

READING THE BIBLE (in MARCH) EXODUS TO DEUTERONOMY

These books that make up The Law (The Torah) with Genesis were put together at a later date, though built on traditional scriptures orally passed down. This was done at times through the ages but most significantly at the time of the Exile in Babylon (597 BC for 50 years) in order to preserve both the faith and the way of life that was intrinsically part of it. So here we find stories of the great journey to the Promised Land in which their faith, their relationship with God, was born, and the rules for living out that faith.

Usually we find the first more easy to read than the second. But in Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy we find a quite revolutionary approach to living with friend and foe, slave and free, debtor and creditor. Of course it is framed in a civilisation whose approach to life often seems strange or harsh to us, and whose image of a compassionate God is not ours. But we have to put ourselves into their mindset, of an exiled people with a tough nomadic past, always under threat, seeking help and reasons for their plight.

EXODUS

Genesis introduced us to the very origins of the Chosen people of God as a family as they begin with the call of Abram to leave Ur of the Chaldees and head for the Promised Land, trusting solely in God.

Exodus (literally 'the road out' in Greek), takes us to the foundation of the people as a people reborn out of slavery into freedom, led by Moses (the forerunner of Jesus leading us to freedom from sin). One of the great lessons is that freedom means taking responsibility for our lives.

Read all of Exodus if you can as you will know many of the stories. Look at Moses' complex background as slave-child to adopted master to hunted freedom-fighter/ murderer. Look at the plagues again and then the Passover and then its ritual expression in Chapter 12. In Chapter 19 God calls on the people to be his people as he hears their cry of distress.

Read the Ten Commandments (Ch.20) and see, reading the first line, how they (and the other 603) are designed to help a free people live in harmony with God, family and other. Chapter 24 gives us a ritual formalisation of the Covenant (compare with the Mass, scripture and offering.) Then in Ch. 32 the Golden Calf. As we come to the end, see the presence of God descending on to the Ark, 'overshadowing' it, which is the same word in Greek, used for the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary in Luke's gospel. God is now among his people.

LEVITICUS

This book is about how to be a holy people for a Holy God. "Be holy, for I the Lord am holy." 19:2. The word *holy* means *to be separate from the profane world*. People struggle with this book as it is very much a series of laws and instructions and is not an easy read. Chapters 17-27 are called the Book of Holiness and perhaps it is best to start with these. The search is for holiness and wholeness, how to be the true people God created so as to respond to God's act of creation appropriately. We are called to holiness and this is how to live it out.

Some of it seems strange to us now and deals with life in minute detail. See Chapter 13 on diseases and baldness. Sacrifices help to put the people right with God as does the scapegoat in Chapter 16 and the day of Atonement.

In Chapter 24 the use of capital punishment shows many in its favour, but today appears outdated to many of us in the light of Christ.

In Chapter 25 the idea of Jubilee was the basis of our Jubilee in 2000, and is a forward-thinking time of renewal.