religious and economic differences are all created by human beings. The teaching and attitude of Jesus were such that he gave no importance to these differences. During the time of Jesus, a great majority of the people was stamped as impure and they were pushed away from the main stream of society. Jesus went into their midst and spoke to them about the love of God. He did not hesitate to embrace the leper (Mk 1,41) have dinner with the tax collectors (Mk 2,15) and to accept the love of a public sinner (Lk 7, 36-50). He dared to speak in public with a woman who was considered untouchable

(Jn 4, 6-26) and then stayed with the Samaritans, and taught them the message of God's love. Samaritans were hated by the Jewish people, considering them as sinners. But, Jesus loved them and accepted them as the children of God. Though society hated the tax collectors, he did not hesitate to call one of them to be his Apostle. Among his disciples, there were Zealots who were engaged in guerilla warfare against Rome. Jesus paid no attention to the externals but he looked and saw their hearts.

During the time of Jesus, women had only the status of a gentile slave. They had no rights and were not allowed to enter the Synagogue. A woman was not to speak with a man in public. They had no right to file a petition in a court or to be a witness in a case. Having no children and becoming a widow were considered as her fault. She was the visible sign of a hopeless society. But, Jesus took a different approach to women. He allowed many women to be his companions and disciples (Lk 8, 1-3). A public sinner walked into a dining hall and expressed her love and Jesus accepted her and restored her spirit (Lk 7, 36-50). A bent woman stood outside the Synagogue with fear and trepidation. Jesus called her into the Synagogue and healed her, restoring to her the dignity and all the rights of a daughter of God (Lk 13, 10-17).

Table fellowship with the outcast was another decisive move in the life of Jesus. Having meals with someone was a sign of fellowship. Jesus did not refuse any invitation. He went to the house of the Pharisee as well as of the tax collector. The people, who were pushed aside as sinners by the so called holy ones, shared meals with him. It was around the table that he deepened his relationship with everybody. This was symbolic of breaking himself and sharing with others. He exhorted his disciples to continue that practice. It was precisely for this that He established the Eucharist, in which He broke the bread and shared it with them as a symbol of sharing himself and gave them a new commandment, to love each other as He has loved

them. People who were marginalized and were stamped as sinners found great joy and consolation in the presence of Jesus. He had such a close relationship with them that others accused him of being a “friend of the Tax Collectors and Sinners” (Lk 7,34). No one was excluded from his friendship. The Roman centurion, the one in charge of the Synagogue, the tax collector as well as the Pharisee were like brothers for Jesus. Thus, the Kingdom became a reality in the fellowship with Jesus.

Jesus desired to start such a community on earth in which all the people will have membership. The rich and the poor, the saint and the sinner, the Jews and the gentiles must come around at the same table in a deep sense of love and community. It was for this that he formed the disciples into a Church. There the authority serves. Humble service was the right and responsibility of the one in authority (Lk 22, 25-27). Such an attitude and approach uplifted the social status of the ones who were thrown into the periphery of society and were filled with inferiority feeling. This approach should be reflected in the words and deeds of the members of the Church, Jesus demanded. The Eucharistic celebrations must deepen this sense of community and fellowship.

### **III. Freedom**

The social and religious structures of the time of Jesus were such that they imprisoned the people in the feeling of inferiority, fear and guilt. The precepts of the Covenant were made with the intention of ending slavery and assuring freedom for all. But, eventually the 613 laws and their subdivisions became a weight that the people could not bear. The interpretation and application of laws about Sabbath and ritual purity can be seen as examples. Ordinary people could never learn those laws and even if they learned them, they would not be able to obey them.

It was taught that it is a sin to break a law and God will punish the sinner. Hence the common people lived in constant fear. Added to that, they feared the natural forces and Satan.

Anxiety about their own future consumed them. Jesus removed these fears by his words and actions. He taught that laws are not to make men slaves but to free them. By eating without ritual purification, touching the impure and healing on the Sabbath, Jesus demonstrated the emptiness of the explanations that the Pharisees gave to the laws. People began to experience freedom from the slavery of sin and the burden of a large number of laws. Satan is defeated; death has lost its sting. Death is not the end of life, but the beginning of a new and eternal life with God, entering the Father's house. There is no room for fear in the Kingdom of God that is a community of the children of God.

#### **IV. Justice**

A life according to the law was considered as Just. Breaking the law was considered as a sin. The just will receive God's blessings while the sinner will be punished. Health, wealth and long life were considered as signs of God's blessing. At the same time, illness, poverty, physical infirmity etc. were considered as punishment from God. Jesus corrected these views and proclaimed, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled'. 'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man'. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. 'But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation'. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. 'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets'" (Lk 6, 20-26). The Sermon on the Mount granted consolation to the poor and demonstrated the nature of the Kingdom of God. Through the literal observance of the laws taught by the Pharisees, no one will attain justification. Health and wealth are not the signs of a

just life and in the same way poverty and illness are not the signs of sin and punishment from God.

God is just and he forgives the sins of the one who repents. To be just before God, the rich have to share their wealth with the poor; they should admit the poor to share table fellowship with him (Lk 16, 19 – 31); The foolish farmer should open his barns to the poor (Lk 12, 16 – 21): and look after the needy regardless of their cast, creed or social status (Lk 10, 30-37). Those who see the distorted face of Jesus in the poor, sick and needy, and care for them, giving what they need, would have share in the Kingdom of God. The justice of the Kingdom of God goes beyond the justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5, 20). The Kingdom of God bears fruit in the love that is shared. The teaching of Jesus leads to this hope.

### **c. The Kingdom of God grows**

Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God without the support of any material resources or socio-religious and economic structures. In all appearance, it is fragile, like a seed that falls on the earth. But the life inside the seed has strength and it will come out breaking the shell. The process will take place without any sound, without drawing attention to it. Slowly it will grow into a tree and the birds of the air would build nest on the branches. All the people of the world will be gathered under its shade.

Most of the parables of the Kingdom of God are expressions of Jesus' vision and optimism concerning the future. The mustard seed will grow into a big bush (Mt 13, 31 – 33). Though some seeds will perish falling on the wayside, rocks and among the thorn bush, some will fall in the good soil and produce fruits 100 % (Mt 13, 3 – 9). The focus is not on what was lost but on what was there. Just as a little yeast ferments the entire flour in the pot (Mt 13, 33), the Kingdom of God will transform this world. The project that the Carpenter from Nazareth began with a few fishermen in Galilee will transform

the world into the Kingdom of God. It will grow in the midst of oppositions. The birds coming from outside will try to devour them. The weeds from inside will try to crush them (Mt 13, 36-43). The thief will be in the boat. The wheat and the weed will grow together. In the net there will be good fish and bad fish (Mt 13, 47 – 50). But none of them will be able to stop the growth of the Kingdom of God.

With the coming of Jesus, the Kingdom of God was inaugurated. It will defeat all the powers of Satan because it is God who establishes His Kingdom on earth. He is the Lord who sows the seed and makes it grow by giving light, water and nutrition. Hence there is no need to despair if one believes in the Kingdom of God. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12, 32). Faith should lead us to action and the activities inspired by faith would strengthen hope.

# 4

## DEATH ON THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION: SOURCE OF HOPE

From the human point of view the life of Jesus and the project of establishing the Kingdom of God were utter failures. At first, thousands followed him, filled with awe for the miracles he performed and attracted by his teachings. But gradually the miracles became fewer. The religious leaders, who observed him with suspicion and prejudice from the beginning, began plotting to do away with him. They made false accusations against him. As his teaching became demanding and inviting to take up their cross, the public moved away from him. Even many of his followers left him (Jn 6, 66). At the decisive moment all left him. One of his collaborators, the specially chosen twelve apostles, betrayed him. The leader of the apostolic college renounced him. The frightened disciples went in hiding.

The Temple guards and Roman Army came together to arrest him. He was put on trial by the High Priest with the Sanhedrin, the king of Galilee and the Roman Governor. Though they could not prove him to be guilty, he was accused of blasphemy by the religious court and revolution by the Roman court and condemned to be crucified. In the popular trial, the people, compelled by the Jewish leadership, chose Barabbas over Jesus. In the midst of thousands gathered for the Passover Feast, Jesus walked carrying the Cross on which he was to be nailed, between two thieves, like a criminal. He hung on the Cross, between heaven and earth, rejected by all, insulted by

the onlookers who challenged him to come down and prove his divinity. From the Cross, he looked up and cried, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me”? Heaven did not open its gates. Father did not come down to save His son. Not even a word of consolation was uttered by the Father. After the most painful death, his body was taken down from the Cross, and buried in a hurry in a borrowed tomb. The tomb was sealed and soldiers stood guard to make sure that he or his body will not come out of the tomb. Apparently Jesus encountered the greatest defeat. But a greater surprise was in store for the world.

The sealed Tomb opened by itself. The guards could not stop him. At the very same place where evil celebrated victory, good came out victorious. Death was swallowed up by life. The crucified rose from the dead! The empty tomb proclaimed in a loud and clear voice that the last word about humanity and the universe was not death but Life. It proved that the ruler of the universe is not Satan but God. The Resurrection demonstrated that Satan was defeated and his claim as the ruler of the universe was wiped out.

The death of Jesus was not a sudden and unexpected tragedy. From the beginning, Jesus knew that his life was leading him to the Cross. By the middle of his public life, he began to warn the disciples regarding the impending death. Through his warnings and teachings, he tried to prepare the Apostles to accept His cruel end. “From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Mt 16, 21). All the three Synoptic Gospels have recorded three times the clear and certain warnings about the kind of death Jesus would suffer at the hands of the gentiles (Mk 8,31; 9,31 10, 30-34). Besides these, he had given many hints about his impending death. However, in all these accounts the death and resurrection appeared together.

Jesus challenged his enemies to destroy the Temple and that he would reconstruct it in three days. Jesus was talking about his own body (Jn 2, 10 – 21). The enemies will destroy it with death, but he will restore it to life by rising from the dead. “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12, 24). The seed has to die to bring out new life. Jesus died so that those who believe in Him may have life eternal. “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. So that everyone who believed in him may have eternal life” (Jn 3, 14 -15). Lifting up had a double meaning - death and resurrection. Death on the cross or rather raising on the cross is seen as the exaltation of Jesus. In the Gospel of St. John (Jn 12, 32; 11, 52) death and resurrection are the two sides of the same coin. There is no resurrection without death and death is meaningless without resurrection.

Crucifixion was neither an inevitable event in history nor something forced upon Jesus. For an outside observer it may appear to be so. It was the completion of the plan of God and the conclusion of the Salvation History. A great number of prophecies in the Old Testament, (especially Is 53 and Ps 23) refer to this event. On the part of Jesus, it was an act of total obedience and complete surrender to the will of the Father. It was the ultimate expression of His love for the Father and for humanity. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15, 13). “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn 10, 11); “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father” (Jn 10, 18). The resurrection was the response of the Father for this total surrender in full freedom. It was the sign that the sacrifice offered was accepted. Jesus offered Himself so that no one will perish but attain eternal life. Through His death and resurrection, the gate of heaven is opened for all.

The shadow of the Cross was visible in the life style, decisions, miracles and teaching of Jesus. When he rejected the easy ways suggested by Satan, he was choosing the path of the Cross. There was no place for him to lay his head. He identified himself with the poor and accepted the plight of the poor from the manger to the Calvary. The sick, the poor and the marginalized became his friends. Power went out from him (Lk 6, 19. 8, 40) to heal and this was not pleasing to his enemies. The warning was there in the first promise, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen 3, 15). The prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled in him. “He took over our weakness, he carried our sins. He took our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Mt 8, 17).

He was wounded to heal our wounds. He died to defeat death and to lead us to eternal life. Jesus told us to, “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Mt,7, 13-14). He walked as the first one through the narrow path. The one who came to light the fire on earth, was consumed by that very fire. “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Lk 12, 49). Jesus won victory over pain and death not by staying away from them but by accepting them. The way to eternal life has to go through death.



## CONCLUSION

Jesus is the beacon of hope to those who are engulfed in the darkness of despair. He is the anchor for the ship caught in the middle of the storm. All the promises God had given to humanity are fulfilled in Jesus. The Promised Land of the Fathers became a reality in the Kingdom of God that Jesus established. It is not reserved for any nation or race, but open to all. All the people in the world are blessed through Him. Jesus is healing for the sick; forgiveness for the sinner; sight for the blind; liberation for the imprisoned; and hope for those who consider themselves hopeless. No one who trusts in Him would need to despair.

Though Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God on earth, the process of transforming the world is not complete yet. He will come again to renew everything; to wipe away every tear from every eye, to awake the ones sleeping in the tombs and to make the Kingdom of God full reality (Rev 21, 1-4; 22, 20). It is his promise: “I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn 14, 3). <sup>RSV</sup> “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (Jn 14,18). “Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (Jn 17, 24).

The Father will not reject the prayer and desire of Jesus. The Kingdom of God will become a reality when we become

one with Jesus who is one with the Father (Jn 17, 23). Until then we have to walk through the path of the Cross, eating the bread of our hardships and drinking the water of suffering. The Prophet Isaiah has said, “Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher” (Is 30, 20).

Jesus has not promised to take us away from the difficulties and pain of the world but He has given them a new meaning. If we remain in Him, we would have the strength to encounter any pain. “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (Jn 15,33). In all our toil and hardships, He is there with us, to make our “yoke light and our burden easy”. We are to take up our daily cross and walk behind Jesus who won victory over death. When Peter was walking on the water, he got scared seeing the strong wind and he began to sink. He cried out to Jesus, “Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Mt 14, 31).

When we call to him, He comes to us. We can always find refuge in His open heart. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12, 1-2).

The one who has promised to be with us till the end of time has defeated death and received all powers from the Father (Mt 28, 18-20). He is the one who says, “See, I am coming soon;

my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work" (Rev 22, 12). "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev 7, 17). "To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1, 27). Those who believe that Jesus is in them are the prophets of hope. They prepare the way for His coming; they cry out, to the Lord to come and He replies, "Surely I am coming soon. "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! **MARAN ATHA**" (Rev 22, 20).

\* \* \* \* \*