

THE OLD TESTAMENT

- Some people think that the New Testament is sufficient for Christians. Nothing could be further from the truth. We do not know our Christian faith as we should until we also know something of its Old Testament ancestry.
- The Old Testament and New Testament form a unity. The whole Bible is the record of how God saved the world, the whole Bible is the word of God, the whole Bible has Christ as its centre and focus. The whole Bible is the story of divine plan leading men to God. We could divide the Bible up into three periods:
- The first period is when God is active in the world through the life and work of the people of Israel.
- In the second period God is active in the world through the life of his son - Jesus.
- In the third period God is active in the world through the life and work of the Church and this is the story told in the Acts of the Apostles and New Testament epistles.
- The whole story deals with how Paradise was lost (Adam and Eve) and how it was regained in Christ. The writers of the Gospels were very much aware of the relevance of the O.T. St. John for instance begins his Gospel in deliberate imitation of the Opening to the Book of Genesis - "In the beginning etc."
- The whole Bible (O.T. and N.T.) is a record of how God reveals himself progressively. But it is very important to understand that what God reveals to men is not a set of

statements, but himself - a person. "To know" in the Bible is not to have information about but to have an intimate experience of God. It is a relationship of love. It is not an academic knowledge of God but vital contact with God as a person. The Bible is the story of the presence of God among men. He shows Himself in different ways. He spoke to Moses, face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11).

- But most of all he spoke to the prophets and they were given the important task of proclaiming His word to the people whether welcome or unwelcome.
- The God of Israel is a God who saves - he is a God who acts. God comes across as being very patient with his people who repeatedly rebel against Him. Eventually God's Word was no longer the audible word - it took on flesh in the person of Jesus ("The Word became flesh and dwelt among us").
- The Word of God in the O.T. is very relevant to us in the twentieth century. It is the same God who loved the people of Israel who loves us today. We must respond to His Word in word and deed.

WHAT KIND OF GOD WAS THE GOD OF ISRAEL?

- The O.T. often speaks of God on the level of human actions. In Genesis God appears as a gardener, planting shrubs in Eden. God "strolls through the Garden in the cool of the day". God comes down to close the door of the ark when Noah and his cargo have gone aboard. God is also given to human reactions - he is angry, he is jealous, he can hate. But in the O.T. they knew also that no words could describe God

- The most obvious conclusion is that the God of the O.T. is a personal, loving God - not a philosophical abstraction.
- To think of God as an amiable old man living in the skies is nowhere to be found in the Bible. No matter how primitive their knowledge of civilization, all men at all times have acknowledged some kind of Supreme Being. But it is possible to find a man who lives as if there is no God. A fool in the Bible is the man who is in rebellion against God.
- God called Abraham out of Mesopotamia which was a country which worshipped many Gods.
- For the Mesopotamians the river Euphrates was called a God, and for the Egyptians the sun was a God. But these Gods were blind forces rather than interested persons.
- But the God of the O.T. was personally interested in his people. Abraham was a man of intense faith. He never doubted God. Abraham took the great leap of faith by answering the call of God to go into the unknown (Gen 12). One of the names for the God of Israel in the early stages was "Elohim".
- The name Yahweh comes on the scene at the incident of the burning bush in Exodus 3. The word Yahweh is certainly part of the Hebrew verb "to be". "I am who I am"(Yahweh) means that God doesn't merely exist but is personally present to the Israelites.
- Yahweh is the one who is always present, who is always near. God shows himself to Moses in the savage surroundings of the desert. He appears in the form of fire to

indicate his great holiness. He is a God who is closer to the lonely and rejected than anyone else.

- In the desert the Israelites felt like this and God said "I have seen the affliction of my people. God is responsive to the miseries of men, and he wishes to liberate them from their oppressed condition. "I have come down to deliver them from the hands of the Egyptians.
- Yahweh was a dynamic and caring God. The great thing which happened at Mt.Sinai is that God made a covenant with his people that "he would be their God and they would be his people". The Israelites often forgot this Covenant - they often were tempted to worship other gods. Remember they were surrounded by countries that had a pantheon of deities.
- The prophets remind the people many times that Yahweh is the only God there is. (Isaiah 46:9). The Israelite faith is summed up in text from Deuteronomy 6:4-7. The God of Israel is also a holy God.
- There is a tremendous difference between God and man. The Israelites often expressed the holiness of God as possessing a throne in heaven where "his gaze tests mortal man". But God is never exclusively in Heaven, he is everywhere especially close to the poor and the weak. (Psalm 139).
- Last, but not least the most common way the Israelites saw Yahweh is that he was a God of faithfulness and steadfast love. The Israelites grew in their knowledge of God and they came to appreciate his infinite love for them. (Psalm 23, 18, 28)