

Introduction to the Bible [series 8]

First Century World of Jesus

Our understanding of the 1st century world when Jesus was born is from Hebrew Scriptures [Old Testament]. Jesus was born a Jew. Jewish people of 1st century had been known in different titles during their history. Hebrews originated as a Semitic tribe about 4 thousand years ago. Their ancestral leaders were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Twelve sons of Jacob formed the twelve tribes of Hebrew people. Jacob received the name 'Israel' [means wrestle with God] after his encounter with God, as we read in Genesis 32:27. After the Hebrews were freed from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses and the foundation of the new nation in Canaan, Hebrews became known as Israelites.

Messianic Hope: King David's reign was the golden age of Israel's monarchy. David built the capital city Jerusalem. God established a covenant with David: 'your house and your kingdom shall endure forever [2Samuel 7:16]. *The blind man in the gospel addressed Jesus as 'son of David' [Mark 10:46-52]. He confessed Jesus as the awaited messiah!* From 587-538 BC Israelites lived in exile. It is said that only the descendants of the tribe of Judah survived the exile and for this reason, the post-exilic Israelites in Palestine came to be known as Jews [from Judah]. [Jesus was born, in a legal sense, from the tribe of Judah, because Joseph was of the house of David and tribe of Judah].

Division of Israel: David's son Solomon expanded Israelites kingdom and the end of Solomon's reign witnessed the division of the nation of Israel between Solomon's sons Jeroboam and Rehoboam. The northern kingdom of Israel was consisted of 9 and half tribes and the southern kingdom of Judah was formed by 2 and half tribes. During this time of turmoil and invasions by Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians, we see the rise of prophets in Israel. Lamentation over loss of land and Temple is a constant theme in the book of Psalms.

Re-building of the Nation: Ezra and Nehemiah, leaders of the community in exile, were instrumental for the return of the small Israelite community back to Palestine. They began the re-building of the Temple in Jerusalem in 515 BC. The history of Israel was shaped by their awareness as covenant people. Old Testament narrates both fidelity and infidelity of the people to the God of the covenant which is also reflected in New Testament writings. God, by revealing himself to the people of Israel, was preparing them for the coming of Christ, the light of the world. In Isaiah 49:6 the Lord says to Israel, 'I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth'. Christmas is the celebration of God fulfilling this promise of sending the Messiah in Jesus Christ, Son of God, whose kingdom is everlasting, who is savior of the world [Luke 1:32-35; 2:10-11].
to be continued...

WISH YOU A BLESSED CHRISTMAS

Father Jose