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*'You will be to me . . .
a holy nation'*

—*The Pentateuch and the Early History of Israel*



GOD REVEALED HIS PERSONAL NAME,
YAHWEH,
TO MOSES

GOD ENTERED A
COVENANT
WITH THE ISRAELITES
THROUGH MOSES AT SINAI

MOSES LED THE ENSLAVED ISRAELITES
TO FREEDOM: THE
EXODUS JOURNEY

JEWES REMEMBER THE EXODUS AT THE
**SEDER PASSOVER
OR SEDER SUPPER**

JESUS CHRIST INAUGURATED THE
NEW PASSOVER

THE EUCHARIST
IS THE PASSOVER FEAST OF
THE NEW COVENANT

ALL HUMAN BEINGS DESIRE AND PURSUE FREEDOM. THE Exodus is the epic freedom journey of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the land that God promised them. The Exodus prefigures God's freeing humanity from the slavery of sin to the new life promised in the *Protoevangelium*. In this chapter we explore the remaining four books of the Pentateuch, namely, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. We also take a brief look at the Books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth, which scholars judge to be part of the early history of Israel.



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: THE PATH TO TRUE FREEDOM

LEVITICUS, NUMBERS AND DEUTERONOMY:
DETAIL THE LAWS TO GUIDE ISRAEL TO
KEEP AND LIVE THE COVENANT

BOOKS OF JOSHUA, JUDGES
AND RUTH: REVEAL THE EARLY
LIFE OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE
PROMISED LAND

Faith Focus: These teachings of the Catholic Church are the primary focus of the doctrinal content presented in this chapter:

- ⊙ God freed his people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the land he promised.
- ⊙ God revealed his personal name, Yahweh, to Moses.
- ⊙ God chose Moses to lead the enslaved Israelites to freedom.
- ⊙ The Last Supper fulfills the Exodus command to celebrate the Passover meal.
- ⊙ God revealed his Law to the Israelites through Moses and entered a covenant with them at Sinai.
- ⊙ Our faith is monotheistic; there is only one God.
- ⊙ God is always faithful and merciful.PDF

Discipleship Formation: As a result of studying this chapter and discovering the meaning of the faith of the Catholic Church for your life, you should be better able to:

- ⊙ identify those elements in society that enslave people, in particular, young people;
- ⊙ cooperate with the grace of God to overcome whoever and whatever enslaves you;
- ⊙ discover the liberating power of living and obeying the Law of God;
- ⊙ commit yourself to the reading of the Scriptures and taking part in the celebration of the Sacraments.

Scripture References: These Scripture references are quoted or referred to in this chapter:

OLD TESTAMENT: **Genesis** 37:26–28, 43:8–10, 44:18–34, 49:8–12; **Exodus** 1:1–7, 16 and 22, 2:1–11, 3:5–9 and 12, 12:1–13:10, 15:1–21, 16:1–15, 19:3b–6 and 8; **Leviticus** 19:1–2, 26:11–12, **Numbers** 6:2–3 and 22–27, 13:16; **Deuteronomy** 4:1–9, 6:3–9, 32:51, 34:4–6; **Joshua** 1:1–9, 23:1–24:33; **Judges** 4:1–5:31, 6:1–8:35, 13:1–16:25; **Ruth** 1:16

NEW TESTAMENT: **Matthew** 2:13–18, 5:14–20 and 43–46, 12:23, 20:29–31, 21:9–17, 22:42–45; **Mark** 1:24; **Acts of the Apostles** 7:20–22

Faith Glossary: Familiarize yourself with the meaning of these key terms. Definitions are found in the Glossary: atonement, covenant, Decalogue, Exodus, Hebrews, Israelites, Jews, judges (of Israel), New Covenant, Passover, Promised Land, worship, Yahweh (YHWH)

Faith Words: Exodus; Passover

Learn by Heart: Numbers 6:24–26

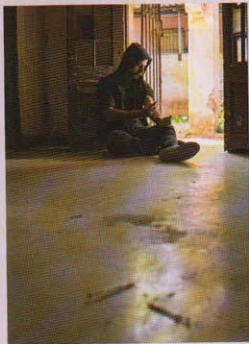
Learn by Example: Harriet Tubman, a Moses figure for her people

ATTEND AND REFLECT

Who are today's enslaved people?

King Heroin is my shepherd

King Heroin is my shepherd;
I shall always want.
He maketh me lie down in gutters.
He leadeth me beside the troubled waters.
He destroyeth my soul.
He leadeth me in the paths of wickedness for
the effort's sake.
Yea, I shall walk through the valley of poverty
and will fear all evil, for thou, Heroin, art
with me.
Thy needle and capsule try to comfort me.
Thou strippest the table of groceries in the
presence of my family.
Thou robbest my head of reason.
My cup of sorrow runneth over.
Surely heroin addiction shall stalk me all the
days of my life, and I will dwell
In the House of the Damned for ever.



OPENING CONVERSATION

- ⊙ Read 'King Heroin is my shepherd'. What is the author trying to convey? What does it say about the addictive power of drugs?
- ⊙ What other forms of addiction can you name that may seduce and enslave young people? What is their attraction? Why do you think anyone develops an addiction?
- ⊙ What might help people to free themselves from addictions and other self-destructive habits?

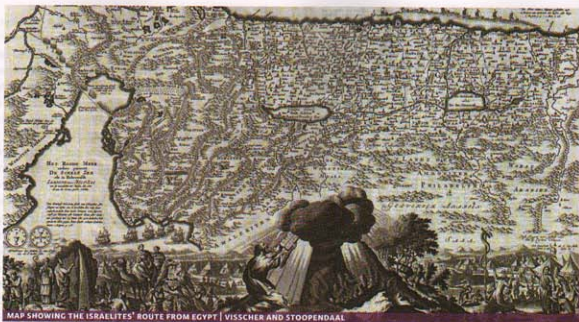
OVER TO YOU

- ⊙ Addiction comes in many forms and enslaves people in different ways. It is a form of slavery that wears attractive and seductive clothing.

- ⊙ What is the nearest thing to an addiction that you may have in your life?
- ⊙ How are you dealing with it?

THE BOOK OF EXODUS—FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM

The *Exodus* is at the heart of the Old Testament and reads like an action-packed drama. The Book of *Exodus* is the second book of the Pentateuch and picks up where the story of Joseph in Genesis left off. (Check out *Exodus* 1:1–7.) The Greek word *exodus* means 'departure'. The Book of *Exodus* highlights God's intervention in the history of his people. It is the story of the Israelites' *departure* from slavery in Egypt and their journey through the wilderness (or desert) in search of the land God promised them.



The Names of God's Chosen People

The writers of the Scriptures use the names Hebrews, Israelites and Jews to designate the people of the Old, or First, Covenant.

Hebrews: In the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites are most often referred to as the 'Hebrews' by other peoples.

Israelites: The name *Israelites* identifies God's people as the descendants of Israel, or

Jacob, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham.

Jews: The name *Jew* designates a descendant of Judah, a member of the tribe of Judah, which is one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Jacob blesses Judah, one of his sons, to be the ruler over all his sons. (Check out more about Judah in Genesis 37:26–28, 43:8–10, 44:18–34, 49:8–12.)

The narrative in the Book of Exodus begins about 450 years after the death of Joseph. The Israelites were no longer welcome inhabitants in Egypt, as they were in the days of Joseph. The reigning Pharaoh feared these foreigners as a threat because of the increase in their population and so he curtailed their freedom and gave them the legal status of slaves.

The Pharaoh attempted to control the Hebrew population by issuing a royal command to the midwives: "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live" (Exodus 1:16). Many of the midwives who feared God more than Pharaoh did not obey the edict.

Pharaoh, aware of their dissent, "commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live" (Exodus 1:22).

FAITH WORD

Exodus

God's saving intervention in history by which he liberated the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, made a covenant with them, and brought them into the Promised Land.

—*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC),
Glossary



NEW ENGLAND HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

THE STORY OF MOSES

Moses is the central figure of the Pentateuch. God chose Moses to reveal the divine name and to lead the Hebrews out of slavery through the desert, to the borders of the land of the Canaanites. Canaan, or the **Promised Land**, is the land that God promised would be the new home of the Hebrews. (Take time to read Exodus 2:1–11 and 3:5–9.)

The birth and youth of Moses: Chapter 2 of Exodus gives the account of the birth, adoption and early life of Moses. Moses' mother, soon after his birth, placed her infant son in a basket made of reeds and set him afloat on the Nile river. (Interestingly, the Hebrew word the writer of Exodus uses for *basket* is the same word as is used for the ark built by Noah.)

The daughter of Pharaoh found and adopted the infant 'as her own son [and] named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water"' (Exodus 2:10). The Hebrew name *Moses* comes from a Hebrew verb that means 'to draw out'. Moses, now an adopted member of the royal family, was reared and educated as a member of the court of the Pharaoh.

The Jews of Jesus' time interpreted this tradition of Moses' birth and adoption as central to God's action in forming them as the Chosen People. We see this reflected in St. Stephen's defense of his faith in Jesus. Stephen says to the Council of Elders:

At this time Moses was born, and he was beautiful before God. For three months he was brought up in his father's house; and when he was abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. So Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds.

—Acts of the Apostles 7:20–22

TALK IT OVER

- ⊙ In your study of history, who else have you learned about who acted as the Pharaoh did to protect their self-interests? What devastating effects did that have on people?
- ⊙ Who have you learned about who acted with the courage of the midwives? What were the consequences of their actions?
- ⊙ What can we learn from the conflict between the Pharaoh and the midwives?

LET'S PROBE DEEPER: A SCRIPTURE ACTIVITY

- ⊙ Look up and read Matthew 2:13–18. Compare Herod's edict with Pharaoh's.
- ⊙ Might Matthew be making a connection between Moses and Jesus? Give your reasons.

TALK IT OVER

- ⊙ How does Exodus 2:1–11 contribute to the unfolding of the Revelation of the divine plan of salvation?



HEAR THE STORY

The flight of Moses to Midian: One day Moses witnessed an Egyptian whipping a Hebrew worker; angered, Moses came to the defense of the Hebrew slave by killing the Egyptian. Fearing for his own life, Moses fled Egypt to the land of Midian. The Bible lists the *Midianites* among the descendants of Abraham.

Moses married a Midianite wife and settled down to the life of a humble nomadic shepherd, tending the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro. This primitive existence, close to nature and in the desert, was a spiritual preparation for his great role in the salvation story. It was there in the desert of Midian that Moses encountered God in the 'burning bush':

[God said]: 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. . . . Then the LORD said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.

Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites. . . . The cry of the Israelites has come down to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.'

—Exodus 3:5–9

OVER TO YOU

- ⊙ What does God reveal about himself in Exodus 3:5–9?
- ⊙ Have you ever experienced the presence of God in your life on occasions when you might have felt oppressed? How did the experience of God's presence strengthen you?

God reveals his personal name: Moses was alarmed by God's command that he return to Egypt and order Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery, and he protested over and over again. First, Moses resisted by claiming he was unsuited for such a task; but God insisted.



Moses protested again, claiming he did not even know God's name. God responded and revealed the sacred name to be **Yahweh (YHWH)**. 'Yahweh is the personal name of the God of Israel, revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai' (CCC, Glossary).

The divine name, which is 'mysterious just as God is mystery' (CCC, no. 206), has been translated in many ways. These translations include 'I AM WHO I AM', 'I AM HE WHO IS' and 'I AM WHO AM'. Many biblical scholars today add that YHWH can be translated as 'The One who causes to be'.

This mysterious name of God reminds us that no name or symbol or image can fully express the mystery of who God is. The context of this passage in Exodus, however, reveals that God is always faithful. He is and will always be there, 'present to his people in order to save them' (CCC, no. 208). In choosing Moses and

commissioning him to lead the Israelites to freedom, God responded to their cry for help. He faithfully fulfilled his promises to Abraham. (Check out Exodus 3:6, 12.)

We, the Church, are God's own people, too. The Church is the new People of God. God calls us, his Church, to be messengers of hope and freedom. God calls and strengthens us to speak out and actively side with the victims of oppression and work for their freedom—the freedom to live as children of God.

OVER TO YOU

- ⊙ What is the greatest truth about God that you have learned from the biblical account of the Exodus?
- ⊙ In your own life, choose one situation of slavery (it could be an addiction) from which you need to be freed. How might you achieve this freedom?

In your own life, choose one situation of slavery from which you need to be freed



HEAR THE STORY

True freedom



Go Down, Moses

When Israel was in Egypt's land,
Let my people go;
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go. . . .

Refrain:

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land;
tell old Pharaoh to let my people go.

O let us from all bondage flee,
and let us all in Christ be free. (*Refrain*)

Freedom is a basic human right. The search for freedom is universal. A major theme running through the human story is 'People in power tend to enslave other people; enslaved people desire and struggle to free themselves'.

OPENING CONVERSATION

- What witness do the words quoted above from the African American spiritual 'Go Down, Moses' give to the human desire and struggle for freedom?
- What oppressed people today might utter such words?
- Who might free these people from their oppression?

OVER TO YOU

- When have you cried out to God to set you free? Who or what was oppressing or enslaving you?
- Pray to God; express your trust in his desire and grace 'to set you free'.

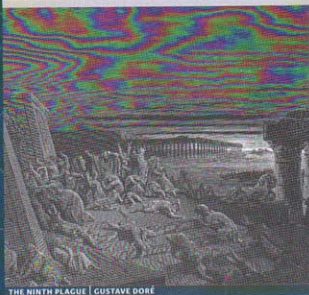
'LET MY PEOPLE GO'

Moses, accompanied by his brother Aaron, returned to Egypt. Together they confronted Pharaoh and delivered God's command to set his people free. But the message, at first, fell on deaf ears, a doubting mind and a hardened heart.

The Israelites were discouraged and doubtful. They had been enslaved for so long that many of them could not come to trust in God's promise of freedom which Moses delivered to them. People who have been enslaved for a long time often lose faith and hope in even the possibility of freedom.

The proud Pharaoh was defiant and stood his ground. Why should he heed the command of the God of slaves? He worshiped gods of true power, a power he believed to be greater than the God of the Hebrews. However, during the time of Pharaoh's refusal to set the Hebrew slaves free, ten plagues devastated the land of Egypt, inflicting anguish and suffering on the Egyptian people, including the defiant Pharaoh himself.

Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh over and over again. They boldly claimed that the plagues gave witness to the power of the God of the Hebrews and to his fidelity to his enslaved people. The plagues were a sign that God wanted Pharaoh to liberate the Hebrews. (Check out Exodus 12:43—13:10).



THE NINTH PLAGUE | GUSTAVE DORÉ

These events and the entire Exodus epic continues the inspired narrative of God's faithfulness to his promises and his people. The evil humans inflict on one another cannot thwart the divine plan of salvation and God's desire for righteousness and justice among people.

The Ten Plagues

Exodus, chapters 7 through 12

1. Waters of the Nile turn into blood.
2. Frogs cover the land.
3. Gnats infest the land.
4. Flies swarm over the land and infest homes.
5. Pestilence destroys livestock.
6. Boils infect people and animals.
7. Hail rains down upon people and animals and destroys vegetation.
8. Locusts swarm over Egypt.
9. Darkness covers the land.
10. Death of the firstborn children and cattle.

THE JOURNEY TO FREEDOM BEGINS . . . AND CONTINUES

The tenth and final plague broke Pharaoh. The angel of death 'passed over' the homes of the Hebrews and spared the firstborn Hebrew children, but the Egyptians were not spared, and neither was Pharaoh's son. At the loss of his son, Pharaoh finally gave in. He freed the Hebrews to leave Egypt, and they became a liberated people.

Before leaving, they were to eat a celebratory meal by which they would always remember God liberating them. (Check out Exodus 12:1–28, 43–50.) Jews, as the Book of Exodus commands, continue to remember this saving, liberating work of God among them, at a meal during **Passover** each year. This meal is known as the Seder Passover, or Seder Supper. The structure of the Seder as it is celebrated today evolved many years after the Last Supper.

The Apostolic Tradition of the Church identifies the Last Supper Jesus celebrated with his disciples as a Passover meal. Jesus Christ

inaugurated the new Passover. He delivered all people from death and the slavery of sin through shedding his own blood on the Cross. The celebration of the Eucharist is the Passover feast of the **New Covenant**.

The account of the Last Supper in the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke uses the language, food and ritual of the Passover. This clearly reveals the meaning of Jesus' sacrificial Death on the Cross within the context of the saving, liberating work of God among his people.

By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus' passing over to his father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom.

—CCC, no. 1340

We affirm that same faith during the celebration of Mass in the Eucharist Prayer right after the institution narrative and the Consecration. We proclaim, 'Save us, Savior of the world, / for by your Cross and Resurrection / you have set us free'.

THINK, PAIR AND SHARE

- ☉ Share with a partner how you understand the connection between the Passover and the Eucharist.
- ☉ How do the words of the institution narrative connect with the Last Supper? With your lived experience?

JOURNEY INTO THE WILDERNESS

Pharaoh had a change of heart soon after the Hebrews departed Egypt. He rallied his charioteers and other military and pursued the fleeing Israelites—this time with the intention of exterminating them. The writer of Exodus again makes the point that God will prevail. Even the evil of attempted genocide will not derail the divine plan of salvation.

The Israelites overcame the insurmountable. The waters of the Red Sea parted. Moses and God's people passed over the dry land that lay between the walls of water to safety. The

pursuing Egyptians were not so lucky; the waters came crashing down and they were drowned. Once again, evil does not prevail.

Moses, Aaron's sister Miriam and God's people see in these works of nature the hand of God who promised he would liberate them. Moses and the Israelites praise God:

I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.
The LORD is my strength and my might,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

—Exodus 15:1–2

Miriam and all the other women celebrate 'with tambourines and with dancing', and Miriam praises God, saying, 'Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; / horse and rider he has thrown into the sea' (Exodus 15:21).

OVER TO YOU

- ☉ Pause and take time to read the entire Canticale of Moses in Exodus 15:1–21.
- ☉ Reflect on a time when you overcame suffering. How did the 'liberated you' feel?

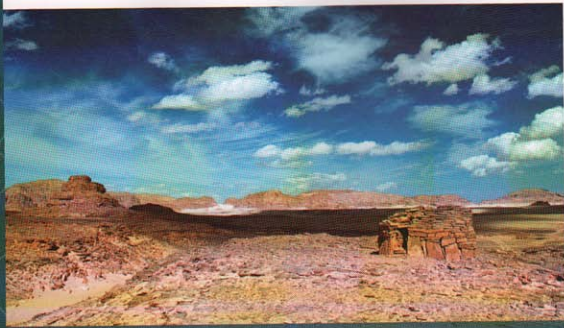


FAITH WORD

Passover

The name of the Jewish feast that celebrates the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and from the Angel of Death who passed over their doors marked by the blood of sacrificed lamb. Jesus Christ inaugurated the new Passover by delivering all people from death and sin through his own blood shed on the Cross. The celebration of the Eucharist is the Passover feast of the New Covenant.

—United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA), 523



THE SINAI DESERT TODAY

Sinai

Sinai is the name the P sources give to both the desert, or wilderness area, through which the Israelites made their Exodus journey, and the mountain on which God revealed himself to Moses. The P and D sources name the mountain Mount Horeb. Archaeologists and biblical scholars locate the Sinai area in the area known today as the Sinai Peninsula. The Sinai Peninsula lies between the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba. It is primarily arid desert containing a mountain chain.

THE SINAI COVENANT

One might think that the exhilarating and liberating experience of crossing through the parted waters of the Red Sea to safety would have sustained the hope of the Israelites through the journey ahead. The writer of Exodus tells a different tale.

The Israelites became a disgruntled group; they complained and quarreled among themselves. They were quick to forget God's faithfulness to them and their liberation from Egypt and they were reluctant to face the hazards of the desert. They yearned for the days of old in Egypt and they turned away from God to worshiping idols. Throughout it all, God

assured them of his loving, sustaining fidelity. For example, check out the story of the Quail and Manna in Exodus 16:1–15.

All this came to a head when they arrived at Mount Sinai. God called Moses up the mountain. Moses encountered God face to face, and God gave Moses this message to deliver to the Israelites:

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 obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. This is what you must tell the Israelites.

—Exodus 19:3b–6

Moses walked down the mountain and delivered the Lord's message to the elders of the people. 'The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do"' (Exodus 19:8). Later on God called Moses back up the mountain into the divine presence and gave him the Ten Commandments, or the **Decalogue**. The term *decalogue* means 'ten words'. Moses went down from Sinai and delivered God's word and commanded the people:

Hear, therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so

that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you . . .

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

—Deuteronomy 6:3–9

These events at Sinai are not only significant for Jews; they are also significant for Christians. At Sinai God proclaimed for all time that the people of Israel were God's own chosen people—forever. The covenant that God and the Israelites entered at Sinai was a never-to-be-repeated event, a covenant God has never revoked and that he has fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in his Church, the new People of God.

The Ten Commandments form the foundation of how the People of God are to live in true freedom. Jesus Christ is the new and everlasting covenant. He is the Incarnate Son of God who came 'not to abolish but to fulfill' both the Law and the Prophets. (Check out Matthew 5:17–20.) Christians profess faith in the one God who revealed himself to Moses; our faith is monotheistic. We embrace and live the Commandments as Jesus taught, and in doing so bring the light of God into the world. (Check out Matthew 5:14–16.)

TALK IT OVER

- ⊗ What are the best lessons young people today can learn from the story of Moses and the saving events in the Book of Exodus?

WHAT ABOUT YOU PERSONALLY?

- ⊗ What wisdom for your own life did you learn from the events of the Exodus?
- ⊗ How might you be confident and assure other young people that God is always ready to 'bear you up on eagles' wings'?

God is always ready to 'bear you up on eagles' wings'



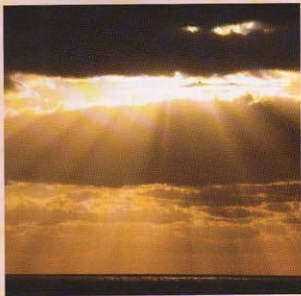
EMBRACE THE VISION

The caring, merciful presence of God in our lives

God's Constant Presence

When I was a boy I looked for God by directing my gaze toward the light coming from on high. As a young lad I looked for God in my brothers and sisters around me. When I grew up I sought God along desert tracks. Now I have come to the end of the road; I have only to close my eyes and there God is, within me. If I see light I see God in the light, and if I see darkness I feel God in the darkness—but always within me.

—Carlo Carretto, *Essential Writings*



OPENING REFLECTION

In 1954, aged forty-four, Carlo Carretto journeyed to the desert of North Africa. After a career as an activist, he became a member of the Little Brothers of the Gospel. The Little Brothers of the Gospel are a religious congregation whose way of life has been approved by the Catholic Church. Their mission is to proclaim the Gospel by living a life rooted in prayer and in the Gospel command of love. Carlo says he made his journey in response to a voice that said, 'Leave everything, come with me into the desert. I don't want your action any longer. I want your prayer, your love.'

- ⊗ Read Carlo Carretto's reflection above.
- ⊗ How do Carretto's words respond to Moses' command to the Israelites, 'Hear, O Israel, . . .?'
- ⊗ How and where have you experienced God's presence in your life? How did you respond?
- ⊗ What does it mean to be truly present to others?

LIVING OUT THE COVENANT— THE BOOKS OF LEVITICUS, NUMBERS AND DEUTERONOMY

The writers of Exodus clearly reveal that the wandering Israelites encountered the presence of God throughout their Exodus journey. The caring and merciful God was their constant companion. Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the remaining three books of the Pentateuch, each give us an insight into how the Israelites lived and celebrated God's caring and merciful presence with them. These three books of the Pentateuch detail the laws that were to guide Israel to keep and live the covenant. These laws, reflecting the spirit of the Ten Commandments, deal with relationships, rituals and matters of daily life. In many ways, these books define, in practical ways, who the Jews were called to be, 'a kingdom of priests, a holy nation' (Exodus 19:6).

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

The Book of Leviticus is named after Levi, one of the sons of Jacob. The male members of the tribe of Levi were designated to be priests in Israel. It was their responsibility to conduct appropriate **worship** of God on behalf of God's holy people. Israel was a holy nation, a holy people, because they were the people of the Holy One, God. 'The LORD spoke to Moses saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy"' (Leviticus 19:1–2). They were to live and celebrate this holiness in both their liturgical worship and their daily lives. They were called to love their Lord God above all else and to love their neighbor as they loved themselves. Chapters 1–16 of Leviticus contain the laws of worship and sacrifice and the responsibilities of priests. Chapters 17 through 26 treat the moral and ritual laws for living as a 'holy nation'.

Community liturgical worship was central in the life of the Israelites. It expressed who they were—God's own beloved and holy people—and what bound them together as one people. Through liturgical worship the Israelites poured

out their faith and trust in God. They believed God's promise to them, 'I will place my dwelling in your midst. . . . And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people' (Leviticus 26:11–12).

The rituals prescribed in the first part of Leviticus are rituals of **atonement** that took place in the Temple. The word *atonement* means 'bringing together'. In the Bible, 'atonement' designates two things: repentance for sin, and reconciliation with God. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, the high priest entered the Temple sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, where God dwelled. He offered incense and the blood of a bull and a goat. The sacrifice of blood was meant to represent the life of the people, offered to God to reaffirm their covenant and signal their repentance for their sins. Today, Jews still celebrate Yom Kippur. It is the holiest day of the Jewish year, and one that Jews set aside for fasting, repenting for the sins of the past year and renewing their covenant with God.

The second section of Leviticus contains the 'Holiness Code'. These teachings, or laws, show how true worship of God is expressed



THE SHOFAR HORN IS SOUNDED IN SYMAGOGUES TO MARK THE END OF THE FAST OF YOM KIPPUR

THINK IT THROUGH

The Promised Land

Certain Unalienable Rights

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.
—Declaration of Independence



OPENING CONVERSATION

From your study of American history, you will remember that the driving force that led the 'Thirteen Colonies' to rebel against British rule was their desire to be a free and independent people. They wanted to live in freedom and enjoy certain fundamental rights, which they named in the opening of the *Declaration of Independence* to be the 'Laws of Nature' and of 'Nature's God'.

- ⊗ Where in Scripture might the founders of our country have found inspiration?
- ⊗ What similarities do you see between the struggle for American independence and the Israelites' struggle to live as the free People of God?

THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE ISRAELITES IN THE PROMISED LAND

The first part of the early history of God's people in the Promised Land continues with the Old Testament Books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth. These three books, and 1 and 2 Samuel and 1

and 2 Kings, are similar in tone to the theology and teachings of the Book of Deuteronomy. For this reason they are sometimes named the 'Deuteronomistic history' of the Israelites. Let us take a brief look at the Books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth.

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

The Book of Joshua passes on the Israelite understanding of the role of Joshua in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. The Hebrew name *Joshua* means 'Yahweh is salvation'. In Numbers 13:16 we read that Moses changed the name of his assistant Hosea (a Hebrew name that means 'salvation') to Joshua, whom God would later commission to succeed Moses. (Check out Joshua 1:1–9.) Joshua represented everything that Israel was called to be—completely faithful and trusting in God.

The Book of Joshua offers startling accounts of how Israel entered, took control of and settled in the Promised Land under Joshua's command.

The Canaanites were the dominant inhabitants of the land when the Israelites moved into the Promised Land. The people of Canaan were primarily an agricultural society; they were polytheists who believed that their gods, called *ba'als*, controlled the rains, the seasons and the fertility of the soil. The Hebrew word *ba'al* can mean 'Lord' or 'master'. This belief of the people of Canaan in many 'gods' became both a challenge and a temptation for the Israelites, as the command of Moses rang in their ears: 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone' (Deuteronomy 6:4).

As we read the description of the violence and ensuing destruction involved in the conquest of Canaan, we may wonder how such violence could be part of the divine plan. When we interpret these events we need to keep in mind the culture and times in which the sacred writer wrote the Book of Joshua. The whole story of the Israelites' conquest of Canaan reflects many sad truths about human history. God and God's plan for humanity had not yet been fully revealed.

TALK IT OVER

- ⊗ Christianity, Judaism and Islam all confess faith in one God. Do some Christians, Jews and Muslims today justify the use of violence in order to bring about what they deem to be 'good'? Explain.
- ⊗ Compare those actions with the acts of violence recorded in the Book of Joshua.
- ⊗ Compare those actions with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:43–46 that we are to love everyone, even our enemies.

At the end of his life, Joshua summoned the leaders of the twelve tribes and begged his people never to forget what God had done for them, and he warned them of the consequences if they did forget. In his speech to the Israelites in Joshua 23:1–24:33, Joshua admonished the rebellious Israelites that they must adhere to the Law of Moses and love God. Failure to do so would result in their loss of the Promised Land.

Echoing the command of Moses, 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your



STATUE OF THE GOD BAAL | 19TH-CENTURY ENGRAVING

The people of Canaan believed that their gods, called *ba'als*, controlled the rains, the seasons and the fertility of the soil

JUDGE AND ACT

REFLECT ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

- ⊙ Look back over this chapter and reflect on what you have come to know about God and the divine plan of salvation. Share the teachings of Scripture and the Catholic Church on these statements:
- ⊙ God freed his people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the land he promised.
- ⊙ God revealed his personal name to be Yahweh.
- ⊙ The Exodus is the epic story of God leading his people from slavery to freedom.
- ⊙ The Last Supper Jesus celebrated with his disciples fulfilled God's command to celebrate the Passover.

- ⊙ God revealed his Law to the Israelites through Moses and entered a covenant with them at Sinai.
- ⊙ God is always faithful and merciful.
- ⊙ God's saving love is universal and God offers that love to all.
- ⊙ Our faith is monotheistic; there is only one God.

OVER TO YOU

- ⊙ Who is your favorite character or characters from the biblical books you explored in this chapter? Why?
- ⊙ What wisdom for your life can you learn from them?

LEARN BY EXAMPLE

Harriet Tubman (c. 1820–1913), a Moses figure for her people

Harriet Tubman has been described by her biographer Sarah Bradford as 'of her People'. Harriet was born into slavery on a plantation in Maryland around 1820. The exact date of her birth is unknown, since the birth details of slaves were not recorded. As she grew up, Harriet experienced the cruelties of slave life—the beatings, insults and daily indignities. Like other African people enslaved in this country, Harriet was the victim of an oppression based on a false interpretation of the Gospel preached by the 'Christian' slave masters. The slave masters quoted the Scriptures to stress the virtue of obedience and they counseled slaves to be content with their lot.

Harriet and other slaves took a different message from the Gospel, captured in the African American spiritual 'Go Down, Moses'. This spiritual attests to the faith in the God who led Moses and the Hebrew slaves out of bondage in Egypt. It attests to the hope in



the God who inspired the prophets and who became incarnate in Jesus Christ in order to bring about God's reign of justice and freedom. This was not the god of the slave masters, but the God who sides with the oppressed to set them free.

Drawing upon this faith, Harriet believed that God intended for her and all people to be free. This faith emboldened Tubman to train for her escape from slavery, which included learning how to move quietly, to be at home in nature and to find her way in the dark. When the time came, Harriet's faith in God and these skills enabled her to travel on bravely, cross into the free state of Pennsylvania, and into freedom.

Harriet soon came to believe that God was calling her to a wider mission. While she was free, her people in Maryland were not. Harriet chose to return to the South to assist the escape of those still in bondage. Over the next twelve years, Harriet helped rescue at least three hundred enslaved black people, among whom were her parents. These freedom journeys were fraught with danger. It was one thing to travel alone, but quite

another to move twenty or thirty people, including children, across hundreds of miles of open country, endeavoring to avoid armed bounty hunters who roamed the countryside. Yet Harriet Tubman did not lose even one of her charges.

A price was put on Harriet's head and "Wanted" posters were widely circulated. Among whites she became one of the most hated figures in the South—but among enslaved people she was known as 'Moses'.

During the Civil War, Harriet worked first as a nurse, then as a scout and spy. After the war she retired to a small house in Auburn, New York, where she continued to provide shelter and care to poor blacks. Harriet Tubman lived into her nineties and died peacefully on March 10, 1913. Her life has inspired generations of black Americans struggling for equality.

TALK IT OVER

- ⊙ Why would Harriet Tubman be called 'The Moses of her People'?
- ⊙ Name other people who might be called 'The Moses of their People'. Give specific reasons.

OVER TO YOU

- ⊙ What is the best lesson for your life you can learn from the life and faith of Harriet Tubman?
- ⊙ How can you be a 'Moses' to some person or group?

SHARE FAITH WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- ⊙ Share the story of Joshua, Ruth or one of the judges with family and friends.
- ⊙ What lessons does the story have for living our faith today?
- ⊙ How can you put those lessons into practice? What difference will doing so make?

JUDGE AND DECIDE

- ⊙ Think of some of the false gods that tempt young people today.
- ⊙ How can you avoid following them in your own life?
- ⊙ What might you do to help your friends to avoid following them as well?

LEARN BY HEART

**The LORD bless you and
keep you;
the LORD make his face
shine upon you, and be
gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his
countenance upon you,
and give you peace.**

NUMBERS 6:24–26

PRAYER REFLECTION

All pray the Sign of the Cross together.

LEADER

God is always present with us. God is our ever-present companion as we make our lifelong journey from being freed by Christ from slavery to sin to new life as an adopted child of God. As we make this journey, God blesses us with many blessings. *(Pause)*

READER

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and
be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and
give you peace.

—Numbers 6:24–26

LEADER

Recalling the beautiful blessing from the Book of Numbers, we ask God to bless us. After each petition, respond, 'Lord, bless us.'

READER

God, bless our relationships. May we think kindly of others, speak well of them and act lovingly toward them. *(Pause)*

ALL

Lord, bless us.

READER

Bless those who are in bondage throughout the world. May there be people of faith to help them come to know the freedom of the children of God. *(Pause)*

ALL

Lord, bless us.

READER

God, bless those who are far from home and far from friends; may they realize that you are always close and may they receive the hospitality they deserve. *(Pause)*

ALL

Lord, bless us.

READER

Bless all people suffering from harmful addictions; may they receive the help they need to recover, be healed and live lives of happiness and fulfillment. *(Pause)*

ALL

Lord, bless us.

READER

God, bless our efforts to be faithful to you every day of our lives. *(Pause)*

ALL

Lord, bless us.

LEADER

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and
be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and
give you peace.

—Numbers 6:24–26

Conclude by praying the Sign of the Cross together.