

Introduction to the Bible [series 14b]

Formulation of Faith in the Bible [continued from previous article]

The Promise to Patriarchs [*God of the Fathers*]

God's promise to ancestors of Israel is an important theme in the Pentateuch narratives [first five books of the Bible]. From time in memorial the existence of faith in the God of the fathers existed. The unique feature of the patriarchal origin of faith was the personal relationship of the worshipper to God [read life of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob]. The promise of posterity was the original content of this confession of faith and a pledge of the land of their own was added to it. When the Israelites settled down in Canaan they realized the actualization of promise to patriarchs. The concept of promise of God and fulfillment became integral to patriarchal narrative in the Old Testament. God of the fathers is one God who brought Israel out of Egypt.

Guidance in the wilderness [*Israel's forty years of sojourn in the desert*]: In the hymnic recital of the great acts of God, a wilderness theme is prominent as in Psalms 135; 136. Wilderness theme is about the formation of the people. It involves protection and providence from the part of God at people's request and fundamental to this theme is the 'role of murmuring motive' [Exodus 15:22ff-people murmured against Moses; Numbers 20:1-13]. A desire of the people is expressed followed by a complaint, then an intercession on the part of Moses resulted in the Lord's miraculous intervention. God meets the need of the people when they beseeched him; divine providence is highlighted.

God's response to People's rebellion: People murmured against Moses, complained that they had no water or food in the desert. Succeeding hardships of the people were interpreted as God's 'punishment' and through the intercession of Moses people received reprieve of punishment [Numbers 11:1-3; 17:6-15; 21:4-10]. Here, the major theme narrated is the miraculous gift of food [Manna] and water and how to preserve life in the desert. The focus is also on the effects of disobedience and forgiveness of a loving God. The unbelief calls for punishment [*we can look at 'God punishing' as not experiencing blessings/grace*], yet it is a medicinal punishment and its purpose is a warning against resistance to God's plan. The murmuring theme in Israel's faith confession presents the need for responsible obedience. Israel's faith experience, covenant and election, as the people journey to the promised Land, are the historical background of these themes. Exodus 19-24: God did enter into a covenant with a historical people at a particular time and place, God who revealed himself as 'I am who I am'. The commandments are best understood as channels of Israel's personal and covenantal relationship with God who directed them to a new life.

Confession of Faith in One God [*Eis Theos Formula*]: God is God of Exodus; this God is One [Yahweh=I am who am]. Belief in One God was never a result of philosophical speculation. It was the natural result of the experience of God's close and loving presence with the people. It is not difficult to see in the redemption of Israel, belief in other gods was still a fact to be reckoned with. In the vision of Isaiah in chapter 6 other

gods are exterminated; future kingdom of this only God reduces every other power into nothing [Isaiah 10:4; 31:3; 2:2-4; 6:3]. Monotheistic formula appeared in the 17th Century BC describes Yahweh as the true God of all kingdoms of the earth, the only God, in contrast to him all other gods are nothing [1King 8:16; 2King 19:25; Jeremiah 2:11; 10:7; 16:20]. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 gives Israel's confession of faith in One and only God. Exilic and post-exilic thinking of Israel was a reformulation of faith [Jeremiah 16:14-15; 23:7ff. Isaiah speaks of the new thing Yahweh is going to do-Isaiah 44:18-19. The prophets spoke of a new covenant and a new redemption when God will put his law in the hearts of people [Jeremiah 31:33], which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

To be continued...

Father Jose