

NATIONAL NEWMAN CHAPLAINS ASSOCIATION  
COLLEGE OUTLINE OF SACRED DOCTRINE

*A Basic Lecture for Students in Non-Catholic Colleges and Universities*

General Editor  
Joseph M. Wyss, O.P., S.T.Lr., Ph.D.

---

THE CHAPLAIN'S LECTURE

---

SALVATION-HISTORY IN THE  
OLD TESTAMENT

Rev. Richard H. McGrath, S.T.D.

*Father McGrath is a priest of the Diocese of Covington, Ky., and is Chairman of the Theology Department of Villa Madonna College. He studied at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and received the doctorate in theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome, in 1956. He has studied and done archaeological research in the Holy Land and other countries of the Near East and is a member of the leading biblical, theological and archaeological societies. In addition to various articles in scholarly and popular reviews he has published in doctoral dissertation, THE RELIGIOUS MEANING OF THE TOWER OF BABEL NARRATIVE.*

**I. INTRODUCTION.**

- A. It is a commonplace to say that the purpose of reading is to find the mind of the author.**

One must "out-read," namely attempt to understand the author's point of view. "In-reading," a constant danger, must be carefully avoided. Otherwise one might superimpose his own prejudices and outlooks. The same principle holds true in handling the Bible. We need to place it back into the times and circumstances whence it arose and thus attempt to reconstruct the view of life as had by the sacred author.

- B. Particularly important to understand is the historical viewpoint.**

Modern Scripture scholars insist that the Bible is not a collection of texts to be used as proofs of dogmas. To look upon the texts as only substantiating our beliefs is to get a partial view of Scripture. We would neglect the whole and fail to see the under-

lying plan. Today we attempt to see more of the Bible as a whole and fit the individual parts into that whole.

**C. Behind all Scripture there is the fact that God has a plan for man's salvation and that history is a record of the events unfolding that plan.**

The so-called "salvation-history" may be defined simply as the Biblical record of God's plan worked out in our world in the events that take place. History shows God drawing mankind to himself. God has acted in history revealing something of his nature and his plan. He has acted by making and keeping a covenant with man. It is this covenant, this testament, that the Bible presents.

"Salvation-history is the account of God's intervention in our world, drawing mankind to himself, communicating his divine life and bringing about his universal reign" (Tos, *Approaches to the Bible: the Old Testament*, p. 20.)

Scripture sees everything in the world as moving in a straight line. All comes from God; all goes toward him.

**D. Commonly the Bible is called the revelation of the "Word of God."**

As with all ancient peoples, so with the people of the Bible a word is more than someone's thoughts put into language. Rather, the word is active. It is not static but endowed with the power of the one who speaks. Words accomplish things. The spoken word is not mere sound but an invisible and real element doing what it says. Take for example the blessings and curses in Scripture, e.g. the blessings of Jacob, (Gen. 49). Or see the creation occurring by the word of God, (Gen. 1). Words are conceived as most certainly producing their effect. They do what they stand for. Thus, the word of God is not just a series of things said, but rather of things done. God's power is active in his word. When he speaks events take place.

Chapters 40-55 of Isaiah furnish a good example of this attitude on the word. The word determines what is to take place, (Is. 41). It is unalterable, (Is. 45, 23). For the Old Testament the word is not a social convention, a mere tag or label. It is power; it is doing something. "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it (Is. 55, 11)."

**E. The Bible as the Word of God does not just mean that it contains his thoughts, reflections, etc., but rather that it contains his deeds—how in history God worked out man's salvation.**

We speak of salvation-history as the underlying theme of all Scripture, showing by what has occurred in history that God was slowly but surely fulfilling his divine plan. The Bible is not a book of words as such. It tells of the acts of God, his manifestations. The lesson repeated over and over is that man is not in life by accident. He is being guided and directed by a God in accordance with an original plan, man's final happiness. All things tend to that goal.

**II. THE BIBLE SHOWS A CONSTANT PROGRESSION IN THE WORKING OUT OF THIS PLAN.**

Everything does not happen at once. Both God himself and his plan is revealed slowly over the course of hundreds of years. We do not, therefore, expect to find the full revelation in any one particular book of Scripture.

It was probably not until the Israelites had settled in the land of Canaan after the Exodus that they began to see a religious meaning in their historical experiences. The idea of sal-



vation-history was only gradually evolved and seemingly did not reach its full understanding until the biblical books were written during the days of the monarchy, the divided kingdoms, the Babylonian exile and restoration. It only dawned slowly upon the leaders of Israel that their history was part of God's plan—a history not of what they had done, but of what God had done for them. As the authors recall and set down their history they also unfold the revelation of God in that series of circumstances which befell their nation. As a result, Old Testament history does not glorify the Israelite nation but the nation's God.

**A. The facts narrated in the Old Testament are not just a series of incidents without purpose or direction.**

The authors saw world history and God's purpose side by side and were convinced that the two were connected. The Old Testament becomes accordingly a record of events controlled by God's providence and directed to a definite end. There is no sacred author who gives events for the sake of the events. All have reference to God.

If asked, then, what is the peculiar purpose of the biblical writers with regard to history, how did they interpret it, what is their understanding of it, we answer that they have a basic belief in a divine plan for the salvation of mankind and the tending of all history towards its fulfillment. Nothing just happens. God's hand directs all.

The authors deliberately chose their material and manner of presentation from this religious viewpoint. Everything, no matter how small, was related to God. For example, the wearing of clothes (Gen. 3, 21), the coming of the rainbow (Gen. 9, 13); the phenomenon of various languages (Gen. 11) are all given religious explanations. The Bible always considers such things as rain or the lack of it, sickness and health, war, etc. as immediately sent or controlled by the hand of God. Thus does Judith pray, stating that all things have been devised and accomplished by God (Judith 9, 4 ff.).

**B. In the historical books especially this religious view is quite in evidence.**

Everywhere are found specific examples of God's design in history. Confer such places as: Jos. 1, 7 ff. where the entering of Canaan and the taking of Jericho are attributed directly to God; Jos. 23, 11-13 where God is said to fight for the Israelites and drive out their enemies; I Sam. 12, 9-11; II Chr. 27, 6; 28, 19 are further examples of events attributed to God rather than the Israelite people.

History often appears in the Bible as a series of war and peace. War is had when men are unfaithful to God, when they go to idols, etc. Take for example the cycle of the book of Judges. Here repeated endlessly is the idea that when Israel is faithful to God all goes well. They conquer the land of Canaan, but when they fall into idolatrous practices God lets them lose battles. He lets them fall under the control of their enemies. When Israel cries out in prayer a savior, a judge, is raised up for them and the people are victorious because God fights with and through them. When they sin again, the cycle is repeated. All is but a manifestation of God's plan, will, guidance, etc.

**C. The purpose, therefore, of the historical outlook—the salvation-history outlook—is not to give precise information on what happened.**

The authors have no intention of giving all the details. Rather they want to make the religious elements in their history serve the instruction of each generation. Not concerned with events as such, they employ history as a vehicle for inculcating religious truths. Material is collected to support this thesis. Elements that do not bolster their view are left aside or de-emphasized by the writers.

**D. There is subordination of history to a religious thesis.**

Examine the history of David's reign, for example. It is in an atmosphere of religion that the personality and work of David is drawn. The events are simply a background for religious instruction. Such a procedure does not mean that the happenings are falsified, but it does entail a certain amount of simplification, omission, emphasis and artificiality which would not be allowed in our modern way of writing history.

**E. In studying carefully these historians of the Old Testament one can see how they worked.**

They generally lacked what we would call a "critical sense." There is no regard for a scientific examination of the sources employed. They make no effort to eliminate contradictory details. Sometimes two or three accounts of the same thing are given as in the two accounts of creation (Gen. 1 and 2), the two versions of the flood (Gen. 6 ff.). Further, the use of round numbers (note the frequency of forty) as well as stories such as those in the Samson saga lead us to suspect that the author is not recording things exactly as they might have happened.

**F. The sacred writers did not look upon their task as our present-day historians look upon theirs.**

They had no desire to trace the sequence of events nor give an orderly arrangement of them. There was no interest in history itself but rather a desire to see the action of God in history. Their manner of handling their sources and their conclusions from the data are the consequences of their religious conception of history. The past was only a spring-board for showing how God worked out his plan.

**III. THE HEBREW HISTORIAN FOUND IT EASY TO SEE PAST HISTORY AS A SUCCESSION OF DIVINE INTERVENTIONS.**

What we would explain as economic and military reverses were to them examples of divine punishment. Blessings which we might attribute to good geographical location are to them rewards from God for good behavior. As these historians saw it, every day that counted was a day on which the relation between the Hebrew people and its God was further disclosed. The most wonderful event had happened to this people—God had chosen it as an instrument through which he would work out man's eventual salvation. The writers are concerned with presenting just enough of Hebrew history to illustrate the interest and continuous manifestations of God.

Israel's history was a sacred history—the history of a revelation which in its development was connected with specific persons, places and things. The consciousness of a close bond between history and revelation caused Israel to record events for one sole purpose, that of religious instruction.

**A. The Semitic mentality is not abstract, but concrete and picturesque.**

It makes little distinction between what is real and what is ideal. The Semite never thinks just to be thinking. His thought applies to life. He prefers to live the truth rather than express it. Often in his writings he tries to convey not an abstract truth, but an experience, a feeling, a mood. Being an artist, his prose is poetry. The language is flowery and figurative. All the devices found in the Oriental mentality are used.

Semitic thinking has been classified as "pre-logical," as is that of most of the Eastern world. It might be compared to the thought of a child for whom everything has a reality and a concrete meaning. The imagination is active and fantasy finds a place next



to reality. There is a tendency to think of everything as it ought to be—the ideal. This in turn leads to exaggeration, as for example the statement in Gen. 34, 27 that Jacob's sons destroyed a whole city to revenge the violation of their sister. This total destruction is what should have been, not necessarily what actually happened. Exaggerations occur also in the use of numbers, e.g. the number of people who left Egypt under Moses is an impossible number to take literally in view of the events, the crossing of the sea in one night, the wandering in the desert of Sinai, etc.

Further, there is an underplaying of human elements, e.g. the destruction of Jericho (Jos. 6) where the capture is attributed immediately to God. Use of stories and legends finds a place in Semitic history. Specific examples will be shown as we consider the various periods of salvation-history.

Also, in the Semitic expression there is a lack of subordination. Everything is of equal value. Notice the constant use of coordinate clauses. The Semite does not analyse. His phrases and clauses are generally simply linked with "and." His thinking goes in circles more than in straight lines. There is, however, a progression of thought, more intuitive than logical. It might be compared to some extent to the modern "stream of consciousness" writers.

Finally, the biblical mind does not ask "Did it happen?" Anything can happen in this manner of thinking. The sole and important question is "What does it mean?" If we follow the mind of the author we will not ask such questions as "Was there a real flood and a real ark?", "Did the Israelites really cross the Red Sea?" Rather our constant question is "What does it mean when such events are stated as occurring?" Remember that it will be a religious meaning since this is how the author views history. All somehow speaks of God and the ways of God in the world.

**B. Much of the Old Testament could be called a mediation on history—a midrash, to use a term frequently employed by modern biblical scholars.**

The authors take an historical event and through reflection on the matter attempt to bring out further meanings. To give us the results of their meditations they must add to, subtract, re-arrange, etc. the history. Thus the end product is basically an event of history, but seen through the eyes of a religious person which fact colors his outlook.

Some might object to such an interpretation, but if the author wishes to use such an approach to history that is his business. He cannot be denounced for using it. It is rather for us, the readers, to understand his approach and go along with him if we would ferret out his meaning. In many ways the interpretation of an historical happening is of more value to the reader than the actual event with all details. For example, one can say some thing orally and by his expression and gestures convey his meaning. If his words are recorded without indicating what he meant by them they may give a totally different impression to some future reader. True, the words are there, but having to interpret them for himself, the reader may make mistakes. It would often be preferable to have the interpretation of the words rather than the actual words so that the full meaning might be received. A religious interpretation of history is quite valid if that is what the author intends to give us.

**C. In salvation-history the Old Testament is the period of preparation.**

It does not tell the whole story and without the New Testament is incomplete, for all history moves towards Christ. Its role is to prepare for the salvation that will come through the Redemption. The Old Testament covers a long period in time and presents to us various stages in salvation history.

The stages may be sub-divided into:

- 1—The plan and its beginnings;
- 2—The choice of individuals to carry out the plan;
- 3—The choice of a people;
- 4—The choice of a homeland;
- 5—Formation of the people in the homeland.

All of these stages prepared for the final and full accomplishment of God's plan.

#### IV. THE PLAN IS REVEALED IN THE OPENING CHAPTERS OF GENESIS.

Here all things are made by God. They are all good and are to serve man. In both accounts of creation (Gen. 1 and 2) man appears as the culmination of creation. God's plan is to create man and to create him for happiness. The world and all other creatures are made to help man to be happy. God has in mind nought but man's good.

The "how" of creation is not mentioned. To salvation-history this is not important. It is the fact of creation that counts. Scientific preoccupations are not the author's concern. He has nothing to do with them. In setting down God's plan for man's happiness the writer makes use of every device at his command. He musters to his aid symbolism and stories found also in parallel Babylonian accounts. To be concrete, he employs anthropomorphism and speaks of God as though God were a man. By describing the garden and its blessings, the author insists on man's being made for happiness.

In the world of the present, however, the human race does not live in complete happiness. There is evil, and the Hebrew writer must account for it and fit it into his presentation. Thus, again making use of symbols and stories, he shows that man himself by accepting temptation seemingly thwarts God's plan. Upon a scene of pristine goodness evil enters in the symbol of a serpent, and our first parents fail.

God's purpose in creating will not be destroyed, however. In the famous passage Gen. 3, 15 we find laid down, albeit somewhat vaguely, the basic promise of the ultimate fulfillment of God's designs. From now on in the world there will be enmity between the evil and the good. Constant struggle between these forces is promised. Eventually, somehow good will be triumphant. "He (the seed of the woman, the seed of the good) shall crush your head," God says to the serpent.

##### A. Before moving into history proper, Genesis then gives several general examples of the struggle found in all history—that between good and evil.

The first is a domestic example of two brothers. The good and the evil are personified in the concrete example of two men, Cain and Abel, who, for the purposes of continuity in the account, are made the children of Adam and Eve. With the death of Abel, seemingly evil has won. But God steps into the picture with the threat of eventual punishment and promise of evil's downfall.

Moving to a wider sphere, the author takes as his second example a catastrophic flood which he uses as an instance of how God punishes evil. The struggle of good and evil is re-iterated, the flood representing the triumph of the good. Although the narrative may be based upon an actual Babylonian flood, the writer develops it, exaggerates it and uses his usual story technique not to tell of an actual flood, but rather of God's triumph over the wicked and his mercy toward the good represented by Noah.

The same lesson is brought out in the Tower of Babel narrative. Evil is presented as again flourishing. But God has the final say. In this case, evil is represented by the building of a Babylonian ziggurat or temple-tower which to the Hebrews was part of idolatry. The difficulty that comes to men from varied languages makes the writer use it as his example of God's punishment.



**B. Beginning with chapter 12 of Genesis salvation-history properly speaking is set down. The second stage begins—the choice of individuals in carrying out God's plan.**

Throughout the remainder of the Bible we see how in history God's promise of salvation is worked out. We propose here to give only in summary some of the more important steps in God's revelation of himself and his plan as seen by the Hebrew writers in their history.

With Abraham we come to an historical time, the nineteenth century B.C. according to the best view. A pagan Mesopotamian became the individual of God's choice in the founding of a new nation in whose history salvation would eventually be achieved. God picked Abraham and initiated the events that would lead to a glorious future. This is the essential point repeated time and again by the sacred writers in all the items mentioned concerning Abraham. In accordance with God's desires, Abraham and his family migrated from Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The major section of Genesis relates narratives about the founding-fathers of Judaism, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

The literary style employed in the telling would make these accounts belong to the form of composition known as the saga. The patriarchs are portrayed as lords of all they survey. They are the heroes. To give them heroic stature the writers deliberately magnify them, while they diminish and underplay the roles of others. This mannerism is characteristic of the saga. Other elements of this type of writing are seen in the fact that the heroes, the patriarchs, wander about the world of their day and take part in adventures. Perils threaten them, but escape is always assured. The hero is always clever and gets the better of his enemies, e.g. note the craftiness of Jacob in securing the birthright (Gen. 25, 27 ff and 27), in besting Laban (Gen. 30, 25-43). Since this is the style of these narratives, one does not expect genuine history in every detail. An historical core is present, but freely expressed and interpreted according to the religious purpose of the biblical telling. It is to be noted that in all the elements of the patriarchal saga religion is the guiding motive. Why the wanderings? Why the trickery of Jacob? Because such is God's design.

**C. How much the patriarchs themselves knew of God and his plan is hard to say.**

In their day many gods were spoken of, some of them forces in nature, some of them personal gods located at various shrines. Paganism was all around. Was the Hebrew God considered as just one more deity—another manifestation of some superhuman force? Quite frankly, it is almost impossible to know the exact ideas of the patriarchs themselves. We must distinguish the actual knowledge of the persons represented by Abraham, Jacob, etc. from that of later authors. The latter was often imposed on the former. Remember that the authors don't want us to miss the hand of God in everything. Thus we often get their view of patriarchal beliefs rather than what the patriarchs actually believed.

For patriarchal ideas of God the safest approach is through the names given to God. From these in Genesis we would not be justified in concluding, as some have done, that the patriarchs were simply polytheistic like their neighbors. In practice perhaps they were not completely weaned from polytheistic notions. They may have had some belief in national and tribal deities, i.e. there was one deity who had lordship over all, but alongside him was a special deity for each tribe. While, therefore, their monotheism may not have been pure, they were developing toward the idea of the one God. The uniqueness of patriarchal religion was the fact that it contained the germ of subsequent Hebrew religious development. We do not completely know how elevated the patriarchal notion of God really was, but it is the foundation of all that was to come later. However limited their appreciation of God and his intervention in their lives, they could grasp the fundamental facts of his power over history and his direc-



tion of it toward their good. Abraham is said to have had faith, which in the biblical context means a covenant and a commitment to God. This was not merely an assent of the intellect. The Semites are practical. Faith means a complete giving of oneself to the deity and his service. However much they may have known as individuals concerning God their belief in him changed their lives. It sent them wandering in a foreign land, living in the expectation of the fulfillment of God's promise, the coming of a glorious future. In the telling of the patriarchal story, Genesis wants us to see the beginnings of salvation-history and the distinctiveness of the religion of the patriarchs. God had chosen them as part of his plan. Only the eyes of faith can discern this initiative of divine providence. It is with such eyes that the Hebrew authors view the foundations of their race.

## **V. THE BOOK OF EXODUS PRESENTS GOD'S CHOICE OF BOTH A PERSON AND A PEOPLE THROUGH WHOM HE WOULD WORK.**

The story of Moses and the welding of disparate tribes into a nation is one of the great peaks in salvation-history. No longer is God's choice upon individuals or families, but upon a whole people. This choice is the glory of the Israelite nation, and it is no wonder that the exodus and the events leading to it became their most often repeated story. It is no wonder that even the New Testament writers recall many of these events and are at pains to show their fulfillment in Christ.

### **A. Exodus is one of the best books to examine in the study of salvation-history.**

Here we clearly see the religious viewpoint, since God is said to be behind all the wondrous events. The work reads like a hymn of praise to God for his mighty acts on behalf of his people. The Israelite God is superior to all and when he speaks, "Let my people go," his words produce effects which eventually bring the people out of the slavery of Egypt into the Promised Land.

God's providence is seen in raising up the leader Moses. As he grows up Moses is prepared by the events of his life to play a great role. Brought up in the court of the pharaoh he received an education and a knowledge of Egyptian ways. Later dwelling for some time on the Sinai desert he learned the ways of that desert through which he was to lead the Israelites. At the experience of the burning bush Moses came to realize his vocation and returned to be God's instrument in the exodus from Egypt. Throughout the entire episode it is God who is performing. He says, ". . . I have come down to rescue" (Ex. 3, 8); to Moses, "I will be with you (Ex. 3, 12);" "Forced by my mighty hand, he will send them away (Ex. 6, 1);" "You will know that I, the Lord, am your God when I free you from the labor of the Egyptians (Ex. 6,7)."

The literary style of these narratives could be classified as popular tales of wonder. The historical events are overlaid with elements of the marvelous. The authors take the historical core of the exodus and surround it with somewhat exaggerated statements and stories so that the reader will get the point that these events did not just happen by chance, but all was under the influence of God. Yahweh is presented as an active God, working in history to deliver his people and lead them to the promised land.

A series of plagues under God's direction forces the pharaoh to release the Hebrews. The plagues are based upon common troubles in Egypt, e.g. frogs, mosquitos, flies, sandstorms; but are worse than usual and start and stop at Moses' command. All the details of these plagues indicate that these are God's wonders. In the tenth plague we find that ". . . the Lord slew every first-born in the land of Egypt (Ex. 12, 29).

In the going out from Egypt the Hebrews are led by God. He directs their route and takes them on through the waters of the sea until they are completely free of Egypt. Modern Scripture studies would indicate that the people under Moses probably crossed



a small and shallow swamp located between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. The Hebrew text speaks of the "Sea of Reeds" not the Red Sea, a much larger body of water. Aided by natural causes, wind and tides, the escaping Hebrews were able to maneuver over the swampy terrain. In the retelling of the episode in Exodus the biblical author again adds details, i.e., the water stood like walls as the people passed through (Ex. 14, 22), in order to make his point that the escape is due to God's help. If one reads the passages he will easily note that the subject of all the activity is "He," "Yahweh."

The author's religious view can be seen in Exodus 15, a song of praise in honor of God, supposedly sung by the Israelites after the passage of the waters (in actuality it is a later composition inserted at this point in the narrative). "Your right hand, O Lord, magnificent in power . . . has shattered the enemy. In your great majesty you overthrew your adversaries. . . . At a breath of your anger the waters piled up. . . . In your mercy you led the people you redeemed; in your strength you guided them to your holy dwelling (Ex. 15, 6-13)."

The same outlook flows through the descriptions of the coming of the manna, the quail and water from the rock as the people wander in the desert of Sinai. All these items are manifestations of God's providence. ". . . I will now rain down bread from heaven for you (Ex. 16, 4)."

**B. The high-point is reached when at Mount Sinai God formally selects this people as his, the instrument of his designs.**

God presents himself to the Israelites as their God and calls them to holiness. The covenant at Sinai began a new relationship between God and men. This covenant established status for the people thus honored. God joined Israel to himself.

Here at Sinai the people began to realize that Yahweh was indeed different from other gods. He was a personal God. He was most good and most powerful, accomplishing all he willed. Yahweh's transcendence and power had stood out in the wonders of the exodus, in the providence he had shown during the desert wanderings and in the theophany at Sinai. The Sinai experience transformed the Israelites as nothing had done before. Their lives were changed and their faith was expressed in their daily activity. They were now God's people. He had picked them. They were committed to him and *had to be holy because God was holy*. Man's salvation had moved a step closer.

**C. Next in the movement of salvation-history was the movement of the chosen people into their homeland.**

It is in the books of Josue and Judges that we read of the conquering of Canaan by the Israelites and their gradual settlement in it. Once again the viewpoint is religious. God is faithful to his promises and fights with his people to give them the land. From the strict historical aspect, we know that during the thirteenth century B.C. these Semitic tribes infiltrated the land of Canaan. Slowly, in a long series of small battles, by persistent infiltration the Israelites took over. This historical fact is presented in the Bible as God's movement. It is he who throws out the Canaanites. He again is pictured as employing wonders to achieve his ends. The Jordan is crossed by the invading people in a marvelous way (Jos. 3); the city of Jericho is easily taken when its walls collapse, etc. The work that the Hebrews had to do in these battles is generally minimized to make plain that the credit belongs to God. The victories are his.

Other items in these books also have religious motivation. For example, the wholesale slaughter of the Canaanites, including women and children, is done to preserve the people against pagan and immoral influence. This was to be a holy land under a holy God and his people.

## VI. A MORE COMPLETE FORMATION OF THE ISRAELITES NOW TOOK PLACE.

For our considerations we will break it down into the following headings:

- A—the days of the kingdom;
- B—the role of the prophets;
- C—the Babylonian exile;
- D—the restoration;
- E—Syrian persecution and Jewish independence.

### A. God formed his people into a unified society.

During the days of the judges, unity was notably lacking among the tribes of Israel. Each group did much what it wanted without reference to others. The times were somewhat barbaric and without organization and government would remain so. A step forward was taken in their history when the Israelites demanded a king. The monarchy began with the installation of Saul. From the religious view again, Saul and the succeeding kings reigned at God's behest. To Samuel God said, ". . . I will send thee a man of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be ruler over my people (I Sam. 9, 16)." Though king, Saul in practice differed little from a judge. He lived and died a warrior, doing little by way of organizing a government.

#### 1. It was with the establishment of David on the throne that the Israelite Nation seemed to be reaching its promised glory.

For his people, David was the king par excellence. He achieved full unity among the tribes. He brought peace to the land. He gave the people a national capitol at Jerusalem, the center of government and religion. Israel now had the promised land under its control and it seemed as though the movement begun with Abraham had reached its end. Through the prophet Nathan God promised David that his dynasty would endure. To the people of those days salvation-history had reached its terminus. The happiness willed by God for mankind would now become a reality. David was the *Servant of Yahweh* (II Sam. 3, 18) appointed to be an instrument in man's salvation. Such is the attitude of the authors of the books of Samuel and Chronicles. David's reign unfolded God's goodness and showed the plan more clearly: a Davidic king would be the savior.

#### 2. As subsequent events showed, the history of salvation had by no means reached its zenith.

True, the line of David would furnish the glorious savior-king, but this was a long way off. More preparation of God's people was necessary. God's ways are not the ways of men and his plan now called for a purification of the people.

The glories of David's days faded fast. Solomon came to the throne in a blaze of activity. Relations with other nations flourished; trade and commerce grew; magnificent buildings, especially the temple, went up; culture developed; Israelite wealth expanded. But all was to be short-lived. Solomon amazed everyone by his splendor, but failed to reach the hearts of his subjects. He aimed to push a tiny, undeveloped country into competition with the great nations of the world. His plans were too grandiose. Heavy taxation burdened the people. Further, states the Bible, because of his pagan wives Solomon turned to false gods in his later life and thus aroused the opposition of the pious Hebrews. Upon the death of Solomon and the accession of his son, the kingdom split into two rival factions. With the establishment of two kingdoms, one in the north, the other in the south, the days of the glorious monarchy were over.



**3. In the complicated history of the divided kingdom the struggle between good and evil again bursts forth.**

It is Yahwism versus paganism, the true against the false. In both the northern and southern kingdoms king followed king, one more wicked than the other. The biblical authors have little good to say about most of them. Social and moral decay set in. The poor were oppressed and the rich lived in luxury.

Religion became syncretic, i.e. a mixture of elements from several religions. Pure worship of Yahweh was dying out as it was mingled with pagan customs. In time, the kings actively supported pagan elements and these cults and their priests flourished in the land which Yahweh had given his people. Perhaps many of the common people did not realize what was taking place. In any case in both north and south, heresy and idolatry came into being. Apostasy was officially promoted.

**B. The fight against paganism was carried on mainly by the prophets whom God now raised up in his behalf.**

The prophets were God's spokesmen and the defenders of right. There had been a few scattered prophets before, but it was at this time of the divided kingdom when the "Golden Age" of prophetism came into existence. First arose the non-writing prophets whose preaching is represented by books in the Bible. Elijah might be considered a looming figure in salvation-history for in the minds of later Hebrews he was the one who would return to point out the true Davidic king. Recall the Transfiguration scene in the New Testament where Elijah appears with Moses and converses with Christ.

**1. The work of the prophets constitutes a great chapter in the history of salvation.**

The prophet was God's messenger and an interpreter of the divine Word. It was precisely his job to point out the fact that God was active in the history of Israel and to explain the role of that nation in relation to world events. Sent by God, the prophet was to remind the people of the Divine Plan and urge them to respond with obedience and love.

The prophetic role was twofold: it recalled the people to God and gave further revelation of that God. The struggle with paganism made the prophets insist on monotheism—one God only. Idols were figments of man's imagination. They were nothing.

The true God, Yahweh, is supreme and all-powerful, directing the course of history, not only that of the Chosen People but of all nations (Amos 9, 7). He judges all and makes use of the pagan nations as instruments in punishing the offenses of Israel (Amos 6, 11; Is. 7, 18; Jer. 5, 15-17).

The prophets insist also on God's holiness (Is. 6). His holiness demands holiness from his people. Sin separates man from God and so must be avoided. Oppression of the poor must be abolished (Amos 2, 6; Is. 1, 17-23; 5, 23; Jer. 7, 5; 22, 3). Injustice, pride and luxury must be rooted out (Jer. 2, 8; 5, 31; Is. 3, 16; Amos 4, 6).

The prophets preached a more spiritual form of religion. It must be internal, from the heart, not just a series of external observances (Is. 1, 11-17; Jer. 6, 20; Osee 6, 6).

The struggle against evil brought the prophets and through them the people to a greater realization of God's goodness and his union with them. A penetrating insight into the divine benevolence for Israel was presented by Osee (Hosea) under

the figure of a marriage. As the prophet loved his unfaithful wife and went out after her and brought her back, so did God love faithless Israel and would bring it eventually to glory. In justice God would have to punish, but after destruction would come restoration. God's plan for salvation was yet going to be fulfilled.

**2. The prophets see the history of Israel headed for a great future—a perfect kingdom headed by a perfect king.**

They hail the coming of a new David who will bring to complete fulfillment the desires of the first David: peace, justice, victory over evil, greatness. (Jer 30, 8-9; Ezech. 34, 23-24). They recall God's promises to David and proclaim that sometime in history yet to come a descendant of David would appear establishing the reign of happiness and peace. The great glory of the prophetic teaching is the proclamation that history is headed towards a Person, the Messiah, in whom God's plans of salvation will find fruition.

**3. But the message of the prophets was a call and a promise. It helped prepare for the reality but did not give it. The promise still had to be worked out in history.**

The preaching of the prophets often fell upon deaf ears, and infidelities continued on the part of the Israelites. As related in the later books of Kings and Chronicles, as well as the Prophets, evil was punished. Idolatry and immorality remained until the good God stepped in to recall the people to the covenant. The destruction of both kingdoms ensued, the Northern one perished forever under the sword of Assyria, the Southern one went into exile in Babylonia. The biblical authors see the destroyers as instruments in God's hands for furthering man's understanding of God and his plan.

**C. Religiously speaking, the tragedy of the Babylonian Exile proved to be a God-send.**

It became for many Hebrews a period of deep reflection over their past. They recalled God's covenant and they realized their infidelities. The prophetic teachings were pondered and began to sink in. In many ways, the exile might be compared to a retreat, an evaluation of the past and a preparation for the future.

There were dangers to the faith in Babylon since the deportees were in a pagan land surrounded by pagan customs and beliefs. Many of the Jews must certainly have fallen from their worship of Yahweh. On the whole, however, most of the exiles rejected idolatry and attached themselves more firmly to their religion. They came to realize the superiority of true, internal spirituality over mere external sacrifice. They believed that their unfortunate condition was a result of their sins and rejection of Yahweh. They repented sincerely.

The attitudes of the exiles were developed and fostered by several of the prophets who preached during these times. God had not forsaken his people. His promises were still to hold. In the plan of salvation these exiles had a role of importance to play and in the years of captivity God prepared them for this role.

The formation of correct outlooks was encouraged especially by the prophets Ezechiel and Deutero-Isaia. The despondent exiles are offered hope of future glory. Once more will they return to the Promised Land, say the prophets, where a descendant of David will rise to shepherd them. The temple would be rebuilt and would be the center and source of new life. During the exile it began to dawn on many Israelites that they were not only a nation but a religious community, a church, and were to be instrumental in God's hands in bringing salvation to the nations.



**D. The return to Jerusalem from exile became a reality when the Babylonian Nation fell to the Persians under Cyrus.**

One of the first acts of Cyrus when he gained control of Babylon was an edict permitting captives to return to their respective homelands. For Israel, this meant the opportunity to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. Cyrus was hailed as God's chosen instrument, as many prepared for the trek back to southern Palestine.

**1. The returning exiles were of a different spirit from the Israelites of earlier days.**

They had given up idolatry completely. They were convinced that there was only one true God. Yahweh. All other deities were nothing.

Further, there was a deeper attachment to the Law. In exile, without temple or sacrifice, the people turned more and more to a study of the Law given to Moses and attempted to observe its prescriptions in all details.

Another important element in the reflections of many of the Chosen People was the thought of universalism. Since Yahweh was the true God, he had made all and was to be worshipped by Gentile as well as by Jew. Many of the psalms composed at this time call upon the Gentiles to praise God. It was by no means a complete understanding, but it seems that some began to see that Israel's history and Israel's God had meaning for all mankind.

**2. As Judaism was reestablished in its homeland, the binding force was religion.**

When the exiles returned, they were not much of a nation. They had no ruler of their own, but were under Persia. The people followed the high priest as their real leader and existed as a kind of religious state. The community thus formed was a foreshadowing of the Church to come. Their real bond of unity was their faith in one God and their following of the Law.

Under the leadership of the priest and scribe, Esdras, the people renewed their covenant with Yahweh. Note the passage in Neh. 9 where the renewal is mentioned. We find herein a recital of the whole of Israel's history, a visible sign of God's designs for mankind. For many the renewal meant a conviction that the Hebrew Race as the Chosen People had a special vocation and role to play in the world. It behooved them to live up to the requirements of that role.

For several centuries after the return from exile Judaism was unmolested and quietly grew in its little corner of the world. Elsewhere, nations were rising and falling. Persia fell before the Greeks and the Jews had a new over-lord which meant little to them at the time. Upon the death of Alexander the Great, several new kingdoms arose, breaking away from the world empire created by Alexander. Palestine was caught between the kingdom of the Ptolemies in Egypt and that of the Seleucids in Syria. Ruled at first from Egypt, Judaism and its beliefs were unmolested. While there was peace and growth in these days, surely God's plan of salvation was still incomplete. Where was the descendant of David who would establish the reign of glory? Where was any king or kingdom for the Jews? Unharmed, indeed, they were yet controlled by foreign powers. When would God change the situation and move forward the story of salvation?

**E. In the second century B.C. Palestine passed under the control of Syria, and Old Testament salvation-history entered its final phase.**

Eventually there came to the throne of Syria king Antiochus IV, one determined to hellenize, to paganize Judea. He insisted on the adoption of Greek ways and religion. The faithful Jews could not comply with these demands. To do so would mean break-

ing once again the covenant with God. Judaism had learned its lesson during the exile—that without Yahweh they were nothing. Fidelity to him was imperative. Desertion to Greek gods was unthinkable.

Thwarted in his demands, Antiochus began a persecution of Judaism. He boldly entered Jerusalem and the temple, seized the treasures and put to death all those who resisted. On the altar of sacrifice a statue of Jupiter Olympus was erected. The practice of Judaism meant death. It seemed as though the end was at hand for the People of God. Many Jews were martyred; others became apostates.

- 1. From this background of the Syrian persecution came the Book of Daniel which formed another important step in the history of salvation.**

The unknown author uses stories of Daniel to provide inspiration for the persecuted Jews. He shows how the nation has been in troubles before and God has always saved it. The people are reminded of God's past mercies and protection. Daniel is a book of hope and promise as the author proclaims that God will destroy the Syrian persecuter. In the latter section of the book we read the great apocalyptic visions in which the various kingdoms of the world's history arise and perish. Just as they have done, so will Syria. All earthly kingdoms will be replaced by a new and eternal kingdom, that of the Messiah. The author proclaims that all is about to give way to the fulfillment of God's promises. The "Son of Man" is soon to come and found a new kingdom of peace and glory. It is this term "Son of Man" that Christ was to use as his favorite expression and title. In a magnificent vision, the Son of Man is given power, glory and kingship. All nations will serve him; all peoples will honor him. Thus does Daniel make clearer still that history leads on to a person who will save in keeping with God's will. Stirred by this vision, Judaism held on to its faith.

- 2. Led by a small band of zealous Jews who loved God and his covenant, a revolt broke out against Antiochus.**

It was obvious that some action had to be taken to break the power of Syria over Palestine lest all perish. The group known to us as the Maccabees instigated the revolt and amazingly had success. Syria was defeated and driven from the country. After centuries of outside-rule, the Jews were again their own rulers. The temple was purified and re-dedicated. Idols were destroyed. Again in keeping with the religious beliefs of the Jews, God is given the credit for the victory and is yearly thanked for his goodness by the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah).

The leaders of Jewish independence eventually set up a new kingdom and a new dynasty. With the reestablishment of the kingdom it may have seemed to many that Jewish hopes were about to be fulfilled. Through the centuries expectation of the promised Davidic king remained the central thought of faithful Israelites. Now perhaps Daniel's vision of the Messianic kingdom was at hand.

- 3. Those who looked to the new dynasty as the fulfillment of God's promises were to be disappointed.**

The Hasmonean dynasty was not of David's line and it would soon falter and perish beneath Roman domination. The Maccabees and their reign were not meant to be themselves the fulfillment. The glory of their revolt and victory is that they had saved Judaism from destruction so that soon in another way the promise of the prophets would be realized.

Old Testament history ends with the rule of the Maccabees, but one other event must be mentioned in our summary of salvation-history before Christ. This event



would be the rise of Rome and the capture of Palestine by the Romans in 63 B.C. Jewish independence was again lost. Once more true believers must have wondered how salvation would come.

Still the Jews did not give up hope under the Romans. They ardently longed for the fulfillment of the divine promises and felt that now somehow God would produce the Messiah and the promised glory. Their longing was not to go unfilled this time. When all seemed lost, the Messianic era dawned. God had directed history to this moment. He would now accomplish man's salvation.

## **VII. CONCLUSION.**

### **A. Salvation-history now moves into the New Testament which is beyond the scope of this lecture.**

Naturally, our subject is not complete. We leave it hanging in the air. But such is the ending of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is incomplete because salvation does not occur in it. It was the time of preparation. It was the time when God gradually revealed himself and molded a people. The process we have followed is history—history as God directed it for his purposes.

### **B. It might all seem a strange development, but consider exactly what God was preparing men for.**

Only then shall we be able to understand why he prepared them as he did. Essentially God was preparing men to come to Christ in the fullness of understanding and belief. Without a long preparation God's method of salvation in Christ would hardly have been meaningful to mankind. Man had to be weaned from paganism to the One God and then formed into a correct, non-materialistic view of things.

At the time of Abraham's call, idolatry and polytheism were widely practiced. Although man was capable of reasoning to the existence of one true God, in practice few did. As a result, God had to reveal himself to man.

Because of man's lack of knowledge in this area of the divine, God revealed himself and his plan only in a gradual manner. In educating a child, we do not tell everything at once. Rather we adapt our teaching to his capabilities, gradually leading him from simple knowledge to more profound. God treated the human race the same way.

First men had to understand that there was only one God. Then, they had to learn of his power and greatness. Next followed a realization of his goodness. Man came to know that God willed nought but good for man and was leading man to a share in the divine goodness and happiness. With the passing years of history, the exodus, the entrance into Canaan, the kingdom of David, etc., one divine benefit followed another. Only when mankind in the person of Israel had learned these lessons was it ready for the revelation of the New Testament.

As men slowly learned who God was, they also slowly had to learn morality. Children often do sinful things without knowing that they are wrong. Thus it was with God's people. There were many immoral things whose sinfulness they did not grasp. God had to educate them over the years.

Also education in the proper worship of God was needed and took time. Man's worship had to become more and more spiritual in order to grasp the full meaning of Christ.

While all this process of education was going on, God was also forming the people. Instruction alone was not sufficient. A formation was necessary. God first set aside

a *family*, that of Abraham. Then he developed this family into a *people*, this under Moses. Then he gave them a land and eventually under David the people became a *society*. Finally, the society was formed into a *church*, religious body. This feat was accomplished through the prophets and the experiences of the exile.

However, there still remained some material and political elements in God's people that had to disappear. They still had their own land and independence under the Maccabees. To complete the formation into a total spiritual people that independence was taken away when the Romans captured Palestine. The time had come for God to transform the Old Testament Church into something better, the Church of the New Testament.

**C. The Old Testament made man realize the need of God and utter dependence upon him. It paved the way for an appreciation of God's saving act: the entrance of God himself into the world's history in the person of Jesus Christ.**

After men had experienced salvation from the slavery of Egypt, they were better able to understand salvation from sin. After they had lived under the law given to Moses, they were better able to accept the law of Christ. After they had experienced God's blessing in the material Davidic kingdom they were better able to receive blessings of a higher nature as they entered the spiritual kingdom founded by Christ.

The Bible maintains that our salvation occurs in an historical context. The Old Testament was the period of preparation in salvation-history. All the events within it under God's guidance and plan led to the dawning of the Messianic kingdom.

**Bibliographical Note:** The bibliography added to the Notes for the Student could be added to indefinitely.. The vast literature in this field makes the best bibliography the catalogue of the libraries available.

*cum permissu superiorum*

Published by THE PRIORY PRESS, 2005 So. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60608  
for the use of Newman Chaplains



NATIONAL NEWMAN CHAPLAINS ASSOCIATION  
COLLEGE OUTLINE OF SACRED DOCTRINE

*A Basic Lecture for Students in Non-Catholic Colleges and Universities*

General Editor  
Joseph M. Wyss, O.P., S.T.Lr., Ph.D.

---

NOTES FOR THE STUDENT

---

## SALVATION-HISTORY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Rev. Richard H. McGrath, S.T.D.

*Father McGrath is a priest of the Diocese of Covington, Ky., and is Chairman of the Theology Department of Villa Madonna College. He studied at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and received the doctorate in theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome, in 1956. He has studied and done archaeological research in the Holy Land and other countries of the Near East and is a member of the leading biblical, theological and archaeological societies. In addition to various articles in scholarly and popular reviews he has published in doctoral dissertation, THE RELIGIOUS MEANING OF THE TOWER OF BABEL NARRATIVE.*

The Bible is not just a collection of texts to be used as proofs of dogmas. Rather it is the presentation of God's plan for man's salvation. Scripture considers history as a record of events unfolding God's plan.

Salvation-history is the account of God's intervention in our world, drawing mankind to himself, communicating his divine life and bringing about his universal reign. Scripture sees everything in the world as moving in a straight line. All comes from God; all goes toward him.

The Bible is the revelation of the "Word of God". This word is active, not only a sound but a powerful element that does what it says. The Bible as God's Word does not contain his thoughts, but rather it contains his deeds and shows how in history God worked out man's salvation.

The facts narrated in the Old Testament are not just a series of incidents without purpose or direction. The authors saw world history and

God's purpose side by side and were convinced that the two were connected. No sacred author gives events for the sake of the events. All have reference to God.

The authors deliberately chose their material and manner of presentation from this religious viewpoint. In the historical books especially this view is in evidence. Confer such places as: Jos 1, 7ff. where the entering of Canaan and the taking of Jericho are attributed directly to God; Jos 23, 11-13 where God fights for the Israelites.

The salvation-history outlook does not give precise information on what happened. History is subordinated to a religious thesis. History is to serve the religious instruction of each generation. Elements that do not bolster their view are left aside or de-emphasized by the writers. Happenings are not falsified, but there is a certain amount of simplification, omission, emphasis and artificiality which would not be allowed in our modern way of writing history.



The sacred writers did not look upon their task as our present day historians look upon theirs. They desired to see not history itself but rather the action of God in history. What we would explain as economic and military reverses they saw as examples of divine punishment. They believed that God had chosen the Hebrew people as an instrument through which he would work out man's eventual salvation. The writers present just enough of Hebrew history to illustrate the interest of God in Israel and the continuous manifestation of God to his people.

The Semitic mentality is not abstract but concrete and picturesque. The Semite prefers to live the truth rather than express it. His thinking may be called "pre-logical" and may be compared to that of a child for whom everything has a reality and a concrete meaning. There is a tendency to think of everything as it ought to be—the ideal. This leads to some exaggeration, e.g. the statement that Jacob's sons destroyed a whole city to revenge the violation of their sister (Gen. 34, 27).

The Biblical mind does not ask "Did it happen?" The sole and important question is "What does it mean?"

Much of the Old Testament could be called a meditation on history—a midrash. The authors take an historical event and through reflection attempt to bring further meanings. The end product is basically an event of history, but seen through the eyes of a religious person which fact colors his outlook.

In salvation-history the Old Testament is the period of preparation. Its role is to prepare for the salvation that will come through Christ. The Old Testament covers a long period and presents the various stages of salvation-history.

The stages are sub-divided into:

- 1—The plan and its beginnings;
- 2—The choice of individuals to carry out the plan;
- 3—The choice of a people;
- 4—The choice of a homeland;
- 5—Formation of the people in the homeland.

The plan is revealed in the opening chapters of Genesis. God creates man for happiness. The "how" of creation is not seriously proposed. We are simply given a story telling of the fact of creation which is all that counts to the author.

De facto, the human race does not live in complete happiness. The existence of evil must be

accounted for. So, again by use of symbols and stories, the author shows that man himself by accepting temptation brings evil into the world. God's purpose in creating will not be destroyed, however. In Gen. 3, 15 there is laid down the basic promise of the ultimate fulfillment of God's designs. There will be constant struggle between good and evil, but eventually good will triumph.

Genesis then gives several examples of the struggle between good and evil: Cain and Abel; Noah and the Flood; the Tower of Babel.

Beginning with Gen. 12, salvation-history properly speaking is set down. The second stage begins: the choice of individuals in carrying out God's plan. A pagan Mesopotamian, Abraham, became the individual of God's choice in the founding of a new nation in whose history salvation would eventually be achieved.

How much the patriarchs themselves knew of God and his plan is hard to say. We must distinguish the actual knowledge of Abraham, Jacob, etc. from that of later authors. The latter was often imposed on the former.

The patriarchal names for God indicate that they may not have been weaned completely away from some remnants of polytheism. However, they were developing in the idea of the one God.

Abraham is said to have had faith, which in the Bible means a covenant with God. This was not merely an assent of the intellect. It meant the giving of oneself to the deity and his service. It sent the patriarchs wandering in a foreign land, living in expectation of the fulfillment of God's promise, the coming of a glorious future.

The Book of Exodus presents God's choice of a people through whom he would work. The story of Moses and the welding of disparate tribes into a nation is one of the great peaks in salvation-history. Here we clearly see the religious viewpoint, as God is said to be behind all the wondrous events. The work reads like a hymn of praise to God for his mighty acts on behalf of his people.

The literary style of these narratives could be classified as popular tales of wonder. The historical events are overlaid with elements of the marvelous. Yahweh is presented as an active God, working in history to deliver his people and lead them to the promised land.



The stories of the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the coming of the manna, etc. are probably based upon natural occurrences. The Biblical author adds details, exaggerations, etc. to make the point that all is under God's guidance.

The high-point is reached when at Mount Sinai God formally selects this people as his, the instrument of his designs. God joined Israel to himself. At Sinai the people began to realize that Yahweh was different from other gods. He was a personal God. He was most good and powerful, accomplishing all he willed. The Sinai experience transformed the Israelites as nothing had done before.

The next movement of salvation-history was the entrance of the chosen people into their homeland. In the books of Josue and Judges we read of the conquering of Canaan. Once again the viewpoint is religious. God fights for his people to give them the land. It is he who throws out the Canaanites. The work that the Hebrews had to do in these battles is generally minimized so that the credit may more clearly seem to belong to God.

A more complete formation of the Israelites now took place and may be considered under the following headings:

- 1—the days of the kingdom;
- 2—the Babylonian exile;
- 3—the restoration;
- 4—Syrian persecution and Jewish independence.

God formed his people into a unified society. During the days of the judges, unity was lacking. A step forward was taken when the Israelites demanded a king.

It was with the establishment of David on the throne that the Israelite nation seemed to be reaching its promised glory. David was the king par excellence. He brought peace to the land. He gave the people a national capitol at Jerusalem. God promised David that his dynasty would endure. To the people of those days salvation-history seemed to have reached its terminus. Happiness would now be a reality for mankind. Subsequent events showed, however, that more preparation was necessary before salvation would come. God's plan now called for a purification of his people.

The glories of David's days faded fast, and in the history of the divided kingdom the struggle between good and evil again bursts forth. It is Yahwism versus paganism, the true against the false. Social and moral decay set in. Religion became syncretic, i.e. a mixture of elements from several religions. The kings actively supported paganism.

The fight against paganism was carried on mainly by the prophets whom God now raised up in his behalf. The work of the prophets constitutes a great chapter in the history of salvation. It was precisely the prophet's task to point out the fact that God was active in the history of Israel and to explain the role of their nation in relation to world events.

The prophetic role was twofold: it recalled the people to God and gave further revelation of that God. The prophets insisted on monotheism, on God's power, holiness, justice, etc. They preached a more spiritual form of religion. It must be from the heart, not just a series of external observances.

The prophets hail the coming of a new David. They recall God's promises and proclaim that sometime in history yet to come a descendant of David would appear and establish the reign of happiness and peace. The great glory of the prophetic teaching is the proclamation that history is headed towards a Person, the Messiah, in whom God's plans will find fruition.

The teaching of the prophets generally fell on deaf ears and the Babylonian exile followed. This tragedy of exile, religiously speaking, proved to be a God-send. It became for the Hebrews a period of deep reflection over their past. They recalled God's covenant and they realized their infidelities. During the exile there began to dawn on many Israelites that they were not only a nation but a religious community, a church, and were to be instrumental in bringing salvation to the nations.

When the Persians gained control of Babylonia, the Jews were permitted to return to Palestine. The returning exiles were of a different spirit from the Israelites of earlier days. They had given up idolatry completely. There was a deeper attachment to the Law and a greater observance of its prescriptions.

As Judaism was reestablished in its homeland, the binding force was religion. The people had no ruler of their own, being under Persian



domination. So they looked to the high priest as their real leader and became a kind of religious state. The community thus formed was a foreshadowing of the Church to come.

In the second century B.C. Palestine passed under the control of Syria, and Old Testament salvation-history entered its final phase. The Syrian king, Antiochus IV, was determined to paganize Judea. He insisted on Greek ways and religion. A serious persecution broke out.

From this background of the Syrian persecution came the book of Daniel which formed another important step in the history of salvation. The author, using stories of Daniel, shows how the nation has been in troubles before and God has always saved it. Daniel is a book of hope and promise. Syria will perish as all earthly kingdoms must. All will be replaced by a new and eternal kingdom, that of the Messiah. The "Son of Man" is soon to come. Daniel makes clearer that history leads on to a person who will save. Stirred by this vision, Judaism held on to its faith.

Led by a small band of zealous Jews, a revolt broke out against the Syrians. Syria was defeated and driven from the country under the Maccabees. An independent Jewish kingdom was again set up.

Those who looked to the new dynasty as the fulfillment of God's promises were to be disappointed. The Hasmonean dynasty was not of David's line and would soon falter and perish beneath Roman domination. The glory of the Maccabean revolt is that it saved Judaism from destruction so that in another way the promise of the prophets would be realized.

Old Testament history ends with the Jews still longing for the Messiah and the promised glory. Under Rome, when all seemed lost for the fulfillment of the promise, the Messianic era dawned. But that would take us on into the New Testament.

The preparation for salvation is the story the Old Testament has to offer. It might all seem a strange development, but remember what God was preparing men for. He had to wean a simple people from idolatry. He had to teach monotheism, educate in morality and proper worship. Further, he had to form the people into a society and a church, a religious body. All material and political elements had to disappear to make way for a spiritual people.

The Old Testament made man realize the need of God and paved the way for an appreciation of God's saving act: the entrance of God himself into the world's history in the Person of Jesus Christ.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albright, W. F., *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (N.Y., Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957).  
Anderson, B. W., *Understanding the Old Testament* (N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1957).  
Bouyer, L., *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture* (Indiana, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1958).  
Bright, J., *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1959).  
Charlier, C., *The Christian Approach to the Bible* (Maryland, Newman Press, 1959).  
Ellis, P. F., *The Men and the Message of the Old Testament* (Collegeville, Minn., The Liturgical Press, 1962).  
Maly, E. H., "The Nature of Biblical History" (in *The Bible Today*, March 1963, pp. 277-285).  
McKenzie, J. L., *The Two-Edged Sword* (Milwaukee, Bruce, 1956).  
Tos, A. F., *Approaches to the Bible: The Old Testament* (N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1963).  
Wright, G. E., *God Who Acts* (London, SCM Press, 1952).

*cum permissu superiorum*

Published by THE PRIORY PRESS, 2005 So. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60608  
for distribution by Newman Chaplains