



the second century BC. As you read (and it will, I warn you, take a while to get through it), do not try to reconstruct the history of Israel; rather look out for the answers to the question “Where was God when we were suffering?” And certainly, in the earlier books, Joshua and Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, look for the pattern that the authors detected: God, who is invariably faithful, generously giving the people the land, then the people forgetting what God has done and being punished by God. After that, they realise that they have got things badly wrong, and repent. So God restores them.

THE STORY OF GOD’S PEOPLE

How are you to start reading these books? One thing that you might do is look at the charming (and brief – it is only four chapters) book of Ruth; you will find it immediately after the book of Judges, whose last three chapters (19-21) you must only read when you are feeling strong, as they contain some horrible stories. Ruth will cheer you up. It quite consciously continues the story of Israel and produces the enchanting (though unmistakably feisty) character of Ruth, the foreigner who stayed with her mother-in-law and met Boaz, a man of integrity who became her husband. Then, in the very last line of this book, we discover that she became the great-grandmother of King David. This is a story in which God has been powerfully at work in Israel’s history, despite all sorts of discouraging events. If you start your browse through the story of God’s people with these four chapters, and keep asking, “What is God doing here?”, you will get a glimpse of where God has been in the history of the people of God.

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you all the day long.
O Lord, you are good and forgiving, full of mercy to all who call to you.**

FIRST READING Jeremiah 20:7-9

PSALM Psalm 62

RESPONSE For you my soul is thirsting, O Lord my God.

- O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting. My body pines for you like a dry, weary land without water. **R.**
- So I gaze on you in the sanctuary to see your strength and your glory. For your love is better than life, my lips will speak your praise. **R.**
- So I will bless you all my life, in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul shall be filled as with a banquet, my mouth shall praise you with joy. **R.**

- For you have been my help; in the shadow of your wings I rejoice. My soul clings to you; your right hand holds me fast. **R.**

SECOND READING Romans 12:1-2

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Alleluia, alleluia!
May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our mind, so that we can see what hope his call holds for us.
Alleluia!**

GOSPEL Matthew 16:21-27

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

How great is the goodness, Lord, that you keep for those who fear you.

Next Sunday’s Readings:

Ezekiel 33:7-9
Romans 13:8-10
Matthew 18:15-20

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WHAT ABOUT THE “HISTORIES”?

The next set of Old Testament texts we shall look at is what are called the “histories”. Perhaps the most important thing to say is that, as we read, we should not be looking for “the facts”, so much as for the life that always pulses beneath the surface of the biblical text. These “histories” are the accounts that take the reader from the first entry into the Holy Land, all the way down to that terrible moment when Israel went into exile in Babylon; so it consists of Joshua and Judges, then the move into a new world of monarchy with the two books of Samuel and two books of Kings. After that you will find the two books of Chronicles, a run-through of very much the same material, to be read with Ezra and Nehemiah. This takes the story down to the fourth century BC and tries to express what God was doing in Israel’s history. After this, in our Catholic Bibles, comes the very charming story of Tobit, which is not in the Hebrew Bible but is still worth reading today; and it is all about how God does not abandon God’s people. Then (again in our Bibles) comes the equally charming (though in certain respects rather alarming) story of Judith and what she did to Nebuchadnezzar; and the point of the story is that, whatever things may feel like, God is very much in charge. After that you will find the extraordinary story of Esther, and (although God is not much mentioned in the story) the certainty that God is looking after the people. Finally in our Bibles there are the rather different works that we know as 1 and 2 Maccabees, the first a translation into Greek of a Hebrew account of Israel’s struggle for independence between 174 and 134 BC, and the second a summary of a five-volume Greek history between 175 and 160, written by Jason of Cyrene.



What holds all these works together is not precisely the attempt to write the history of Israel, more a way of asking where God has been in the life of the people. What this range of books invites you to do is to ask what God (who is that life) has been doing in the multifarious history of Israel, from its first arrival in the Promised Land, to the political changes from being ruled by “judges” to being ruled by “kings”, to the split between north and south, to the fall of the Northern Kingdom, to the various stories of what unbelievers did to Israel, all the way down to the last quarter of

How to read the Bible



Fr Nicholas King SJ guides us through reading the Old Testament’s “historical” books.

30 AUGUST 2020

22ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II