



## **Toward Understanding the Bible**

### **Part 1. Old Testament.**

**Bishop Alexander (Mileant).**

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#### **Old Testament.**

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## **1. An Introduction.**

### **Why the Holy Scriptures are so dear to us.**

**T**he aim of this and the following booklets about the Bible is to provide the Orthodox reader with fundamental information regarding how, when and by whom the books of the Holy Scripture were written, as well as briefly explaining their contents.

The Holy Scripture is dear to the Orthodox faithful because it contains the **basis of our faith**. Despite this, one has to acknowledge that, at a time when many Christians of different denominations are ardently studying the Bible, Orthodox Christians — apart from the some exception — rarely read it, especially the Old Testament. Naturally, since thousands of years separate us from the times when the Holy Books were being written, it is difficult for the contemporary

reader to transport himself into that environment. However, once the reader becomes familiar with the historical context of the era and the peculiarities of the biblical language, he will begin to appreciate its spiritual richness. The link between the Old and the New Books will become quite evident to the reader. At the same time, religious-moral questions worrying the reader and modern society as a whole, will become apparent as not problems specific of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but a never-ending conflict between good and evil, between faith and unbelief that has always troubled the human society.

The historical pages of the Bible are also dear to us because they not only **truthfully** describe events of the past, but place them in a **correct religious perspective**. In this regard, there is no secular book — old or contemporary — that can match the Bible. This is because the appraisal of events described in the Bible had been given not by man, but by God. Therefore, in the light of God's word, mistakes or correct resolutions of moral problems by generations gone by can serve as guides in resolving contemporary problems on both personal and societal levels. By familiarizing oneself with the substance and meaning of the Holy Books, the reader will gradually develop a love for them, as repeated readings will unearth new gems of God's wisdom.

Consequently, the Holy Scripture is a **lifetime study** — not only for the youthful student but for the greatest theologian; not only for the layman or the newly converted but for the highest ecclesiastical spiritual rank and wisest man. The Lord bequeaths to Joshua, leader of the Israelites and a disciple of Moses: *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shall meditate therein day and night”* (Joshua 1:8); while Apostle Paul writes to his student Timothy *“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation”* (2 Timothy 3:15).

For more than four hundred years the Bible has been the best-selling book in the world. An unknown author summed the case for the Bible many years ago when he wrote: “This book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the doom of sinners, the happiness of believers... Read it to be wise; believe it to be safe; and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. Christ is its grand object; our good, its design; and the glory of God its end.

Among all the books ever published, the Bible remains unique. Available in languages understood by at least 97 per cent of the world's population, the whole Bible has been published in 237 tongues, and parts of the Bible appear in more than 1250 languages and dialects. Even the blind may read Bible in Braille. The Bible is the most universally available publication in the history of mankind.

The culture of Western man is derived in large measure from the message of the Bible. Western man's views of reality, of nature and destiny of man, of marriage and the family, of organized society, of the structure of the Church, of standards personal morality, all bear the stamp of the Bible. In most Western nations civil law is based primarily upon the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament. Human personality is of supreme value, we say, because of man's having been created in the image of God, a direct teaching of Scripture. The sense of dignity and worth of man is rooted in the teaching of the Bible that man has an immortal soul with an eternal destiny. The prompting to heal the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the naked and house the homeless comes from the Biblical message that God loves the entire human race, and all men are brothers. The objective of a more perfect society for which Western man strives comes essentially from the Biblical concept of the Kingdom of God. The public philosophy of democratic societies derives from the Biblical truth that individual man is of supreme worth, and that he must be expected to place the common needs of others above his own personal desires.

## Understanding of the Holy Scriptures.

The holy scriptures or the Bible is a collection of books that we believe were written by the Prophets and Apostles, inspired and moved by the Holy Spirit. The word “Bible” (*ta biblia*) is a Greek word meaning “books.”

In order to appreciate any book one needs to know its theme, the purpose that has guided its writing. The Bible is God’s written word. It is the record of God’s dealings with man. It reveals how God has acted and how man has responded. It is a book containing a library of many books, the product not of one period and place but of many minds and many ages. It is not a book of science; it is a book of religion, supreme in morals and ethics. It holds the place of highest honor and authority in the Church, for it points beyond itself to the will and the ways of God. An ancient Church Father wrote, “*God did not become words, He became flesh.*” We revere and believe in the Book, but we worship the God whom the Book makes known.

The Bible is a Book for religious faith. The God of the Bible is the God of creation. The Bible opens with the words, “*In the beginning God...*” He is the first cause, the source of all that follows. He brought form out of formlessness and light out of darkness, and finally He created life itself. Man, as he is seen in the pages of the Bible, sometimes walking with God and sometimes apart from Him, is invested by the God of the Bible with freedom of moral choice. He may do right or he may do wrong. He lives in a universe of moral laws as inexorable as the laws of nature. To lie, to cheat, to lust is to destroy personality just as surely as to take poison is to destroy the physical body. Let a man violate the laws of the moral universe and doom awaits him. This the Bible makes clear.

But the Bible says something else. The central theme of the Bible is that since man by himself cannot lift himself, nor by his own strength keep all of the laws of God, God has acted to help him. God has entered history to save him. For the Bible is also the story of man’s redemption. God “*Gave His only Son,*” because He loved man and wanted him to have the fullness of life that belongs to the perfect creation which He had purposed before time was. God did not create man and then abandon him. God entered into man’s life. The life and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central theme of the whole Biblical story, the purpose for which the Bible was written.

The Bible has one story. It is the record of God’s making Himself known to man and of man’s response to God’s self-disclosure. The Old Testament is the story of a Covenant people in a community of faith, ancient Israel, journeying toward a new and better place in time, sometimes obedient and sometimes disobedient to God, Who was always striving to break through to show Himself in completeness. He spoke through His prophets, through saints, seers, and rulers, and through the events of history until the time had “*Fully come when everything in heaven and earth should be unified in Christ,*” (Eph. 1:10) as Paul put it, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,*” (John 1:14) as John put it. God spoke the living Word in terms humanity could understand, “*The way, the truth, the life*” in a Person. The New Testament continues the theme with the people of the New Covenant, the new Israel of God, the Body of Christ, the Church of witnessing people journeying through history. Here is the Book of man in his pilgrimage through time and beyond time, learning to know God, to discern His will and do it, living in a community of faith, ever witnessing to the coming Kingdom, the law of which is love, and the Ruler of which will be the transcendent God at the final consummation of history.

But the major theme of the Holy Scripture is the **salvation of humanity by the Messiah**, the incarnate Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament proclaims salvation in the forms of symbols and prophecies about the Messiah and the Kingdom of Heaven. The New Tes-



tament enunciates the actual realization of our salvation through the incarnation, life and teachings of the God-Man, sealed through His death and Resurrection. Depending upon the times they were written, the Holy Writings are grouped into the New and Old Testaments. The first contain that which the Lord revealed to the world through God-inspired prophets before Christ's appearance on Earth, while the second group describes that which was taught by our Lord Savior Himself and his Apostles.

## The inspiration of the Bible.

**W**e believe that the prophets and the Apostles did not write through their own human intellect but rather through **God's inspiration**. He cleansed their souls, enlightened their reasoning and revealed to them mysteries of faith and of the future, normally inaccessible to the human mind. That is why their writings are described as divinely-inspired: "*For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,*" says the apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:21). The apostle Paul calls the writings as divinely-inspired in 2 Timothy 3:16. Regarding the importance of the Holy Scriptures Jesus said, "*Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled*" (Matt. 5:18).

Moses and Aaron are examples of God's revelations to the prophets. God sent to a very reticent Moses, his brother Aaron as an intermediary. Being inarticulate, Moses's bafflement as to how he would expound God's will to the people was answered by the Lord: "*Thou (Moses) shalt speak unto him (Aaron) and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be the spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God*" (Exodus 4:15-16).

While believing in the inspirationally divine qualities of the Bible, one must remember that it is the **Book of the Church**. According to God's plan, people are called upon to save themselves not on an individual basis but as a society which He guides and dwells in. This society is called the Church. By historical definition, the Church is divided into the Old Testament which governed the Jewish people, and the New Testament to which the Orthodox Christians belong. The New Testament inherited the spiritual richness of the Old Testament, namely the word of God. The Church not only preserved the word of God but has retained its correct understanding. This is because, just as the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets and Apostles, He continues to live in the Church and to lead her. Consequently, the Church gives us correct guidance for the application of its written wealth: that which is more actual and important, and those passages that have retained a historical significance only but are not relevant to modern times.

## Original form and languages of the Scripture.

**I**nitially, the books of the Old Testament were written in a Jewish tongue. Later books of the Babylonian era contain many Assyrian and Babylonian words and phraseologies, while "deutero-canonical" books written during the Greek reign — with the exception of the 3<sup>rd</sup> book of Ezra which is in Latin — were authored in Greek.

Books of the Holy Scripture did not leave the hands of their holy authors in the format we are seeing them now. They were initially written on parchment or on papyrus (a paper-reed that grew prolifically in Egypt and Israel) using a sharpened bamboo stick dipped in ink. In effect,

what was being written were not books but papyrus or parchment scrolls that resembled long ribbons, coiled on to a wooden spool. These rolls were written on one side only. Consequently, in order to make them more manageable, instead of gluing together these papyrus or parchment ribbons into huge rolls, they were stitched into books.

The original text of these scrolls was written in bold capital letters with no spaces between the words so that one sentence resembled one word. The reader himself had to divide the sentence into words and naturally enough, occasionally made mistakes. At the same time these ancient manuscripts did not contain any commas nor full-stop or emphasis signs. As well, the ancient Jewish language did not employ vowels but only consonants.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the division of sentences into words in the Holy Books was undertaken by Deacon Eulaly, of the Alexandrine Church. Slowly but surely, the Bible began to take on its current format. Because of its contemporary division into chapters and verses, the reading and locating of specific passages in the Bible is quite an easy matter.

### **In Accordance with the Saviour's Commandments.**

**(By Protopresbyter M. Pomazansky)**

The Early Christian Church constantly dwelt in spirit in the Heavenly City, seeking the things to come, but she also organized the earthly aspect of her existence; in particular, she accumulated and took great care of the material treasures of the Faith. First among these treasures were the written documents concerning the Faith. The most important of the Scriptures were the Gospels, the sacred record of the earthly life and the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Next came all the other writings of the Apostles. After them came the holy books of the Hebrews. The Church also treasures them as sacred writings.

What makes the Old Testament Scriptures valuable to the Church? The fact that a) they teach belief in the one, true God, and the fulfillment of God's commandments and b) they speak about the Saviour. Christ Himself points this out. *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life and they are they which testify of Me*, He said to the Jewish scribes. In the parable about the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Saviour puts these words about the Rich Man's brothers into the mouth of Abraham: *They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them*. "Moses" means the first five books of the Old Testament; "the prophets" — the last sixteen books. Speaking with His disciples, the Saviour mentioned the Psalter in addition to these books: ... *all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me*. After the Mystical Supper, when they chanted a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives, says the Evangelist Matthew. This refers to the chanting of psalms. The Saviour's words and examples are sufficient to make the Church esteem these books — the Law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms — to make her preserve them and learn from them.

In the Hebrew canon, the cycle of books recognized as sacred by the Hebrews, there were and still remain two more categories of books besides the Law and the Prophets: the didactic books, of which only the Psalter has been mentioned, and the historical books. The Church has accepted them, because the Apostles so ordained. Saint Paul writes to Timothy: *From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*. This means: if one reads them wisely, then one will find in them the path which leads to strengthening in Christianity. The Apostle had in mind all the books of the Old Testament, as is evident from what he says next: *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (2 Tim. 3:16).



The Church has received the sacred Hebrew books in the Greek translation of the Septuagint, which was made long before the Nativity of Christ. This translation was used by the Apostles, as they wrote their own epistles in Greek. The canon also contained sacred books of Hebraic origin, which however were extant only in Greek. The Orthodox Christian Church includes them in the collection of Old Testament books (in the biblical science of the West they are called the “deuterocanonical” books). From the time of their Council in Jamnia in 90 A.D., the Jews ceased to make use of these books in their religious life.

In accepting the Old Testament sacred scriptures, the Church has shown that she is the heir of the Old Testament Church — not of the national aspect of Judaism, but of the religious content of the Old Testament. In this heritage, some things have an eternal significance and value, but others have ceased to exist and are significant only as recollections of the past and for edification as prototypes, as, for example, the regulations concerning the tabernacle and the sacrifices, and the prescriptions for the Israelites' daily conduct. Therefore, the Church makes use of her Old Testament heritage quite authoritatively, in accordance with her understanding of the world, which is more complete than and superior to that of ancient Israel.

### Using the Old Testament.

**(By Protopresbyter M. Pomazansky)**

While in principle fully recognizing the merit of the Old Testament books, the Christian Church has not, in practice, had the opportunity to make use of them everywhere, always, and to their full extent. This is clear from the fact that the Old Testament Scriptures occupy four times as many pages in the Bible as the New. Before books were printed, that is to say, during the first 1500 years of the Christian era, copying the books, collecting them, and acquiring them was, in itself, a difficult matter. Only a few families could have had a complete collection of them, and certainly not every Church community did. As a source of instruction in the Faith, as a guide for Christian life in the Church, the New Testament, of course, occupies the first place. It can be said only of the Old Testament Psalter that the Church has constantly used it, and still uses it, in its complete form. From the time of the Apostles until our day, she has used it in her services and as the companion of each Christian, and she will continue to use it until the end of the world. From the other books of the Old Testament, she has been satisfied with select readings, and these not even from all the books. In particular, we know of the Russian Church that although she had already shone forth resplendently in the 11th-12th centuries, before the Tatar invasion (this fullness of her life was expressed in the writing of Church services, in iconography and church architecture, and reflected in the literary monuments of ancient Russia) she nevertheless did not have a complete collection of the Old Testament books. Only at the end of the 15th century did Archbishop Gennadius of Novgorod manage, with great difficulty, to gather Slavonic translations of the books of the Old Testament. And even this was just for one archdiocese, for one bishop's cathedra! Only the printing press gave the Russian people the first complete Bible, published at the end of the 16th century and known as the Ostrog Bible. In our time, the Bible has become readily available. However, in practice the purely liturgical use of the books of the Old Testament has remained the same as always, as it was originally established by the Church.

### Understandest Thou What Thou Readest?

**(By Protopresbyter M. Pomazansky)**

According to the account in the Acts of the Apostles, when the Apostle Philip met one of Queen Candace's eunuchs on the road and saw the book of the Prophet Isaiah in his hands, he asked the eunuch, *Understandest thou what thou readest? He replied, How can I except some man should guide me?* (Acts 8:30-31). Philip instructed him in the Christian understanding of what he had been reading, with the result that this reading from the Old Testament was followed immediately, there on the road itself, by the eunuch's baptism. As the Apostle interpreted in the light of the Christian faith what the eunuch had been reading so we also must approach reading the Old Testament from the standpoint of the Christian Faith. It needs to be understood in a New Testament way, in the light which proceeds from the Church. For this purpose the Church offers us the patristic commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, preferring that we should assimilate the contents of the sacred books through them. It is necessary to bear in mind that the Old Testament is the *shadow of good things to come* (Heb. 10:1). If the reader forgets this, he may not receive the edification he should, as the Apostle Paul warns. Concerning the Jews he writes that *even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts: with them it remaineth untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament*, that is to say, they are not spiritually enlightened unto faith. Nevertheless, when they *shall turn to the Lord*, the Apostle concludes his thought, *the veil shall be taken away* (2 Cor. 3:14-16). So we must also read these books from a Christian point of view. This means to read them while remembering the Lord's words: ... *They [the Scriptures] are they which testify of Me*. They require not simply reading, but searching. In them are contained the preparation for the coming of Christ, promises, prophecies, and types or antitypes of Christ. It is according to this principle that the Old Testament readings are chosen for use in the church services. Furthermore, if the Church offers us moral edification in them, she chooses such passages as are written, as it were, in the light of the Gospel, which speak, for example, of the "eternal life" of the righteous ones, of "righteousness according to faith," and of Grace. If we Christians approach the books of the Old Testament in this light, then we find in them an enormous wealth of edification. Even as drops of dew on plants shine with all the colors of the rainbow when the sunlight falls on them, even as twigs of trees that are covered with ice are iridescent with all the tints of color as they reflect the sun, so these scriptures reflect that which was foreordained to appear later: the events, deeds, and teaching of the Gospel. But when the sun has set, those dew drops and the icy covering on the trees will no longer caress our eyes, although they themselves remain the same as they were when the sun was shining. It is the same with the Old Testament Scriptures. Without the sunlight of the Gospel they remain old and decaying, as the Apostle said of them, as the Church has also called them, and *that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away*, as the Apostle expresses it (Heb. 8:13). The Kingdom of the chosen people of old has come to an end, the Kingdom of Christ has come: *the law and the prophets were until John; from henceforth the Kingdom of God is proclaimed* (Luke 16:16).

## History of the Bible's emergence.

The holy books did not come into being suddenly, in their current completeness. The time between Moses (1450 BC) and Samuel (1050 BC) can be called the formative years of the Holy Scripture. Inspired by God, Moses wrote down his revelations, laws and narrations, decreeing to the Levites who carried the ark containing God's commandments, *"Take this book of the law and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God"* (Deuteronomy 31:26). The successive holy authors continued writing their books with specific requests that they be included with the five Books of Moses, as though it was one Book. For example, in Joshua 24:26

we find “*And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law,*” i.e. in the book of Moses. Similarly with Samuel, the prophet and judge that lived at the beginning of the Kings’ period, it was written that “*Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the Lord*” (1 Sam. 10:25) i.e. to the side of the ark where the other books of Moses were kept.

During the time between Samuel and the Babylonian bondage (589 BC), the Israelite elders and prophets acted as gatherers and guardians of the holy books of the Old Testament. In the books of Chronicles, the prophets are often mentioned as the main authors of Jewish writings. One must also observe the remarkable witness by the Judean historian, Josephus Flavius, to the practice by the ancient Jews of re-examining the text of the Holy Writings after every serious disturbance, for example after a lengthy war. This sometimes resulted in what seemed the emergence of fresh Holy Writings, which were permitted to be produced by God-inspired prophets with their knowledge of ancient events and their ability to record the history of their people with remarkable accuracy. It is worthy to note that Judean history records that their pious king Ezekiel (710 BC), together with some selected elders, produced a book containing the writings of Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Songs and the Ecclesiastes.

The period between the Babylonian bondage and the times of the Great Synagogue during Ezra and Nehemiah (400 BC), appears as the conclusive stage of transcription of the Old Testament’s “canonical” books. The main protagonist in this enormous effort was the priest Ezra, the holy teacher of God’s laws (Ezra 7:12) In collaboration with the learned Nehemiah (creator of an extensive library), Ezra gathered “*Reports in the writings and commentaries of Nehemiah; and how he, founding of the library, gathered together the acts of the kings, the prophets, of David, and the epistles of the kings concerning the holy gifts*” (2 Mac. 2:13). He assiduously examined all prior God-inspired writings and published them in one arrangement, including the book of Nehemiah as well as his book, under his own name. As the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were living in this era they, apart from undoubtedly assisting Ezra in his efforts, had their own books included in his writings. After Ezra, the Jewish people did not receive any more God-inspired prophets and consequently, all the writings that appeared from that point on, were not included as holy books. For example, the book of Jesus Son of Sirach, while also written in the Jewish language and regarded as worthy by the Church, is not part of the holy canon.

The contents of the holy books of the Old Testament prove their ancient beginnings. The narratives in the books of Moses describe, with unmistakable clarity, the way of life in those distant days and the patriarchal structure of society. Because these descriptions correspond exactly with the ancient traditions of those people, the reader invariably feels that the author was present in those ancient times.

The responses from experts of the Jewish language confirm that the very style of the writings stamps them as being extremely ancient: months have no names but are referred to simply as numbers i.e. first, second, third etc ... month, and the books themselves carry no individual identity being designated by their opening words e.g., BERESHIT (“in the beginning” — Genesis), WE ELLEH SHE’MOT (“and these are the names” — Exodus), etc. as though to prove that as there were no other writings in existence, there was no need to specifically identify the books by name. After Moses, subsequent writings of holy fathers bear corresponding characteristics of the spirit and the people of those ancient times.

### **The Old Testament contains the following books:**

Five books of the Prophet Moses or **Torah** (encompassing the foundation the faith of the Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

**Historical** books: Book of Joshua, Book of Judges, Book of Ruth, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, 1<sup>st</sup> Book of Ezra, Book of Nehemiah & the 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of Esther.

**Educational** Books (having instructional contents): The Books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Book of Ecclesiastes and Book of Song of Solomon.

**Prophetic** books (primarily containing prophecies): one book each of prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and twelve books of the minor prophets, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

The names of the above list of holy books was taken from the translations of 70 Greek interpreters (*Septuagint*). The Jewish as well as some modern translations of the Bible have different names for some of the holy books.

Apart from this list of books of the Old Testament, the Bible contains another following nine books, regarded as “deutero-canonical”: the books of Tobias, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Jesus Son of Sirach, Second and Third books of Ezra, and three books of Maccabees. They are regarded as such because they were written **after** the list of “canonical” books had been completed by Ezra. These books were always respected by the Early Church. In fact, the Greek Bible known as the *Septuagint*, which the Apostles and the early Fathers used, does not distinguish between the “canonical” and the “deutero-canonical” books. While the Russian version of the Bible, which follows the Early Christian tradition, contains both groups of books, some modern versions exclude the “deutero-canonical” books.

## The New Testament.

The Church was born on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles (Acts 2). At that time none of the books of the New Testament yet existed. In the first years of her existence, the Church had no written documents whatever, except the books of the Old Testament as indicated earlier. The events of the Gospel were related from one believer to another by word of mouth; those who came to accept the Faith heard them from the believers. This was entirely in keeping with the culture in which the Church lived, which was above all else an oral culture. Relatively few people were able to read, let alone write, and so they heard the word of God and kept it (cf. Luke 8:21; 11:28). The holy Apostle Paul insists upon the matter: “*Therefore brethren, stand fast and hold to the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or our letter*” (2 Thess 2:15).

In due course, as the Church began to spread beyond her place of origin in Jerusalem and Galilee, communications between the local churches became necessary and letters were written. Some of these were of such great importance to understanding the Faith that they began to be read in church services, along with the Scriptures (the Old Testament). But copies existed initially only in the local churches to which they had been addressed, although in time in many others as well. As travelers moved from one place to another they carried hand-written copies of the letters for the edification of other believers. Some of these letters were written by the apostles, but there were others, written by other believers as well. Eventually, some of them came to have the character of what we now call “open letters,” addressed to the Church as a whole, rather than to any particular congregation. These are the “universal” or “catholic” or “general” epistles.

As the Church spread, it also became necessary to commit the central core of the events of Our Lord's life and His teaching to writing, to provide a written Gospel for those who came to the Faith far from the little out-of-the-way province of the Empire in which the Lord had lived and died. So it was that the four written Gospels came into being. But this came to pass only after the Gospel had been proclaimed and passed from one believer to another by word of mouth, by tradition ("handing-on") for many years. It is readily apparent upon comparison that no one of the written Gospels contains the entire story. Just as important, perhaps more so, as one would assume, had he no prejudice to the contrary, all four of them together yet are less than the totality of the Tradition of which they are a part. As the Gospel of St. John concludes: "*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written*" (John 21:25).

To be sure, all that is essential of the Lord's life and teaching is to be found in the Gospels — but not all that is desirable or helpful to our salvation. Neither any one nor all four of the Gospels together were written to be absolutely exhaustive and final. Were that the case, of course, we would have no need of the rest of the New Testament, nor the Old Testament, either. (There have been heretics who claimed just such outrageous foolishness).

The Revelation of St. John the Theologian (or the "Apocalypse") and the Acts of the Apostles are of course "special cases." The former, almost certainly the last book of the New Testament to be written, is agreed by most scholars to have been written by St. John near the end of his life, during the reign of Dometian, probably about A.D. 95 (although parts of it may perhaps have been written at an earlier date). It is the only book of the New Testament concerning which there was significant disagreement in the Church. There were parts of the Church for several centuries in which it was not accepted as part of the Scriptures (of this, more later). The Acts of the Apostles, written by the Evangelist Luke, of course could not have been completed any earlier than A.D. 63, as it refers to St. Paul's imprisonment at Rome which continued into that year.

### **The canon of the New Testament.**

The earliest known list of books which apparently were regarded as "scripture" in the Church's history comes from about A.D. 130 and is known as the Muratorian Canon. Portions of the work have been lost, but it is apparent that it includes the four Gospels and most of the epistles of St. Paul, as well as various other books. But doubts existed in portions of the Church concerning the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of Jude, the 2nd Epistle of Peter, the 2nd and 3rd Epistles of John, and the Apocalypse (this lasted right up to the council which finally confirmed the canon). As noted earlier, there were portions of the Church in which other books than those we now recognize as part of the New Testament were accepted as such.

It is not until A.D. 369, with St. Athanasius's "Festal Epistle" for that year, that we can find a "table of contents" for the New Testament which corresponds exactly to that which we now accept. For 336 years the Church had been living, growing, developing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and only then would it have been possible (though not even yet with universal acceptance) to print "the Holy Bible" as we now know and accept it!

This, of course, is already four decades after the Council of Nicaea, after the Creed had been written, after the Church (as many Protestants would have it) had been finally and ultimately corrupted by St. Constantine. The formal liturgical worship of the Church was already well-defined and so similar to that of the Orthodox Church today (a fact readily established by reference to indisputable historical documents) that a believer transported in time from then to an Orthodox Church service now would find himself completely at home.



Only five years earlier than St. Athanasius' Epistle, however, the Council of Laodicea (the canons of which were confirmed by the Sixth Ecumenical Council) promulgated a list of the books of the New Testament which was identical... except that it did not include the Apocalypse (Revelation) amongst "all the books that are to be read" (Canon 60). It was not for quite some time yet that there was truly universal agreement as to the books of the New Testament, and it was yet to be another thousand years before there would be a single book identical in contents to what we now call the Bible.

## Other books?

The picture we have, then, is that of a body of Church literature growing throughout the first 70 years of the Church's life. Some of these books were originally known in only one or a few local churches; others more rapidly gained a widespread audience. What was considered "scripture" in a particular local church was that which was read at the Church services, along with the books of the law and the prophets, and the Psalms, from the Old Testament. But we have not yet touched upon the fact that in this rich climate — of the oral Tradition of the Church and the new books which spoke of salvation — there were also other books, quite a number of them, in fact. Some of them were written even during the time in which the books of the New Testament came to be; others were written within the same time-frame, but shortly later.

Some of these "other books" may indeed have been written by the apostles themselves (e.g., the Epistle of Barnabas; the Apostolic Constitutions). Others were written by other members of the early Christian Church or by the immediate successors of the apostles in the governance of the Church (e.g., the "Shepherd" of Hermas; the epistles of St. Clement, of St. Ignatius, of St. Polycarp). Some of these books were in various parts of the Church (and some of them quite widely) regarded as "scripture," exactly on a par with the Gospels and the other books of the New Testament as we now have it. These books, however, should not be confused with the wholly inauthentic books written later, in the second and third centuries, by various heretics, who attributed their forgeries to the apostles in an attempt to authenticate their heretical teachings — such as the "Gospel of Thomas," the "Essene Gospel of Peace" and various others.

One thing is inescapable: the Bible is a difficult book, sealed, so to speak, with seven seals (see Rev. 5:1). But the Bible is not difficult because it is written in some unknown language or in code. We may, in fact, be so bold as to suggest that the great difficulty with the Bible is its magnificent clarity and directness. For the mysteries of God are given to us in the context of the daily lives of ordinary people. It may be, in fact, that the whole story of our salvation seems just all too human — just as Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, God Incarnate, was to all appearances a very ordinary man, the son of a carpenter.

The Bible transmits to us and preserves for us the Word of God in a form which human beings can grasp. When God spoke to man, the communication had to be in a form we could hear and understand. Divine inspiration does not get rid of what is human: it transfigures what is human. We must not think that human language degrades or darkens the glory of revelation nor that it restricts the power of the Word of God. We must rather believe this: that human words can be used quite adequately to convey the Word of God to us. His Word does not become tarnished or cloudy when it is expressed in human language. We are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27; 5:1; 9:6) and the very fact of this image and likeness makes communication possible. That God speaks to us in the forms which are our own thought and speech makes our language something greater, for now the Holy Spirit enables us to speak of God.



Theology (literally “words about God”) is thus made possible through His revelation. And, yes, theology (truly defined) is our response to God who first spoke to us, whom we have heard, and of whose words we have a record, and now proclaim.

This process is never complete, for we are never perfect in our development of theology: we must keep working at it. We always go back to the very same point of beginning, God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures, which is His revelation. Through the creeds, the doctrines of the Church, the Eucharistic liturgy and the various prayer liturgies, and other sacred signs and symbols, theology (and, indeed, true philosophy) witnesses to the meaning of that revelation.

We must also realize, however, that in one respect the Scriptures are themselves a response to God, for they are at one and the same time the Word of God and the response of humanity. The Bible is the Word of God brought to us through the faithful response of those people who wrote it and handed it down to us. Indeed, in every case in which someone wrote, by the inspiration of God, a work which became part of the Bible, the presentation carries some flavor of that person, in being a response to God it is also an interpretation of the message received from God. Thus, there is certainly a sense in which all parts of Scripture reflect the context in which the revelation was given. It would be impossible for that not to be.

Having received the revelation in the form of the Scriptures, the Church has, through her experience in the world through the centuries, found it necessary to produce explanations. These explanations, seen as a whole, form that which is the structure and pattern of beliefs which are to be found especially in the creeds and other decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, but also in the writings of the great theologians of the Church such as St. Gregory Nazianzus (called “the Theologian”), St. Basil the Great, St. John of Damascus, St. Symeon the New Theologian and others. They are also to be found in the liturgical services, especially in the hymns and prayers.

## **Bible translations.**

### **The Greek translation by 70 interpreters (Septuagint).**

The most accurate translation of the original text of the Holy Bible writings are found in the Alexandrine version, known as the one produced by the 70 interpreters. This effort began in the year 271 BC by orders of King Ptolemy Philadelphus. Renowned for his thirst for knowledge, the king wanted to acquire the books of the Jewish law for his library, and to this end, directed his librarian Demetrius to obtain and translate these books into Greek, the most widespread language of that time. Six of the most talented representatives from each tribe of Israel were selected and were directed to Alexandria, bringing with them the exact replica of the Jewish Bible. These translators were stationed on the island of Faros, close to the capital, and concluded their task in a short period of time. It is this translation of the holy books by “the seventy” that is used by the Orthodox Church.

### **The Latin translation (Vulgate).**

Up to the fourth century of our era, among the several Latin translations of the Bible, the version translated into Ancient Latin (the Itala) was the most popular because it was based on the original content of the 70 translators and consequently, reflected the unadulterated clarity and exceptional conformity to the holy text. However, after St. Jerome — one of the most learned fathers of the Church in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century — published his translation of the Holy Scriptures in 384

AD (based on authentic Jewish writings), the Western church slowly but surely began to forsake the original Itala version in favor of this interpretation. In the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, the Council of Trent established St. Jerome's version as the official Holy Scripture (titled Vulgate, meaning "popular edition") of the Roman Catholic Church.

### **The Slavonic translation.**

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Moravian Prince Rostislav, being displeased with the efforts of the German missionaries, requested the Greek king Michael to send him some competent instructors in the Christian faith. In response, King Michael sent two Thessalonian brothers — Saints Cyril and Methodius — accomplished scholars of the Slavonic language who had already begun the translation of the Holy Scripture while still in Greece. On the way to the Slavonic lands, the two Saints stayed for a time in Bulgaria, not only continuing their translation there but also enlightening that country with God's word. In 863 they arrived in Moravia, continuing their translation as well as their apostolic efforts in the Slavonic lands. Upon the death of St. Cyril, St. Methodius completed the translation in Pannonia, having moved there (because of civil unrest in Moravia) under the patronage of pious prince Kotsella.

In 988, Russia embraced Christianity under the rule of St. Vladimir, and the Slavonic version of the Holy Bible translated by Saints Cyril and Methodius became an integral part of that faith.

### **Russian translation.**

With the passage of time, the differences between the Russian and Slavonic languages increased markedly, causing great difficulties for many in reading the Holy Scripture. As a consequence, in 1815, by order of Emperor Alexander I and with the blessing of the Russian Holy Synod, the Russian Bible Society funded the publication of the New Testament in the then modern Russian language. Of all the books of the Old Testament, only the Psalms were translated, as this book, above all others, was widely used in the Orthodox Church Services. Subsequently, during the reign of Alexander II, in 1860 a new and more accurate version of the New Testament was published, followed by the publication of the "canonical" books of the Old Testament in 1868. The following year saw the Holy Synod bless the issue of the historical books of the Old Testament, and in 1872 the wisdom books. Meanwhile, Russian translations of the holy books of the Old Testament appeared with increasing frequency in spiritual magazines so that by 1877, the complete text of the Bible was popularly available in the Russian language. However, not everyone was sympathetic with the appearance of the Russian translation, preferring the original Church-Slavonic version. Vocal supporters of the Russian version included such notable luminaries as St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow and later, Bishop Theophan the Recluse, Patriarch Tikhon and many other outstanding pastors of the Russian Church.

### **Other translations of the Bible.**

In 1160, the Bible was translated into the French language by Peter Valde. The first translation into German appeared in 1460, followed by an updated version by Martin Luther in 1522-32. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Bede the Venerable was the first person to translate the Bible into the English language. The "King James" English version was produced in 1603 during the reign of James I, and published in 1611. Over the years, the Bible in Russia has been translated into

many indigenous languages. Metropolitan Innocent translated it into the Aleutian languages, while the Academy of Kazan translated it into many others, including Tartar. The British and American Bible Societies were the most successful organizations to translate and disseminate the Bible in many languages.

To conclude of these observations, it has to be noted that every translation has its advantages as well as shortcomings. In striving to translate the text in a literal sense, the interpretation suffers through the sheer ponderous and difficult understanding of the original text. On the other hand, translations that strive to impart the general meaning of the Bible in the most understandable and acceptable format often suffer inaccuracies. The Russian Synodal translation avoids both these extremes, containing in itself and in simple language, the maximum closeness to the meanings of the original text. Of the currently available English texts, Orthodox priests prefer the “King James” version for similar reasons.

In our missionary leaflets on the Bible, we propose to publish them in the following order:

- 1 — Introduction
- 2 — Five books of Moses
- 3 — Historical books of the Old Testament
- 4 — Books of wisdom of the Old Testament
- 5 — Books of prophets of the Old Testament
- 6 — The 4 Gospels
- 7 — The Acts and the Epistles
- 8 — Epistles of Apostle Paul
- 9 — Revelations of St. John (Apocalypse).

## Conclusion.

**T**hus the Bible came to be what it is, came into existence, only in the context of the living, dynamic Church of Christ, which had its origin at Pentecost (although its antetype, of course, was to be found in the Chosen People whose history led to the incarnation of the Son of God). It was the life of the Church throughout the first seventy or so years of her existence which, guided by the Holy Spirit, gave rise to the written texts which in due course were to comprise the New Testament. And it was the continuing life of the Church for more than another three hundred years which was required to refine and define the exact contents of the Scriptures.

Thus, it is pointless and misleading and even dangerous to discuss the Scriptures apart from the life of the Church. If the Scriptures as we know them could only come into existence through the action of the Holy Spirit upon and in the Church over a period hundreds of years, then obviously the rest of the experience of the Church during those same centuries (and subsequent ones as well) is of vital importance to their understanding.

And what is this “Church?” It is the same Church which was founded by Our Lord, governed by the Apostles in the earliest decades, later guided and shepherded by their successors, the bishops. It is the same Church which suffered intermittent persecution for three hundred years, which finally attained freedom under the reign of St. Constantine, which by the guidance of the Holy Spirit defined the meaning of the Scriptures as it confronted the perpetrators of the various heresies. It is the same Church which in the holy Councils wrote the Nicene Creed, sum-

marizing the very essence of the Faith and the Scriptures, which in these same Councils wrote the Canons which are the guidelines even to this day for its life.

This is the same Church which teaches us to venerate the saints and their relics. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Church learned how to celebrate the holy Liturgy, the Lord's Supper, with dignity and splendor, long before the time at which we can identify a final agreement concerning the contents of the Bible.

And so we are forced, if we confront the facts with honesty and integrity, to one inescapable conclusion: it is only through the Church that we have access to the Bible at all. And it is likewise to the Church that we must turn for its understanding.

This classic riddle "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" is very much to the point here. In point of time, it should be apparent that the Church long precedes the Bible as an integral collection of books, and considerably precedes even the individual books of the New Testament. Thus, it is quite certain that the Church founded by Our Lord was not "based on the Bible." The Church created by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost had no Bible as we know it and did not have to have it to be truly the Church.

## 2. The Pentateuch.

### Introduction.

The first five books of the Bible, generally referred to as the *Pentateuch* (from the Greek word *pente*, "five," and *teuchos*, "a tool" or "implement"), were written by the Prophet Moses during the forty years journey through the Sinai desert. Originally these books constituted a single collection of God's revelations and were designated as the "**Torah**" which means "the Law" in Hebrew (Josh. 1:7). Sometimes these books were also called the "Books of Moses" (1 Ezra 6:18), "the Book of the Law" (Gal. 3:10); "the Law of Moses" (Luke 2:22) or "the Law of the Lord" (Luke 2:23, 10:26; Matt. 5:17).

The word "book" in reference to them should not be understood in its modern sense, for several different writing materials were used by Old Testament scribes, including papyrus and leather scrolls or sheets, pieces of broken pottery, clay tablets, and stone. The term "book" rather indicates that its content was in a written form as opposed to the oral tradition. The combination of divine authorship and human transmission gave the Law its supreme authority and made it The Book for the ancient Hebrews.

Because the books of Pentateuch were the first ever written, originally they had no unique titles like all subsequent books of the Bible. To distinguish in The Law one book from another the ancient Jews referred to them by their opening words of each of them, for example: "in the beginning," "these are the names," etc.. It was much later that each book of Pentateuch received its title in concordance with its context: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Apparently this naming convention appeared first in the *Septuagint* — a third-century BC Greek translation of Old Testament, and also in the *Samaritan Pentateuch*, which is even earlier. This convention was retained ever since.

The Pentateuchal account of the creation of the world and man stands unique in all ancient literature. All non-biblical creation legends by their polytheistic crudity stand in striking contrast to

the majestic account documented in Gen. 1:1-2:3. The unifying principle of the universe in one omnipresent and omniscient God is revealed through inspiration in the majestic Genesis account. Ancient Mesopotamian writers blindly groped after this principle. The Pentateuch is all the more striking against the background of a world grossly ignorant of the first principles of causation. The discovery of secondary causes and the explanation of the how of creation in its ongoing operation is the achievement of science. Revelation alone can sense the “why” of creation. The Bible alone discloses that the universe exists because God made it and has a definite redemptive purpose in it. Regarding its account of creation as outlined in Gen. 1, the sequence of phases of creation that it lists is amazing in that it is in basic agreement with what the modern science has discovered — several millennia after the writing down of the Genesis account (see in the appendix “the Days of creation”).

In its account of the Flood the Pentateuch is also incomparably superior to the crudities and inconsistencies of the polytheistic account preserved in the eleventh book of the Assyro-Babylonian classic *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. See in the appendix some thoughts on this topic.

The Pentateuch also records the most ancient history of humanity with particular attention to the development of the Hebrew people. Israel was not formed in a vacuum, but amid the age old civilization of Mesopotamia and the Nile. God providentially led the Hebrews into Egypt, then prepared them for their high calling — to be the people of God, the prototype of Christ’s Church. The crying out of oppressed Israelites in Egypt provoked a striking intervention of God. God revealed himself to Moses as a savior, and the epic story of deliverance was recorded in the book of Exodus. This book also tells of the Sinai covenant, which is rightfully regarded as the key to the Old Testament. Through the covenant Israel becomes God’s people, and God becomes Israel’s Lord. This act marked the fulfillment of the first promise that Abraham will become the father of a great nation. Thus the sacred history was formed within the bosom of early Israel, guided by the spirit of God. It was sung beside the desert campfires, it was commemorated in the liturgical feasts, such as Passover, and it was transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation.

The activity of God is revealed with a great emphasis throughout the Pentateuch, and tells a great deal about His nature and His purposes for mankind. Because of this, the Pentateuch is not just a historical book. It is rather an account of creation and redemption. It has an all-pervading purpose to include only such historical background as is essential for introducing and preparing the stage for the Redeemer. In other words, the Pentateuch is much more than history. It is history wedded to prophecy, a Messiah-centered history combining with a Messiah-centered prophecy. To consummate the redemptive plan it initiates, it has been called the philosophy of Israel’s history.

In such a character, the Pentateuch catalogs the events concerning the origin of the Israelite people and many other nations. Archaeology has shed abundant light on many accounts of the Pentateuch. Babylonian cuneiform tablets illustrate the creation and particularly the Flood, yielding amazing parallels of detail. The longevity of the patriarchs is illustrated by the Sumerian king list. The Table of the Nations (Gen. 10) is shown by archaeological discoveries to be an amazing document. The patriarchal age is set in the framework of authentic history and the Egyptian sojourn, the Exodus, and the conquest are now much better understood as the result of the triumphs of scientific archaeology since 1800.

The Pentateuch is of great religious, historical, and cosmic importance. It is the foundation of all subsequent divine revelation. Both Christianity and Judaism rest on its inspired revelations. The primary names of Deity — Jehovah, Elohim, and Adonai — and five of the most important compound names occur in the opening book of the Pentateuch. Its content initiates the

program of progressive self-revelation of God culminating in the Messiah-Christ Who is at the center of all subsequent revelations.

Next a brief description of the content of each book of Pentateuch follows.

## Genesis.

**I**n the Holy Scripture, the first Book of Moses is called by its first word *Bereshit* which means “in the beginning.” The Greek name for this book — “genesis” points to its context: an account of the creation of the world, the first people and the first communities in patriarchal times. As was already stated, the description of the creation of the world follows a religious and not a scientific aim, specifically: to show that God is the **primary Designer and Cause** of all being. The earth and all that fills it did not originate haphazardly, but through the will of the Creator. Man is not just an animal, for he holds within himself the breath of God — an **immortal soul**, made in the **likeness of God**. Man was created for the highest aspirations — to **perfect himself through virtuosity**.

The devil is sinfully responsible for the fall of mankind and is the fountainhead of evil in the world. God constantly concerns Himself with the salvation mankind and directs it toward good. Here in a few words is that religious perspective with which the Book of Genesis describes the emanation of the world, mankind and ensuing events.

The Book of Genesis was written with the purpose of giving mankind a concept of the world and of mankind’s history, after traditions began to be forgotten, and to preserve in purity the first prophesies regarding the Messiah, the Divine Savior of mankind.

At a finer level of detail the content of Genesis can be subdivided as follows. It begins with an account of how the universe came into existence (1:1-2:14), creation of Adam, placing him in a special “garden,” Paradise, located to the East of Eden and the story of Eve (2:15-25) and their sin (3:1-13), the consequences of their sin, as well as the promise of the Savior given to Eve (3:14-24).

In the second section, (4-11) descendants of Adam are described — the crime of Cain and his impious descendants (chapter 4), preserving of faith through the longevity of the OT patriarchs (chapter 5), increased impiety and sinfulness and selection of Noa in order to preserve faith (chapter 6), disastrous flood and its subsiding, the sacrifice of Noa (ch. 7-8). Resumption of God’s promises after the Flood, and Noa’s prophecy about his children (chapter 9), nations spread across the Near East after the Flood and the separation of the tongues, the descendants of Shem are listed (chapters 10 and 11).

In the third section, that takes the final 39 chapters of Genesis, Abraham becomes prominent after obeying God’s call (12:1-25:20), promises and covenants with him are also found here. Thereafter the narratives continue with Isaac and promises to him (25:20-28:1-9), and Jacob (28:10-38:30), the story of Joseph’s life (chapters 39-47). This section concludes with the prophetic blessing of the sons of Joseph by Jacob (chapter 48), blessing of Jacob given to his own sons (chapter 49, this chapter also contains an account of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha, primarily for the sin of sodomy (homosexuality), death and burial of Jacob, Joseph’s faith in eventual return of the people of God into the promised land (chapter 50).

### Narrative of the Creation of the World.

(By Protopresbyter M. Pomazansky)



The first place in the book of Genesis is occupied by the origin of the world. Moses, the seer of God, speaks briefly about the creation of the world. His account occupies about one page of the Bible. But at the same time he took in everything with a single glance. This brevity displays profound wisdom, for what loquacity could embrace the greatness of God's work? In essence this page is an entire book, which required great spiritual stature on the part of the sacred author and enlightenment from above. It is not without reason that Moses concludes his account of the creation as if he were concluding a large and long work: *This is the book of the generations of the heavens and the earth, when they were made, in the day in which the Lord God made the heavens and the earth* (Gen. 2:4).

This was a mighty task — to speak of how the world and all that is in the world came to be. A large enterprise in the realm of thought requires a correspondingly large store of means of expression, a technical and philosophical vocabulary. But what did Moses have? At his disposal was an almost primitive language, the entire vocabulary of which numbered only several hundred words. This language had almost none of those abstract concepts which now make it much easier for us to express our thoughts. The thinking of antiquity is almost entirely expressed in images, and all its words denote what the eyes and ears perceive of the visible world. Because of this, Moses uses the words of his time with care, so as not to immerse the idea of God in the crudeness of purely earthly perceptions. He has to say “God made,” “God took,” “God saw,” “God said,” and even — “God walked;” but the first words of Genesis, *In the beginning God made*, and then, *The Spirit of God moved over the water*, already speak clearly of God as a spirit, and consequently of the metaphorical nature of the anthropomorphic expressions we quoted above. In a later book, the Psalter, when the metaphorical nature of such expressions about the Spirit became generally understood, we encounter many more such expressions, and ones which are more vivid. In it we read about God's face, about the hands, eyes, steps, shoulders of God, of God's belly. *Take hold of weapon and shield, and arise unto my help* (Ps. 35:2), the psalmist appeals to God. In his homilies on the book of Genesis, commenting on the words, *And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the afternoon*, Saint John Chrysostom says:

“Let us not, beloved, inattentively pass over what is said by Divine Scripture, and let us not stumble over the words, but reflect that such simple words are used because of our infirmity, and everything is accomplished fittingly for our salvation. Indeed, tell me, if we wish to accept the words in their literal meaning, and will not understand what we are told at the very beginning of the present reading. *And they heard, it is said, the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the afternoon*. What are you saying? God walks? Surely we are not ascribing feet to Him? And shall we not understand anything higher by this? No, God does not walk — quite the contrary! How, in fact, can He Who is everywhere and fills all things, Whose throne is heaven and the earth His footstool, really walk in paradise? What foolish man will say this? What then does it mean, *They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the afternoon*? He wanted to awaken in them such a feeling (of His nearness), that it would cast them into anxiety, which is what actually happened: they felt this, trying to hide themselves from God Who was approaching them. Sin happened — and the crime — and shame fell upon them. The impartial judge, the conscience, rose up, cried out with a loud voice, reproached them, exposed them and, as it were, exhibited before their eyes, the seriousness of the crimes. In the beginning, the Master created man and placed the conscience in him, as an inexorable accuser, which cannot be deceived or flattered ...”

In our era of geological and paleontological research and discoveries, the world of the past is depicted on an immeasurably vast time scale; the appearance of humanity itself is ascribed to immensely distant millennia. In questions of the origin and development of the world, science follows its own path, but it is not essential for us to make efforts to bring the Biblical account into congruence and harmony in all points with the voice of contemporary science. We have no need to plunge ourselves into geology and paleontology to support the Biblical account. In principle we are convinced that the words of the Bible and scientific data will not prove to be in contradiction, even if at any given time their agreement in one respect or another is still not clear to us. In some cases scientific data can show us how we should understand the facts in the Bible. In some respects these two fields are not comparable; they have different purposes, to the extent that they have contrasting points of view from which they see the world.

Moses' task was not the study of the physical world. However, we agree in recognizing and honoring Moses for giving mankind the first elementary natural history; for being the first person in the world to give the history of early humanity; and, finally, for giving a beginning to the history of nations in the book of Genesis. All this only emphasizes his greatness. He presents the creation of the world and its history, in the small space of a single page of the Bible; hence it is already clear, from this brevity, why he does not draw the thread of the world's history through the deep abyss of the past, but rather presents it simply as one general picture. Moses' immediate aim in the account of the creation was to instill basic religious truths into his people and, through them, into other peoples.

The principal truth is that God is the one spiritual Being independent of the world. This truth was preserved in that branch of humanity which the fifth and sixth chapters of the book of Genesis call the "sons of God," and from them faith in the one God was passed on to Abraham and his descendants. By the time of Moses, the other peoples had already lost this truth for some time. It was even becoming darkened among the Hebrew people, surrounded as they were by polytheistic nations, and threatened to die out during their captivity in Egypt. For Moses himself the greatness of the one, divine Spirit was revealed by the unconsumed, burning bush in the wilderness. He asked in perplexity: *Behold, I shall go forth to the children of Israel, and shall say to them, "The God of our fathers has sent me to you" — and they will ask of me, "What is His name?" What shall I say to them? Then, Moses heard a mystical voice give the name of the very essence of God: And God spoke to Moses, saying, I am the Being. Thus shall ye say to the children of Israel, the Being has sent me to you* (Ex. 3:13-14).

Such is the lofty conception of God that Moses is expounding in the first words of the book of Genesis: *In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth*. Even when nothing material existed, there was the one Spirit, God, Who transcends time, transcends space, Whose existence is not limited to heaven, since heaven was made together with time and the earth. In the first line of the book of Genesis the name of God is given without any definitions or limitations: for the only thing that can be said about God is that He is, that He is the one, true, eternal Being, the Source of all being, He is the Being.

A series of other truths about God, the world, and man, are bound up with this truth and follow directly from the account of the creation. These are:

- God did not separate a part of Himself, was in no way diminished, nor was He augmented in creating the world.
- God created the world of His free will, and was not compelled by any necessity.
- The world does not, of itself, have a divine nature; it is neither the offspring of the Deity, nor part of Him, nor the body of the Deity.

- The world manifests the wisdom, power, and goodness of God.
- The world which is visible to us was formed gradually, in order, from the lower to the higher and more perfect.
- In the created world “everything was very good”; the world in its entirety is harmonious, excellent, wisely and bountifully ordered.
- Man is an earthly being, made from earth, and appointed to be the crown of earthly creation.
- Man is made after the image and likeness of God, and bears in himself the breath of life from God.

From these truths the logical conclusion follows that man is obliged to strive towards moral purity and excellence, so as not to deface and lose the image of God in himself, that he might be worthy to stand at the head of earthly creation.

Of course, the revelation about the creation of the world supplanted in the minds of the Hebrews all the tales they had heard from the peoples surrounding them. These fables told of imaginary gods and goddesses, who a) are themselves dependent on the existence of the world and are in essence, impotent, b) who are replete with weaknesses, passions and enmity, bringing and spreading evil, and therefore, c) even if they did exist would be incapable of elevating mankind ethically. The history of the creation of the world, which has its own independent value as a divinely revealed truth, deals, as we see, a blow to the pagan, polytheistic, mythological religions.

The Old Testament concept of God is expressed with vivid imagery in the book of the Wisdom of Solomon: *For the whole world before Thee is as a little grain in the balance yea, as a drop of the morning dew that falleth down upon the earth!* (Wis. 11:22). The book of Genesis confesses pure, unadulterated monotheism. Yet Christianity brings out a higher truth in the Old Testament accounts: the truth of the unity of God in a Trinity of Persons. We read: *Let us make man according to our image; Adam is become as one of us*; and later, God appeared to Abraham in the form of three strangers.

Such is the significance of this short account. If the whole book of Genesis consisted only of the first page of the account of the world and mankind, it would still be a great work, a magnificent expression of God's revelation, of the divine illumination of human thought.

## **The Dawn of Humanity.**

**(By Protopresbyter M. Pomazansky)**

The second and third chapters of the book of Genesis unfold a new theme; we can say that they begin a new book: the history of mankind. It is understandable why Moses speaks twice about the creation of man. It was necessary for him to speak of man in the first chapter as the crown of creation, in the general picture of the creation of the world. Now, after concluding the first theme: *And the heavens and the earth were finished, and the whole world of them* — it is natural that he should begin the history of humanity by speaking again of the creation of the first man and of how woman was made for him. These are the contents of the second chapter, which also describes their life in Eden, in paradise. The third chapter tells of their fall into sin and their loss of paradise. In these accounts, together with the literal meaning, there is a symbolic meaning and we are not in a position to indicate where precisely events are related in their natural, literal sense, and where they are expressed figuratively, we are not in a position to separate the

symbol from the simple fact. We only know that, in one form or another, we are being told of events of the most profound significance.

A symbol is a relative means of expression, which is convenient in that it is pictorial, and therefore makes an impression on the soul. It does not require great verbal means to express a thought. At the same time, it leaves a strong impression of the given concept. A symbol gives one the possibility of penetrating more deeply into the meaning of the thought. Thus, in quoting the Psalmic text, *Thy hands have made me*, Saint John of Kronstadt accompanies it with the remark: “Thy hands are the Son and the Spirit.” The word “hands” in relation to God suggests to him the idea of the Most-holy Trinity (*My Life in Christ*). We read similar words in Saint Irenaeus of Lyons: “The Son and the Holy Spirit are, as it were, the hands of the Father” (*Against Heresies*, bk. 5, ch. 6).

It is essential to make a strict distinction between Biblical symbol and imagery, with the special meaning which is hidden within it, and the concept of myth. In the Bible there is no mythology. Mythology belongs to polytheism, which personifies as gods the phenomena of nature and has created fantastic tales on this basis. We are justified in saying that the book of Genesis is a “de-mythologizing” of ancient notions, the unmasking of mythology, that it was directed against myths.

It might be said that one can also see symbolism in mythology. This is true. But the difference here is that the truth — often deeply mysterious — lies behind Moses' figurative expressions; but mythological stories present fiction inspired by the phenomena of nature. These are symbols of the truth; the others are symbols of arbitrary fantasy. For an Orthodox Christian this is similar to the difference between an icon and an idol: the icon is the depiction of a real being, whereas an idol is a depiction of a fictitious creation of the mind.

The symbolic element is felt most strongly where there is the greatest need to reveal an essential point. Such, for example, is the account of the creation of the woman from Adam's rib. Saint John Chrysostom teaches us:

And He took, it says, one of his ribs. Do not understand these words in a human way, but know that crude expressions are used in adaptation to human infirmity. Indeed, if Scripture did not use these words, then how could we come to know the ineffable mysteries? Let us not, then, dwell only on the words, but let us take everything in an appropriate way, as relating to God. This expression 'took' and all similar expressions are used on account of our infirmity (loc. cit., pp. 120-1).

The moral conclusion of this story is comprehensible to us. Saint Paul points it out: woman is called to be in submission to man. *The head of the woman is the man; the head of every man is Christ ... ; for the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man* (1 Cor. 11:3,8). But why did Moses speak specifically of the manner in which woman was created? He undoubtedly had the intention of protecting the minds of the Hebrews from the fictions of mythology and, in particular, from the mythology of ancient Mesopotamia, the homeland of their ancestors. These sordid and morally corrupting tales tell of how the world of gods, the world of man and the world of animals are in some way merged together: goddesses and gods form unions with men and animals. We find a hint of this in the depictions of lions and bulls with human heads, which are so widespread in Chaldeo-Mesopotamian and Egyptian art.' The Biblical account of the creation of woman supports the concept that the human race has its own, absolutely unique, independent origin and keeps its physical nature pure and distinct from the beings of the supernatural world, and from the lower realm of animals. That this is so is evident from the preceding verses of the account: *And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make for him a help suitable for him* (Gen. 2:18). And He brought all the wild beasts to Adam, and Adam

gave them names, *but for Adam there was not found a helpmate like to himself* (Gen. 2:20). Then it was that God put a trance upon Adam and made him a wife out of one of his ribs.

Thus, after the truth of the unity of God, the truth of the unity, independence, and distinctness of the human race is confirmed. It is with these two basic truths that Saint Paul begins his sermon on the Areopagus in Athens: God is one, *and He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth* (Acts 17:26). The account of the creation of man and of the origin of the human race which is given in the book of Genesis deals just such a blow to polytheistic, mythological concepts, as did the story of the creation of the world.

The first people lived in paradise, in Eden, that most beautiful garden. The dawn of humanity is illumined by rays of the Sun of Grace in Moses' account. Now, under the influence of some cave discoveries, early man is usually depicted for us in the gloom of a cave. However, the Bible tells us that, although man was in a childlike state in the spiritual sense, he was still a noble creature of God from the beginning of his existence; that from the beginning, his countenance was not dark, not gloomy, but radiant and pure. He was always intellectually superior to other creatures. The gift of speech gave him the opportunity to develop his spiritual nature further. The riches of the vegetable kingdom presented him with an abundance of food. Life in this most beneficent climate did not require much labor. Moral purity gave him inner peace. The process of development could have taken on a higher form, one which is unknown to us.

In the animal world, although it stands lower than man, we observe many noble-featured, harmoniously built species in the kingdoms of fourlegged animals and birds which express beauty and grace in their external features. We observe so many gentle animals, prepared to show attachment and trust and, what is more important, to serve in almost a disinterested way. There is also much harmony and beauty before us in the plant world and, one could say, the plants compete to be of service with their fruits. Why then is it necessary to conceive of early man alone as deprived of all the attractive and beautiful features with which the animal and plant kingdoms are endowed?

## The Fall into Sin.

### (By Protopresbyter M. Pomazansky)

Man's blessedness and his nearness to God are inseparable, *"God is my protection and defense: whom shall I fear?"* (cf. Pss. 27:1, 32:7). God "walked in paradise," so close was He to Adam and Eve. But in order to sense the beatitude of God's nearness and to be aware that one is under God's protection, it is necessary to have a dear conscience. When we lose it, we lose this awareness. The first people sinned and then they straightway hid from God. *Adam, where art thou? — I heard Thy voice, as Thou walkedst in the garden, and I feared, because I am naked, and hid myself.*

The Word of God tells us that God is omnipresent, and He is always near. The awareness of this nearness is dimmed only because of man's corruption. However, it does not become extinguished completely. Throughout all the ages, it has lived and continues to live in holy people. It is said of Moses that God spoke with him face to face, as a man would speak with his friend (cf. Deut. 34: 10). *Near art Thou, O Lord*, we read in the psalms (Pss. 119:151; 145:12). "My soul lives in God as a fish lives in water or a bird in the air, immersed in Him on all sides and at all times; living in Him, moving in Him, at rest in Him, finding in Him breathing room," writes Saint John of Kronstadt. In another place he reasons: "What is the meaning of the appearance of the three strangers to Abraham? It means that the Lord, in three Persons, continually, as it were, travels over the earth, and watches over everything that is done on it; and that He Himself comes



to those of His servants who are watchful and attentive to themselves and their salvation, and who seek Him, sojourning with them and conversing with them as with His friends (*We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him* — John 14:23); while He sends fire upon the ungodly” (*My Life in Christ*).

This closeness was lost, and so was blessedness. Blessedness was lost and suffering appeared. Moses' account of the fall into sin is essentially the same as the Lord's parable about the Prodigal Son. He left the father, hid himself from him, that he might be satiated with the sweetness of a free life. But instead of pleasure, he was rewarded with husks, which were used to feed animals, and these not to satiety. It was the same with our forefathers; their fall was followed by grief and sufferings. *I will greatly multiply thy pains and thy groanings; in pain thou shalt bring forth children... In pain..., in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread, until thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken...*

Eating the forbidden fruit, it would seem, was such a minor offense. Could it really have such consequences or bring such a punishment? But everything in life has its beginning; great things arise from insignificant, small ones. An avalanche in the mountains begins from a slight tremor. The Volga originates from a little spring, and the broad Hudson from the “tear clouds” which are lost in the mountains.

Simple observation tells us that there is a connection between vices and suffering, that they lead to suffering and that man thus punishes himself. If death and many of the hardships of life constitute a chastisement from God, still it must be recognized that the majority of man's sufferings are created by humanity itself. This applies to savage wars, accompanied with the terribly inhuman treatment of the vanquished. Wars, in fact, constitute the entire history of humanity. It also applies to those types of suffering inflicted by man on man, which have accompanied the peaceful periods of history: slavery, the yokes of foreign invaders, and the various kinds of violence, which are caused not only by greed and egoism, but also by a kind of demonic passion for cruelty and brutality. In a word, all this is expressed in the old proverb: man's worst enemy is man.

Would man have enjoyed complete blessedness on earth if the fall had not occurred? Would he be free from worries, annoyances, sadness, accidents? Apparently the Bible does not speak of such tranquility in life. Where there is light, there is also shadow; where there is joy, there must also be sorrow. But what sorrows can last long, if the Lord is near?... if He commands His angels to protect His supreme creatures, those who bear His image and likeness in themselves? The Church teaches that man in paradise was created for immortality, not only that of the soul, but also of the body. Yet even if he were not eternal in his earthly body, what woe could there be if he perceived his immortality with all the powers of his soul? If he knew and felt that a transformation into a yet higher form of life awaits him?

## **The Problem of Evil.**

**(By Protopresbyter M. Pomazansky)**

Now we have touched upon one of the very broadest questions, that of the general problem of suffering in the world which is so very difficult for religious philosophy to explain. Why is the law of the constant renovation of life, the beneficent law of the life of the world, conjoined with suffering? Is it inevitable that creatures should mutually destroy each other? That some should be eaten by others to support their own life? That the weak should be in fear of the strong, and brute force should triumph in the animal kingdom? Is the struggle of one creature with another an eternal condition of life?



The Bible does not give a direct answer to our questions. However, we do find indirect indications of a solution. Here is what is said about the first law of nourishment which God gave His creatures. God appoints the seeds of plants and the fruit of trees as food for man. Only after the flood does he also make meat lawful for him. For animals, God declares: *And to all the wild beasts of the earth, and to all the fowls of heaven, and to every reptile creeping on the earth, which has in itself the breath of life, [I have given] every green plant for food, and it was so* (Gen. 1:30).

But the fall occurred. Before the flood, the human race had become corrupt. This corruption also touched the world of earthly creatures: *And the Lord God saw the earth, and it was corrupted; because all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth* (Gen. 6:12). The law of concord gave way to the law of struggle. And Saint Paul writes: For the earnest expectation of creation awaiteth the manifestation of the sons of God. *For creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him Who hath subjected the same in hope, because creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not they only, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body* (Rom. 8:19-23).

This means that the groaning of creation is not eternal; obviously then, neither is the law of conflict, the right of the strongest. And is it, indeed, indisputably a law of life? Do we not observe that the ferocious, bloodthirsty, and formidably strong representatives of the animal world disappear more quickly from the face of the earth than the apparently defenseless, gentle creatures, which continue to live and multiply? Is this not an oblique indication to humanity itself not to rely on the principles of force? The holy Prophet Isaiah speaks of the temporary nature of the principle, when he prophesies about the time (of course not in this sinful world) when *the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down together with the kid* (Is. 11:6).

The account of the origin of evil in the world, of moral evil, and physical and spiritual sufferings, is given in the third chapter of the book of Genesis, and constitutes a new, third blow against pagan mythology. According to the mythological tales, the gods experienced passions and vices and the sufferings which resulted; conflicts, treachery and murders take place among them. Then there are religions which postulate that there is a god of good and a god of evil; but one way or the other, evil is thus primordial. Hence, suffering is a normal condition of life, and there is no path to genuine moral perfection. This is not what the Bible tells us. *God did not create or cause evil.* What was created was “very good” by nature. Sin came into the world through temptation; that is why it is called “sin,” i.e., a missing of the mark, losing of the way, a deviation of the will to the wrong side. After sin came suffering.

The author of the Wisdom of Solomon says: *For God made not death: neither hath He pleasure in the destruction of the living. For He created all things that they might have their being; and the generations of the world were healthful, and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor the kingdom of Hades upon the earth... For God created man for incorruption, and made him to be the image of His own eternity. But through the envy of the devil, came death into the world; and they that are of His portion experience it* (Wis. 1:13-14; 2:23-24).

But the moral law is not destroyed by man's fall. It continues to shine, the distinction between good and evil is not lost. Man retains the possibility of returning to his lost riches. The path to it lies through that grief which leads to moral purification and rebirth, through the sorrow of repentance, which is depicted at the end of the third chapter of Genesis, in the account of the expulsion from Paradise. From the last verses of the third chapter of Genesis, we begin to see the radiant horizon of the New Testament far in the distance, the dawn of the salvation of the human

race from moral evil and, at the same time, from suffering and death, through the appearance of the Redeemer of the world.

Thus, the story of the fall into sin is of exceptional importance for understanding the entire history of humanity, and is directly connected with the New Testament. A direct parallel arises between the two events: Adam's fall into sin and the coming of the Son of God on earth. This is always present in Christian thought, in general and particular terms. Christ is called the Second Adam; the tree of the Cross is contrasted with the tree of the fall. Christ's very temptations from the devil in the desert recall, to a certain extent, the temptations of the serpent: there it was "taste of the fruit" and "ye shall be as gods;" here, *If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread*. The Church Fathers prefer a direct, literal understanding of the story of the fall into sin. However, even here the real element, the element of the direct meaning, is so closely intertwined with the hidden, spiritual sense, that there is no possibility of separating them. Such, for example, are the mystical names "tree of life" and "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The Church, rejoicing in her salvation in Christ, turns her gaze towards the same "Paradise of old," and she sees the Cherubim, who were placed at the gates of Paradise when Adam was expelled, now no longer guarding the tree of life, and the flaming sword no longer hindering our entry into Paradise. After repenting on the cross, the thief hears the words of the Crucified Christ: *Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise*.

## Exodus.

This book was originally called by its opening words "*elle-shemot*" which in Hebrew means "These are the names..." because it begins with the list of names of the descendents of Jacob who migrated to Egypt in the times of Joseph. The Greek name, *Exodus*, indicates the book's contents: the exodus of the sons of Israel from Egypt.

The book relates how the sons of Jacob, a small tribe of wondering shepherds, became a God chosen nation. The covenant was central to this event. It bound God and Israel in an agreement by which God undertook to provide for all His people's material needs, including a land in which to live, if they would worship Him alone as the one true God and live as a holy community. Central to the rules of the covenant were the Ten Commandments, which are still fundamental to any relationship with God. The tabernacle was a portable temple of worship which was placed in the center of Israel's wilderness encampment, symbolizing God's presence in their midst. The religious and moral laws listed in the Book of Exodus did not lose their importance until this day, in fact, in His sermon of the Mount, Lord Jesus Christ has taught the deeper level of their understanding. In contrast, the civil laws and religious rites given to Hebrews and listed in the book of Exodus have lost their importance and were revoked by the Holy Apostles in the council of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15).

This book deals with the miracle of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and with God's covenant relationship with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Exodus can be subdivided into two main sections, historical and that of the giving of the Law. Preliminaries to the departure from Egypt (Ex. 1:1-4:28), where the providential acts of the Lord in the life of Moses, chosen by God for the deliverance of His people are listed, followed by the circumstances leading up to the Exodus, including the ten plagues of Egypt and the celebrating of the first Passover (4:29-12:39). The deliverance from Egypt and the subsequent journey to Sinai (chapters 12-18) precede the giving of the Law of God through Moses, where chapter 19 describes the circumstances of the giving of the Law, and consecutive chapters contain the codex of the moral and civil laws, sealed by Hebrews entering into covenant with God (chapters 20-24). Next follow the laws relat-

ed to church services and priesthood (chapters 25-31), transgression of the Law in intervals of idolatry (chapters 32-33). A renewal of the covenant relationship (chapter 34) is followed by narratives describing the construction of the tabernacle and implementation of the Lord's directions by Moses (chapters 35-40).

It is instructive to put the accounts of Exodus in a historical perspective. Joseph was sold to Egypt by his brothers during the reign of the Hyksos, a Semitic tribe known as shepherd kings (some 2000 years BC). At that time Egypt was highly prosperous and mighty. The Pharaoh was most likely Amenemhet IV. He elevated Joseph in rank when he saved the Egyptians from famine and bestowed great blessings on him and his family. However, the ethnic Egyptian nobles united in Thebes and slowly drove out the Hyksos. Afterward there entered the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty of the Pharaoh Amasis 1<sup>st</sup> (Ahmose I) The new rulers changed their relations toward the Jews. There began persecutions which turned to oppressive slavery. The new Pharaohs while working the Jews as slaves and forcing them to build cities, were at the same time concerned that the Jews would unite with outlying nomadic tribes and seize dominion in Egypt. The exodus of Jews from Egypt falls sometime in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century BC. At that time the Pharaoh most probably was Thutmose I. The book First Kings 6:1 states that Solomon began building the temple "*in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt.*" Solomon is thought to have begun construction about 960 BC, a fact that also places the time of Exodus to the midst of the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC.

### Leviticus.

The Greek name of this book indicates that it contains the codex of rules, related to the service of the descendants of Levi (one of Jacob's sons) in the Old Testament temple. These priests were responsible for teaching the Law to the people, conducting sacrificial worship in the tabernacle according to the directions given by God, and ordering the life of the community. Because Israel was meant to live as a holy people (Ex. 19:6), Leviticus contained regulations for both the spiritual and material aspects of life. These rules can be divided into the following sections: sacrificial laws (Leviticus 1-7); laws governing ordination (Leviticus 8-10); laws about impurities (Leviticus 11-16); laws about holiness (Leviticus 17-26); and rules governing vows (Leviticus 27).

All this material was divinely revealed to the nation of Israel directly from God. No part of it has been adopted from any other nation. The Year of Jubilee legislation (Lev. 25:8-17) is unique in the Near East. Leviticus continues the narrative of Exodus, but it emphasizes the way in which God is to be worshipped and the manner in which His people are to live. Holiness must govern the community (Lev. 11:44); and this must be reflected by everyone, not just the priesthood.

### Numbers.

This book follows the lead given by Leviticus in emphasizing the holiness of Israel. All the various elements that make up the book bear upon this important concept. The book can be divided into three broad sections: the departure from Sinai (1:1-10:11); the journey to Kadesh (10:11-20:21) and the journey from Kadesh to Moab (20:22-36:13). The holiness of the tabernacle is central, as is the important place that the Levites occupied (8:5-26) in relation to the Aaronic priesthood. The description of the wilderness wanderings shows how quickly divine blessing could turn to severe judgment whenever God's commandments were broken.

This book contains a lot of laws, in part new, in part the same as already listed in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. These laws have lost their meaning in the New Testament times. As

Apostle Paul wrote to Hebrews, the Old Testament sacrifices were the **prototype** for the redemptive sacrifice of our Lord and Savior at Calvary. The prophet Isaia wrote about this with much greater emphasis in the 54th chapter of his book. The priestly dresses, altars, candlestick and other ordinances of the OT temple worship were made by Moses after the examples directly revealed by God on Mt. Sinai, and are still used in modified form, in our church services.

The disobedience and idolatry of the Israelites is a sad theme in Numbers. Once even Moses was not totally obedient to God. Although he brought Israel to Moab and within sight of the Promised Land, he was not privileged to lead the nation across the Jordan River. The book ends with the nation looking forward to the settlement of Canaan.

### Deuteronomy.

The Greek name for this book indicates that it summarizes the laws given earlier, sometimes providing more details. This book may be described as a covenant-renewal document that begins with a review of Israel's departure from Sinai (1:1-4:40); describes the religious foundation of the nation (4:44-26:19), reestablishes the covenant (chapters 27-30), and narrates the final days of Moses (chapters 31-34). In Deuteronomy Moses looks back upon God's blessing and provision while looking forward to the time when Israel will occupy the Promised Land.

The language of the book is noble oratory that glorifies the righteous and faithful God of Sinai and encourages the response of His people in obedience and faithfulness. The God revealed in Moses' addresses is not only the Judge of all the earth, but also the **loving Father** of mankind. Israel is reminded that the privileges of covenant relationship with Him also carry responsibilities. Moses predicts a dark future for the nation if it does not follow the covenant principles and remain faithful to God.

In conclusion of this brief overview it should be stressed that the Law contained in the Pentateuch constitutes a very unique judicial code --- much more noble than any other ancient judicial code. Of course some similarities can be found between the Ten commandments and laws of ancient nations that inhabited the northwestern part of Mesopotamia (well-known laws of the Sumerian king Ur-Nammu (2050 BC), the Amorite king Bilalam, the Sumer-Akkadian ruler Lir-it-Ishtar, the Babylonian king Hammurabi (1800 BC), and the Assyrian and Hittite laws composed around 1500 B.C.). These similarities stem from the fact that ultimately the moral law is ingrained by God into the human soul, so that all people, even when they don't know anything about God or His revelation, have a good feeling of what is right and what is wrong. This is so much so, that if our nature was not corrupted by primordial sin, it is most likely that just the voice of conscience would be sufficient to regulate our personal and social life.

However, whatever similarities of detail there might have been with other ancient codes, the Law of Moses has nothing in common with them in its religious values. Indeed, the central message is the monotheism which the Hebrew people were the first to expound — the worship of one single, invisible and just God, and the rejection of every form of idolatry which was so prevailing among pagans. The first and most important of the Ten commandments was: *“You shall have no other gods before me”* (Exod. 20:3).

Because at the time of Moses the tribes of Israel were forming into a nation the Mosaic Code goes far beyond religious observance. It deals with political, social and family affairs in a progressive spirit well in advance of its period. For example: there must be no arbitrary exercise of power; even a king must fear God and obey the law, *“that his heart may not be lifted up*

*above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left” (Deut. 17:20).*

Justice must be impartially administered, for rich and poor alike: *“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God gives you, according to your tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality; and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise, and subverts the cause of the righteous” (Deut. 16:18-19).*

Special protection is extended to the needy and the under-privileged, to fugitive slaves, debtors, hired servants, orphans, widows and foreigners. Women must be respected, and a slander against the chastity of a wife is a crime. Even the ox may not be muzzled while it is treading the grain on the threshing floor, and the mother-bird must be spared if eggs are collected from her nest. There must be fair practices in commerce — *“a full and just weight you shall have, a full and just measure you shall have” (Deut. 25:15).* Men shall be exempted from military service if they have recently built a house, planted a vineyard or betrothed a wife, or are faint-hearted. Always, in his dealings with others, the Hebrew must say to himself: *“Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:19).*

For century after century, the Jewish rabbis and sages discussed and refined the Laws of Moses. Their commentaries were gathered together in the huge tomes of the Talmud, which a learned man might study all his life without exhausting them. In this fashion was shaped the distinctive outlook and way of life which the Jewish people carried with them to all the countries of their dispersion. Through Christianity, the Law of Moses profoundly influenced the civilization of the Western world.

**A note regarding the authorship of the Pentateuch.** Jesus Christ names Moses as the author of Pentateuch: *“If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me” (John 5:46, Mark 12:26; John 7:23).* The Pentateuch itself depicts Moses as having written extensively (see Ex. 17:14, 24:4, 34:27, Num. 33:2, Deut. 31:24). Acts 7:22 tells us that *“Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.”* In the notes accompanying the text we observe a number of loan-words from Egyptian that are found in Genesis, a fact which suggests that the original author had his roots in Egypt, as did Moses. Deuteronomy identifies the book’s content with Moses: *“These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel” (1:1).* *“Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests” (31:9)* may well refer to his writing of the entire book as well. “Moses” name appears nearly forty times in the volume, and the book clearly reflects Moses’ personality. The first person pronoun used freely throughout its pages further supports Mosaic authorship. Both Jewish and Samaritan tradition are unanimous in identifying Moses as the author. In the post-exilic writings the Law, or Torah, was often attributed directly to Moses (Neh. 8:1; 2 Chr. 25:4; 35:12). Also Apostles Peter and Stephen Christ acknowledges Moses as the author of the book’s content (Matt. 19:7; Mark 10:3-4; Acts 3:22; 7:37).

## Messianic prophecies in the Pentateuch.

**T**he Pentateuch contains several important Messianic prophecies: About the “Seed of the woman,” Who will crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15); about the descendant of Abraham, in Whom all the nations will be blessed (Gen. 22:16-18); about the coming of Messiah in times, when the tribe of Judas will fall from power (Gen. 49:10); on the Messiah, in the image of the Rising Star (Num. 24:17); and about Messiah, as the greatest Prophet (Deut. 18:15-19).

Jesus Christ, scolding the unbelieving Jews, remind them of these prophecies: *“For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me” (John: 5:46).* Here these prophecies are listed together with references of their fulfillment.



## Old Testament's Prophecy

### The Messiah shall be born of a Woman

**Genesis 3:15** And I [the Lord] will put enmity between thee [Devil] and the Woman, and between thy seed and her seed; He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Explanation: In this first prophecy about the Messiah the Lord promises that the Descendant of the Woman (Virgin Mary) will crush the Devil, although in doing so He will suffer physically. The prophecy was fulfilled when He died on the Cross.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Genesis 3:15 (ancient rabbinic literature): "And it shall be that when the sons of the woman study the Torah [the books of Moses] diligently and obey its injunctions, they will direct themselves to smite you [the serpent] on the head and slay you; but when the sons of the woman forsake the commandments of the Torah and do not obey its injunctions, you will direct yourself to bite them on the heel and afflict them. However, there will be a remedy for the sons of the woman, but for you, serpent, there will be no remedy. They shall make peace with one another in the end, in the very end of days, in the days of the King Messiah."

Son of Abraham

**Genesis 22:18** [The Angel to Abraham:] And in thy Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

### The Scepter from Juda

**Genesis 49:10** The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from his loins, until Shiloh comes [He, to Whom it is determined to come]; and He is the expectation of nations. [Septuagint translation]

Explanation: The Jews always had rulers from their own tribe. King Herod, being an Idumean, was the first ruler of foreign descent. Precisely during his reign the Messiah was born, fulfilling the prophecy. "Shiloh" most probably means "Conciliator." Jesus reconciled us with God.

### He Shall be a prophet

**Deuteronomy 18:18-19** [God says to Moses:] I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words

## New Testament's fulfillment

**Galatians 4:4** But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.

**1 John 3:8** For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

**Matthew 8:29** [Seeing Jesus, the demons] cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

**Luke 10:18-19** [Jesus to His disciples:] I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Also Romans 16:20.

**Revelation 12:11** And they [the faithful] overcame him [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

**Galatians 3:16** Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one: And to thy Seed, which is Christ.

**Romans 9:5** Of whom [Jews] as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever.

**Hebrews 7:14** For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.

**John 18:31** Then said Pilate unto them [the Jewish authorities, accusing Jesus], Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death. [Here the Jewish authorities recognized that they lost the power to administer the death penalty].

**Matthew 21:11** And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

**Luke 7:16** And there came a fear on all, and



in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And whatever man shall not hearken unto My words which that Prophet shall speak in My name, I will take vengeance on him.

Explanation: The postscript, made at the end of the book of Deuteronomy more than 450 years B.C., states that among the many prophets which were sent to the Jews not one was as great and important as Moses. The Jews always expected to see in the coming Messiah their greatest prophet and lawgiver.

Ralbag (Gersonides, ancient rabbinic literature) comments on the above text: "A prophet from the midst of thee. In fact the Messiah is such a Prophet..."

### **The Star out of Jacob and the light of the world**

**Numbers 24:17** I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. [i.e. He will destroy all the enemies of God]

they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.

**John 7:40** Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, of a truth this is the Prophet.

**Acts 3:20-23** [Deacon Stephen to the Sanhedrim:] God shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

**Matthew 2:1-2** When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

**Revelation 22:16:** I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

**John 8:12** Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

**Acts 13:47-48** For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

Explanation: Jesus is called the "Star" because He guides all to their salvation.

## The Prophet Moses.

**M**oses is the most majestic figures in the Old Testament. His role is so central that the Pentateuch is called the Five Books of Moses, and the code of religious laws, the Law of Moses. No one else in the Old Testament had such close relationship with God as he, because “*The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*” (Exod. 33:11). This special place of Moses among the Forefathers is also prominent in the New Testament, for example in the account of Transfiguration of Christ.

The story of Moses’s life opens in Egypt. Patriarch Jacob and his family had settled as a pastoral clan in the land of Goshen in the northeast corner of the Nile delta. Here their descendants lived and prospered for four centuries, till “*there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph*” (Exod. 1:8. This was possibly the Pharaoh Thutmose I who ruled in the middle of the 15 century BC (some say that he was Pharaoh Rameses II, in the 13th century BC — the greatest builder in Egyptian history). The Pharaoh decided that the Children of Israel had become too numerous and strong. He turned them into slave laborers, and put them to work under Egyptian taskmasters on the construction of two treasure cities, Pithom and Rameses, “*And made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field*” (Exod. 1:14). When this did not reduce their numbers, Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill every male infant at birth. The midwives evaded this decree on the pretext that “*the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and are delivered before the midwife comes to them*” (Exod. 1:19). The frustrated ruler then charged his people to throw the male babies into the river, and drown them.

Amram and Jochebed, the parents of Moses, were of the priestly house of Levi. When the child was born, his mother kept him hidden for three months. She then enclosed him in a basket woven of rushes and sealed with pitch, and concealed him among the reeds at the river's edge.

Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe at this spot and when she saw the basket she sent a maid to fetch it. On opening it, the baby started crying and the princess felt pity for it, realizing that it was one of the Hebrew children her father had ordered killed. Moses's elder sister Miriam had been posted a little distance away to watch. She approached the princess and offered to find a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child. This was agreed, and she ran off to fetch Moses's mother. When he was older, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and gave him the name of Moses, “*Because I drew him out of the water*” (Exod. 2:10. The Hebrew form, Moshe, means “to draw out”).

The boy grew up at the royal court but remained aware of his Hebrew origin. One day Moses, now a grown man, went off alone to find out what was happening to his kinsmen. He saw an Egyptian overseer flogging an Israelite slave. Thinking himself unobserved, Moses slew the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand. Next day he intervened in a fight between two Israelites and was alarmed when one of them said pointedly: “*Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?*” (Exod. 2:14). Report of his deed reached Pharaoh, and he had to flee for his life eastward into the Sinai desert.

Pausing to rest at a well, Moses assisted some young women to water their flocks. When they told their father Jethro (or Reuel, Iothoros) about the helpful stranger at the well, he invited Moses to eat with them. Jethro was the priest of a tribe of desert nomads from Midia. Moses remained with him and married one of his seven daughters, Zipporah. She bore him a son whom he called Gershom, since Moses was a stranger (Heb. *ger*) in a strange land.

Moving deep into the desert in search of pasture for his father-in-law's flocks, Moses came to the mountain of Horeb (or Sinai). He turned aside to examine a strange sight: a bush that was

burning without being consumed. God's voice came out of the bush commanding him to halt and remove his shoes, as he was on holy ground. Moses was told that he had been chosen to lead his brethren out of their oppression and bring them to the Promised Land. Moses shrank from this task, saying: *“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”* (Exod. 3:11) To reassure him, the name of the Lord (“Jehovah”) was revealed to Moses, and he was given certain miraculous signs to impress Pharaoh and the Israelites: turning his staff into a snake, making his hand white with leprosy and turning water into blood. Still reluctant, Moses pointed out that *“I am slow of speech and of tongue”* (Exod. 4:10). The Lord became impatient with him, and replied that his brother Aaron could be his spokesman.

Moses took leave of Jethro and set out with his wife, his eldest son Gershom and his newly-born second son Eliezer.

### Let My People Go.

Aaron came to meet Moses and was told what the Lord required of them. They called together the Israelite elders, and in Moses's presence Aaron conveyed the Lord's message and performed the magic signs. The people were convinced that God was about to liberate them and sank down in worship.

Moses and Aaron then gained an audience with the reigning Pharaoh (probably the successor of the ruler from whom Moses had fled). In the name of the God of Israel they requested him to *“Let my people go”* (Exod. 5:1). They did not dare suggest that the Israelites would leave the country for good. Instead, they claimed that sacrifices had to be made to their God at a place three days' journey into the wilderness.

Pharaoh bluntly rejected the request. He charged the Israelites with laziness, and issued instructions that they should no longer be supplied with straw for making bricks. They would have to seek their own straw, without lowering their daily output. The people reproached Moses for having added to their hardships, and Moses complained to the Lord that his mission had only done harm. *“For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he has done evil to this people, and Thou hast not delivered thy people at all”* (Exod. 5:23). The Lord declared that he had hardened Pharaoh's heart in order that *“the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them”* (Exod. 7:5).

The whole of Egypt has experienced a series of plagues, except for the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived. As each plague became intolerable Pharaoh agreed to let Moses's people go, but changed his mind when the affliction stopped.

First, Aaron and Moses smote the water of the Nile with the rod and it turned to blood before the eyes of Pharaoh and his court. *“And the fish in the Nile died and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt”* (Exod. 7:21).

When Pharaoh refused to give way, frogs came swarming out of the river and spread everywhere, as Moses had warned Pharaoh they would, crawling *“into your house, and into your bed-chamber and on your bed, and into the house of your servants and of your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls”* (Exod. 8:3).

The third plague was one of lice which sprang from the dust and infected man and beast alike. There followed swarms of flies; cattle disease; an epidemic of boils; a fierce hailstorm that smashed the trees and flattened the crops; vast clouds of locusts that devoured all growing things; and three days of pitch darkness.

The tenth calamity was the most dreadful of all — the slaying of the first-born. The Lord commanded Moses and Aaron that on the fourteenth day of the month, at dusk, each Israelite

family should slaughter a lamb or kid and roast its flesh for a sacrificial meal. *“In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover”* (Exod. 12:11) Blood from the slaughtered animal was to be daubed on the lintel and door posts so that the Lord would recognize and pass over family, and even among the domestic animals. There was grief and panic throughout the country. That same night Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and begged them to leave at once with their people, together with all their herds, flocks and possessions. The Egyptians handed over to them jewels and other valuables to speed their departure.

They set out at once from the city of Rameses that their forced labor had helped to build. In fulfillment of an ancient promise, the remains of Joseph were carried with them for burial in Canaan. *“Four hundred and thirty years,”* says the Bible (Exod. 12:40), had passed since their ancestor Jacob had first come to live in Egypt. Forty years of wandering lay ahead of them before they would reach their journey's end. Moses was at this time eighty years old and his brother Aaron eighty-three.

Each year Jews commemorate the Exodus in the seven-day spring festival of Passover, as enjoined in Exod. 12. They eat “matzoth” (flat cakes of unleavened bread) to recall the haste with which their ancestors departed. At the “Seder” or ceremonial meal, bitter herbs are the symbol of the bondage in Egypt, and a roasted shank-bone represents the paschal lamb eaten that fateful night.

The great highway from Egypt to Canaan and beyond lay along the Mediterranean coast of the Sinai desert. From the edge of the Nile delta to Gaza it was but a week's march for armies or trading caravans. But that direct and well-traveled route was the most dangerous for the Israelites; and the coastal plain of Canaan to which it led was held by hostile inhabitants. A mob of runaway slaves would not have been able to fight its way through to the Promised Land. So Moses turned away from the coastal road *“lest the people repent when they see war, and return to Egypt”* (Exod. 13:17). Instead, they headed southeast, towards the open desert.

The first halt was at Succoth, thirty-two miles from the city of Rameses, and the next at Etham on the edge of the desert. They were trying to move as fast as they could, fearing that Pharaoh would pursue them. *“And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and night”* (Exod. 13:21).

Their haste was warranted. Pharaoh's courtiers said to him, *“What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?”* (Exod. 14:5) He set out in pursuit with a mobile force that included six hundred chariots. When the Israelites saw them coming, they trembled with fear and cried out to Moses, *“Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?”* (Exod. 14:11) They were at this time at the edge of the Reed Sea (incorrectly translated into English as the “Red Sea”). Nothing but a miracle could save them. At the Lord's behest, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and a strong east wind pushed the water aside, so that the Children of Israel were able to cross dry-shod to the other side. Dashing after them, Pharaoh's chariots were engulfed for *“the waters returned”* (Exod. 14:28), and men and horses were drowned. (This may have happened in the area of the Bitter Lakes, through which the Suez Canal now passes.). When the Israelites *“saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore”* (Exod. 14:31), they sang a song of thankfulness to the Lord, while Moses's sister Miriam played on a timbre (tambourine) and led the women in dance.

The elation of their new-found freedom was short-lived. They now entered the wilderness of Shur in the Sinai peninsula — a wasteland of sand and gravel, intersected with limestone ridges and dry watercourses, in the beds of which a little sparse scrub could be found for the flocks. The sun scorched them by day and the cold was sharp at night.

The chief problem was water. After trekking for three days, they reached a spring of brackish water at Marah (which means “bitter”). Moses threw a certain bush into the water which made it drinkable. A day's march further on they were able to camp in the oasis of Elim, “*where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees*” (Exod. 15:27). Soon they ran out of food and railed at Moses and Aaron for taking them away from the “flesh pots” (Exod. 16:3) of Egypt. The Lord would come to the rescue, Moses promised, and would provide “*in the evening flesh to eat and in the morning bread to the full*” (Exod. 16:8). Flocks of migrating quails sank down to rest among the scrub at night and could easily be snared (as the desert Arabs do today).

In the early morning, when the dew vanished, the ground was strewn with manna, and “*it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey*” (Exod. 16:31). Moses told them the manna was bread from the Lord. They were to gather and prepare just enough to satisfy their hunger, for what was not eaten would go bad in the heat of the day. On the sixth day a double portion could be gathered, and would remain fresh over the Sabbath. (It has been suggested that the manna may have been the resin-like substance that is exuded by the tamarisk trees in the desert, and drops on the ground when dry.)

The Israelites moved deeper into the southern part of the Sinai desert and came to Rephidim. Once more they were without water, and complained loudly. Moses was told by the Lord to gather the elders together and in their presence smite a rock. He did so and fresh water gushed out. Moses called the place “Massah and Meribah” (meaning “testing and contention,” Exod. 17:7).

They now faced a human threat, being attacked by a party of Amalekites, fierce desert raiders. The Israelites were not yet organized or trained to fight. Moses sent for Joshua the son of Nun, a young Ephraimite, and told him to select and lead a group of Israelite defenders. Moses himself climbed to the top of a hill together with Aaron and Hur (traditionally Moses's brother-in-law); and from here they witnessed the battle. While Moses held up his hands with the sacred rod, the Israelites gained, but they were pushed back when his arms dropped from weariness. His two companions seated him on a stone and, standing on either side of him, held his arms raised in the air until nightfall, when the battle was won and the Amalekites routed. Moses built an altar to the Lord.

In the third month after leaving Egypt, the Israelites reached the wild and rugged terrain of the wilderness of Sinai. In its center a cluster of gaunt granite peaks of a dark-red color rose to a height of eight thousand feet, with deep canyons around them. The Israelites camped on the open ground before a peak called Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb. It was here that Moses had heard the voice of the Lord from the burning bush many years before. Jethro now came to see Moses, bringing Zipporah and their two sons, who had been on a visit to her family. Moses welcomed the old man warmly, and they sat for a long time in the tent talking about all the wondrous things that had happened since Moses had gone back to Egypt. The Midianite priest exclaimed: “*Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods*” (Exod. 18:11). Jethro offered a sacrifice on the Hebrew altar and Moses invited the elders to a feast in his honor.

Jethro was present next day while Moses gave judgment in the disputes and claims brought before him. In the evening Jethro offered his son-in-law some sage advice. It was too burdensome for Moses to deal personally with every trivial matter, while scores of people stood around awaiting their turn. Why should Moses not delegate authority to able men, and put each in charge of a fixed number of persons? Moses agreed, and appointed “*rulers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses*” (Exod. 18:25-26). Moses charged them to “*judge righteously between a man and his brother or the alien that is with him. You shall not be partial in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike; you shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgment is God's*”



(Deut. 1:16-17). Having instigated this system of administration, Jethro took his leave and returned to his own land.

### The Ten Commandments.

It was timely for Moses to be relieved of routine duties, for the Lord was about to call on him to fulfill a loftier purpose. The stage was set for one of the most awesome moments in human history: the handing down of the Law on Mount Sinai.

God called Moses up to the mountain and instructed him to tell the Children of Israel that if they would keep his covenant “*you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation*” (Exod. 19:6). They were ordered to wash and purify themselves for two days, and on the third day they gathered before the mountain that was covered with a thick cloud. Out of it came thunder, lightning and the loud blasts of a trumpet. “*And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly*” (Exod. 19:18). Then the voice of God rolled forth, solemnly pronouncing the Ten Commandments:

- 1. I am the Lord your God ... thou shall have no other gods before Me.**
- 2. Thou shall not make for thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shall not bow down to them, nor serve them.**
- 3. Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.**
- 4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days thou shall labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God.**
- 5. Honor thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee, and that thy days may be long upon the earth.**
- 6. Thou shall not kill.**
- 7. Thou shall not commit adultery.**
- 8. Thou shall not steal.**
- 9. Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.**
- 10. Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife; thou shall not covet thy neighbor's house, nor his field ... nor anything that is thy neighbor's.** (Exod. 20:2-17).

See in the appendix a commentary on the Second Commandment. Other Commandments are covered in our booklet “The Ten Commandments.”

A number of other laws were then made known to Moses. He built a stone altar with twelve pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel, and instructed young men to sacrifice oxen on it. Moses read out “*the book of the covenant*” (Exod. 24:7) and sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices on the people as “*the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words*” (Exod. 24:8).

He then left Aaron and Hur in charge of the encampment and disappeared into the cloud that still covered the mountain. There he remained for forty days and forty nights, communing with the Lord. At the end of that time God gave him “*two tables of the testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God*” (Exod. 31:18).

Down in the camp, the Israelites had lost faith when Moses failed to reappear. They came in a body to Aaron and said, “*Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him*” (Exod. 32:1). Aaron felt obliged to appease them. He asked for all the gold earrings worn by the



men and women, melted them down, and molded a golden calf. The people made burnt-offerings to it, and they sang, feasted and danced naked around it.

On the mountain the Lord told Moses what his “*stiff-necked people*” (Exod. 32:9) were doing, and threatened to destroy them. Moses pleaded for them, and the Lord relented. But when Moses came down and saw the spectacle with his own eyes, he was seized with rage and dashed the two stone tablets to the ground, breaking them. Moses threw the golden calf into the fire, ground it up, mixed it with water and made the Israelites swallow it. He upbraided Aaron, who tried to defend himself, saying, “*you know the people, that they are set on evil*” (Exod. 32:22). Moses felt a drastic purge was needed. He rallied round him the men from the priestly tribe of Levi (to which he and Aaron belonged) and ordered them to put to the sword a large number of the idol-worshippers.

This painful experience left Moses with a sense of failure, and he asked the Lord to relieve him of the leadership. The reply was that the journey to the Promised Land should continue as before. Moses again ascended the sacred mountain, carrying two stone tablets he had hewed to replace those smashed. Once more he stayed there forty days and nights without food or water. When he returned with “*the words of the covenant, the ten commandments*” (Exod. 34:28) engraved on the tablets for the second time, Aaron and the Israelites observed that his face shone with such light that “*they were afraid to come near him*” (Exod. 34:30).

The Lord had given Moses precise instructions for the construction of an Ark of acacia wood covered with gold, and a tabernacle with an open-air altar. They were to form a portable temple for the Israelites' wandering life.

The Ark containing the tablets of the Law was placed in the Tabernacle, which was consecrated by Moses in the presence of all the people. As long as the pillar of cloud or of fire stood still over the Tabernacle, it was a sign that the Israelites should remain at that spot until the pillar moved forward again.

### **From Sinai to Kadesh.**

In the second month of the second year the Children of Israel moved northward from Mount Sinai towards the wilderness of Paran, in the central plateau of the Sinai peninsula. Soon trouble broke out again, this time over the monotonous diet of manna. As refugees are apt to do, they became nostalgic for the land they had fled. Tearfully they asked, “*O that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic*” (Num. 11:4-5).

Moses felt weary of leading the discontented community he had brought out of slavery. He said to the Lord: “*I am not able to carry all this people along, the burden is too heavy for me. If thou will deal thus with me, kill me at once*” (Num. 11:14-15) At this cry of distress, the Lord saw that Moses needed help in carrying the burden. He had Moses summon seventy elders to the Tabernacle, and inspired them, so that they would serve as a council to share responsibility with him. As for the people's demand for flesh, the Lord taught them a lesson. Huge flocks of quail were blown inland from the sea and piled up all round the camp. For two days the Israelites gorged themselves on the meat of the birds until they fell violently ill and a number of them died.

At their next camping place Aaron and Miriam started speaking against Moses, of whom they had become jealous. The Lord was angry at this attack, and Miriam was stricken with leprosy. Moses prayed that she be forgiven, and she recovered after seven days of isolation in the desert outside the camp. Oddly enough Aaron was not punished — perhaps because of his priestly role.

The Israelites resumed their journey northward, and came to rest at Kadesh-barnea, a green and well-watered oasis some fifty miles south of Beersheba. They were now nearing the southern rim of Canaan, but it was for them unknown country. Moses decided to send into it a scouting party of twelve picked men, one from each tribe to “*see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many*” (Num. 13:18) — also, whether the inhabitants lived in fortified towns or in tents, and whether the soil was fertile.

The spies crossed the Negev, passed Arad on the plateau above the Dead Sea, and traveled through the central hill country of Canaan. The party reached Cadet safely after a forty-day trip and reported that Canaan was truly a land flowing with milk and honey. Nevertheless “*the people who dwell in the land are strong and the cities are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there*” (Num. 13:28. Anak is Hebrew for “giant”). They also reported on the Amalekites who dwelt in the arid south of Canaan, and the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites and other peoples in the settled areas further north. As Moses had requested, they brought back specimens of the fruit they had seen: figs, pomegranates and a bunch of grapes so large that it had to be carried on a pole slung between two men. They had picked it near Hebron at the brook of Eshcol, a name which means “grape cluster.”

One of the scouts, Caleb of the tribe of Judah, proposed that in spite of the dangers they should advance into the country without delay and trust the Lord to help them overcome resistance. He was supported only by Joshua from the tribe of Ephraim. The other ten were much more discouraging. They submitted “*an evil report of the land that devours its inhabitants; all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature... and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers*” (Num. 13:32-33). The gathering that listened to the report was cast into gloom. What was the good of bringing them to the Promised Land, they said, in order to be slain in it? It would be better to find a new leader who would take them back to Egypt. A wrathful Lord decreed that for their lack of belief in Him, they would stay wandering in the desert for forty years, till that generation had died out, except for Joshua and Caleb.

The Children of Israel now settled down for some decades to the life of nomad shepherds and cattle-herders roaming the wilderness of Zin, with their base at the oasis. “*So you remained at Kadesh many days*” (Deut. 1:46). During this period Moses developed the religious code and the rituals of worship. The stern discipline with which observance was enforced was illustrated by the case of the man who gathered sticks for firewood on the Sabbath and was ordered to be stoned to death.

The leadership of Moses and Aaron was challenged by a revolt — all the more serious because it started with their own tribe of Levi, which was dedicated to priestly duties. It was led by the Levite Korah the son of Izhar, together with two Reubenite brothers, Dathan and Abiram, and they were supported by two hundred and fifty respected men. Punishment was swift. The earth split open and swallowed up the three rebel leaders with their households. The two hundred and fifty supporters were consumed by fire from the Lord. Moses felt the need of some act to bolster the status of Aaron and the priests. He collected and placed in the Tabernacle a staff from each of the tribes, with the Levites represented by Aaron's own rod. When they were taken out and shown to the people next morning, it was seen that Aaron's staff had sprouted with blossoms and borne almonds. Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, died at Kadesh and was buried there.

### **Onward to Canaan.**

After nearly forty years had gone by, most of them spent at Kadesh, the time had come to resume the march towards the Promised Land. Unable to penetrate Canaan from the south, the

Israelites now set out on a lengthy detour in order to enter from the east, across the Jordan river. The route northward into Transjordan lay along the ancient caravan route known as the King's Highway. Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, to say, "*Now let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field or vineyard, neither will we drink water from a well; we will go along the King's Highway, we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left, until we have passed through your territory*" (Num. 20:17). The king refused, and Moses thought it prudent to bypass Edom from the west, traveling up the great rift of Wadi Araba towards the Dead Sea. On the way, Aaron died on top of Mount Hor where he had been taken by Moses and by Aaron's son Eleazar, who succeeded him as high priest.

The Israelites now had a taste of the warfare that lay ahead. They were attacked and a number of them killed and captured by Canaanites from Arad, that lies on the plateau west of the Dead Sea. Further on, they passed through a region infested with venomous snakes and some of them were bitten. Moses stuck a brass serpent on a pole, and looking at it served as a magic cure for snake bite.

From the southern end of the Dead Sea, they turned eastward into the mountains, through the precipitous valley of Zered that divided Edom from Moab. They emerged on the plateau and skirted round Moab to the deep gorge of the river Arnon that entered the Dead Sea from the east.

The country north of the Arnon had recently been conquered by the Amorites under King Sihon. He also refused the Israelites passage and attacked them. He was defeated and his capital Heshbon occupied. The advance continued northward into the fertile land of Gilead, up to the Yarmuk river. Og, the giant king of Bashan (the Golan Heights) gave them battle and was repulsed. Thus ended the first phase of the Israelite invasion.

The Israelites started to cohabit with Moabite women, and were drawn into the cult of the local deity, the Baal of Peor. The Lord smote them with a plague but was mollified by the act of an outraged priest called Phinehas, son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron. He seized a javelin, rushed into a tent where an Israelite was lying with a Midianite woman and with one blow trans-fixed them both.

The camel-riding Midianites in the region seem to have been involved in this Israelite immorality. An Israelite expedition was sent against them, with a thousand men from each tribe. They wiped out the Midianite encampments with religious zeal, sparing only the young girls. Moses ruled on the division of the captured livestock: half to the fighting men and half to the rest of the community, with special shares for the priesthood.

A census was taken and showed that none of the men of the Exodus was left alive, except for Joshua, Caleb and Moses himself. A new breed of Israelites had grown up as free men, hardened by the rigors of desert life and disciplined by the laws Moses had taught them. Out of the craven and unruly bondsmen that had emerged from Egypt, Moses had in forty years molded a small but stalwart nation, ready to meet its destiny in the Promised Land. He was not to share that destiny; his own task was nearly done.

### **The Death of Moses.**

In three farewell addresses, recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses recalled for the Israelites the story of their wandering; expanded their religious and legal code; and instructed them about their coming settlement in Canaan.

To a desert-weary people Moses painted a pleasant picture of the country they were about to enter: "*For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread*

*without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper” (Deut. 8:7-9).*

Moses composed a song of praise to God, whom he had served so humbly and faithfully, and gave his blessing to each of the tribes in turn.

Before he died, Moses was given a distant view of the Promised Land from “*Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho*” (Deut. 34:1). On a height jutting out from the great escarpment, Moses stood with his back to the Moab plateau, stretching away to the empty desert beyond the eastern horizon. Before him a tremendous panorama unfolded. Thousands of feet below glittered the Dead Sea, the lowest body of water on the earth's surface. Beyond it rose the dun-colored rampart of the Judean desert, with Jerusalem and Hebron and other Canaanite cities hidden behind its rim. To the right, the Jordan River looped snake-like through lush green banks. And the Lord said: “*I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there*” (Deut. 34:4).

After this single view Moses died and was buried by the Lord “*in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-Peor; but no man knows the place of his burial to this day*” (Deut. 34:6). At his death he was a hundred and twenty years old, but “*his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated*” (Deut. 34:7). For thirty days the Children of Israel wept and mourned for the great leader and teacher they had lost, “*And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face*” (Deut. 34:10).

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### **Addendum 1: The Days of Creation.**

“I believe in the One God, our Father, All-Encompassing, the Creator of the heavens and earth and all that is visible and invisible” — we confess in our everyday prayer at home and in church. Therefore, the universe to us is not only a subject of scientific knowledge but of faith as well. Regardless of the particular mysteries that the science uncovers in the realm of physics, chemistry, geology, cosmology, etc., the fundamental questions of regarding the universe remain unanswered: where did the laws of nature and the elements that form our universe come from? And what is the purpose of everything that surrounds us and of our own lives? Science is not only incapable of answering these worrisome questions; indeed, they lie beyond the grasp of science. The answer to these questions is found only in the God-given Bible.

In the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, the Prophet Moses reveals to us the story of God's creation of Earth and man. Until recently, science was unable to offer any convincing explanation of the origins of the world. Only in the 20th century, thanks to advances in astronomy, geology and paleontology, the history of the origins of the world has lent itself to scientific study. And what has science found? That the world originated in the precise order that Moses had recounted!

Though the purpose of Moses was not to give a detailed scientific explanation of the origins of the universe, his account preceded current scientific discoveries by several thousand years. His description was the first to evidence that the world is not eternal, but was created in time and developed in an evolutionary manner. The same conclusion — that the universe has not always existed — has been reached by contemporary astronomers, who have discovered that the universe is expanding like a balloon. Fifteen to twenty billion years ago, the entire universe was

condensed into a microscopic dot, which, having exploded, began to expand in all directions, creating in the process our world.

Moses divided God's creation of the world into seven periods, which he symbolically referred to as "days." During six days God created the world, and on the seventh, "rested from His labors." Moses doesn't say how long the days lasted: the seventh day, which has seen the entire development of the human race, has been continuing over a period of millennia. The figure "seven" is often used in the Bible with a symbolic, not literal meaning. It indicates fullness, completion.

*"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"* — with these words the Bible encompasses all that God created: our visible physical world as well as the invisible angelic world that lies beyond our powers of physical perception. The word "created" indicates that God made the world from nothing. This conclusion is also being reached by many scientists: the deeper nuclear physics probes into the basis of matter, the more obviously it sees its emptiness and immateriality. Apparently, even the "quarks" that comprise protons are not basic and hard particles. It seems that matter is some inexplicable form of energy.

Returning to the biblical description of the world, we see that in its general form it confirms what current scientific theory has to say on this issue. Skipping the particulars of the appearance of galaxies following the original "In the beginning," Moses' account focuses on the creation of our Earth and everything that inhabits it. On the first "day," "God said: let there be light." These words probably relate to the moment when the interstellar dust and gases that formed our solar system became so condensed under gravitational influences that a thermonuclear reaction (hydrogen becoming helium) took place, causing a great emission of light. In this way, the sun was formed. Light is the key factor in the appearance of life on earth.

The same gases and dust from which the sun formed also formed comets, meteorites, asteroids, protoplanets, etc. This whole circulating and rushing mass of gases, dust and rocks was called "water" by Moses. Mutual gravitational pulls caused it to form into planets. This is "the separation of the water that is below the earth from the water that is above it," which took place on the second day of creation. In this manner, the solar system, or Biblical "heavens," took its final form.

In the beginning, the Earth, along with the other planets, was red-hot. Evaporating water from the depths of the Earth enveloped it in a thick atmosphere. As the surface of the Earth cooled, water began to fall in the form of rain, creating oceans and continents. Then, thanks to water and light, plant life began to appear — this was the third "day" of creation.

The first green plants, water-borne microorganisms, and later huge land plants began to clear the atmosphere of carbon monoxide gases and produce oxygen. Up to this moment, if one were to look up from the Earth at the sky, he would see no more than the outlines of the sun, moon and stars, because the Earth was covered by a thick and opaque atmosphere, of approximately the same type as the planet Venus now has. This is why Moses places the appearance of the sun, moon and stars on the fourth "day," following the appearance of plant life. Ignorant of this fact, atheists and materialists of the beginning of our century often made light of the Bible's ordering of the appearance of the sun following plant life. According to the Bible, dispersed sunlight reached the Earth's surface from the first day of its existence, even though the contours of the sun were indiscernible.

The increase of oxygen in the atmosphere made possible the appearance of more complex life forms — fish and birds (on the fifth "day"), and later — mammals, and finally — human beings (on the sixth "day"). Scientific knowledge is in complete agreement with this order of evolution.



The Biblical account does not dwell on the details of the development of life on Earth that interest contemporary science. But it must be kept in mind that the purpose of the Biblical account is not to list details, but to expose the Original Cause of the Creation and the wisdom of its Author. Moses closes his story with the following words: “and God saw what He had made and it WAS GOOD!” In other words, the Creator had a specific goal in mind: that all should serve good and lead to good. Nature has retained the seal of goodness and continues to remind us not only of the wisdom, but of the blessedness of the Creator.

According to the Book of Genesis, last to be created was man. Current scientific thought also agrees that man appeared relatively recently, following the appearance of other living organisms. In the question of the appearance of man, the main difference between religion and science is in the area of methods and goals. Science attempts to detail the physical appearance of man — of the body, whereas the Bible speaks of man in his complete form, having, besides a body, a judicious soul in God’s image. The Bible also confirms that man was made from “earth,” i.e. out of the same elements as other creatures. This fact is important because it alludes to the close relationship between man and the animal kingdom. Yet at the same time, the Bible underlines man’s special position among the animals as blessed with “God’s breath” — an eternal soul. Thanks to his soul, created in God’s image, man is capable of discerning good from evil. This spiritual feeling causes him to seek God’s company, to follow the path of moral perfection. In the end, earthly pleasures alone cannot satisfy man’s spiritual thirst. These facts confirm the Bible’s statement that man is not merely the highest form of animal evolution, but a representative of two worlds: the physical and spiritual. Understanding this mystery helps man to find his place in the world, heed his calling to do good and become closer to God.

In concluding this brief sketch of God’s creation of the universe, it should be noted that both in this account as well as in the later story of the life of our ancestors in Eden there are symbols and allusions, the full meanings of which are beyond our powers of understanding. The purpose of the symbols is that they give the reader the opportunity to understand the main points that God wishes to open to us, without getting bogged down in complicated details: in this case the reasons for evil, sickness, death, etc.

Science continues to study the world around us. It uncovers new and interesting facts that help us to better understand the Bible. Yet often “we cannot see the forest for the trees”; for this reason the general principles are far more necessary to us than the details. The purpose of the Bible is to open to us the principles of existence, and for this reason its significance will remain eternal.

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## **Addendum 2: The Second Commandment and the use of icons.**

*(Adopted from an article of Fr. Victor Potapov)*

The Second Commandment defines his worship, warning against the worship of false, pagan gods: *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.*

Does the Second Commandment prohibit making the sacred images called icons? We have a distinguished answer by Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky: One of the outward forms of worship of God and the veneration of the saints is the use of sacred images and the respect shown to them. Among the various gifts of man that distinguish him from other creatures is the gift of art or of depictions in line and color. This is a noble and high gift, and it is worthy to be



used to glorify God. With all the pure and high means available to us, we must glorify God according to the call of the Psalmist: “*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name*” (Psalm 102:1). *All that is within me* refers to all the capabilities of the soul. And truly, the capability of art is a gift from God.

In the Bible we read:

“Of old under Moses, the Lord hath called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; and to devise skilled works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work. And He hath put in his heart that he may teach [others] . . . Them hath He filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer” (Exodus 35:30-35).

Skilled artists made sacred material objects first for the tabernacle of Moses and later for the Temple of Solomon. Although some were merely sacred adornments, others sacred material objects were revered as exceptional places of God's glory. For example, so great was the Ark of the Covenant that its very touch without special reverence could cause death (II Samuel): at the time of the transfer of the Ark under David, Uzzah was struck dead because he touched the Ark with his hand. Just as holy was the Cherubim of Glory over the Ark, in the midst of which God deigned to reveal Himself and to give His commands to Moses. “*There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two Cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel*” (Exodus 25:18-22). These were the *visible image of the Invisible God*, in the expression of Metropolitan Macarius.

The Old Testament Temple had images on the walls and curtains, but no depictions of the departed righteous ones, such we see in Christian Church. They did not appear because the righteous ones themselves were awaiting their deliverance, waiting to be brought up out of hell. Christ's descent into hell and His Resurrection made their delivery possible. According to the Apostle, *they without us should not be made perfect* (Hebrews 11:40). These righteous ones were glorified as saints only in the New Testament.

So Sacred Scripture strictly prohibits worship of idols, but it does not prohibit Christian icons. Idols are images of false gods, demons, or imaginary thing by worship of lifeless objects of wood, gold, or stone. The Sacred Scriptures strictly insist that we separate holy and unholy, *unclean and clean* (Leviticus 10:10). Whoever cannot see the difference between sacred images and idols blasphemes and defiles the icons. He commits a sacrilege condemned in Sacred Scripture; *Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?* (Romans 2:22).

Ecclesiastical archaeology has shown that the ancient Christians used sacred images in the catacombs and their other places of assembly for prayer, and then later in their churches. Certain Christian writers (such as those at the Council of Elvira, Spain, in 305) set themselves against statues and similar images, but they probably had contemporary pagan idol worship in mind. Their cautions and prohibitions also fit their historic conditions, when, for example, Christians needed to hide holy things from their often hostile pagan persecutors and non-Christian masses. From the start, the Christian missionary ideal had also been to draw people away from pagan idol-worship. Only later could the fullness of the forms for glorifying God and His saints in colors emerge in sacred images.

Records of the Seventh Ecumenical Council define expressed the Orthodox dogma of sacred icon veneration in the following words: “We therefore . . . define with all certitude and accuracy that just as the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross, so also the venerable and holy images . . . should be set forth in the holy churches of God for veneration . . . For by so much more frequently as they are seen in artistic representation (that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Theotokos, the angels and saints who are depicted in the icons), by so much more readily are men lifted up to the memory of their prototypes, and to a longing after them. And to these should be given due salutation and honorable reverence [Greek: *timitiki proskynisis*], not indeed that true worship of faith [Greek: *latreia*] which pertains alone to the Divine nature; but to these . . . incense and lights may be offered . . . For the honor which is paid to the image passes on to that which the image represents.” (*Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Erdmans, p. 550).

Orthodox canons say nothing about veneration of the statues in the religious art of the West in the middle ages and later. However, the virtually universal tradition of the Orthodox Church of both East and West and of the Eastern Church in later centuries has been to create two-dimensional depictions and bas-reliefs, but not to allow statues in the round. The reluctance seems to lie in the inevitably greater realism of three-dimensional images, which make them suitable for representing the things of this world (for example, statues of emperors), but not those of heaven, which neither our worldly thoughts nor our realism can capture. Two-dimensional icons, on the other hand, are *windows to heaven*.

### 3. The historical books of the Old Testament.

#### Brief overview of the historical books.

The historical books of the Old Testament cover the life of the Jewish people from the time they entered the Promised Land under Joshua the son of Nun (1451 BC) to the time of the Maccabees (150 BC). In particular, the books of Joshua and Judges cover the earliest period in the history of the Jewish people, when the Jewish tribes that populated the Promised Land had not yet been united into one state, but were separate from each other to a lesser or greater extent. The books of Kings and Chronicles cover the monarchical period in the history of the Jewish people that lasted about five hundred years. This period ended with the fall of the Kingdom of Judah and the beginning of the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Judith and Esther tell us of the events that followed the Babylonian captivity and of the restoration of Jerusalem. Finally, the books of the Maccabees cover the last period of the Old Testament history of the Jewish people, as they were fighting for independence several hundred years before Christ.

The political and spiritual development of the Jewish nation spanned many centuries and took place in several stages. God chose the Jewish people to bring salvation to all nations on earth through the Jews. It was in God’s plan that the Savior of the world, Christ, the first citizens of God’s Kingdom and preachers of the Christian Faith should come from among the Jewish people. The Old Testament prophets, being sent by God, spiritually prepared the ground in the Jewish nation for building God’s Kingdom among people. The path of spiritual development of the Jewish people was not smooth. There were times of spiritual growth and prosperity, as well as times of decreased interest to religion and even apostasy.

Of course, not everything that is found in the sacred books has equal significance for us. When reading the Old Testament history, one should remember that it covers **pre-Christian** era. The noble Christian principles of love for one's enemies, complete forgiveness and self-control were unknown to people in that ancient time before the coming of grace. The Jews lived surrounded by antagonistic Gentile nations — Canaanites, Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites, Philistines, and later — Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians and others whose superstitious beliefs and cruel Gentile customs pulled the Jews down a path of spiritual decline. There was no one from whom to learn good. These Gentiles used each and every opportunity to cruelly enslave and oppress the Jews. Throughout its history, the Jewish people constantly struggled to preserve their faith pure and to physically survive. To be correctly understood, this history must be read in the context of morals and customs of the time. Throughout the historical books of the Bible, of value are truthfulness and objectivity of this Sacred Book. The Bible does not idealize people or events, but sternly and impartially evaluates everything, including great national heroes, thus helping the reader to learn from both good and bad examples. It tells us what to do, and what to avoid.

Despite adverse external circumstances, many sons of the Jewish people achieved great spiritual heights and have left examples worthy of imitation by people of all ages. Even though the Jews often sinned no less than their Gentile neighbors, yet they were **able to sincerely repent**. One may assume that it was for this quality that they were chosen by God. As the Gospels say, **they were given much, and therefore much was often required of them**.

Another value of the historical books of the Bible is their clear message that it is not blind accident, but God that directs and decides destiny of each individual and every nation. The Bible provides excellent examples of God's Providence by showing how He exalts and rewards the righteous for their virtue, has mercy on repentant sinners, while at the same time punishing stubborn sinners as their righteous Judge. In Biblical description of individual lives and events, the reader is able to see qualities of the Great God Whose mercy is endless, Whose wisdom is incomprehensible, Whose power is infinite, and Whose righteous judgment is inescapable. No secular book about history is able to convey such spiritual perspective on events. Only the Bible can do this!

## Significance of the Prophets.

**B**efore we discuss historical events described in the Bible, we should briefly comment on the significance of prophets in the life of the Jewish nation. Even though the Law of Moses did command priests to teach godliness to the people, yet this commandment was rarely followed in practice. Most priests limited their activities to offering sacrifices in the temple and cared little about educating the people. For this reason the people remained in ignorance of spiritual things. Idolatry practiced by the Gentile neighbors and their cruel and immoral customs were easily borrowed by the Jews and led to apostasy from faith in God. With rare exceptions, Jewish kings and other leaders were poor role models for the people. In order to instruct the people in the true faith, God frequently sent them His prophets. Prophets had an enormous impact on the faith of the nation and quite often saved it from spiritual disaster.

While priesthood among the Jews was inherited, yet it was God who called each prophet to the ministry individually. Prophets came from all social groups. Some of them were peasants or shepherds and were almost illiterate, while others came from royal families and were highly educated. The main task of the prophets was to point to failures of the people in matters of religion

and morality and to restore godliness in the nation. While teaching people about the faith, the prophets frequently predicted the future events in the life of the nation, as well as the coming of the Savior of mankind, Messiah, and the end of the world. Often a prophet would gather quite a few followers and disciples who would stay around him for a long time. These would form brotherhoods or prophetic schools, helping prophets in their spiritual labors. Prophetic brotherhoods became especially prominent during the time of the prophet Samuel who gave them a strong organizational structure and made them a source of spiritual and moral revival of the nation. Thus the prophets were spiritual leaders (elders) of their brotherhoods, members of which lived in well organized communities where they studied the Bible, prayed to God, copied books and rewrote chronicles which would later become a source of the historical books of the Bible. Sometimes the more gifted of the disciples in these communities were called by God to prophetic ministry, thus continuing the cause of their prophet and teacher.

Out of prophetic communities came people who fearlessly opposed idolatry and uncompromisingly kept and spread the faith in God. These were men strong in spirit and not afraid to tell the truth to the face of kings and the mighty of that time. For this, prophets were often persecuted and ended their lives in martyrdom. From the time of the prophet Samuel, prophets were always present throughout the Old Testament history. Prophetic ministry reached its peaks in the time of the prophets Elisha and Elisha, and later, in the times of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel.

As centuries passed, the Jews developed a concept of a true prophet as opposed to false prophets: a true prophet was distinguished by seeking no benefit of his own, by obedience to God and fearless performance of his duty, by exceptional humility and love for people, by being strict with himself and living a pure life.

## The book of Joshua.

The story in the Books of Moses (Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) brings us to the end of the forty-year-long journey of the Jewish nation through the desert of the Sinai peninsula. While in the desert, the Israelites were renewed spiritually and strengthened in their faith in God. It was now time for the Jews to inherit the land which God had promised to their righteous ancestors — Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The book of Joshua tells us of how the Jews, led by a disciple of Moses, Joshua the son of Nun, conquered the Promised Land. Up until that time the Promised Land was populated by Canaanites, the descendants of Ham, for which reason the land was called the land of Canaan.

Reading the book of Joshua, we can clearly see how God was constantly helping the Jewish people in taking possession of the Promised Land. At times this help assumed the form of manifest miracles. For example, when, at the very beginning of the conquest, the Jews had to cross the Jordan, the waters stopped, and the Jews were able to walk on the dry riverbed (Ch. 3). Later, when they were taking the Canaanite city of Jericho on the border of the land of Canaan, the walls of the city collapsed after the Israelites had walked around the city and sounded the sacred trumpets (Ch. 6). It is worth noting that the site of ancient Jericho is now being excavated by archaeologists. These excavations shed light on the events of ancient history described in the book of Joshua. God's help in conquering the land of Canaan was also manifest in "the stopping of the sun" during the battle at Gibeon (Ch. 10).

Upon conquest, the Promised Land was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel. The tribe of Judah took the southern part of the Holy Land. The tribe of Levi was the only one that did not receive a portion of the land, since descendants of Levi were to perform priestly duties for the

inhabitants of the whole land. However the Levites received some cities scattered throughout the Promised Land.

After Joshua the son of Nun died, the Jewish people entered the period of so called Judges. These were temporary leaders chosen by God from among the Jews in order to save the nation from the hands of its oppressive neighbors. The four-hundred-year-long period, during which the Jewish tribes lived without permanent leaders, is described in the book of Judges.

## The book of Judges.

**T**his book contains the history of the chosen nation from the death of Joshua the son of Nun to the time of Judge Samson (1425-1150 B.C.). Having settled in the land of Canaanites, the Jews began to get closer to them, to intermarry and borrow their idolatry and disgusting pagan customs. God punished the Jews for these sins. He allowed their neighbors — Ammonites, Philistines, Moabites and others to enslave and oppress them. Exhausted under their enemies' oppression, the Israelites would repent and turn to God. Then He would have mercy on them and send them His chosen one in the person of a judge. The judge would organize the army and, with God's help, drive away the oppressor. Yet after some number of years the Israelites would again forget God, start worshipping idols and commit sin and would again be oppressed by foreigners. Then they would again repent, and God would send them another judge to deliver them. Six times Israel came under foreign oppression, and six times God delivered the nation through judges.

One of the principles clearly illustrated by the book of Judges is that an apostasy from God's Law is followed by oppression, and repentance — by deliverance. And God's help is manifested in miraculous ways: the number of soldiers and weapons and other military advantages are not a factor in the outcome. This is clearly demonstrated by the example of judge Gideon. With only 300 soldiers, he vanquished a huge Midianite army and delivered the Jews from cruel oppression (Ch. 6-7). Also remarkable is the life of Samson. Having received an unusual physical strength from God, he several times seriously defeated the Philistines who were oppressing the Jews at the time (Ch. 13-16). His life, which was full of adventure, his marriage to treacherous Delilah, and his death as a hero have been a basis for an opera and a few movies.

## The books of the Kingdoms.

**T**hen there are several books in the Bible called **the books of the Kingdoms and Paralipomenon**. They deal with the monarchical period in the history of the Jewish people. After Samson, the prophet Samuel judged the people. Under his leadership, the tribes of Israel decided to unite into one state under a king. Samuel anointed Saul to be king over Israel. Saul was succeeded by David and, later, by David's son Solomon. Under Rehoboam the son of Solomon the one kingdom split into two: the kingdom of Judah — in the south, and the kingdom of Israel — in the north of the Holy Land. The books of the Kingdoms cover a period of 500 years from the birth of Samuel (1100 B.C) to the release of Jeconiah king of Judah from prison in 567 B.C.

In the Hebrew Bible, the book of the Kingdoms is divided into two parts called *Sepher Shemuel (The Book of Samuel)* and *Sepher Melakhim (The Book of the Kings)*. However, in the Bible of the Seventy, or Septuagint, which is the Greek translation, as well as in the Russian Bible, *Sepher Shemuel* is divided into two parts called 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> books of the Kingdoms. So is



*Sepher Melakhim* also divided into two parts called 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> books of the Kingdoms. Tradition has it that the prophet Samuel wrote the first part of the 1<sup>st</sup> book of the Kingdoms, and the prophets Nathan and Gad wrote the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> (Ch. 26-31) and the whole of the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of the Kingdoms. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> books of the Kingdoms were written by several prophets.

**The books of Paralipomenon** supplement and, in part, repeat the books of the Kingdoms. In the Hebrew Bible they comprise a single book called *Dibreh-Gaionim*, or *Chronicles*. The Seventy called this book *Paralipomenon*, i.e. *About That Which Had Been Omitted*. They also divided it into two parts. Here are the main events recounted in the books of the Kingdoms.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Book of Samuel** (1<sup>st</sup> of Kingdoms according the Septuagint) begins its story with the birth of Samuel. Godly, yet childless, Hannah prayed God to give her a son, which request was granted. She named him **Samuel** and, in fulfillment of her vow, consecrated him to God's service under the high priest Eli. Hannah's song of praise for the birth of her son, found in Chapter 2 of the book, forms the basis for some extollations sung during the evening services. We find a number of interesting lessons in the life of Samuel (Ch. 1-4). For example, one can see the importance of raising children: the whole family of kind, yet weak-willed, high priest Eli was rejected by God for the wickedness of Eli's sons. When Samuel grew old, he relieved himself of the responsibility of a judge and anointed Saul of the tribe of Benjamin to be king of Israel (Ch. 5-12). Then the book of the Kingdoms tells us about the reign of **Saul**. Saul was at first obedient to God, but later became proud and began to be negligent about doing the will of God. For this reason God instructed Samuel to anoint a boy named **David**, of the town of Bethlehem, to be king over Israel (Ch. 13-16). At that time a war broke out between the Jews and the Philistines, and young David, with God's assistance, killed a Philistine giant named Goliath (Ch. 17). The defeat of Goliath resulted in a victory for the Jews and made David famous, which moved Saul to envy. After this event Saul, till the end of his life, persecuted David, trying to kill him (Ch. 18-24). At the end of the book we read about Saul's visit to a woman who had a familiar spirit at Endor, a failed war against the Philistines and the death of Saul (Ch. 25-31). David's sad feelings over unjust persecution on the part of Saul were expressed in his well-known psalms.

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of Samuel** (2 of Kingdoms according the Septuagint) covers the forty-year-long reign of David. The first few years of David's reign were quite successful, because God was helping him in everything he did. David took the fortress of Jerusalem away from the Jebusites and made it his capital city. Previously Jerusalem had been a Canaanite city of *Ushalim*, i.e. *city founded by god Shalem*. The city is known from the Accadian records of 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (correspondence of Tell-el-Amarna). The Biblical tradition identifies it with the city of Melchizedek, a contemporary of Abraham, as well as with the mount in the land of Moriah where Abraham offered sacrifice. David moved the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and was about to construct the first temple, in place of the portable tabernacle (i.e. tent-temple). But the Lord told David, through a prophet, that the temple would be built by his son (Ch. 1-10). The second half of David's reign was spoiled by his sin with a married woman, Bath-sheba, and the resulting turmoil in his family life and in the life of the state. David was especially broken-hearted over the rebellion of his son Absalom and the civil war that followed (Ch. 11-24). David expressed his deep regret over his sin of adultery in Psalm 50 (51 in the English Bible), which is a psalm of repentance.

There is much a Christian can learn from the life of David: his deep faith in God, unshakable hope in God's help, his sympathy for the weak and the oppressed, an ability to see his own faults, to repent of them and to correct them. The apostles write about David with great respect. Church Fathers frequently use examples from the life of David in their teachings. His inspired psalms are an eternal masterpiece of religious poetry and lie in the foundation of divine services.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of the Kingdoms contains a **prophecy** about **the eternal kingdom of the Messiah-Christ**. This prophecy was given to David through the prophet Nathan (see 7:12-16. Cf. Matt. 22:42 and Luke 1:32-33).

**The 1st Book of the Kingdoms** (3<sup>rd</sup> of Kingdoms according the Septuagint). Here we read about the reign of **Solomon** who, for his faith and humility, was gifted by God with great wisdom. Solomon built in Jerusalem a temple, the beauty and riches of which surpassed those of all palaces and pagan temples of the time. Under Solomon, the nation of Israel reached the peak of its well-being and glory (Ch. 1-11). Yet, high taxes and harsh construction labors were a heavy burden on the people and caused protests. Solomon's reputation of a wise ruler was spoiled by polygamy and construction of pagan shrines around Jerusalem. Dissatisfaction with Solomon among the people led to the division of his kingdom after his death, under his son, **Rehoboam** (Ch. 12). The kingdom split into two parts: the kingdom of **Judah** with the capital in Jerusalem, ruled by the kings of the family of David, and the kingdom of **Israel** with the capital in Samaria, ruled by kings of various dynasties (980 B.C.). The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>) books of the Kingdoms recount, in parallel, the events in both kingdoms: the acts of kings, heroic feats of prophets as well as wars and religious life of these kingdoms.

The kings of Israel were afraid that, if their subjects visited the temple in Jerusalem, they might want to reunite with the kingdom of Judah. For this reason the Israelite kings began to build pagan shrines in various parts of Israel and to encourage people to worship idols. These policies led to apostasy of the Israelite people from God. During this time of religious decline, God sent Israel a few remarkable prophets who slowed down the process of spiritual decay. Two of these messengers from God — the prophet Elijah and his disciple, Elisha — stand out in a special way.

The prophet Elijah (900 years B.C.) was one of the strongest defenders of true faith and godliness (Ch. 17-21). Grieving over the spiritual death of his people, Elijah was determined and tough in punishing the wicked. Elijah was called to prophetic ministry under the wicked Israelite king Ahab. Ahab's blood-thirsty wife, Jezebel, who was a daughter of a pagan priest from Sidon, put many Jewish prophets to death and filled the land of Israel with pagan priests of Baal. To teach Ahab and the people of Israel a lesson, Elijah struck the land with a three-year-long drought. The prophet himself was first hiding at a creek, where he was fed by a raven that brought him food daily. After the creek had dried up, the prophet lived in the house of a widow in Zarephath. The prophet prayed, and a small amount of flour and oil miraculously lasted two years, providing food for the widow's family and the prophet. When the widow's only son died, Elijah prayed, and the boy rose from the dead. At the end of the three-year-long drought, Elijah invited the king, the pagan priests and all the people of Israel to come to the mount of Carmel. Here, at Elijah's prayer, fire in the form of lightning came down from heaven and, in front of all that were present, devoured the sacrifice offered by Elijah. Having seen such a great miracle, the people believed in God and, in tears, repented of idol worship. The priests of Baal that came to the mountain were put to death. Then, at last, it began to rain. The famine was over.

For his holy life and a great love for God, the prophet Elijah was taken to heaven alive in a fiery chariot. The story of the 2<sup>nd</sup> (4<sup>th</sup>) **Book of the Kingdoms** starts with this event. According to prophecy, Elijah will come again before the end of the world in order to expose the lies of the antichrist. At that time he will die as a martyr.

The holy prophet **Elisha** was a disciple of the prophet Elijah and received the mantle and the prophetic gift of Elijah, when Elijah was being taken up into heaven. Elisha labored for over 65 years, under six different kings of Israel, from Ahab to Joash. He was fearless in telling the wicked kings the truth and rebuking them for their wickedness. He was greatly respected by the people of Israel, he was strong in the spirit and in the faith, and he also had a gift of seeing the

future. During his life, prophetic brotherhoods in the kingdom of Israel thrived more than ever before or after him. Among his most glorious miracles were the resurrection of a young man, turning fresh the salty waters of a spring in Jericho, and healing Naaman, a Syrian military commander, from leprosy. Besides, the prophet Elisha secured numerous victories for the kings of Israel by his wisdom and ability to see the future. Elisha died a very old man in the city of Samaria during the reign of king Joash (Ch. 2-13). Our Lord Jesus Christ mentioned the prophets Elijah and Elisha several times in His discourses. Every believer should be familiar with the lives and acts of these prophets.

Despite the efforts of the prophets Elijah, Elisha and others, idol-worship and disgusting pagan customs eventually did damage to the spiritual foundation of the people of Israel. Because of this sin of apostasy, God allowed the kingdom of Israel to be destroyed. After being defeated by the Assyrian armies several times in 722 B.C, the kingdom of Israel fell (Ch.17). Then large numbers of Israelites were relocated to **Assyria**, and some inhabitants of Assyria were relocated to Israel. The Israelites intermarried with the Assyrians, and the nation of Samaritans was thus formed.

From this point on, the story of the 4<sup>th</sup> Book of the Kingdoms focuses on the kingdom of **Judah**. From among the kings of Judah, we should mention the godly king **Hezekiah**. Having inherited the throne from his wicked father, Hezekiah was determined to bring law and order to the weakened Judea. First of all, he took care of the internal affairs of the nation whose religious life had declined. Influenced by their pagan neighbors, the Jews began to gradually forget the true God and started building altars to pagan deities. These altars were sometimes erected next to the temple. Hezekiah boldly demolished the shrines of idols, cut down groves devoted to pagan gods and destroyed everything that reminded the people about idols. Thus he restored the true faith in Judea. Among the events that took place during his reign, the most remarkable was the miraculous defeat, by an angel, of 185,000-strong Assyrian army that besieged Jerusalem under the command of Sennacherib (Ch. 19). Good lessons can also be learned from the miraculous healing of Hezekiah who was about to die, yet God had mercy on him because of his faith and his good works. The people of Judah remembered Hezekiah along with the godly kings David and Josiah (Ch. 23). Hezekiah was a contemporary of the prophet **Isaiah** — one of the greatest prophets of all time. Being a highly educated man and a poet, the prophet Isaiah wrote a remarkable book full of prophecies about the Messiah and His Kingdom of grace. Isaiah is also known as the Old Testament Evangelist.

Hezekiah's successors on the throne encouraged idolatry. The prophets were persecuted and put to death under these kings. For example, the elderly prophet Isaiah was cut in half with a wooden saw during the reign of Hezekiah's son **Manasseh**. The prophet **Jeremiah** also suffered a lot. The kingdom of Judah was filled with lawlessness, just as it happened in Israel some years earlier. Despite the alliance with Egypt, the kingdom of Judah fell, having been defeated several times by the Babylonian king **Nebuchadnezzar**. The magnificent temple and the city of Jerusalem were leveled with the ground. Numerous inhabitants were killed or taken away to Babylon as captives (586 B.C., cf. Ch. 19-25). The **Babylonian captivity** lasted 70 years from 605 B.C., when the first group of people was taken away. The captivity ended in the third year after the conquest of Babylonian Empire by the Persian king Cyrus in 539 B.C. The captive Jews were spiritually supported by the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel.

The stories of the books of the Kingdoms clearly illustrate a general and unchangeable spiritual law: faith in God and godly living prolong the well-being of a nation, whereas wickedness inevitably leads to destruction. Military power, diplomatic skills and other apparent advantages are of secondary importance for the well-being of a country. The validity of this law can be traced throughout the history of many nations!

## Chronology.

<u>Kings of Israel</u>	<u>Kings of Judah</u>	<u>Prophets</u>	<u>Events</u>
Ahab 875-852	Jehoshaphat 876-851	Elijah	Growth of Phoenicia.
Ahaziah 853-851	Jehoram 851-842	Elisha 850-790	
Jehoram 851-842	Ahaziah 843-842		
Jehu 842-814	Athaliah 842-836		
Jehoahaz 814-797	Jehoash 836-796	Joel	Growth of Assyria.
Joash 797-881	Amaziah 796-782	Jonah	Founding of Rome 750
Jeroboam 782-740	Azariah 782-737	Amos	
Menahem 740-737	Jotham 737-735	Hosea	
			Fall of Israel 722. Siege of Jerusalem 700
Pekah 737-733	Ahaz 735-725	Isaiah 730-690	
Hoshea 733-722	Hezekiah 725-696	Micah, Nahum	
	Manasseh 696-641	Zephaniah,	Persecution of the prophets.
	Amon 641-639	Habakkuk	Fall of Nineveh 606
	Josiah 639-608	Jeremiah	
	Jehoiakim 608-597	Obadiah	
	Jehoiachin 597		
	Zedekiah 597-586	Ezekiel	Fall of Jerusalem 586 and Babylonian captivity.
		Daniel	Fall of Babylon 539.
		Haggai	Cyrus the king of Persia 559-29.
		Zechariah	Return from the captivity 536
			Darius I, Rebuilding of the Temple 534-516.
		Malachi 475	The Decree of Artaxerxes 446, the beginning of the weeks of Daniel.
			Ezra collects the books of the Holy Scripture 450-425.

## The book of Ezra.

The book of Ezra deals with the events at the end of the Babylonian captivity. In the Hebrew Bible, there is only one book of Ezra. In the Greek Bible of the Seventy (Septuagint), there are two more, so-called deuterocanonical, books of Ezra, for a total of three. (In some English versions of the Bible the Book of Nehemiah is called 2<sup>nd</sup> Ezra, so there are four books of Ezra — *trans*). The main topic of the book of Ezra is the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity. The first return followed the Decree of **Cyrus** in 536 and was led by Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua. It was then that the rebuilding of the Temple began. The second return was led by Ezra during the reign of **Artaxerxes Longiman**.

Ezra was a grandson of the high priest Seraiah who was killed by Nebuchadnezzar. Ezra was close to the Persian court and was among the educators of Artaxerxes Longiman. In the 7<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (457 B.C.), Artaxerxes issued a decree by which Ezra and any other Jews were allowed to return from Babylon to Jerusalem and to start rebuilding the city and providing religious education to the Jewish people.

After ruling the people for 14 years, Ezra delegated all authority to **Nehemiah** and focused on teaching the people about God's Law and collecting the books of the Holy Scripture into one book. He founded *The Great Synagogue* — a group which, under the guidance of the last prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, helped Ezra to review and correct the Holy Scripture and to collect it into one book, thus completing the **canon of the Old Testament**. The books written after Ezra were not included in the list of Sacred books, for which reason they are called deuterocanonical, even though they are highly respected and can be found in many translations of the Bible. Most of the books, composed after Ezra, were written in Greek which was commonly used at the time.

## The book of Nehemiah.

**N**ehemiah descended from the tribe of Judah and was likely a member of the royal family. He occupied the high post of the butler at the Persian court. In the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of the Persian king Artaxerxes Longiman (465-424 B.C., i.e. in 446 B.C.), Nehemiah learned, from his kinsmen that came from Palestine, about the desperate condition the city of Jerusalem was in. He convinced the king to send him to his country as a ruler with high authority. He rebuilt the city and surrounded it with walls, despite resistance on the part of the Samaritans. Having rebuilt and populated the city and sanctified its walls, Nehemiah, together with Ezra, began to educate the people about religion, morals and the life of society. The Law of Moses was read, the feast of **Tabernacles** was celebrated, the rich forgave the debts of the poor, the covenant between the people and God was renewed. Then Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes, but later came to Jerusalem again and uprooted various crimes among the people. Thus, during 30 years before his death, Nehemiah labored to restore Jerusalem and strengthen the faith among the people.

Just as Nehemiah continued the cause of Ezra, his book is also a continuation of the book of Ezra. Ezra describes the beginning of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, namely the reconstruction of the temple and the religious and moral education of the people. Nehemiah deals with the construction of the walls, the settlement and rebuilding of the city, the structure of the society based on religious principles. Both books record the history of the people of God and show the ways of God's Providence by which the nation was saved and prepared for the coming of the promised Messiah.

The decree of Artaxerxes, issued to Nehemiah in 446 B.C., has a special significance as a starting point for the weeks of Daniel related to the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah (Dan. 9:22-27).

As a historical reminder about God's mercy to the chosen people, the book of Nehemiah contains numerous lessons for us to learn. Nehemiah's self-sacrificial love for his country and his people, which caused him, like Moses, to neglect the luxury and comfort of the royal court, his constant hard work for the well-being and glory of his country — all this provides us with a model worthy of imitation.

## The book of Esther.

**T**he book borrows its title from its main character named Esther, which means *Star*. For her beauty, a Jewish orphan by the name of Hadassah became the wife of the Persian king Artaxerxes or, probably, Xerxes who reigned in 485-465 B.C. Her name was later changed to Esther. Es-

ther was raised by her uncle Mordecai who was a gatekeeper at the royal court. A few years earlier, Mordecai saved the king's life, when some of the king's servants conspired to kill him. Mordecai's service to the king was recorded in the Persian documents.

Some time after Esther became the queen, the king's powerful and proud minister named Haman, who hated the Jews, decided to exterminate all of them within the borders of the Persian Empire. For this purpose, he wrote an appropriate decree, as if on the king's behalf, and began to look for a convenient occasion to have it signed by the king. By God's Providence, Mordecai learned about Haman's plan. Being confident of success and hating Mordecai, Haman built gallows on which to hang him. But Haman's plan fell through. At a banquet, Esther boldly exposed his conspiracy and rebuked him for his intention to hang her uncle who had saved the king's life. Having learned about the evil character of Haman, the angered king frustrated the plan of Haman and ordered him to be hanged on the gallows prepared for Mordecai (as a Russian saying goes, "do not dig a pit for someone else, for you will fall into it yourself"). To commemorate deliverance of the Jews from Haman, the feast of **Purim** was established (*Purim* is Hebrew for *casting lots*).

## The book of Judith.

**T**he events described in the book of Judith took place in Israel during the reign of the king Manasseh. The book is named after its main character. Judith was a beautiful and godly widow of a certain Manasseh of the tribe of Simeon from the city of Bethulia. By her courageous deed she saved her city and the whole country from the Assyrian armies that came to devastate the land under the command of Holofernes (approx. 650 years B.C.).

Having occupied all of the coastal land, Holofernes and his huge army made a stop on the border of Judea near Bethulia in the tribe of Issachar. The inhabitants of Bethulia were suffering from starvation and thirst and were about to surrender, when Judith, being firm in her faith in God's coming help, showed up in the enemy's camp. Having found favor with Holofernes, Judith decapitated him at night, after a party. Then she took the commander's head to her fellow-citizens. Encouraged by this, the Jews drove the Assyrian army away. After this Judith was highly respected, lived a long godly life and died at the age of 105.

## The books of Maccabees.

**T**hese books bear the name of the heroes whose actions they describe. The books recount the events that took place in 330-130 B.C. The domination of the Persian Empire was replaced by that of the Greek Empire founded by **Alexander the Great**. His huge Empire did not last long. After Alexander's death, it was split into four kingdoms, two of which — those of Egypt and Syria — played an important part in the history of the Jewish people. Palestine ended up being a disputed territory as the rulers of these two kingdoms fought over the inheritance. In 203 B.C. Judea changed hands, and the Jews suffered much under the rule of the kings of Syria, since the Syrian rulers made every effort to convert the Jews to a pagan religion. The Jews who believed in the true God were persecuted with special cruelty by the king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.). During his reign, the Greek pagan cult was declared to be the official state religion. Those who refused to convert to paganism were persecuted and put to death. God's temple was desecrated. Antiochus claimed the honor due to God and called himself Epiphanes, which means

*the appearance of God.* For his cruel persecution of believers, he became a type of the coming last persecutor of the faith — the Antichrist. When writing about the Antichrist, Apostle Paul predicted that he would sit in the temple of God, claiming to be God (2 Thes. 2:4), thus reminding them about a similar situation involving Antiochus. When Jesus Christ was talking about the abomination of desolation in the sanctuary of God's temple (which was predicted by the prophet Daniel in Dan. 9:27, cf. Matt. 24:15), He reminded them of the condition of the temple in Jerusalem under Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus was struck by a terrible disease and died, being devoured alive by worms.

The **1<sup>st</sup> Book of Maccabees**, after a brief remark about the conquests of Alexander the Great and the division of his kingdom between his commanders (330-310 B.C.), describes the horrors of the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes (175 B.C.). The priest Mattathias and his five sons stood up to defend the faith. For their successful fight against the supporters of paganism, they were named **Maccabees**, i.e. *hammers*. From among the sons of Mattathias, Juda, Jonathan and Simon became particularly famous.

The **2<sup>nd</sup> Book of Maccabees** complements the first one by giving more details about the fight of the Palestinian Jews against the enemies of the faith sent by the Syrian kings, starting with Heliodorus sent by the king Seleucus Philopator to rob the Jerusalem temple, to the victory of Juda Maccabee over Nicanor — a commander sent by Demetrius Seleucus. During the persecution raised by Antiochus Epiphanes, a 90-year-old priest **Eleazar, the seven brothers** and many others were put to death as martyrs in 166 B.C., after suffering cruel tortures (Ch. 6-7). These sufferers became later known as *the Maccabean Martyrs* and are remembered by the Church on August 1/14.

The **3<sup>rd</sup> Book of Maccabees** contains an account of earlier persecutions of the Jews in Egypt that started in 216 B.C. during the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator, i.e. 50 years before the time of Juda Maccabee. The persecution was caused by king Ptolemy's anger with the high priest Simon, at whose prayer the king was prevented by God from entering the sanctuary of the temple at Jerusalem. The book describes Ptolemy's plot to destroy the Jews by luring them to the Hippodrome and trampling them with elephants. At the high priest's prayer, God send two angels who scared the elephants, and the Jews were thus saved.

In conclusion we must say that the books of Maccabees are full of accounts of courage and strong faith in God. During the time of persecution by pagans, Christians found in these books numerous edifying examples of patience and strength in the faith.

## The Years Preceding the Coming of the Savior.

**T**he events that took place later in the history of the Jewish people are not recorded in the Bible. In 63 B.C. the Holy Land was occupied by the Roman commander **Pompey**. From that time on, Palestine with its four regions became subject and tributary to Rome. The power soon was concentrated in the hands of a crafty Edomite by the name of Antipater who managed to win the trust of the Romans. Antipater passed the power on to his son, the cruel **Herod the Great**, who declared himself the king of the Jews in 37 B.C. He was the first to call himself a king of the Jews without being a Jew. During his reign the true King and Savior of the world, Jesus, was born in a small town of Bethlehem. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy which patriarch Jacob uttered 2000 years earlier: "**The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be**" (Gen. 49:9-11).



## 4. Didactic books of the Old Testament.

*For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding (Prov. 2:6).*

**T**he Bible has several books that contain moral instruction and are commonly known as *didactic*. As compared to the books of Moses, that contain direct and mandatory commandments of God, the didactic books are written with the intent of encouraging people to live a godly life. They teach a person to live his/her life in such a way that it will be blessed by God, filled with well-being and peace of mind. This category includes the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Wisdom of Solomon, and Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach.

As far as their literary form, most didactic books of the Old Testament are written as poetry in the original Hebrew. Hebrew poetry is characterized by poetic parallelism, which is noticeable even in translation. The essence of this parallelism is that the writer's thought is expressed not in one sentence, but rather in several, usually two, sentences, which work together to develop the idea by comparison, contrast or substantiation. These types of parallelism are called synonymic, antithetic and synthetic. The following passages from Psalter (a.k.a. the book of Psalms—*transl*). provide examples of various types of poetic parallelism:

*“When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion”* (synonymic parallelism, Ps. 114:1,2).

*“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright”* (antithetic parallelism, Ps. 20:7,8).

*“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever”* (synthetic parallelism, Ps. 19:7-9).

Among the Jews, the didactic books, together with some historical (Ruth, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Paralipomenon) and prophetic (Lamentations, Daniel) books are known as *Ke-tubim* (or *Hagiographa* in Greek), i.e. *Sacred Scriptures*.

### The book of Job.

**T**his book is named after its main character, Job, who lived during the time of the patriarchs, long before Moses, not far from the Holy Land. He was a quite rich and happy man who had many children. But his wealth did not make him proud or selfish. On the contrary, everyone who knew Job loved him for his kindness, wisdom and sympathy for the poor. Many came to him for advice and considered it an honor to be his guest.

The devil was envious of Job's virtuous life and decided to retaliate. In order to show Job's great patience and virtue in front of everybody, the Lord did not prevent the devil from hurting Job. And within a very short time the devil hurled numerous troubles on Job. Job lost everything

he had: his family, his enormous wealth, even his health—everything was gone. Having come down with terrible leprosy, he did not dare to live among healthy people and had to settle outside his town. Friends came to visit him there. Job was pouring out his grief before them, trying to figure out the reason for his mishaps. No one was able to help or comfort him. Yet the thought of grumbling against God was far from Job. Suffering in body and soul, he stunned his friends with his infinite patience, saying, “*Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD... What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*” (Job 1:21, 2:10).

Job's suffering lasted, probably, about a year. Having shown to all the great faith of Job, God put the devil to shame by again giving Job everything that the devil had taken away. Job miraculously recovered from untreatable leprosy, quickly grew wealthy and started a new family. Job lived many more years and enjoyed even greater honor and love. Having seen the fourth generation of his offspring, he died, being 140 years old.

Job lived in the country of Uz which is believed to have been located east of Jordan and south of Damascus, in the ancient Bashan. The land was named after Uz, son of Aram, a descendant of Shem (Gen. 10:22-23). Job was an Aramite, and his friends, mentioned in the book, were Edomites, also descended from Abraham.

It is believed that the book was originally written by Job himself, whose desire was expressed by him in verses 23 and 24 of chapter 19. The very content of the book shows that it could have been written only by a local person who took part in the events described. This original story was later given a poetic form by an inspired Hebrew writer. Otherwise it would not be included among the sacred books. The book of Job is written in perfect Hebrew. The original record was found by the Jews when they conquered Bashan. The Jews copied it into a collection like *The Book of the Righteous* mentioned in the book of Joshua (10:13). King Solomon could very well be the one who gave the book its present form, since in many ways it is similar to other Solomon's books—*Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*.

Job is mentioned in several books of the Bible as a man of great righteousness. For example, the book of Ezekiel places Job on the same level with patriarch Noah and prophet Daniel (Ezek. 14:14-20). The apostle James mentions Job as an example of a very patient person: “*Behold, we count them happy which endure. We have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy*”(James 5:11).

The goal of the book of Job is to show that earthly happiness does not always correspond to virtuous life. Sometimes misfortunes are allowed to happen in the lives of the righteous in order to **strengthen them in being good**, to put the devil to shame for his lies, and to glorify the righteousness of God. To put it briefly, the book of Job addresses a very deep and hard-to-understand issue of the relationship between righteousness and reward, between evil and punishment. Besides, the book of Job has a high value as a literary piece.

During his sickness, Job uttered a very important prediction concerning the Redeemer and the coming resurrection of the dead: “*For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me*” (Job 19:25-27).

## Psalter.

**W**ithout exaggeration, one can say that the book of Psalms, or the Psalter, is, for a Christian, the most important book in the Old Testament. The Psalter is a book of prayers for every occasion: when in grief, in a hopeless situation or in fear, in distress, in the tears of repentance and in the joy of consolation, in thankfulness and in just praising the Creator. St. Ambrose of Milan writes thus: “*The grace of God breathes in all of the Scripture, but especially in the sweet song of the book of Psalms.*”

The title of the book derives from the Greek *psalo* which means to play a stringed musical instrument. King David was the first to accompany the singing of his divinely inspired prayers with playing a musical instrument called psalterion which resembled a harp. The Jews call this book *Tehillim*, meaning *praises*.

The Psalter was being composed for over 8 centuries, starting with Moses (1500 BC) to Ezra and Nehemiah (400 BC), and contains 150 psalms. King David was the first major contributor to the book. He wrote over 80 psalms—more than any other single writer. Besides the psalms of David, the book contains 1 psalm of Moses (90<sup>th</sup>), 3 psalms of Solomon (72<sup>nd</sup>, 127<sup>th</sup> and 132<sup>nd</sup>), 12 psalms of Asaph the seer and his descendants, 1 psalm of Eman (88<sup>th</sup>), 1 of Epham (89<sup>th</sup>), 11 psalms of the sons of Korah. Authorship of the other psalms is unknown. The psalms are written according to the rules of Hebrew poetry and are amazingly beautiful and powerful.

At the beginning of a psalm we often find a brief note that indicates the psalm’s content. It may be a prayer, a psalm of praise, or a teaching psalm. Sometimes these notes indicate the poetic method used in the psalm, e.g. *the writing*, i.e. epigrammatic psalm. Others indicate the method of performing, e.g. *psalm* is to be accompanied by playing the psalterion, *song* is sung vocally, some psalms are accompanied by other musical instruments, and sometimes the instruments are changed as the psalm is performed. Some psalms begin with a few words from another song, the performance of which is similar to the performance of the given psalm—something like the *similars* (*podobny*) in church services.

The content of the psalms is closely related to the life of the righteous king David. David was born a thousand years before the birth of Christ in Bethlehem and was the youngest son among the many children of a poor shepherd named Jesse. Having become the king in Jerusalem after the death of King Saul, King David became the greatest of all the kings that would ever rule over Israel. He had a combination of character traits so valuable for a good king: the love for the people, justice, wisdom, courage and, most importantly, strong faith in God. David himself was often in charge of religious celebrations, offering sacrifices to God on behalf of the Jewish people and singing psalms.

The poetic beauty and the depth of religious feelings found in the psalms of David inspired numerous later psalm writers. Therefore, even though not all of the psalms were written by David, yet fair is the common name of the book of psalms: *The Psalter of King David*.

### Importance of the Psalter in Divine Services.

The Psalter contains many thoughts and words addressed to one’s own soul, words of instruction and of consolation. Therefore it is no surprise that the Psalter is so widely used in prayer. Starting with the Old Testament times, every single divine service uses psalms. Psalms were first used when offering daily sacrifices, and on sabbaths and feasts. David introduced the use of musical instruments when singing psalms. These were harp, tympanum, psalter, cymbal, trumpet and others. The Lord Jesus Christ prayed with the words of psalms. Thus, after the Last

Supper, He sang as He was going up to the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30). Following the example of Jesus Christ and the apostles, the Church of the early centuries often used Psalter for prayer (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, 1 Cor. 14:26). To make reading of the Psalter during divine services more convenient, it was divided into 20 parts called *kathismas* (*kathizo* is the Greek for *sit*).

Now the Psalter is fully **christianized**. This means that the Church assigns Christian meaning to all sayings of the Psalter, while the Old Testament meaning is of secondary importance. The words “raise, Lord” found in the psalms remind us of Christ’s resurrection. Words about captivity are understood as referring to the captivity of sin. The names of nations hostile to Israel are taken to mean spiritual enemies, and the name Israel means the people of the Church. The call to exterminate the enemies is the call to fight our passions. Salvation out of Egypt and Babylon is the salvation in Christ. Here is a list of psalms used in divine services:

**During Matins:** at the beginning: 20, 21, Exapsalmos (i.e. The Six Psalms; Russian: *Shestopsalmiye*): 3, 38, 63, 88, 103, 143. Before canon: 51. Psalms of praise: 148, 149, 150.

**During the Hours:** 1<sup>st</sup> Hour: 5, 90, 101. 3<sup>rd</sup> Hour: 17, 25, 51. 6<sup>th</sup> Hour: 54, 55, 91. 9<sup>th</sup> Hour: 84, 85, 86.

**During Vespers:** The beginning psalm: 104, “Blessed is the man:” 1, “Lord, I cry unto Thee:” 141, 142, 130, 117, at the end of the service: 34.

**During Liturgy:** 103, 146.

(Note: the psalms listed here are according to their numbering in the King James version of the Bible. The Septuagint numbering differs slightly.)

To help the reader find the psalms that correspond to his specific prayerful disposition, we offer the following list of psalms according to their content:

Psalms of thanksgiving and praise: 34, 66, 67, 92, 96, 97, 103, 104, 117, 146, 149, 150.

Praising God: 8, 18, 93, 103, 104.

Instructional: 1, 41, 33, 46, 85, 90, 101, 112, 127.

Pouring out grief: 3, 13, 17, 38, 55, 88, 142, 143.

Expressing trust in God: 54, 86, 91, 112, 121.

Asking God’s protection against enemies and trouble: 3, 4, 25, 41, 55, 70, 143.

Psalms of repentance: 39, 51.

Expressing joy: 33, 84, 115.

## The book of Proverbs.

**T**he book of Proverbs was mainly written by Solomon, son of David, who reigned in Jerusalem a thousand years BC. Some parts of the book were written by other authors. Thus one may consider Solomon to be the main contributor to the book of Proverbs, just as David was the main contributor to the book of Psalms.

When Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, offered his prayers and burnt offerings (sacrifices that were burned) to God, God appeared to him at night and said: “Ask what I shall give thee.” Solomon asked for only one thing from God: **wisdom** to lead God’s people. “And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither

hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee” (1 Kings, 3:11-14) And indeed Solomon became famous for his wisdom, so that people came from distant countries to listen to him. Many of Solomon’s sayings were included in the book of Proverbs.

In the Hebrew Bible, the book has the title *Mishle Shlomo*, the Seventy (Greek translation of the Bible made in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) call it *Paremia*, and the Slavonic Bible calls it *Proverbs of Solomon*. The Fathers call it *The Wisdom of All Virtue*. The book of Proverbs is written in the form of poetic parallelism.

The book of Proverbs is full of practical teaching on how to wisely build one’s life on the fear of God, truth, honesty, hard work and self-control. These instructions are very true and to the point. They contain a lot of imagery, liveliness and intellectual acuity.

The book of Proverbs has always been highly respected, and many sacred writers used it. For example, “*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble*” (Prov. 3:34, James 4:6) “*And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*” (Prov. 11:31, 1 Peter 4:18) “*My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*” (Prov. 3:11-12, Heb. 12:5-6).

The book of Proverbs stresses the importance of acquiring wisdom and the advantages of wisdom over all the treasures in the world.

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her” (Prov. 3:13-18).

Then the author of the Proverbs directs his thought upwards to God Who is the source of wisdom. Here is how the wisdom of God is depicted.

“The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men ... For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD” (Prov. 8:22-31, 35, see also 1:20-33, 9:1-11).

What is remarkable in this passage is that Wisdom is presented as a person, as if a divine being. Such personification of Wisdom, puzzling to the Old Testament man, becomes clear in the light

of the New Testament teaching about the **Son of God**—our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is also called the **Word**. He, according to St. John Theologian, created everything: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made*” (John 1:1-4). And the Apostle Paul calls Jesus Christ “*the power of God, and the wisdom of God*” (1 Cor. 1:24).

Thus the teaching of the book of Proverbs about the hypostasis of God’s Wisdom prepared the ground among the Jewish people for the faith in the Only-begotten Son of God.

## The book of Ecclesiastes.

**T**he Greek word *Ecclesiastes* derives from *Ecclesia*—Church and means *a church preacher*. In Hebrew this book is called *Koheleth*, from *kahal*—congregation. Thus the book is a collection of sayings of a church preacher.

As the book itself obviously indicates, Ecclesiastes is a pseudonym taken by the son of David who ruled in Jerusalem. This points to Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes. Solomon’s authorship is further confirmed by the description of the author’s wisdom, wealth, glory and luxurious life (see. Eccl. 1:12-18 and 1 Kings 4:29 and further).

The main topic of the book of Ecclesiastes is the **vanity and emptiness of all earthly things** — labor, knowledge, riches, luxury and pleasures without faith in God and life after death. The book teaches about the fear of God and keeping His commandments as the conditions for possibility of happiness in this vain world. What is valuable is that the author presents this teaching based on his personal experience of many years and his deep analysis. The reader of the book can easily feel the great wisdom of the author enlightened by God’s revelation.

In the beginning Ecclesiastes explains why human activities are vain and fruitless. The earth and all the natural phenomena on the planet are going in a circle, and all the work they do does not change the quantity of matter nor the quality of the acting forces. The first aspiration of a human is to learn. That is why Ecclesiastes, more than anyone else, tried to acquire knowledge. But the knowledge he acquired resulted in vexation of spirit, for knowledge does not provide what is lacking, it does not correct the will corrupted by sin. Thus the increase in knowledge increases sorrow. Another human aspiration is to find pleasure. To achieve this, Ecclesiastes acquired wealth and indulged in sensual pleasures, but all this turned out to be vanity, for the accumulation of riches comes with hard labor and cares, and enjoyment of riches does not depend on man, but on God in Whose hands is the very human life.

Then Ecclesiastes depicts vanity of human life. Without God, everything in this life is limited in time and, like in inanimate nature, goes in a cycle: birth and death, joy and sadness, truth and lie, love and hatred. But aspiration for life, truth, good and beauty has been placed into the human spirit by the Creator. Hence, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the Creator is going to satisfy these aspirations — after death. There is no hope to satisfy these here because of the cycle of opposites. On this earth a person should believe in God and humbly obey His commandments, should diligently do his religious and moral duties and not be deceived by the illusion of worldly well-being. Only then can man acquire peace.

Hence Ecclesiastes concludes that the purpose of human life is **moral education** to prepare for the life after death, where a man’s happiness will be according to his moral merit.

To summarize his observations, Ecclesiastes teaches about the significance of life here on earth as a preparation for the life to come. Being moderate in using earthly things, one should take care to do good. It is for this purpose that God created man.



The book of Ecclesiastes is believed to have been written during the last years of Solomon's life, after he had experienced and understood much, and repented before God, having realized the vanity of the pleasures of the flesh. The book of Ecclesiastes is replete with deep thoughts which may not be fully understood and appreciated right away by a reader inexperienced with abstract concepts.

## The Song of Songs.

### (Song of Solomon)

**T**his book was written by Solomon during the better years of his reign, shortly after construction of the temple was completed. It takes the form of a drama and consists of conversations between the Lover and his Beloved.

During the first reading this book may appear to be just another ancient lyrical song. This is the way it is understood by many free-thinking commentators who do not take into account the voice of the Church. One needs to read the prophets in order to see that, in the Old Testament, the image of the Lover and the Beloved was used in an elevated sense to represent the union between God and His faithful. This book was included in the canon of Jewish sacred books because it was in this elevated symbolic sense that the Old Testament tradition understood the book and prescribed it to be read on Passover. The Apostle Paul uses the same symbolism in the New Testament, though not in the form of poetry, when comparing the love between husband and wife to that between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:22-32). We often hear the same image of bridegroom and bride in the hymns of the Church where it is used to symbolize the fervent love of a Christian soul for the Savior of the soul. The same strong love of soul for Christ is found in the writings of Christian ascetics.

It is instructional to compare the following passage from the Song of Songs with a similar depiction of love by the Apostle Paul.

“Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned” (Song. 8:6-7).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39, see also 1 Cor. 13).

## The book of Wisdom of Solomon.

**T**his book is about God's wisdom. Its composition was influenced by the Proverbs of Solomon, and therefore the name of Solomon is included in the title. Yet the book of Wisdom was pro-

duced many centuries after the death of Solomon. It was written in Greek and is not found in the Hebrew Bible. The writer of the book was familiar with the Greek philosophy and customs of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. The theme of the book is the teaching about the true divinely revealed religion as the manifestation of God's Wisdom, whereas pagan idol worship is considered to be a product of the erring and sinful human mind.

The main goal of the book's writer is to show the **advantages of God's wisdom** preserved in the divinely revealed religion of the Jews on one hand, and the **meaninglessness of idol worship** on the other.

The writer of the book of Wisdom first describes the contemporary beliefs and morals of the Jews who, being righteous worshippers of the true God, suffered persecution on the part of pagans (1-3). In the following chapters he writes about the sure reward of the righteous sufferers and the inevitable punishment of pagan persecutors, if not here on earth, then definitely after death. God did not create death. It has its cause in human sin. Man was created incorruptible. Therefore the righteous will be at rest, even if they die, and their souls are in the hand of God. Suffering and death have redemptive significance for the righteous, so that their cruel suffering and early death assure us of their future glory.

The writer concludes by describing characteristics and advantages of the God-given wisdom.

## The book of Jesus Son of Sirach.

**T**he writer of the book, who calls himself Jesus son of Sirach, was a scribe from Jerusalem. He was knowledgeable about the Law, the Prophets and the books of the fathers. He was one of the last representatives of the Great Synagogue. To acquire knowledge, he traveled a lot in foreign lands and suffered much trouble and persecution. He collected his thoughts, observations and travel notes in one book which he completed in the days of high priest Eleazar (287-265 BC). This Eleazar dispatched 72 translators to Alexandria to translate Sacred Scriptures into Greek. Jesus was among those sent, and his name is found in Aristeus' list of translators.

The book of Jesus son of Sirach is preserved in the Greek translation. The Hebrew original was for a long time considered to have been lost, but in the relatively recent past a biblical journal reported the discovery of the Hebrew original of the book.

The book of Jesus describes advantages of God-given wisdom (1). There are also instructions on various virtues: patience in suffering and trust in God (2), honoring one's parents and humility (3), helping the poor and relying on oneself (4), attitude to learning (7), attitude to the rich and powerful (8), attitude to women (9), avoiding pride, drunkenness etc. Chapters 24-33 give, on behalf of God's Wisdom, brief instructions on how to succeed in virtue, how to raise children, and how to exercise self-control.

In chapters 42-43 Jesus praises God's greatness, so obvious in the harmony and meaningfulness of nature. Jesus son of Sirach concludes his book with the following prayer of thanksgiving:

"I will thank thee, O Lord and King, and praise thee, O God my Saviour: I do give praise unto thy name: For thou art my defender and helper, and has preserved my body from destruction, and from the snare of the slanderous tongue ... Therefore will I give thanks, and praise thee, and bless thy name, O Lord. When I was yet young, or ever I went abroad, I desired wisdom openly in my prayer. I prayed for her before the temple, and

will seek her out even to the end. Even from the flower till the grape was ripe hath my heart delighted in her: my foot went the right way, from my youth upsought I after her. I bowed down mine ear a little, and received her, and gat much learning. I profited therein ... The Lord hath given me a tongue for my reward, and I will praise him there-with" (Ch. 51).

In the book of Jesus son of Sirach, besides useful advice and precise observations, one can feel the inspiration of heavenly Wisdom, for which Jesus was constantly asking God. That is why his book has always been heeded and loved by Orthodox Christians.

## Selected Proverbs.

**Topics:** friendship, health, truthfulness, almsgiving, speech, prayer, wisdom, trusting God, repentance, drunkenness, self-control, family, humility, honesty, advice, patience, hard work, moderation, chastity.

**Translator's Note:** *There is some (random) disagreement between various translations of the books of Sirach and Wisdom as to the numbering of verses. This translator made an effort to follow the King James Version.*

**Friendship:** *Be in peace with many: nevertheless have but one counselor of a thousand (Sir. 6:6). A faithful friend is a strong defense: and he that hath found such an one hath found a treasure (Sir. 6:14). Forsake not an old friend; for the new is not comparable to him (Sir. 9:10).*

*A friend cannot be known in prosperity: and an enemy cannot be hidden in adversity (Sir. 12:8). See also: Eccl. 4:9-12; 10:8; Sir. 7:34; 33:6.*

**Health and medicine:** Sir. 30:16; 38:1-12.

**Truth, lie, flattery:** *A thief is better than a man that is accustomed to lie: but they both shall have destruction to heritage (Sir. 20:25). Praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner, for it was not sent him of the Lord (Sir. 15:9). Strive for the truth unto death, and the Lord shall fight for thee (Sir. 4:28). Be steadfast in thy understanding; and let thy word be the same (Sir. 5:10).*

**Almsgiving:** *Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine (Prov. 3:9-10). Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee (3:27-28). There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty (Prov. 11:24-26). By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil (Prov. 16:6). He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again (Prov. 19:17).*

*Water will quench a flaming fire; and alms maketh an atonement for sins (Sir. 3:30). Be not slow to visit the sick: for that shall make thee to be beloved (Sir. 7:35). Dishonour not a man in*

*his old age: for even some of us wax old (Sir. 8:6). See also: Prov. 21:13, Sir. 4:1-8; 4:31; 7:33; 18:15; 34:18-19; 38:16.*

**Speech:** *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver (Prov. 25:11). There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health (Prov. 12:18). In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury (Prov. 14:23). Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding (Prov. 17:28). Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him (Prov. 29:20).*

*If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee; and be bold, it will not burst thee (Sir. 19:10). Many have fallen by the edge of the sword: but not so many as have fallen by the tongue (Sir. 28:18). Let thy speech be short, comprehending much in few words; be as one that knoweth and yet holdeth his tongue (Sir. 32:8). See also: Prov. 13:3; 4:24; 5:13; 6:16-19; 32:9; 19:9; 20:5; 20:6.*

**Prayer:** *Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words (Eccl. 5:2-3).*

*Before thou prayest, prepare thyself; and be not as one that tempteth the Lord (Sir. 18:23). The prayer of the humble pierceth the clouds (Sir. 35:17).*

**Wisdom:** *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7). Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee (Prov. 2:3-11).*

*For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow (Eccl. 1:18). Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness (Eccl. 2:13). A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed (Eccl. 8:1). Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour (Eccl. 10:1).*

*He that hath small understanding, and feareth God, is better than one that hath much wisdom, and transgresseth the law of the most High (Sir. 19:24). See also: Prov. 3:13-26; 4:5-9; 15:33; Sir. 6:18; 6:34; 21:15; 38:24; 39:1-9.*

**Trust in God:** *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths (Prov. 3:5-8). Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth (Prov. 27:1).*

*Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain (Prov. 30:7-9).*

*As the clay is in the potter's hand, to fashion it at his pleasure: so man is in the hand of him that made him, to render to them as liketh him best (Sir. 33:13). A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps (Prov. 16:9). See also: Prov. 16:3; Eccl. 12:14; Sir. 5:1; 16:12; 20:9.*

**Repentance and forgiveness:** *Wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished (Wis. 11:16). And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (1 Pet. 4:18, cf. Prov. 11:31) For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief (Prov. 24:16).*

*Make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day (Sir. 5:7). Whatsoever thou takest in hand, remember the end, and thou shalt never do amiss (Sir. 7:36).*

*Reproach not a man that turneth from sin, but remember that we are all worthy of punishment (Sir. 8:5). A sinful man will not be reprov'd, but findeth an excuse according to his will (Sir. 32:17). See also Sir. 15:11.*

*For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others (Eccl. 7:20-22).*

**Drunkennes:** *Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast (Prov. 23:29-35). Shew not thy valiantness in wine; for wine hath destroyed many (Sir. 31:25).*

**Self-control, loss of temper:** *A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame (Prov. 12:16). The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression (Prov. 19:11). He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls (Prov. 25:28). If thou blow the spark, it shall burn: if thou spit upon it, it shall be quenched: and both these come out of thy mouth (Sir. 28:12). See also: Prov. 17:27; 19:19.*

**Family and raising of children:** *Prov. 13:24. Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6). Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell (Prov. 23:13-14).*

**About a virtuous wife:** *Prov. 21:9; 31:10-31.*

**About parents:** *For the blessing of the father establisheth the houses of children; but the curse of the mother rooteth out foundations (Sir. 3:9). Better it is to die without children, than to have them that are ungodly (Sir. 16:3). See also: 3:12-13; 33:20-21.*

**Humility and pride:** *Surely he (God—transl). scorneth the scorers: but he giveth grace unto the lowly (Prov. 3:34). Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall (Prov. 16:18). Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility (Prov. 18:12). The greater thou art, the more humble thyself, and thou shalt find favour before the Lord (Sir. 3:17-18). Why is earth and ashes proud? (Sir. 10:9) The Lord hath plucked up the roots of the proud nations, and planted the lowly in their place (Sir. 10:15). See also: Sir. 3:21; 4:7; 13:1; 20:11.*

**About dreams:** *Whoso regardeth dreams is like him that catcheth at a shadow, and followeth after the wind (Sir. 34:2).*

**Honesty and modesty:** *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). For there is a shame that bringeth sin; and there is a shame which is glory and grace (Sir. 4:21).*

**Advice:** *Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counselors they are established (Prov. 15:22).*

**Patience and hardship:** *My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth (Prov. 3:11-12).*

*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city (Prov. 16:32). Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better (Eccl. 7:3).*

*My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation ... For gold is tried in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of adversity (Sir. 2:1-5). Woe be to fearful hearts, and faint hands, and the sinner that goeth two ways! Woe unto him that is fainthearted! for he believeth not; therefore shall he not be defended. Woe unto you that have lost patience! and what will ye do when the Lord shall visit you? They that fear the Lord will not disobey his Word; and they that love him will keep his ways. They that fear the Lord will seek that which is well, pleasing unto him; and they that love him shall be filled with the law. They that fear the Lord will prepare their hearts, and humble their souls in his sight, saying We will fall into the hands of the Lord, and not into the hands of men: for as his majesty is, so is his mercy (Sir. 2:12-18).*

**Hard work and laziness:** *Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger (Prov. 19:15). See also: Prov. 6:6-11; 24:30-34; Sir. 40:1.*

**Moderation:** *Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith (Prov. 15:16-17). See also: Sir. 31:19; 37:30-31.*



**Chastity (and marital faithfulness):** *As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion (Prov. 11:22).*

*When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee ... To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life (Prov. 2:10-19). See also Prov. 5:1-23.*

*Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent (Prov. 6:28-29).*

*The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein. Turn away thine eye from a beautiful woman, and look not upon another's beauty; for many have been deceived by the beauty of a woman; for herewith love is kindled as a fire (Prov. 22:14). See also Sir. 9:8-9.*

## 5. Prophetical Books.

### The Importance of Prophecies.

**T**he stream of time rushes the shuttle of our life to the infinite ocean of eternity. Neither people, nor demons, nor angels, but only God knows what awaits each of us. Some people are trying to unwrap the mystery of the future by using horoscopes, fortune-telling, witchcraft, superstitious tokens and other sinful and vain means, which are banned in the Holy Scripture (Lev. 19:31 and 20:6, Deut. 18:10-13, Jer. 27:9-10). However what is useful for us to know about our future has already been revealed by God through His Only-Begotten Son, and through the mediation of His selected people, the Prophets and the Apostles.

To an extent, every book of the Holy Scripture contains prophecies. Some of the Biblical books predominantly tell us about the future events, though; therefore they are called prophetic. We can find sixteen prophetic books in the Old Testament and one, The Apocalypse, in the New Testament. The Old Testament books of prophecies include the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The writers of the first four books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel) are called the Major Prophets, because their books are bigger in size than the books of the other fourteen prophets, who are therefore called Minor. There are two more books that are added to the Book of Jeremiah: The Lamentations of Jeremiah and the Book of Baruch. Sometimes the prophets wrote down their discourses themselves; sometimes their followers recorded them. Many predictions from the prophetic books have already been fulfilled, namely those about the fate of some ancient nations, the advent of the Messiah, and the New Testament times. The prophecies about the Last Times of the world (the kingdom of the antichrist, the Second Coming of Christ, the resurrection of all the dead and the Last Judgment) are yet to come

true. However, there are already some indications that these events of the end of mankind's history are approaching. As well as the miracles, the prophecies bear the witness of God's selection of the prophets and **inspiration** of their books.

The Christian faith teaches us that the future of each person and the entire mankind is not a result of a conjunction of incidental circumstances, or 'fate.' All events in the inanimate nature are fully controlled by the Maker. As regards the acts of men, God has given us the freedom of doing things that we wish, but He is assisting us in the implementation of our good intentions. All of the Holy Scripture, the Lives of Saints, and an insight into our own lives would convince us that God cares about the well-being of humans and directs their lives to salvation.

If acts of a person are determined only by his or her own will, how then can God foresee what exactly the person will decide to do? Answering this question, we must take it into account that the past and the future are human concepts. God lives **beyond and above** the time; for Him, **everything is in the present**. Everything to the tiniest detail is bare before His all-seeing eyes: every big and small event in the life of each living being, secret thoughts and desires, all things happening in the life of the human society in past, present and future, everything that is taking place in the most remote ends of the Universe, in the world of angels and in hell.

Why does God conceal from us some future events but reveals others? He does so for our spiritual benefit. From that tragic moment when the first man listened to the tempter and broke the commandment of God, the intense struggle over human soul has been going on, and the man is in the very center of the fighting. The Lord, angels and the saints who achieved perfection are his protectors and helpers, while demons and the people who took the evil part are his enemies. In order to help a believer to gain a victory, God shows him what his certain acts lead to, what snares the devil sets up, and what the Lord intends to do to help the faithful. On the other hand, concealing certain things, like the day of death, from a human, God makes him keep up his good effort at all times.

When circumstances require, the prophetic predictions can be very specific and detail the events of the future, naming countries, cities, people and even giving timeframes. But more often the prophecies **combine in one panorama** several events, divided by many centuries, yet akin in spirit. Such juxtaposition of different events in one vision is possible because the isolated facts are not equal in importance to the **spiritual processes** that run in the depths of human hearts. That is why prophecies predominantly speak about the moral condition of people and demonstrate the **relationship** between this condition and future things. At that, the prophecies provide the utmost clear manifestations of God's care for all humans, His guiding hand in the lives of individual people and countries and the entire world; His infinite love and long-suffering for those who seek good, and the wrath of His justice to those persisting in their sins and cooperating with the devil.

The aim of our two brochures, dedicated to the prophetic books of the Old Testament, is to familiarize the reader with the content of the prophetic books. In our previous brochure — “The Old Testament Regarding the Messiah” — we gave examples of predictions about the advent of the Messiah, His personality, acts and miracles. To avoid repetition, we will discuss other predictions and sermons of the ancient prophets here.

## The Time of the Prophets.

**I**t will be easier to understand the books of prophecies, if we are aware of the spiritual circumstances under which they were written. This is why we will briefly tell the reader about the most important events of those times.

Under Solomon's son king Rehoboam (980 B.C.), the kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms: Judea and Israel. Descendants of King David reigned in Judea, situated in the South of the Holy Land. Jerusalem, overseen by the beautiful temple built by Solomon on the mount Zion, was its capital. The law allowed the Jews to have only one temple, which was the spiritual center for the Jewish community. Judea consisted of two tribes: descendants of Judah and Benjamin. The other 10 tribes were in the kingdom of Israel in the northern part of the Holy Land. Its capital was Samaria, reigned by kings of various dynasties.

The Israeli kings, fearing that their subjects, who visited the temple in Jerusalem, would wish to again become loyal to the kings Judah, prevented them from making pilgrimage to Jerusalem. They built pagan sanctuaries in different parts of Israel to tend to the spiritual needs of the people, and encouraged the people to worship idols. The temptation of idolatry was strong, because all the nations that surrounded Israel worshipped various deities. Phoenician god Baal was especially popular. Together with idol worship, the Jews borrowed rude and immoral heathen traditions.

In this time of hardship for the religion, God sent His prophets to Israel to impede the spiritual decay and restore the piety among the people. The first Israeli prophets, Elijah and Elisha, lived under Ahab, Jehu and Jehoahaz, kings of Israel, from 900 B.C. till 825 B.C. They did not leave any records of their preaching to the posterity, though the miracles they worked and some of their teachings were put down in the First and Second Books of Kings.

During the long reign of Jeroboam II (782-740 B.C). the Israeli kingdom reached the highest prosperity. The weakened neighboring kingdoms of Syria, Phoenicia, Moabites, Ammonites and Edomites did not bother the Jews. Peace and prosperity accompanied the expansion of the borders of the kingdom of Israel. These were the blooming days of arts and commerce. But at the same time the morality started to degrade rapidly. The rich oppressed the poor, judges acquitted for bribes, depravity was rampant among the superstitious public. The prophets Joel, Amos and Hosea fought against these evils.

Jonah has a special place amongst the prophets because he did not preach to the Jews, but did it in Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. After his preaching and the repentance of the Ninevites, the Assyrian kingdom started to strengthen, expand and subsequently became a mighty military power. In two centuries, the Assyrian Empire spread over the territories of modern Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Israel. In 738 B.C. the king of Israel was forced to pay an enormous tribute to Tiglathpileser of Assyria. As the demands of Assyrian kings were increasing, the Israeli kings had to seek allies among the kings of the neighboring countries. King Tekoah of Israel together with Rezin the king of Syria attempted to force Ahab the king of Judea into a union against Assyria. Scared Ahab called for help from Tiglathpileser III. In 734 Tiglathpileser invaded Israel again, attached Galilee and Damascus to his kingdom and led many Israelites to captivity. While Tiglathpileser was alive, Israeli king Hoshea was submissively paying the regular tribute to Assyria. But after his death an alliance with Egypt was made. Then Shalmaneser IV the king of Assyria invaded Israel and devastated it and his successor Sargon conquered and devastated Samaria, the capital of Israel, in 722. Israelites were expatriated to different parts of the vast Assyrian Empire, and neighboring peoples were relocated to their land. Such was the end of the kingdom of Israel. Samaritans, the descendants of Israelites mixed with pagans, later settled in

the area. The prophets Joel, Amos and Hosea predicted the forthcoming adversities to Israel. They saw the repentance as the only way for the Jewish people to escape them.

The Judean kingdom existed for more than a hundred years after the collapse of Israel. When Samaria fell, the pious king Hezekiah (725-696) reigned in Judaea. Following the politics of his father Ahab, he maintained the alliance with Assyria. However, after the death of Sargon Hezekiah joined the coalition of the neighboring countries, trying to overthrow the Assyrian yoke. In 701 the Assyrian army led by king Sennacherib invaded Judaea and devastated several Judean cities. Hezekiah bought out with a large tribute. Soon Sennacherib invaded Judaea again, intending to collect new tribute needed to support his military power, and threatened to destroy Jerusalem. Relying on God's help, Hezekiah decided to defend Jerusalem. Then the prophet Isaiah stepped forth and predicted that Sennacherib's designs would fail and God would save the Jews. Indeed, during the following night an angel of the Lord defeated the 185,000-strong Assyrian army. Ashamed, Sennacherib returned to Assyria and was soon murdered by conspirators (2 Kings 20). Isaiah provided a flourishing manifestation of the gift of prophecy. His book is a remarkable monument of the prophetic writing. We will discuss it later in more detail. The prophets Micah and Nahum prophesied around the same time.

Hezekiah's impious son Manasseh (696-641 B.C.) was the opposite of his faithful and kind father. His reign turned out to be the darkest period in the history of the Jewish people. It was the time when prophets were persecuted and faith ruined. Manasseh made a union with Assyria and set himself a goal of making paganism the prevailing religion in his country. He mercilessly murdered the advocates of the faith. The great Isaiah was martyred during his reign, which lasted around fifty years and caused unrecoverable harm to the faith. The few prophets who survived the persecutions were hiding, and nothing is known about their activities. In his old age Manasseh attempted to get rid of the dependence on Assyria, but paid for it dearly. Eventually he recognized his guilt before God and repented, but neither the aging Manasseh, nor his successors managed to restore the faith among the people.

The pious king Josiah (639-608 B.C.) reigned after Manasseh. Eager to revitalize the people's belief in God, he zealously undertook a religious reform, and regular services resumed in the Temple. However, the success of his reforms was mostly superficial. Pagan traditions and superstitions had taken deep root in the people. The upper class was morally degraded. Yet the prophets Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk and particularly Jeremiah tried to wake the people for repentance and restore the faith in God. In 608 the Egyptian army of Pharaoh Necho II made war with Assyria and passed through Judaea. Josiah wanted to remain loyal to Assyria and faced Pharaoh Necho in a battle, but was defeated at Megiddo. For a short time Judaea became subject to Egypt.

This was the time of loss of power of Assyria and strengthening of the Babylonian monarchy. Joined armies of Nabopolassar of Babylon (king of the Chaldeans) and Xerxes of Media destroyed Nineveh in 606. This was the end of the militant Assyrian Empire, which sent dismay and devastation throughout the neighboring countries for a hundred and fifty years. Nabopolassar's successor Nebuchadnezzar (Nabuchodonosor) on a victorious march to Egypt invaded Judaea, and in 604 king Jehoiakim became a Babylonian subject. Despite the warnings of Jeremiah, Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin raised a revolt against Babylon and with many of his court was led to captivity in Babylon (It was the first Babylonian captivity in 597). The prophet Ezekiel was among the captives. In 588, under king Zedekiah, Judaea rebelled against Babylon (Chaldea) again. In 586 Jerusalem was besieged and taken. The Temple was burned down, and the city was destroyed. The blinded king with other subjects was led away into Babylonian captivity. It was the beginning of the second Babylonian captivity. The Jews spent in captivity about 70 years, from 597 B.C. till 536 B.C.

## Chronology.

(Years Before Christ).

Kings of Israel	Kings of Judah	Prophets	Principal Developments
Ahab 875-53	Jehoshaphat 876-51	Elijah	Development of Phoenicia
Ahaziah 853-51	Jehoram 851-42		
Jehoram 851-42	Ahaziah 843-42	Elisha 850-790	
Jehu 842-14	Athaliah 842-36		
Jehoahaz 814-797	Joash 836-796	Joel	Development of Assyria
Joash 797-81	Amaziah 796-82	Jonah	
Jeroboam 782-40	Azaraias 782-37	Amos	Foundation of Rome 750
Menahem 740-37		Hosea	
Pekah 737-33	Jotham 737-35		
Hoshea 733-22	Ahaz 735-25	Isaiah 730-690	Fall of Israel 722
	Hezekiah 725-696	Micah, Nahum	Siege of Jerusalem 700
	Manasseh 696-41	Zephaniah, Habakkuk	Persecution of Prophets
	Amon 641-39	Jeremiah	
	Josiah 639-08	Obadiah	Fall of Nineveh 606
	Jehoiakim 608-597		
	Jehoiachin 597	Ezekiel	
	Zedekiah 597-86	Daniel	Fall of Jerusalem 586
		Haggai	Babylonian Captivity
		Zechariah	Fall of Babylon 539
		Malachi 475 cr	Cyrus of Persia 559-29
		In 446 Artaxerxes ruled to restore Jerusalem.	Return from Captivity 536
		Ezra collected the Holy Scriptures 450-25	Darius I. Restoration of the Temple 534-16
			Beginning of the Weeks of Daniel

## Significance of Prophets.

In the Old Testament times the priests, in principle, only made sacrifices prescribed by the law. They did not take care of the public morality. They were priests, not pastors. The Jewish people sojourned in spiritual ignorance and easily adopted heathen superstitions. That is why **teaching** the Jews to **believe and live** correctly was the main goal of the prophets. In view of the violations of God's law, the prophets sternly denounced those who sinned, whoever they were: ordinary people or princes, priests or judges, slaves or kings. Their inspired words had great power to wake the repentant feeling and the desire to serve God. The prophets were the conscience of the people, and 'elders' for those seeking spiritual counsel and instruction. It is only owing to the prophets that the Jewish people retained the true faith until the nativity of Christ. The first fol-

lowers of Christ had been the followers of the last of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist.

While among the Jews the priesthood was inheritable, God called people for prophetic ministry individually. Prophets were coming from various social strata: peasants and shepherds, like Hosea and Amos; upper class, like Isaiah, Zephaniah and Daniel; there were also prophets descending from priests, like Ezekiel and Habakkuk. The Lord did not choose the prophets by their social ancestry, but by their spiritual qualities.

As centuries passed, an image of a true prophet of God developed among the Jews: a man fully unselfish, infinitely devoted to God, fearless before the powerful people but, at the same time, deeply humble, demanding to himself, compassionate and fatherly. God's prophets became advocates and protectors of many weak and abused people.

## Reproof and Consolation.

**I**t hurt the souls of prophets to see violations of justice and piety. They understood that breach of the law by a minority was a bad example and temptation for the others. They saw that immorality was dragging the country to spiritual and physical catastrophe. Therefore, in the strongest of words and with relentless sincerity they rebuked the sinners and openly talked about the severity of punishment for their lawlessness.

Below are several rebuking statements, characteristic of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah:

“Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters... Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment... Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting” (Isaiah 1:4-6, 1:13-18).

Menacing are God's words said through the prophet Jeremiah shortly before the fall of Jerusalem:

“Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD... are these... Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?”

Seeing the hardening of the people's hearts, the prophet bitterly mourned their perdition in these words:

“Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men... And they will deceive every one his neighbor, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and



wearily themselves to commit iniquity... Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant” (Jeremiah, Chapters 7 and 9).

But the prophets not only reproved. When it came to public adversities and woe, they were quick to give consolation to those who repented with hope for God's mercy, promised Divine help and foretold a better future.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins. O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom” (Isaiah 40:1-2; 9-11).

## A Review of the Prophetical Books in Chronological Order.

To make the discussion of the prophetic books clearer, we will order it chronologically. We will talk about the prophets who lived between 9th and 6th centuries B.C.: Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah. This first period is centered on Isaiah, whose book is to be viewed as the high blossom of the gift of prophecy. The visions of the prophets of that time were turned to the collapse of the kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. The first period ended in king Manasseh's persecution and massacre of prophets.

### Book of Joel.

Chronologically, Joel was the first prophet to leave records of his preaching. Joel exercised his prophetic ministry in Judah, probably under the kings Joash and Amaziah, around 800 years B.C. He called himself the son of Pethuel. Those were the years of relative peace and well being. Jerusalem, Zion, the Temple and divine services were always on the prophet's lips. However, the prophet viewed the disasters that struck Judah — drought and, especially, the awful locusts — as the beginning of God's judgment over the Jews and all people.

The main vice attacked by Joel is the mechanical, spiritless doing of the rites prescribed by the law. It was the time when the pious king Joash was trying to restore religion in Judah, but succeeded mainly in improving its external manifestations. The prophet foresaw even greater increase of pagan superstitions and subsequent God's punishment, and called the Jews to sincere repentance, saying, *“Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil”* (Joel 2:12-13).

Often Joel's single prophetic vision combined events divided by many centuries but similar from religious perspective. For example, the forthcoming God's judgment over the Jewish people was combined in Joel's vision with the forthcoming God's judgment over the Universe at the end of the world:

“Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake” (Joel 3:12-18).

But the Holy Ghost was to descend, and the people of God were to be renewed in spirit before the Great Judgment over the world:

“I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered” (Joel 2:28-32).

The Apostle Peter reminded the Jews of this prophecy of Joel when the Holy Ghost descended on the day of Pentecost.

The prophet Joel speaks on the following subjects: locusts (1:2-20), the coming of the Day of the Lord (2:1-11), call for repentance (2:12-17), God's mercy (2:18-27), spiritual restoration (2:28-32); prediction of the Judgment over all nations (3:1-17) and subsequent blessing of God (3:18-21).

## **Book of Jonah.**

Jonah, the son of Amittai, was born in Gathhepher of Galilee (near future Nazareth). He exercised the gift of prophecy in the second half of the 8th century before Christ in Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. He is supposed to be a younger contemporary and follower of the prophet Elisha. Jonah's tomb can be seen in El-Meshkhad, a village situated at the place of ancient Gathhepher.

The Book of Jonah does not contain the usual preaching addressed to the Jews, but describes Jonah's embassy to pagan Nineveh. Jonah initially did not want to go and preach to the Gentiles where God had sent him, and boarded a ship in Joppa to sail to Tarshish (Spain). In order to convince the prophet, the Lord sent a violent storm in the sea, which caused Jonah's ship to start sinking. Frightened sailors learned that Jonah's disobedience was the cause of the unprecedented storm, and threw him into the sea to stop God's anger. Indeed, the storm ceased and Jonah was swallowed by a giant fish. (This is possible, though the case is very rare. There are whales, called “Fin-Buck,” that reach 88 feet in length. Their stomachs may have 4 to 6 sections, each capable of holding a small group of people. Whales inhale air and each has a 686 cubic feet air chamber in the head. Sometimes animals and people were found alive in the heads of such

whales. Shark whales, reaching the length of 70 feet, also can hold a man without causing injury). Having spent about three days inside the fish, Jonah deeply repented of his disobedience and started to pray God to forgive him. Then the Lord ordered the fish to get Jonah to the land, and the prophet found himself on a beach close to Beirut. Convinced by these events, the prophet obediently proceeded to Nineveh, preaching denouncement and punishment for the city. The Ninevites believed the prophet, imposed strict fasting on themselves and their cattle, and deeply repented. The Lord had mercy on Nineveh and averted His punishment. The lives of over a quarter of a million people were saved. As the time passed, Nineveh became a capital of a powerful and militant state.

The book of Jonah gives a vivid example of God's love to all people, regardless of their nationality. The Lord Jesus Christ reminded the Jews of the miracle of Jonah and reproved them for not repenting, as the Ninevites had repented after Jonah's preaching, though they had a prophet greater than Jonah amongst them. The Lord pointed at Jonah's mysterious stay in a whale's belly for three days and nights as the prototype of His three-day stay in a grave and subsequent resurrection (Matthew 12:39-41).

Jonah's prayer in the belly of the whale, cited at the end of the second chapter of his book, is the model for the *heirmos* of the sixth ode of the Matins. Jonah's prayer started with the following words, *"I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice."*

### Book of Amos.

Amos was of a poor family. He was born in Tekoah, between the Dead Sea and Bethlehem. This is how he told about his vocation to prophecy, *"I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel"* (Amos 7:14-15). Amos prophesied in Bethel and other towns of the kingdom of Israel under the king Jeroboam II. He was a contemporary of the prophets Hosea, Micah and Isaiah. Those were the years of relative peace and prosperity.

The prophet was a shepherd by birth and grieved about the oppression of the poor people, keeping back laborers' hire, injustice and bribery of judges, depravity of rulers and negligence of priests. Amos viewed the restoration of justice as the first precondition in averting God's punishment. He was persecuted for his prophecies, and by the intriguing of Amaziah the priest of Bethel, the prophet was even exiled from this town.

At that time the Gentile states and towns had their 'patron gods'. In a like way, some Jews saw God Jehovah as their local God, comparable with Phoenician god Baal and other deities. The prophet Amos emphasized that the power of God stretched out beyond His chosen people, to the entire Universe, and the pagan deities were nothing. All peoples, not the Jews only, were responsible before God for what they had done, and would be punished for their iniquities. Amos' preaching went far beyond the boundaries of Israel: it was addressed to the Edomites, Ammonites and Moabites, as well as to the capital cities of Damascus, Gaza and Tyre. Having called the Jewish people to the faith, God manifested His **special mercy** to them. Therefore the Jews were to set good examples to the neighboring nations, and more would be required from them than from others at the Judgment: *"Hear this word... the family which I brought up from the land of Egypt. You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"* (Amos 3:1-2).

The prophet saw that, due to the wickedness of the people, a spiritual famine was coming nearer, and that would be worse than physical starvation: *"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord*

*GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it”* (Amos 8:11-12). This prophecy is coming true in front of our eyes in the countries of militant atheism, where the word of God is sometimes being picked out from quotations of the anti-religious propaganda.

Summarized content of the book of Amos is as follows: denouncement of the sins of Israel and neighboring nations (Chapters 1 and 2), renouncement of the mighty and rich people and call for justice (Chapters 3 through 5), prediction of God's Judgment (5:18-26). The last chapters (6-9) include five visions of the judgment of God. The conclusion of the book of Amos is a prediction of the spiritual revival of people.

### **Book of Hosea.**

The prophet Hosea, the son of Beerai from the tribe of Issachar, lived and prophesied in the kingdom of Israel shortly before its collapse. His prophetic ministry began at the end of the reign of Jeroboam II around 740 B.C. and lasted until the fall of Samaria in 721. It was a period of spiritual decline of the Israeli people, increase of idolatry and spiritual depravity. Pressure from the hostile Assyria added to the political instability in Israel and frequent coups d'état.

The prophet Hosea energetically denounced the vices of his contemporaries, and especially the obscene pagan traditions that the Jews had adopted from the neighboring nations. Hosea also predicted the forthcoming misfortunes. It is known of his personal life that he married Gomer who was publicly unfaithful to him and adulterous. The prophet had to divorce her formally, but he still loved and sympathized with her. His own personal drama was for the prophet a picture of how sad the spiritual adultery of the Israeli people was for God, Who made a covenant with them on Sinai — the covenant that the Jews broke and dishonored when they fell in spiritual fornication. Therefore the Lord predicted through the medium of the prophet that the Jews would be rejected, and the Gentiles called to the Kingdom of God: *“And I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God”* (Hosea 2:18-23).

The prophet also rebuked the priests who reduced the faith in God to callous rites, and neglected to instruct the people in the law of God:

*“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame. They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity. And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings”* (Hosea 4:6-9).

The prophet further addressed those who were still able to hear his preaching, *“Come, and let us return unto the LORD... His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.”* That is what God values in the actions of people: *“I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings”* (Hosea 6:1-3, 5-6).

In view of the forthcoming destruction of the kingdom of Israel, Hosea made his best effort to wake a feeling of repentance in the people. But he also saw what was to come after the disas-

ters, at the end of time, when the people of God would be fully renewed, and when all grieves and death itself would be eliminated: *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction”* (Hosea 13:14). Some phrases from the book of Hosea were often cited by the New Testament writers (See Hosea 11:1, Matthew 2:15; Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13; Hosea 2:23, 1 Peter 2:10; Hosea 13:14, 1 Corinthians 15:55; Hosea 10:8, Luke 23:30 etc.).

The content of the book of the prophet Hosea is as follows: unfaithful wife and whoredom of Israel (1-2), God's faithfulness (3), reproof of Israel (4-7), God's judgment over Israel (8-10), a series of brief discussions on the previous topics (11-14). The book closes in the promise of salvation for the righteous (14).

## Book of Isaiah.

Isaiah, one of the greatest prophets of all time, lived in the first half of the 8th century B.C. Generously endowed by God with spiritual gifts, Isaiah belonged to the capital's high society and had free access to the royal house. He had political views of a statesman and an outstanding poetic talent. The alliance of these exclusive qualities made his book unique in the ancient literature. The book of Isaiah is rich in prophecies of the Messiah, His blessed Kingdom and the New Testament time, therefore the prophet Isaiah is called “the Old Testament Evangelist.”

The prophet Isaiah, the son of Amos, was born in Jerusalem around 765 B.C. (The name Isaiah means “God is saving.”) When Isaiah was 20, he was called to prophetic ministry by a special revelation of God: he saw God Sabaoth, sitting on the throne, surrounded by angels (Isaiah, Chapter 6). Isaiah prophesied under Azaraias, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, the kings of Judaea. He is known to have been married with two children. His prophetic ministration ended in martyrdom in the 8th year of the reign of Manasseh when, according to the tradition, the prophet was sawn asunder with a wooden saw (Hebrews 11:37). Apart from the book of prophecies, he wrote chronicles of kings Uzziah and Hezekiah (now lost, though) and put in order the last seven chapters of the Proverbs of Solomon (Proverbs 25:1).

Under kings Azaraias (Uzziah) and Jotham the Jewish people were infected with idolatry, which even more increased under Ahaz. This king “made molten images for Baalim... and burnt his children in the fire” (2 Chronicles 28:1-4). Pekah, the king of Israel and Rezin, the king of Syria made a ware against him. Ahaz sent rich gifts to the Assyrian king Tiglathpileser and he vanquished Pekah and Rezin, but imposed a large tribute on Ahaz. The prophet Isaiah encouraged the people during the invasion by Pekah and Rezin and gave the king a sign of victory over them in the prophecy about the Messiah's birth from a Virgin (Isaiah 7:14). Yet the prophet reproved Ahaz for asking help from the Assyrian king.

Ahaz's son Hezekiah was pious. However, the morality of the urban inhabitants degraded so that the prophet likened them to the Gentiles, exterminated by God: *“The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves”* (Isaiah 3:9-11).

The prophet especially armed up against judges and the people at the helm of power, whose responsibility was to protect the innocent and care about justice:

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that... justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!”

“Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!” (Isaiah 5:20-23, 10:1-2).

The prophet predicted that for these crying iniquities *“the LORD will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day. The ancient and honorable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail”* (Isaiah 9:14-15).

Both the ministers of the Temple and the Temple goers were not flawless, and the prophet accused them of callousness and hypocrisy: *“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men”* (Isaiah 29:13).

The prophet grieved over the sins of the people in the following prayer:

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people” (Isaiah 64:6-9).

Yet the prophet believed in the power of repentance, and that there is no sin beyond the mercy of God:

“Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah, Chapter 1).

In the 14th year of the reign of Hezekiah, Sennacherib of Assyria attacked Jerusalem. By the king's and the prophet's prayer, the 185,000 strong Assyrian army was defeated by a God's angel, and the city was saved (Isaiah, Chapters 36-37). After a while, the king Hezekiah became fatally sick, but was miraculously cured by the prophet's prayers (Isaiah, Chapters 38-39).

The Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians and Edomites were the neighbors of Israelites. They always threatened to invade Judaea, and the Jews had to either defend themselves or pay tribute. In the state of permanent clashes, the kings of Judaea needed a reliable guide, and God sent Isaiah to them in order to warn the kings and the people of dangers, encourage them, predict the fate of the Jews and their neighbors, and foretell the future salvation by the Messianic Child. A special theme of Isaiah's prophecy was the **Babylonian** kingdom, which he identified with the **kingdom of evil of the latter days**, and its king with **antichrist**, anti-Messiah. That's why many elements of prophecies about Babylon are yet to be fulfilled (see Chapters 14, 21, 46-47; cf. Chapters 16-17 of Revelation). In Chapters 24-25 Isaiah spoke about the judgment of the universe.



Isaiah's prophecies are characterized by unusual clarity and poetry. Prediction of the Savior's suffering (Chapter 53) was written so clearly as though the prophet himself had been present at the Crucifixion. Isaiah's most remarkable prophecies included: birth of Emmanuel from a Virgin (7:14), many miracles to be done by the Messiah (35:5-6), His humility and meekness (42:1-4) and His other acts, which are discussed in greater detail in the brochure "The Old Testament Regarding the Messiah." Remarkable was the accuracy of Isaiah's prophecy about Cyrus, which became known to this king 200 years later (44:27-28; 45:1-3, Ezra 1:1-3).

The prophet Isaiah said that the chosen people in its mass would be rejected by God for iniquity, and only the "**holy remnant**" would be saved (Isaiah 6:13). The place of the rejected Jews in the Kingdom of the Messiah would be taken by the converted Gentiles (Isaiah 11:1-10, 49:6, 54:1-5, 65:1-3).

Isaiah's description of God's glory and power, His wisdom, goodness and omnipotence are of remarkable depth and poetry; against the background of the Creator's perfection, the pagan deities are trifling and despicable.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:8-11).

More than once the prophet testified about God's grace to the repentant and the humble.

"Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:1-2). "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:29-31).

"Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low. And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees... And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isaiah 25:3-9).

The last 27 Chapters of the book of the prophet Isaiah (40-66) contain many consolatory predictions regarding the New Testament times and the renovation of the world after the general judgment. This is the vision of the New Jerusalem (the Church) on the holy hill:

“Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever” (Isaiah 60:18-21).

The themes discussed in the Chapters of the book of Isaiah are as follows: rebuking the sins of Judah (1), God's judgment over the world and the advent of the Kingdom of God (2-3); salvation of the remnant of the people and the Messiah (4), song about the vineyard (5), vision of the Lord of Hosts (6), conflict with Syria and the birth of Emmanuel (7), the wonderful Child (8-9), speech about Assyria (10), the Messiah and His Kingdom (11), song of praise to God (12), prophecies about Gentile kingdoms, Babylon and antichrist (13-14), Moab (15), Samaria and Damascus (17), speech about Ethiopia and Egypt (18-20), prediction of the fall of Babylon (21), prediction of the invasion in Judaea (22), Tyre (23); Judgment over the universe and the renovation of the world (24-25), raising of the dead (26), song about the vineyard continued (27), speech about Samaria and Jerusalem (28-29), Egypt (30-31), the New Testament times (32), prediction about Assyria (33), judgment over nations and God's grace (34-35), historic records (36-39), prediction about the end of the Babylonian captivity and about John the Baptist (40, 48), prediction about king Cyrus (41 and 45), Servant of the Lord (42), consolation of the captives in Babylon (43-44), fall of Babylon (46-47), the Messiah (49-50), restoration of Zion (51-52), the suffering Messiah (53), the Gentiles called to the Messianic Kingdom (54-55), the New Testament times (56-57), reproof of hypocrites (58-59), the glory of the New Jerusalem (60), the Messiah and the new Testament times (61-63), the prophet's prayer for his people (62), the Gentiles called to the faith (65), triumphant Church and the final judgment of the renegades (66). In spite of its antiquity, the book of Isaiah reads as if it were written yesterday. It is so rich in contents, consolatory and poetic that each Christian should always have it at hand.

### **Book of Micah.**

Prophet Micah descended from the tribe of Judah and was Morasthite by the place of birth, a small settlement south of Jerusalem. He was a younger contemporary of Isaiah and prophesied for fifty years about the fate of Samaria and Jerusalem during the reign of king Hezekiah and the first half of the reign of impious Manasseh. Micah is mentioned in the book of Jeremiah (26:18). When some wanted to kill Jeremiah for his prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem, certain elders defended him, saying, that in the days of king Hezekiah Micah predicted the same, and no one persecuted him for the prophecy. Abrupt discourse of the book of Micah is the evidence that only a portion of his prophecies has survived, while the other part, probably, perished during Manasseh's persecution of prophets.

The principal idea of the book of Micah was that the Lord remained faithful to His covenant with the chosen people and, after having them cleansed with disasters and repentance, would lead them (and through them the Gentiles) to the Kingdom of the Messiah. The book of Micah contains a prediction about the destruction of Samaria and devastation of Jerusalem; promise of the salvation of Israel through the Elder from Bethlehem; it pointed out the ways to salvation. Micah came forward to support the poor and the destitute of his people, and to denounce the heartless and arrogant rich. *“The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a*

*net. That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up. The best of them is as a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge” (Micah 7:2-4).*

This is what the Lord expects from a man: *“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:8).* The prophet closed the book by addressing God in these words: *“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:18-19).*

The content of the book of Micah: destruction of Jerusalem and Samaria (1-2), sins of the inhabitants of Judaea (3), the Kingdom of Messiah (4), the birth of Christ in Bethlehem (5), judgment over nations (6), mercy to the faithful (7).

The key events of the second prophetic period, which started after Manasseh (6th through 4th centuries B.C.), were the religious reform of the king Josiah (639-608 B.C.), development of the Babylonian kingdom, destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.), Babylonian captivity of the Jews; repentance of the Jews and their return to their land (536 B.C.), restoration of the Jerusalem Temple (475 B.C.). After that, the Messianic expectations were becoming increasingly tense until the time of the Nativity.

### **Book of Zephaniah.**

The result of the long reign of wicked Manasseh (696-641 B.C.) was that almost all God's prophets in Judaea were murdered or went underground. Saint Zephaniah probably was the first prophet to raise his voice after the half-century silence of God's messengers. Zephaniah preached under the pious Judean king Josiah about 20 years before the devastation of Jerusalem (639-608 B.C.). Enumeration of Zephaniah's forefathers to the 4th generation indicates his noble origin. King Josiah's religious reform is supposed to have been encouraged by the prophet Zephaniah. However, the reform could bring but little fruit: it was too hard to restore the religious principles of the people, undermined by Manasseh. In distress Zephaniah watched the people running spiritually wild and getting captivated by pagan superstitions.

However, the prophet severely denounced those responsible for guiding the people and giving them good example — Judaic princes, judges and priests:

*“Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city! She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God. Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame” (Zephaniah 3:1-5).*

The goal of this severe reproof of course was to avert the forthcoming disasters from the Jews. Zephaniah as well predicted God's punishment to the neighboring nations — Moabites and Ammonites in the east, Assyrians in the north, Ethiopians in the south. These punishments were not needed to exterminate the people, but to make them listen to reason and lead them to the true faith. Zephaniah closed his book by describing the Messianic times and the spiritual revival of

the world: *“For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent”* (3:9).

The content of the book of Zephaniah is as follows: God's Judgment over Jerusalem (1-2:3), judgment over the neighboring nations (2:4-15), judgment over Jerusalem again (3:1-8), the Messiah and salvation of the world (3:9-20).

## Book of Nahum.

The prophet Nahum was called the Elkoshite (“elgoshi” in Hebrew), which probably was the reference to his father's name. According to tradition, Nahum's family was from the village which was later named after him. It is mentioned in the Gospel as Capernaum (i.e. the village of Nahum) on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. After the devastation of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., Nahum's ancestors moved to Judaea, where Nahum exercised his prophetic ministrations in early 7th century B.C.

In his three-chapter book, Nahum mostly spoke about the punishment of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian kingdom. In the past Nineveh was the weapon in the arms of God, used to punish and convict the Jewish people; that was why Isaiah called Assyria *“the rod of the anger of God and the staff in His hand”* (Is 10:5-15). Nahum depicted the punishment of the Jews by the Assyrians in the following images: *“The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet... Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him”* (Nahum 1:3-7).

200 years before this, in the days of the prophet Jonah, God forgave Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, for the sake of the repentance of her inhabitants. After that, Assyria started to grow and strengthen rapidly. Encouraged by their victories, the Assyrians became very arrogant and cruel to the conquered nations. In his book Nahum very accurately described the moral condition of contemporary Nineveh, the city of blood and treachery. Nahum saw the forthcoming punishment of Nineveh as a just retaliation to this city for the innocently shed blood. Indeed, the previously invincible Nineveh was soon conquered by Nabopolassar of Babylon in 612 B.C. Herodotus, Dioscorus of Sicily, Xenophon and other Greek authors, colorfully portrayed its devastation and subsequent collapse of the entire mighty Assyrian Empire.

As foretold by the prophet Nahum, after its devastation Nineveh completely disappeared from the face of the earth: *“Where is the dwelling of the lions, — asked the prophet in surprise, — The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin. Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard”* (2:11-13). Over two thousand years, the very location of Nineveh had been forgotten and only in the 19th century the place was found during the excavations by Rawlinson and others. These archaeological findings confirmed the truth and remarkable accuracy of Nahum's prophecies even more.

## Book of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk was a Levi (Levi's descendants were priests, acolytes and singers in the Temple in Jerusalem). He lived shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem and was a contemporary of the Prophet Jeremiah. His book is distinguished for its clear, exalted and poetic language. Experts in the Holy Scripture praise this book for its simplicity, brevity and depth of depiction.

The prophet Habakkuk taught that the wicked and lawless would perish, and the righteous would be saved by their faith. This idea was first revealed in the form of a conversation between God and the prophet about the judgment and condemnation of the wicked people, and later on as the prophet's hymn, depicting God's judgment, which would result in destruction of the wicked and salvation of the righteous. *“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places”* (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

The prophet Habakkuk foretold justification by grace through faith in the Kingdom of the Messiah: *“Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith”* (Habakkuk 2:4, cf. Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38).

The second and third chapters of the book of Habakkuk serve as the model for the heirmos of the 4th ode of the canon of Matins. Some expressions of these chapters are literally repeated in certain heirmoses, for example, “I will stand upon my watch” in the Canon of Easter, or “I have heard thy speech, and was afraid... His glory covered the heavens...” and so forth. The Apostolic Fathers see these phrases of Habakkuk as referring to the Messiah.

The prophet Habakkuk foresaw the distant future when *“the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (Habakkuk 2:14). His book encloses the prophet's bewilderment about the success of the wicked (1:1-4), God's reply (1:5-11), the prophet's further perplexities (1:12-17) and the Lord's answer (2:1-5), prediction of grief to the Chaldeans for their depredation (2:6-20), hymn to God (Chapter 3).

## Book of Jeremiah.

The prophet Jeremiah (in Hebrew, “Exalted by God”) was descended from a priest's family; he was born in Anathoth, four kilometers northwest of Jerusalem. He was called to prophetic ministry during the reign of Josiah and prophesied under Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. The Lord revealed to Jeremiah that He decided to make him a prophet even before he was born: *“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations”* (Jeremiah 1:5). Appointing Jeremiah for the ministry of a prophet, the Lord stretched His arm to touch his mouth, and said: *“Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant”* (Jeremiah 1:9-10).

For about forty years since then Jeremiah had continuously prophesied, teaching people faith and piety. On behalf of God, Jeremiah said: *“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD”* (Jeremiah 9:23-24).



Under the pious king Josiah Jeremiah taught freely. The public religiosity was predominantly expressed in rituals, while in spirit people were departing from God further and further: “*My people have committed two evils, — said the Lord through the lips of Jeremiah, — they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water*” (Jeremiah 2:13).

With the passage of time, Jeremiah's truthful words started to irritate the listeners and, from the reign of Jehoiakim, the prophet was always persecuted, even by the members of his family. It came to the point where Jeremiah had to be hiding because Jehoiakim condemned him to death. However, Jeremiah dictated his denouncements to his follower Baruch, who announced them to the king and the people. In order to conceal one of such speeches from the public, Jehoiakim was burning it, leave after leave, as it was read. Jeremiah knew that it was useless to make war against the Babylonians and tried to convince Zedekiah, the last Judean king and the successor of Jehoiakim (who was taken captive to Babylon), to submit to Nebuchadnezzar. For doing this he was imprisoned as the enemy of the fatherland, and later thrown into a dung pit.

The years preceding the collapse of the kingdom of Judaea were the time of utter spiritual desperation and blindness of the Jews. That's why Jeremiah's prophetic ministry was one of the most bitter and hard. At times Jeremiah was so depressed by the grief that he did not even want to live: “*Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth... For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily*” (Jeremiah 15:10-11, 20:7).

Finally, Jeremiah decided to stop preaching at all: “*Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name.*” But Jeremiah could not hold back his gift of prophecy for a long time: “*But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay*” (Jeremiah 20:8-9).

Compared to other prophetic books, the book of Jeremiah contains many autobiographical notes, which makes it especially valuable for the understanding of the essence of the gift of prophecy and relationship between God and His elect.

In view of the forthcoming disaster, Jeremiah increasingly discharged his denouncements onto the main culprits of the spiritual hardening of the regular people — the rich and those at the helm of power:

“*Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; That saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is cieled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD*” (Jeremiah 22:13-16).

However, the spiritual hardening of the upper class was already incurable: “*The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars*” (Jeremiah 17:1). We must say that the spiritual wickedness of Jeremiah's contemporaries, as well as the Jews in the seventies A.D., when Jerusalem was destroyed for the second time, in many respects characterize the spiritual wickedness of the people of the latter days before the Second Coming of Christ. Therefore, in the lips of the prophets and the Savior, both the first and the second destruction of Jerusalem serve as images of the end of the world and get combined with it in a single prophetic vision (Matthew Chapter 24).



In the book of Jeremiah we find frequent references to his clashes with false prophets who, unlike Jeremiah, were appeasing people by saying that there would be no disaster and everything would go well. These persuasions lulled the conscience of the people and actually sped up the spiritual decay. It is appropriate to note that, according to the Savior's prediction, coming of many false prophets will also be a sign of the nearing end of the world: "*Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many*" (Matthew 24:5, 11). Thus, Jeremiah's denouncements apply even today.

Under king Zedekiah in 586 B.C., the prophecies of Jeremiah and other prophets finally came true: the hordes of Nebuchadrezzar surrounded Jerusalem, took it and destroyed the city and the Temple. The survivors were led to captivity which had to last 70 years, in accordance with the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:11). During the seizure of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was bound and led away together with other captives, but Nebuchadrezzar commanded to free him on the way. Soon after that fugitives from Jerusalem captured Jeremiah and led him to Egypt, where he continued his prophetic ministrations for several years. In the Second Book of the Maccabees (2 Maccabees 2:4-5) it is recorded that, when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, Jeremiah hid the tabernacle and the ark with the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, and the altar of incense in a cave in mount Nebo. The attempts to find these things later did not succeed. The tradition has it that Jeremiah was stoned at Daphne for the prediction of invasion of Nebuchadrezzar into Egypt. Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) made an honorable funeral for the relics of the prophet Jeremiah and buried them in a precious tomb in Alexandria.

The main idea of the book of Jeremiah was that God, through the Babylonians, would enforce the judgment on the Jews and Gentiles in order to clean off their idolatry and pagan iniquity. After the captivity, the Jews would return to their land and the Lord in the person of the Messiah, King the Shepherd, would restore the throne of David (in the spiritual sense) and make the New Covenant. Jeremiah's inherent lyrical disposition, perceivable in his speech, made his book a remarkable monument of the ancient poetry.

In brief, the **Book of Jeremiah** tells about the vocation of Jeremiah (1), contains his prophecies during the reigns of Josiah (2-6) and Jehoiakim (7-20), reproof of kings and false prophets (21-25:14), prophecies about the neighboring nations (25:15-38; 46-51), devastation, restoration (25-33) and the last days of Jerusalem (34-45), plus a historical summary (52).

The book of Jeremiah is followed in the Bible by the book of the **Lamentations of Jeremiah**, which was written soon after the devastation of Jerusalem. It contains five chapters, which colorfully depict the misery of the destroyed Temple and the city, and the grief of the Jews. The original text of this book was an acrostic with the first letters of each line set in the order of the Hebrew alphabet, like in Psalms 37 and 119. Jeremiah addressed all passers-by on behalf of Jerusalem, wishing that they escaped such a fate, explained the reasons of what had happened and asked for sympathy. The book of Lamentations was closed with a prayer: "*Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old*" (Lamentations 5:21).

Another book, adjoining the books of Jeremiah, is the **Book of Baruch**, written by Baruch the son of Neriah. Enumeration of the five generations of his ancestors shows the nobility of his descent. Indeed, his brother Seraiah was the chief of tax collectors and went with Zedekiah the king of Judah into Babylon to Nebuchadrezzar (Jeremiah 51:59). The prophet Baruch was a follower and assistant to the prophet Jeremiah. Together with his teacher Baruch bore the persecution and oppression of the contemporaries (Jeremiah 36:19-26; 43:3; 45:2-3). After the destruction of Jerusalem Baruch relocated to Egypt with Jeremiah, and stayed there until the death of his teacher. After that Baruch moved to Babylon where, as the tradition has it, he died in the twelfth year after the destruction of Jerusalem.

The book of Baruch was written out of the desire of the Jews from Babylon to encourage their compatriots, who had stayed in the devastated Judaea, with donations and an accompanying letter. The letter on behalf of the captives was compiled by Baruch. First he read this letter to the captured king Jehoiachin with the Jews that lived in Babylon, and then sent it to Joakim the high priest in Judaea.

In his letter Baruch explained to the Jews that the disasters that befell them did not mean final rejection, but were only a temporary punishment for the sins. Therefore the people had to grieve over their sins, not the captivity. In due time the Lord would free His people from the captivity, and the glorious days of Jerusalem would come, when the Person of the Wisdom of God would become incarnate. (The Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, is called Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs: Proverbs 8:22-30, Baruch 3:36-4:4). The book of Baruch showed how beneficial were the disasters for the Jews: many admitted their share of the guilt, repented and became more humble and obedient to God.

### **Book of Obadiah.**

The Book of Obadiah is the shortest work in the Old Testament, containing only 21 verses. It is based on the vision of Edom, a country southwest of Judaea; the Edomites that inhabited it were related by blood to the Jews. Nothing is said about the prophet Obadiah neither in his book, nor in the rest of the Biblical writings. The book of Obadiah was written soon after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, when the Edomites encouraged and gloated over the devastation of the city, instead of providing help or at least showing sympathy to their blood brothers. The grief of the Jews over this behavior of the Edomites was expressed in the following words from Psalm 137: *“Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.”* In his prophetic vision Obadiah saw the punishment of the Edomites for their cruelty. The prophet also foretold the return of the Jews from the captivity.

### **Book of Ezekiel.**

The prophet Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, was born in Judaea. Together with king Jehoiachin and 10,000 Jews he was led captive to Babylon in 597 B.C. and settled in Mesopotamia at the river of Chebar, a tributary of the River Tigris.

Ezekiel was called to the ministry of a prophet at the age of thirty by the vision of the “appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.” It was in the fifth year of the reign of Jehoiachin, and since then he prophesied to the settlers of the Mesopotamian Tel Aviv for 22 years, from 592 till 570 B.C. The description of his vision of the four living creatures with the faces of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle was later used for the symbols of the Four Evangelists (Ezekiel 1:10). Ezekiel preached not only to the captive Jews, but also to the “rebellious house of Israel” — the Israelites who had been led here after the devastation of their kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. These Israelites had no spiritual leaders in the land of captivity and fully degraded spiritually.

Calling Ezekiel to prophetic ministry, the Lord said to him:

“And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me... they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD. And they,

whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear... yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them... Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 2:3-7, 3:8-9).

The Lord further revealed to Ezekiel what was his mission and responsibility as a prophet:

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

Obedying God, the prophet Ezekiel severely denounced the inclination of the Israelites to pagan traditions, their hypocrisy and disobedience. However, Ezekiel predicted the end of the captivity and restoration of the Temple and Jerusalem, so that they would not lose their hearts.

Ezekiel lived far away from Judaea, yet in his prophetic spirit he flew to Jerusalem (8:1-3) and from Mesopotamia he saw every detail of the siege of Jerusalem (4:1-17), capturing of king Zedekiah, destruction of the city and the Temple. The prophet passed on his visions to the Israelites who cared for the fate of their native land. The prophet had a wife who died in the fourth year of his prophetic ministration as a prophetic symbol of the grief of the Jews, and her death was made known to Ezekiel the day before (24:15-24).

The tradition says that Ezekiel was a “judge” of the captives, that is their spiritual leader. Once he rescued a group of captives from robbers, and multiplied food by his prayer when the crop was poor. The prophet Ezekiel was martyred for the exposure of the idolatry of the elders of Israel.

The language and the narrative of the book of Ezekiel are characterized by a few **symbolic visions**, parables and allegories. By this, the book of Ezekiel can only be compared to the Revelation of St. John the Theologian. The vision of the glory of the Lord, described in the first three chapters of the book, was extraordinary and even hard to picture. In general, the imagery and symbolism of the prophet's speech made the understanding of the book difficult, and experts in the Bible and the Hebrew language, such as the blessed Jerome, complained about it. Even the naming in the book of Ezekiel is special: God is Adonai Sabaoth, i.e. “the Lord of Hosts,” Shaddai, or “Almighty,” the people are Israel, which means “the one struggling with God.” The prophet often called himself “son of man,” which implied his humble and humiliated position of a prophet in the captive nation.

Remarkable is Ezekiel's vision when an Angel of God set a mark upon the foreheads of the men in Jerusalem “that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.” The people marked by the Angel were saved from the fate of the other inhabitants of

Jerusalem who were slain when the enemy took the city. According to the vision, the punishment of the wicked had to start with the ancient men at the sanctuary (Ezekiel 9:1-7). This vision of Ezekiel is very similar to the vision of the Apostle John the Theologian (Revelation 7:1-4) and tells us that the grace of God, like a seal, distinguishes those who love God and protects them from the common fate of the wicked.

As foretold by Ezekiel, the faithful of the forthcoming Kingdom of Messiah would not only formally fulfill the commandments of God, as the best of the Old Testament Jews did, but they would be absolutely different people by their spiritual content: *“And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God”* (Ezekiel 11:19-20, 36:26-27).

To sum up, the contents of the book of Ezekiel is as follows: vision of the appearance of the glory of God and Ezekiel's vocation to the ministry of a prophet (1-3), thirteen reproving speeches against the Jews and the symbolic acts mimicking the fall of Jerusalem (4-24), denouncement of Gentiles: the neighbors of the Jews (25), people of Tyre (26-28). Verses 13-19 in Chapter 28 refer to the devil, personified by the king of Tyre (see a similar speech about antichrist in Isaiah 14:5-20). Prophecies about the Egyptians (29-32), the prophet's new mission after the fall of Jerusalem: console and encourage (33), the Lord is the shepherd of revived Israel (34), punishment of Edom (35), revival of Israel (36), raising of dead bones as the prophecy about resurrection of the dead (37), apocalyptic prophecies about the enemies of the Church and the defeat of the hordes of Gog (38-39) (Cf. Revelation 20:7 about Gog and Magog), new eternal Kingdom of God and the new Temple (40-48, see Revelation, Chapter 21). Prophecies of the last 14 Chapters of Ezekiel, referring to the last times, have many common features with the mysterious visions of Daniel and the Apocalypse of the Apostle John the Theologian. These prophecies are yet to be fulfilled, and their interpretation should be tentative, with account to their heavy load of symbolism.

## **Book of Daniel.**

The prophet Daniel was of a noble, maybe even of royal descent. In the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, during the first conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (in 606 B.C.), young Daniel was taken captive to Babylon. Together with other noble youths, Daniel was sent to a school to be trained for service at the royal court. Daniel was then between 14 and 17 years old.

Three friends of Daniel went to school together with him: Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael. They had to learn the local language and various Chaldean disciplines for several years. When the Jewish boys were admitted to the school, they were renamed into Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Having adopted these Gentile names, the boys did not change the faith of their fathers, though. They feared the abomination of the pagan meals from the king's table, sprinkled with the idol-offered blood, and asked their Gentile instructor to give them plain vegetable food instead. The instructor conditionally agreed to give vegetable food to the boys for ten days. At the end of the try period these youths turned up to be healthier than the others who ate from the king's table. After that they were permitted to continue eating vegetarian food. The lord rewarded the pious boys with success in studies, and at the examination the Babylonian king found them to be wiser than his Babylonian magicians.

After the completion of the course of studies, Daniel with his three friends was to serve at the royal court, and remained at the court as a man of high rank during the entire reign of Neb-

uchadrezzar and his five successors. After the conquest of Babylon he became counselor to kings Darius of Media and Cyrus of Persia (Daniel 6:28).

God gave Daniel the ability to understand visions and dreams; Daniel demonstrated it by interpreting two dreams to Nebuchadrezzar (Chapters 2 and 4). In the first dream, Nebuchadrezzar saw a tremendously huge and terrific image, which was broken with a stone that rolled from a mountain. Daniel explained it to the king, that the image symbolized the four Gentile kingdoms, which had to supplant one another, starting with Babylon and ending with Rome. The stone that broke the image symbolized the Messiah, and the mountain — His everlasting Kingdom. This is how Daniel finished his interpretation of the dream:

“Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands (the Savior was born without a corporal father), which smote the image... and brake them to pieces... and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth... And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:31-45).

This dream proved to be a prophecy about the Church. Indeed, the Christian faith that first appeared in the Roman Empire, has filled the whole world and will continue to exist until the end of the world, while there is no trace now from the formerly mighty pagan empires.

The third chapter of the book of Daniel tells about the feat of his three friends who refused to bow to the gold idol of Marduk and for this were thrown into a furnace of fire, but an angel of God saved them from any harm from fire. The grateful “Prayer of the three holy children” serves as the model for the 8th and 9th odes of the Canon of Matins.

Nothing is known about the acts of the prophet Daniel during the seven years of the reign of the three successors of Nebuchadrezzar: Evilmerodach, Neriglissar and Labashi-Marduk). Nabonidus, the assassin of Labashi-Marduk, made his son Belshazzar his co-ruler. In the first year of Belshazzar Daniel had the vision about the four kingdoms, which transformed into the vision of the heaven and God as the Ancient of days and the “Son of Man,” i.e. the Son of God Who was to become incarnate (Daniel, Chapter 7). As we know from the Gospels, Our Savior often called Himself the Son of Man to remind the Jews about this prophecy of Daniel. Before the council, when the high priest asked Christ whether He was the promised Messiah, the Lord directly pointed out this vision of Daniel and reminded about the heavenly glory of the Son of Man (Daniel, Chapter 7; Matthew 26:64). In its main part the vision of Daniel referred to the time before the end of the world and the Last Judgment, though some of its features gave the indication about the persecutions by Antiochus Epiphanes in the third century before Christ and the persecution of the Church in the times of antichrist.

The next vision — about two monarchies represented by the images of a goat and a ram, put down in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar, — also referred to the end of the world. This vision had some features in common with the visions of the Apostle John the Theologian, recorded in his book of Revelation (Daniel, Chapters 7-8, Revelation, Chapters 11-12 and 17).

Babylon was taken by Darius the king of Media in the 17th year of the reign of Belshazzar (539 B.C.). Belshazzar was killed during the battle for the city, as it was predicted to him by the mysterious hand writing “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN” on the wall (thou art found wanting, thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians, Daniel 5:25). The prophet Daniel interpreted these words to Belshazzar. As we have already mentioned, the fall of Babylon had been predicted by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isaiah, Chapters 13-14 and 21,



Jeremiah, Chapters 50-51). In the book of Revelation Babylon signifies the kingdom of the evil of the world (Revelation 16-19).

Under Darius of Media Daniel was one of the three top officials of the Median kingdom. The pagan officials slandered Daniel before Darius out of envy and cunningly achieved that Daniel was thrown to lions. But God kept His prophet unhurt (Chapter 6). Later on, Daniel received the revelation of the Seventy Weeks ( $70 \times 7 = 490$  years), which indicated the time of the Messiah's advent (Daniel, Chapter 9; see explanation of this vision in the second part of the brochure "The Old Testament Regarding the Messiah").

During the reign of Darius, Daniel retained his rank at the court. It was not without his care that in 536 B.C. Cyrus ruled to free the Jews from the captivity. The tradition has it, that the prophet Daniel showed Cyrus the prophecy of Isaiah (Is. 44:28-45:13). Surprised by this prophecy about himself, the king recognized the power of Jehovah and commanded the Jews to build a Temple in Jerusalem in His honor (1 Esdras, Chapter 1). Under the same king Daniel was for the second time miraculously saved from the lions when he was thrown to them for having killed the dragon worshipped by the pagans (Chapter 14). In the third year of the reign of Cyrus in Babylon, Daniel was honored to receive a revelation about the future fate of the people of God in connection with the history of the Gentile kingdoms (Chapters 10-12). The prediction of the persecutions for the faith refers to the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes and antichrist at the same time.

Cited below are two apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel:

"And at that time shall Michael stand up (Archangel Michael, Revelation 20:11), the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book (The Book of Life, meaning God's awareness of all good works of a man, see Revelation 13:8, 20:12). And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:1-3, cf. Matthew 13:43). "The words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" (Daniel 12:9-10).

Some interpret the three and a half years of intensified persecution of the faithful as the term of the reign of antichrist (Daniel 12:9-13); by the way, Jesus Christ also preached for three and a half years. However, the apocalyptic timeframe may be merely symbolic.

Little is known about the subsequent life of the prophet Daniel. He died at a very old age, about 90 years old, probably in Susa (Ectabanes). The book of Daniel consists of 14 Chapters. The first six chapters of the book make up its historical part. They tell how the glory of God proliferated among the Jews and the Gentiles during the captivity. Chapters 7-12 are prophetic and contain visions about the future of the Gentile nations that surrounded the Jews, and about the future Kingdom God, the Church. Some modern Biblical critics question the authenticity of the Book of Daniel. Yet the Lord Jesus Christ twice referred to the prophecies contained there, and for us faithful it is a sufficient witness of the book's authenticity. It is remarkable how accurately Daniel predicted the time of the coming of Christ and the beginning of the New Testament. This prophecy of the "Weeks" is unpleasant to those Jews who reject Christ and continue waiting for a new "messiah."



## Book of Haggai.

The prophet Haggai prophesied in Judaea during the reign of king Darius I (Persian, Hystaspes, 522-486 B.C.). That was the time when many Jews, led by Zerubbabel, returned to Judaea from the Babylonian captivity. One named Joshua was the high priest at the time. In the second year after the return from the captivity the Jews started the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, at the site of the destroyed Temple of Solomon. But due to the intrigues of the Samaritans and other ill-wishers, the construction was postponed by 15 years, until king Darius commanded to resume it.

The people were poor. However, they believed that the grandeur of the second temple should not be less than that of the Temple of Solomon, destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar. That's why some said that the time for the construction of the new Temple had not yet come. This cooled down the zeal of the builders. So, in order to encourage the people for the completion of construction of the second Temple, God sent Haggai. His prophetic ministry continued for about one year.

The prophet Haggai used the following words to convince the Jews to carry on the building of the Temple:

“Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit” (Haggai 1:6-10).

In the brochure “The Old Testament Regarding the Messiah” we cited Haggai's promise that the Messiah would come into this new Temple, and His coming would bring it the glory much greater than that of the richly decorated first Temple (Haggai 2:5-9). The book of Haggai has two chapters, which contain four speeches of Haggai, dedicated to the construction of the Temple.

## Book of Zechariah.

The prophet Zechariah is also called the *sickle-seer*, for he saw a flying roll bent in the shape of a sickle (5:1-4). Zechariah, son of Berechiah and grand son of Iddo, was a descendant of a family of priests. He was called for the prophetic ministry at a young age and, being a contemporary of Haggai, started to prophesy in the second year of the reign of Darius I (520 B.C.). Like Haggai, Zechariah encouraged people to complete the construction of the Temple. He did not finish his prophetic book until after the consecration of the Temple in 516 B.C.

The book of Zechariah, like that of Ezekiel, is characterized by the numerous symbolic visions, and also by detailed predictions about the last days of the Savior's life; it has the peculiarities that cannot be found in the writings of any other prophet: that the Lord would enter Jerusalem riding upon a donkey, that He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, that He would be pierced on the Cross, and that the Apostles would run away from Gethsemane. God called the Jews to genuine piety, saying through the lips of Zechariah:

“Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 1:3). “These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD” (Zechariah 8:16-17).

The contents of the book of Zechariah is as follows: call for repentance (1:1-6), vision of an angel among the myrtle trees (evergreen southern plant with big fragrant flowers) (1:7-17), vision of the four riders (1:18-21), vision of an angel with a measuring line (2), vision of the high priest Joshua and the Messiah (3), vision of a gold candlestick (4), vision of a flying roll and ephah (measure for bulk granular materials) (5), vision of four chariots and the Messiah as the High Priest (6), Zechariah's prophetic speeches about the New Testament times (7-8), Messianic predictions (9-11), prophecies about the gifts of grace that are given to the faithful (12), prophecies about the Messiah and the redemption of Jerusalem (13-14).

### Book of Malachi.

Prophet Malachi (“messenger” in Hebrew) was a younger co-laborer to Ezra and Nehemiah; he descended from the tribe of Zebulun. As he was the last of the Old Testament prophets, he is called the Seal of Prophets. He exercised the gift of prophecy 475 years before the Advent of Christ.

From the Book of Malachi it is apparent that in the prophet's lifetime the Temple had already been restored and divine services were held, though often without due reverence. The prophet denounced the negligence of priests, telling them on behalf of God, “*A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?*” (Malachi 1:6). In the New Testament era, the Judaic priests would be replaced by people that fear God, “*For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering*” (Malachi 1:6-11).

The prophet further denounced the Jews for mixed marriages, irregular tithing, offering animals with blemish for sacrifices, superficial callous rites, murmuring against God for supposed delay in the fulfillment of the promise of the coming of Messiah. Malachi does not rebuke the Jews for the sin of idol worship, because after the disasters, related to the Babylonian captivity, they were totally cured of this superstition.

Malachi said prophecies about John the Baptist, the prophet and forerunner, who would come to get the people ready to receive Christ: “*Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap*” (Malachi 3:1-2, see Mark 1:1 and Matthew 11:14, 17:12). Malachi's following prophecy, similar to the previous one, is also about Christ's forerunner, but is obviously related to His Second Coming: “*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse*” (Malachi 4:5, Cf. Revelation 11:3-6).

The content of the Book of Malachi is as follows: lack of pious reverence in people (1:6-14) and priests (2:1-9), cruelty and turning away from God (2:10-16), disregard of God's promises and commandments (2:17-3:6), non-tithing of tithes (3:7-12), God's Judgment (3:13-4:3), the last call for repentance (4:4-6).

All prophetic predictions, excluding those which are regarding the last times, have been fulfilled, and often with impressive precision. We especially treasure the predictions about the Savior of the World, the Church and God's grace given to the faithful. The books of prophecies also give comfort because, no matter how much evil seems to triumph, it will be exterminated by God, and the truth will triumph; eternal life and bliss are awaiting the faithful.

## Index of the Most Important Prophecies and Themes.

### On God.

**God's Omnipotence and Majesty:** Isaiah 6:1-4, Isaiah 55:8-11, Isaiah 64:1-3, Jeremiah 10:12, Jeremiah 16:21, Ezekiel Chapters 1-2, Daniel 2:20, Daniel 7:9-11, Nahum 1:3-7. The **Grace** of God: Isaiah 55:6, Isaiah 54:10, Isaiah 64:5, Lamentations 3:22-28, Micah 7:18-19. **Justice** of God: Isaiah 1:27-30, Isaiah 30:18, Isaiah 33:1-5, Isaiah 59:16-19, Jeremiah 9:23-24, Ezekiel 18:20-24, Daniel 9:7. God's **Omniscience:** Jeremiah 17:9-10. **Holiness** of God: Isaiah 6:3, Isaiah 57:15, Hosea 11:9. **Eternity** of God: Isaiah 43:10.

### On Kingdom of God.

The **New Testament:** Isaiah 55:3, 59:20-21; Jeremiah 31:31-34, Daniel 9:24-27 (See Acts 13:34).

**Gentiles** Called to the Church: Isaiah 2:2, Isaiah 11:1-10, Isaiah 42:1-12, Isaiah 49:6, Isaiah 54:12-14, Isaiah 65:1-2, See Galatians 4:27, 1:9 and 2:23. **Internal Spiritual Regeneration:** Isaiah 44:3, Zechariah 12:10-13:1, 14:5-9, Isaiah 35:1-7, Isaiah 55:1, Isaiah 55:10-11, Isaiah 12:3-5, Joel 2:28-32. One Heart and **New Spirit:** Ezekiel 11:19-20, Ezekiel 36:24-2. The Kingdom of God as the **Mountain of God:** Isaiah 2:2-3, Isaiah 11:1-10 (See Romans 15:12), Daniel 2:34, Joel 3:17, Obadiah 17, Zechariah 8:3.

### On Virtues.

**Reverence before God:** Malachi 4:2, Malachi 3:16-18. **Faith:** Habakkuk 2:4. **Trust** in God: Isaiah 8:9-14, Isaiah Chapters 25-27, Isaiah 26:2-12, Isaiah 30:7, Isaiah 30:15, Isaiah 40:29-31, Isaiah 51:7-8, Isaiah 51:12-14, Isaiah 54:10, Jeremiah 9:23-24, Jeremiah 15:20-21, Jeremiah 17:7-8, Ezekiel 34:14-16, Micah 7:7-19, Habakkuk 3:17-19. **Knowledge of God:** Isaiah 2:2-3, Isaiah 11:1-10, Isaiah 54:13, Jeremiah 9:23-24, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hosea 6:3. **Humility:** Isaiah 57:15-16, Isaiah 66:1-2, Micah 6:8. Longing for **Virtue:** Isaiah 1:17, Isaiah 33:14-16, Isaiah 55:6-7, Baruch 4:4, Zechariah 7:9-10, 8:16-17. **Justice:** Isaiah 1:27, Micah 6:8. **Mercy:** Isaiah 1:17, Isaiah 58:2-12, Hosea 6:6.

## Call for Repentance.

**Reproof:** Isaiah 1:3-6, Isaiah 3:9-11, Isaiah 5:20-23, Isaiah 10:1-2, Isaiah 19:13, Isaiah 30:1, Isaiah 42:18-20, Isaiah 45:9-10, Isaiah 57:20-21, Isaiah 59:1-4, Jeremiah 2:13, Jeremiah 5:1-5, Jeremiah Chapter 7, Jeremiah 8:9-11, Jeremiah 9:8, Jeremiah 15:1-2, Jeremiah 17:1, Jeremiah 17:5, Jeremiah 22:13-17, Jeremiah 44:4-6, Jeremiah 48:10, Micah 7:1-6, Zephaniah 3:1-5, Malachi 1:6. Call for **Repentance:** Isaiah 1:16-20, Isaiah 64:6-9, Jeremiah 8:4-5, Ezekiel 18:30-32, Hosea 6:1-3, Joel 2:11-17, Zechariah 1:3-4, Malachi 1:9.

## On the Latter Days.

**Spiritual Famine:** Amos 8:11. **False prophets:** Isaiah 9:15, Jeremiah 14:14-16, Jeremiah 23:15-17, Jeremiah 23:26-28, Ezekiel 13:3-16, Ezekiel 14:9-11, Zephaniah 3:4, Micah 3:5-7. **Good Shepherds:** Jeremiah 3:15; **Bad Shepherds:** Isaiah 56:10-11, Jeremiah 10:21, Jeremiah 23:1-6, Ezekiel 34:1-6, Zechariah 11:16-17. **Antichrist:** Isaiah 14:4-20, Ezekiel 28:13-19, Daniel 11:35-40, Daniel 12:9-13. **Judgment over People:** Isaiah 2:10-21, Isaiah 13:6-15, Isaiah 24:4-23, Isaiah 63:1-6, Isaiah 66:15-16, Jeremiah 46:10, Jeremiah 50:31-32, Ezekiel 9:4-8 (Revelation 7:3), Ezekiel 30:2-3, Ezekiel 38:20-23, Daniel 7:9-12 (Revelation 4:2, 5:11, 20:12), Joel 2:1-10, Joel 3:2-17, Amos 5:18-20, Zephaniah 1:14-18, Zephaniah 3:8-9, Nahum 1:3-7, Obadiah 15, Malachi 4:5, Malachi 4:5 (Revelation 11:3-6).

**Elimination of Evil and Suffering:** Numbers 24:17, Isaiah 11:1-10. Everlasting **Joy:** Isaiah 42:1-12, 54:12-14, 60:1-5, 61:1-4). **Resurrection of Flesh (Job 19:25) and Elimination of Death:** Isaiah, Chapter 26, 42:1-12, 61:1-4, Zechariah 9:9-11, Hosea 13:14. Triumphant **Truth and Justice:** Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1-10, Chapter 26, Jeremiah 23:5.

**Glory of the Triumphant Church:** Isaiah, Chapters 26-27, Isaiah 52:1-2, Isaiah 60:1-5, Isaiah 61:10-11, Isaiah 62:1-5.

**Renovation of the World:** Isaiah 4:2-6, Isaiah 11:1-10, Isaiah 44:22-24, Isaiah 49:13-15, Isaiah 52:1-9, Isaiah 60:1-21, Isaiah 61:10, Isaiah 62:11-12, Isaiah 65:17-20, Isaiah 65:25, Isaiah 66:22-24, Jeremiah 32:39-41, Jeremiah 33:6-9, Jeremiah 33:15-16, Baruch 5:9, Daniel 12:1-3, Hosea 3:4-5, Hosea 13:14, Habakkuk 2:14, Zephaniah 3:9, Zechariah 8:3.

## Conclusion.

**W**ith the moral hardening of people in the Old Testament era and in the absence of spiritual leaders, the prophets carried out the difficult task of teaching people to believe in God, abstain from vice and live righteously. Naturally, reproof dominated in the discourses of the prophets. In order to stir up the conscience of the listeners, the reproof was often very strong and even harsh, which makes the prophetic books look somewhat severe in the eyes of a modern reader. The Savior expressed it in an image: the ancient prophets had been digging up the earth of the hardened human hearts to make it ready to receive the seeds of the Apostolic preaching in future (John 4:37-38). Had any of today's preachers or authors addressed the Jews with the adjectives that are scattered everywhere throughout the books of the prophets, he would have been accused of extreme anti-Semitism without any doubt.

True, the prophets also spoke about the glory of Israel, Hebrews being God's chosen people, and defeat of the Gentiles, but this language should not be viewed as chauvinism. The prophets understood Israel, Zion, the chosen people and other like names as **spiritual**, not **national concepts**. In other words, the prophets used these words as symbols of the Kingdom of God, of which many nations would become a part. Of course, the Jews were the first to be called into this Kingdom, but the prophets also foresaw that the majority of the Jews would break away from the faith, and the Gentiles would be called to the Church (see the Index above for the list of prophecies about the calling of the Gentiles to the Kingdom of God). By the way, the names Zion, Jerusalem, Israel are used in the divine services our Church with the same spiritual meaning, as synonyms of the word Church.

In the New Testament times, the predictions of the prophets about calling the Gentiles to faith inspired the Apostles' bold preaching among pagans. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote, *"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ"* (Ephesians 3:8).

Being the spiritual leaders of their people, the prophets often stepped forward as the only protectors of all the weak and hapless in their nation. Often this mission required them to expose the venality of judges, avarice and brutality of princes, negligence and hypocrisy of priests, falsehood of self-appointed prophets. For the word of truth the prophets were always persecuted; very few of them died the natural death. Yet ordinary people valued and loved them and followed their teachings.

In the years of great disasters and national catastrophes the prophets were the only comforters of the woeful. The prophets also revealed the great qualities of the One God: omnipotence, omniscience, justice to non-repentant and infinite mercy to the humble. In their prophecies they displayed the unsearchable ways of God's providence, by which He guided the destiny of the mankind toward the better part. The prophets also loved to tell about the forthcoming time of the New Testament, the spiritual renovation and the final triumph of truth and justice. Here their prophetic vision was always focused on the coming Messiah the Savior. The prophets predominantly heralded Him and His acts (see the brochure "The Old Testament Regarding the Messiah").

Calling to virtue, the prophets taught people to sincerely believe in God and serve Him without hypocrisy, recognize the sinfulness and repent, be meek, just and merciful to those in need.

God revealed to His elect the events of the near and distant future of their nation, neighbors and the whole mankind. Their predictions were always accurately fulfilled, and this is the proof that they were the chosen people inspired by God. At the same time, the prophets explained the **moral causes of all events**: nothing good or bad would happen by chance. Good things are the reward for virtues, suffering is the punishment for sins, though not as vengeance but as correction to persuade the sinners. Only from the **standpoint of morality** it becomes clear why the predictions of prophets may combine elements of different times. For example, the ancient Babylon is associated with the kingdom of the evil of the latter times; persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes with the persecutions of antichrist; hostile hordes of ancient pagan tribes with the persecutors of the Church in its historical way; judgment over the people of the Old Testament times with the Judgment over the universe; spiritual renovation in the New Testament Church with complete renovation of the world after the general resurrection. These parallel events in the life of humankind are spiritually akin, and the prophets placed them together in a single prophetic picture. Any faithful who knows, which elements of a certain prophetic vision have already fulfilled, may better comprehend what is still to come. Without doubt the Revelation of John the

Theologian depicted the last events of the world by the imagery borrowed from the prophetic books of the Old Testament.

So, getting familiar with the Old Testament prophetic books helps a Christian to understand the essence of modern religious and moral processes and see where they lead. The books of prophecies are to be read with prayer and humility, remembering that *“no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”* (2 Peter 1:20-21).

**Addendum**

## **How to read the Bible**

**by Archimandrite Justin Popovich.**

**T**he Bible is in a sense a biography of God in this world. In it the Indescribable One has in a sense described Himself.

The Holy Scriptures of the New Testament are a biography of the incarnate God in this world. In them it is related how God, in order to reveal Himself to men, sent God the Logos, Who took on flesh and became man, and as man told men everything that God is, everything that God wants from this world and the people in it.

God the Logos revealed God’s plan for the world and God’s love for the world. God the Word spoke to men about God with the help of words insofar as human words can contain the uncontainable God.

All that is necessary for this world and the people in it — the Lord has stated in the Bible. In it He has given the answers to all questions. There is no question which can torment the human soul, and not find its answer, either directly or indirectly in the Bible.

Men cannot devise more questions than there are answers in the Bible. If you fail to find the answer to any of your questions in the Bible, it means that you have either posed a senseless question or did not know how to read the Bible and did not finish reading the answer in it.

### **What the Bible contains.**

In the Bible God has made known:

- 1) what the world is; where it came from; why it exists; what it is heading for; how it will end;
- 2) what man is; where he comes from; where he is going; what he is made of; what his purpose is how he will end;
- 3) what animals and plants are; what their purpose is; what they are used for;
- 4) what good is; where it comes from; what it leads to; what its purpose is; how it is attained;
- 5) what evil is; where it comes from; how it came to exist; why it exists — how it will come to an end;



6) what the righteous are and what sinners are; how a sinner becomes righteous and how an arrogant righteous man becomes a sinner; how a man serves God and how he serves satan; the whole path from good to evil, from God to satan;

7) everything — from the beginning to the end; man's entire path from the body to God, from his conception in the womb to his resurrection from the dead;

8) what the history of the world is, the history of heaven and earth, the history of mankind; what their path, purpose, and end are.

### **The beauty of the Bible.**

In the Bible God has said absolutely everything that was necessary to be said to men. The biography of every man — everyone without exception — is found in the Bible.

In it each of us can find himself portrayed and thoroughly described in detail; all those virtues and vices which you have and can have and cannot have.

You will find the paths on which your own soul and everyone else's journey from sin to sinlessness, and the entire path from man to God and from man to satan. You will find the means to free yourself from sin.

In short, you will find the complete history of sin and sinfulness, and the complete history of righteousness and the righteous.

If you are mournful, you will find consolation in the Bible; if you are sad, you will find joy; if you are angry — tranquility; if you are lustful — continence; if you are foolish — wisdom; if you are bad — goodness; if you are a criminal — mercy and righteousness; if you hate your fellow man — love.

In it you will find a remedy for all your vices and weak points, and nourishment for all your virtues and accomplishments.

If you are good, the Bible will teach you how to become better and best; if you are kind, it will teach you angelic tenderness; if you are intelligent, it will teach you wisdom.

If you appreciate the beauty and music of literary style, there is nothing more beautiful or more moving than what is contained in Job, Isaiah, Solomon, David, John the Theologian and the Apostle Paul. Here music — the angelic music of the eternal truth of God — is clothed in human words.

The more one reads and studies the Bible, the more he finds reasons to study it as often and as frequently as he can. According to St. John Chrysostom, it is like an aromatic root, which produces more and more aroma the more it is rubbed.

### **Prayerful preparation.**

Just as important as knowing *why* we should read the Bible is knowing *how* we should read the Bible.

The best guides for this are the holy Fathers, headed by St. John Chrysostom who, in a manner of speaking, has written a fifth Gospel.

The holy Fathers recommend serious preparation before reading and studying the Bible; but of what does this preparation consist?

First of all in prayer. Pray to the Lord to illumine your mind — so that you may understand the words of the Bible — and to fill your heart with His grace — so that you may feel the truth and life of those words.

Be aware that these are God's words, which He is speaking and saying to you personally. Prayer, together with the other virtues found in the Gospel, is the best preparation a person can have for understanding the Bible.

### How We should read the Bible.

Prayerfully and reverently, for in each word there is another drop of eternal truth, and all the words together make up the boundless ocean of the Eternal Truth.

The Bible is not a book, but life; because its words are spiritual life (John 6:63). Therefore its words can be comprehended if we study them with the spirit of its spirit, and with the life of its life.

It is a book that must be read with life — by putting it into practice. One should first live it, and then understand it.

Here the words of the Savior apply: *“Whoever, is willing to do it — will understand that this teaching is from God”* (John 7:17). Do it so that you may understand it. This is the fundamental rule of Orthodox exegesis.

At first one usually reads the Bible quickly, and then more and more slowly, until finally he will begin to read not even word by word, because in each word he is discovering an everlasting truth and an ineffable mystery.

Everyday read at least one chapter from the Old and the New Testament; but side by side with this put a virtue from each into practice. Practice it until it becomes a habit to you.

Let us say, for instance, that the first virtue is forgiveness of insults. Let this be your daily obligation. And along with it pray to the Lord: *“O gentle Lord, grant me love towards those who insult me!”*

And when you have made this virtue into a habit, each of the other virtues after it will be easier for you, and so on until the final one.

The main thing is to read the Bible as much as possible. What the mind does not understand, the heart will feel; and if neither the mind understands nor the heart feels, read it over again, because by reading it you are sowing God's words in your soul.

And there they will not perish, but will gradually and imperceptibly pass into the nature of your soul; and there will happen to you what the Savior said about the man who *“Casts seed on the ground, and sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, while the man does not know it”* (Mark 4:26-27).

The main thing is: sow, and it is God Who causes and allows what is sown to grow (1 Cor. 3:6). But do not rush success, lest you become like a man who sows today, but tomorrow already wants to reap.

### Seed in our souls.

By reading the Bible you are adding yeast to the dough of your soul and body, which gradually expands and fills the soul until it has thoroughly permeated it and makes it rise with the truth and righteousness of the Gospel.

In every instance, the Savior's parable about the sower and the seed can be applied to every one of us. The Seed of Divine Truth is given to us in the Bible.

By reading it, we sow that seed in our own soul. It falls on the rocky and thorny ground of our soul, but a little also falls on the good soil of our heart — and bears fruit.

And when you catch sight of the fruit and taste it, the sweetness and joy will spur you to clear and plow the rocky and thorny areas of your soul and sow it with the seed of the word of God.

Do you know when a man is wise in the sight of Christ the Lord? — when he listens to His word and carries it out. The beginning of wisdom is to listen to God's word (Matt. 7:24-25).

Every word of the Savior has the power and the might to heal both physical and spiritual ailments. “*Say the word and my servant will be healed*” (Matt. 8:8). The Savior said the word — and the centurion's servant was healed.

Just as He once did, the Lord even now ceaselessly says His words to you, to me, and to all of us. But we must pause, and immerse ourselves in them and receive them with the centurion's faith.

And a miracle will happen to us, and our souls will be healed just as the centurion's servant was healed. For it is related in the Gospel that they brought many possessed people to Him, and He drove out the spirits with a word, and healed all the sick (Matt. 8:16).

He still does this today, because the Lord Jesus “*Is the same yesterday and today and forever*” (Heb. 13:8).

Beware.

Those who do not listen to God's words will be judged at the Dreadful Judgment, and it will be worse for them on the Day of Judgment than it was for Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:14-15).

Beware — at the Dreadful Judgment you will be asked to give an account for what you have done with the words of God, whether you have listened to them and kept them, whether you have rejoiced in them or been ashamed of them, the Lord will also be ashamed of you when He comes in the glory of His Father together with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).

There are few words of men that are not vain and idle. Thus there are few words for which we do not mind being judged (Matt. 12:36).

In order to avoid this, we must study and learn the words of God from the Bible and make them our own; for God proclaimed them to men so that they might accept them, and by means of them also accept the Truth of God itself.

## Words of the Word.

Great is the mystery of the word — so great that the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Christ the Lord, is called “the Word” or “the Logos” in the Bible.

God is the Word (John 1:1). All those words which come from the eternal and absolute word are full of God, Divine Truth, Eternity, and Righteousness. If you listen to them, you are listening to God. If you read them, you are reading the direct words of God.

God the Word became flesh, became man (John 1:14), and mute, stuttering man began to proclaim the words of the eternal truth and righteousness of God.

## The Grace-filled Word.

In every word of the Savior there is much that is supernatural and full of grace; and this is what sheds grace on the soul of man when the word of Christ visits it.

Therefore the Holy Apostle calls the whole structure of the house of salvation: “*The word of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:32).

Like a living grace-filled power, the word of God has a wonder-working and life-giving effect on a man, so long as he hears it with faith and receives it with faith (I Thess. 2:13).

Everything is defiled by sin, but everything is cleansed by the word of God and prayer — everything — all creation from man on down to a worm (I Tim 4:5).

By the Truth which carries in itself and by the Power which it has in itself, the word of God is sharper than any sword and pierces to the point of dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12). Nothing remains secret before it or for it.

### The birth-giving word.

Because every word of God contains the eternal Word of God — the Logos — it has the power to give birth and regenerate men. And when a man is born of the Word, he is born of the Truth.

For this reason St. James the Apostle writes to the Christians that God the Father has brought them forth “*By the word of truth*” (1:18), and St. Peter tells them that they have been “*Born anew...by the word of the living God, which abides forever*” (1 Peter 1:23).

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## The Lost Scriptural Mind.

Fr. George Florovsky

“*As the Truth is in Jesus*” (Ephesians 4:21).

Christian ministers are not supposed to preach their private opinions, at least from the pulpit. Ministers are commissioned and ordained in the church precisely to preach the Word of God. They are given some fixed terms of reference — namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ — and they are committed to this sole and perennial message. They are expected to propagate and to sustain “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” Of course, the Word of God must be preached “efficiently.” That is, it should always be so presented as to carry conviction and command the allegiance of every new generation and every particular group. It may be restated in new categories, if the circumstances require. But, above all, the identity of the message must be preserved.

One has to be sure that one is preaching the same gospel that was delivered and that one is not introducing instead any “strange gospel” of his own. The Word of God cannot be easily adjusted or accommodated to the fleeting customs and attitudes of any particular age, including our own time. Unfortunately, we are often inclined to measure the Word of God by our own stature, instead of checking our mind by the stature of Christ. The “modern mind” also stands under the judgment of the Word of God.

## Modern Man and Scripture.

But it is precisely at this point that our major difficulty begins. Most of us have lost the integrity of the scriptural mind, even if some bits of biblical phraseology are retained. The modern man often complains that the truth of God is offered to him in an “archaic idiom” — i.e., in the language of the Bible — which is no more his own and cannot be used spontaneously. It has recently been suggested that we should radically “demythologize” Scripture, meaning to replace the antiquated categories of the Holy Writ by something more modern. Yet the question cannot be evaded: Is the language of Scripture really nothing else than an accidental and external wrapping out of which some “eternal idea” is to be extricated and disentangled, or is it rather a perennial vehicle of the divine message, which was once delivered for all time?

We are in danger of losing the uniqueness of the Word of God in the process of continuous “reinterpretation.” But how can we interpret at all if we have forgotten the original language? Would it not be safer to bend our thought to the mental habits of the biblical language and to relearn the idiom of the Bible? No man can receive the gospel unless he repents “changes his mind.” For in the language of the gospel “repentance” (*metanoie*) does not mean merely acknowledgment of and contrition for sins, but precisely a “change of mind” — a profound change of man’s mental and emotional attitude, an integral renewal of man’s self, which begins in his self-renunciation and is accomplished and sealed by the Spirit.

We are living now in an age of intellectual chaos and disintegration. Possibly modern man has not yet made up his mind, and the variety of opinions is beyond any hope of reconciliation. Probably the only luminous signpost we have to guide us through the mental fog of our desperate age is just the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” obsolete or archaic as the idiom of the Early Church may seem to be, judged by our fleeting standards.

## Preach the Creeds!

What, then, are we going to preach? What would I preach to my contemporaries “in a time such as this?” There is no room for hesitation: I am going to preach Jesus, and him crucified and risen. I am going to preach and to commend to all whom I may be called to address the message of salvation, as it has been handed down to me by an uninterrupted tradition of the Church Universal. I would not isolate myself in my own age. In other words, I am going to preach the “doctrines of the creed.”

I am fully aware that creeds are a stumbling block for many in our own generation. “The creeds are venerable symbols, like the tattered flags upon the walls of national churches; but for the present warfare of the church in Asia, in Africa, in Europe and America the creeds, when they are understood, are about as serviceable as a battle-ax or an arquebus in the hands of a modern soldier.” This was written some years ago by a prominent British scholar who is a devout minister too. Possibly he would not write them today. But there are still many who would wholeheartedly make this vigorous statement their own. Let us remember, however, that the early creeds were deliberately scriptural, and it is precisely their scriptural phraseology that makes them difficult for the modern man.

Thus we face the same problem again: What can we offer instead of Holy Scripture? I would prefer the language of the Tradition, not because of a lazy and credulous “conservatism” or a blind “obedience” to some external “authorities,” but simply because I cannot find any better phraseology. I am prepared to expose myself to the inevitable charge of being “antiquarian” and “fundamentalist.” And I would protest that such a charge is gratuitous and wrong. I do keep and hold the “doctrines of the creed,” conscientiously and wholeheartedly, because I apprehend

by faith their perennial adequacy and relevance to all ages and to all situations, including “a time such as this.” And I believe it is precisely the “doctrines of the creed” that can enable a desperate generation like ours to regain Christian courage and vision.

### The Tradition Lives.

“The church is neither a museum of dead deposits nor a society of research.” The deposits are alive — *depositum juvenescens*, to use the phrase of St. Irenaeus. The creed is not a relic of the past, but rather the “sword of the Spirit.” The reconversion of the world to Christianity is what we have to preach in our day. This is the only way out of that impasse into which the world has been driven by the failure of Christians to be truly Christian. Obviously, Christian doctrine does not answer directly any practical question in the field of politics or economics. Neither does the gospel of Christ. Yet its impact on the whole course of human history has been enormous. The recognition of human dignity, mercy and justice roots in the gospel. The new world can be built only by a new man.

### What Chalcedon Meant.

“And was made man.” What is the ultimate connotation of this creedal statement? Or, in other words, *who* was Jesus, the Christ and the Lord? What does it mean, in the language of the Council of Chalcedon, that the same Jesus was “perfect man” and “perfect God,” yet a single and unique personality? “Modern man” is usually very critical of that definition of Chalcedon. It fails to convey any meaning to him. The “imagery” of the creed is for him nothing more than a piece of poetry, if anything at all. The whole approach, I think, is wrong. The “definition” of Chalcedon is not a metaphysical statement, and was never meant to be treated as such. Nor was the mystery of the Incarnation just a “metaphysical miracle.” The formula of Chalcedon was a statement of faith, and therefore cannot be understood when taken out of the total experience of the church. In fact, it is an “existential statement.”

Chalcedon's formula is, as it were, an intellectual contour of the mystery which is apprehended by faith. Our Redeemer is *not* a man, but God *himself*. Here lies the existential emphasis of the statement. Our Redeemer is one who “came down” and who, by “being made man,” identified himself with men in the fellowship of a truly human life and nature. Not only the initiative was divine, but the Captain of Salvation was a divine Person. The fullness of the human nature of Christ means simply the adequacy and truth of this redeeming identification. God enters human history and becomes a historical person.

This sounds paradoxical. Indeed there is a mystery: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifested in the flesh.” But this mystery was a revelation; the true character of God had been disclosed in the Incarnation. God was so much and so intimately concerned with the destiny of man (and precisely with the destiny of every one of “the little ones”) as to intervene *in person* in the chaos and misery of the lost life. The divine providence therefore is not merely an omnipotent ruling of the universe from an august distance by the divine majesty, but a kenosis, a “self-humiliation” of the God of glory. There is a *personal* relationship between God and man.



### Tragedy in a New Light.

The whole of the human tragedy appears therefore in a new light. The mystery of the Incarnation was a mystery of the love divine, of the divine identification with lost man. And the climax of Incarnation was the cross. It is the turning point of human destiny. But the awful mystery of the cross is comprehensible only in the wider perspective of an integral Christology; that is, only if we believe that the Crucified was in very truth “the Son of the living God.” The death of Christ was God's entrance into the misery of human death (again *in person*), a descent into Hades, and this meant the end of death and the inauguration of life everlasting for man.

There is an amazing coherence in the body of the traditional doctrine. But it can be apprehended and understood only in the living context of faith, by which I mean in a personal communion with the personal God. Faith alone makes formulas convincing; faith alone makes formulas live. “It seems paradoxical, yet it is the experience of all observers of spiritual things: no one profits by the Gospels unless he be first in love with Christ.” For Christ is not a text but a living Person, and he abides in his body, the church.

### A New Nestorianism.

It may seem ridiculous to suggest that one should preach the doctrine of Chalcedon “in a time such as this.” Yet it is precisely this doctrine — that reality to which this doctrine bears witness — that can change the whole spiritual outlook of modern man. It brings him a true freedom. Man is not alone in this world, and God is taking personal interest in the events of human history. This is an immediate implication of the integral conception of the Incarnation. It is an illusion that the Christological disputes of the past are irrelevant to the contemporary situation. In fact, they are continued and repeated in the controversies of our own age. Modern man, deliberately or subconsciously, is tempted by the Nestorian extreme. That is to say, he does not take the Incarnation in earnest. He does not dare to believe that Christ is a divine person. He wants to have a *human* redeemer, only assisted by God. He is more interested in human psychology of the Redeemer than in the mystery of the divine love. Because, in the last resort, he believes optimistically in the dignity of man

### A New Monophysitism.

On the other extreme we have in our days a revival of “monophysite” tendencies in theology and religion, when man is reduced to complete passivity and is allowed only to listen and to hope. The present tension between “liberalism” and “neo-orthodoxy” is in fact a re-enactment of the old Christological struggle, on a new existential level and in a new spiritual key. The conflict will never be settled or solved in the field of theology, unless a wider vision is acquired.

In the early church the preaching was emphatically theological. It was not a vain speculation. The New Testament itself is a theological book. Neglect of theology in the instruction given to laity in modern times is responsible both for the decay of personal religion and for that sense of frustration which dominates the modern mood. What we need in Christendom “in a time such as this” is precisely a sound and existential theology. In fact, both clergy and the laity are hungry for theology. And because no theology is usually preached, they adopt some “strange ideologies” and combine them with the fragments of traditional beliefs. The whole appeal of the “rival gospel” in our days is that they offer some sort of pseudo theology, a system of pseudo dogmas. They are gladly accepted by those who cannot find any theology in the reduced Christianity of “modern” style. That existential alternative which many face in our days has been apt-

ly formulated by an English theologian, “Dogma or... death.” The age of a-dogmatism and pragmatism has closed. And therefore the ministers of the church have to preach again doctrines and dogmas — the Word of God.

### The Modern Crisis.

The first task of the contemporary preacher is the “reconstruction of belief.” It is by no means an intellectual endeavor. Belief is just the map of the true world, and should not be mistaken for reality. Modern man has been too much concerned with his own ideas and convictions, his own attitudes and reactions. The modern crisis precipitated by humanism (an undeniable fact) has been brought about by the rediscovery of the real world, in which we do believe. The rediscovery of the church is the most decisive aspect of this new spiritual realism. Reality is no more screened from us by the wall of our own ideas. It is again accessible. It is again realized that the church is not just a company of believers, but the “Body of Christ.” This is a rediscovery of a new dimension, a rediscovery of the continuing presence of the divine Redeemer in the midst of his faithful flock. This discovery throws a new flood of light on the misery of our disintegrated existence in a world thoroughly secularized. It is already recognized by many that the true solution of all social problems lies somehow in the reconstruction of the church. “In a time such as this” one has to preach the “whole Christ,” Christ and the church — *totus Christus, caput et corpus*, to use the famous phrase of St. Augustine. Possibly this preaching is still unusual, but it seems to be the only way to preach the Word of God efficiently in a period of doom and despair like ours.

### The Relevance of the Fathers.

I have often a strange feeling. When I read the ancient classics of Christian theology, the fathers of the church, I find them more relevant to the troubles and problems of my own time than the production of modern theologians. The fathers were wrestling with existential problems, with those revelations of the eternal issues which were described and recorded in Holy Scripture. I would risk a suggestion that St. Athanasius and St. Augustine are much more up to date than many of our theological contemporaries. The reason is very simple: they were dealing with things and not with the maps, they were concerned not so much with what man can believe as with what God had done for man. We have, “in a time such as this,” to enlarge our perspective, to acknowledge the masters of old, and to attempt for our own age an existential synthesis of Christian experience.

## Revelation and Interpretation.

Archpriest Georgy Florovsky

### Message and Witness.

What is the Bible? Is it a book like any other intended for any occasional reader, who is expected to grasp at once its proper meaning? — Rather, it is a **sacred** book addressed primarily to believers. Of course, a sacred book can be read by anyone as well, just 'as literature.' But this

is rather irrelevant to our immediate purpose. We are concerned now not with the letter but with the message. St. Hilary put it emphatically: *Scriptura est non in legendo, sed in intelligendo*. [Scripture is not in the reading, but in the understanding.] Is there any definite message in the Bible, taken as a whole, as one book? And again, to whom is this message, if any, properly addressed? To individuals, who would be, as such, entitled to understand the book and to expound its message? Or to the community, and to individuals only in so far as they are members of that community?

Whatever the origin of particular documents included in the book may have been, it is obvious that the book, as a whole, was a **creation of the community**, both in the old dispensation and in the Christian Church. The Bible is by no means a complete collection of all historical, legislative and devotional writings available, but a **selection** of some, **authorized** and **authenticated** by the use (first of all liturgical) in the community, and finally by the formal **authority of the Church**. And there was some very definite purpose by which this “selection” was guided and checked. *“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name”* (John 20:30-31). The same applies, more or less, to the whole Bible. Certain writings have been selected, edited and compiled, and brought together, and then commended to believers, to the people, as an authorized version of the divine message. The **message is divine**; it comes from God; it is the Word of God. But it is the faithful community that acknowledges the Word spoken and testifies to its truth. The sacred character of the Bible is ascertained by faith. The Bible, as a book, has been composed in the community and was meant primarily for its edification. The book and the Church cannot be separated. The book and the Covenant belong together, and Covenant implies people. It was the People of the Covenant to whom the Word of God had been entrusted under the old dispensation (Rom. 3:2), and it is the Church of the Word Incarnate that keeps the message of the Kingdom. The Bible is the Word of God indeed, but the book stands by the testimony of the Church. The canon of the Bible is obviously established and authorized by the Church.

One has, however, not to overlook the missionary background of the New Testament. “The Apostolic Preaching,” therein embodied and recorded, had a double purpose: the edification of the faithful and the conversion of the world. Therefore the New Testament is not a community-book in the same exclusive sense as the Old Testament surely was. It is still a **missionary** book. Yet it is no less fenced-off from the outsiders. Tertullian's attitude to the Scriptures was typical. He was not prepared to discuss the controversial topics of the faith with heretics on the Scriptural ground. Scriptures belonged to the Church. Heretics' appeal to them was unlawful. They had no right on foreign property. Such was his main argument in the famous treatise: *De praescriptione haereticorum*. An unbeliever has no access to the message, simply because he does not “receive” it. For him there is no “message” in the Bible.

It was no accident that a diverse anthology of writings, composed at various dates and by various writers, came to be regarded as a single book. *Ta biblia* is of course plural but *the Bible* is emphatically singular. The scriptures are indeed one Holy Scripture, one Holy Writ. There is one main theme and one main message through the whole story. For there is a story. Or, even more, the Bible itself is this story, the story of God's dealings with his chosen people. The Bible records first of all God's acts and mighty deeds, *Magnalia Dei*. The process has been initiated by God. There is a beginning and an end, which is also a goal. There is a starting point: the original divine fiat — *“in the beginning”* (Gen. 1:1). And there will be an end: *“even so come”* (Rev. 22:20). There is one composite and yet single story from Genesis to Revelation. And this story is history. There is a process going on between these two terminal points. And this process has a definite direction. There is an ultimate goal, an ultimate consummation is expected. Every par-

ticular moment is correlated to both terms and has thereby its proper and unique place within the whole. No moment therefore can be understood except in the whole context and perspective.

God has spoken “*at sundry times and in divers manners*” (Heb. 1:1). He was revealing himself through ages, not once, but constantly, again and again. He was leading his people from truth to truth. There were stages in his revelation: per incrementa. This diversity and variety should not be ignored or overlooked. Yet it was ever the same God, and his ultimate message was ever the same. It is the identity of this message that gives to the various writings their real unity, despite the variety of manners. Different versions were taken into the book as they stood. The Church has resisted all attempts to substitute a single synthetic Gospel for four differing Gospels, to transform the Tetraevangelion into a Dia-tessaron, in spite of the difficulties implied in the “contradictions of the Evangelists” (with which St. Augustine was wrestling). These four Gospels did secure the unity of the message well enough, and perhaps in a more concrete form than any other compilation could afford.

The Bible is a book about God. But the God of the Bible is not *Deus absconditus*, but *Deus revelatus*. God is manifesting and revealing himself. God intervenes in human life. And the Bible is not merely a human record of these divine interventions and deeds. It is a kind of divine intervention itself. It carries with itself a divine message. God's deeds constitute themselves a message. No need therefore to escape time or history in order to meet God. For God is meeting man in history, i.e. in the human element, in the midst of man's daily existence. History belongs to God, and God enters human history. The Bible is intrinsically historical: it is a record of the divine acts, not so much a presentation of God's eternal mysteries, and these mysteries themselves are available only by a historical mediation. “*No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*” (John 1:18). And he declared him by entering history, in his holy incarnation. Thus the historical frame of the revelation is not something that ought to be done away with. There is no need to abstract revealed truth from the frame in which revelations took place. On the contrary, such an abstraction would have abolished the truth as well. For the Truth is not an idea, but a person, even the Incarnate Lord.

In the Bible we are struck by the intimate relation of God to man and of man to God. It is an intimacy of the Covenant, an intimacy of election and adoption. And this intimacy culminates in the incarnation. “*God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law*” (Gal. 4:4). In the Bible we see not only God, but man too. It is the revelation of God, but what is actually revealed is God's concern about man. God reveals himself to man, “appears” before him, “speaks” and converses with him so as to reveal to man the hidden meaning of his own existence and the ultimate purpose of his life. In Scripture we see God coming to reveal himself to man, and we see man meeting God, and not only listening to his voice, but answering him too. We hear in the Bible not only the voice of God, but also the voice of man answering him — in words of prayer, thanksgiving and adoration, awe and love, sorrow and contrition, exultation, hope or despair. There are, as it were, two partners in the Covenant, God and man, and both belong together, in the mystery of the true divine-human encounter, which is described and recorded in the story of the Covenant. Human response is integrated into the mystery of the Word of God. It is not a divine monologue, it is rather a dialogue, and both are speaking, God and man. But prayers and invocations of the worshipping psalmist are nevertheless “the Word of God.” God wants, and expects, and demands this answer and response of man. It is for this that he reveals himself to man and speaks to him. He is, as it were, waiting for man to converse with him. He establishes his Covenant with the sons of men. Yet, all this intimacy does not compromise divine sovereignty and transcendence. God is “*dwelling in light unapproachable*” (1 Tim. 6.16). This light, however, “*lighteth every man that cometh into the world*” (John 1:9). This constitutes the mystery, or the “paradox” of the revelation.

Revelation is the history of the Covenant. Recorded revelation, i.e. the Holy Scripture, is therefore, above all, history. Law and prophets, psalms and prophecies, all are included and, as it were, woven into the living historical web. Revelation is not a system of divine oracles only. It is primarily the system of divine deeds; one might say, revelation was the path of God in history. And the climax was reached when God entered history himself, and for ever: when the Word of God was incarnate and “made man.” On the other hand, the book of revelation is as well the book of human destiny. First of all, it is a book which narrates the creation, fall and salvation of man. It is the story of salvation, and therefore man organically belongs to the story. It shows us man in his obedience and in his obstinate rebellion, in his fall and in his restoration. And the whole human fate is condensed and exemplified in the destiny of Israel, old and new, the chosen people of God, a people for God's own possession. The fact of election is here of basic importance. One people has been elected, set apart from all other nations, constituted as a sacred oasis in the midst of human disorder. With one people on earth only did God establish his Covenant and grant his own sacred law. Here only a true priesthood has been created, even though but a provisional one. In this nation only true prophets were raised, who spoke words inspired by the Spirit of God. It was a sacred, though hidden centre for the whole world, an oasis granted by God's mercy, in the midst of a fallen, sinful, lost and unredeemed world. All this is not the letter, but the very heart of the Biblical message. And all this came from God, there was no human merit or achievement. Yet, all this came for the sake of man, “*for us men and for our salvation.*” All these privileges granted to the Israel of old were subordinate to the ultimate purpose, that of a universal salvation: “*For salvation is of the Jews*” (John 4:22). The redeeming purpose is ever universal indeed, but it is being accomplished always by means of separation, selection or setting apart. In the midst of human fall and ruin a sacred oasis is erected by God. The Church is also an oasis still, set apart, though not taken out of the world. For again this oasis is not a refuge or shelter only, but rather a citadel, a vanguard of God.

There is a centre in the Biblical story, or a crucial point on the line of the temporal events. There is a new beginning within the process, which does not, however, divide or cut it into parts, but rather gives to it an ultimate cohesion and unity. The distinction between the two Testaments belongs itself to the unity of the Biblical revelation. The two Testaments are to be carefully distinguished, never to be confused. Yet they are organically linked together, not as two systems only, but primarily in the person of the Christ. Jesus the Christ belongs to both. He is the fulfiller of the old dispensation and by the same act that he fulfills the old, “*the Law and the prophets,*” he inaugurates the new, and thereby becomes the ultimate fulfiller of both, i.e. of the whole. He is the very centre of the Bible, just because he is the *arche* and the *telos* — the beginning and the end. And unexpectedly this mysterious identity of the start, the centre and the goal, instead of destroying the existential reality of time, gives to the time-process its genuine reality and full meaning. There are no mere happenings which pass by, but rather events and achievements, and new things are coming to existence, that which never existed before. “*Behold I make all things new*” (Rev. 21:5).

Ultimately, the Old Testament as a whole has to be considered as “*a book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham*” (Matt. 1:1). It was the period of promises and expectation, the time of covenants and prophecies. It was not only the prophets that prophesied. Events also were prophecies. The whole story was prophetic or “typical,” a prophetic sign hinting forward towards approaching consummation. Now, the time of expectation is over. The promise had been accomplished. The Lord has come. And he came to abide among his people for ever. The history of flesh and blood is closed. The history of the Spirit is disclosed: “*Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*” (John 1:17). But it was an accomplishment, not destruction of the old. *Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet.* [The Old Testament extends into



the New]. And *patet* means precisely: is revealed, disclosed, fulfilled. Therefore, the books of the Hebrews are still sacred, even for the new Israel of Christ not to be left out or ignored. They tell us still the story of salvation, *Magnalia Dei*. They do still bear witness to Christ. They are to be read in the Church as a book of sacred history, not to be transformed into a collection of proof-texts or of theological instances (*loci theologici*), nor into a book of parables. Prophecy has been accomplished and law has been superseded by grace. But nothing has passed away. In sacred history, “the past” does not mean simply “passed” or “what had been,” but primarily that which had been accomplished and fulfilled. “Fulfilment” is the basic category of revelation. That which has become sacred remains consecrated and holy for ever. It has the seal of the Spirit. And the Spirit breathes still in the words once inspired by him. It is true, perhaps, that in the Church and for us now the Old Testament is no more than a book, simply because the Law and the Prophets were superseded by the Gospel. The New Testament is obviously more than a book. We do belong to the New Testament ourselves. We are the People of the New Covenant. For that reason it is precisely in the Old Testament that we apprehend revelation primarily as the Word: we witness to the Spirit “that spake through the prophets.” For in the New Testament God has spoken by his Son, and we are called upon not only to listen, but to look at. “*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you*” (1 John 1:3). And, furthermore, we are called upon to be “in Christ.”

The fullness of revelation is Christ Jesus. And the New Testament is history no less than the Old: the Gospel history of the Incarnate Word and the beginnings of church history, and the apocalyptic prophecy too. The Gospel is history. Historic events are the source and the basis of all Christian faith and hope. The basis of the New Testament is facts, events, deeds — not only teaching, commandments or words. From the very beginning, from the very day of Pentecost, when St. Peter as an eye-witness (Acts 2:32: “*whereof we are all witnesses,*” *martyres*) witnessed to the fulfilment of salvation in the Risen Lord, apostolic preaching had emphatically an historical character. By this historical witness the Church stands. Creeds have an historical structure too, they refer to the events. Again, it is a sacred history. The mystery of Christ is precisely in that “*in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*” (Col. 2:9). This mystery cannot be comprehended within the earthly plane alone, there is another dimension too. But historical boundaries are not obliterated, not dimmed: in the sacred image historical features are dearly seen. Apostolic preaching was always a narrative, a narrative of what had really happened, *hic et nunc*. But what happened was ultimate and new: “*The Word was made flesh*” (John 1:14). Of course, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Ascension are historical facts not quite in the same sense or on the same level as the happenings of our own daily life. But they are no less historical for that, no less factual. On the contrary, they are more historical — they are ultimately eventful. They cannot obviously be fully ascertained except by faith. Yet this does not take them out of the historical context. Faith only discovers a new dimension, apprehends the historical datum in its full depth, in its full and ultimate reality. The Evangelists and the Apostles were no chroniclers. It was not their mission to keep the full record of all that Jesus had done, day by day, year by year. They describe his life and relate his works, so as to give us his image: an historic, and yet a divine image. It is no portrait, but rather an ikon — but surely an historic ikon, an image of the Incarnate Lord. Faith does not create a new value; it only discovers the inherent one. Faith itself is a sort of vision, “*the evidence of things not seen*” (Heb. 11:1: St. John Chrysostom explains *elenchos* precisely as *opsis*). The “invisible” is no less real than “visible” — rather more real. “*And yet no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost*” (1 Cor. 12:3). It means that the Gospel itself can be apprehended in all its fulness and depth only in spiritual experience. But what is discovered by faith is given in very truth. The Gospels are written within the church. In this sense they are the witness of the Church. They are records of church experi-



ence and faith. But they are no less historical narratives and bear witness to what had really taken place, in space and in time. If “by faith” we discover much more than what can be detected “by senses,” this only discloses the utter inadequacy of “senses” in the knowledge of spiritual matters. For what had really happened was the mighty deed of the Redeeming God, his ultimate intervention in the stream of historical events. One should not divorce the “fact” and the “meaning” — both are given in reality.

Revelation is preserved in the Church. Therefore, the Church is the proper and primary interpreter of revelation. It is Protected and reinforced by written words; protected, but not exhausted. Human words are no more than signs. The testimony of the Spirit revives the written words. We do not mean now the occasional illumination of individuals by the Holy Ghost, but primarily the permanent assistance of the Spirit given to the Church, that is “*the pillar and bulwark of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15). The Scriptures need interpretation. Not the phrasing, but the message is the core. And the Church is the divinely appointed and permanent witness to the very truth and the full meaning of this message, simply because the Church belongs itself to the revelation, as the Body of the Incarnate Lord. The proclamation of the Gospel, the preaching of the Word of God, obviously belongs to the esse of the Church. The Church stands by its testimony and witness. But this witness is not just a reference to the past, not merely a reminiscence, but rather a continuous rediscovery of the message once delivered to the saints and ever since kept by faith. Moreover, this message is ever re-enacted in the life of the Church. Christ himself is ever present in the Church, as the Redeemer and head of his Body, and continues his redeeming office in the Church. Salvation is not only announced or proclaimed in the Church, but precisely enacted. The sacred history is still continued. The mighty deeds of God are still being performed. Magnalia Dei are not circumscribed by the past; they are ever present and continued, in the Church and, through the Church, in the world. The Church is itself an integral part of the New Testament message. The Church itself is a part of revelation — the story of “the Whole Christ” (*totus Christus: caput et corpus*, in the phrase of St. Augustine) and of the Holy Ghost. The ultimate end of revelation, its telos, has not yet come. And only within the experience of the Church is the New Testament truly and fully alive. Church history is itself a story of redemption. The truth of the book is revealed and vindicated by the growth of the Body.

## History and System.

We must admit at once that the Bible is a difficult book, a book sealed with seven seals. And, as time runs on, it grows no easier. The main reason for that, however, is not that the Book is written in an “unknown tongue” or contains some “secret words that man may not repeat.” On the contrary, the very stumbling-block of the Bible is its utter simplicity: the mysteries of God are framed into the daily life of average men, and the whole story may seem to be all too human, just as the Incarnate Lord himself appeared to be an ordinary man.

The Scriptures are “inspired,” they are the Word of God. What is the inspiration can never be properly defined — there is a mystery therein. It is a mystery of the divine-human encounter. We cannot, fully understand in what manner “God’s holy men” heard the Word of their Lord and how they could articulate it in the words of their own dialect. Yet, even in their human transmission it was the voice of God. Therein lies the miracle and the mystery of the Bible, that it is the Word of God in human idiom. And, in whatever the manner we understand the inspiration, one factor must not be overlooked. The Scriptures transmit and preserve the Word of God precisely in the idiom of man. God spoke to man indeed, but there was man to attend and to perceive. “Anthropomorphism” is thus inherent in the very fact. There is no accommodation to human

frailty. The point is rather that the human tongue does not lose its natural features to become a vehicle of divine revelation. If we want the divine word to ring clear, our tongue — is not to leave off being human. What is human is not swept away by divine inspiration, it is only transfigured. The “supernatural” does not destroy what is “natural”: hyper physin does not mean para physin. The human idiom does not betray or belittle the splendour of revelation, it does not bind the power of God's Word. The Word of God may be adequately and rightly expressed in human words. The Word of God does not grow dim when it sounds in the tongue of man. For man is created in the image and likeness of God — this “analogical” link makes communication possible. And since God deigned to speak to man, the human word itself acquires new depth and strength and becomes transfigured. The divine Spirit breathes in the organism of human speech. Thus it becomes possible for man to utter words of God, to speak of God. “Theology” becomes possible — *theologia*, i.e. *logos peri Theou*. Strictly speaking, theology grows possible only through revelation.

It is the human response to God, who has spoken first. It is man's witness to God who has spoken to him, whose word he has heard, whose words he has kept and is now recording, and repeating. Surely this response is never complete. Theology is ever in the process of formation. The basis and the starting point are ever the same: the Word of God, the revelation. Theology witnesses back to the revelation. It witnesses in divers manners: in creeds, in dogmas, in sacred rites and symbols. But in a sense Scripture itself is the primary response, or rather Scripture itself is at once both the Word of God and the human response — the Word of God mediated through the faithful response of man. There is always some human interpretation in any Scriptural presentation of the divine Word. So far it is always inescapably “situation-conditioned.” Is it ever possible for man to escape his human situation?

The Church has summarized the Scriptural message in creeds, and in many other ways and methods. Christian faith has developed or grown into a system of beliefs and convictions. In any such system the inner structure of the basic message is shown forth, all particular articles of faith are presented in their mutual interdependence. Obviously, we need a system, as we need a map in our travels. But maps refer to a real land. And any doctrinal system too must be related to the revelation. It is of utter importance that the Church has never thought of her dogmatic system as a kind of substitute for the Scriptures. Both are to be kept side by side: a somewhat abstract or generalized presentation of the main message in a creed or in a system, and all particular documents referring to the concrete instances of revelation. One might say a system and the history itself .

Here a problem arises: how, and to what extent, can history be framed into a system? This is the main problem of theological hermeneutics. What is the theological use of the Bible? How should the divers and concrete witnesses, covering hundreds of years, be used for the construction of a single scheme? The Bible is one indeed, and yet it is, in fact, a collection of various writings. We are not entitled to ignore that. The solution depends ultimately upon our conception of history, upon our vision of time. The easiest solution would have been indeed if we could simply overlook or overcome the diversity of times, the duration of the process itself. Such a temptation faced Christianity from an early date. It was at the root of all allegorical interpretations, from Philo and Pseudo-Barnabas to the new revival of allegorism in post-Reformation times. It was a permanent temptation of all mystics. The Bible is regarded as a book of sacred parables, written in a peculiar symbolical language, and the task of exegesis is to detect their hidden meaning, to detect the eternal Word, which happens to have been uttered in divers manners and under divers veils. The historical truth and perspective are irrelevant in this case. Historical concreteness is no more than a pictorial frame, a poetical imagery. One is in search of eternal meanings. The whole Bible would be then reconstructed into a book of edifying exam-

ples, of glorious symbols, which point out the supertemporal truth. Is not the truth of God ever the same, identical and eternal? In that mood, it is but natural to look in the Old Testament for the evidences of all distinctive Christian beliefs and convictions. Two Testaments are as it were melted into one, super-temporal, and their distinctive marks obliterated. The dangers and shortcomings of such a hermeneutical approach are too obvious to need an extensive refutation. But the only real remedy against this temptation would be the restoration of historical insight. The Bible is history, not a system of belief, and should not be used as a *summa theologiae*. At the same time, it is not history of human belief, but the history of the divine revelation. The basic problem remains, however, still unsolved: for what purpose do we need both system and history? By what reason and for what purpose did the Church keep them always together? Again, the easiest answer to this question is the least satisfactory: one may suggest at once that the Scriptures are the only authentic record of the revelation, and everything else is no more than a commentary thereupon. And Commentary can never have the same authority as the original record. There is some truth in this suggestion, but the true difficulty, we have to face is elsewhere. Why are not the earlier stages of the revelation superseded by the later ones? Why do we still need the law and the prophets even in the new covenant of Christ, and, to a certain extent, on the same level of authority as the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament writings? I mean, as chapters of the same unique book, as it were. For, obviously, they are included in the canon of Scripture, not as historical documents only, not as chapters on the stages of history already passed away. This applies particularly to the Old Testament. “*For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John*” (Matt. 11:13). Why do we still keep both the law and the prophets, and in what sense? What can be the right use of the Old Testament in the Church of Christ?

First of all, it needs to be an historical use. Yet, again this history is a sacred history — not a history of human convictions and their evolution, but a history of the mighty deeds of God. And these deeds are not disconnected irruptions of God into human life. There was an intimate unity and cohesion. They led and guided the chosen people into God's supreme purpose, unto Christ. Therefore, in a sense, the earlier ones were reflected, as it were, or implied in the later ones. There was a continuity of the divine action, as there was an identity of the goal and purpose as well. This continuity is the basis of what was called the “typological” interpretation. Patristic terminology was at that point rather fluent. Still, there was always a clear distinction between two methods and approaches. “Allegory” was an exegetical method indeed. An allegorist dealt primarily with the texts; he searched out the hidden and ultimate meaning of Scriptural passages, sentences and even particular words, behind and beneath “the letter.” On the contrary, “typology” was not an exegesis of the texts themselves, but rather an interpretation of the events. It was an historical, and not merely a philological method. It was the inner correspondence of the events themselves in the two Testaments that had to be detected, established and brought forward. A typologist looked not for the “parallels” or similarities. And not every event of the Old Testament has its “correspondence” in the New. Yet there are certain basic events in the old dispensation which were the “figures” or “types” of the basic events in the new. Their “correspondence” was of divine appointment: they were, as it were, stages of a single process of the redemptive Providence. In this manner “typology” was practiced already by St. Paul (if under the name of an “allegory”: Gal. 4:24: *Hatina estin allegoroumena*). There is an identical purpose of God behind all his mighty interventions, and in full it has been revealed in Christ. St. Augustine put it very clearly: “*in ipso facto, non solum in dicto, mysterium requirere debemus* [We ought to seek the mystery not just in word, but in the fact itself] (*in ps. 68, sermo, 2, 6*). And “the mystery” of the Old Testament was Christ; not only in the sense that Moses or the prophets “spoke” of him, but primarily because the whole stream of sacred history was divinely oriented towards him. And in this sense he was the fulfilment of all prophecies. For that reason, it is only in the

light of Christ that the Old Testament can be properly understood and its “mysteries” unveiled — they were, in fact, unveiled by the coming of him “who should come.” The true prophetic meaning of the prophecies is clearly seen only, as it were, in retrospect, after they have been actually fulfilled. An unaccomplished prophecy is always dim and enigmatic (so are the prophecies of the Book of Revelation, which point to what is still to come, “at the end”). But it does not mean that we simply put arbitrarily a new meaning into the old text: the meaning was there, though it could not yet be seen clearly. When, for instance, we, in the Church, identify the Suffering Servant (in the Book of Isaiah) as Christ the crucified, we do not simply “apply” an Old Testament vision to a New Testament event: we detect the meaning of the vision itself, although this meaning surely could not have been clearly identified in the times preceding Christ. But what had been first just a vision (i.e. an “anticipation”) has become an historical fact.

Another point is of utter importance. For an “allegorist” the “images” he interprets are reflections of a pre-existing prototype, or even images of some eternal or abstract “truth.” They are pointing to something that is outside of time. On the contrary, typology is oriented towards the future. The “types” are anticipations, pre-figurations; their “prototype” is still to come. Typology is thus an historical method, more than a philological one. It presupposes and implies intrinsically the reality of history, directed and guided by God. It is organically connected with the idea of the covenant. Here the past, the present and the future are linked in a unity of divine purpose, and the purpose was Christ. Therefore typology has emphatically a Christological meaning (the Church is included here, as the Body and the Bride of Christ). In practice, of course, a true balance was never strictly kept. Even in patristic use typology was variously contaminated by allegorical deviations or accretions, especially in the devotional and homiletic use. What is, however, of importance is that in the catechetical tradition of the Early Church, closely related to the administration of the sacraments, this balance was always kept. This was the tradition of the Church, and deviations were due more to the curiosity or imagination of individual scholars. The Church was, in full sobriety, historically minded. Along with a presentation of the doctrine (i.e. a system) the Holy Bible was always read in the churches, with the deliberate purpose of reminding the faithful of the historical basis and background of their faith and hope.

St. Augustine suggested that the prophets spoke of the Church even more clearly than of Christ himself, i.e. of the Messiah (in ps. 30.2, enarratio, 2, M.L., 36, 244). In a sense, this was only natural. For there was already a Church. Israel, the chosen people, the people of the covenant, was much more a Church than a nation, like other “nations.” *Ta ethne, nationes* or *gentes* — these kindred terms were used in the Bible (and later) precisely to describe the heathen or pagans in contrast to the only nation or people that was also (and primarily) a Church of God. The Law was given to Israel just in her capacity as a Church. It embraced the whole life of the people, the “temporal” as well as the “spiritual,” precisely because the whole of human existence had to be regulated by the divine precepts. And the division of life into “temporal” and “spiritual” departments is, strictly speaking, precarious. In any case, Israel was a divinely constituted community of believers, united by the Law of God, the true faith, sacred rites and hierarchy — we find here all elements of the traditional definition of the Church. The old dispensation has been, accomplished in the new, the covenant has been reconstituted, and the old Israel was rejected, because of her utter unbelief: she missed the day of her visitation. The only true continuation of the old covenant was in the Church of Christ (let us remember that both terms are of Hebrew origin: the Church is *qahal* and Christ means *Messiah*). She is the true Israel, *kata pneuma*. In this sense already St. Justin emphatically rejected the idea that the Old Testament was a link holding together the Church and the Synagogue. For him the opposite was true. All Jewish claims were to be formally rejected: the Old Testament no longer belonged to the Jews, as they had not believed in Christ Jesus. The Old Testament belonged now to the Church alone. Nobody

could any longer claim Moses and the prophets, if he was not with Jesus the Christ. For the Church was the New Israel and the only heir of the promises of old. A new and important hermeneutical principle was implied in these rigoristic utterances of the early Christian apologist. The Old Testament was to be read and interpreted as a book of the Church. The book **on** the Church, we should add.

The Law was superseded by the truth, and in it has found its accomplishment, and thereby was abrogated. It no longer had to be imposed upon the new converts. The New Israel had its own constitution. This V art of the Old Testament was antiquated. It proved to be basically “situation-conditioned” — not so much in the sense of a general historical relativity as in a deeper providential sense. The new redemptive situation had been created or inaugurated by the Lord: a new situation in the sacred perspective of salvation. Everything that belonged essentially to the previous stage or phase had now lost its meaning, or rather kept its meaning as a prefiguration only. Even the Decalogue perhaps was not exempt from this rule and was overruled by the “new commandment.” The Old Testament is now to be used solely in its relation to the Church. Under the old dispensation the Church was limited to one nation. In the new all national discriminations are emphatically abrogated: there is no more distinction between a Jew and a Greek — all are indiscriminately in the same Christ. In other words, one has no right to isolate certain elements of the old dispensation, apart from their immediate relation to the life of the Church, and set them as a Scriptural pattern for the temporal life of the nations. The old Israel was a provisional Church, but she was not a pattern nation. One may put it this way. Obviously, we can learn a lot from the Bible on social justice — this was a part of the message of the Kingdom to come. We can learn a lot about a particular political, social and economic organization of the Jews through the ages. All that may possibly be of great help in our sociological discussions. And yet it is hardly permissible to detect in the Bible (viz. in the Old Testament) any permanent or ideal pattern of political or economic settlement for the present or for any other historical realm at all. We may learn quite a lot from Hebrew history. This will, however, be only a historical lesson, not a theological one. Biblical fundamentalism is no better in sociology than anywhere else. The Bible is no authority on social science, as it is no authority on astronomy. The only sociological lesson that can be extracted from the Bible is precisely the fact of the Church, the Body of Christ. But no reference to the Bible in “temporal” affairs can be regarded as a “Scriptural evidence.” There are “Scriptural evidences” only in theology. It does not mean that no guidance whatever can be found or even sought there in the Bible. In any case, such a search will not be a “theological use” of the Bible. And perhaps the lessons of the old Hebrew history are on the same level as any other lessons of the past. We have to distinguish more carefully between what was permanent and what was but provisional (or “situation-conditioned”) in the old covenant (and first of all we have to overcome its national limitations). Otherwise we would be in danger of overlooking what was new in the new covenant. In the New Testament itself we have to make a clear distinction between its historical and prophetic aspects too. The true theme of the whole Bible is Christ and his Church, not nations or societies, nor the sky and the earth. The old Israel was the “type” of the new, i.e. of the Church Universal, not of any particular or occasional nation. The national frame of the provisional Church has been done away by the universality of salvation. There is, after Christ, but one “nation,” the Christian nation, *genus Christianum* — in the ancient phrase, *tertium genus* — i.e. precisely the Church, the only people of God, and no other national description can claim any further Scriptural warrant: national differences belong to the order of nature and are irrelevant in the order of grace.

The Bible is complete. But the sacred history is not yet completed. The Biblical canon itself includes a prophetic Book of Revelation. There is the Kingdom to come, the ultimate consummation, and therefore there are prophecies in the New Testament as well. The whole being of the



Church is in a sense prophetic. Yet, the future has a different meaning post Christum natum. The tension between present and future has in the Church of Christ another sense and character than it had under the old dispensation. For Christ is no more in the future only, but also in the past, and therefore in the present also. This eschatological perspective is of basic importance for the right understanding of the Scriptures. All hermeneutical “principles” and “rules” should be re-thought and re-examined in this eschatological perspective. There are two major dangers to be avoided. On the one hand, no strict analogy can be established between the two Testaments, their “covenantal situations” being profoundly different: they are related as “the figure” and “the truth.” It was a traditional idea of patristic exegesis that the Word of God was revealing himself continuously, and in divers manners, throughout the whole of the Old Testament. Yet all these *theophanies* of old should never be put on the same level or in the same dimension as the incarnation of the Word, lest the crucial event of redemption is dissolved into an allegorical shadow. A “type” is no more than a “shadow” or image. In the New Testament we have the very fact. The New Testament therefore is more than a mere “figure” of the Kingdom to come. It is essentially the realm of accomplishment. On the other hand, it is premature to speak of a “realized eschatology,” simply because the very eschaton is not yet realized: sacred history has not yet been closed. One may prefer the phrase: “the inaugurated eschatology.” It renders accurately the Biblical diagnosis — the crucial point of the revelation is already in the past. “The ultimate” (or “the new”) had already entered history, although the final stage is not yet attained. We are no more in the world of signs only, but already in the world of reality, yet under the sign of the Cross. The Kingdom has been already inaugurated, but not yet fulfilled. The fixed canon of Scripture itself symbolizes an accomplishment. The Bible is closed just because the Word of God has been incarnate. Our ultimate term of reference is now not a book, but a living person. Yet the Bible still holds its authority — not only as a record of the past, but also as a prophetic book, full of hints, pointing to the future, to the very end.

The sacred history of redemption is still going on. It is now the history of the Church that is the Body of Christ. The Spirit-Comforter is already abiding in the Church. No complete system of Christian faith is yet possible, for the Church is still on her pilgrimage. And the Bible is kept by the Church as a book of history to remind believers of the dynamic nature of the divine revelation, “at sundry times and in divers manners.”

## The function of tradition in the Ancient Church.

Archpriest George Florovsky (1893-1979)

*“Ego vero Evangelio non crederem, ni si me catholicae Ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas.”* [Indeed, I should not have believed the Gospel, if the authority of the Catholic Church had not moved me]. St. Augustine, contra epist. Manichaei, L1.

### St. Vincent of Lerins and tradition.

The famous dictum of St. Vincent of Lerins was characteristic of the attitude of the Ancient Church in the matters of faith: “We must hold what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all” [*Commonitorium*, 2]. This was at once the criterion and the norm. The crucial emphasis was here on the permanence of Christian teaching. St. Vincent was actually appealing to the



double “ecumenicity” of Christian faith — in space and in time. In fact, it was the same great vision which had inspired St. Irenaeus in his own time: the One Church, expanded and scattered in the whole world, and yet speaking with one voice, holding the same faith everywhere, as it had been handed down by the blessed Apostles and preserved by the succession of witnesses: “Which is being preserved in the Church from the Apostles through the succession of the presbyters.” These two aspects of faith, or rather — the two dimensions, could never be separated from each other. *Universitas* and *antiquitas*, as well as *consensio*, belonged together. Neither was an adequate criterion by itself. “Antiquity” as such was not yet a sufficient warrant of truth, unless a comprehensive consensus of the “ancients” could be satisfactorily demonstrated. And *consensio* as such was not conclusive, unless it could be traced back continuously to Apostolic origins. Now, suggested St. Vincent, the true faith could be recognized by a double recourse — to Scripture and Tradition: “In two ways ... first clearly by the authority of the Holy Scriptures, then by the tradition of the Catholic Church.” This did not imply, however, that there were two sources of Christian doctrine. Indeed, the rule, or canon, of Scripture was “perfect” and “self-sufficient” — “For all things complete and more than sufficient.” Why then should it be supplemented by any other “authority”? Why was it imperative to invoke also the authority of “ecclesiastical understanding” — *ecclesiasticae intelligentiae auctoritas*? The reason was obvious: Scriptures were differently interpreted by individuals: “So that one might almost gain the impression that it can yield as many different meanings, as there are men.” To this variety of “private” opinions St. Vincent opposes the “common” mind of the Church, the mind of the Church Catholic: “That the trend of the interpretation of the prophets and the apostolic writings be directed in accordance with the rule of the ecclesiastical and Catholic meaning.” Tradition was not, according to St. Vincent, an independent instance, nor was it a complementary source of faith. “Ecclesiastical understanding” could not add anything to the Scripture. But it was the only means to ascertain and to disclose the true meaning of Scripture. Tradition was, in fact, the authentic interpretation of Scripture. And in this sense it was co-extensive with Scripture. Tradition was actually “Scripture rightly understood.” And Scripture was for St. Vincent the only, primary and ultimate, canon of Christian truth (*Commonitorium*, cap. II, cf. cap. 28).

### The hermeneutical question in the Ancient Church.

At this point St. Vincent was in full agreement with the established tradition. In the admirable phrase of St. Hilary of Poitiers, “For Scripture is not in the reading, but in the understanding;” [ad *Constantium Aug.*, lib. II, cap. 9, ML X, 570; the phrase is repeated also by St. Jerome, *Dial. c. Lucifer.*, cap. 28, ML XXIII, 190-191]. The problem of right exegesis was still a burning issue in the Fourth century, in the contest of the Church with the Arians, no less than it has been in the Second century, in the struggle against Gnostics, Sabellians, and Montanists. All parties in the dispute used to appeal to Scripture. Heretics, even Gnostics and Manichees, used to quote Scriptural texts and passages and to invoke the authority of the Holy Writ. Moreover, exegesis was at that time the main, and probably the only, theological method, and the authority of the Scripture was sovereign and supreme. The Orthodox were bound to raise the crucial hermeneutical question: What was the principle of interpretation? Now, in the Second century the term “Scriptures” denoted primarily the Old Testament and, on the other hand, the authority of these “Scriptures” was sharply challenged, and actually repudiated, by the teaching of Marcion. The Unity of the Bible had to be proved and vindicated. What was the basis, and the warrant, of Christian, and Christological, understanding of “Prophecy,” that is — of the Old Testament? It was in this historical situation that the authority of Tradition was first invoked. Scripture belonged to the Church, and it was only in the Church, within the community of right faith, that Scripture could

be adequately understood and correctly interpreted. Heretics, that is — those outside of the Church, had no key to the mind of the Scripture. It was not enough just to read and to quote Scriptural words — the true meaning, or intent, of Scripture, taken as an integrated whole, had to be elicited. One had to grasp, as it were in advance, the true pattern of Biblical revelation, the great design of God’s redemptive Providence, and this could be done only by an insight of faith. It was by faith that *Christuszeugniss* could be discerned in the Old Testament. It was by faith that the unity of the tetramorph Gospel could be properly ascertained. But this faith was not an arbitrary and subjective insight of individuals — it was the faith of the Church, rooted in the Apostolic message, or *kerygma*, and authenticated by it. Those outside of the Church were missing precisely this basic and overarching message, the very heart of the Gospel. With them Scripture was just a dead letter, or an array of disconnected passages and stories, which they endeavored to arrange or re-arrange on their own pattern, derived from alien sources. They had another faith. This was the main argument of Tertullian in his passionate treatise *De praescriptione*. He would not discuss Scriptures with heretics — they had no right to use Scriptures, as they did not belong to them. Scriptures were the Church’s possession. Emphatically did Tertullian insist on the priority of the “rule of faith,” *regula fidei*. It was the only key to the meaning of the Scripture. And this “rule” was Apostolic, was rooted in, and derived from, the Apostolic preaching. C. H. Turner has rightly described the meaning and the intention of this appeal or reference to the “rule of faith” in the Early Church. “When Christians spoke of the ‘Rule of Faith’ as ‘Apostolic,’ they did not mean that the Apostles had met and formulated it ... What they meant was that the profession of belief which every catechumen recited before his baptism did embody in summary form the faith which the Apostles had taught and had committed to their disciples to teach after them.” This profession was the same everywhere, although the actual phrasing could vary from place to place. It was always intimately related to the baptismal formula [C. H. Turner, *Apostolic Succession*, in “Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry,” edited by H. B. Swete (London, 1918), pp. 101-102. See also Yves M. J. Cougar, O.P., *La Tradition et les traditions, 11. Esrai Theologique* (Paris, 1963), pp. 21 ss]. Apart from this “rule” Scripture could be but misinterpreted. Scripture and Tradition were indivisibly intertwined for Tertullian.

“For only where the true Christian teaching and faith are evident will the true Scriptures, the true interpretations, and all the true Christian traditions be found;” [XIX. 3]. The Apostolic Tradition of faith was the indispensable guide in the understanding of Scripture and the ultimate warrant of right interpretation. The Church was not an external authority, which had to judge over the Scripture, but rather the keeper and guardian of that Divine truth which was stored and deposited in the Holy Writ [Cf. E. Flesseman-van-Leer, *Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church* (Assen, 1954), pp. 145-185; Damien van den Eynde, *Les Normes de l’Enseignement Chretien dans la litterature patristique des trois premiers siecles* (Gembloux-Paris, 1933), pp. 197-212; J. K. Stimmann, *Die Praescriptio Tertullians in Lichte des romirchen Rechts and der Theologie* (Freiburg, 1949); and also the introduction and notes of R. F. Re-foule, O.P., in the edition of *De praescriptione*, in the “Sources Chretiennes,” 46 (Paris, 1957)].

### St. Irenaeus and the “Canon of Truth.”

Denouncing the Gnostic mishandling of Scriptures, St. Irenaeus introduced a picturesque simile. A skillful artist has made a beautiful image of a king, composed of many precious jewels. Now, another man takes this mosaic image apart, re-arranges the stones in another pattern so as to produce the image of a dog or of a fox. Then he starts claiming that this was the original picture, by the first master, under the pretext that the gems were authentic. In fact, however, the original design had been destroyed. This is precisely what the heretics do with the Scripture. They disregard and disrupt “the order and connection” of the Holy Writ and “dismember the truth.” Words, expressions, and images are genuine, indeed, but the design, the *ipotesis*, is arbitrary and false (*adv. haeres.*, 1. 8. 1) . St. Irenaeus suggested as well another analogy. There

were in circulation at that time certain *Homerocentones*, composed of genuine verses of Homer, but taken at random and out of context, and re-arranged in arbitrary manner. All particular verses were truly Homeric, but the new story, fabricated by the means of re-arrangement, was not Homeric at all. Yet, one could be easily deceived by the familiar sound of the Homeric idiom (1.9.4). It is worth noticing that Tertullian also refers to these curious *centones*, made of Homeric or Virgilian verses (*de praescr.*, XXXIX). Apparently, it was a common device in the polemical literature of that time. Now, the point which St. Irenaeus endeavored to make is obvious. Scripture had its own pattern or design, its internal structure and harmony. The heretics ignore this pattern, or rather substitute their own instead. In other words, they re-arrange the Scriptural evidence on a pattern which is quite alien to the Scripture itself. Now, contended St. Irenaeus, those who had kept unbending that “canon of truth” which they had received at baptism, will have no difficulty in “restoring each expression to its appropriate place.” Then they are able to behold the true image. The actual phrase used by St. Irenaeus is peculiar: *prosarmosās to tis alithias somatic* (which is clumsily rendered in the old Latin translation as *corpusculum veyitatis*). But the meaning of the phrase is quite clear. The *somatic* is not necessarily a diminutive. It simply denotes a “corporate body.” In the phrase of St. Irenaeus it denotes the *corpus* of truth, the right context, the original design, the “true image,” the original disposition of gems and verses [Cf. F. Kattenbusch, *Das Apostolische Symbol*, Bd. II (Leipzig, 1900), ss. 30 ff., and also his note in the “Zeitschrift f. neutest. Theologie,” x (1909), ss. 331-332]. Thus, for St. Irenaeus, the reading of Scripture must be guided by the “rule” of faith — to which believers are committed (and into which they are initiated) by their baptismal profession, and by which only the basic message, or “the truth,” of the Scripture can be adequately assessed and identified. The favorite phrase of St. Irenaeus was “the rule of truth,” *kanon tis alithias, regula veritatis*. Now, this “rule” was, in fact, nothing else than the witness and preaching of the Apostles, their *kirigma* and *praedicatio* (or *praeconium*), which was “deposited” in the Church and entrusted to her by the Apostles, and then was faithfully kept and handed down, with complete unanimity in all places, by the succession of accredited pastors: Those who, together with the succession of the episcopacy, have received the firm charisma of truth [IV. 26. 2]. Whatever the direct and exact connotation of this pregnant phrase may be [It has been contended that *charisma veritatis* was actually simply the Apostolic doctrine and the truth (of the Divine Revelation), so that St. Irenaeus did not imply any special ministerial endowment of the bishops. See Karl Müller, *Kleine Beiträge zur alien Kirchengeschichte*, 3. *Das Charisma veritatis* and der Episcopat bei Irenaeus, in “Zeitschrift f. neut. Wissenschaft,” Bd. xxiii (1924), ss. 216-222; cf. van den Eynde, pp. 183-187; Y. M: J. Congar, O.P., *La Tradition et les traditions, Étude historique* (Paris, 1960), pp. 97-98; Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt and geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen, 1953), ss. 185 ff.; and also-with the special emphasis on the character of “Succession” — Einar Molland, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum and the Apostolic Succession*, in the “Journal of Ecclesiastical History,” 1.1, 1950, pp. 12-28, and *Le développement de l’idée de succession apostolique*, in the “Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses,” xxxiv.c, 1954, pp. 1-29. See, on the other hand, the critical remarks of Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession in the first two centuries of the Church* (London, 1953), pp. 207-231, esp. 213-214], there can be no doubt that, in the mind of St. Irenaeus, this continuous preservation and transmission of the deposited faith was operated and guided by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The whole conception of the Church in St. Irenaeus was at once “charismatic” and “institutional.” And “Tradition” was, in his understanding, a *depositum juvenescens*, a living tradition, entrusted to the Church as a new breath of life, just as breath was bestowed upon the first man — (*quemadmodum a.s. piratio plasmationis* III. 24. 1). Bishops or “presbyters” were in the Church accredited guardians and ministers of this once deposited truth. “Where, therefore, the *charismata* of the Lord have been deposited (*posita sunt*), there is it proper to learn the truth, namely from those who have that succession of the Church which is from the Apostles (*apud quos est ea quae erit ab apostolis ecclesiae successio*), and who display a sound and blameless conduct and an

unadulterated and incorrupt speech. For these also preserve this faith of ours in one God who created all things, and they increase that love for the Son of God, who accomplished such marvellous dispensation for our sake, and they expound the Scriptures to us without danger, neither blaspheming God, nor dishonoring the patriarchs, nor despising the prophets” (IV. 26. 5).

### The *regula fidei*.

Tradition was in the Early Church, first of all, an hermeneutical principle and method. Scripture could be rightly and fully assessed and understood only in the light and in the context of the living Apostolic Tradition, which was an integral factor of Christian existence. It was so, of course, not because Tradition could add anything to what has been manifested in the Scripture, but because it provided that living context, the comprehensive perspective, in which only the true “intention” and the total “design” of the Holy Writ, itself of Divine Revelation, could be detected and grasped. The truth was, according to St. Irenaeus, a “well-grounded system,” a corpus (*adv. haeres. II. 27. 1 — veritatis corpus*), a “*harmonious melody*” (II. 38. 3). But it was precisely this “harmony” which could be grasped only by the insight of faith. Indeed, Tradition was not just a transmission of inherited doctrines, in a “Judaic manner,” but rather the continuous life in the truth [Cf. Dom Odo Casey O.S.B., *Benedict von Nursia als Pneumatiker*, in “Heilige Überlieferung” (Münster, 1938), ss. 100-101: *Die heilige Überlieferung ist daher in der Kirche von Anfang an nicht bloss ein Weitergeben von Doktrinen nach spätjüdischen (nachchristlicher) Art gewesen, sondern ein lebendiges Weiterblühen des göttlichen Lebens*. In a footnote Dom Casel sends the reader back to John Adam Mohler]. It was not a fixed core or complex of binding propositions, but rather an insight into the meaning and impact of the revelatory events, of the revelation of the “God who acts.” And this was determinative in the field of Biblical exegesis. G. L. Prestige has well put it: “The voice of the Bible could be plainly heard only if its text were interpreted broadly and rationally, in accordance with the apostolic creed and the evidence of the historical practice of Christendom. It was the heretics that relied on isolated texts, and the Catholics who paid more attention on the whole to scriptural principles” [G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics* (London, 1940), p. 43]. Summarizing her careful analysis of the use of Tradition in the Early Church, Dr. Ellen Flesseman van Leer has written: “Scripture without interpretation is not Scripture at all; the moment it is used and becomes alive it is always interpreted Scripture.” Now, Scripture must be interpreted “according to its own basic purport,” which is disclosed in the *regula fidei*. Thus, this *regula* becomes, as it were, the controlling instance in the exegesis. “Real interpretation of Scripture is Church preaching, is tradition” [Flesseman, pp. 92-96. On St. Irenaeus see Flesseman, 100-144; van den Eynde, 159-187; B. Reynders, *Paradosis, Le progrès de l’idée tradition jusqu’à Saint Irénée*, in the “Recherches de thologie ancienne et medivale,” v (1933), 155-191; *La polemique de Saint Irene*, *ibidem*, vii (1935), 5-27; Henri Holstein, *La Tradition des Apotres chez Saint Irénée*, in the “Recherches de Science religieuse,” xxxvi (1949), 229-270; *La Tradition dans l’Eglise* (Paris, 1960); André Benoit, *Ecriture et Tradition chez Saint Irene*, in the “Révue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses,” xL (1960), 32-43; *Saint Irénée, Introduction a l’étude de sa théologie* (Paris, 1960)].

### St. Athanasius and the “Scope of Faith.”

The situation did not change in the Fourth century. The dispute with the Arians was centered again in the exegetical field — at least, in its early phase. The Arians and their supporters have produced an impressive array of Scriptural texts in the defense of their doctrinal position. They wanted to restrict theological discussion to the Biblical ground alone. Their claims had to be met precisely on this ground, first of all. And their exegetical method, the manner in which they handled the text, was much the same as that of the earlier dissenters. They were operating with selected proof-texts, without much concern for the total context of the Revelation. It was imperative for the Orthodox to appeal to the mind of the Church, to that “Faith” which had been once delivered and then faithfully kept. This was the main concern, and the usual method, of St.

Athanasius. The Arians quoted various passages from the Scripture to substantiate their contention that the Saviour was a creature. In reply St. Athanasius invoked the “rule of faith.” This was his usual argument. “Let us, who possess the scope of faith, restore the correct meaning of what they had wrongly interpreted” (*c. Arian*. III. 35). St. Athanasius contended that the “correct” interpretation of particular texts was only possible in the total perspective of faith. “What they now allege from the Gospels they explain in an unsound sense, as we may discover if we take in consideration the scope of the faith according to us Christians, and read the Scripture using it (*ton skopon*) as the rule” (III. 28) On the other hand, close attention must be given also to the immediate context and setting of every particular phrase and expression, and the exact intention of the writer must be carefully identified (I. 54). Writing to Bishop Serapion, on the Holy Spirit, St. Athanasius contends again that Arians ignored or missed “the scope of the Divine Scripture” (*ad Serap.*, II. 7; cf. *ad episc. Eg.*, 4). The *skopos* was, in the language of St. Athanasius, a close equivalent of what St. Irenaeus used to denote as *ipotesis*, — the underlying “idea,” the true design, the intended meaning (See Guido Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, *sub voce: id quod quis docendo, scribendo, credendo intendit*). On the other hand, the word *skopos* was a habitual term in the exegetical language of certain philosophical schools, especially in Neoplatonism. Exegesis played a great role in the philosophical endeavor of that time, and the question of hermeneutical principle had to be raised. Jamblichos was, for one, quite formal at this point. One had to discover the “main point,” or the basic theme, of the whole treatise under examination, and to keep it all time in mind. St. Athanasius could well be acquainted with the technical use of the term. It was misleading, he contended, to quote isolated texts and passages, disregarding the total intent of the Holy Writ. It is obviously inaccurate to interpret the term *skopos* in the idiom of St. Athanasius as “the general drift” of the Scripture. The “scope” of the faith, or of the Scripture, is precisely their credal core, which is condensed in the “rule of faith,” as it had been maintained in the Church and “transmitted from fathers to fathers,” while the Arians had “no fathers” for their opinions (*de decr.*, 27). As Cardinal Newman has rightly observed, St. Athanasius regarded the “rule of faith” as an ultimate “principle of interpretation,” opposing the “ecclesiastical sense” (P.82, *c. Arian*. I. 44) to “private opinions” of the heretics [*Select Treatises of St. Athanasius*, freely translated by J. H. Cardinal Newman, Vol. II (Eighth impression, 1900), pp. 250-252]. Time and again, in his scrutiny of the Arian arguments, St. Athanasius would summarize the basic tenets of the Christian faith, before going into the actual re-examination of the alleged proof-texts, in order to restore texts into their proper perspective. H. E. W. Turner has described this exegetical manner of St. Athanasius:

Against the favorite Arian technique of pressing the grammatical meaning of a text without regard either to the immediate context or to the wider frame of reference in the teaching of the Bible as a whole, he urges the need to take the general drift of the Church’s Faith as a Canon of interpretation. The Arians are blind to the wide sweep of Biblical theology and therefore fail to take into sufficient account the context in which their proof-texts are set. The sense of Scripture must itself be taken as Scripture. This has been taken as a virtual abandonment of the appeal to Scripture and its replacement by an argument from Tradition. Certainly in less careful hands it might lead to the imposition of a strait-jacket upon the Bible as the dogmatism of Arian and Gnostic had attempted to do. But this was certainly not the intention of St. Athanasius himself. For him it represents an appeal from exegesis drunk to exegesis sober, from a myopic insistence upon the grammatical letter to the meaning of intention (*skopos, haraktir*) of the Bible” (H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* (London, 1954), pp. 193-194).

It seems, however, that Professor Turner exaggerated the danger. The argument was still strictly scriptural, and, in principle, St. Athanasius admitted the sufficiency of the Scripture, sacred and inspired, for the defense of truth (*c. Gentes*, I). Only Scripture had to be interpreted in the context of the living credal tradition, under the guidance or control of the “rule of faith.” This



“rule,” however, was in no sense an “extraneous” authority which could be “imposed” on the Holy Writ. It was the same “Apostolic preaching,” which was written down in the books of the New Testament, but it was, as it were, this preaching in epitome. St. Athanasius writes to Bishop Serapion: “Let us look at that very tradition, teaching, and faith of the Catholic Church from the very beginning, which the Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers preserved. Upon this the Church is founded” (*ad Serap.*, I. 28). The passage is highly characteristic of St. Athanasius. The three terms in the phrase actually coincide: *paradosis* [tradition] — from Christ himself, *didaskalia* [teaching] — by the Apostles, and *pistis* [faith] — of the Catholic Church. And this is the foundation (*themelion*) of the Church — a sole and single foundation. Scripture itself seems to be subsumed and included in this “Tradition,” coming, as it is, from the Lord. In the concluding chapter of his first epistle to Serapion St. Athanasius returns once more to the same point. “In accordance with the Apostolic faith delivered to us by tradition from the Fathers, I have delivered the tradition, without inventing anything extraneous to it. What I learned, that have I inscribed (*eneharaksa*), conformably with the Holy Scriptures” (c. 33). On an occasion St. Athanasius denoted the Scripture itself as an Apostolic *paradosis* (*ad Adelph.*, 6). It is characteristic that in the whole discussion with the Arians no single reference was made to any “traditions” — in plural. The only term of reference was always “Tradition,” — indeed, *the* Tradition, the Apostolic Tradition, comprising the total and integral content of the Apostolic “preaching,” and summarized in the “rule of faith.” The unity and solidarity of this Tradition was the main and crucial point in the whole argument.

### The purpose of exegesis and the “Rule of Worship.”

The appeal to Tradition was actually an appeal to the mind of the Church. It was assumed that the Church had the knowledge and the understanding of the truth, of the truth and the “meaning” of the Revelation. Accordingly, the Church had both the competence and the authority to proclaim the Gospel and to interpret it. This did not imply that the Church was “above” the Scripture. She stood by the Scripture, but on the other hand, was not bound by its “letter.” The ultimate purpose of exegesis and interpretation was to elicit the meaning and the intent of the Holy Writ, or rather the meaning of the Revelation, of the *Heilsgeschichte*. The Church had to preach Christ, and not just “the Scripture.” The use of Tradition in the Ancient Church can be adequately understood only in the context of the actual use of the Scripture. The Word was kept alive in the Church. It was reflected in her life and structure. Faith and Life were organically intertwined. It would be proper to recall at this point the famous passage from the *Indiculus de gratia Dei*, which was mistakenly attributed to Pope Celestine and was in fact composed by St. Prosper of Aquitania: “These are the inviolable decrees of the Holy and Apostolic See by which our holy Fathers slew the baneful innovation ... Let us regard the sacred prayers which, in accordance with apostolic tradition our priests offer uniformly in every Catholic Church in all the world. Let the rule of worship lay down the rule of faith.” It is true, of course, that this phrase in its immediate context was not a formulation of a general principle, and its direct intention was limited to one particular point: Infant Baptism as an instance pointing to the reality of an inherited or original sin. Indeed, it was not an authoritative proclamation of a Pope, but a private opinion of an individual theologian, expressed in the context of a heated controversy [See Dom M. Capuyns, *L’origine des Capitula Pseudo-Celesliniens contre les Senzipelagiens*, in ‘*Révue Bénédictine*,’ t. 41 (1929), pp. 156-170; especially Karl Federer, *Liturgie and Glaube, Eine theologieverchichtliche Untersuchung* (Freiburg in der Schweiz, 1950. *Paradosis*, IV; cf. Dom’ B. Capelle, *Autorité de la liturgie chez les Pères*, in ‘*Recherches de Théologie ancienne et medievale*,’ t. XXI (1954), pp. 5-22]. Yet, it was not just an accident, and not a misunderstanding, that the phrase had been taken out of its immediate context and slightly changed in order to express the principle: *ut legem credendi statuatur lex orandi*. [So that



the rule of worship should establish the rule of faith]. “Faith” found its first expression precisely in the liturgical, sacramental, rites and formulas — and “Creeds” first emerged as an integral part of the rite of initiation. “Credal summaries of faith, whether interrogatory or declaratory, were a by-product of the liturgy and reflected its fixity or plasticity,” says J. N. D. Kelly [J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* London, 1950), p. 167]. “Liturgy,” in the wide and comprehensive sense of the word, was the first and initial layer in the Tradition of the Church, and the argument from the *lex orandi* [Rule of worship] was persistently used in discussion already by the end of the Second century. The Worship of the Church was a solemn proclamation of her Faith. The baptismal invocation of the Name was probably the earliest Trinitarian formula, as the Eucharist was the primary witness to the mystery of Redemption, in all its fulness. The New Testament itself came to existence, as a “Scripture,” in the Worshipping Church. And Scripture was read first in the context of worship and meditation.

### St. Basil and “Unwritten Tradition.”

Already St. Irenaeus used to refer to “faith” as it had been received at baptism. Liturgical arguments were used by Tertullian and St. Cyprian [See Federer, *op. cit.*, s. 59 ff.; F. De Pzuw, *La justification des traditions non écrites chez Tertullien*, in ‘Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses,’ t. XIX, 1/2, 1942, pp. 5-46. Cf. also Georg Kretschmar, *Studien zur frühchristlichen Trinitätstheologie* (Tübingen, 1956)]. St. Athanasius and the Cappadocians used the same argument. The full development of this argument from the liturgical tradition we find in St. Basil. In his contest with the later Arians, concerning the Holy Spirit, St. Basil built his major argument on the analysis of doxologies, as they were used in the Churches. The treatise of St. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, was an occasional tract, written in the fire and heat of a desperate struggle, and addressed to a particular historic situation. But St. Basil was concerned here with the principles and methods of theological investigation. In his treatise St. Basil was arguing a particular point, -indeed, the crucial point in the sound Trinitarian doctrine, — the *homotimia* of the Holy Ghost. His main reference was to a liturgical witness: the doxology of a definite type (“with the Spirit”), which, as he could demonstrate, has been widely used in the Churches. The phrase, of course, was not in the Scripture. It was only attested by tradition. But his opponents would not admit any authority but that of the Scripture. It is in this situation that St. Basil endeavored to prove the legitimacy of an appeal to Tradition. He wanted to show that the *omotimia* of the Spirit, that is, his Divinity, was always believed in the Church and was a part of the Baptismal profession of faith. Indeed, as Pere Benoit Pruche has rightly observed, the *omotimos*, was for St. Basil an equivalent of the *omousios* [See his introduction to the edition of the treatise *De Spirilu Sancto* in ‘Sources Chrétiennes,’ (Paris, 1945), pp. 28 ss]. There was little new in this concept of Tradition, except consistency and precision.

His phrasing, however, was rather peculiar. “Of the dogmata and kerygmata, which are kept in the Church, we have some from the written teaching, and some we derive from the Apostolic paradosis, which had been handed down *en mistirio*. And both have the same strength in the matters of piety” (*de Spir. S.*, 66). At first glance one may get the impression that St. Basil introduces here a double authority and double standard — Scripture *and* Tradition. In fact he was very far from doing so. His use of terms is peculiar. Kerygmata were for him what in the later idiom was usually denoted as “dogmas” or “doctrines” — a formal and authoritative teaching and ruling in the matters of faith, the open or public teaching. On the other hand, *dogmata* were for him the total complex of “unwritten habits,” or, in fact, the whole structure of liturgical and sacramental life. It must be kept in mind that the concept, and the term itself, “dogma,” was not yet fixed by that time, it was not yet a term with a strict and exact connotation [See the valuable study by August Deneffe, S.J., *Dogma. Wort and Begriff*, in the ‘Scholastik,’ Jg. VI (1931), ss. 381-400 and 505-538]. In any case, one should not be embarrassed by the contention of St. Basil that *dogmata*

were delivered or handed down, by the Apostles *en mistirjo*. It would be a flagrant mistranslation if we render it as “in secret.” The only accurate rendering is: “by the way of mysteries,” that is — under the form of rites and (liturgical) usages, or “habits.” In fact, it is precisely what St. Basil says himself: Most of the mysteries are communicated to us by an unwritten way. The term *ta mistika* refers here, obviously, to the rites of Baptism and Eucharist, which are, for St. Basil, of “Apostolic” origin. He quotes at this point St. Paul’s own reference to “traditions,” which the faithful have received (2 Thess. 2:15; I Cor. 11:2). The doxology in question is one of these “traditions” (71; cf. also 66) — The Apostles and Fathers who from the very beginning arranged everything in the churches, preserved the sacred character of the mysteries in silence and secrecy. Indeed, all instances quoted by St. Basil in this connection are of ritual or liturgical nature: the use of the sign of the Cross in the rite of admission of Catechumens; the orientation toward East at prayer; the habit to keep standing at worship on Sundays; the epiclesis in the Eucharistic rite; the blessing of water and oil, the renunciation of Satan and his pomp, the triple immersion, in the rite of Baptism. There are many other “unwritten mysteries of the Church,” says St. Basil (c. 66 and 67). They are not mentioned in the Scripture. But they are of great authority and significance. They are indispensable for the preservation of right faith. They are effective means of witness and communication. According to St. Basil, they come from a “silent” and “private” tradition: From the silent and mystical tradition, from the unpublic and ineffable teaching. This “silent” and “mystical” tradition, “which has not been made public,” is not an esoteric doctrine, reserved for some particular elite. The “elite” was the Church. In fact, “tradition” to which St. Basil appeals, is the liturgical practice of the Church. St. Basil is referring here to what is now denoted as *disciplina arcani* [The discipline of secrecy]. In the fourth century this “discipline” was in wide use, was formally imposed and advocated in the Church. It was related to the institution of the Catechumenate and had primarily an educational and didactic purpose. On the other hand, as St. Basil says himself, certain “traditions” had to be kept “unwritten” in order to prevent profanation at the hands of the infidel. This remark obviously refers to rites and usages. It may be recalled at this point that, in the practice of the Fourth century, the Creed (and also the Dominical Prayer) were a part of this “discipline of secrecy” and could not be disclosed to the non-initiated. The Creed was reserved for the candidates for Baptism, at the last stage of their instruction, after they had been solemnly enrolled and approved. The Creed was communicated, or “traditioned,” to them by the bishop *orally* and they had to recite it by memory before him: the ceremony of *traditio* and *redditio symboli*. [Transmission and Repetition (by the initiated) of the Creed]. The Catechumens were strongly urged not to divulge the Creed to outsiders and not to commit it to writing. It had to be inscribed in their hearts. It is enough to quote there the *Procathechesis* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cap 12 and 17. In the West Rufinus and St. Augustine felt that it was improper to set the Creed down on paper. For that reason Sozomen in his *History* does not quote the text of the Nicene Creed, “which only the initiated and the mystagogues have the right to recite and hear” (*hist. eccl.* 1.20) . It is against this background, and in this historic context, that the argument of St. Basil must be assessed and interpreted. St. Basil stresses strongly the importance of the Baptismal profession of faith, which included a formal commitment to the belief in the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (67 and 26). It was a “tradition” which had been handed down to the neophytes “in mystery” and had to be kept “in silence.” One would be in great danger to shake “the very foundation of the Christian faith” if this “unwritten tradition” was set aside, ignored, or neglected (c. 25). The only difference between *dogma* and *kirigma* was in the manner of their transmission: *dogma* is kept “in silence” and *kerygmata* are “publicized.” But their intent is identical: they convey the same faith, if in different manners. Moreover, this particular habit was not just a tradition of the Fathers — such a tradition would not have sufficed: *uk eksarki*. In fact, “the Fathers” derived their “principles” from “the intention of the

Scripture” following the intention of the Scripture, deriving their principles from the scriptural witnesses. Thus, the “unwritten tradition,” in rites and symbols, does not actually add anything to the content of the Scriptural faith: it only puts this faith in focus [Cf. Hermann Dörries, *De Spiritu Sancto, Der Beitrag des Basilius zum Abschluss des trinitarischen Dogmas* (Göttingen, 1956); J. A. Jungmann, S.J., *Die Stellung Christi im liturgischen Gebet*, 2. Auflage (Münster i/W, 1962), ss. 155 ff., 163 ff.; Dom David Amand, *L’arcese monastique de Saint Basile*, Editions de Maredsous (1949), pp. 75-85. The footnotes in the critical editions of the treatise *De Spiritu S.* by C. F. H. Johnson (Oxford, 1892) and by Benoit Pruche, O.P. (in the ‘Sources Chékietiennes,’ Paris, 1945) are highly instructive and helpful. On *disciplina arcani* see O. Perler, s.v. Arkandisciplin, in ‘Reallexikon für Antike and Christentum,’ Bd. I (Stuttgart, 1950), ss. 671-676,. Joachim Jeremias, *Die Abendmahls Worte Jesu* (Göttingen, 1949), ss. 59 ff., 78 ff., contended that *disciplina arcani* could be detected already in the formation of the text of the Gospels, and actually existed also in Judaism; cf. the sharp criticism of this thesis by R. P. C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (London, 1962), pp. 27 ss].

St. Basil’s appeal to “unwritten tradition” was actually an appeal to the faith of the Church, to her *sensus catholicus*, to the *fronima ekklesiatiķon* [Ecclesiastical mind]. He had to break the deadlock created by the obstinate and narrow-minded *pseudo-biblicism* of his Arian opponents. And he pleaded that, apart from this “unwritten” rule of faith, it was impossible to grasp the true intention and teaching of the Scripture itself. St. Basil was strictly scriptural in his theology: Scripture was for him the supreme criterion of doctrine (*epist.* 189.3). His exegesis was sober and reserved. Yet, Scripture itself was a mystery, a mystery of Divine “economy” and of human salvation. There was an inscrutable depth in the Scripture, since it was an “inspired” book, a book by the Spirit. For that reason the true exegesis must be also spiritual and prophetic. A gift of spiritual discernment was necessary for the right understanding of the Holy Word. “For the judge of the words ought to start with the same preparation as the author ... And I see that in the utterances of the Spirit it is also impossible for everyone to undertake the scrutiny of His word, but only for them who have the Spirit which grants the discernment” (*epist.* 204). The Spirit is granted in the sacraments of the Church. Scripture must be read in the light of faith, and also in the community of the faithful. For that reason Tradition, the tradition of faith as handed down through generations, was for St. Basil an indispensable guide and companion in the study and interpretation of the Holy Writ. At this point he was following in the steps of St. Irenaeus and St. Athanasius. In the similar way Tradition, and especially the liturgical witness, of the Church was used by St. Augustine [Cf. German Mártin, O.D., *La tradicin en San Agustín a través de la controversia pelagiana* (Madrid, 1942) (originally in ‘Revista española de Teología,’ Vol. I, 1940, and II, 1942); Wunibald Roetzer, *Des heiligen Augustinus Schriften als liturgie-gerchichtliche Quelle* (München, 1930); see also the studies of Federer and Dom Capelle, as quoted above].

### **The Church as interpreter of Scripture.**

The Church had the authority to interpret the Scripture, since she was the only authentic depository of Apostolic *kerygma*. This *kerygma* was unfaillingly kept alive in the Church, as she was endowed with the Spirit. The Church was still teaching *viva voce*, commending and furthering the Word of God. And *viva vox Evangelii* [the living voice of the Gospel] was indeed not just a recitation of the words of the Scripture. It was a proclamation of the Word of God, as it was heard and preserved in the Church, by the ever abiding power of the quickening Spirit. Apart from the Church and her regular Ministry, “in succession” to the Apostles, there was no true proclamation of the Gospel, no sound preaching, no real understanding of the Word of God. And therefore it would be in vain to look for truth elsewhere, outside of the Church, Catholic and Apostolic. This was the common assumption of the Ancient Church, from St. Irenaeus down to Chalcedon, and further. St. Irenaeus was quite formal at this point. In the Church the fullness of truth has been gathered by the Apostles: *plenissime in eam contulerint omnia quae sunt veritatis* [lodged in her hands most copiously are all things pertaining to truth (*adv. haeres.*, III.4.1)]. Indeed, Scripture itself was the major part of this Apostolic “deposit.” So was also the Church. Scripture and Church could not be separated, or opposed to each other. Scripture, that is — its

true understanding, was only in the Church, as she was guided by the Spirit. Origen was stressing this unity between Scripture and Church persistently. The task of the interpreter was to disclose the word of the Spirit: *hoc observare debemus ut non nostras, cum docemus, led Sancti Spiritus sentential proferamus* [we must be careful when we teach to present not our own interpretation but that of the Holy Spirit (in Rom. 1.3.1)]. And this is simply impossible apart from the Apostolic Tradition, kept in the Church. Origen insisted on *catholic* interpretation of Scripture, as it is offered in the Church: *audiens in Ecclesia verbum Dei catholice tractari* [hearing in the Church the Word of God presented in the catholic manner (in Lev. hom., 4.5)]. Heretics, in their exegesis, ignore precisely the true “intention” or the *voluntas* of the Scripture: *qui enim neque juxta voluntatem Scripturarum neque juxta fidei veritatem profert eloquia Dei, seminat triticum et metit spinas* [those who present the words of God, not in conjunction with the intention of the Scriptures, nor in conjunction ‘with the truth of faith, have sown wheat and reaped thorns (in ferem. hom., 7.3)]. The “intention” of the Holy Writ and the “Rule of faith” are intimately correlated and correspond to each other. This was the position of the Fathers in the Fourth century and later, in full agreement with the teaching of the Ancients. With his usual sharpness and vehemence of expression, St. Jerome, this great man of Scripture, has voiced the same view:

Marcion and Basilides and other heretics ... do not possess the Gospel of God, since they have no Holy Spirit, without which the Gospel so preached becomes human. We do not think that Gospel consists of the words of Scripture but in its meaning; not on the surface but in the marrow, not in the leaves of sermons but in the root of meaning. In this case Scripture is really useful for the hearers when it is not spoken without Christ, nor is presented without the Fathers, and those who are preaching do not introduce it without the Spirit ... It is a great danger to speak in the Church, lest by a perverse interpretation of the Gospel of Christ, a gospel of man is made (in Galat., I, 1. II; M. L. XXVI, c. 386).

There is the same preoccupation with the true understanding of the Word of God as in the days of St. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen. St. Jerome probably was simply paraphrasing Origen. Outside of the Church there is no “Divine Gospel,” but only human substitutes. The true meaning of Scripture, the *sensus Scripturae*, that is, the Divine message, can be detected only *juxta fidei veritatem* [in conjunction with the truth of faith], under the guidance of the rule of faith. The *veritas fidei* [the truth of faith] is, in this context, the Trinitarian confession of faith. It is the same approach as in St. Basil. Again, St. Jerome is speaking here primarily of the proclamation of the Word in the Church: *audientibus utilis est* [to those who hear the Word].

### **St. Augustine and Catholic Authority.**

In the same sense we have to interpret the well known, and justly startling, statement of St. Augustine: *Ego vero Evangelio non crederem, nisi me catholicae Ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas* [Indeed, I should not have believed the Gospel, if the authority of the Catholic Church had not moved me (c. *epistolam Fundamenti*, v.6) ]. The phrase must be read in its context. First of all, St. Augustine did not utter this sentence on his own behalf. He spoke of the attitude which a simple believer had to take, when confronted with the heretical claim for authority. In this situation it was proper for a simple believer to appeal to the authority of the Church, from which, and in which, he had received the Gospel itself: *ipsi Evangelio catholicis praedicantibus credidi*. [I believed the Gospel itself, being instructed by catholic preachers]. The Gospel and the preaching of the *Catholica* belong together. St. Augustine had no intention “to subordinate” the Gospel to the Church. He only wanted to emphasize that “Gospel” is actually received always in the context of Church’s catholic preaching and simply cannot be separated from the Church. Only in this context it can be assessed and properly understood. Indeed, the witness of the Scripture is ul-

timately “self-evident,” but only for the “faithful,” for those who have achieved a certain “spiritual” maturity, — and this is only possible within the Church. He opposed this teaching and preaching *auctoritas* of the Church Catholic to the pretentious vagaries of Manichean exegesis. The Gospel did not belong to the Manicheans. *Catholicae Ecclesiae auctoritas* [the authority of the Catholic Church] was not an independent source of faith. But it was the indispensable principle of sound interpretation. Actually, the sentence could be converted: one should not believe the Church, unless one was moved by the Gospel. The relationship is strictly reciprocal [Cf. Louis de Montadon, *Bible et Eglise danr l’Apologélique de Saint Augustin*, in the “Recherches de Science religieuse,” t. II (1911), pp. 233-238; Pierre Battifol, *Le Catholicisme de Saint Augustin*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris, 1929), pp. 25-27 (see the whole chapter I, L’Eglise régle de foi); and especially A. D. R. Polman, *The Word of God according to St. Augustine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1961), pp. 198-208 (it is a revised translation of the book published in Dutch in 1955 - *De Theologie van Augustinus, Het Woord Gods bij Augurtinus*); see also W. F. Dankbaar, *Schriftgezag en Kerkgezag bij Augustinus*, in the *Wederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, XI (1956-1957), ss. 37-59 (the article is written in connection with the Dutch edition of Polman’s book)].