

## PRACTICAL EXERCISES

**1.** Reread the story found in this chapter where Esau gives up his birthright for some of Jacob's pottage. What does this story reveal about Esau's personality? What does it reveal about Jacob's personality? Many people become weak and fall into a life of sin because they cannot overcome their impulses and try to satisfy every desire. How might you better prepare yourself to be strong the next time you are tempted? What sacraments did Christ give to the Church to aid us?

**2.** Jacob gained his father's blessing by pretending he was Esau and deceiving his

father Isaac. Why do you think God still made him the founder of his chosen nation instead of Esau? What does that say about God's plan and its relationship with fallen humanity?

**3.** Joseph's brothers committed a terrible sin when they intended to leave Joseph for dead and then sold him into slavery in Egypt. God, however, used the situation to let Joseph assume a place of power in Egypt and eventually save his whole family from starvation. How does this story relate to the story of Noah? How does this story relate to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ?

## FROM THE CATECHISM

**218** In the course of its history, Israel was able to discover that God had only one reason to reveal himself to them, a single motive for choosing them from among all peoples as his special possession: his sheer gratuitous love (cf. Dt 4: 37; 7: 8; 10: 15). And thanks to the prophets Israel understood that it was again out of love that God never stopped saving them and pardoning their unfaithfulness and sins (cf. Is 43: 1-7; Hos 2).

**287** The truth about creation is so important for all of human life that God in his tenderness wanted to reveal to his People everything that is salutary to know on the subject. Beyond the natural knowledge that every man can have of the Creator (cf. Acts 17: 24-29; Rom 1: 19-20), God progressively revealed to Israel the mystery of creation. He who chose the

patriarchs, who brought Israel out of Egypt, and who by choosing Israel created and formed it, this same God reveals himself as the One to whom belong all the peoples of the earth, and the whole earth itself; he is the One who alone "made heaven and earth" (cf. Is 43: 1; Ps 115: 15; 124: 8; 134: 3).

**707** Theophanies (manifestations of God) light up the way of the promise, from the patriarchs to Moses and from Joshua to the visions that inaugurated the missions of the great prophets. Christian tradition has always recognized that God's Word allowed himself to be seen and heard in these theophanies, in which the cloud of the Holy Spirit both revealed him and concealed him in its shadow.

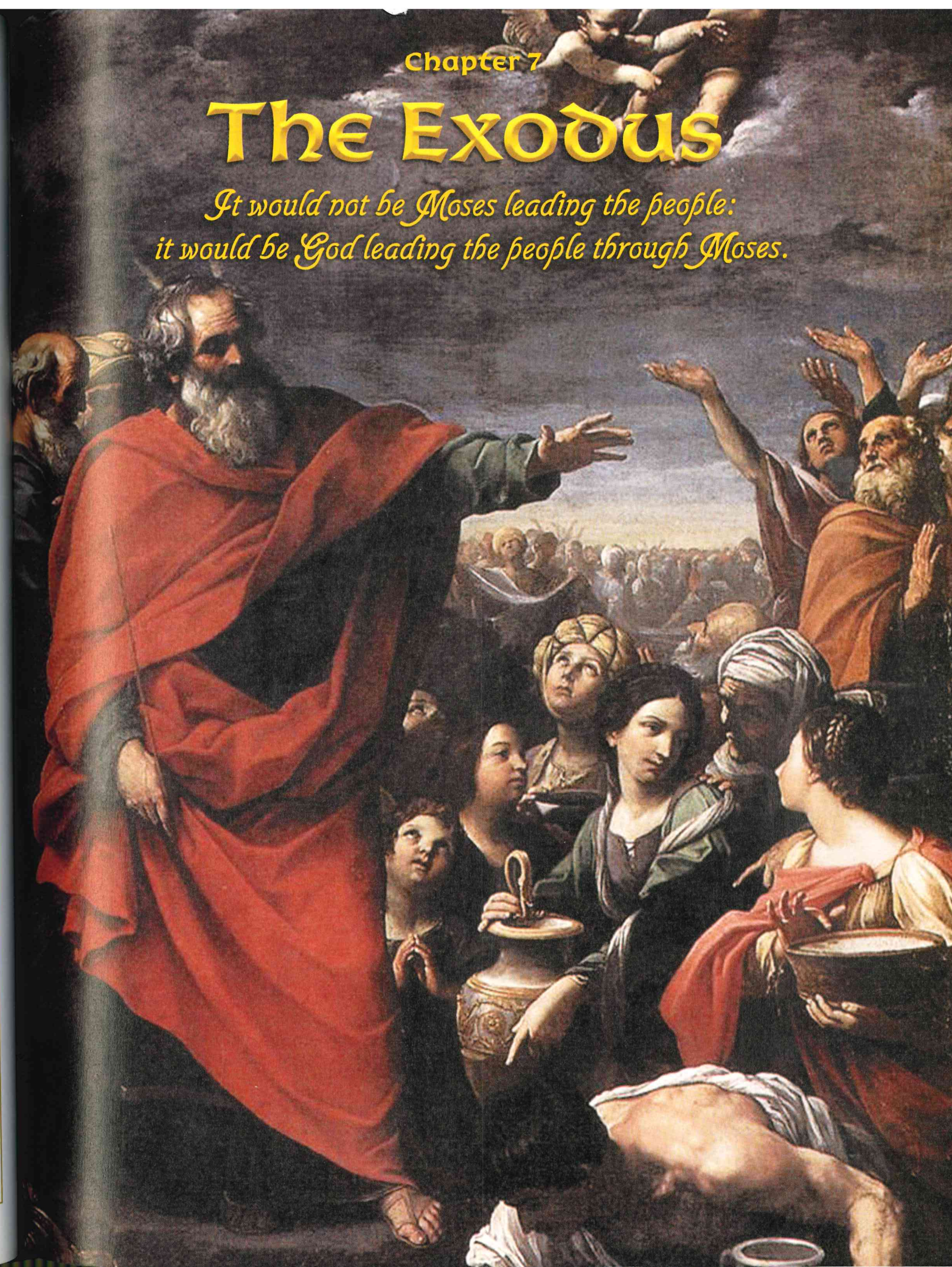
## Endnotes

- |                   |                                 |                   |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Gn 24: 14.     | 6. We use the alternate reading | 10. Gn 37: 7.     |
| 2. Gn 24: 17-19.  | given in a footnote in the      | 11. Gn 37: 9.     |
| 3. Gn 26: 34-35.  | Revised Standard Version.       | 12. Gn 37: 19-20. |
| 4. Gn 28: 1.      | 7. Gn 29: 17.                   | 13. Gn 45: 5.     |
| 5. See Gn 32: 10. | 8. Gn 30.                       | 14. Gn 46: 2-4.   |
|                   | 9. Gn 37: 3.                    |                   |

## Chapter 7

# The Exodus

*It would not be Moses leading the people:  
it would be God leading the people through Moses.*





## Chapter 7

## The Exodus



## Read

## Exodus

1:8 - 2:15  
 3:1 - 22  
 5:1 - 6:1  
 11:1 - 12:50  
 13:17 - 14:31  
 20:1 - 20

The book of Exodus begins where Genesis leaves off. It tells us that, after Joseph died, his family and his brothers' families—starting with that symbolically perfect number of seventy souls—“multiplied and grew exceedingly strong.” They formed a big part of the population of northern Egypt. They were rich, too: they owned much of the best land. But that prosperity wouldn't last forever. It was not God's plan that they should remain guests in Egypt, with no homeland of their own.

And as the people of Israel moved toward the land God had promised them, God would establish a new covenant—not with one man, or with one family, or with one tribe, but with the whole nation.

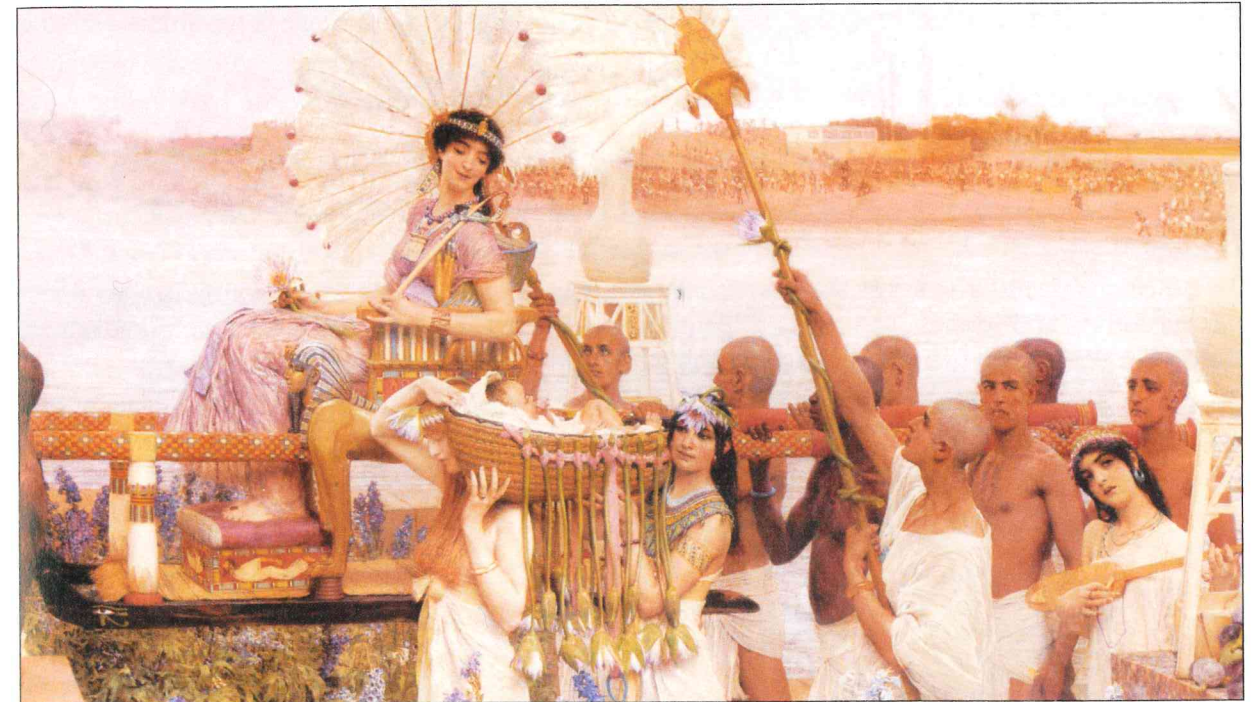
## The Birth And Rescue Of Moses

- A new king in Egypt enslaves the people of Israel.
- The Egyptians are ordered to kill every male Israelite child at birth.
- Moses escapes and is brought up in the king's court.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” Possibly a palace coup succeeded in overthrowing one pharaoh and his dynasty and replacing it with a new dynasty. In any case, it doesn't mean the new king had never heard of Joseph. It means that this new king refused to have the kind of friendly relations with the people of Israel that his predecessors had.

“Behold,” he said to his people, “the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.”<sup>1</sup> To justify the brutal oppression he was about to introduce, the king appealed to patriotic Egyptians by painting the Israelites as dangerous subversives. It's an old tyrant's trick.

So the Pharaoh (which is what the Egyptians called their kings) enslaved the Israelites, making them work on his building projects. But the people of Israel still multiplied. “And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.”<sup>2</sup>



As part of his program of “dealing shrewdly,” Pharaoh decided to kill all the male children of Israel at birth—but not the females. Why not the females? When the females grew up, they would have to marry Egyptians. Then all the good land that the people of Israel owned would go right back into Egyptian hands. It was a wicked plan, but it made a certain diabolical sense.

Of course, the Hebrew midwives would not cooperate, and the people of Israel still multiplied. Some of the children were slaughtered, but one in particular was successfully hidden before being killed. His name was Moses, which the Hebrews interpreted as “brought up out of the water.”<sup>3</sup>

## Moses Rebels

- Moses is raised in Pharaoh's court with his own Hebrew mother as nurse.
- As a young man, Moses kills an Egyptian for abusing a Hebrew slave.
- Fearing for his life, Moses flees Egypt and settles in Midian.

It is hard not to see the hand of God in the story of Moses' rescue. Pharaoh's daughter found a basket floating in the reeds and took pity on the baby inside. When she asked for a Hebrew nurse, she was led to Moses' own mother—though she never found out the woman's secret identity. “And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son; and she named him Moses, for she said, Because I drew him out of the water” (Ex 2:10). Moses was raised with all the advantages Pharaoh's palace could offer him. He grew up getting the best clothes, the best education, the best food, the best everything. But his own Hebrew mother was there to teach him the true faith of his ancestors.<sup>4</sup>

As he became a young man, Moses began to notice how badly the people of Israel—his people—were treated.

One day, as he was out walking among the Hebrews, he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave. It must have been an intolerably savage beating. Something snapped in Moses. He killed the Egyptian. At that moment, he branded himself a rebel. He threw away his allegiance to



Pharaoh's court and took his stand with the Hebrews, "choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the People of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin."<sup>5</sup>

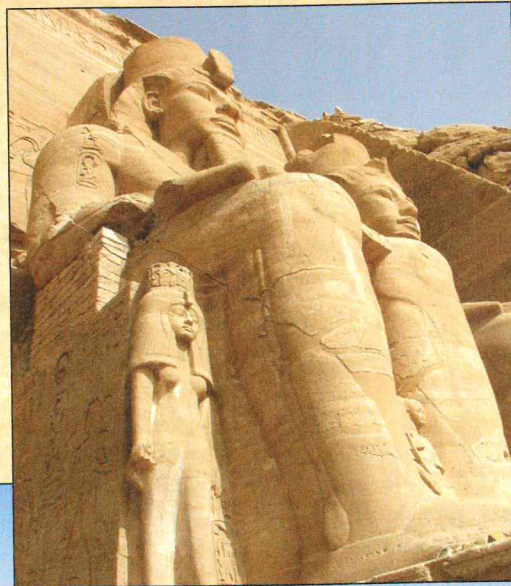
Still, Moses seems to have had second thoughts. Realizing what he had done, he hid the body and hoped no one would ever find out.<sup>6</sup>

But the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting. He tried to break up the fight, but the one who had started it had a nasty surprise for him. "Who made you a prince and a judge over us?" he asked Moses sarcastically. "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"<sup>7</sup>

The secret was out! Fearing for his life, Moses ran away to Midian. He found refuge with a priest named Jethro, and soon he had married the priest's daughter Zipporah. Since they were Midianites, they were descendants of Abraham (see Gn 25:12).

That might have been the end of the story of Moses. He settled down and grew old in Midian, raising livestock with his well-to-do father-in-law and bringing up his own family.

But God had not forgotten the troubles of his people in Egypt, even if Moses had.

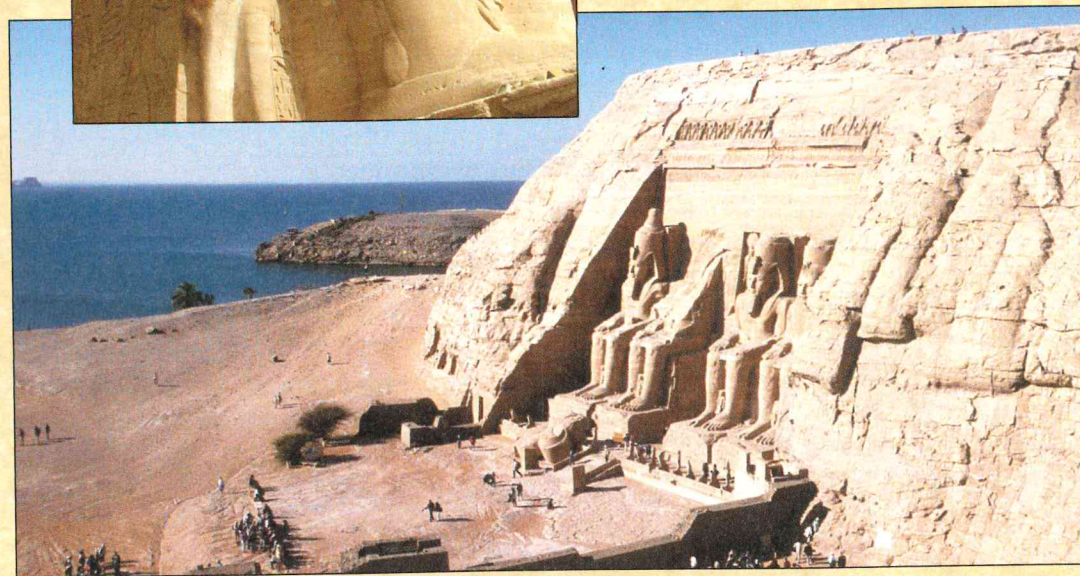


### Date Of The Exodus

Based on archaeological studies, the Exodus is often dated to the time of the 19th Dynasty of Egyptian pharaohs, in particular the reign of Ramses II, 1292-1290 B.C., and Merneptah, (1212-1204 B.C.)

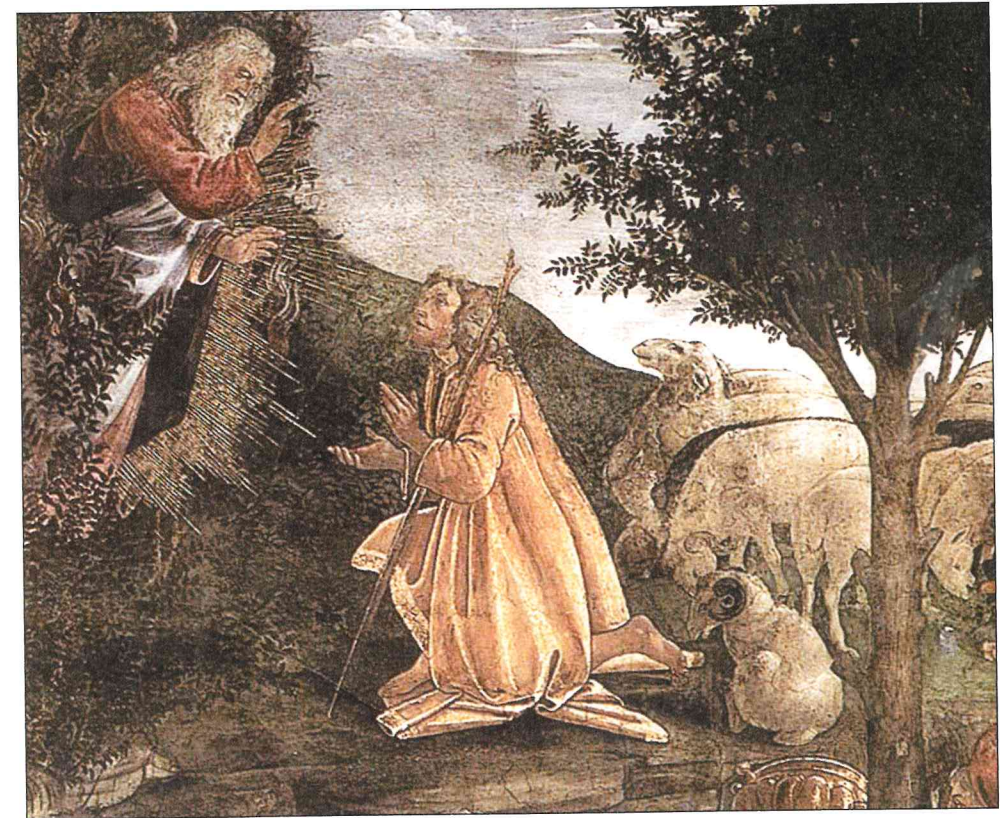
If the Exodus took place in the 1200's B.C., Seti I, Ramses II, or Merneptah would be the pharaohs who spoke to Moses face-to-face.

*The Temple of Ramses II at Abu-Simbel*



## The Burning Bush: God Reveals His Name To Moses

- **Moses unexpectedly encounters the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at Sinai.**
- **God orders Moses to go back to Egypt and lead Israel to freedom.**
- **God reveals his sacred Name to Moses.**
- **Knowing God's Name means knowing the truth about God.**



One day Moses, by now eighty years old, had led his sheep and cattle into the wilderness to the side of Mount Horeb, "the mountain of God" as the sacred writer calls it, which is in the wilderness of Sinai. Suddenly he saw a strange sight: a bush was on fire—but although the bush was burning, it was not being burned up. Moses decided to take a closer look. That was when God spoke to him for the first time.

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," the voice from the bush told him. Moses naturally covered his face, "for he was afraid to look at God."<sup>8</sup>

God identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If God was just the God of Abraham, the Midianites and the Ishmaelites could claim him, because both peoples came from Abraham. Even the Egyptians could lay some claim—after all, one of Abraham's wives, the first one to bear him a child, was Hagar, the Egyptian. If God had just said, "Abraham and Isaac," the Edomites, who were descended from Esau, could have claimed him.

Instead, God narrowed down the family lines: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. This was the God of the people of Israel, God's own covenant family—the people who were now slaves in Egypt.



"I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt," God told Moses. God had a plan for his people: he would bring them to a land of their own, the land he promised to their father Abraham. And then God told Moses the really big news: Moses would be the one to go back to Egypt and free his people.

The last place Moses wanted to go was Egypt. As far as he knew, he was still a wanted criminal there. The task seemed doomed to failure from the start.

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" Moses asked.<sup>9</sup>

"But I will be with you," God reminded him. He promised Moses that he would bring the people of Israel to worship God on the very mountain where they now stood.

Moses still wasn't convinced that he could do it. "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

"I AM WHO I AM," God answered. "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"<sup>10</sup> God's name, the sacred truth about God's nature, is "I AM."

Moses was still reluctant. The same pattern appears in Scripture over and over: God chooses a prophet who does not want to be chosen. God's assignments are never easy. But the prophet cannot run away. Moses tried every excuse, but God had an answer for every one. If Moses was worried about his speaking ability, he could ask his brother Aaron—a good public speaker—to help him.

God had chosen Moses for a reason. Moses might not think of himself as a leader, but God would be with him. It would not be Moses leading the people: it would be God leading the people through Moses.

God revealed himself to his people Israel by making his name known to them. A name expresses a person's essence and identity and the meaning of this person's life. God has a name; he is not an anonymous force. To disclose one's name is to make oneself known to others; in a way it is to hand oneself over by becoming accessible, capable of being known more intimately and addressed personally. (CCC 203)

God revealed himself progressively and under different names to his people, but the revelation that proved to be the fundamental one for both the Old and the New Covenants was the revelation of the divine name to Moses in the theophany of the burning bush, on the threshold of the Exodus and of the covenant on Sinai. (CCC 204)



Sunrise from atop the traditional location of Mount Sinai, Jebel Musa, "the mountain of Moses."

## The Message To Pharaoh

- Israel is God's first-born son, the covenant head of the family of nations.
- Israel is called to act as a priest for the other nations.

God sent Moses to Egypt with a message and a demand, both to be delivered to Pharaoh. The message was this: "Israel is my first-born son."<sup>11</sup>

In other words, Israel is the elder brother of all the nations. Israel will be their covenant head. The other nations are like God's younger children, Israel's younger siblings, but God will make Israel a model for righteousness and wisdom so that nations might learn how to walk in the ways of God—much like Shem, and much like Shem's descendant, Abraham.

The demand was simple and reasonable: let the people of Israel go three days' journey into the desert to offer sacrifice to the Lord. Moses was not to demand their freedom, or even ask Pharaoh to be less hard on them. They just needed a few days for a religious festival. But there was an ominous threat that went with the demand: "If you refuse to let him [Israel] go, behold, I will slay your first-born son."<sup>12</sup> Egypt, God says, could be his child, too—but only by letting God's first-born son Israel go to serve God, so that Egypt would learn how to serve God by watching him. Israel is going to be like a priest. Just as Adam was called to be a priest-king, Israel is called to be a royal priestly nation.

Of course, God knew that Pharaoh would not listen. "And the LORD said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.'"<sup>13</sup> Because of that, God would bring judgment on the Egyptians. The first-born of Egypt would be killed, and Israel would be led out of slavery toward the Promised Land.



Below Jebel Musa, The Monastery of St. Catherine, built by Justinian ca. 550 A.D., marks the traditional spot where early Christians believed Moses met God at the burning bush. Springs in the area still supply water for Bedouin flocks.



# The Plagues

- The first nine plagues are arranged in three cycles.
- Israel is commanded to kill the Egyptian gods as sacrifices.
- The plagues, too, are judgments on the Egyptian gods.

So two old men—Moses at eighty years old and his brother Aaron at eighty-three—went back to Egypt to confront the most powerful king in the world.

Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover I will not let Israel go.” Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray, a three days’ journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get to your burdens.” And Pharaoh said, “Behold, the people of the land are now many and you make them rest from their burdens!” (Ex 5:1-4)

As far as Pharaoh was concerned, the Lord—that is, Yahweh—was just the name of some tribal god he had never heard of. If the Israelites had enough free time to plan elaborate feasts in the wilderness, Pharaoh would give them something to do.

The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the number of bricks which they made heretofore you shall lay upon them, you shall by no means lessen it; for they are idle; therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ Let heavier work be laid upon the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.” (Ex 5:6-10)

So the Egyptians made the Israelite slaves work even harder, and of course the Israelites blamed Moses and Aaron.

Because Pharaoh refused to listen, God sent ten plagues to Egypt. We can see them as nine plagues plus one: the last one, the killing of the first-born of Egypt, was the plague that broke even Pharaoh’s hard heart.

The sacred writer has arranged the first nine plagues in three cycles of three each. In each cycle, the first two plagues come after a warning, and the third with no warning to Pharaoh at all.

1. Plague of blood (Ex 7: 14-24)	4. Plague of flies (Ex 8: 20-32)	7. Plague of hail (Ex 9: 13-35)	God tells Moses, “Go to Pharaoh in the morning...”
2. Plague of frogs (Ex 8: 1-15)	5. Plague on Egyptian cattle (Ex 9: 1-7)	8. Plague of locusts (Ex 10: 1-20)	God tells Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh...”
3. Plague of “gnats” or “lice” (Ex 8: 16-19)	6. Plague of boils (Ex 9: 8-12)	9. Plague of darkness (Ex 10: 21-28)	Moses gives Pharaoh no warning.

Pharaoh shrugged off the first two plagues; his court magicians could create at least something that looked like the same sort of plague. With the plague of gnats (which might have been some sort of mosquito), the magicians threw up their hands and admitted, “This is the finger of God.” Pharaoh, however, still wouldn’t listen.

With the fourth plague, God made it even more obvious that it was the God of the Israelites who was sending the plague. When the flies came, they covered all of Egypt—except Goshen, where the Israelites lived.

Now Pharaoh was willing to negotiate. Perhaps the Israelites could just take some time off and sacrifice here in Egypt, he suggested. But Moses could not accept those conditions. And his argument is very important, because it tells us not only why God chose these particular plagues, but also why God asked the Israelites to sacrifice animals like cattle, sheep, and goats.

But Moses said, “It would not be right to do so; for we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God offerings abominable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? We must go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he will command us.” (Ex 8: 26-27)

What does Moses mean when he says that the sacrifices will be “abominable to the Egyptians?” He means that the people of Israel would sacrifice the very animals Egyptians worshiped as gods! In fact, another translation of what Moses said is “we shall sacrifice the abominations of the Egyptians

to the LORD our God.” God’s message to his people was clear: Israel had to give up the Egyptian gods and worship the one true God. The animal sacrifices would be a permanent warning against falling back into the idolatry of the Egyptians.

The plagues, too, were judgments on the gods of Egypt. The Egyptians worshiped the Nile as a god (Hapi); God turned its water to blood. The Egyptians worshiped a bull; God brought a plague on their cattle. The Egyptians worshiped a frog; God sent them so many frogs that they had to shovel them into stinking piles of dead Egyptian gods.

In return for their foolish and wicked thoughts, which led them astray to worship irrational serpents and worthless animals, thou didst send upon them a multitude of irrational creatures to punish them, that they might learn that one is punished by the very things by which he sins. (Wis 11:15-16)

After each plague, Pharaoh seemed willing to listen to reason. But as soon as Moses prayed to God and the plague was gone, Pharaoh backed out of his deal with Moses and refused to let Israel go into the wilderness.



The Seventh Plague of Egypt by William Turner



## The Passover

- The last plague kills every first-born son in Egypt.
- The plague skips the houses of the Israelites, marked with the blood of the Passover lamb.
- The Passover lamb is a type of Christ, the Lamb of God, whose blood saves us from eternal death.
- The Egyptians hurry the Israelites out of Egypt.

Moses' first message to Pharaoh had carried a grim warning. Israel, the Lord said, was God's first-born son, and "if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son."<sup>14</sup> The time had come when God would carry out that threat.

The Lord told Moses that he would send the angel of death to kill the first-born sons of Egypt, including the first-born male offspring of all the cattle, sheep, and goats. Once again, by killing the animals, God would symbolically slaughter the gods of Egypt. (In fact, Nm 33: 4 says exactly that: "upon their gods also the LORD executed judgments.")

But God gave the people of Israel a way to save their first-born sons. The Israelites were told to take a lamb without blemish, sacrifice it, spread its blood over their doorposts, and eat it as part of a sacred meal. As the angel of death passed through Egypt, it would pass over their houses, sparing their first-born sons.

The instructions for the ceremonial feast were very specific. The Israelites would eat unleavened bread—bread with no yeast in it—because there would be no time for them to let it rise before Pharaoh himself would throw them out of Egypt. The lamb had to be roasted, not boiled. And the Israelites had to eat their feast with their traveling clothes on.<sup>15</sup> Not only that, but for the rest of time, the children of Israel were to observe a week-long Passover every year, so that they would never forget what God had done for them.



*"At midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon..." (Ex 12: 29)*



The blood of the Passover lamb was a type of the blood of Christ, who by his blood saved us from eternal death.

## The Passover Lamb As A Type Of Christ

The Passover was more than a deliverance from bondage in Egypt. The blood of the Passover lamb, sprinkled on the doorposts to save the first-born sons of Israel from immediate death, was a type of the blood of Christ, who by his blood saved us from eternal death. By celebrating the Passover every year, the People of God would be preparing themselves to understand the death of the Lamb of God.

As God had told Moses, the angel of death passed *through* Egypt, killing all the first-born sons and the first-born of all the cattle. But wherever the blood of the Passover lamb was sprinkled on the doorposts, the angel of death passed over that house.

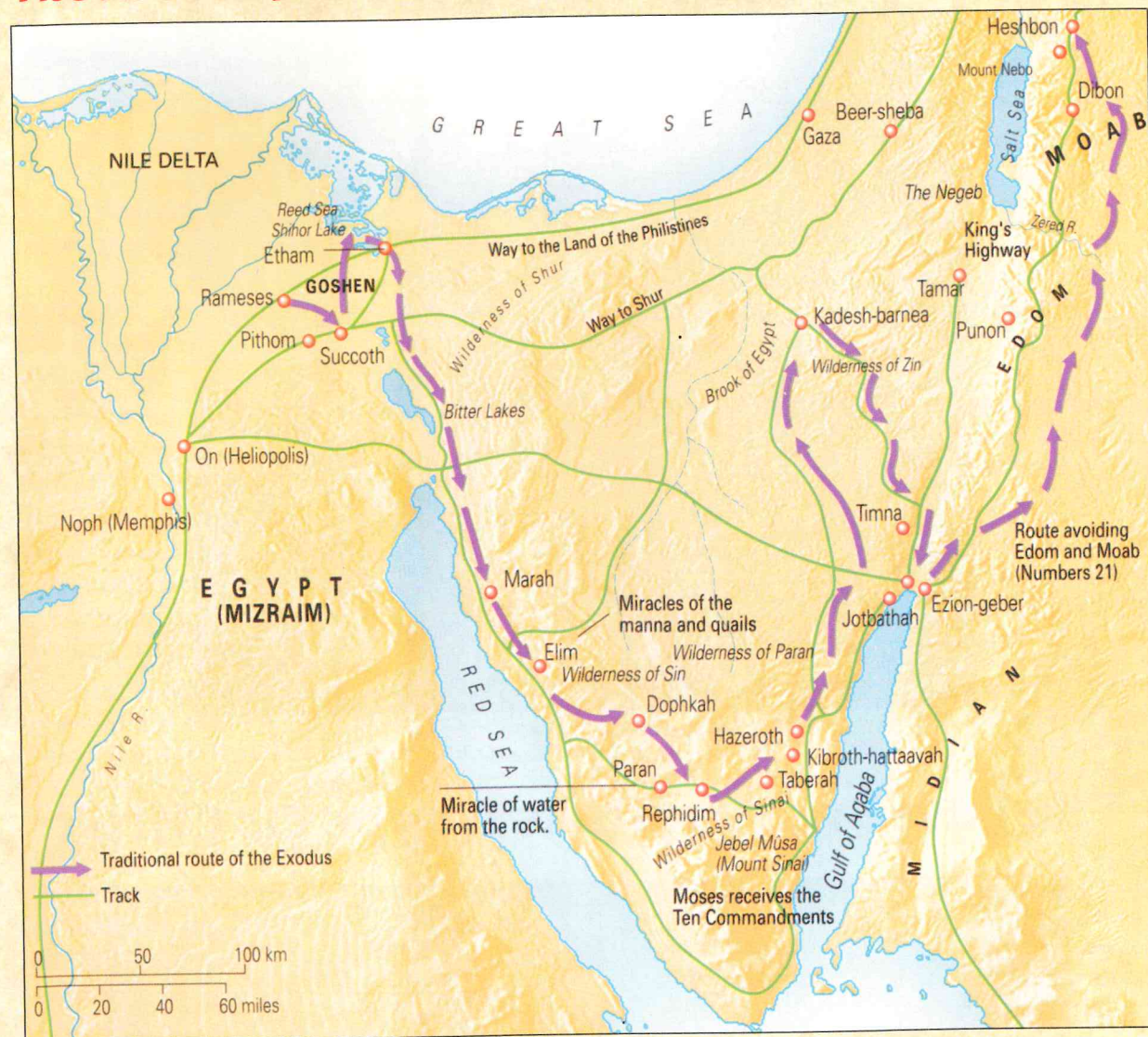
*And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where one was not dead. And he summoned Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also!"*

*And the Egyptians were urgent with the people, to send them out of the land in haste; for they said, "We are all dead men." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their mantles on their shoulders. (Ex 12:30-33)*

Now the Egyptians demanded that the Hebrews leave at once. In the middle of the night, hundreds of thousands of Israelites—who had already packed what they could carry, following Moses' instructions—began their march into the wilderness. God himself led them with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day.



## The Route Of The Exodus



The Wilderness of Paran

## Escape From Egypt

- Pharaoh changes his mind again and chases after the Israelites.
- Clearing a path through the sea, God miraculously saves the Israelites from the Egyptian army.

As soon as the Israelites were packed and gone, Pharaoh had yet another change of heart—his last, as it would turn out. He and his nobles suddenly realized that they had lost all their cheap labor. “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” they asked one another.<sup>16</sup>

So Pharaoh gathered a formidable army, including horses and chariots, and set out to catch up with the Israelites. The Israelites had reached the Sea of Reeds (which is usually translated as “Red Sea” in English). In front of them was the water; behind them, they saw a horde of Egyptian warriors about to descend on them.

As they would do many times afterward, the people turned against Moses.

**When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were in great fear. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD; and they said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” (Ex 14: 10-12)**

But God told Moses to stretch out his rod toward the sea, and a fearful storm came up. The pillar of fire and cloud moved between the Israelites and the Egyptians, so that neither side could see the other. God sent a strong east wind to blow all night, and it cleared a dry path straight through the water. The Israelites marched straight through the sea on dry land.

When the Egyptians saw what had happened, they were furious. They followed the same path straight into the sea. But their chariots got stuck in the mud. By the time the people of Israel were all safely across, the Egyptians were all bogged own in the middle of the sea.

Then God told Moses to stretch out his rod again. The waters came crashing back over the Egyptians, and Pharaoh and his whole army drowned. Without raising a sword, Israel had defeated Egypt, the mightiest empire in the world. God himself had won the victory. It was a kind of baptism: through the waters of the Red Sea, God had saved the people of Israel from certain death. (See 1 Cor 10: 12, where Paul says that “our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”)

The Exodus—Greek for “going out”—was Israel’s declaration of independence. From now on, the Israelites would be on their own. But what would they do with their independence? So far they had no land, and no government except God himself through Moses. Israel was not yet a nation.



Inset: Pharaoh Ramses II and his chariot is carved on the wall of his temple at Abu-Simbel.



## Spiritual Food In The Wilderness

- Hungry and thirsty, the Israelites complain to Moses.
- God sends them miraculous food and water.
- The “bread which the LORD has given” is a type of the Eucharist.

With no more Egyptians to worry about, the people had time to think about their own bellies again. The Israelites had been driven out of Egypt with no time to pack any food for the journey. In a few days, they were hungry and miserable. Once again, they began to think of their slavery in Egypt as “the good old days.” “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt,” they grumbled to Moses and Aaron, “when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”<sup>17</sup>

But God had a way of dealing with their hunger. “I will rain bread from heaven for you,” he told Moses. And the next morning the Israelites found “a fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground.”<sup>18</sup>

“What is it?” they asked one another.

“It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat,” Moses told them.

So they called the thing “manna,” meaning “what-is-it?” As long as Israel wandered in the wilderness, the manna continued to appear on the ground, enough to feed the whole nation.

And when the people complained that they were thirsty (“Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?”), God gave them water from a dry rock in the desert.<sup>19</sup>

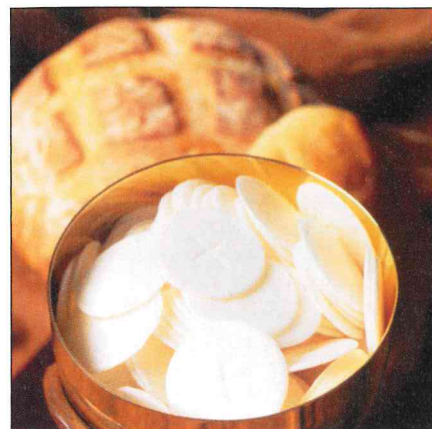
Once again, Christians can see that God was doing more than taking care of his people’s hunger and thirst. The manna was a type of the Eucharist, as Jesus himself would point out:

So they [the multitude] said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world.”

They said to him, “Lord, give us this bread always.”

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.” (Jn 6: 30-35)



And the rock itself was a type of Christ, who gives us living water to drink—as St. Paul would tell the Corinthians:

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (1 Cor 10: 1-4)

The manna was a type of the Eucharist, as Jesus himself would point out.



*“This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather of it, every man of you, as much as you can eat;...’”*  
(Ex 16: 16)



## The Covenant At Sinai

After three months of wandering, Israel reached the Mountain of God in the wilderness of Sinai—the very same mountain where God had revealed his sacred name to Moses from the burning bush. There Moses went up the mountain alone, and God gave him a message for the whole nation of Israel:

And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. (Ex 19: 3-8)



José de Ribera's *Moses* is represented as the penultimate teacher, instructing his people in the ways of the Lord with patience, but also knowing how difficult it is for them to keep God's commandments.

If the people would obey God's voice, then they would be a nation of priests. What does that mean? It means that God, who made the whole world, had chosen Israel as the nation to bring his word to the rest of the nations. God would have a personal relationship with his people. He would talk to them directly, and he would be their leader and guide. In turn, Israel—as God's first-born—would carry God's message to the rest of the family of nations.

The people purified themselves for three days, and on the third day they saw a thick cloud descend on the mountain. Moses alone entered the cloud, but the whole people heard the voice of God from the cloud. They all heard the conditions of God's covenant with them—the rules we know as the Ten Commandments:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

1. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.
2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.
3. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.
4. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- 9-10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's. (Ex 20: 2-17)

(The traditional catechetical formula has two commands against coveting: the first against coveting your neighbor's wife, and the second against coveting his property.)

When the people heard the voice of God himself speaking to him, they were so frightened that they begged Moses not to let it happen again. “You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.”<sup>20</sup>

So Moses went up to speak for the people, and God gave him a more detailed version of the laws by which Israel was to live. Then Moses built an altar, and the people sealed the covenant with a sacrifice. Moses threw half the blood of the sacrifice against the altar. Then he read the book of the covenant to the people, and again they agreed to do everything God had told them to do. Moses sprinkled the other half of the blood on the people, uniting them and God in the same covenant



sacrifice. "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

In the promise to Abraham and the oath that accompanied it (cf. Heb 6:13), God commits himself but without disclosing his name. He begins to reveal it to Moses and makes it known clearly before the eyes of the whole people when he saves them from the Egyptians: "he has triumphed gloriously" (Ex 15:1; cf. 3:14). From the covenant of Sinai onwards, this people is "his own" and it is to be a "holy (or "consecrated"): the same word is used for both in Hebrew) nation" (cf. Ex 19:5-6), because the name of God dwells in it. (CCC 2810)

After that, all the elders of Israel went up to the mountain and saw the glory of the Lord directly, without Moses to stand between them and God. God was keeping his covenant promise: Israel was a nation of priests, speaking directly with God.

## The Decalogue And The Natural Law

The Ten Commandments (also called the "Decalogue," literally "ten words") sum up and proclaim God's law. They form an organic unity, outlining in full the requirements for loving both God and neighbor. For example, one cannot honor another person without blessing God his Creator, and one cannot adore God without loving all men, his creatures. In this way, the Decalogue brings man's religious and social life into unity.

The Decalogue involves man's humanity and social existence, and so it also reflects and expresses the natural law. The natural law contains those rules which regulate moral behavior that are available to us through the application of human reason.

Many of the laws of the commandments, such as "Thou shall not kill," can be understood through reason without the help of divine revelation. Many nations at the time of the Exodus, for example, obeyed this commandment because it is understandable that, simply in terms of human experience, killing poses a danger to society. But the commandments of the Decalogue, although accessible to reason, contain a complete and certain understanding of the natural law. The Decalogue is a privileged expression of the natural law because it was made known to us by both divine revelation and human reason.

## The Temple In Heaven And On Earth

Now Moses went up the mountain once more, leaving his brother Aaron in charge. For forty days and forty nights he was alone with God. (Here we see that important number forty again, a number we have already seen in the Flood, and one that will appear again more than once.)

This time, God showed Moses the pattern of the Tabernacle, the tent that would serve as a temple for the wandering people of Israel. It was a mirror of the heavenly temple. And its centerpiece would be the Ark of the Covenant, an ornate box in which the tablets with the Law would be stored. That Ark of the Covenant would be God's throne on earth, a shadow of his heavenly throne. The God of all creation, who is present everywhere, would dwell in the midst of his chosen people in a way that made them different from every other nation.

For forty days, God showed Moses visions of heaven itself, as it would be represented on earth in the tabernacle. Moses must have expected that the people would be overjoyed when he came back down to them. God was going to live with them on earth in a way no other people could experience.

But the people of Israel had given up waiting for Moses.

### SUPPLEMENTARY READING

#### Commentary, Exodus 3: 11-12

"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?' He said, 'But I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain.'"

In reply to Moses' first objection about his sheer inability to do what God is asking of him, God assures him that he will be at his side and will protect him—as he will help all who have a difficult mission of salvation (cf. Gn 28:15; Jos 1:5; Jer 1:8). The Blessed Virgin will hear the same words at the Annunciation: "The Lord is with you" (Lk 1:27).

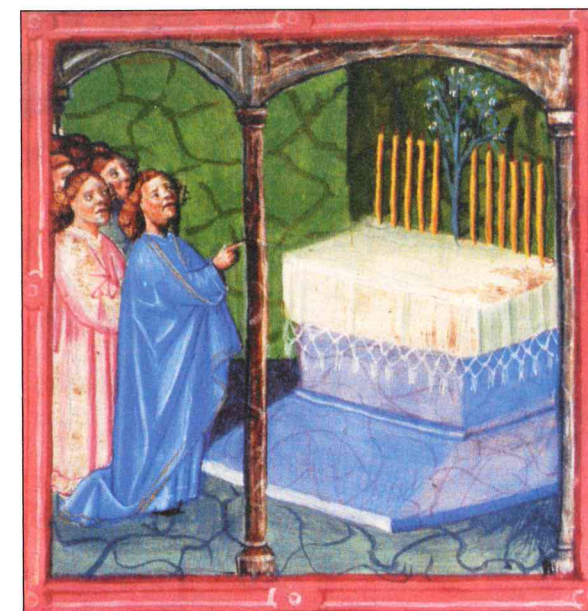
The sign which God gives Moses is linked to his faith, because it involves both a promise and a command: when they come out of Egypt, Moses and the people will worship God on this very mountain. When this actually happens, Moses will acknowledge the supernatural nature of his mission but, meanwhile, he has to obey faithfully the charge given him by God.

Moses' conversation with the Lord is a beautiful prayer and one worth imitating. By following his example, a Christian can dialogue personally and intimately with the Lord: "We ought to be seriously committed to dealing with God. We cannot take refuge in the anonymous crowd. If interior life doesn't involve personal encounter with God, it

doesn't exist—it's as simple as that. There are few things more at odds with Christianity than superficiality. To settle down to routine in our Christian life is to dismiss the possibility of becoming a contemplative soul. God seeks us out, one by one. And we ought to answer him, one by one: 'Here I am, LORD, because you have called me' (1 Kgs 3:5)" (St. J. Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 174; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2574-5).

#### Julius Africanus, *Chronography*, frag. 2:

When men multiplied on the earth, the angels of heaven came together with the daughters of men. In some copies I found "the sons of God." What is meant by the Spirit, in my opinion, is that the descendants of Seth are called the sons of God on account of the righteous men and patriarchs who have sprung from him, even down to the Savior Himself; but that the descendants of Cain are named the seed of men, as having nothing divine in them, on account of the wickedness of their race and the inequality of their nature, being a mixed people, and having stirred the indignation of God.



*"And Moses deposited the rods before the Lord in the tent of the testimony.*

*And on the morrow...the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds, and produced blossoms..."*  
(Nm 17: 7-8)



## VOCABULARY

**AARON**

Moses' brother; acted as his spokesman. He founded the priesthood of Israel.

**ARK OF THE COVENANT**

An ornate box that held the tablets of the Law. It represented God's throne on earth.

**DYNASTY**

A series of rulers from the same family.

**EXODUS**

Israel's escape from Egypt; from a Greek word meaning "going out."

**HEBREW**

The name used by the Egyptians to describe the Israelites and related tribes. The language spoken by these people.

**IDOLATRY**

The worship of man-made images as though they were gods.

**MANNA**

The miraculous food that the Israelites ate in the desert. It is a type of the Eucharist.

**MIDWIFE**

A woman who assists at childbirth. Hebrew midwives defied Pharaoh's command that all male Hebrew children should be killed.

**MOSES**

The man God chose to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. He was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in Pharaoh's court, but fled Egypt after rebelling against the Egyptian taskmasters.

*"They shall make an ark of acacia wood; two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, . . . And you shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you."*  
(Ex 25: 10-16)

**PASSOVER**

The saving of the first-born children of Israel when the first-born of the Egyptians were killed. It is the most important event in Israel's history and remembered with an annual feast.

**PLAGUE**

A disaster that affects a large number of people. The Ten Plagues in Exodus were signs of God's wrath against the Egyptians, and particular judgments against the Egyptians' false gods.

**REEDS, SEA OF (RED SEA)**

The body of water initially blocking the Israelites' escape from Egypt. It miraculously parted for them, but Pharaoh and his armies were drowned when they pursued.

**SINAI**

The mountain where Moses received the Law from God.

**TABERNACLE**

The tent that served as a meeting place and temple for the Israelites while they wandered in the desert. It was designed as a reflection of the temple of heaven.

**TEN COMMANDMENTS**

The fundamental laws given by God at Sinai. They deal with our relationship with God and each other.



## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why did the Pharaoh want to kill all the male children of Israel, but not the females?
2. What incident caused Moses to rebel against the Egyptians?
3. Who was Zipporah?
4. How did God identify himself when Moses approached the burning bush?
5. What did this answer indicate?
6. What was Moses' first excuse when God told him he was to go back to Egypt?
7. How was Moses told to identify the God of Israel to the Jewish people?
8. What is the usual response to God's call to prophets in Scripture?
9. What was the first demand Moses was told to make to Pharaoh?
10. How did Pharaoh react to Moses and Aaron's plea to go sacrifice to God?
11. Why would the Israelites not be able to sacrifice to God among the Egyptians?
12. How did God punish the Egyptians for Pharaoh's refusal?
13. Why did the Israelites sprinkle lambs blood on their doors on the night of the Passover?
14. What were the instructions for the ceremonial feast?
15. What else was required?
16. What was the symbolism of the blood?
17. How did God keep the Egyptians from catching the Israelites?
18. How did God succeed in defeating the Egyptians who came after Moses?
19. Of what Sacrament is the manna a type?
20. What is the significance of God choosing the Israelites as a nation of priests?
21. How did Moses seal the covenant between God and Israel after God had given the Ten Commandments?
22. How long was Moses alone on the mountain with God?
23. What did God show Moses?

## PRACTICAL EXERCISES

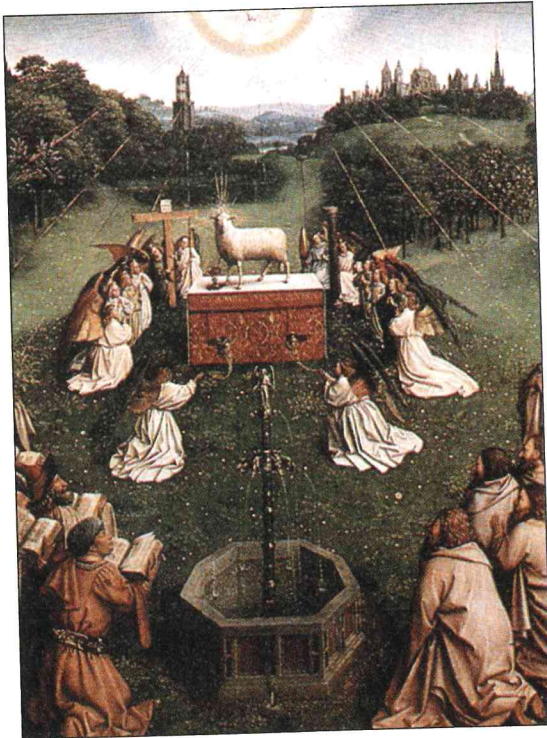
1. The story of Moses offers us another opportunity to analyze how God calls each of us to fulfill a certain part of his plan. God chose Moses to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, and Moses was at first unwilling. Read Exodus 4: 1-17 and list all of the ways Moses tries to convince God that he would not be able to free Israel. How does God respond? What does this tell us about what God may be calling us to do?
2. The Church states that the Ten Commandments "form an organic unity. To transgress one commandment is to infringe all the others. One cannot honor another person without blessing God his Creator. One cannot adore God without loving all men, his creatures. The Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) brings man's religious and social life into unity" (CCC 2069). What does this teaching mean? Try to come up with other examples of how disobeying one commandment infringes on another.



FROM THE CATECHISM

**205** God calls Moses from the midst of a bush that burns without being consumed: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3: 6). God is the God of the fathers, the One who had called and guided the patriarchs in their wanderings. He is the faithful and compassionate God who remembers them and his promises; he comes to free their descendants from slavery. He is the God who, from beyond space and time, can do this and wills to do it, the God who will put his almighty power to work for this plan. "I am who I am."

Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I Am has sent me to you'...this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations" (Ex 3: 13-15).



**1334** In the Old Covenant bread and wine were offered in sacrifice among the first fruits of the earth as a sign of grateful acknowledgment to the Creator. But they also received a new significance in the context of the Exodus: the unleavened bread that Israel eats every year at Passover commemorates the haste of the departure that liberated them from Egypt; the remembrance of the manna in the desert will always recall to Israel that it lives by the bread of the Word of God (cf. Dt 8: 3) (cf. Ps 104: 13-15); their daily bread is the fruit of the promised land, the pledge of God's faithfulness to his promises.

The "cup of blessing" (1 Cor 10: 16) (Gn 14: 18; cf. *Roman Missal*, EP I [Roman Canon] 95) at the end of the Jewish Passover meal adds to the festive joy of wine an eschatological dimension: the messianic expectation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. When Jesus instituted the Eucharist, he gave a new and definitive meaning to the blessing of the bread and the cup.

**2574** Once the promise begins to be fulfilled (Passover, the Exodus, the gift of the Law, and the ratification of the covenant), the prayer of Moses becomes the most striking example of intercessory prayer, which will be fulfilled in "the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tm 2: 5).

Endnotes

- |                |               |                  |
|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1. Ex 1: 9-10. | 8. Ex 3: 6.   | 15. Ex 12: 1-13. |
| 2. Ex 1: 12.   | 9. Ex 3: 11.  | 16. Ex 14: 5.    |
| 3. Ex 2: 10.   | 10. Ex 3: 14. | 17. Ex 16: 3.    |
| 4. Ex 2: 5-10. | 11. Ex 4: 22. | 18. Ex 16: 14.   |
| 5. Heb 11: 25. | 12. Ex 4: 23. | 19. Ex 17: 1-7.  |
| 6. Ex 2: 12.   | 13. Ex 4: 21. | 20. Ex 20: 19.   |
| 7. Ex 2: 14.   | 14. Ex 4: 23. |                  |

Jan van Eyck's *Adoration of the Lamb* from The Ghent Altarpiece brings together worshipers from the Old Testament and the New Testament. The lamb on the altar symbolizes the Passover Lamb and Christ the Lamb of God.