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# 4 The Journey to the Promised Land Begins: The Exodus and the Sinai Covenant

## Introducing Chapter 4

The Exodus event is an important step in God's divine plan. It moves humanity closer to the time when God will "be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:28). The word *exodus* comes from a word that means "exit" or "departure." The Book of Exodus covers the Israelites' slavery in Egypt during the reign of Rameses II (1279–1212 BC) and ends with their journey to independence in a new land.

Exodus opens with an account of Moses' birth, infancy, and childhood—a literary device indicating that his life will be one of great importance. The next significant event is Moses' meeting with God at the burning bush (cf. Ex 3). God shares his name with Moses: "I Am who Am," from which comes the Biblical name "Yahweh."

As further reading of Exodus teaches, what is most important to people of faith is not just knowing the name of God, but rather *how* God is known and *what* God has done and will do. The reader of Exodus learns the *how* and *what* beginning in Exodus 5 and the ten plague stories and how they lead to the Israelites' expulsion from Egypt. From these stories, two basic religious points are made: 1) God keeps his promises to his people, and 2) God is a God of liberation, not enslavement.

Exodus reinforces these two teachings by recounting other key events: the wandering of the Israelites in the desert wilderness, God's provision of food (manna) and water, and the revelation on Mount Sinai in which the Israelites receive the directions (laws) about how to live as God's People. These laws include both the Ten Commandments and the laws of Moses. As Chapter 4 explains, the laws of Moses have three sources: (1) the Covenant Code, (2) the Deuteronomic Code, and (3) the Levitical or "Priestly" Code. All three of these codes contain civil and religious laws.

The chapter also examines ways that Catholics can live according to the Ten Commandments and the laws of Moses in a modern context. One way is to practice the Beatitudes preached by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt. 5–7) as an expression of the "New Law" of the Gospel.

## Background Notes for the Teacher

Exodus is the second book of the Pentateuch. Although its authorship has been traditionally ascribed to Moses, it was more likely compiled and edited in the sixth century BC by a priestly writer. As with the other books of the Pentateuch, the Exodus compilation consists of four ancient sources: the Yahwistic (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomic (D), and Priestly (P).

This book serves as an important archetype of New Testament themes. In Exodus, God leads the Israelites from slavery in Egypt

to freedom. In the New Testament, Jesus leads God's People from the slavery of sin to the freedom of living as children of God. Just as Moses leads the people and becomes a great lawgiver, so Jesus leads us to the King's Kingdom and gives us the new law of love. Just as the Ten Commandments and laws of Moses are ways to live as God's People, so Jesus' New Law summarizes the Mosaic Law and enables us to be faithful to God's covenant with us.

The Book of Exodus has two main parts: the rescue of the Israelites from Pharaoh in Egypt (Ex 1:1–15:21) and the journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Ex 12:37–40:38). The narrative shows us how Yahweh keeps his promises to his people and rescues them from slavery. God sustains the people throughout their wilderness trials and brings them to the sacred mountain where they receive four gifts that identify them as God's people: a leader (Moses), a law (the Ten Commandments), a temple (the desert tabernacle with its ministers and ritual), and land.

## Resources

### Printed Materials

Clifford, Richard J., S.J. "Exodus" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 44–60.

Craghan, John F. "Exodus" in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, ed. by Dianne Bergant, C.S.A. and Robert J. Karris, O.F.M. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989), pp. 79–114.

"Exodus, The" and "Exodus, The Book of" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 209–217.

"Exodus" and "Exodus, Book of" in *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. by John L. McKenzie, S.J. (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1965), pp. 255–258.

McCarter, P. Kyle, Jr. "Exodus" in *HarperCollins Bible Commentary Revised Edition*, ed. by James L. Mays. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 2000), pp. 119–144.

### Audiovisual Materials

A&E Old Testament Video Collection: *Moses* (British Broadcasting Corporation)—50 minutes—Shows the call of Moses and the Exodus event. Produced in 1996.

*Exodus: Volume 1* (Cokesbury)—80 minutes—Dr. Maxie Dunnam covers the first seven chapters of Exodus, including a discussion of Moses' birth, the burning bush, and Pharaoh's stubbornness.

*Exodus: Volume 2* (Cokesbury)—80 minutes—Dr. Maxie Dunnam discusses Exodus 8–20: the ten plagues, crossing the Red Sea, wandering in the desert, and the Ten Commandments.

*Exodus: Volume 3* (Cokesbury)—80 minutes—Dr. Maxie Dunnam covers Exodus chapters 21–40, discussing the Ark of the Covenant, the tabernacle, and the mercy seat.

*Moses* (available from Vision Video)—184 minutes—After God appears to him in a burning bush, Moses becomes the leader and spokesman for the Israelite people who are slaves in Egypt. Eventually, he is able to lead his people to freedom across the Red Sea.

*Power Tools: Ten Commandments* (Concordia)—33 minutes—This presentation teaches the facts about the Ten Commandments and then uses “power tools” to help students apply the Ten Commandments to their own lives.

*The Ten Commandments* (Mass Media)—219 minutes—This classic movie, starring Charlton Heston, covers the events in the life of Moses. Included are his birth, his rise to leadership, and his successful liberation of his people.

## Internet Links

<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/egypt>—National Geographic's Treasures of Egypt includes many photos of Egypt and links to other sites.

[www.memphis.edu/egypt](http://www.memphis.edu/egypt)—Presents a tour of the Institute of Egyptian Art and Archaeology at the University of Memphis to see more than 150 objects from 3500 BC–AD 700. The collection includes mummies, religious and funerary items, and jewelry.

[www.egyptianmuseum.org](http://www.egyptianmuseum.org)—Offers a virtual tour of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum in San Jose, California, as well as educational resources for teachers about ancient Egypt.

[http://mv.vatican.va/3\\_EN/pages/MEZ/MEZ\\_Main.html](http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/MEZ/MEZ_Main.html)—See virtual images from the Gregorian Egyptian Museum, part of the Vatican Museum.

[www.ancientegypt.co.uk/menu.html](http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/menu.html)—This site of the British Museum provides interactive information about ancient Egypt, including short games and Webquests for students to complete.

[www.jewfaq.org/index.htm](http://www.jewfaq.org/index.htm)—This site presents rules or facts about the Hebrew language and Jewish beliefs in addition to other facts about Judaism.

[www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com)—Provides updated educational information about Jewish history, beliefs, texts, and everyday life.

## Relevant Teachings from Church Documents

- By the covenant God formed his people and revealed his law to them through Moses. (*CCC*, 72)
- The Old Law is the first stage of revealed law. Its moral prescriptions are summed up in the Ten Commandments. (*CCC*, 1980)
- The Law of Moses contains many truths naturally accessible to reason. God has revealed them because men did not read them in their hearts. (*CCC*, 1981)
- The Decalogue contains a privileged expression of the natural law. It is made known to us by divine revelation and by human reason. (*CCC*, 2080)
- By his covenant with Abraham (see Gn 15:18) and, through Moses, with the race of Israel (see Ex 24:8), [God] acquired a people for himself, and to them he revealed himself in words and deeds as the one, true, living God. (see Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 14)
- [After the era of the patriarchs,] [God] taught [Israel], through Moses and the prophets, to recognize him as the only living and true God, as a provident Father and just judge. (see Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 3)

## Music Suggestions

- “Be Not Afraid” by Bob Dufford, S.J. from *Earthen Vessels, Glory & Praise 1*, or *Young People's Glory & Praise* (OCP [NALR]); *Celebrate or Gather* (GIA); *Breaking Bread* (OCP).
- “Come to the Water” by John Foley, SJ, from *Wood Hath Hope or Glory & Praise 2* (OCP [NALR]); *Gather* (GIA); *Breaking Bread* (OCP).
- “Go Down, Moses” (African American Spiritual) from *Lead Me, Guide Me or Gather* (GIA).
- “Here I Am, Lord” by Dan Schutte from *Lord of Light or Glory & Praise 3* (OCP [NALR]); *Celebrate or Gather* (GIA); *Spirit Song or Breaking Bread* (OCP).
- “Lift Up Your Hearts” by Roc O'Connor, S.J., from *Lord of Light or Glory & Praise 3* (OCP [NALR]); *Gather* (GIA); *Breaking Bread* (OCP).
- “Psalm 95: If Today You Hear God's Voice” by David Haas from *Gather* (GIA).
- “Shepherd of Souls” by James Montgomery from *Worship II or Gather* (GIA); *Breaking Bread* (OCP).
- “Song at the Sea/Exodus 15” by Niamh O'Kelly-Fischer in *Gather* (GIA).
- “Unless A Grain of Wheat” by Bob Hurd from *Breaking Bread* (OCP); *Gather* (GIA).

“Wade in the Water” (African American Spiritual) in *Lead Me, Guide Me or Gather* (GIA).

“You Are All We Have” by Francis Patrick O’Brien in *Gather* (GIA).

## Advance Preparations

- Prepare any handouts you plan to use with the class and obtain and view any videos or Internet resources you wish to include in your lesson plans.
- Obtain a recording of any music you wish to include in the prayer service (see page 126 of the TWE) or at any other point during a lesson.
- Arrange for a student, parent, or school staff person to show some home movies of his or her infancy while then describing how these formative years contributed to the kind of person he or she is now.
- Arrange for a rabbi or practicing Jew to speak to the students on the symbols and practice of the Passover celebration.
- Gather together the supplies the students will need to make collages: magazines, scissors, drawing paper, and glue (see page 119 of the TWE).
- Have large pieces of butcher paper available for the students to do the map suggested in the “Learn by Doing” activity (page 125).

## Chapter Objectives and Assessment

### Essential Question

How do the experiences of God’s People and their laws apply to our lives today?

### Chapter Objective

Students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast the Ten Commandments, the Covenant Code, the Deuteronomic Code, and the Levitical Code.

### Performance Assessment Project

The life that is prescribed for the Israelites in the Torah is in many ways different from our lives today, yet modern morality is founded upon Mosaic Law. Have the students complete a detailed table comparing and contrasting the Ten Commandments, the Covenant Code, the Deuteronomic Code, and the Levitical Code. Then, ask that they each write a short essay explaining how they think the Old Testament Laws apply to our lives today.

# Introduction

## Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- summarize the origin, significance, and pattern of the Book of Exodus.

## Lesson Assessment

- Thirty-second Summary
- For Review Questions

## Bell-Ringers

1. **Direct Instruction:** Print this question on the board: “What do the primeval history stories teach us about God and his will?” Have the students record their answers and discuss.

*Possible Answers:*

- God’s will is to create a people in his image—both male and female.
  - God’s will is peace, not violence. Violence is considered sinful in these stories. God creates in peace—it is humans that bring violence. The flood story suggests that God was so sickened by human violence that God regretted creating humanity.
  - God’s will is trust and truthfulness—not the lies and deceptions of human beings in their society.
  - God’s will is care for creation—not destruction and exploitation.
  - God’s will is joyful diversity—not forced unification.
  - God is not impressed with how great our human material accomplishments are, but with how we care for each other, and also how we care for the created environment.
2. **Group Discussion:** Introduce the theme of “journey”—present in the Israelites’ journey from slavery to freedom. Ask the students to think about an important journey they have made and discuss in groups of three:
    - How long did the journey last?
    - Where did they go?
    - What happened first?
    - What supplies or equipment did they need to take with them?

The Book of Exodus tells the story of the Israelites’ escape from slavery into a new covenant with God on Mount Sinai.

### Introduction

The Book of Exodus continues the story of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt when the Book of Genesis leaves off. As time passed, according to the introduction in Exodus, the positive accomplishments of Joseph were forgotten. When the land was filled with thirst (Ex 1:7) the Egyptian leaders were concerned about their siding with Egypt’s enemies. This concern is given as the reason for the enslavement of the Hebrews.

As with the other books of the Torah, the stories of Exodus were collected and edited at the time of the Babylonian Exile, about seven hundred years after the events took place. The people exiled in Babylon would certainly have understood what it was like to be held in slavery and they would have been comforted and encouraged by stories that celebrated the liberation of slaves.

Exodus is just such a recounting of events, telling of the miraculous release of the Israelites from Egypt, their journey across the Red Sea to Mount Sinai where they entered into a special covenant with God. At Mount Sinai, through Moses, God gave the Israelites the Law—the moral, civil, and worship regulations that allowed them to become a holy people.

The Ten Commandments are at the heart of the Sinai Covenant. The Good and Beautiful® *The Ten Commandments* teaches: “The Ten words sum up and proclaim God’s law” (GGC 206F). These are basic moral laws given by God to his people. The Book of Deuteronomy quotes Moses explaining the significance of the Ten Commandments:

“Then words, and nothing more, the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your entire assembly on the mountain from the midst of the fire and the dense cloud. He wrote them upon two tablets of stone and gave them to me. (De 5:22)”

The origins of the Ten Commandments and their meaning for people today will be covered in this chapter in the context of the Book of Exodus. The Book of

## THE HYKSOS FOREIGN RULERS IN EGYPT

The Joseph stories may have been situated in a brief period of foreign rule in Egypt that occurred between 1650 and 1500 BC. Egyptians refer to this time as *the water submergence* to the rule of a people called the “Hyksos”—an Egyptian term for “foreigner.” The Hyksos were probably not people of a distinct race, but most likely the rulers among the more Egyptian populations of the time. It would have been possible for a Hebrew like Joseph to rise to a high position among the Hyksos, and perhaps that explains the enslavement of the Hebrews. All those who arrived and benefited from the Hyksos rule may have been given over to the Egyptian rulers as captives.



## Background Information

### Records of Slaves

Slavery of foreign laborers is recorded in the ancient papyri of Egypt. Among these slaves were Syrians and Canaanites (the Israelites). These slaves were involved in building projects at Pithom and Rameses. The Israelites were most likely slaves in Egypt during the New Kingdom (1550–1970 BC). Rameses II reigned from 1279–1212 BC, the time that the Exodus reportedly began. The Exodus journey took approximately forty years to complete.

Exodus follows a clear pattern. The major steps of the story are:

- The Call of Moses
- The Exodus: Confrontation Followed by Escape
- The Wandering of the People in the Wilderness
- The Reception of the Law at Mount Sinai
- The Approach to the Promised Land

#### Read Exodus 1.

The first chapter of Exodus is a largely transitional material, bridging the gap from Joseph, the last major figure in the Book of Genesis to Moses, the central figure of the Book of Exodus.

#### Section in Review

##### Quick View

- Out of fear, the Egyptians enslaved the Hebrews and forgot the days of Joseph's assistance.
- Many connections can be made between the experience of slavery during the Babylonian Exile and the stories of Exodus.
- The Israelites made a special covenant with YHWH at Mount Sinai where he gave them the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Law.

##### For Review

1. **Main Idea:** When were the stories of Exodus collected and edited into the form we have today? What connection was there between the stories of Exodus and the lives of the Jews at that time?
2. **Critical Thinking:** What connection might there have been between the imposition of slavery on the Hebrew people in Egypt and the period of

"Hyksos" rule in Egypt between 1650 and 1500 BC?

3. **Critical Thinking:** Why are the Ten Commandments the centerpiece of the Sinai Covenant?

##### For Reflection

Ask your parents to tell you what they remember about your birth or your infant and toddler years. Try to find a story that seems indicative of the sort of person you are becoming, or that you want to be. Write the story, embellishing it a bit, if you like, until you think it tells something significant about you.

Despite Moses's weaknesses and failures, YHWH chooses him to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt.

#### The Call of Moses

##### Read Exodus 2:1–10.

Birth stories are rare in the Bible, but when they do occur they are usually a strong indication that the person born is going to be someone important. The Book of Genesis included stories about Isaac's birth, Jacob and Esau's, and Joseph's too. Their births were significant because of who they grew up to be.

Like people of other traditions, the Hebrews told birth stories of famous people—especially stories of previously barren women miraculously giving birth to great figures. Such storytelling was a way of honoring the memory of a famous person, much in the same way that traditions have arisen in the United States surrounding the youth of its founding fathers. For example, George Washington

##### Hyksos

A group of non-Egyptians who came to power in Egypt between 1650 and 1500 BC.

Choose one person from each triad to summarize for the entire class the “journeys” that were discussed.

## Teaching Approaches

1. **Direct Instruction:** Introduce the Book of Exodus. You may wish to have the students turn to the introduction to Exodus in their bibles. Highlight the principal divisions of the book outlined in the introduction. Compare this outline with the major steps offered on page 83.
2. **Direct Instruction:** Explain how Exodus 1 is a transitional chapter that bridges the story of Joseph to Moses. Call on several good readers to read Exodus 1 aloud as the others follow along in their bibles.
3. **Direct Instruction:** Refer to the stories of journeys that were shared by the students and explain further how Exodus covers an important journey made by the Israelites. The journey starts in northeastern Egypt and ends in Canaan, the site of modern-day Israel and Palestine.
4. **Video Presentation:** Choose and play a video that details the geography of northeastern Egypt and the Nile (e.g., see Internet link to *National Geographic's Treasures of Egypt*).
5. **Direct Instruction:** Allow class time for the students to read the Introduction and short feature, “The Hyksos—Foreign Rules in Egypt” (page 82). Explain further that the Hyksos pharaohs resided in Memphis and Avaris (or Tanis) from 1720–1552 BC. They opened the borders to non-Egyptians, and allowed these non-Egyptians to rise to power in their governments. (This may be the time of Joseph’s rise to power in Egypt.) In 1552 BC, two native Egyptians from the south—Kamose and Ahmose—drove the Hyksos back to Syria-Palestine. When they became the new pharaohs, they degraded the social status of all Semites in Egypt to that of slaves.
6. **Individual Assignment:** Have the students read and compare Genesis 47:1–6 to Exodus 1:8–14 on a piece of paper by noting the difference in the attitudes of the pharaohs to the Hebrews in each of these passages.
7. **Direct Instruction:** Point out the paragraphs in the Introduction that share the significance of the Ten Commandments for people today. Explain that while many of the individual laws from the Old Testament are dietary laws, the Ten Commandments

## Answers to the For Review Questions (page 83)

1. The stories of Exodus were probably collected and edited at the time of the Babylonian Exile, about seven hundred years after the events took place. The Israelites in captivity in Babylon would have identified with their ancestors who were slaves in Egypt. Just as God freed the slaves, so they could hope that God would free them and restore them to the land of Israel.
2. While the Hyksos were in power in Egypt, the government would have welcomed the Israelites. They could even aspire to positions of power, as did Joseph. When the Egyptians regained power and exiled the Hyksos, they would have turned against the Israelites, even making them slaves.
3. The Ten Commandments are the basic moral laws given by God to his people. These “ten words,” as they are known, sum up and proclaim God’s law.

are based in the natural law and have significance for all of mankind.

8. **Assessment:** Based on the short introduction to the Book of Exodus, have students write a paragraph or bullet-point summary of the Book of Exodus that includes information about its origin, significance, and pattern. Challenge them to speak for thirty seconds about this topic at their desks. Call on the number of students that corresponds to the amount of time you have remaining in class.

9. **Homework Assignment:**

- Write answers to For Review questions 1–3, page 83.
- Work on the story of your birth or early childhood. Especially focus on how this story tells what kind of person you are and are becoming. (See For Reflection assignment, page 83).
- Read “The Call of Moses” (pages 83–86) including the passages in the Book of Exodus referenced in the text.

## The Call of Moses

### Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- describe the life and role of Moses.
- explain the origin of God’s names.

### Lesson Assessment

- Create a Moses baseball card
- God name tag

### Bell-Ringers

1. **Direct Instruction:** Ask students to verbally answer the For Review questions they completed for homework.
2. **Student Presentations:** Call on volunteers to share the stories they wrote as part of the For Reflection assignment.

### Teaching Approaches

1. **Direct Instruction:** Choose a good reader to read aloud Exodus 2:1–10. Have the other students follow along in their bibles. Pause at various points to review and summarize the text.

“never told a lie” and Abraham Lincoln “read book after book by flashlight.”

The Book of Exodus begins with the story of Moses’ birth, the closest to his life from the eyes of the Pharaohs, and his mother’s attempts to protect him. The story of the infant Moses floating down the Nile River is a hook most likely had a long oral tradition. It is the only story that survives from his youth, but its existence in Scripture is enough to inform us that Moses’ role will be an important one.

The Hebrew authors claim that Moses’ name derived from the Hebrew verb *masa*—“to draw out” (Ex 2:10) though it is also strongly related to the names of Egyptian pharaohs (“Thutmose” or “Ahmose” meaning simply, “son of” or “young son of”). The special attention paid in Exodus 2:10 to the Hebrew root of the name Moses has great significance. This is the only name used in verse 10. It serves to establish Moses’ Hebrew identity, despite his Egyptian upbringing, and refers both to his own being “drawn out” of the River Nile and to his efforts to draw the Hebrew People out of Egypt. At that point, the story

abruptly ends, and an entirely different time in the life of Moses begins at Exodus 2:11.

Read Genesis 2:11–22  
With this next episode, Moses is an adult, confronting for the first time one of the main themes of the entire Mosaic tradition—the slavery of the Hebrew people. While there are doubts about the exact historical details of the Moses story, the slave economy of Egypt is historically accurate, and is often referred to in Egyptian documents from that time. There are even ancient Egyptian writings that refer to the escape of slaves, although not in great numbers.

When Moses intervenes in two fights between Hebrew slaves and Egyptian slave masters, he immediately gets into trouble. In the first fight, Moses kills an Egyptian slave master to prevent him from beating a Hebrew slave. In the second, he is blamed by two Hebrew slaves (who are fighting among themselves) for assuming that he has anything to teach them, and it becomes obvious that he has been recognized as the one who killed the Egyptian in the first fight. After these episodes, Moses

## DOES GOD HAVE A NAME?

In Hebrew, after the tradition arose among the Jews that one should not speak YHWH, the holy name of God, the Jewish scribes came up with a little trick to remind readers not to pronounce it by accident—especially in public reading of the Scriptures.

In order to understand this trick, remember that Hebrew is written with consonants only, and not vowels (which are indicated, instead, by little signs above and below the consonants). When the scribes did not want to take the vocal signs from the word Adonai (“Lord”) and artificially put them on the consonants of “YHWH,” it was not really supposed to be pronounced. Rather, it was supposed to remind the reader to say “Adonai” not “YHWH.”

At some point, the tradition was forgotten among Christians, and the word was misread, taking the consonants and the added vowels. This new word came out “Jehovah.” This means that, contrary to what some Christians believe, “Jehovah” is not the “true” name of God. In fact, the opposite is true: it is a historically mistaken reading.

The traditional name for God is “YHWH” (usually pronounced “Yah-weh”) but even this is partly an assumed pronunciation. Parts of this name are found in Hebrew personal names like “Yehoiakim,” “Jehoshaphat,” “Jerome,” “Yehi” (Hebrew), also Elshin is a name for God that was widely used, depending on the geographic region. Elshin was often thought to be more typical of northern Israel, and YHWH more common in southern Israel. Elshin appears in Hebrew names like “Mich-EL,” “Dan-EL,” and “Av-EL.”

יהוה



### Background Information

#### Moses’s Ark

The basket in which baby Moses was put is sometimes referred to as an “ark.” An ark is simply a chest or box. In this case, it was covered with tar, or pitch, to prevent water from seeping through. The story connects with other stories in the Bible. For example:

- The story of Noah’s ark. (Both Noah and Moses are saved through water.)
- The story of the Ark of the Covenant, a portable box the Israelites carried with them from Mount Sinai until the days of the monarchy. This ark symbolized God’s protection and presence.
- The story of Jesus’ baptism and the Sacrament of Baptism, where salvation comes to us through water.



### Extending the Lesson

Research at least five other rules or facts about the Hebrew language. Use the Internet ([www.jewfaq.org/alephbet.htm](http://www.jewfaq.org/alephbet.htm)) and other sources.

lives for years among a desert-dwelling people called the Midianites, where he marries and learns to shepherd his father-in-law's flock. It is while he is living in the desert that he receives his amazing call to be the liberator of God's people.

This short introduction to Moses suggests that violence is not going to be the way of success for him. He will not defeat the Pharaoh in a great battle, nor free the slaves by force of arms. The inspired message of these early chapters of Exodus is that a power much greater than Moses's own human attempts is necessary to settle the issue of the Hebrews' slavery: God himself must liberate his people, though Moses will be the instrument he chooses to bring this about.

#### "I Am the One Who Is"

Read Exodus 2:23–25.

In Exodus 3, God calls Moses to his mission. Moses meets God in a fiery bush in the desert, a bush that at first attracts Moses's attention because it does not burn though it is engulfed in flames. In Exodus 3:14, God shares his name with Moses. It is a mysterious name, translated into English as "I am who I am"—but actually built on the basic Hebrew verb "to" from which the Biblical name "YHWH" derives. "It is a mysterious name because God is mysterious" (CCG, 206). Although Orthodox Jews do not pronounce this name (believing it to be so sacred that they must not speak it) Christians have never observed this practice, believing instead that what God has revealed is intended for our use and understanding. But that doesn't mean that those haven't been mistakes in what is to be understood (see "Does God Have A Name?" on page 84).

What is important in the Moses tradition is not necessarily the name of God, but rather *how* God is known and *what* God has done and will do. "God, who reveals himself as 'I AM,' reveals himself as the God who is always there, present to his people in order to save them" (CCG, 207).

Exodus 3:15–17 presents an interesting summary of who God is by mentioning the ancestors of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) as well as the events that will take place—liberation from Egypt and entry into the Promised Land. This is what is really important to the Hebrews. God is known by what he does, not by special names or words.



**LOS DIEZ MANDAMIENTOS**  
EXHIBITION TO CELEBRATE THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EXODUS

The Spanish film poster for *The Ten Commandments*. The film starred Charlton Heston as Moses. The Spanish title is *Los Diez Mandamientos* and the poster shows Moses with the tablets in front of Pharaoh.

Interestingly, even the name of Jesus communicates this fact. The name "Jesus" literally means "YHWH Saves." Even the name of the Messiah communicates that God is known by what he does, not primarily by what he is called.

#### Who Does God Call?

The movies love to portray great and mighty heroes. Consider the impressive figure of actor Charlton Heston playing Moses in the great film classic, *The Ten Commandments*. Even for children, Moses is portrayed as powerful and mighty, as in the animated film, *The Prince of Egypt*. How accurate are these portrayals of Moses?

In fact, Exodus 3 and 4 present a very reluctant hero. Moses has four objections to being chosen. First, he wonders, "who am I?" (to go about meeting an untamed people) (Ex 3:11). When God reassures him that it will be God,

- Group Assignment:** Distribute "Biblical Birth Stories" (Handout 4A). Organize the class in groups of five. Each student should read and summarize one of the listed Scripture birth stories. Allow time, then have the students share summaries of their stories with the group. Each person should record the others' summaries on their paper. Next, have the students compare these birth stories to the stories of Moses' birth (Ex 2:1–10). Finally, lead a brief class discussion that summarizes the groups' findings (see Background Information, below).
- Class Discussion:** Reread Exodus 2:11–22 as needed. Point out that the surrounding cultures in the Old Testament era often thought of the gods as violent. Moses' revelation that violence is not the will of God was extremely significant. Ask the students to share examples from the news today of people who do or do not consider violence to be a part of God's will.
- Direct Instruction:** Refer to the subsection "I Am the One Who Is." Direct the students to read Exodus 2:23–3:23. Note that this title used for God is the source of the word Yahweh. Point out the feature "Does God Have A Name?" (page 84).
- Direct Instruction:** Remind the students that God's name is overshadowed by *how* God is known and *what* God has done and will do. This point is emphasized in the Student Text on page 85 and in Exodus 3:15–17.
- Assessment:** God goes by various names in the Old Testament. Have students create nametags for God that complete the sentence "Hello, my name is..." and on the back have them write the meaning and significance of God's name.
- Video Presentation:** Choose to play parts of both films assigned for homework—*The Ten Commandments* and *The Prince of Egypt*. Play the same scene (e.g., Moses' reception of the Law) from both films. Note the differences. Have the students write their impressions of how Moses was portrayed in one or both films compared to how he was described in Scripture. Call on volunteers to share their impressions. Record a summary of their responses on the board or overhead.
- Class Discussion:** Call on students to answer these questions:
  - Is Jehovah a true name of God? Why or why not? (No. Jehovah was a misread form of Yahweh.)
  - What is the meaning of the name *Jesus*? (Jesus literally means "Yahweh saves.")



9. **Class Discussion:** Refer to the assigned text reading. Allow time for the students to read Exodus 3–4. Point out God’s power in transforming what first appeared to be a flawed man into a great leader. Also point out that in the history of our nation we have had unlikely leaders. Franklin Delano Roosevelt became disabled by polio, and yet he led the United States through the Great Depression and served as president for four terms. Ask the students to name leaders from their peer groups, teams, or school who have overcome obstacles or flaws to become good leaders.

10. **Assessment:** Have students summarize what they have learned about Moses by creating a baseball card for him. For students who have never seen or collected baseball cards, show them some images online or find some to bring into class to share as examples. On one side, have them draw a picture of Moses. On the back, have students write the most important information about him. You might suggest that they use categories like: hometown, birth and death dates, position, key life events, etc.

11. **Homework Assignment:**

- Write answers to For Review questions 1–4, page 86.
- Complete the For Reflection assignment (page 86). As an alternative, you may wish to use any art medium to depict the Israelites’ relationship with Yahweh while on pilgrimage in the desert.
- Read “The Exodus: Confrontation Followed by Escape” in the Student Text and memorize the ten plagues (Ex 5–11) and plan to review them in class.

not Moses, doing the rescuing. Moses asks, essentially, “who are you?” (Ex 3:13). After hearing God’s answer to this, Moses worries that the Israelites will not believe him, so God gives him a staff and shows him miracles that Moses can perform to convince the Israelites that God is with him (Ex 4:1–9). When Moses continues his objections, saying that he is not a good speaker, God promises to tell him everything he needs to say. At this point, Moses is running out of objections so he simply begs God to “send someone else!” (Ex 4:13). To this point, though it seems like we do not have a flattering portrait of Moses, actually we are learning much about the power of God and the value of prayer, that is, “the repeating of good things from God.” St. John Damascene as quoted in CCC, 2559. The Catechism points out:

But in the dialogue in which God confides in him, Moses also learns how to pray: he balks, makes excuses, above all questions: and it is in response to his questions that the Lord reveals his ineffable name, which will be revealed through his mighty deeds. (CCC, 2575)

What else can we learn from this? Who does God call “the brave and the mighty”? The great generals or the powerful leaders? No. God calls the simple and timid, the questioning and the doubtful, and often the weak and the few. God calling a man like Moses reminds us of Jesus calling men like Peter and Thomas despite their weakness and doubt. Moses is the classic “anti-hero” in the sense that he does not exhibit many qualities associated with human greatness. Yet, he is the hero of the Old Testament!

God, it seems, does not need the mighty—only the willing. Moses finally goes, clutching a staff in his hand as a reminder that he does not go alone. The story of God’s people continues in a powerful and dramatic way.

**Section in Review**

**Quick View**

- Moses’s name and the incidents surrounding his birth are significant clues to his importance in Scripture.
- God is known more by what he does than what he is called (i.e., YHWH, Adonai, Jehovah, Lord).
- Despite his weaknesses, God lifts up Moses as the hero of the Old Testament.

**For Review**

1. **Main Idea:** Why did the original editors of the Book of Exodus include the story about Moses’s birth and adoption by one of Pharaoh’s daughters?
2. **Main Idea:** Why do the Hebrew authors have Pharaoh’s daughter give Moses a Hebrew name? What is the Hebrew meaning of the name “Moses”?
3. **Main Idea:** What four objections did Moses have to being sent to Egypt to find the Israelites from slavery?
4. **Critical Thinking:** Compare Moses, the reluctant hero of the Old Testament, to modern heroes today. How is God’s hero different from the heroes you see in movies?

**For Reflection**

Have you ever been asked to do something that you weren’t sure you could do, even though the person asking thought you could? How did you feel about being asked? How did you respond?

**Answers to the For Review Questions (page 86)**

1. Biblical authors often told amazing birth and infancy stories about important people. Because Moses was important, it was fitting that there was some mention in the Bible about his miraculous deliverance from death as a baby.
2. The name Moses is derived from a Hebrew word that means “to draw out.” But Moses is also related to the names of Egyptian pharaohs. “Mosis” means “son of.” The Pharaoh’s daughter may have given Moses his name to show that he, though adopted, was also a son of Pharaoh. Furthermore, the name establishes Moses’s Hebrew identity and prefigures his leadership in drawing out the Hebrew people from Egypt.
3. Moses had these four objections: (1) He worried that he was the wrong person to rescue the enslaved people. (2) He did not know the name of the voice who was speaking to him. (3) He worried that the Israelites would not believe him. (4) He did not have speaking skills to get the job done.
4. Answers will vary, but students should point out the humility of Moses and the weaknesses he possessed. Despite these flaws, God chose Moses to lead his people. Modern heroes today are often praised for their own strengths and abilities, not for their dependence on God.

The Israelites' escape from Egypt typifies God's saving work of the liberation of the oppressed.

## The Exodus: Confrontation Followed by Escape

*Read Exodus 5–11.*

There are many interesting elements to the great story of God's conflict with Pharaoh, and the horrific events that led up to the final release of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage. There are also a number of interesting understandings about how these stories (which include the ten plagues) are to be read.

One common understanding of the ten plagues is that each is directed against a specific Egyptian god. But trying to match up all the plagues with known deities and their images presents problems. Consider the following:

Plague	Egyptian God
1. Nile turned to blood	Khnum or Hapi (god of water or the River Nile)
2. Frogs	Heket (goddess of child-birth portrayed as frog)
3. Lice/gnats	?
4. Flies	?
5. Pestilence	Harhor (god portrayed as a bull)
6. Boils	?
7. Hail	Seth (god of wind and storms)
8. Locusts	Min (goddess of fertility and vegetation)
9. Darkness	Amon-Re (Sun god)
10. Death of Firstborns	Osiris (god of judgment or death)

None does this theory fail to account for the three plagues that cannot be associated with any known god, but some of the gods are associated to the plague by their image (i.e., Heket and Harhor), others by the area over which they were understood to have influence (i.e., Seth, Min, Amon-Re, and Osiris), and some of these gods were never "worshipped" by the Egyptians at all (i.e., Khnum or Hapi). The idea that each plague was directed against a specific Egyptian deity is a clever argument, but ultimately must be set aside as contrary to what we know both of Biblical texts and Egyptian history and culture. In fact, the Biblical portrayal presents these plagues as directed against Pharaoh himself. He was, after all, considered a divine figure in Egypt whose responsibilities included the well-being of Egypt itself.

Similar questions must be raised about another popular theory that these plagues were actually naturally occurring circumstances. Perhaps, for example, red algae of some kind turned the Nile red and made the water undrinkable (the first plague). Perhaps excessive flooding of the Nile River Valley left pools of standing water for mosquitoes (the third plague). Perhaps there was an outbreak of anthrax among the livestock of Egypt, infecting cattle and even making the people sick (the fifth and tenth plagues). Hail and storms and locusts are obviously both naturally occurring phenomena (the seventh and eighth plagues). And so on.

Such an explanation starts out to prove that the story of the Israelites' escape from the Pharaoh is possible, that it can be believed because the plagues can be explained rationally. But others take that explanation one step further and argue that if the plagues are not miraculous at all, if they are merely "natural events," then Moses, Pharaoh, and all the people were entirely foolish into thinking that some "God" was behind these merely freakish events of nature. In truth no matter what way the story is examined, God was the initiator of these events. It was in the Exodus that "God formed Israel as his people by freeing them from slavery in Egypt" (CEC, 61).

The first nine plagues follow an arrangement of three sets of plagues, which are indicated by the special way that each set is introduced. Each set includes three different plagues:

- Set A (plagues 1, 4, and 7)*
- Introduced with a phrase instructing Moses to go to the pharaoh in the morning.

# The Exodus: Confrontation Followed by Escape

## Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- describe the theories behind the meaning and organization of the ten plagues.
- explain the evidence that two oral traditions were combined to form the story of the Israelites' escape from Egypt.

## Lesson Assessment

- Mind-map the theories
- Argument/support outline

## Bell-Ringers

1. **Class Activity:** Call on ten students to line up before the class. Ask them to recite in order the ten plagues from Exodus 5–11. If a person misses one of the plagues, replace him or her with another student who stands in the same place. Then have the group begin again. Continue until all ten plagues are named in order.
2. **Class Discussion:** Share with the students a recent news item that is weather-related (a flood, drought, earthquake, wildfire caused by lightning, hurricane, tornado, frost, etc.). Then form a panel of students (four or five) and ask them the following questions. Allow for the other students to offer their feedback:
  - What do you think is the relationship between God and these natural disasters? Where is God when these events occur?
  - Does God send these disasters to punish certain people?
  - Does God have no power to stop these disasters?
  - Does God really care what happens to the victims of such disasters?

Then say that the next part of the Exodus story deals with nature and what the Israelites came to believe was its relationship to God.

## Teaching Approaches

1. **Direct Instruction:** Explain more about the use of the divine infliction of plagues as a literary device in the Bible. In fact, it is used in other places of the Bible outside Exodus. For example, when the Philistines were victorious in battle against the Israelites and stole the Ark of the Covenant, God

inflicted punishment in the form of mice and tumors (cf. 1 Sm 4–6). When King David angered God by taking a national census, God retaliated by sending a plague that decimated the country (cf. 2 Sm 24). The plague literary device demonstrates God’s justice and his mercy toward the victims of injustice.

- Group Assignment:** Allow students to work in triads to complete Handout 4B, “The Plagues against Egypt.” The handout asks the students to compare the number and order of plagues from three sources: the Exodus 7:8–13:16, Psalm 78, and Psalm 105. Then, as a class, discuss how these three accounts are similar or different. How many plagues are listed in each Biblical source? Ask the students to give possible explanations about why the Bible seems to contradict itself. (Most likely, the stories of the plagues were passed down orally throughout the centuries. Different tribes developed different details to the stories.)
- Direct Instruction:** Explain that the *number* of plagues is not nearly as important as believing something disastrous happened to make Pharaoh change his mind. Also point out that it is not important whether or not the plagues literally happened. What *is* important is that God is faithful to his promises to the descendants of Abraham and Jacob. God is with them, and he will help them to become a great nation in their own land.
- Class Discussion:** Ask the students to summarize what we can learn from the story of the ten plagues. Write these ideas on the board and call on the students to elaborate each point:

- God acts to save his people.
- God wills the liberation of slaves.
- God remains faithful to his ancient promises to make the Israelites his people.

Summarize the discussion by re-reading the final paragraph before the subsection “The Release from Egypt” (page 88).

- Assessment:** Have students create a mind map of the theories surrounding the ten plagues. Supporting main ideas should include the theories that the plagues correspond to Egyptian gods or that they were naturally occurring circumstances.
- Journal Assignment:** Brainstorm a list of who or what might enslave people today (see For Reflection assignment, page 89). Have the students take note of the list prior to completing the journal entry.

Set B (plagues 2, 5, and 8)  
 • Introduced with the phrase: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh. . . .’”

Set C (plagues 3, 6, and 9)  
 • Introduced by instruction from God to Moses or Aaron to perform an act.

Plague	Introductory Phrase	Set
Nile turned to blood	Exodus 7:15	A
Frogs	Exodus 8:1	B
Gnats	Exodus 8:12	C
Flies	Exodus 8:20	A
Pestilence (cattle dying)	Exodus 9:1	B
Boils	Exodus 9:8	C
Hail	Exodus 9:13	A
Locusts	Exodus 10:1	B
Darkness	Exodus 10:21	C



*Pestilence, one of the seven plagues of Egypt*

The arrangement of the plagues into three sets by introductory phrases was an interesting literary technique. The purpose of the stories of the plagues is not to show God’s power over Pharaoh or even that he can work miracles, but that God’s will is for liberation of slaves and the creation of a people out of the enslaved and oppressed. What is important is that God revealed his will to the Israelites and they understood their history as a people in light of that revelation. These stories teach us about God and the formation of his people, the Israelites. They teach that God chooses those that God liberates the oppressed. They teach that unrighteousness, such as Pharaoh, cannot maintain oppression when God wills liberation. They also teach that with liberation comes responsibility.

#### The Release from Egypt

It appears most likely that, once again, two different oral traditions have been woven together in the Book of Exodus to tell the story of how the Israelites left Egypt. At the conclusion of the nine plagues in Exodus 10:28, Pharaoh and Moses have the following exchange:

“Leave my presence,” Pharaoh said to him, “and see to it that you do not appear before me again! The day you appear before me you shall die!”  
 Moses replied, “Will I still be there before you again?”

But look at the words of the Lord to Moses that begin chapter 11:

Then the Lord told Moses, “One more plague will I bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. After that he will let you depart. In fact, he will not merely let you go; he will drive you away.” (Ex 11:1)

Exodus 10 ended with Moses saying that the Israelites were leaving; yet Exodus 11 opens with God calling for another plague. A discriminating reader will wonder why.

The usual answer is that the end of Exodus 10 and the beginning of Exodus 11 is a rather awkward transition between two originally different traditions about how the people of Israel left Egypt. Chapters 7 to 10 of Exodus represent the “nine plagues” tradition and chapter 11 is the story of the Israelites leaving Egypt following the first

## Handout 4B “The Plagues against Egypt” Answers

Exodus	Psalm 78	Psalm 105
1. blood	1. blood	1. darkness
2. frogs	2. flies	2. blood
3. gnats	3. frogs	3. frogs
4. flies	4. caterpillars/ locusts	4. flies/gnats
5. cattle	5. hail/frost	5. hail
6. boils	6. cattle	6. locusts
7. hail	7. firstborn	7. firstborn
8. locusts		
9. darkness		
10. firstborn		

Passover. By weaving in the beginning of the Passover tradition at the end of Exodus 10, it becomes the “truth” plague. But, perhaps it was once an entirely unique story about how the people left Egypt after one horrendous event—the death of the firstborn of Egypt.

Furthermore, by adding the Passover tradition to the tradition of the nine plagues, the text obscures a connection that would otherwise be more obvious—that the “Passover” event is directly related to the *Agony* of the story of Moses. Without the interesting chapters that relate the nine plagues, it is possible to connect the killing of the first-born Egyptian children (Ex 12:29–30) to the act of the Egyptian pharaoh to kill the Hebrew boys at the time of Moses’ birth (Ex 1:15–16). Rather than being merely horrendous or even cruel, the Passover event can be understood as punishment on the Egyptian people for the Pharaoh’s original decree. Violence leads to violence.

The two traditions of the release of the Hebrews from Egypt may blur an exact understanding of how the Exodus actually took place in history. But there was a distinct religious purpose to editing these materials together to form the story as it is now included in the Old Testament, mainly that God keeps his promises to his people and God is a God of liberation and not enslavement.

Another important teaching to keep in mind is that as Jews celebrate Passover today, they commemorate the saving actions of God and give thanks for them. The “Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may conform their lives to them” (CCC, 1363). In the Church’s liturgy, the memorial takes on a new, deeper meaning and the saving events actually become present: “When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ’s Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present” (CCC, 1364).



### Passover Today

Write a script outlining the significant elements of a Passover celebration today. Include

- Food and table preparation. Write a grocery list of foods for the meal and directions for food preparation and table setting.
- Write and answer the four questions asked of younger children at the Seder Meal.
- Retell the story of the Exodus in your own words.

### Section in Review

#### Quick View

- The stories of the ten plagues in the Old Testament help us to understand God’s intentions to bring liberation to the oppressed.
- Two different oral traditions seemed to have developed around the Israelites’ escape from Egypt.
- While the Jewish Passover commemorates God’s saving actions, the Eucharist actually makes present God’s saving work on the Cross.

#### For Review

1. **Main Idea.** Why is the explanation of the plagues as evidence of God’s superiority over the gods of the Egyptians insufficient?
2. **Main Idea.** What is the religious message that is conveyed through the story of Moses’ confrontation with Pharaoh and the Israelites’ release from Egypt?
3. **Main Idea.** Explain the origin of the celebration of Passover as it is described in Exodus 12.

#### For Reflection

- What does it mean that “God is a God of liberation and not enslavement”? How is sin a form of slavery? How can God help you to get free from sin?

7. **Class Discussion:** Ask volunteers to share more of their lists of addictions from the For Reflection assignment. Write them on the board. Note that any form of addiction is a type of slavery. Addictions can be sinful because they degrade human dignity and liberty. Follow up this part of the discussion by having the students comment on how God offers freedom from addiction.
8. **Direct Instruction:** Summarize the text section, “The Release from Egypt.” Help the students to understand the possible explanations for how the two oral traditions were woven together. The Passover tradition is included in Exodus 10:26 as Moses speaks of a sacrifice that will be offered to the Lord. The entire Passover tradition is also included in Exodus 12. Ask the students to explain how the Passover story would have evolved if included directly after the killing of the Hebrew boys at the time of Moses’ birth (Ex 1:15–16). Finally, point out again that the key points of the text are that 1) God keeps his promises to his people and 2) God is a liberator, not a God who enslaves.
9. **Group Assignment:** Allow time for the students to work in pairs or small groups to complete the “Passover Today” assignment. Call on some students to share their list of foods with meal directions. Others can share answers to the four questions asked of younger children at the Seder Meal. Two others can retell the story of the Exodus in their own words.

## Extending the Lesson

- **Group Presentation:** Work with other classmates to organize and plan a Seder Meal for the class to share in the final class period before the Chapter Test.
- **Guest Speaker:** Allow at least 15–20 minutes for your guest speaker (rabbi or practicing Jew) to speak to the students on Passover celebrations today. Encourage students to take notes to help in completing the “Passover Today” assignment on page 89.

## Answers to the For Review Questions (page 89)

1. Not every plague corresponds to an Egyptian god. Furthermore, some of the gods were never worshipped by the Egyptians at all.
2. The message: God wills the liberation of slaves and the creation of a people out of the enslaved and oppressed. God chooses slaves and makes them his people.
3. The Israelites celebrate a ritual meal and spread the blood of the lamb on their lintels. The angel of death, who kills the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, sees the blood and spares the sons of the Israelites. Since that time, the Israelites celebrate the Passover meal, which recounts how the angel passed over them and how God saved them.

10. **Direct Instruction:** Connect the Jewish experience of Passover with the Church's celebration of the Eucharist. Point out that deeper meaning of the Eucharist as explained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1364.

11. **Assessment:** Have the students show their understanding of the arguments that two oral traditions were combined to form the Israelites' escape from Egypt in an outline. Each argument should be supported with evidence from the Student Text. If necessary, each piece of evidence should also have supporting details.

12. **Homework Assignment:**

- Complete most of the work on the "Passover Today" assignment (page 89). View the "Judaism 101" website or other resources (also use Handout 4C, "Seder Food Symbols") to help with background information on how Passover is celebrated today ([www.jewfaq.org/holidaya.htm](http://www.jewfaq.org/holidaya.htm)). You will have some more time to finish the assignment in the next class period.
- Write answers to For Review questions 1–3, page 89. Note Scripture references from Exodus 12 to support your answer to Question 3.
- Read "The Wandering of the People in the Wilderness" including the separate feature "Book of Numbers: Organizing a People" (page 90).

90 The Old Testament

The Israelites struggled to maintain faith in God after their liberation from Egypt.

**The Wandering of the People in the Wilderness**

*Read Exodus 15–18.*

After a canticle sung by Moses and the Israelites celebrating God's saving power (Ex 15:1–17), Exodus continues with another story cycle containing traditional stories about the life of the Israelites during the time they were wandering in the wilderness (Ex 15–18). Sometimes these episodes are referred to as "miraculous," as they are primarily a series of complaints from the people against the leadership of Moses, and eventually, against God himself.

These chapters depict an unruly and resentful people who have left Egypt, unsure of their future. They complain about food (Ex 16:1–4) and water (Ex 17:1–3), and they face serious dangers from desert peoples who are considerably less than hospitable (Ex 17:8–16). Finally, Moses's father-in-law Jethro suggests that Moses select some helpers from among the people to assist in organizing the group (Ex 18). This story provides a plausible explanation of the leadership of elders among the Hebrews, although this is not a particularly unusual social system for agrarian societies.

How many people wandered in the wilderness with Moses? The traditional number, 600,000 (Ex 12:37), seems unacceptably high. Not only is this number quite likely larger than the entire population of whole sections of Palestine, it

**“miraculous”**  
The stories in the Book of Exodus of the complaints of the Israelites to the desert against Moses and against God.


**elders**  
Males, usually male, members of the Israelite community who met regularly to rule on specific disputes within the community.

**Book of Numbers: Organizing a People**

The Book of Numbers also tells the story of the Israelites' journey, beginning with the Exodus, and continuing for thirty-eight years from their time at Mount Sinai to their arrival at the border of Canaan, the Promised Land.

Numbers gets its name from two censuses of the Hebrew people, one taken at the beginning of their desert journey (Chap. 1) and the other near the end (Chap. 26). The "numbers" of the Hebrews reported in each of the censuses may be exaggerated and interpreted in the same way as the numbers of people in the Exodus went. The book does explain the social organization of Israel into twelve tribes.

Two censuses taken from the Book of Exodus are also presented in the Book of Numbers. The first is YHWH's census for the Israelites. He leads them by day with a cloud and by night with fire. He provides food, water, and protection for their travels. The second theme involves Israel's "miraculous." As in Exodus, the people complain both about Moses and YHWH himself.





## Relocation

Imagine you have to move immediately from your home and relocate to a land a great distance away. You are given only one wooden crate that you may fill with ten personal treasures, possessions, heirlooms, symbols of your life that will remind you of yours and your family's past. Write the ten things you will take with you.

*Writing Prompt: Use your personal treasures, possessions, heirlooms, symbols of your life that will remind you of yours and your family's past. Write the ten things you will take with you.*

would represent a massive number of people trying to survive in the Sinai deserts. Pointing out that the Hebrew term usually translated “thousands,” can also be translated “family group” or “village group” typically solves the problem. So, if there were six hundred “family groups” that left Egypt, a more reasonable number would be not more than 6,000 (and perhaps much less)—certainly not over half a million people! We should also keep in mind that the Bible mentions that some Egyptians and possibly other

Gratitude does not come on flowery beds of ease to any people. We must fight to win the prize. No people to whom liberty is given, can hold it as freely and sweet if as gratefully as those who wrench liberty from the iron hand of the tyrant. The humbling and dangers involved in the struggle give strength and toughness to the character, and enable it to stand firm in storm as well as in sunshine.

—Frederick Douglass

Research and report on one or more of the following:

- ways in which former African American slaves identified with the Israelites in their quest for freedom;
- how Christianity was introduced to slaves and former slaves;
- how abolitionist texts relied on the Bible to support an end to slavery.

fremigians left with the Hebrews (Ex 12:38). So it was a group of mixed ancestry long before Israel was formed in a nation in the Promised Land.

## Section in Review

### Quick View

- Despite God's saving work, the Israelites often complained and doubted his ability to provide for them in the wilderness.
- Although a large number of Israelites escaped from Egypt, the estimated 600,000 people may be unacceptably high.

### For Review

- Main Idea:** What are the two prominent themes of the stories of the Israelites' time spent in the wilderness?
- Main Idea:** How might the number of people who escaped Egypt actually be less than the 600,000 cited in the Book of Exodus?
- Critical Thinking:** Read Frederick Douglass's quote to the left. How does this point of view relate to the experience of the Israelites after their liberation?

### For Reflection

Think about how the two themes of the wilderness stories are present in your relationship with God. What needs of yours has God met throughout your life? When have you “murmured,” or doubted God's care, or the care of those whom God put in your life to care for you?

# The Wandering of the People in the Wilderness

## Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- describe what life would have been like as an Israelite wandering in the wilderness.

## Assessment


- Diary Entry

## Bell-Ringers

- Class Discussion:** Bring a crate to class with some treasured items. Tell students that these items represent what you would want to take with you if you were told to move immediately and could only be able to take a few things. Continue by having the students work in pairs to do the “Relocation” activity on page 91. Allow time for them to share their lists with a partner.
- Class Discussion:** Introduce the lesson of a wandering people who wound up complaining about their time in the desert. Ask these questions for general discussion:
  - Is it normal for people to complain, no matter how good their situation may be? Give examples for your opinion.
  - What are some popular complaints teens have today? How legitimate are these complaints?
  - What were the complaints of the Israelites in the desert? Do you think these complaints were legitimate? Why or why not?

## Teaching Approaches

- Video Presentation:** Play approximately ten minutes of a film of Moses, including the time of wandering in the desert. (See the presentation from the A&E Old Testament Video Collection on Moses on page 100 of the TWE.)
- Direct Instruction:** Highlight some of the important events from the desert from Scripture, including:
  - The Quail and Manna (Ex 16:4–15)
  - Water from the Rock (Ex 17:1–7)
  - Battle with Amalek (Ex 17:8–16)
  - Origins of Elders, Tribes of Israel (Ex 18:17–27)



## Answers to the For Review Questions (page 91)

- Two prominent themes are: (1) Yahweh cares for Israel. He leads them by day and by night. He also provides food, water, and protection for their needs. (2) The Israelites are not grateful for what God is doing. They complain about Moses and about God himself.
- The number 600,000 is close to the entire population of ancient Palestine. A more reasonable number is six hundred family groups, or six thousand people. The Hebrew word for “thousands” can also mean “family group” or “village group.”
- At no point in the Book of Exodus did the Israelites experience what Frederick Douglass describes as “flowery beds of ease.” God expected the Israelites to faithfully work hard to faithfully maintain their freedom.

3. **Individual Assignment:** Call on students to share part or all of their reports on slavery based on the quotation from Frederick Douglass. The Religious Tolerance website offers some background information on the issue. See [www.religioustolerance.org/chr\\_slav.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_slav.htm).
4. **Assessment:** Have the students create diary entries as if they were wandering in the desert with the Israelites. Remind the students that in reality, the Israelites would not have had the materials or the education to create the diaries. This activity is for students to show their understanding of the experiences that the Israelites had. Consider allowing the students to read their diary entries to the class.
5. **Homework Assignment:**
- Answer the For Review questions 1–3, page 91.
  - Complete the For Reflection assignment, page 91. Try to write the entry in narrative form, rather than just making a list of several random times God has been present to you. Also include times when you have “murmured” against God.
  - Memorize the Ten Commandments as listed on page 260 of the Catholic Handbook for Faith in the Student Text.
  - Read “The Reception of the Law at Mount Sinai,” “Hebrew Understanding of Covenant,” and “The Ten Commandments” in the Student Text (pages 92–95).

92 The Old Testament

The Ten Commandments are directives for how to live our lives.

**The Reception of the Law at Mount Sinai**

The release of the Israelites from Egypt leads ultimately to their gathering at the foot of Mount Sinai and their reception of the “Law,” the religious, civil, and ritual statute from God by which they were to become a holy people. In fact, it is only when the Israelites make an agreement with God at Mount Sinai that they fully become a people in whom the promise

*natural law*  
The participation of man in God's eternal law that reveals what he intends us to do and avoid according to his will and loving plan.

Commandments that summarize the obligations of all who love God. This agreement between God and the Chosen People is often referred to as the “Sinai Covenant.” With the covenant comes the Law of Moses, often called “The Torah.” The Law given to Moses is an expression of what man knows in his own soul to be right or wrong, the natural law. The basic principles of natural law extend to the entire human race. Natural law corresponds to three basic human drives and needs: (1) preserving life; (2) developing as individuals and communities; and (3) sharing life with others. The Ten Commandments provide the principal commandments of the natural law.

**Hebrew Understanding of Covenant**

Recall again that a covenant is an agreement between God and people. At Mount Sinai the most important covenant of the Old Testament is established. Essentially, it is a two-way agreement, with obligations for both parties involved. God agrees to be the God of this people—“I, the Lord, am your God” (Ex 20:2)—but this is immediately followed by the “obligations” of the agreement for the people—the Ten Commandments. Note that these Commandments are made special in the Book of Exodus because all the people heard God speak these Commandments, whereas only Moses heard the remainder of the law after Exodus 20:18, and then passed them on to the people.

In order to understand the central essence of Hebrew religion, we must understand that the basic covenant between God and the people obligates the people to obedience to the Law. Therefore, the very center of the relationship between God and the people in the Hebrew tradition is not focused on what the people *think about God*. Rather, it is

*Painted with an image painted by Rubens showing Moses with the tablets containing the 10 Commandments, on the summit of Mount Sinai.*

of a Savior for humankind would be fulfilled. Their liberation was only part of the agreement—learning and keeping their responsibilities as required by the Law was the other part. It is the Ten



concerned with how they live their life. Understanding that obedience to the Law is of primary importance to the Israelites helps us to understand the entire Old Testament, especially in the tradition of the Prophets (see Chapter 7, pages 147–166).

### The Ten Commandments

If you know anything about ancient Biblical law, it is usually that the Ten Commandments are the centerpiece. They are reproduced in two of the law collections, in Exodus 20 and again in Deuteronomy 5. A summary of the laws is listed in the Old Testament below.

1. Israelites are to worship no other god but YHWH.
2. Israelites are to fashion no image (idol) to represent God.
3. Israelites are not to take the name of God in any oath, or in magical rites or incantations, as if they can control the power of God. (Swearing is more than merely using “bad” language.)
4. Israelites are to observe and honor the Sabbath (Friday night, through Saturday until sundown) as a rest from work.
5. Israelites are to honor their parents.
6. Murder is forbidden.
7. Adultery is forbidden.
8. Stealing another person’s property is forbidden.
9. Falsely accusing another Israelite of a crime is forbidden.
10. Acting on desires for a neighbor’s position or possessions is forbidden.

Because these Ten Commandments were spoken directly to the Israelite people, the tradition arose late in Hebrew history, and into the period of Christianity, that these ten laws were central laws of the Old Testament. Jesus, himself, acknowledged them: “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Mt 19:17). Since the time of St. Augustine in the fourth century, the Ten Commandments have been a source for teaching baptismal candidates. As such, “the tradition of the Church has acknowledged the primordial importance and significance” of the Ten Commandments (CCC, 2064).

The Ten Commandments state clearly what is required in the law of love of God and neighbor and

Christians in every generation are obliged to keep them. The next subsections explain more about what that obligation entails for Christians for each Commandment.

#### I. I, the Lord am your God: you shall not have other gods besides me.

To worship God means we accept God as our Creator and ourselves as made in his image. To understand what it is to worship, think of some sins against the First Commandment: idolatry (false worship of many gods), atheism (denial of God’s existence), and agnosticism (saying no one knows for sure whether God exists). Oppositely, the First Commandment asks us to practice the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Practicing our religion also helps us to keep the First Commandment.

#### II. You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.

We must respect God’s name and never use the name of God, Jesus, Mary, or the saints in an improper way. This means that when we take an oath or make a promise in God’s name, we must be true to it. We should also respect our own name and strive for holiness. God made us and knew us from the beginning of time. Our name will be with us into eternity. This Commandment forbids blasphemy, a sin that involves harmful words against God, Jesus, or even the Church. Cursing is also a violation against this Commandment.

#### III. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath was set aside by God, to remind us of the time of creation when God rested on the seventh day. It is a day intended for people to rest from their work and to praise God for his works of salvation.



## The Reception of the Law at Mount Sinai

### Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- describe the key parts of the Ten Commandments.

### Lesson Assessment

- For Review Questions
- Ten Commandments Essay

### Bell-Ringers

1. **Class Activity:** Call on students to recite the Ten Commandments in order. Or, make a game of it by asking each student to recite one commandment, moving in order around the room. If there is an incorrect response, start over with the first commandment and the next student.

### Teaching Approaches

1. **Writing Assignment:** Check the students’ comprehension of the reading assignment. Print the following questions on the board or overhead. Have students write their answers and either exchange with a partner for correction, or hand them in.
  - What is another name for the Law of Moses? (The Torah)
  - What is a covenant? (an agreement between God and people)
  - What was God’s obligation in the Sinai Covenant? (to be the God of his people)
  - What was the Israelites’ obligation in the Sinai Covenant? (to obey the law and to worship God)
  - What is the centerpiece of ancient Biblical law? (the Ten Commandments)
  - What are the three different collections of laws in the books of Moses? (The Covenant Code—Exodus 20–23, the Deuteronomic Code—Dt 5–28, and the Levitical Code—Book of Leviticus.)
2. **Direct Instruction:** Review the basic principles of natural law. Explain that the Ten Commandments provide the principal commandments of natural law (see page 92).
3. **Group Activity:** There is a lot of information about the Ten Commandments in this section. Have students Jigsaw-read the information about each of



# Review Session

## Bell-Ringers

- Direct Instruction:** Review ways that the Gospel of Matthew treats Jesus as the new Moses. Check the students' answers to the "Reviewing the Connection" exercise.

### Answers:

- Ex 2:1–10 and Mt 2:13–15 (Moses and Jesus were each threatened from the time of their births.)
  - Ex 20:1–17 and Mt 5:1–12 (Moses gave the old Law to his people; Jesus offered the New Law of Love in the Beatitudes.)
  - Ex 14:21–22 and Mt 14:25–33 (Both walked over bodies of water.)
  - Ex 16:4–15 and Mt 14:13–21 (Moses fed the people with manna; Jesus fed the people with bread miraculously taken from five loaves and two fish.)
  - Ex 1:2–5 and Mt 1:1–5 (Moses and Jesus share the same ancestors.)
  - Ex 12:1–27 and Mt 26:26–29 (Moses initiated the Passover ritual, and Jesus the Eucharist.)
- Student Presentations:** Allow students who worked on any of the enrichment exercises assigned at the end of the previous lesson to share their work. Display the Beatitude collages and other art projects around the room. Add details to the reports on Jewish dietary laws and the Jubilee Year (see Background Information, below).

## Further Reflections

Moses was the one chosen by God to lead the Israelites from their exile in Egypt.

To Moses, God revealed his divine name: YHWH, which means, "I am who I am."

The Exodus is the name for God's saving intervention that occurred in history, through which the Israelites were liberated from slavery. God made a covenant with them and they were brought to the Promised Land of Canaan.

After the patriarchs, God formed Israel as his people by freeing them from slavery in Egypt. He established with them the covenant of Mount Sinai and, through Moses, gave them his law so that they would recognize him and serve him as the one living and true God, the provident Father and just judge, and so that they would look for the promised Son(s) (Gen. 22).

A covenant is a solemn agreement between human beings or between God and human beings. The covenant with Moses is the primary covenant of the Old Testament. In this covenant, God revealed his Law through Moses in preparation for Salvation through the prophets, and ultimately the New Covenant established by Christ. The Ten Commandments are central to the Sinai Covenant.

For Jews, the events of the Exodus are not simply recalled in celebrations today. Rather, in every Passover, the Exodus events are made present and real so that Jews can conform their lives to these events. In the New Testament, the memorial takes on a new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, Christ's Passover is made present. The sacrifice of Christ on the Cross is made present once and for all.

## Vocabulary Review

Directions: Provide an example of each of the following:

- Ten Commandments
- natural law
- civil laws
- religious laws
- positive justice
- restorative justice
- Covenant Code
- laws of sacrifice
- parity laws
- laws of Jubilee

## Performance Assessment Project

Though life that is prescribed for the Israelites in the Torah is in many ways different from today, modern morality is rooted in Mosaic Law. Complete a detailed table comparing and contrasting the Ten Commandments, Covenant Code, Deuteronomistic Code, and Levitical Code. Then, write a short essay explaining why you think the Old Testament Law apply to our lives today.

## Vocabulary Review Answers

- See pages 93–95.
- See page 92.
- See page 97.
- See page 97.
- See page 97.
- See page 97.
- See pages 97–98.
- See page 98.
- See pages 98–100.
- See page 100.

### Called to Prayer

*I will sing to the Lord, for he is gloriously triumphant;  
horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.  
My strength and my courage is the Lord,  
and he has been my savior.  
He is my God, I praise him;  
The God of my father, I extol him.  
The Lord is a warrior,  
Lord is his name!*

—Exodus 15:1–3

- **Reflection:** The Israelites clearly admired God's power and his ability to fight for them when they were in danger. How can you use God's strength in your life today?
- **Meditation:** Which descriptions of God (gloriously triumphant, my strength, my courage, my savior, God of my father, or warrior) resonate with you most deeply?
- **Resolution:** Write your own canticle of praise to God based on something he has done for you in your lifetime.

### Notes

1. One other point of difference: At the end of the nine plagues (Ex 10:28–29), the people leave because Pharaoh tells them to go. In the Passover tradition, it is suggested that the Israelites have to leave Egypt quickly (Ex 12). The Israelites' exodus, or departure, from Egypt is described in Exodus 13:17–14:31. It includes the story of the miraculous crossing of Reed Sea or Sea of Reeds. The Israelites are able to cross, but the Egyptians drown.
  2. If any of your Jewish friends invite you to a Passover celebration, don't miss it. It is a wonderful tradition to learn about and enjoy.
  3. Indentured servitude describes an agreement in which a contract binds one person in service of another for a specific amount of time. At the end of the contract, the servant would be released from his or her duties. In the Mosaic Law, it was a way to pay debts, and the term was traditionally seven years.
  4. This argument was made by anthropologist Mary Douglas in a 1966 book titled *Purity and Danger*.
5. Note that animals with one category, but not both, are excluded as "unclean" (e.g., the rock badger and hare of Lv 11:5–6).

## Teaching Approaches

1. **Group Activity:** Discuss the "Learn by Doing" activity. Pass out butcher paper and markers. Have the students work in pairs to draw a map of the Israelites' pilgrimage through the desert. Have them include the following places:
  - Ramesses (Ex 12:37)
  - Succoth (Ex 13:20)
  - Red Sea (Ex 14:22)
  - Desert of Shur (Ex 15:22)
  - Marah (Ex 15:23)
  - Elim (Ex 15:27)
  - Desert of Sin (Ex 16:1)
  - Rephidim (Ex 17:1)
  - Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18)
  - Kadesh (Nm 20:1)
  - Mount Hor (Nm 20:22)
  - Plains of Moab (Nm 33:50)
  - From Shittim to the River Jordan (Jos 3:1)

Point out the passage in Exodus 13:17 that explains that God did not lead the Israelites on the shortest route to help them avoid the land of the Philistines.

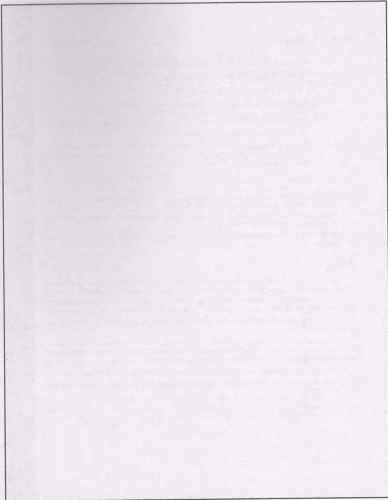
2. **Individual Assignment:** Assign the students to read Deuteronomy 32:48–52; 34:1–12. Ask:
  - What is the reason given for Moses' death before the Israelites entered the Promised Land? (His disobedience at Meribah.)
  - How old was Moses when he died? (120; explain that Moses probably didn't live that long. Advanced age in the Bible is a literary device to show that God has favored that person. Because Moses was an extraordinary prophet of God, who spoke to God face to face, the author of Deuteronomy had him live to a very old age.)
  - What do you think is the overall message of the Bible passage you just read? (Death is punishment for sin. Life means obeying God.)

### Learn by Doing

Create a hand-drawn map that traces some of the places on the route of the Exodus. Include places mentioned in the following Scripture passages:

- Exodus 12:37
- Exodus 13:20
- Exodus 14:22
- Exodus 15:22
- Exodus 15:23
- Exodus 15:27
- Exodus 16:1
- Exodus 17:1
- Exodus 19:18
- Numbers 20:1
- Numbers 20:22
- Numbers 33:50
- Joshua 3:1

- Direct Instruction:** Quiz the students on the definitions of the following vocabulary terms: civil laws, natural law, religious laws, elders, Hyksos, Jubilee, “murmurings,” punitive justice, and restorative justice. Assure students can identify the Sinai Covenant, the Hebrews’ names for God, and the meaning of Moses’ name. Also ask again some or all of the For Review questions from the chapter to help the students prepare for the Chapter Test.
- Individual Assignment:** Have students complete the Vocabulary Review section of the chapter review. When they are finished, have them record their answers on the board, or ask students to share their answers orally.
- Prayer Experience:** Read together the excerpt from the canticle of Moses, which he said shortly after the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 15:1–3). Guide the students through the three-part reflection process and have them journal about their reactions to each question prompt. If there is time, have the students share their reactions as a class or in groups.
- Homework Assignment:**
  - Study for the Chapter 4 Test.



## Background Information

### Jewish Dietary Laws

The *Kashrut* is the body of laws dealing with what foods Jews can and cannot eat and how these foods must be prepared. The word *kosher* comes from *Kashrut*. It means “fit, proper, or correct.” (See also “Animals with Cloven-Footed Hoofs That Chew the Cud,” on page 120 of the TWE). Here are the basic Jewish dietary laws:

- Do not eat certain animals (camel, rock badger, hare, pig, lobsters, oysters, shrimp, clams, crabs, rodents, reptiles, amphibians, insects, etc.). Do not eat the flesh, organs, eggs, or meat of the forbidden animals.
- Kill the allowed animals according to Jewish law.
- Drain all blood from the allowed meat before eating it.
- Do not eat certain parts of allowed animals.
- Do not eat meat with dairy.
- Use separate utensils for meat and dairy. Utensils that have come in contact with one of these foods may not be used for the other.
- Do not eat or drink grape products made by non-Jews.


### Jubilee Year Today

Many farmers today rotate their crops or let certain fields lie fallow so that they may replenish themselves of nutrients. Also, Pope John Paul II declared 2000 a Jubilee Year. Pope John Paul II encouraged government leaders to forgive criminals and release them from prison. He specifically prodded the Italian government to release his would-be assassin from prison, and it was done.

## Chapter 4 Assessment

### Teaching Approaches

1. **Chapter Test:** Allow a brief time for review. Then administer the Chapter 4 Test. Each question is worth four points.
2. **Writing Assignment:** When students have finished the test, have them take a copy of the Chapter 4 Performance Assessment Guide (available online in *The Old Testament Performance Assessment Companion*). Have them read through it and start to plan for the project by copying the sample outline in the handout.
3. **Direct Instruction:** When everyone has completed the test, introduce the Performance Assessment Project in more detail. Follow the teaching approaches outlined in *The Old Testament Performance Assessment Companion*.



### Chapter 4 Test Answers

#### Part 1. Matching

1. D; 2. B; 3. G; 4. A; 5. C; 6. F; 7. E

#### Part 2. Multiple Choice

8. b; 9. a; 10. b; 11. d; 12. c; 13. d; 14. a

#### Part 3. Short Fill-ins

15–16. Any two of the following: “who am I” to go about rescuing people, “who are you” that I should do as you ask, the Israelites will not believe him, and isn’t there someone else God could send?

17. the death of the first-born of the Egyptians

18. murmurings

19. elders

20. Jubilee

21–23. The infant Jesus was threatened by a foreign king; he escaped by going to Egypt; Jesus’ law, the Beatitudes, was given on a mountaintop.

#### Part 4. Short Answer

24. The ten plagues may represent Egyptian gods. Another theory suggests that the plagues were naturally occurring circumstances.

The arrangement could be a part of a literary technique to express God’s will for the liberation of slaves.

25. The Deuteronomistic Code seems to reflect the time of the prophets, who had a keen interest in social justice, while the Covenant Code was likely much older and presents a less humanized version of slavery and servitude.