

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Levels of Meaning, Archeology, Old Testament Faith Journey      Historical Foundations of the Bible      Adult Formation/Spiritual Life      Thursday, May 16, 2002**  
7:30 p.m.      Third Presentation      Church Hall

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Heavenly Father, we ask you to be with us this evening as we seek to understand your word and bring it more meaningfully into our lives. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Last week I ended by mentioning something from Clement of Alexandria. Now Clement was a Father of the Church in Egypt, and he followed a particular school of thought that by today's standards was very, very intelligent; but for the most part we have ignored him for most of two thousand years. But Clement's view of Scripture was that it has different senses; there are different meanings in Scripture. And the literal was surely not the most important, if it's even important at all.

So the five he talked about were these: first the historical, second the doctrinal, third—what was the third one? Does anyone remember? Prophetic. The fourth one was philosophical. And the fifth one was mystical. Now I added a sixth one, and now I'm going to add a seventh one. Well, I didn't add the sixth one. The sixth one was added—called the "sensus plenior," literally the fuller sense. There are thus many senses: the historical sense, the doctrinal sense, the prophetic sense, and so on. And then the fuller sense, called the "sensus plenior," which we don't want to get into that too much because it will lead us astray from our topic under discussion, but we can mention it. Most modern biblical scholars will not use this sort of a scheme at all, but I find it very helpful. Sensus plenior—nobody likes that any more. That idea is that although the author doesn't really know what he is writing, the Holy Spirit is inspiring him to write something that will mean something later on to another generation. An example of the sensus plenior is the interpretation of the Psalms in such a way as to refer to Christ.

Now today this is becoming a big controversy in the Church because in, for example, the Psalms very often the word "ish" is used, translated in Greek "aner." That is the male person; it is not the general use of the word "man" in the generic sense meaning anyone. That would be perhaps "adam" in Hebrew, "anthropos" in Greek. In Latin it would be "homo." But rather they use the other word "ish," meaning male person, "aner" and in Latin "vir." "Beatus vir qui timet Dominum." That is a very famous line from the Psalm, "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord." Now the Fathers said, "Well why did they use this word? Why didn't they say, 'Blessed is anyone who fears the Lord?'" Well, they came up with an answer: because the author they thought was David, and they thought David was actually talking about himself. "Blessed am I who fear the Lord," in other words. They thought it was another way of saying that. But then they said that considered from the spiritual sense, which David didn't know but the Holy Spirit was inspiring him to say, "Blessed," really, "is Christ." So "vir" or "aner" becomes a term used for Christ.

Now it's with this Christological interpretation of the Psalms that the Psalms become incorporated into liturgy, Christian liturgy, in a way that no other part of the Old Testament was incorporated. You probably are aware of the fact that reading from the Old Testament as a regular thing is of recent origin. It only goes back to the Second Vatican Council and the expansion of the Lectionary, which now includes the Old Testament. There was a big question in the early Church about the Old Testament: should we even keep it? I might have mentioned this before. One of the Fathers called Marcion actually ended up a heretic. He said, "Let's get rid of it altogether. We don't need it." So there was a big controversy. But the Fathers, who saw a spiritual sense, referring to Christ in the Psalms, then used that as a basis for putting the Psalms into liturgy.

Now today there are translations which are generic translations or they are gender neutral translations which say something like, "Blessed is anyone who fears the Lord," or "Blessed are they who fear the Lord," which in one sense is all right if you take it from a general idea, but it isn't exactly what the Psalm says. But then more conservative people say, "Well, but that takes it away from Christ. It's no longer referring to Christ." That could be counteracted with the argument, "Well, it didn't refer to Christ in the first place!" But then that will be counteracted with the argument, "Well, then let's not use it in the liturgy." So that's why these controversies rage and I don't want to get into them. I think they're pretty pointless, eventually. But I just want to say that's what people say. And a lot of what I'm sharing with you is what people say, what scholars say, what theologians come up with. And I'm not going to tell you whether I think it's right or wrong. I'm just telling you that there are people who say various things, and you need to sort through them and see how you might gain something from these insights.

Let's go to the historical. I'm going to flesh this out by using the two infancy narratives from the New Testament. Matthew and Luke are the only two that tell about Jesus' birth. However, if you ever read these stories carefully, you will realize that they are not telling the same story. Most people simply fill in the blanks and end up with a combination of stories, but actually they're two distinct stories. Luke, for example, talks about Mary and Joseph living in Nazareth, and they are called to Bethlehem by a census of the Roman emperor, and therefore as they get to Bethlehem they look for a room; they don't find a room, and they end up in a stable. In the stable Jesus is born. And of course, the shepherds come and witness this, and then they go back to Nazareth. That's one story.

Matthew tells a different story. Matthew says that Joseph and Mary are living in Bethlehem, and she becomes pregnant, and the Christ Child is born, and the Magi come from the East, and they enter the house where the Child was, but on the way they stopped to talk to Herod. Herod says, "Well, tell me where the Child is, because I want to worship him, too." And an angel comes to Joseph and says, "Don't trust Herod; he wants to kill the Child. Leave. Take the Child and his mother to Egypt until I tell you." Later on an angel comes back to Joseph and says, "Herod is dead, but don't go home." Read this carefully. "Don't go back where you came from, because you can't trust Herod's son

Archelaus. Rather, go to Galilee; thus, Christ became known as a Nazorean.” That’s that story.

They are two different stories, and they differ on historical points. They agree Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and they agree he grew up in Nazareth, and they agree that he was born of Mary. They agree that Jesus really had no true human father; that he is really the Son of the Most High; that the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, so that Jesus is really the Son of God. They agree on that; that’s doctrinal. But historically they disagree: where did these two people live before; where did they go after the birth? Now you might say, well, those are not important. Well, of course, they’re not important—you’re right. But what this shows us is that those two evangelists didn’t really know details. Now if they didn’t know details, then we assume they were not intending to give them to us.

But ask yourself this question: how do you tell anybody; how do you teach doctrine; how do you prophesy; how do you teach philosophy; how do you teach mystical meaning? Mysticism has to do with how the eternal patterns are ever present, how when we really learn about God in the past we’re learning about God in the present, and we’re learning about God in the future because God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. That’s mystical insight. Now how do you teach illiterate people anything about these topics except by telling a story? There is no other way to do it. There was no other way. So the evangelists told stories. So did the authors of the Old Testament. But we have to keep in mind that that’s what they were doing.

And very often their real point was doctrine, for example, Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is really the Son of God, not the Son of Joseph—that’s doctrine, not history.

Prophesy. What about Herod? Is there any record of Herod killing all kinds of children, killing all kinds of boys, or anybody doing that kind of thing? No, there’s no such record. Is it plausible that he would have done that? Well, that’s up to you. You can say it is plausible or not plausible. In my personal opinion, it’s not plausible. But that story of Herod killing all the children and trying to kill Christ himself is very prophetic. It’s prophetic in the sense that state power tried to destroy the Word of God—absolutely true—tried to! The cross is the ultimate attempt. Of course, it failed because the Word of God is the Word of God and not just the word of man or not just a person, a human person. So that’s really a prophetic story. And along the way, of course, many innocents are killed; that also is prophetic.

It’s also philosophical. And throughout the Old Testament too, there is a philosophical question about the role of government in life. And there’s a constant criticism of government. In the story of Jesus and Herod there is a criticism of the very idea that union of Church and state is not a good idea from the biblical point of view, although a common situation in the ancient world.

Mystical point of view. How can the virginal birth of Jesus be seen to be something that speaks to all people of their need for rebirth? See, the idea of birth from a virgin is

birth from nothing in the order of cause and effect, birth from grace. Well, birth from grace is what rebirth is about. It's what Baptism is about. So the story of Jesus' virgin birth is a mystical presentation of Baptism as well. So that's one way of looking at these different meanings.

Now I would add another one to the historical on the same level. I would call it the dramatic. And I put that there because I think that many of the stories that are told in the Old Testament, in particular, are really told for dramatic affect. They may also have other reasons here, but they're told for dramatic effect. And the drama itself is part of the whole meaning of it. Why? Well, if you think about even liturgy, when we gather for liturgy we listen to the proclamation of the gospel, we listen to the proclamation of the Old Testament, the reading of the lessons from the New Testament; and the reading itself is part of why we gather. And we need a vehicle and the drama.

Take for example, David and Goliath. I mean that is a very dramatic story. Now is it historically true? Well, I really don't know, and nobody knows whether there really was a guy named "Goliath" who was killed by David's slingshot. It seems a little far-fetched to me, but it is, I suppose, possible. However, think in terms of these other purposes here.

Prophetically, what does this say about the ability of God's chosen one to overcome even the greatest obstacles? What does it say about the ability of even the small people, for example, the small, insignificant, marginalized, poor people of the earth overcoming the giants of oppression? And that's really what the Philistines were. They were oppressors.

And there is also a philosophical statement, which also runs throughout the Old Testament: God—the champion of justice, God—the champion of the poor. Now we might call that "theology," but Clement used the word "philosophy"; and it's just as good really for our purposes.

Other issues, for example, another story, dramatic story, and the story of "the walls of Jericho come tumbling down." Jericho is one of the oldest sights in the world. It dates back to 6,000 BC. There are very few sights that are older, Catal Huyuk, in Asia Minor is just about as old. I actually don't know an older site. It's been excavated. The problem is this: if you take a timeline based on the Bible itself, which is this,<sup>1</sup> and you try to say, "Well, when did the walls of Jericho come tumbling down?" well, you're going to put it somewhere here between 1200 BC and 1150 BC, let's say. Now archeologists have gone into that area and they've excavated all the way down to 6000 BC. They have found no walls that would be in the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age, which would be that period. So then you have to account for the evaporation of walls, if you really want to believe the walls came tumbling down. My personal view is that is another dramatic story that is told to entertain and encourage, first of all, children to identify with the heroes of their past, but also to encourage people to trust in God. After all, the story of Jericho is really the story of how God overcame the enemies of Israel. It's not how Israel

overcame their enemies; it's how God overcame their enemies. From that point of view there is a pacifistic element in those stories.

On the other hand, there is another very disturbing side where God says to Joshua, or whoever, "Okay, now I want you to wipe out all of the livestock and all the people in this town." That's not very pacifistic! And that's very troubling to—I would think—even to modern-day Jewish people, but it's truly troubling to Christian people. You know, what kind of a God would say this? That's not the God that Jesus taught us about. Well, that brings up another story, which Clement and all the Fathers of the Church had brought up very often: the discrepancies between the moral nature here on the philosophical level, the moral nature of God as Jesus teaches it with the moral nature of God as he appears in the stories of the Old Testament. And what they said is, well, if there's a discrepancy, we believe in what Jesus taught and we reject the other because they knew that they couldn't have both, and that is true.

However, on the other hand, there is this tremendous philosophical idea, which I will get to in a minute, actually I should really do as part of talking about the Exodus itself. The Exodus itself is like the central drama of the whole Old Testament. Now when I was in the seminary, which was a long, long time ago—1971-75 I was in theology—and at that time the going dispute, or controversy, I should say, among scholars was whether the history of the Exodus was the central story of the Old Testament or whether the idea of the covenant was the central theme in the Old Testament. And actually it's a very sophisticated question. For a long time I didn't even know why they were talking about it, but it gets down to this: do we imagine that the events are really caused by God? That is the way many scholars at that time were promoting this and especially a very well known man named George Wright. And of course, he had very sophisticated American archeologists working on his side, especially William Albright and John Bright. And their view was that the way to look at the Bible is that God is actually entering into history and causing events to take place. And anyway that's exactly how the people who wrote the Bible saw things, that God was causing events.

This other school said that, well, that isn't really what the Bible says. What the Bible is really talking about is how the Hebrew people came to a philosophical, doctrinal knowledge of, awareness of, God as Spirit, as unique, as source of order and law, and that they gave themselves to this God the way other nations would become vassals of a foreign king. So that is, you might say, an alternate theory of what's central in the Old Testament. And then, even there, there's a difference between whether the Hebrew people saw themselves as vassals or not; and that's a technicality we don't have to worry about. But the centrality of the covenant itself—I really do believe that the covenant is the central issue in the Old Testament. And that when Jesus died, the night before he died, he even brought up the idea of the covenant. He said, "This is the cup of my blood of the new and eternal covenant." That's very central. So covenant is the central issue.

Now where did the idea of covenant come from? Well, there's a question that can't be answered. I can't answer it; no one can answer it. Where did the Hebrew people get this idea? I don't know. They had it. We go back to two weeks ago and last week when we

talked about what is inspiration. The only way I can answer that question is to say they were inspired by the Holy Spirit to understand their lives in a unique way. Now exactly when this inspiration took place, I don't know—and nobody knows. So, we'll proceed.

The Exodus event: The exodus event is a problematic event because it is, first of all, a story that is extremely improbable. What's improbable about the Exodus? Well, let's go back to looking at the Bible as literature, which it is. And I point out to you the book by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, which is one of the latest books published by a team of archeologists from Israel, from Palestine.<sup>2</sup> They are in possession of all of the relevant materials both archeological and literary, not to say that their opinions are necessarily correct, but it's one of the latest books.

Now one of the things that they bring up, and it's also brought up in this book, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, by Jared Diamond<sup>3</sup>—this is a Pulitzer Prize winning book on—what? The fates of human societies: What Mr. Diamond does is he looks at what is required for a group of people to grow and develop and function as a society. And he has here a table of societies. And he explains that there are different kinds of membership. One he calls a “band,” one he calls a “tribe,” one he calls “chiefdom,” one he calls a “state.” And they have different degrees of complexity. Now a band has dozens of people whereas a tribe has hundreds of people, whereas chiefdom has thousands of people, whereas a state has over fifty thousand people.<sup>4</sup>

Now the first problem with the Exodus story is that it claims that there are over six hundred thousand people, but they're not a state. Well, how were they organized? Who fed them? How did they all go in one direction? I mean, these are not simple matters. You say, “Well, Moses was in charge of them.” Yeah, well, Moses was one person. You know, later on there is a story about how Moses' father-in-law comes and says, “Moses, you're wearing yourself out with all these disputes and conflicts you're trying to solve.” Well, if there were six hundred thousand people, he would have been worn out a long time before that! See—that's too many—that's just too many!

Furthermore, if you look at the area itself, there is no sign that there was such a population ever. Now people do leave a trail. Nobody is a perfect ecologist. There has never been a perfect ecological group. If you go to the American West and you go and do archeology, you find all kinds of garbage from the Navaho and from the various Indian groups. They leave all kinds of stuff, and everyone always has. But now in Egypt and the Nile delta, there's no stuff for six hundred thousand people. Okay?

However, there are some interesting figures and facts that play into the Exodus story. For one thing, around 1570 BC there was an invasion of Egypt by Semitic people. And we know about this because the Egyptians talk about this, and they talk about it in very negative terms, like an invasion. But maybe it wasn't really an invasion. Maybe it was really people coming to eat. Or maybe it was like a lot of migrants showing up for work. Some people call that an invasion. Some people feel invaded in this country, feel invaded by migrants from the south coming up; but is that really an invasion? Well, they called it an “invasion.” They called these people the “Hyksos,” and that has a specific

meaning, but we don't have to go into that. It has something to do with shepherd kings, I think is the actual meaning—Hyksos, “shepherd kings.”

Now the trouble is that according to the Egyptians eventually after about a hundred-fifty, two hundred years they kicked these people out. They drove them out! Okay? Now is that the historical basis for the Exodus story, that actually Palestinian people came down, settled—and, oh, that's the point, the Hyksos actually took over the role of Pharaoh; they actually took over everything! There was a Semitic Pharaoh for at least a hundred-fifty—two hundred years. It was at a low point in the history of Egypt. But eventually the Egyptians rose up again, kicked out the Semites, and drove them out; and according to one of the Egyptian steles, it says that they went up into Canaan and founded the city of Jerusalem. Are they talking about the people we call the “Hebrews”? Very hard to say!

Part of the problem is who were the Hebrews? And what does “Hebrew” mean? See; even names are so ambiguous. If you read the story of the Exodus you will see that they're always called “Hebrews” until the time of Sinai. When they enter into covenant with God they become the “Israel of God.” Okay? But before that “Hebrews.” Well, what does “Hebrew” mean? Well, it means someone who speaks Hebrew. See? What's an Arab? An Arab is someone who speaks Arabic. Is there such a thing as an Arab nation? Not exactly. Was there ever? No. Arab is a language. Hebrew is a language. There are people who are called by the language they speak. But I am not English. Mahatma Gandhi was not English either, but he spoke English. So when you call people by the language they speak, you're defining them in a particular way; but does that say much about them? Not necessarily. Now one scholar—although these gentlemen here do not agree with him—one scholar, an American, believes that the word “Hebrew” comes from another word “Apiru.” And “Apiru” is a word meaning the “landless peasants” or another word for them would be the “serfs.” So it's another word for the lowest class.

I think I mentioned two weeks ago that in ancient society there was a class system. And Egypt was surely an established state, and it had a class system. On the top was Pharaoh, representative of the god; in some cases he was called “god.” He was the son of god, Horus. And then there was the priestly class and the craftsmen and then soldiers and then peasants. And the peasants have no real freedom; they have to do what they are told. They work, and then they're given food. Well, now some people call that “slavery,” but I don't know if it's really slavery either. They weren't in chains. It was just a way of life. That was what was expected. Russia got rid of serfdom in 1848, I think. And those serfs were tied to the land; they had to work; they had no choice. So this is something like the lower classes in the ancient Near East. Is that what is meant by the word “Hebrew”? Perhaps.

When did they leave? —another question! Some say 1220 BC.<sup>5</sup> It could have been 1220 or 1280 BC; a lot of people have guessed around that time. But actually the Hyksos were expelled in 1570 BC, according to Egyptian dates; but, of course, with dating that's a little problem. Some say 1440 BC. So here's a problem.

The word “Israel”—who is the “Israel of God”? Well, if you go to the Book of Genesis, you’ll find “Israel” used for the first time as a name of Jacob. Jacob is also Israel. Okay. Later on, however, Israel becomes the name—it’s a political name. So it starts as a personal name, and then it becomes a political name for this covenanted people. Now I say “political,” and I mean “political and religious at the same time.” In the Near East, in the ancient world, politics and religion were always connected—including here. The difference was that the Israel of God had no political leaders. The only political leader was God. Moses was not a political leader, actually. Moses was a “prophet,” meaning a “spokesperson.” God was in charge; God was the government. I don’t know if you remember two weeks ago, I also said that in the societies of the ancient Near East, for all intents and purposes, god was another name for the government because the ruler was ruling in the name of god. Whatever the ruler said was from god; whatever the gods said and did benefited the ruling class, which was the government. So another way of saying “god” was the “government,” and that is where, of course, the covenant was totally different. The covenant said that, no, there won’t be any ruling class, and God is really a spirit, God is not a human person, and God does not rule through a person. Well, yes, in the sense of the prophets he speaks to them, but a person can’t take God’s place as his vicar, which is a typical way that Babylonian and Egyptian societies and other Near Eastern societies operated. So in this way the Israel of God was in one sense very modern and very spiritual. Okay. So Israel then has the second meaning. It’s a political-religious meaning.

But then it gets a third meaning. Later on, “Israel” becomes a geographical meaning referring to the northern part of Palestine or Canaan. So we have to keep in mind, when you say “Israel,” what do you mean? The name “Israel”? The person “Israel”? The group of people who are the “Israel of God,” or do you mean the place we call “Israel”? Now today “Israel” is the name also of a country, which is a state; and it has now been separated from religion because now a Christian or a Jew or an atheist or a Muslim can be a citizen of Israel. So you see how things change? But in the past that would have been impossible; to be part of the Israel of God, you had to be a member of this religious cult that worshiped Yahweh as king. So I hope you see that we’re talking about a religious political situation that’s utterly unique, not to be found anywhere else in the world—at least in theory. Now did this actually ever exist and function? Well, we don’t know if it really functioned, but this is the idea we read about in the Scriptures; so it was what they were pursuing—let’s put it that way.

Another word “Judah.” The first time you read about “Judah,” it’s the name of one of Jacob’s sons. Then later on “Judah” becomes the group, and it’s not even a family; it’s more than a family. It’s a clan, and it’s even more than a clan; it’s a complete tribe descended supposedly from the man Judah. And later it becomes a geographical name applied to the southern part of Palestine. So, again, when you say “Judah”—now that’s where the word “Jew” comes from, “Judah”—so you really want to ask yourself, well, what is meant here when you hear these words? They could be many different things.

The words “Canaan and Palestine,” incidentally, are completely geographical words. “Canaan” is not found, as far as I know, anywhere outside the Bible. “Palestine” is really

a Latin word. Now modern-day Muslims and Christians who live in Palestine, Canaan, call themselves “Palestinians.” They may or may not be Israeli citizens, but they call themselves “Palestinians.” And the Jews do not call themselves Palestinians because the word “Palestinian” to them has a foreign connotation of domination, domination from the Greeks, Persians, Romans, and others. So all these words have connotations, shades of meaning, and it’s all-important. So we have to keep that in mind. But it makes it more difficult for us to peel back the time and say, well, this is simply what was. We’re not exactly sure.

Now in the Book of Exodus it says that the Hebrews were forced to do labor. Okay? And it mentions two places: Pithom and Raamses, supply cities. Well, this is interesting about that. Historically, the first man named Raamses became Pharaoh in 1320 BC. Okay? So that itself tells you something about the relationship between these people and the Hyksos who were expelled in 1570 BC. They must not be exactly the same people, but they could be related. It could have been that they expelled these, let’s say, the ruling military people in 1570 BC, but stragglers were left behind, something like that.

Now there is a stele that was attributed to the Pharaoh Merneptah. And he says that he—you know the Egyptians were always great military power people—he said that he decimated a people called “Israel.” So the name “Israel” now is found outside of the Bible on the Merneptah Stele. But the claim is that he has decimated the people of Israel. Now one of the most important archeological finds in the last fifty years was a place called Tell el Amarna. Okay? Now there they found four hundred letters that were very revealing about the cultural, social, political, legal condition of the ancient near east—and of Canaan, incidentally—of Canaan, modern-day Palestine. However, here’s the strange thing: they say nothing about Israel. The Stele of Merneptah does; it says that he defeated Israel, but these letters that are extremely detailed about the land of Canaan say nothing about Israel.

Another fact of history, and these have been uncovered, forts! Egypt built a whole series of forts one day’s march apart. These forts were in order to protect Egyptian interests, and they ran all the way up into Canaan. In fact, Egypt had military power that influenced Canaan really throughout most of the time before the Babylonian Exile. The purpose of the forts was to keep foreigners out. They were also granaries, and they also were watersheds. So the Egyptians could have military operations. In one day’s march they could get to the next fort; they’d have provisions; they’d have a place to stay; then they’d go to the next fort all the way up. And they did maintain political suzerainty that means a sort of hegemony over most of this area for centuries.

On the other hand, in favor of the Exodus story the idea that the Hebrew people were put to making bricks, that would fit into a normal job for the serf class. The serf class would be planters when it was the planting season, harvesters when it was the harvesting season, irrigators when it was the irrigating season, bricklayers when it was the bricklaying season, plumbers when it was the plumbing season. You get the idea that they did whatever they had to do? And in this way the state gave them work, so it was a kind of socialism. We give you work; you don’t go get work—we give you work. Then

we take care of you: we feed you, we clothe you, and so on. So you don't really want to think about the ordinary state as actual bondage.

But now the Bible says that the Hebrew people felt that they were in bondage. But perhaps they had different ideas. What's the difference between being in bondage and not being in bondage? It has a lot to do with your mind. If you don't expect anything else and you grow up and you're always doing this and you never think there's anything wrong with it, well, then that's the way you live! Think of the world of poor people for centuries. I mean, they just subsist—that's it! But the Hebrew people had this idea that that wasn't really what they should do, that they had a right to a better life and a life that was free. See? And that idea of freedom, freedom to worship Yahweh and freedom to be, is central to what makes the Hebrew people philosophically different from the other people. So that is all locked into the meaning. See? And I think if you notice in this there's a progression toward deeper and deeper meaning.

So don't get stuck at the historical level, especially because the historical facts themselves may be doubtful. Don't forget also I mentioned Pope Leo XIII had already run into this problem back in the early 1900's, later 1800's, when he wrote about inspiration. And he said that, well; it doesn't cover natural and scientific facts. Well, what's a natural and scientific fact? Well, in a sense history is a natural, scientific fact: scientific in the sense that we can discover it scientifically, natural in the sense it doesn't belong to the realm of what God does or what God says.

Now also there is evidence that there were a lot of migrant workers in the eastern delta of Egypt—so a lot of migrant workers.

It is also notable that the Bible calls this the land of "Goshen." And the word "Goshen" itself—I actually forgot what it means, but it's related to some other word. I'm going to try to look that up.

Now I want to quote to you from page 63 of Silberman. "The conclusion"—this is his conclusion; this is not doctrinal or dogmatic, and you don't have to accept it if you don't like it, but this is his conclusion, their conclusion. "The conclusion—that the Exodus did not happen at the time and in the manner described in the Bible—seems irrefutable when we examine the evidence at specific sites where the children of Israel were said to have camped for extended periods during their wandering in the desert (Numbers 33) and where some archeological indication—if present—would almost certainly be found. According to the biblical narrative, the children of Israel camped at Kadesh-barnea for thirty-eight of the forty years of the wanderings. The general location of this place is clear from the description of the southern border of the land of Israel in Numbers 34. It has been identified by archeologists with the large and well-watered oasis of Ein el-Qudeirat in eastern Sinai, on the boarder between modern Israel and Egypt. The name Kadesh was probably preserved over the centuries in the name of a nearby smaller spring called Ein Qadis. A small mound with the remains of a Late Iron Age fort stands at the center of this oasis. Yet repeated excavations and surveys throughout the entire area have not provided even the slightest evidence for activity in the Late Bronze Age, not even a

single sherd left by a tiny fleeing band of frightened refugees.”<sup>6</sup> So from this viewpoint of the archeologist, there is no historical evidence for the actual way in which this type of timeline has been developed. And furthermore, they will tell you that they don’t have a better idea either. So they do not trust the accuracy, but on the other hand, they say that they’re not quite sure what the actual details really are.

For a good idea of what the Old Testament means—and that’s what I told you I’d like to focus on in this third talk, what the Old Testament means—it’s helpful to find out how was the Old Testament actually written.

Now first of all, I don’t know if you’re aware of the fact that Semites, Semitic people, not necessarily the Hebrews but some of the cousins of the Hebrews invented the alphabet. We don’t know whom, but somebody invented the alphabet that was of the Semitic language-type. Now Semitic language involves the Hebrews, the Aramaic speaking people, such as even some modern Lebanese, and the Assyrians. If you park your car down on Wabash, you may very well hand your keys over to an Assyrian who speaks Aramaic. Also Arabs, actually Arabic is a Semitic language. That’s why it’s so stupid for people to call Muslims “anti-Semitic.” Arabs are Semites. Anyway it is this language family that first developed the alphabet. Later it was taken over by the Phoenicians, and then the Greeks took it over from the Phoenicians. But it was borrowed already twice before the Greeks got it. The Romans are the ones who perfected the simple alphabet we use.

But when did the alphabet first start to be used in writing? Well, it’s the same for every single group. If you go into Jared Diamond’s study of how societies grow and develop, there’s a certain point at which they start to write, and it comes when they become a state. Writing goes along with statehood, although statehood can exist without writing, namely, what group? What ancient state and civilization existed with no writing? “Mayan?” No, they could write. The Incas, the Incas had no writing. The Mayans did have writing. And there was actually quite a bit of sophisticated knowledge in Mesoamerica among the Indian people of the central Americas. But not in Peru. But the point is that the building of a state is a requisite before writing begins. Why? Well, guess what? You have to have something to write on—paper, sheepskin—this has to be produced. See? So you have to think about all this stuff.

That’s another part of the Exodus story, of why the Exodus doesn’t ring true historically, for example, the golden calf. You know, how possibly could Aaron have created a golden calf? Where would the gold come from? The story is, well, the women had a lot of rings because the Egyptian women were glad to get rid of them, and so they said, “Here. Take my jewelry.” That’s a little bit far-fetched. But the other thing, in order to make a calf, you have to have tools. And not only that, but what about the Ark of the Covenant itself? Supposedly it was made of acacia wood with metal, gold plates, and so on. Where did, first of all, acacia wood come from? Where did the gold come from? How was it processed? How was it built? How did all this happen? Where did the curtain come from? See; these are questions that really don’t—there’s no answer for them.

So what most people believe is that the stories of the golden calf are a reference to later on when the Bible actually is being written—so, end of the eighth century and onward. So end of the eighth century, now we're going backward from our normal thinking, so that's what, year what, end of the eighth century? 700 BC and moving down into the 600's BC. So this is the century in which the people of Judah are actually forming a state. Even now, even at this point, Judah is not a very well populated area. One report said that they imagine—of course, it's purely estimation—that only sixteen thousand people lived there—this is the upper hills, the more rocky, poor, upper hills of southern Israel, including the city of Jerusalem.

So we look at then the process of state formation. We realize that people have to have ink. Ink is not simple to come by. Pens. So when you think of this, you have to have stuff to work with; so you're talking about statehood. It used to be imagined, not too long ago, when I was in the seminary it was still imagined that this was taking place around the year 1,000 BC, which is about the time of David. But now the studies indicate that, no, by the year 1,000 BC they still didn't have it together, they still weren't writing yet, so now it's later in the 600's BC. So that's when the Bible actually starts to be written.

What else is going on at this time? Well, it would parallel, the Bible would parallel all the other societies that Jared Diamond studied. I mean, basic things are always going on. Not every single society has exactly the same qualities, but in general it goes like this: there is a centralizing of cult. Now what do you see as a very important theme in the Old Testament? The centralizing of the cult in—where? Jerusalem--and a gradual condemnation of other shrines. Now we know that there were historically three very popular shrines: Shechem, Shiloh, and Gilgal. What was a shrine? A shrine was a place that the tribes would go for a renewal of covenant. So it's very hard for us to understand this because we have nothing like this in our society. But once a year the various tribes that made up the covenant of Israel, the Israel of God, would get together at some place or another. Now maybe they all tried to gather at one place, or maybe they would gather at two or three different places. But over the period of time they had used three different spots: Shechem, Gilgal, and Shiloh. And these places were maintained as shrines dedicated to God, to God, Yahweh. Don't forget, Yahweh is the God who revealed himself to Moses. Yahweh is the personal God. Yahweh is the conscious one, the ground of all consciousness, "I AM who AM." All right, it is the cult of Yahweh that is the purpose of these shrines.

What did they do? They gathered and they would tell the story of how they were formed. See? And this was all oral because they didn't have books. And this was the role of the priests. What did the priests do? The priests were supposed to remember. That was the primary job of a priest; it was to remember, remember the story, remember the tradition handed on. What is a tradition? It simply means a story you hand on. So remember this. Later on the priests were also responsible for remembering the adjudications; that means the way in which law was applied. But that wasn't the shrine priest. The shrine priest remembered the stories. Later on in the various villages the

priests would meet at the gate with the elders and the elders would say here's a case: "Joe stole Al's sheep. What are we going to do about this?" And the priest would say, "Well, in the past we have said that anybody who steals a sheep has to repay the sheep plus three more sheep and has to apologize." I mean, I'm just making that up—but that's called an "adjudication." And this is case law, and that's how case law built up. And there were no records; it was all done in memory. But now would you trust the memory of—anyone? I don't know, but anyway that's what they did. So Jerusalem took over the role of the traditional shrines and this was the way statehood formed.

Now mind you, Jerusalem was not necessarily a popular place. Jerusalem was not originally part of the early settlements. Jerusalem had for a long time been under the domination of a group called the "Jebusites." When David took over Jerusalem he was a very sharp man, a very wise politician. David didn't defeat the Jebusites; he won them over, and he won them over by promising the priests of the Jebusites, who were called the "Priests of Zadok," from where you get the New Testament term "Sadducees." The Sadducees go back to Zadok. And David said, "Look, if you come along with me, if you join in the cult of Israel, I'll put you in charge of the Ark of the Covenant. Well, that was a pretty good deal! It was financially a good deal! They turned it into a very successful financial franchise. Having control of the Ark of the Covenant meant they got all the revenue from the temple when it was finally built. It wasn't built in David's time, as you know.

Now by the time we get down into the 600's BC there is a movement led by King Josiah. There are only two kings in the whole Books of Kings and Samuel, who are not really considered evil. Well, David is somewhat respected, but he is still—was ah—he ran afoul of the Lord, too. But there are only two guys who are faithful: Hezekiah and Josiah. Josiah is the greater. Well, Josiah was really behind a reform movement. And he was part of the reform movement during which the Bible actually got produced as part of the reform of the culture, land, religion, faith, and practice of Israel that produced the Bible. And centralizing everything in Jerusalem was part of this. And this centralizing cult is very common as you can read in Mr. Diamond or other authors—very common practice when statehood is developed.

Now these men, we presume they were basically men, who were behind Josiah's reform had an idea; they had a political ideology behind what they were doing. They wanted to establish a strong political-religious base centered in Jerusalem and extending as far as possible. Now previously the land of Judah was really a poor country that had very little going for it. The story that is told in the Book of Kings, however, is that David became a very successful monarch. Well, David was a very successful guerrilla warrior, and David was a very successful politician, but there is no archeological evidence that David was an emperor, that David extended an empire in any direction, that the culture of Jerusalem, that the bureaucracy of Jerusalem, that the law of Jerusalem, extended itself—there is absolutely no evidence for this, nor of Solomon. But the Books of Kings talk about this and they present David and Solomon as bigger than life! Solomon is the richest man who has ever lived because he was the wisest man who ever lived, even though he wasn't so wise in the final analysis because he had too many wives and he

succumbed to their gods. But he started out really well, and this is all part of an exaggeration, a hyperbole, that is part of the nature of biblical language.

The Old Testament authors are promoting a political ideology, a social and a spiritual empire, if you want to call it that. They had a vision and they believed Josiah was capable of carrying this out, of uniting and directing a kingdom, you might say, a political kingdom of God on earth. And in order to do that they took the oral tradition that they had from their storytellers and the priests and whoever else, and they borrowed all this material and they fashioned what we now have as the Bible, the story of the patriarchs, the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan. The conquest of Canaan, of course, is told in a way in which, again, God is delivering the enemy into the hands of the faithful Israelites; but whenever Israel becomes unfaithful, then they are defeated. This is a pattern that is constantly emphasized in the Books of Kings. And it goes along with the ideology that they're promoting: faithfulness to God leads to political power. This is clearly different from the ideology of the covenant prior to that time, which was based on the idea that God is pure Spirit, that one doesn't need a king. Don't forget the story in 1 Samuel, I think it's 1 Samuel, where the people come to Samuel and say, "Oh, we want a king." And he says, "Oh, no, don't you know? God is your king. Yahweh is your king." "Yeah, we want another one. We want a real king. We want Saul." And Samuel is so distressed. And he goes to God in prayer. And God said, "Samuel, give them what they want. They're not rejecting you; they're rejecting me." Now it is remarkable that story gets put into the Old Testament, because in a sense it's a criticism of the very idea of monarchy, of state. It's really saying that you shouldn't have done this. And you know there is that prophecy: "Oh, the king will tax your income and take your boys to be soldiers and your slaves will work for him, and on and on." Remember that story? Well, it's pretty accurate. That's exactly what happened.

Anyway the actual stories, however, again, have been reworked in such a way as to make them fit this ideology. So I already mentioned Exodus and the various questions about the probability that it could have really happened that way, especially the number of people, six hundred thousand, but also the conquest of the land. Archeology, again, has gone into these areas. They say, "Well, there was nobody there. They really didn't conquer any cities. There was no one there." In fact, what we see is that the geographical description of the land at the time of Joshua, which you know has to be 1100 BC or before, actually corresponds to the actual situation in the 600's BC. But, of course, you realize that they could not possibly have known what life was like five hundred years earlier. How would they have known? They wrote their story as if—it would be like as if you wrote a story about Christopher Columbus and he comes to Downers Grove and, you know, everything is here the way it is now! Well, someone will say, "Well, I don't think it was like that when Christopher Columbus came here." And you'd say, "Yeah, but I want to tell you about this." So that's what they did. And mostly the whole saga of the glorious united monarchy, David and Solomon, according to Scripture, you know, David and Solomon united the monarchy, but then at the death of Solomon God's punishment of David for his infidelity with Bathsheba and killing Uriah, that finally arrived on the scene and Rehoboam and Jeroboam separated—two sons of Solomon. Rehoboam took Judah; Jeroboam took the north. Well, of course, Jeroboam

actually got the better deal because the north was rich; the south was poor. The north was farmland. Even though it's very hilly, it's not rocky; it's fertile. The south is not fertile. It can only support small life. Even today it's not too great. So all these stories are woven in a way that serves the purpose of what they were doing, namely, calling forth fidelity to a new conquest, if you will, a new kingdom, a new religious political purpose, in the world under King Josiah. And this took place in the Late Iron Age.

Now at this point, any questions?

Question; how many wives are too many wives?

Hum, two are too many! But you know, he said that Solomon had seven hundred—and three hundred concubines—according to the story. But the story was trying to say that Solomon had contact with all these famous kings and that his wives were all alliances. See? That's what it's trying to say. But the author is also saying, because there's always a prophetic undercurrent throughout Samuel and Kings, a prophetic undercurrent saying—it's called the Deuteromistic historian; that's the technical word for it, the prophetic voice there—and so it's saying, "You mix with other people, you're in trouble. You don't mix with other people." Empire was always about incorporating. Alexander incorporated. Rome incorporated. This says, "Don't incorporate. You stay who you are." Now I personally think that's the reason for this awful concept of the "ban." You know, kill all the people and kill all their animals and everything. Remember Saul got into trouble. Samuel came and said, "The Lord is angry with you because you didn't kill all of the animals." And he said, "Oh, but I'm going to sacrifice them to the Lord." And Samuel was so angry with him. Well, why was he angry with him? Because those animals weren't Saul's! So to sacrifice to God what isn't yours is an insult. See? So God said, "Get rid of everything. Keep nothing. Not their stuff, not their property—nothing." Boy, that's pretty bloody. And of course, now the historians say that, well, actually those stories aren't really true because there was nobody there. Although they do say that the land of Palestine went through cycles of habitation and then no habitation, then habitation and then no habitation, according to various cycles of prosperity, which they really can't pin down and date very well.

Question: Where did the idea of purification, all the rules and regulations come from?

Well, that is related to this idea of staying separate. Don't mix with other people. Now the idea of animals being clean, I don't want to get into this, but it has to do with what animals can live in your area. See? An unclean animal is an animal that you should not have around, like pigs. Well, these people saw pigs as eating the food that people could eat, and so therefore they were unclean; they were an unnatural perversion in their sense of nature. and likewise shellfish. Shellfish should not be eaten because they didn't have fins; there was something wrong with them. But that all goes into this idea: who cares what other people are doing, you do this. You follow the law. You follow the rules. And actually they did have unusual hygiene. And that's probably related to the

strength they had even though they had few in numbers, but actually they did rather well in spite of their poverty and their lack of money and strength economically.

Question: Last week you were talking about how the Bible was inspired. Would you say these men who wrote in the 600's BC were inspired?

I would. I would say they were inspired because their basic goal was to promote fidelity to God. And you could read this very clearly. They were very clear about the moral force of law. And you know, in the history of the world this is not very common; in fact, I don't know another case of it. I can't swear there was never one, but it's pretty unusual that men sought to be following the law of God and not making up their own law. And you go back—even the story of Genesis is all about how the original sin is wanting to play God, wanting to be God, wanting to decide for ourselves what's right and wrong rather than following God. So, yes, I think there is a moral and there's a doctrinal goodness, soundness, to the whole thing. And I can read the Bible and I'm inspired by their intentions. I am not, and never was, actually totally in agreement with their historical framework. I never could buy into it.

Question: What's the difference between these stories and fables?

Fables are stories in which animals personify human qualities. But these stories do have some historical roots. It's just we don't know exactly what they are. We cannot in our time; we can't go back and establish clearly what the historical foundations are for the stories. But there were historical foundations. See? And at the same time the purpose of the story is not simply historical, but it has other levels of meaning.

Question: Did Moses exist as an historical figure?

I think so. I don't see how Moses could not have existed as an historical figure. And "Moses" is an Egyptian name, too. So there is a connection with Egypt there. I think that is beyond doubt—in my mind. I'm not saying other people wouldn't deny it. I think some people have denied everything. They've denied that there was a Moses. Probably they denied there were a David and a Solomon. This is carrying skepticism too far. But I do think it's only truthful to say we don't know much about Moses.

Question about why we celebrate the feast of the Holy Innocents.

Well, the feast of the Holy Innocents is an ancient feast that we've celebrated at Christmas time, and that's just part of our Tradition. But, again, prophetically, I mentioned this, that it does have value and meaning because actually innocents are slaughtered all the time. So it isn't like it's not true; it's just not true in that framework, if you want to take it historically—in my view. Now someone else could say, "Well, it is." I'm just saying I'm not convinced. You see what I mean? I'm just saying I am not convinced of its historical authenticity per se, nor do I think that its historical sense is the most important sense. I think its prophetic sense is more important. But someone else

may be very convinced that it really took place. But as far as I know there is no other information or data that would verify that.

Question: If I understand you're focusing on the meaning. If you look at the parable of the Good Samaritan, I think what you're saying then is that whether or not there actually was a good Samaritan on that highway isn't the point but, rather, what that story means to us and how to live our lives today is the point. Is that correct?

That's right.

Question: Can you mention liberation theology and what it has to do with?

Well, I'm not really very much of an expert on liberation theology, and it is time to end. It's 9:00 p.m. now. But I'll just say that the people, who started liberation theology, as I understand them, believe the Exodus was the paradigm of God's action and they wanted to rebuild that action in Latin America, in Latin American societies.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The Collegeville Bible Time-Line. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press

<sup>2</sup> Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel The Fates of Human Societies* (New York, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 268-9.

<sup>5</sup> The Collegeville Bible Time-Line.

<sup>6</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 63.

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