



Exodus is the escape from Egypt. It is God's great exploit in the Old Testament: setting out from a place of slavery to go towards the promised land. God frees his people "with great power, a strong hand and an outstretched arm" which means striking with mighty blows, and opening for them a way through the sea.

Exodus is the heart of the Old Testament and makes it fully relevant in presenting to us a God who frees humankind. This book has given the Jewish religion and later Christian faith a first orientation making them different from all other religions. God does not primarily come in order to be respected or to indicate spiritual paths but rather to choose a people who will allow him to act at the heart of human history. God reveals himself to Moses because he wants to create a nation for himself and it will be Israel.

The Gospels and Christians did recognize in Jesus another Moses who launches a new venture, and in this book they will try to discover symbols of what they are living in the Church: crossing the Red Sea is baptism, the rock from which the spring of water gushes forth is Christ; the Covenant on Sinai anticipates the New Covenant.

In any case we must not forget how the first experience and the significant event all began. The Exodus is first and foremost the liberation of slaves and it is the choosing by God of the Israelites, a genuine liberation which concerns the whole human reality, individual and social. God frees those he wants for himself and Christian *liberty* will be far removed from what western culture understands by that word.

Exodus and History

The narrations of Exodus abound in beautiful stories but are quite different from what we would have observed had we been there at the time. Great frescoes have been painted, but we would like to know what history would say of them.

All is situated around 1240 B.C. a little more than five centuries after Abraham. In the 15th century before Christ, the Egyptians had been conquered by invaders from Canaan who allowed entry into their country to numerous nomads from the desert (see history of Joseph). After two centuries the Egyptians managed to restore their own kings and from that point on the nomads were treated with far less consideration; many fled to avoid taxes or enforced labor. Some were banished (Ex 12:31); others escaped under the darkness of night (Ex 12:38).

It is in this context that Exodus is situated. A nomadic group pursued by an Egyptian army detachment is saved by God through an extraordinary intervention. The Israelites saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore (Ex 14:30). Moses, a prophet, led the fugitives and

interpreted for them this event: Yahweh, the only God, had chosen them to be his people. Moses and his followers were to remain a long time in the oasis of Sinai, and it was there that Moses would give them Yahweh's Law.

History then is found in Exodus, but Exodus relates much more and it is there that history in its modern meaning may not agree with it. For this book is not the work of one author, but rather the result of a long evolution and has been marked by the different ways of recording history in ancient times.

We have mentioned one of these ways in the commentary on chapter 35 of Genesis: history listened to in groups that passed on orally the past story of their clan. In this way one family has been made up with Moses, his father-in-law Jethro (or Reuel), Aaron, brother of Moses, and Miriam, sister of Aaron and prophetess. There is the memory of links established between Moses and leaders or prophets of other clans. In the same way Mount Sinai has been identified in this account with Mount Horeb and the Mount of God. These were separate holy places, certain traditions of which have been confused. More about this will be discussed later.

Very different is the way history is recorded by the Jewish priests who have given this book its definitive form at the time of the Babylonian Exile. They developed old memories in order to assert, not what had been, but the way the people of Israel should see its past and understand itself. In doing this they showed their contemporaries a way of being the people of God and bearers of history. From there comes the vision of an immense nation already formed, organized, which has its Sanctuary in the desert, its priests, and its foundries that will produce the golden calf. This formidable nation walks as one people, nourished by manna for forty years. It receives its laws which in fact will only be observed five or six centuries later. This entire nation leaves Egypt armed to conquer the Promised Land.

The Living God of the Exodus

So here we are, facing a double history, one of science and one which has formed the conscience of Israel and of Christians. The first shows us how God in fact became part of the greater history. It tells us that his action has been very discreet and we discover his very patient pedagogy. The second helps us realize who we are and what we can fully become in Christ.

However we must not totally separate the two as if all the narration of Exodus was no more than fiction. Let us read a few pages: never would they have been written, and never would they have put weight on the conscience of a nation if they were not a true witness; witness of those who were with Moses and whose experiences were surely exceptional. Otherwise never would there have been either the prophets or the Gospel; witness of those priests or prophets who later would write them, for they too had an experience of the living God, the 'Savior of Israel' and because of this they have passed on to us the fire that was lit on Sinai.

The Hebrews increase in Egypt

Acts 7:
14-17

1 ¹ Here are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: ² Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, ³ Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin, ⁴ Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵ These descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; apart from these, Joseph was already in Egypt.

Gen
46:27

⁶ Then Joseph died as did all his brothers and all that generation. ⁷ The sons of Israel were fruitful and kept increasing. To such an extent did they multiply and grow in strength that the land teemed with them.

Ps
105:24;
Dt 26:5;
Acts 13:17

The Hebrews reduced to slavery

Acts 7:
18-19

⁸ Then a new king who had not known Joseph came to power ⁹ and said to his people, “The Israelites are more numerous and stronger than we are. ¹⁰ Let us deal warily with them lest they increase still more and, in case of war, side with our enemy, fight against us and escape from the land.” ¹¹ So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. In that way they built the storage towns of Pithom and Rameses. ¹² But the more they oppressed the Hebrews the more they increased and spread, until the

Egyptians dreaded the Israelites ¹³ and became ruthless in making them work. ¹⁴ They made life bitter for them in hard labor with bricks and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields. In all their work the Egyptians treated them harshly.

Dt 11:10

¹⁵ Then the king of Egypt gave orders to the Hebrew midwives—one of whom was called Shiprah and the other Puah—¹⁶ that when they attended Hebrew women who were on the birthstool and saw that it was a boy, they were to kill it, but if it was a girl they were to let it live. ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded but let the children live. ¹⁸ The king called the midwives and said, “Why have you acted like that and let the children live?” ¹⁹ The midwives replied, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. They are vigorous and give birth even before a midwife arrives.”

²⁰ God blessed the midwives, and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹ Because the midwives revered God, he made them mothers of families.

²² Pharaoh then gave this order to all the people: “Every infant boy born to the Hebrews must be thrown into the Nile, but every girl may live.”

• **1.1** For centuries a great part of humanity has lived under oppression. Historians speak little of humanity’s life of suffering. Rebelliousness was rare since the great majority were resigned, and even came to believe that slavery was a normal situation. But God willed to intervene, at least once, in a manifest form to liberate the Hebrew people. This was the first step in the history of the People of God.

The Bible traces in bold strokes the subhuman conditions of the Hebrews in Egypt:

– the Egyptian lords were afraid of a people who, according to them, grew irresponsibly fast (vv. 10 & 12);

– they imposed hard work on the Israelites who had to build and defend a society which

did not promote their welfare or recognize their rights (v. 11);

– exploitation and oppression went hand in hand with inhuman labor and political repression enforced by the Egyptian overseers;

– finally, an alien authority imposed drastic population control on the Israelites (v. 16).

Situations of oppression can be found in 1 Maccabees 1; 2 Maccabees 4 and 6; Isaiah 5:8; Amos 5:10; Ezekiel 34; Micah 2:1; Job 24:1, 25:9; Lamentations 3:31.

Who were *Shiprah* and *Puah*? These are names of Egyptian women who, because of their compassion for the oppressed people, made mockery of the king’s order and refused to execute what their conscience condemned.

Moses saved from the river

6:20

Acts 7:20;
Heb 11:23

2 • ¹Now a man belonging to the clan of Levi married a woman of his own tribe. ²She gave birth to a boy and, seeing that he was a beautiful child, she kept him hidden for three months. ³As she could not conceal him any longer, she made a basket out of papyrus leaves and coated it with tar and pitch. She then laid the child in the basket and placed it among the reeds near the bank of the Nile; ⁴but the sister of the child kept at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile; her attendants meanwhile walked along the bank. When she saw the basket among the reeds, she sent her maid-servant to fetch it. ⁶She opened the basket and saw the child—a boy, and he was crying! She felt sorry for him, for she thought: “This is one of the Hebrew children.”

⁷Then the sister of the child said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to

nurse the baby for you?” ⁸Pharaoh’s daughter agreed, and the girl went to call the mother of the child. ⁹Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take the child and nurse him for me and I will pay you.” So the woman took the child and nursed him ¹⁰and, when the child had grown, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter who adopted him as her son. And she named him Moses to recall that she had drawn him *out of the water*.

Acts 7:21

Moses discovers his people

• ¹¹After a fairly long time, Moses, by now a grown man, wanted to meet his fellow Hebrews. He noticed how heavily they were burdened and he saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his own people. ¹²He looked around and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

Heb
11:24;
11:27

¹³When he went out the next day he saw two Hebrews quarreling. Moses said to the man in the wrong, “Why are you striking a fellow countryman?” ¹⁴But he answered, “Who has set you prince and judge over

Acts 7:35

• **2.1** The liberation of the Hebrew people begins with a simple, solitary act—that of a mother risking her life to save her son.

Her action is the manifestation of a mother’s love. It is the rebellion of a conscience that refuses to obey an inhuman law. It is the act of faith of a mother who anticipates the wonderful future that God opens to a newly-born infant, knowing also that children are the future of her people (see Heb 11:21).

Isn’t this the same way in which mothers today refuse abortion in the name of their conscience enlightened by faith?

Historians explain that the details of this story were inspired by the legend of king Sargon, who was saved from drowning when he was a boy. Most probably nothing was known about Moses’ childhood. The story of the basket found among the reeds was a pleasant way of expressing God’s providence. Moses would escape from the common destiny of Hebrew children and land in the confined world of those who benefit from culture. The one who

was to free the slaves should experience liberty. The slaves did not even know what the word freedom meant.

• 11. Moses lived a prince’s life. Nevertheless, he went to meet his people who lived in poorer conditions.

He noticed how heavily they were burdened. He did not respond like many culturally privileged who, rather than acting in solidarity with their people, act contrary to their interests (e.g. through the export of capital and brain drain). Moses did not deliberately close his eyes, like those who deny their humble beginnings or reject solidarity with their companions in order to be admitted to higher circles.

Immediately, Moses sides with his people. On the following day, he discovers another aspect of evil: they are not innocent victims. The oppression they suffer has something to do with the violence, the evil and the irresponsibility which exists among them. They are not

us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must be known."

Gen 25:2;
Acts 7:29

¹⁵When Pharaoh heard about it he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in the land of Midian. There he sat down by a well.

Moses in Midian

Gen
24:11

• ¹⁶A priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's sheep. ¹⁷Some shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses went to their help and watered the sheep.

¹⁸When the girls returned to their father Reuel, he asked them, "Why have you come back so early today?" ¹⁹They said, "An Egyptian protected us from the shepherds, and even drew water for us and watered the sheep." ²⁰The man said,

respected by the Egyptians, but neither are they concerned about meriting this respect. This time, Moses does not know what to do and prefers to flee.

Moses has taken the first step on the way that will lead to the liberation of his people. Likewise, those who are able to share the lot of the privileged, but prefer to put themselves at the service of the lowly become, without knowing it, followers of Christ, as Hebrews 11:24-26 says: "By faith, Moses refused to be called son of Pharaoh's daughter. He preferred to share ill treatment with the people of God, rather than enjoy the passing pleasure of sin; he considered the humiliation of Christ a greater wealth than the wealth of Egypt."

Thus we see that the Bible values efforts made to promote human dignity, and the efforts of youth, workers and all those struggling for development and for a more active participation in the building of their future.

The liberation God will bring about is, at the same time, a liberation from structures of oppression and the awakening of each person regarding his or her own sin.

• 16. As a shepherd in the desert, Moses learns the raw life, poor and free, like that of

"Where is he? Why did you leave him there? Call him and offer him a meal."

²¹Moses agreed to stay with the man and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. ²²She had a child and Moses named him Gershom, to recall that he had been a guest in a strange land.

18:3

God remembers Israel

• ²³It happened during that long period of time that the king of Egypt died. The sons of Israel groaned under their slavery; they cried to God for help and from their bondage their cry ascended to God. ²⁴God heard their sigh and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ²⁵God looked upon the Israelites and revealed himself to them.

Jdg
10:16;
1S 7:2

Gen
15:16

The burning bush

3 • ¹Moses pastured the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law, priest

6:2-13;
6:28-
7:7;

Abraham. He lives among the Midianites, who are more or less descendants of the father of the believers (Gen 25:2). Thus, Moses receives from his father-in-law, Reuel, also called Jethro (3:1), the traditions of Abraham and his faith to the one and only God.

• 23. *They cried to God for help and from their bondage their cry ascended to God.* At times, people do not even have the spirit to hope in God, but though they may have forgotten the promises, God does not forget them. There is such a thing as God's time and also God's delay (2 Mac 6:12; Hb 1:2; Sir 35:19; Ps 44; Mk 4:26; Lk 18:1; Rev 6:11). Though we can hasten the hour of God (2 P 3:12), "time and the moment" belong to him (Acts 1:7).

• 3.1 God waits several years and then calls Moses when he is already mature. He calls him at a time when Moses has chosen the paths of a father of a family and shepherd of sheep. He does this in the desert where Moses has apparently isolated himself from the misfortunes of his people and, day after day, wastes the opportunity to help them. Thus, many times God waits for a person in this or

4:27; 24:13; 1K 19:8; Acts 7:30; 13:17
 of Midian. One day he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the Mountain of God.

Gen 16:7; Jdg 6:11; Dt 33:16
²The Angel of Yahweh appeared to him by means of a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. Moses saw that although the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³Moses thought, "I will go and see this amazing sight, why is the bush not burning up?"

Gen 28:16; Jos 5:15; Lev 17:1; 19:12
 Mt 22:32; Gen 28:17; 32:31; Is 6:5; Mk 4:41; Lk 4:36
⁴Yahweh saw that Moses was drawing near to look, and God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" He replied, "Here I am." ⁵Yahweh said to him, "Do not come near; take off your sandals because the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶And God continued, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

Dt 7:1
 Moses hid his face lest his eyes look on God. ⁷Yahweh said, "I have seen the humiliation of my people in Egypt and I hear their cry when they are cruelly treated by their taskmasters. I know their suffering. ⁸I have come down to free them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring

them up from that land to a beautiful spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey,

to the territory of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. ⁹The cry of the sons of Israel has reached me and I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them.

¹⁰Go now! I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt."

¹¹Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the people of Israel out of Egypt?"

¹²God replied, "I will be with you and this will be the sign that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

¹³Moses answered God, "If I go to the Israelites and say to them: 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' they will ask me: 'What is his name?' What shall I answer them?"

• ¹⁴God said to Moses, "I AM WHO AM. This is what you will say to the sons of Israel: 'I AM sent me to you.'" ¹⁵God then said to Moses, "You

Jer 1:5

Acts 7:7; Rom 6:18; Gal 5:13; 1P 2:16

6:2; Is 42:8; 43:10; 52:6; Hos 1:9; Jn 8:24; 8:28; Rev 1:4

Jl 3:5; Acts 4:10; Phil 2:11

that desert of his or her life. During those times, apparently so empty, God prepares his servants while their heart and generosity remain intact.

The Angel of Yahweh appeared to him by means of a flame of fire. The Angel of Yahweh (we know this is one way of saying Yahweh God himself: see *Visions and Angels*, Gen 16:1) presents himself as a fire that catches the eye but burns whoever approaches it.

For centuries, this mountain had been a sacred place, and Moses does what anyone would do when entering a holy place: *take off one's sandals* so as not to bring before God the dust of ordinary existence.

I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. The God Moses' ancestors called by different names is only one and his choice now falls on Moses.

I will be with you. Each time God calls people to a mission, he begins by reassuring them,

for they immediately understand that such mission will fully take possession of them: Joshua 1:5; Judges 6:12; Matthew 28:20; Luke 1:28.

I am sending you to Pharaoh. This will be the first step of Moses' mission. After delivering Israel from Egypt, he will, almost by force, impose their destiny upon them, which is to be the chosen people of God.

God speaks of bringing Israel to the *land flowing with milk and honey*, the land promised to Abraham. He does not fix the time nor give details but foretells an event that will prove the authenticity of the mission: someday, Israel, poor but free, will arrive with Moses at the Mount to meet God and receive his life-giving words.

• 14. THE DIVINE NAME

Among other people who have their own ideas about God and who search in darkness for the meaning of their destiny, Israel was to be a people who knew God according to the

will say to the Israelites: ‘YAHWEH, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me.’ That will be my name forever, and by this name they shall call upon me for all generations to come.

Moses is given his mission

¹⁶Go! Call together the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob appeared to me and said: I

have seen and taken account of how the Egyptians have treated you,¹⁷ and I mean to bring you out of all this oppression in Egypt and take you to the land of the Canaanites, a land flowing with milk and honey.’

¹⁸The elders of Israel will listen to you and, with them, you shall go to the palace of the king of Egypt and say to him: ‘The God of the Hebrews, Yahweh, has met with us. Now let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to Yahweh our God.’

truth, and who, because of this, would know wherein lies true human greatness. The revelation of the one and only God is linked to a freeing mission, and there we have the relevant character of biblical revelation. Some years earlier the Pharaoh Akinaton wished in his own way to identify the only God: his intuition got bogged down in a problem of worship and had no impact on history. The God of Moses is instead the One, Holy and Just God, who desires to be served by free persons.

I am: I AM WHO AM (v. 14). There are two ways of translating these words. The first is what we give here: God is the One who is, who alone exists without any limitation. This meaning agrees with the end of verse 14 and at the same time it gives meaning to “Yahweh.” But it could also be understood as: *I am who I am*. In this case, God does not really refuse to make known his identity to Moses, since he is going to give him his name, but he lets it be understood that no one is able to share the secret of his person.

By this name they shall call upon me (v. 15). It is evident that every name depends on the particular language in which it has its own meaning. God reveals to the Hebrews a name: Yahweh, which in their language is interpreted as: *He is*. If he had spoken to another people, God would have given another name which would have had meaning for them.

Yahweh means at the same time: *He is* and *He causes to exist*. We may understand that God is and causes to exist that which he knows. This name is directly related to the saying by God in verse 14: *I am who am* and *I am*.

I am. This is the God who *Lives and Sees* (Gen 16:13). When he wants to manifest something of his own mystery, he lets blazing fire (Ezk 1:4; Hb 3:4), windstorm and thunder

(Ex 19:16; 1 K 19:11; Ps 18:9-17), and the waves of the sea go before him. All these are nothing more than images that screen, like a cloud (1 K 8:10), God’s mystery which is infinitely more profound. This mystery transcends and reaches beyond not only human insight but the mind of any human or angelic creature.

We all receive existence from God, but God exists in himself and depends on no one and nothing whatsoever. God is One, and none of those who receive existence from him can add anything to God.

Thus, then, God is and he causes to exist the one who knows him. This revelation is critical for understanding the whole Bible and should be remembered when believers simply say, “God is Love; God is Goodness,” and forget that this alone would be false if it were not first affirmed that: God is Who Is. If God were only the Almighty, we would think of prostrating ourselves before him, set out to make war against idols, and give all importance to laws on prayer, fasting, and the good works he demands. If he were only Goodness, we would not understand why he lets us suffer.

But he said: *I Am Who Am*. God is a wholly active and perfectly free Person; and he calls us to be persons who exist in truth. Hence, God creates a world in which we can act responsibly. God does not impose good. He prefers that, through our experience and our errors, we come to discover where the true good is.

To worship God does not mean, as some believe, to lie prostrate before him, but rather to approach him face to face. God wants to be served by persons who, in turn, free others.

In presenting himself this way, the one true God has said the most essential thing. At this early stage of history he could not speak more precisely and reveal the mystery of the Divine

¹⁹I well know that the king of the Egyptians will not allow you to go unless he is forced to do so. ²⁰I will therefore stretch out my hand and strike Egypt in extraordinary ways, after which he will let you go. ²¹And I will make the Egyptians treat my people well when you leave; you will not go empty-handed. ²²Each woman will ask her neighbor, and any Egyptian woman staying in her house, to lend her ornaments of silver and gold, and clothing. With these you will clothe your sons and daughters, and in this way you will plunder the Egyptians.”

Moses granted miraculous powers

4 ¹Moses replied to Yahweh, “What if they will not believe me or listen to me? Maybe they will say: ‘That’s not true. Yahweh did not appear to you.’”

²Yahweh then asked him, “What is that in your right hand?” “A staff,” he replied. ³God said, “Throw it to the ground.” He threw it and it became a serpent; and Moses drew back from it. ⁴Yahweh said, “Take it by the tail.” Moses took it and it was again a staff in his hand. ⁵Then Yahweh said, “With such signs they may believe that Yahweh, the God of your fathers, appeared to you.”

⁶Again Yahweh said to him, “Put your hand on your chest.” He put his hand on his chest and when he took it away his hand was covered with leprosy, white as snow. ⁷And God said, “Put your hand back on your chest.” So he put it back, and when he took it away again, his hand was healthy like the rest of his body.

⁸Yahweh added, “If they don’t believe you and are not convinced by the first sign, they will believe you

Num
12:10;
2K 5:27

Mt 13:57

Persons in the same God: this would be the task of Jesus (Mt 28:19; Jn 1:18-19). Hence, for centuries, the Israelites retained the figure of a Sovereign God who spoke more the language of obedience.

Yahweh or Jehovah? In the last centuries before Jesus’ coming, the Israelites, out of respect, would not pronounce the name of Yahweh. Hence, Yahweh was changed to Yehowah in the Bible, a term which had no meaning nor was pronounced, but on seeing it, the reader knew that he should not say Yahweh, but *Edonah*, or Lord. (It had been put into the sacred consonants *YHWH* of Yahweh the three vowels e, o, a of *Edonah*).

Yahweh has met with us. Invoking religious motives (to offer sacrifices) could not hide the fact that the only objective of the Hebrew slaves was to liberate themselves from the oppression that they suffered. All this happened at a time when there was no social or political problem that was not expressed in religious terms (Ex 17:16; Num 25:16).

But today, some ask: “Does the Bible speak to us in the sense of human and political liberation, or does it rather propose a spiritual liberation?” In truth, this opposition is artificial. Experience teaches us that in order to save one’s neighbor, neither material help nor political change nor prayer is sufficient. What is

important is that persons rise to new life. To do this, they themselves must confront and solve the real problems of their common life—material, educational or political—starting with a more lucid vision of reality as God sees it, and with a more authentic love which is spiritual.

I mean to bring you out of all this oppression. God, who exists, is concerned about those who still do not exist in truth. We say that God saves human persons; and so we suppose that these are real persons and not undeveloped persons without liberty, or responsibility. Salvation is not the washing of souls but the restoration of the human person in all dimensions—individual, family and social. When speaking of liberation, the Bible always refers to a total liberation of the human person. We can study Exodus as a Life of Moses and see that he was saved—or that he grew as a person and as a believer—to the extent that he was taking charge of his material and spiritual tasks as leader liberator of his people.

• **4.1** *They will not believe me.* It is always difficult for the marginalized to unite and put their confidence in the one who can uplift them. But it will cost Israel even more to follow a path to liberation that is slow and so opposed to human wisdom. Moses usually does not care

when they see the second. ⁹But if these two signs are not enough to make them believe you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the ground; and the water from the river will turn into blood.”

Aaron, interpreter of Moses

¹⁰Moses said to Yahweh, “But, my Lord, never have I been a fluent speaker either before or after you have spoken to me. I cannot find words to express what I want to say.”

¹¹Yahweh said to him, “Who gave man a mouth? Who makes him dumb or deaf, with sight or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh? ¹²Go now. I will be on your lips and will inspire what you say.”

¹³But Moses insisted, “My Lord, I pray you, why not send someone else?” ¹⁴At this Yahweh became angry with Moses and said, “What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know he speaks well. Look! He is coming to meet you, ¹⁵and he will be glad when he sees you. You will speak to him and tell him what I have told you to say. And when you tell him, or when he speaks, I will be with you and teach you what you have to say. ¹⁶Aaron will speak for you as a prophet speaks for his god. ¹⁷And with this staff in your hand you will work miraculous signs.”

Moses returns to Egypt

¹⁸Then Moses went back to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to him, “I am going back to my brothers in Egypt to see if they are still alive.” Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace!”

¹⁹Yahweh said to Moses in the land of Midian, “Go back to Egypt for all those who wanted to kill you are dead.”

²⁰Moses took with him his wife and his sons. He put them on a donkey and set off for Egypt, holding in his hand the staff of God.

²¹Yahweh said to Moses, “You are returning to Egypt and you will perform all the miraculous signs that I have empowered you to do, in the presence of Pharaoh. I will, however, make him stubborn so that he will not let the people go. ²²You shall then say to Pharaoh: ‘This is Yahweh’s message: Israel is my first-born son, ²³and I said to you: Let my son go that he may worship me. But you have refused to let him go and, because of this, I will take the life of your first-born son.”

²⁴At a lodging place on the way, the Angel of Yahweh approached Moses and tried to kill him. ²⁵But Zipporah took a flint stone and cut her son’s foreskin and, with it, she

Jer 1:6

Dt 18:18;
Mt 10:19;
Is 6:8

Mt 2:20

Wis 10:17

Dt 1:31;
14:1;
32:6;
Hos 11:1Gen
32:25;
Num
22:22

Jos 5:2

what people think, but acts with the authority of God. This is why he receives power to perform miracles which prove his authority.

All this story is adapted to the world in which Moses lived. We find here the type of portents that were attributed to Egyptian sorcerers.

• 10. *Aaron will speak for you.* Perhaps Moses wants to flee from the call of God; perhaps he feels inferior because he does not have the human qualities that seem essential in a leader. God who calls will provide the necessary means.

To understand the role of Aaron in these events, we must remember that the Jewish priests were called “sons of Aaron”: they were

considered as his descendants. That is why Aaron who was probably Moses’ brother in a vague way just as “Miriam, sister of Aaron,” became in time his blood brother. We find him sharing the authority of Moses, and interpreting his words: in reality all that points out to the priests of Israel and establishes their authority.

• 18. Moses appears to be gravely sick: his wife thinks it is because he has not been circumcised. Therefore, according to the thinking of that time, she circumcises his son instead of him.

It may be noted that 4:19 has been taken textually in Matthew 2:20: the evangelist intends to show that Jesus is the new Moses.

touched the feet of Moses saying, “You are now my husband by blood!”
 12:13 ²⁶And the Angel left him. Zipporah said ‘husband by blood’ because of the circumcision.

Moses meets Aaron

3:1 ²⁷Yahweh said to Aaron, “Go into the desert and meet your brother, Moses.” So Aaron went and met him at the Mountain of God and kissed him. ²⁸Moses related to Aaron all that Yahweh had said to him and all the signs he had commanded him to perform. ²⁹Moses and Aaron assembled all the elders of the Israelites
 Jn 2:11 ³⁰and Aaron told them everything that Yahweh had said to Moses. He also performed all the signs before the people and they believed him. ³¹When they heard that Yahweh had visited the people of Israel and had seen their suffering, they bowed to the ground and worshiped him.

Moses speaks with Pharaoh

23:14; Lk 2:41 **5** ¹After this Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel says: ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast for me in the desert.’” ²Pharaoh replied, “Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice and let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh and I will not let Israel go.” ³They then said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Allow us to make a three days’ journey to the desert. There we shall offer sacrifices

to Yahweh, our God, lest he punish us with the plague or the sword.”
⁴The king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take people away from their work? Get back to your tasks. ⁵The people are now numerous and you are asking them to interrupt their work.”

⁶That same day Pharaoh gave the following order to the taskmasters of the people and to the Israelite foremen, ⁷“You will no longer supply the people with straw for making bricks. Let them go and find it themselves; ⁸but you will exact from them the same number of bricks as before, not one less. They are lazy and that is why they are crying out to go and sacrifice to their God. ⁹Make the work harder for the people and pay no attention to their lies.”

First difficulties

¹⁰The slave drivers and their Israelite foremen went out and said to the people, “Pharaoh will not give you any more straw. ¹¹Go and get it yourselves wherever you can find it, but the amount of work done must be the same as before.”

¹²The people scattered throughout Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. ¹³The taskmasters kept pressing them, saying, “Complete the work required of you each day, as you did when you had straw.” ¹⁴The taskmasters beat the Israelite foremen they had placed over the peo-

• **5.1** The word of God is not as easily heard in the offices of the capital as in the desert. Pharaoh’s responses and decisions seem to be the model which many contemporary directors and administrators imitate. Moses and Aaron receive a negative response and later face the mistrust of their companions.

Throughout history, we find the same opposition from those who did not want to take any initiative to liberate themselves, and did not trust in its success. They paid no attention

to the leaders working for their good. Martin Luther King, shortly before his death, said with sadness that he was shocked by the indifference of the Blacks; he felt alone in struggling for the cause of his own people.

God did not lack the means to advance his liberating work, provided that Moses would have faith and would persevere.

V. 19 Notice the embarrassment of those trusted Israelites who supervised people on behalf of the Egyptian authorities.

ple saying, “Why haven’t your people completed the same amount of work as before?”

¹⁵The Israelite foremen complained to Pharaoh saying, “Why do you treat us like this? ¹⁶We are given no straw and yet we are told to make bricks. We are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.” ¹⁷Pharaoh replied, “Lazy! You are lazy, and that is why you ask to go and sacrifice to Yahweh. ¹⁸Go back to work. You will not be given straw but you will produce the same number of bricks.”

¹⁹The Israelite foremen felt they were in great trouble. ²⁰They met Moses and Aaron who were waiting for them ²¹and said to them, “May Yahweh look upon you and judge you, because you have made us hateful to Pharaoh and his ministers, and placed in his hand a sword to kill us.”

²²Moses then turned to Yahweh and said, “O Lord! Why have you treated your people so badly? Why did you send me? ²³From the time I spoke to Pharaoh in your name, he has brought trouble on this people and you have done nothing to rescue them!”

6 ¹Yahweh said to Moses, “Now you will see that I will overcome him and oblige him to let you go, even force him to drive you out of his land.”

Another narrative of the call of Moses

• ² God spoke to Moses saying, “I am Yahweh! ³I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty, but I did not make myself known to them by the name of Yahweh. ⁴I established my cove-

nant with them promising to give them the land of Canaan, in which they lived as strangers, ⁵and now I remember my covenant as I hear the groaning of the Israelites enslaved by the Egyptians.

⁶Therefore say this to them: “I am Yahweh. I will take you away from the burden of Egypt and free you from its bondage; I will redeem you with the blows of my powerful hand. ⁷I will take you for my people and you will know that I am Yahweh your God who delivered you from the slavery of the Egyptians. ⁸I will bring you to the land I swore I would give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and I will give it to you as your own possession. I am Yahweh.”

⁹This is how Moses spoke to the people of Israel but they did not listen, so discouraged were they by their cruel slavery.

¹⁰Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, ¹¹“Go and speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt and tell him to let the people of Israel leave the country.” ¹²But Moses said, “If the Israelites paid no attention to me, how then will Pharaoh listen to me, a man who has difficulty in expressing himself?” ¹³But Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron and ordered them, and Pharaoh as well, to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt.

The forefathers of Moses and Aaron

¹⁴These were the heads of the tribes: Sons of Reuben, Israel’s first-born: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben.

¹⁵Sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon.

¹⁶These are the sons of Levi with their descendants: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Levi lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. ¹⁷Sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimai and their descendants.

¹⁸Sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. Kohath lived for a hundred and thirty-three years.

Gen 15

3:1—
4:23

Gen 17:1

• **6.2** We said in the beginning of this book that different accounts of the same events were put together. Here begins a later and more summarized story of Moses’ call. It gives a list of his ancestors. The Jewish priests attribute

to Moses a life of 120 years, that is, of three generations—a symbolic and perfect number:

- 40 years old upon leaving Egypt,
- 80 years old when he met God,
- 120 years old at his death.

¹⁹ Sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the descendants of Levi with their families.

²⁰ Amram married Jochebed, his aunt, who gave him two sons, Aaron and Moses. Amram lived a hundred and thirty-seven years.

²¹ The sons of Izhar were: Korah, Nepheg and Zichri.

²² The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan and Sithri.

²³ Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

²⁴ The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph. These are the families of the Korahites. ²⁵ Eleazar, son of Aaron, married one of Putiel's daughters and Phinehas was their son.

These are the heads of the families of the Levites according to their clans.

²⁶ It was to Aaron and Moses that Yahweh said, "Bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt in divisions."

²⁷ It was they who spoke with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, about bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. Yes, it was Moses and Aaron.

²⁸ When Yahweh spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹ he said, "I am Yahweh. Say to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, all that I tell you." ³⁰ But Moses replied, "I am a poor speaker and why would Pharaoh listen to me?"

Announcement of the plagues

4:16

7 ¹ Yahweh said to Moses, "See, I have made you like a god in Pharaoh's eyes; and Aaron, your brother, will be your prophet. ² You will tell Aaron all that I command you, and he will tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel leave the country. ³ But I will make him stubborn and

Ps 135:9

although I multiply my signs and miracles, ⁴ he will not listen to you. Then I will use my power and lead my armies, my people, the Israelites out of Egypt by means of great punishments. ⁵ Then will the Egyptians know that I am Yahweh when they see with what power I bring the people of Israel out of their country."

⁶ Moses and Aaron did exactly what Yahweh had commanded. ⁷ Moses was eighty and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

⁸ Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, ⁹ "When Pharaoh speaks to you and tells you to perform a miracle to prove the truth of what you say, you will say to Aaron: 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.'"

¹⁰ Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did what Yahweh had commanded. Aaron threw his staff before Pharaoh and his ministers, and it became a snake.

¹¹ Pharaoh then summoned wise men and magicians, and they, too, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by means of their secret arts. ¹² Each one threw his staff down and the staffs became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed the staffs of the magicians. ¹³ However, Pharaoh was obstinate and he did not listen to them, as Yahweh had said.

2Tim 3:8

The plagues of Egypt

• ¹⁴ Yahweh said to Moses, "Pharaoh is stubborn; he has refused to let the people leave. ¹⁵ So you will go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes to the water. Wait for him on the bank of the river and hold in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. ¹⁶ You will say to him, 'Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to say to you: 'Let my people go to worship me in the desert; but so far you have not lis-

Ps 78:44;
Wis
11:6-8;
Is 15:9

• **7.14** Here we have the plagues of Egypt. The paragraphs which come from the most ancient story narrate 7 plagues. The other story, the Elohist's, gives 9. The third story adds the plague of ulcers.

The biblical writers knew that the power of evil also performs miracles to obscure the interventions of God. Note these details: 7:11-12; 8:3; 8:14; 9:10.

Chapter 10 describes the reactions of people who recognize the signs of God without arriving at true conversion.

Regarding the plagues or misfortunes of Egypt, the modern reader will ask three things:

– Did these stupendous miracles to bring harm upon the Egyptians really happen?

– If these plagues were merely natural phenomena, should we consider any misfortune as a punishment from God?

– Were the Egyptian peasants or citizens responsible for the politics of Pharaoh, and did they deserve to be punished?

With regard to the first question, we know that for centuries these stories were narrated

Rev 8:8; 16:3 tened. ¹⁷By this you shall learn that I am Yahweh: Look, I will strike the water of the Nile with the staff I have in my hand, and it will turn into blood! ¹⁸The fish in the river will die and the Nile will become foul, and the Egyptians will no longer be able to drink its water.”

Rev 16:4-7 ¹⁹Yahweh said to Moses, “Say to Aaron: ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, rivers, canals, ponds and pools of water; and they will turn into blood. There will be blood throughout Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone.’” ²⁰Moses and Aaron did as Yahweh had commanded.

Aaron raised his staff and struck the waters of the Nile, in the presence of Pharaoh and his ministers, and all the water in the Nile turned to blood. ²¹The fish in the river died and the Nile was contaminated so that the Egyptians could no longer drink the water of the Nile.

There was blood all over the country of Egypt. ²²The Egyptian magicians, however, could do the same with their secret crafts, and Pharaoh remained unmoved; and, as Yahweh had foretold, he would not listen to Moses and Aaron.

²³Pharaoh returned to his house as if nothing of importance had happened. ²⁴And yet all the Egyptians were digging near the Nile for water to drink because they could not drink from the river.

The second plague: the frogs

Rev 16:13 ²⁵Seven days passed after Yahweh had struck the Nile. ²⁶Yahweh said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and tell him that Yahweh says, ‘Let my people go to worship me! ²⁷If you refuse to let them leave, I will punish the country with a plague of

frogs. ²⁸The Nile will teem with frogs. They will invade your house, your bedroom and your bed, your servants’ and your people’s houses, your ovens and your kneading bowls. ²⁹Over you and your people the frogs will climb.”

8 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses, “Say to Aaron: Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, canals and ponds of Egypt ²and cause frogs to cover all the country of Egypt.” ³The magicians of Egypt did the same by means of their secret formulas, and they brought frogs over the land of Egypt!

⁴Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Ask Yahweh to remove the frogs from me and my people and I will send your people to sacrifice to Yahweh.” ⁵But Moses replied, “Let me know, please, when I am to make the petition for you, your officials and your people that you may be rid of frogs except in the Nile.” ⁶Pharaoh answered, “Tomorrow”; and Moses said, “Right, and that you may know that there is no one like Yahweh, our God, ⁷the frogs will disappear from you and your house, your servants and your people; only in the Nile will they remain.” ⁸With this Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh.

Then Moses called on Yahweh concerning the frogs that he had inflicted on Pharaoh. ⁹Yahweh did as Moses had promised Pharaoh and the frogs died in the houses, the farms and the fields. ¹⁰The people piled them in heaps and the land was filled with a foul smell. ¹¹Now that relief had come, Pharaoh became even more stubborn and would not listen, just as Yahweh had foretold.

The third plague: the mosquitoes

¹²Yahweh said to Moses, “Tell Aaron

Ps
78:45;
105:30;
Rev
16:13

Sir 45:3

and amplified by the Israelites. They were meant to show that through these natural misfortunes common in Egypt: the locusts, the Red Nile, frogs—God manifested his will to Pharaoh.

With regard to the second, see the commentary on Luke 13:1. God warns us through signs. National leaders, if they would open their eyes to the evils that afflict their country, would realize that injustices will be paid for dearly.

With regard to the third question, let us not

forget that the sacred authors shared the culture of their times. They were not concerned about whether it was the Egyptians or Pharaoh himself who had sinned in opposing Moses. They only saw that they opposed God’s design and must therefore be vanquished: that is what they expressed with the word “punished.” They were not concerned about the fate of the Egyptian peasant. For them, Egypt represented the unjust Power, and Pharaoh, the Enemy of God.

to strike the dust of the earth with his staff and turn it into mosquitoes throughout the land.”¹³ Aaron did this; he struck the dust of the earth which turned into mosquitoes that tormented people and animals. All the dust of the earth all over Egypt turned into mosquitoes.¹⁴ But when the magicians tried, by means of their secret formulas, to drive away the mosquitoes, they were not able to do so, and the mosquitoes kept tormenting people and animals.¹⁵ The magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God”; but Pharaoh was unmoved and did not listen, as Yahweh had foretold.

Lk 11:20

The fourth plague: the horseflies

¹⁶Yahweh said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and go to Pharaoh, when he is on his way to the river. Say to him: This is Yahweh’s message: Let my people go and worship me.”¹⁷ If you refuse to let them go, I will send horseflies on you, on your officials and on your people and your houses. The houses of the Egyptians will be filled with horseflies and even the ground on which they are built.¹⁸ But on that day I will spare the land of Goshen where my people are. No horseflies will be there and by this you may know that I, Yahweh, am in the land.¹⁹ I will make a distinction between my people and your people. By tomorrow this will have happened.”

Gen 47:1

²⁰Yahweh did this and dense swarms of horseflies invaded Pharaoh’s house and the houses of all his people and devastated the whole country.

²¹Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Go and sacrifice to your God in this country.”²² But Moses replied, “That would not be right. We offer to our God animals which are sacred for the Egyptians. If we were to offer in their presence a sacrifice which offends the Egyptians, wouldn’t they stone us?”²³ We must make a three-day journey into the desert and there we will sacrifice to Yahweh, our God, as he commands.”

²⁴Pharaoh replied, “I will let you go and sacrifice to your God in the desert, but on condition that you do not go far. And pray to God for me!”

²⁵Moses said, “I am leaving you and I will pray to Yahweh for you, and tomorrow the horseflies will leave you, your officials and your people, but do not con-

tinue to deceive us by refusing to let the people go to the desert.”²⁶ Moses left Pharaoh’s house and prayed to Yahweh²⁷ who did as Moses had asked, and delivered Pharaoh, his officers and people from the horseflies. Not one horsefly was left.

²⁸But Pharaoh was relentless and refused to let the people go.

The fifth plague: death of Egyptian livestock

9¹Yahweh said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is the message of Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go and offer sacrifices to me.’² If you refuse to let them go and hold them back any longer, ³the hand of Yahweh will bring a terrible plague on your horses, your donkeys and your camels, on your cattle and your sheep.”⁴ But Yahweh will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt. Nothing belonging to the people of Israel will die.”

Am 4:10

⁵Yahweh then fixed a time and said, “It will be done tomorrow.”⁶ Yahweh did this the following day; all the livestock belonging to the Egyptians died, but not one owned by the Israelites died.⁷ Pharaoh made inquiries and in fact found that none of the cattle belonging to the Israelites had died. But Pharaoh remained adamant and did not let the people go.

The sixth plague: the boils

⁸Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, “Take two handfuls of ashes from the brick oven and let Moses throw it up in the air in front of Pharaoh’s eyes.”⁹ It will become fine dust all over Egypt and bring festering boils on people and animals.”¹⁰ So they took ashes from the oven and, in the presence of Pharaoh, Moses threw it up in the air and it brought festering boils on people and animals.¹¹ And the magicians could not stand before Moses because they had boils like all the other Egyptians.

Rev 16:2

¹²But Yahweh made Pharaoh stubborn and he did not listen to Moses and Aaron as Yahweh had foretold.

The seventh plague: the hail

¹³Yahweh said to Moses, “Rise early; present yourself to Pharaoh and say to

him: 'This is the message of Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews: Send my people away to worship me ¹⁴because this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you, your ministers and your people, that you may know there is no one like me in the whole world. ¹⁵For had I wished, I could have raised my hand against you and your people, and with a similar pestilence wiped you from the face of the earth. ¹⁶But this is why I have let you live: that you may witness my power and that my name may be celebrated throughout the earth. ¹⁷Are you still set against my people leaving the country? ¹⁸Tomorrow at this time I will send very heavy hail such as has never been in Egypt from the day of its foundation. ¹⁹So now let all your livestock and all that you have in the fields take shelter, because when the hail falls on all that remains in the fields, whether people or animals, they will die.'" ²⁰Those among Pharaoh's officials who believed Yahweh's word hurried to bring their slaves and cattle inside; ²¹but those who paid no attention to Yahweh's warning left their slaves and their cattle in the fields.

²²Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand towards heaven and let hail fall throughout Egypt on people and animals, and all that grows in the field." ²³Moses stretched out his staff towards heaven and Yahweh sent thunder and hail; lightning struck the earth ²⁴and Yahweh rained hail on the land of Egypt: lightning flashed in the midst of the hail. It was very heavy hail such as had never been known in all Egypt from the time it had first become a nation.

²⁵Throughout Egypt the hail struck everything in the fields, both people and animals. It beat down everything growing in the fields and felled every tree. ²⁶But where the Israelites lived there was no hail.

²⁷Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Now it is clear I have

sinned. Yahweh is in the right; I and my people are in the wrong. ²⁸Pray Yahweh to stop the thunder and hail! I will let you go, and no longer will you stay here."

²⁹Moses said to him, "As soon as I leave the town I will lift my hands towards Yahweh; the thunder will cease and there will be no more hail, and you will know that the earth is Yahweh's. ³⁰But as for you and your officials, I know that you don't yet fear Yahweh, our God." ³¹The flax and the barley were ruined, as the barley was almost ripe and the flax was in flower, ³²but the wheat and the spelt which are late crops were not destroyed.

³³Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city and raised his hands towards Yahweh. The thunder and hail ceased and it stopped raining. ³⁴Pharaoh, seeing that there was no rain and that the thunder and hail had ceased, sinned yet again. ³⁵He and his ministers remained unyielding and would not let the Israelites go, just as Yahweh had foretold through Moses.

The eighth plague: the locusts

10 • ¹Yahweh said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh for I have made him stubborn and his ministers as well, in order to show my signs among them, ²and that you may tell your grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and about the signs I worked among them, and that you may know that I am Yahweh."

³Moses went with Aaron and said to Pharaoh, "This is the word of Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews: 'How much longer will you refuse to submit to me? Let my people go and worship me. ⁴If you refuse to let my people go, I will bring locusts into your country ⁵and they will completely cover the surface of the land. They will devour what was left after the hail as well as every tree in the fields. ⁶They will fill your house and the houses of your ministers and all the houses in

Rom 9:17

Rev 8:7;
16:21;
Ezk
38:22Num
22:34Rev 9:3;
Jl 1:2;
Nh 3:1512:26;
Dt 4:9

• **10.1** *I have made him stubborn.* In fact the text says: *I hardened him*, or *I let his heart harden*. But the heart for the Hebrews is the place where decisions are made (as the head is for us); that does not mean to say that God poisoned the heart of Pharaoh. Pharaoh

stubbornly persists: that is what God wanted, and it becomes part of his plan to take advantage of the obstacles opposing it. The author surely did not want to confront the problem of human freedom with the all-powerful God.

Egypt, something your fathers and their fathers before them have never seen from ancient times to this day.” Having said this, Moses turned away and left Pharaoh’s presence.

⁷Pharaoh’s ministers said to him, “For how long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go and worship Yahweh, their God. Don’t you realize that Egypt is ruined?”

⁸So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said, “Go! Worship Yahweh, your God. But exactly who are to go?” ⁹Moses said, “We shall go with our young and our old, with our sons and daughters, with our sheep and our cattle, for it is the great feast of Yahweh that we are to celebrate.” ¹⁰Pharaoh said, “May Yahweh help you if ever I let you go with your little ones! Oh no! It’s clear you are bent on evil. ¹¹No! Only the men will offer sacrifice to Yahweh, if that is what you want!” And they were driven away from Pharaoh’s presence.

¹²Yahweh said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand and bring locusts to the land of Egypt. Let them eat every plant in the land, everything that was left after the hail.” ¹³So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt. All that day and night Yahweh brought an east wind over the land and in the morning the east wind brought the locusts. ¹⁴They came and settled on the land in such quantities as had never been seen before and will never be seen again. ¹⁵They covered the sky of Egypt and the earth was in darkness. They devoured all the vegetation in the land and all the fruit of the trees left after the hail. Nothing green remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, in all the land of Egypt.

¹⁶Because of all this Pharaoh hastened to summon Moses and Aaron and said to them, “I have sinned against Yahweh, your God, and against you. ¹⁷Forgive my sin, I pray you, at least for once and ask Yahweh, your God, for a final favor: to rid me of this deadly plague.”

¹⁸Moses left Pharaoh and interceded with Yahweh ¹⁹who brought a very strong

wind from the west that carried off the locusts and swept them into the Red Sea. Not one locust was left within the boundaries of Egypt.

²⁰But Yahweh let Pharaoh be stubborn and he would not allow the Israelites to leave.

The ninth plague: the darkness

²¹Yahweh said to Moses, “Stretch your hand towards heaven and let darkness descend on the land of Egypt, a darkness so dense that it can be felt.” ²²Moses stretched out his hand towards heaven and instantly black darkness covered the land of Egypt for three days. ²³They could not see each other and they could not move about for three days, but where the sons of Israel lived, there was light. ²⁴Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, “Go and worship Yahweh, you and your children with you; leave only your flocks and herds behind!” ²⁵Moses said, “Are you going to give us animals for our sacrifices and burnt offerings? ²⁶No! Our cattle to the last hoof must also go with us, for it is from our livestock that we will choose the victims we will offer to Yahweh. Moreover we shall not know which ones we must sacrifice until we arrive at that place.”

²⁷But Yahweh let Pharaoh be stubborn and Pharaoh would not let them go.

²⁸Pharaoh said to Moses, “Get out of my sight! Take care! Never come before me again, for the day you do, you will die!” ²⁹Moses said, “It is as you say, I shall never come before you again.”

The tenth plague: the death of the first-born

11 ¹Yahweh said to Moses, “I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and Egypt. After that he will send you away and even drive you away completely. ²Speak to the people and tell them that both men and women are to ask their neighbors for articles of silver and gold.”

Wis
17:1–
18:4

Ps
105:28;
Rev 16:10

Rev 9:3

• **11.1** *All the first-born in Egypt shall die.* The tenth plague nears: the “Angel of Yahweh” will make the sons of the Egyptians die. Very possibly, as in 2 Kings 19:25, this

was some epidemic or plague. At this very time, the meal of the paschal lamb will be celebrated.

³Yahweh disposed the Egyptians favorably towards the people. Moses, moreover, was regarded as a person of importance in Egypt both by Pharaoh's ministers and by the people.

⁴Moses said, "This is Yahweh's message: 'About midnight, I shall go through Egypt ⁵and all the first-born in Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who is heir to the throne, to the first-born of the servant behind the mill and the first-born of the animals. ⁶There will be great wailing throughout all Egypt, such as has never been before and never will be again. ⁷But among the Israelites not a dog will howl for the death of either man or beast. This is that you may understand that Yahweh makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

⁸All these ministers of yours will come down to me and bow before me saying, 'Go, you and all who follow you!' After that I will leave." And turning in anger he left Pharaoh.

⁹Yahweh said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, and so the wonders that I do in Egypt will be multiplied."

¹⁰Moses and Aaron had worked all these marvels in the presence of Pharaoh, but Yahweh had made Pharaoh obstinate and he would not let the people of Israel leave his country.

The Passover

12 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt

and said, ²"This month is to be the beginning of all months, the first month of your year. ³Speak to the community of Israel and say to them:

On the tenth day of this month let each family take a lamb, a lamb for each house. ⁴If the family is too small for a lamb, they must join with a neighbor, the nearest to the house, according to the number of persons and to what each one can eat.

⁵You will select a perfect lamb without blemish, a male born during the present year, taken from the sheep or goats. ⁶Then you will keep it until the fourteenth day of the month.

On that evening all the people will slaughter their lambs ⁷and take some of the blood to put on the doorposts and on top of the doorframes of the houses where you eat.

⁸That night you will eat the flesh roasted at the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

⁹Do not eat the meat lightly cooked or boiled in water but roasted entirely over the fire—the head, the legs and the inner parts. ¹⁰Do not leave any of it until the morning. If any is left till morning, burn it in the fire.

¹¹And this is how you will eat: with a belt round your waist, sandals on your feet and a staff in your hand. You shall eat hastily for it is a passover in honor of Yahweh. ¹²On that night I shall go through Egypt and strike every first-born in Egypt,

Lev 23:
5-8;
Num 9:1;
28:16-25;
Dt 16:1-8

Lev 22:19;
35:7

Is 6:10;
Jn 12:37

1P 1:13;
Lk 22:15;
1Cor 5:7

5:1;
10:24;
Mt 26:17;
Lk 22:
15-16

• **12.1** *Let each family take a lamb.* The ancestors of the Hebrews, when wandering with their flocks before they stayed in Egypt, celebrated each year the Pasch of the Lamb, the traditional feast of the shepherds. They sacrificed a lamb on the first moon of spring (v. 2) a critical period for the ewes which had just given birth. The lamb set aside for the feast was kept for several days in the same place

where the people were (v. 6) so that it could be better identified with the family and carry the sins of all its members. Later, the camping tents were sprinkled with its blood to drive away the "deadly" spirits that threatened people and animals.

The sense of the ancient feast has changed. It must be understood that God established the Passover at the time of the exodus from Egypt:

men and animals; and I will even bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt, I, Yahweh! ¹³ The blood on your houses will be the sign that you are there. I will see the blood and pass over you; and you will escape the mortal plague when I strike Egypt.

Jos 5:10;
2K 23:21;
Ezk
45:21

¹⁴ This is a day you are to remember and celebrate in honor of Yahweh. It is to be kept as a festival day for all generations forever.

The feast of the unleavened bread

23:15;
34:18;
1Cor 5:7

• ¹⁵ For seven days you are to eat unleavened bread. From the first day you are to remove all leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first to the seventh day will no longer live in Israel. ¹⁶ On the first day there will be a sacred reunion and another on the seventh. No work is to be done on these days except what is necessary in the preparation of food.

¹⁷ Celebrate the feast of unleavened bread, because on that day I brought your armies out of Egypt. Celebrate it in future generations as an everlasting ordinance. ¹⁸ In the first month, from the four-

teenth day in the evening to the twenty-first, you are to eat unleavened bread. ¹⁹ For seven days there will be no leaven in your houses. Anyone who eats what is leavened will be cut off from the community of Israel whether foreigner or native born. ²⁰ Nothing leavened is to be eaten; only unleavened bread is to be eaten.”

• ²¹ Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Select and take one animal for each family and slaughter the Passover lamb. ²² Take a twig of hyssop dipped in its blood and sprinkle the blood on the doorposts and the top of the doorframe: from then on no one will go out of the door of the house before morning. ²³ Because Yahweh will pass through to strike Egypt and when he sees the blood on the lintel and the doorposts, he will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to enter your houses and kill. ²⁴ You and your descendants shall observe these instructions as an everlasting ordinance; ²⁵ you will carry out this

1K 6:33;
Ps 51:9;
Heb 9:19

Gen
19:13;
2S 24:16;
Heb 11:28

it would always be there to remind Israel of its liberation.

• 15. Centuries later, when Israel became an agricultural people, it was traditional to celebrate yearly, in the spring, a weeklong feast during which they ate unleavened bread. This feast was of pagan origin but the Jewish priests, instead of opposing this practice, preferred to combine it with the feast of the Passover and give it a new meaning by relating it to the exit from Egypt. This unleavened bread would call to mind the hurried flight when the Israelites lacked time to leaven their bread.

• 21. Here we find other more ancient instructions on how to celebrate the Passover.

In sparing the first-born sons of Israel, God again declares his formal opposition to human sacrifice (Gen 22). Certainly the first-born of his people belonged to him (13:1) as did the first-born of the animals and the first fruits of the land (Dt 26:2); but since God himself had spared the first-born of Israel when leaving Egypt, every first-born in Israel would be redeemed, rather than immolated (Ex 13:13).

Henceforth, the Israelite families would consider their first-born as belonging and consecrated to Yahweh (Ex 13:1), for they had been saved from the plague. According to this law, Jesus, the first-born of Mary and of God, would be presented in the Temple (Lk 2:22).

It is the sacrifice of the Passover for Yahweh. (v. 27). This feast coming from most ancient times will acquire a new meaning: the blood of the lamb seals Yahweh’s covenant with the people whom he had chosen from among the other peoples. Henceforth, the Passover will be the feast of Israel’s independence, and God will allow Jesus to die and rise again in the days of the Passover. The death of Jesus seals God’s New Covenant with humanity (Lk 22:20).

Each one of our masses is rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ, “the lamb of God.” Does it help us to enter more deeply into our vocation to be at the service of a world that God continues to free? That takes us far from the idea of an onerous religious obligation to be carried out.

ceremony when you enter the land that Yahweh will give you, as he promised. ²⁶And when your children ask you: 'What does this ceremony mean?' ²⁷you will tell them: It is the sacrifice of the Passover for Yahweh who passed over the houses of the Israelites when he struck Egypt and spared our houses."

When the people heard this they bowed down and worshiped. ²⁸Then they went away and did what Yahweh had ordered Moses and Aaron.

Death of the first-born

²⁹It happened that in the middle of the night Yahweh struck down all the first-born in Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh, heir to the throne, to the first-born of the prisoner in the dungeon and the first-born of all the animals. ³⁰Pharaoh, his officials and all the Egyptians got up in the night and there was loud wailing in Egypt for there was no house without a death.

³¹Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron in the night and said, "Get up and go from among my people, you and the people of Israel. Go and worship Yahweh as you have said!

³²Take your sheep and your cattle, as you told me, and go! provided that the blessing be for me as well."

³³The Egyptians, too, pressed the people to leave the country in all haste. For they said, "If they don't go, we are all going to die."

³⁴So the Israelites carried away on their shoulders the dough which had not yet risen, and their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks.

³⁵They did as Moses had instructed them and borrowed from the Egyptians articles of gold and silver and clothes. ³⁶Yahweh made the Egyptians agree to the requests of his people and give them what they asked for. In this way they plundered the Egyptians.

Israel departs

• ³⁷*The Israelites left Rameses for Succoth, about six hundred thousand of them on the march, counting the men only, and not the children.*

³⁸*A great number of other people of all descriptions went with them, as well as sheep and cattle in droves.*

³⁹*With the dough they had brought with them from Egypt, they made cakes of unleavened bread. It had not risen, for when they were driven from Egypt they could not delay and had not even provided themselves with food.*

⁴⁰*The Israelites had been in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years.*

⁴¹*It was at the end of these four hundred and thirty years to the very day that the armies of Yahweh left Egypt.*

⁴²*This is the watch for Yahweh who brought Israel out of Egypt. This night is for Yahweh, and all the Is-*

Num 14:6;
33:3

Num 11:4

Gen
15:13;
Gal 3:17;
Acts 7:6

13:8;
Dt 6:20;
Jos 4:6

Ps 78:51;
136:10;
Wis
18:6-19

• ³⁷. *People of all descriptions* (v. 38). The wandering Israelites did not look like a holy people. There were those who, for diverse reasons, had decided to leave with Moses. The Savior catches all in his net and only with time, through the trials of the desert, will the good and the bad be separated.

Six hundred thousand. In reality, those who left with Moses could not have been more than some two hundred persons, including wives and children. Let us not forget that these were shepherds who could not survive with less than ten animals per person. A group of

two hundred persons required some two thousand sheep and donkeys. The wells of Sinai and their oases did not permit the transit of more numerous flocks. Maybe these exaggerations originated from a popular version of the events, but otherwise they were intentional. The priests who wrote that paragraph were conscious that the people of Moses initiated the long march of God's people all along the history, and this is the message they wanted to transmit to us: Moses' departure was the beginning of a great venture.

raelites are also to keep vigil on this night, year after year, for all time.

Ordinances for the Passover

⁴³Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, “These are the precepts for the celebration of the Passover. No foreigner is to eat it, ⁴⁴except the slave who has been circumcised after having been bought. ⁴⁵He may eat it. But not so the temporary resident or the hired worker. ⁴⁶The lamb must be eaten inside the house and nothing of it shall be taken outside. Do not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷All the community of Israel will observe this rite.

⁴⁸If a guest is staying with you and wants to celebrate the Passover of Yahweh, he must have all the males in his household circumcised. Then he may take part like one born in the land, but no uncircumcised man may participate. ⁴⁹The law is the same for the native and the stranger living with you.”

⁵⁰All the people of Israel did as Yahweh had commanded Moses and Aaron, ⁵¹and that same day Yahweh brought out the sons of Israel and their armies from the land of Egypt.

Offering of the first-born

13 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, ²“Consecrate to me every first-born: the first to leave the womb among the sons of Israel, whether of man or beast, is mine.”

³Moses said to the people, “Remember the day you came out of Egypt from the house of slavery, for it was by his power that Yahweh brought you out; because of this you will not eat leavened bread.

⁴The day you left was in the month of Abib. ⁵When Yahweh brings you to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey which he swore to your fathers to give you—you will carry out this ceremony.

⁶For seven days you will eat unleavened bread and on the seventh day you will hold a feast in honor of Yahweh. ⁷You

will eat unleavened bread for seven days and no leavened bread is to be seen among you or anywhere throughout all your territory. ⁸On that day you will tell your son: ‘I do this because of what Yahweh did for me when I came out of Egypt.’

⁹This ceremony will be for you as a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead, so that Yahweh’s law may be ever on your lips, for it was with great power that Yahweh brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰Because of this you will observe this ordinance at the appointed time from year to year.

¹¹When Yahweh brings you to the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he swore to you and your ancestors, ¹²you are to give over to Yahweh all that first opens the womb, and every first-born of your cattle as well. These first-born that are males are for Yahweh.

¹³Every first-born donkey will be redeemed by a lamb, and if you do not redeem it, you are to break its neck. Every first-born among your sons you are to redeem. ¹⁴When in the future your son questions you as to what it means you will say: ‘Yahweh, by his power brought us out of Egypt from the house of slavery. ¹⁵As Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, Yahweh slew every first-born in Egypt, of man and beast. That is why I sacrifice to Yahweh all the males of my cattle that first open the womb, but the first-born of my sons, I redeem.’

¹⁶It will be as a sign on your hand and a charm between your eyes, reminding you that the power of Yahweh brought us out of Egypt.”

The departure

¹⁷It happened that when Pharaoh sent the people away, God did not lead them through the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer, for God thought that the people might lose heart if they were faced with the prospect of a battle and would return to Egypt. ¹⁸God therefore led the people by the way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea. So the Israelites left Egypt in an orderly manner.

12:26

22:28;
34:19Num 3:12;
18:15;
Dt 15:19;
Lk 2:23;
Gen 22Num
14:14

• **13.4** As a sign on your hand (vv. 9 and 16). The other peoples used tatoos and religious objects to affirm their religious identity.

The Israelites, instead, would be recognized by the celebration of the day on which God saved them.

Gen
50:25;
Jos
24:32

¹⁹Moses took with him the bones of Joseph for he had made the Israelites swear saying, “God will surely remember you and then you will carry my bones with you away from here.”

²⁰They moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham bordering the wilderness. ²¹By day Yahweh went before them in a pillar of cloud to guide them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, enabling them to travel day and night. ²²Neither the cloud by day nor the fire by night, disappeared from the sight of the people.

Dt 1:33;
Is 4:5;
52:12;
60:19;
Ps 78:14;
Wis
10:17;
18:3;
Jn 8:12

The Egyptians pursue the Israelites

14 ¹Then Yahweh said to Moses, ²“Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, facing Baalzephon. You will encamp opposite this place and near the sea. ³So Pharaoh will think that the people of Israel have lost their way, and the wilderness has closed in on them. ⁴Then I will make Pharaoh’s heart stubborn so that he will pursue you. And I will draw glory for myself at the cost of Pharaoh and his army, and the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh!”

9:16;
10:2

And the Israelites did as they had been instructed.

Crossing of the Red Sea

• ⁵The king of Egypt was told that the people had fled; then Pharaoh and his ministers changed their minds with regard to the people. “What have we done,” they said, “in allowing Israel to go and be free of our service?” ⁶Pharaoh prepared his chariot and took his army with him. ⁷There were six hundred of his best chariots; indeed he took all the Egyptian chariots, each one with his warriors.

⁸Yahweh had hardened the mind of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who set out in pursuit of the Israelites as they marched forth triumphantly. ⁹The Egyptians—all the chariots and horses of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army—gave chase and caught up with them when they had encamped by the sea near Pihahiroth, facing Baalzephon.

¹⁰The Israelites saw the Egyptians marching after them: Pharaoh was drawing near. They were terrified and cried out to Yahweh. ¹¹Then they said to Moses, “Were there no tombs in Egypt? Why have you brought us to

15:24;
16:3;
17:3;
Num 14;
Ps 78:40

• **14.5** On the very night on which they have sacrificed the Passover Lamb, the Hebrews depart. The Egyptians pursue and overtake them when they reach the marshes along the Red Sea (13:17).

Have no fear. God will not abandon those who set forth on the way to freedom. Moses answers as if he has seen the invisible (Heb 11:27), and his faith puts into motion God’s intervention.

Yahweh made a strong east wind blow. In fact, the oldest biblical story about this is very imprecise. It does not say that the Israelites crossed the sea but that they saw their pursuers dead on the seashore (14:30).

God’s intervention was perhaps very moderate: a landslide, a sudden rising of the waters? It was sufficient to save the pursued. But this intervention by Providence, as with so many others in history, would not have changed anything had not God’s prophet Moses been there to tell the meaning of this event: Yahweh liberates Israel to make them his own people.

This is what the later account (printed in smaller letters) wants to teach us when it relates this crossing of the sea in such a triumphalistic way. Here Moses’ group passed in well-ordered file *between two walls of water!* A band of fugitives? Absolutely! They were the *armies of Yahweh* (12:41). With them, the God of the poor was beginning to remake the world.

The liberation of Israel remains a model for Christian history. Here we find other victories, great and small, that have made possible the progress of God’s Kingdom and Justice. In these cases, too, there were groups committed to a liberating task, who, without arms, faced Pharaoh and his chariots, his officers, politicians and bureaucrats.

Those who cross to the other shore are not the same as before: the existence of the People of God has begun. Paul would write about it later: “All underwent the baptism of the land and of the sea” (1 Cor 10:2), that is to say, they safely crossed the deadly waters, thanks to God now present in the Cloud. The Cloud

the desert to die? ¹²What have you done by bringing us out of Egypt? Isn't this what we said when we were in Egypt: Let us work for the Egyptians. Far better serve Egypt than to die in the desert!"

¹³Moses said to the people, "Have no fear! Stay where you are and see the work Yahweh will do to save you today. The Egyptians whom you see today, you will never see again!

¹⁴Yahweh will fight for you and all you have to do is to keep still."

¹⁵Yahweh said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶You will raise your staff and stretch your hand over the sea and divide it to let the Israelites go dryfoot through the sea. ¹⁷I will so harden the minds of the Egyptians that they will follow you. ¹⁸And I will have glory at the expense of Pharaoh, his army, his chariots and horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh when I gain glory for myself at the cost of Pharaoh and his army!"

¹⁹The Angel of God who had gone ahead of the Israelites now placed himself behind them. The pillar of cloud changed its position ²⁰from the front to the rear, between the camps of the Israelites and the Egyptians. For one army the cloud provided light, for the other darkness so that throughout the night the armies drew no closer to each other. ²¹Moses stretched his hand over the sea and Yahweh made a strong east wind blow all night and dry up the sea.

The waters divided ²²and the sons of Israel went on dry ground through the

Is 43:16;
44:27;
50:2;
Ps 77:
17-19;
78:13;
106:9;
114;
Wis 10:18;
1Cor 10:1;
Heb
11:29;
Rev 21:1

middle of the sea, with the waters forming a wall to their right and to their left. ²³The Egyptians followed them and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and horsemen moved forward in the middle of the sea.

²⁴It happened that in the morning watch, Yahweh in the pillar of cloud and fire, looked towards the Egyptian camp and threw it into confusion. ²⁵He so clogged their chariot wheels that they could hardly move. Then the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites for Yahweh is fighting for them against Egypt."

²⁶Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Stretch your hand over the sea and let the waters come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and horsemen." ²⁷Moses stretched out his hand over the sea.

At daybreak the sea returned to its place. As the Egyptians tried to flee, Yahweh swept them into the sea.

²⁸The waters flowed back and engulfed the chariots and horsemen of the whole army of Pharaoh that had followed Israel into the sea. Not one of them escaped. ²⁹As for the Israelites they went forward on dry ground in the middle of the sea, the waters forming a wall on their right and their left.

³⁰On that day Yahweh delivered Israel from the power of the Egyptians and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore. ³¹They understood what wonders Yahweh had done for them against Egypt, and the people feared Yahweh. They believed in Yahweh and in Moses, his servant.

DI 11:4

signifies that Yahweh, in a mysterious way is in the midst of his own, leading the "baptized" people.

We ought also to cross the sea. Christian communities, recent converts, let us leave behind an existence in which we lived alienated

lives, and let us discover a new meaning in life. We cannot do this alone, but together with the community as it matures.

Crossing of the sea. Baptism and liberation. See Hebrews 11:23-40; 1 Peter 1:13-15; Revelation 7:13-17; 12:10-12.

15

- ¹Then Moses and the people sang this song to Yahweh:

I will sing to Yahweh, the glorious one,
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

²Yahweh is my strength and my song,
and he is my salvation.

He is my God and I will praise him;
the God of my father: I will extol him.

³Yahweh is a warrior; Yahweh is his name.

⁴The chariots of Pharaoh and his army
he has hurled into the sea;
his chosen officers were drowned in the Red Sea.

⁵The deep covers them;
they went down like a stone.

⁶Your hand, O Yahweh, glorious and powerful,
your right hand, O Yahweh, shatters the enemy.

⁷In the splendor of your majesty you crush your foes;
you send forth your fury, which devours them like stubble.

⁸At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,
the surging waters stood firm in a heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

⁹The enemy said, "I will give chase and overtake,
I will divide the spoil and make a feast of it."
I shall draw my sword and my hand will destroy them."

¹⁰A breath of yours and the sea covered them;
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

¹¹Who among the gods is like you, Yahweh?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in power, doing wonders?

¹²You stretched out your right hand;
the earth swallowed them.

¹³In unfailing love you guided the people you redeemed,
in strength you led them to your holy house.

¹⁴Hearing this, the nations tremble;
anguish grips the people of Philistia.

Is 43:16;
Ps
106:12;
Rev 15:3

Is 12:2

Jer
51:63;
Rev
18:21

Is 5:24;
Nh 1:10

Dt 3:24;
Ps 86:8

• **15.1** The first canticle of Moses is a shout of joyful thanksgiving. It is, at the same time, a profession of faith. The psalmist says: "Happy are the people who know how to praise."

The liberated people had no reason to glory in themselves at this victory which belonged to God and to Moses, the man of faith. It is proper for them only to give thanks to God.

Revelation will recall this canticle (Rev 15:3) in the vision of the elect and martyrs of Christ, saved from their weakness and crowned with glory.

The ancient religions (and also modern people) celebrate feasts in accordance with the rhythm of nature: feasts of the moon, of summer, of rain, of birth. On the other hand, the feasts in the Bible celebrate the marvels which God did to save them. If it is good to praise God for the wonders of nature, even more should we recognize him in the events of history. Let us give thanks to God, before anything else, for the great and small events that show his Reign coming among us.

Num
20:21

¹⁵The chieftains of Edom are dismayed;
the leaders of Moab are seized with trembling;
the people of Canaan melt away.

Eph 1:14

¹⁶Terror and dread fall upon them,
your powerful arm leaves them still as stone
until your people pass by, O Yahweh!
till the people you have purchased pass by.

Ps 74:2

¹⁷You will bring them in and plant them
on the mountain of your inheritance,
the place you chose to dwell in, O Yahweh,
the sanctuary prepared by your hands.

¹⁸Yahweh will reign forever!

¹⁹When Pharaoh's chariots, horses
and horsemen went into the sea,
Yahweh brought back the waters
over them, while the people of Israel
walked on dry ground through the
sea.

Jdg
11:34;
1S 18:6;
2S 6:5

²⁰Then Miriam, the prophetess,
sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in
her hand and all the women followed
her dancing and playing tambourines.
²¹Miriam sang to them, "Sing to Yah-
weh the glorious one; horse and rider
he has thrown into the sea."

Through the desert

• ²²Moses then led Israel from the
Red Sea towards the wilderness of
Shur. They walked in the desert for
three days without finding water.

Ru 1:20;
Num 33:8

²³They reached Marah but could

not drink the water there as it was
bitter. That is why the place is called
Marah.

²⁴The people grumbled against
Moses and said, "What shall we
drink?" ²⁵Moses then cried out to
Yahweh who showed him a piece of
wood, and when he threw it in the
water, the water became sweet.

14:11;
16:2;
17:3

Num
14:11;
20:2;
1Cor
10:10;

Heb 3:7;
Jos
24:25;
1S 10:25

There Yahweh gave the people
statutes and laws. There he tested
them ²⁶and said, "If you listen care-
fully to the voice of Yahweh, your
God, and if you do what is right in his
eyes, if you obey his commands and
statutes, I will not inflict on you any
of the diseases I brought on the
Egyptians, for I am Yahweh, the One
who heals you."

Heb 3:7;
Is 19:22;
57:18;
Jer 33:6;
Hos 6:1

²⁷Then they came to Elim where

• 22. The Israelites definitely left behind
the most brilliant and impressive civilization of
their times, with its products, irrigation camps
and prestigious culture. Had they not left, they
would have disappeared as a people. But now
like any nation or social class that achieves its
independence, they have to become responsi-
ble for their own destiny.

Moses knows that freedom is not a contin-
ual joy: this is but the beginning of a difficult
way involving sacrifice. On this way, however,
God manifests his Providence and allows us to
walk with self-confidence. Unexpected won-
ders may happen but God is not concerned
with multiplying miracles in order to better our
situation.

The fugitives have reason to be worried:

they are threatened by hunger, thirst, and the
inhabitants of the desert. In the following
pages, the author graphically describes the
dangers and recalls certain interventions by
Providence. But he relates the story with much
liberty, adapting these teachings to his con-
temporaries who were continually tempted by
the easy life, who were avaricious and attracted
by the promises of foreign countries in which
they would have lost their own identity and
mission.

I am Yahweh, the One who heals you.
Each god had his specialty, but Yahweh, the
God of our ancestors is not only liberator. He
also knows our infirmities and his word is
powerful for healing and for keeping us
healthy.

there are twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and there they pitched their camp beside the water.

The manna

Num 11:
33:10

16 ¹ *The Israelites left Elim and the entire community reached the desert of Sin, between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after leaving Egypt.*

Ps
78:32;
Jn 6:
26-52

² *In the desert the whole community of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron ³ and said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of Yahweh in Egypt when we sat down to caldrons of meat and ate all the bread we wanted, whereas you have brought us to this desert to let the whole assembly die of starvation!"*

Wis 16:2;
19:11;
Dt 8:2

⁴ *Yahweh then said to Moses, "Now I am going to rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to gather what is needed for that day. In this way I will test them to see if they will follow my Teaching or not. ⁵ On the sixth day when they prepare what they have brought in, they will find that there is twice as much as they gather each day."*

Ps 81:11

⁶ *Then Moses and Aaron said to the people of Israel, "In the evening you will know that it was Yahweh who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the Glory of Yahweh. For he has heard your*

grumbling against him, because: who are we that you should grumble against us?"

1K 17:6;
Lk 10:16

⁸ *In the evening Yahweh will give you meat to eat and in the morning bread to satisfy your hunger, because Yahweh heard your grumbling. You are not grumbling against us but against Yahweh, for who are we?"*

⁹ *Then Moses directed Aaron to say to the whole community of Israel, "Draw near to Yahweh for he has heard your complaints."*

¹⁰ *It happened that as Aaron was speaking to the full assembly of Israel, they turned towards the desert and saw the Glory of Yahweh in the midst of the cloud.*

¹¹ *Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, ¹² "I have heard the complaints of Israel. Speak to them and say: Between the two evenings you will eat meat, and in the morning you will have bread to your heart's content; then you shall know that I am Yahweh, your God!"*

¹³ *In the evening quails came up and covered the camp. And in the morning, dew had fallen around the camp. ¹⁴ When the dew lifted, there was on the surface of the desert a thin crust like hoarfrost. ¹⁵ The people of Israel upon seeing it said to one another, "What is it?" for they didn't know what it was. Moses told them, "It is the bread that Yahweh has given you to eat."*

Num 11:7

1Cor 10:3

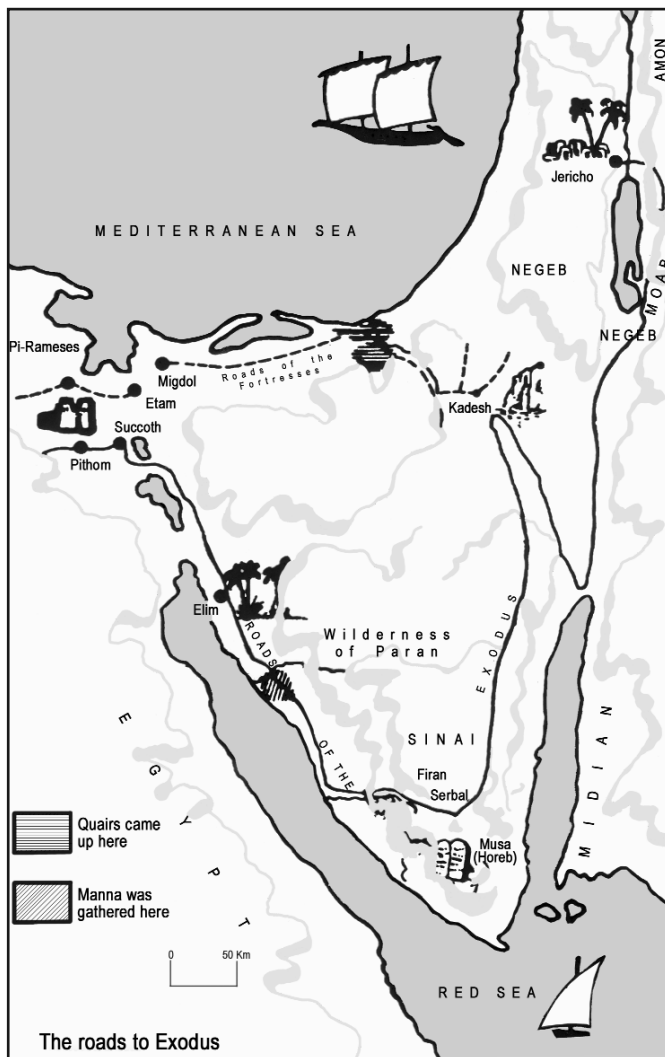
• **16.1** *The whole community of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. Later on we shall again meet the grumblers who are afraid to grumble too publicly. They are not satisfied but have no suggestions to make. They criticize the believers but in fact they just do not want problems.*

Yahweh will give you meat... God provided food for his people just when they lacked everything. Numerous flocks of birds, tired from a long flight, fell at the side of the encampment. Other unexpected food, the man-

na, was also found. This manna was probably the resin that at times seeps out abundantly from the brambles of the desert. In a most desperate moment, this help was, for Israel, the proof that God had not abandoned them. This event is also related in Numbers 11:4.

By this, we understand that our daily bread is a gift of God. When he invites us to take a difficult path, he is committed to helping us and to first giving us the bread we need.

With time, the narration of this event was amplified. Some biblical texts seem to mean



The Bible is simplifying reality when it presents to us a beautiful picture of the Exodus of an entire nation. Historians have proven that several nomadic groups went in and out of Egypt during those years, and the people liberated with Moses formed one of them. Biblical narratives, however, seem to mix up two different groups.

The first group was apparently expelled from Egypt because of a pestilence (the tenth plague) around 1400 B.C. It is not without interest to recall that there were two main roads from Egypt to Sinai. Bordering the sea, the Road of the Fortresses was easy but guarded by the military; further inland, the trail used by fugitive slaves was far more dangerous. Quails could only land along the coast; on the other hand manna was available along the inland road. This first group may have gone out through the road of the fortresses going across that coastland where "quails came up and covered the camp" (Ex 16:13; Num 11:31). Then they came to the oasis of Kadesh where they remained for a long time until the other group arrived. People from the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah were in this caravan and they entered Palestine through the south.

The second group left with Moses, fleeing by night, in the year 1260 B.C. They took the road of the fugitive slaves around the south of Sinai. They witnessed the crossing of the Red Sea. Then they arrived at Horeb passing through the region where tamarisk trees grew. These trees produced the manna (Ex 16:14; Num 11:7). After staying in Kadesh this group, joined by the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin, could have entered Palestine from the east, crossing the Jordan with Joshua (Jos 3).

¹⁶ “This is what Yahweh commanded: Gather it according to the amount each one eats, about four liters a piece, and according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.”

¹⁷ This is what the people of Israel did. They gathered it, some more, others less.

2Cor 8:15

¹⁸ But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered more didn’t have too much while those who gathered less didn’t have too little. Each one had as much as he needed.

Give us our daily bread

¹⁹ And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it till the morning.”

²⁰ But they did not listen to Moses and some of them left it till morning. It bred worms and became foul, and Moses was angry with them.

²¹ Every morning each one gathered as much as he could eat, and when the sun grew hot it melted.

Lev 23:3

²² On the sixth day they gathered the double amount of bread, two omers each, and the leader of the people came to tell Moses. ²³ He said to them, “This is what Yahweh commanded: Tomorrow you shall rest, for that day is a Rest—or sabbath—sacred to Yahweh. ²⁴ Bake today what you have to bake and boil what you have to boil, and you shall put aside what is left over to be kept till the next day.”

So they put it aside until morning as Moses had ordered and its smell was not foul and it was free of maggots. ²⁵ And Moses said, “Eat it today, for this is a day of Rest—or sabbath—in honor of Yahweh. Today you will not find it in the fields. ²⁶ For six days you will gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.”

²⁷ Some of the people went out on the

seventh day but found none. ²⁸ Then Yahweh said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to obey my commands and my laws? ²⁹ Yahweh has given you this Resting Day! That is why on the sixth day he gave you bread for two days. Each of you stay where you are, do not leave your place on the seventh day.” ³⁰ And so the people rested on the seventh day.

Num 11:7

³¹ The people of Israel called this food manna. It was white like coriander seed and it tasted like wafers made with honey.

³² And Moses said, “This is what Yahweh commanded: ‘Take a measure of manna and keep it for future generations to let them see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.’” ³³ Then Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar and fill it with a measure of manna and place it before Yahweh for your descendants.” ³⁴ Accordingly Aaron put a full measure of manna in the jar as Yahweh had commanded Moses and placed it for safekeeping in the Ark of the Covenant.

Heb 9:4

³⁵ The people of Israel ate the manna until they came to an inhabited land. They ate it for forty years up to the time they reached the border of Canaan. ³⁶—The container used for the measurement of manna was of two liters—.

Num 21:5;
Jos 5:12

Water from the rock

17 ¹ The whole community of the people of Israel moved on from the desert of Sin going from place to place as Yahweh commanded, and encamped at Rephidim. But there was no water to drink.

Num 20:
1-13

² The people complained to Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” But Moses replied, “Why do you find

Dt 6:16;
Is 7:12;
Mt 4:7

that God sent the manna daily during 40 years: Exodus 16:35; Joshua 5:12; Psalm 78:24; Wisdom 16:20.

This gift of the bread which came from heaven is mentioned in two different commentaries in later pages of the Bible. In Deuteronomy 8:3: “I gave you manna to eat, to show you that man does not live on bread alone but that every word that comes from the mouth of God is life for man.” See commen-

tary on Mark 6:35. Later, in the Gospel, the manna is an image of the true bread from heaven, Christ, which is given as food of life in the Eucharist: see commentaries on John 6.

• **17.1** God puts Israel to the test in the desert: For how long will these common people be willing to follow an uncommon destiny? How far will their faith go? Israel also tempts God, that is, they ask him for signs because

fault with me? Why do you put Yahweh to the test?”

³But the people thirsted for water there and grumbled against Moses, “Why did you make us leave Egypt to have us die of thirst with our children and our cattle?”

Num
14:10

⁴So Moses cried to Yahweh, “What shall I do with the people? They are almost ready to stone me!”

Num 4:17;
14:16

⁵Yahweh said to Moses, “Go ahead of the people and take with you the elders of Israel. Take with you the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will stand there before you on the rock at Horeb. You will strike the rock and water will flow from it and the people will drink.” Moses did this in the presence of the elders of Israel.

Is 55:1;
Jn 7:38;
19:34;
1Cor 10:4

⁷The place was called Massah and Meribah because of the complaints of the Israelites, who tested Yahweh saying, “Is Yahweh with us or not?”

Num
20:24;
Dt 6:16;
32:51;
Ps
78:15;
95:8

Victory over Amalek

• ⁸When the Israelites were at Rephidim, the Amalekites came and attacked them. ⁹So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites in the morning. As for me, I will stand with God’s staff in my hand at the top of the hill.”

Jos 8:18

¹⁰Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had directed, while Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. ¹¹It happened that when Moses raised his hands, the Israelites would win but when he lowered them, the Amalekites would have the advantage.

¹²As Moses’ arms grew weary they placed a stone for him to sit on while Aaron and Hur on either side held up his arms which remained steadily raised until sunset. ¹³For his part Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the sword.

24:14

¹⁴Yahweh then instructed Moses, “Write this in a book as something to be remembered, and make it known in the hearing of Joshua that I will wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.”

Num
24:20

¹⁵After that Moses built an altar and called it ‘Yahweh is my banner,’ ¹⁶for he said, “Raise up the standard of Yahweh; Yahweh is at war with the Amalekites from generation to generation.”

Dt 25:17;
1S 15:3;
28:18;
Mt 5:43

Meeting with Jethro

18 ¹Jethro, the priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moses, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel, his people, when Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt.

²After Moses had sent away Zipporah, his wife, Jethro, his father-in-law, received her ³and her two sons. The first,

2:22

they do not have total confidence in him. They demand miracles: “If you are with us, show it, here and now.”

The Bible recalls this confrontation in the event of the water coming out of the rock. Moses, too, was put to the test in this place; see the same event related in Numbers 20.

In later times, the Jewish tradition saw in this rock a figure of God, the fountain of life, who was present among his people; the miraculous rock which accompanied them in their wanderings (see 1 Cor 10:4). God is the impenetrable Rock that retains its secret until it allows itself to be wounded and from its own wound life pours forth. Let us understand that humankind, being sinful, loses real knowledge of God and for this reason cannot find him.

But God becomes weak in the person of Jesus who, on dying, reveals the secret of God’s love and compassion for us. The gospel emphasizes that from the heart of Jesus, wounded by the lance, flowed forth blood and water, an image of the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:37 and 19:34).

• 8. The victory over Amalek completes these experiences of Divine Providence. Joshua directs the battle, but Moses with his rod lifted, works wonders. From God comes the victory.

In this story, the Christian tradition has always recognized an image of prayer that obtains victories from God.

The prophet’s mission is not just to speak, but also to be an intercessor before God: 1 Samuel 7:7; Jeremiah 7:16; Exodus 32:30.

Moses had called Gershom, to remember that he had been a guest in a foreign land, ⁴and the other Eliezer, for he said, “The God of my father came to my help and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.”

⁵So Jethro came with Moses’ wife and sons to the desert where the people had encamped at the mountain of God.

⁶Moses was told, “Your father-in-law Jethro is here. He has come with your wife and her two sons.” ⁷So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowing low before him, he kissed him, and when each had inquired about the other’s health, they entered the tent. ⁸Moses then told his father-in-law all that Yahweh had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for the sake of Israel and all the difficulties they had met with on the way and how Yahweh had saved them.

⁹Jethro rejoiced at all Yahweh’s goodness to Israel in freeing them from the power of Egypt and he said, ¹⁰“Blessed be Yahweh who has delivered you from the power of Egypt and Pharaoh, and has rescued the people from the grip of Egypt. ¹¹I know now that Yahweh is greater than all the gods, for he delivered his people when they were being oppressed.”

¹²Then Jethro brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to share this meal with Moses’ father-in-law in the presence of God.

Appointment of judges

• ¹³The next day Moses took his seat to administer justice for the people who stood around him from morning till night.

¹⁴His father-in-law, seeing all the work of Moses for the people, said to him, “What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit and judge while all the people stand around you from morning till night?”

¹⁵Moses answered, “It is the people who come to me to know God’s will. ¹⁶When there is a dispute they bring it to me to decide between the two parties, and I teach them God’s decrees and laws.”

¹⁷Jethro replied, “What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸You and your people will wear yourselves out, for the work is too heavy and you cannot do it alone. ¹⁹Now listen to the advice I am going to give you and God be with you. You will be the people’s representative before God and bring their cases to him. ²⁰You will teach them the statutes and laws and the way they must live and what they must do. ²¹But choose among the people, capable, God-fearing men, men of truth who hate a bribe, and appoint them as leaders for groups of a thousand, a hundred, fifty and ten.

²²They will administer justice at all times, bringing to your attention only those cases of major importance, while they deal with all those of lesser importance. That will ease your burden since they will be sharing it with you. ²³If you do this, God will guide you and you will be able to cope with this duty; and all these

Num
11:14

Num
11:16

Dt 1:9-18

• **18.13** The Hebrews who left Egypt with Moses had to organize themselves. God did not dictate to them what they should do. Partly, they created the institutions they needed. Partly, they adapted those of other peoples. In the present case, they followed the example of the Midianites (Moses’ father-in-law was a Midianite priest).

Moses, like other unquestioned leaders, needs time to realize that everything will work out better if he shares his responsibilities with others. Fortunately, he has become accus-

tomed to listening to God, so that he also knows how to listen to his relatives.

The talk of Jethro underlines the double mission of Moses: he is both the prophet the people need to lead them and the judge with authority to solve the conflicts among persons. In fact many came to consult him about what they ought to do or not to do, so that their projects would be blessed by God and be successful. The judges he chose were models of priests and “elders” who were to govern the people of Israel.

people will reach their place in peace.”

²⁴Moses followed his father-in-law's advice and did as he said. ²⁵He chose capable men from among the Israelites and placed them as leaders for groups of a thousand, a hundred, fifty and ten. ²⁶They administered justice at all times, bringing difficult cases to Moses but judging all other cases themselves.

²⁷Then Moses let his father-in-law return to his own country.

Preparing for the Covenant

19 ¹*Exactly two months after the Israelites had left Egypt, they arrived at the wilderness of Sinai.* ²*They arrived there coming from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai.*

³The Israelites camped there in front of the mountain, but Moses went up to God and Yahweh called to him from the mountain, saying, “This is what you are to say and to explain to the Israelites: ⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagle's wings

and brought you to myself. ⁵Now if you listen to me and keep my covenant, you shall be my very own possession among all the nations. For all the earth is mine, ⁶but you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

And he added, “This is what you are to say to the people of Israel.”

⁷So Moses went and summoned all the elders of the people and related to them all that Yahweh had commanded him to say. ⁸All the people responded with one voice, “All that Yahweh has said, we will do.” Moses then brought back to Yahweh the people's response.

⁹Yahweh spoke to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud so that the people may hear me speaking with you and trust you always.” Then Moses related to Yahweh what the people had said.

¹⁰Again Yahweh spoke to Moses, “Go to the people and have them sanctified today and tomorrow; let them wash their garments ¹¹and be ready for the third day. For on the third day Yahweh will come down on

Dt 7:6;
26:18;
Mal 3:17

Dt 10:14;
Tit 2:14;
1P 2:9;
Rev 1:6

Jos
24:16

13:21;
Mt 17:5;
Jn 14:1

Gen 35:2

• **19.1** The Israelites had come to know God, both in the circumstances of their liberation and in the trials of the desert. In this way they had been prepared for the encounter intended by Yahweh when he called Moses in the desert at Horeb or Sinai (Ex 3:12). The time had come to freely accept God's design to make them his people forever.

All the earth is mine. God is the God of every person and the savior of all, may they be Christians or not. Nevertheless, he has decided to direct history and make it mature from within, through a people whom he has chosen to pass through critical experiences.

A holy nation, this means, consecrated to me. Israel will be the kingdom whose only king is Yahweh. So the efforts of Israel's rulers should be directed towards justice. The Israelites are a free people who belong only to God; hence, they should not allow themselves to be contaminated by idols, impure customs and the false values of other peoples.

You will be for me a kingdom of priests. In any religion, the priest is one who approaches God and receives communications. Israel, as a whole, has this privilege of knowing God and approaching him in a way that other peoples cannot. Israel receives God's promises for all humanity.

This covenant is concretized at the foot of Mount Sinai, in one of the most impressive places that can be imagined. Moses and the elders, that is, the representatives of the people, climb the mountain in the middle of a tremendous electrical storm, while the thunder roars amidst the ravines. The cleanliness of their robes, the prohibition against coming too close, and their abstinence have prepared their spirits to feel the “weight” of God (this is the meaning of the Hebrew word “glory”).

All this helps us understand what Jesus wished to say during the Last Supper with his apostles, when he spoke of a *new covenant* (Mk 14:24). In the prayer that followed, he

Num
10:29

Num
33:15

34:3;
Heb 12:20

Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹²You will fix a limit for the people all around, saying: 'Take care not to go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain will die. ¹³No hand shall touch him but he will be stoned or shot down by arrows; be it man or beast he shall not live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds may some of them go up to the mountain."

1S 21:5

¹⁴Moses came down from the mountain to the people and purified them, and they washed their garments. ¹⁵He then said to the people, "Be ready in three days and abstain from sexual relations."

Dt 4:10-12;
5:2-5;
5:25-31;
Ps 50:3;
Rev 4:5;
8:5

¹⁶On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning and a dense cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast was heard. All the people in the camp trembled. ¹⁷Moses then made the people leave the camp to meet God and stand at the foot of the mountain.

Ps 81:8

¹⁸Mount Sinai was completely covered in smoke because Yahweh had come down in fire, and the smoke rose as from a furnace. The whole mountain shook violently, ¹⁹while the blast of the trumpet became louder and louder. Moses spoke and God replied in thunder.

²⁰When Yahweh had come down to the summit of Mount Sinai, God

called Moses who went to the summit ²¹where Yahweh said to him, "Go down and give this warning to the people, lest they rush to see Yahweh and many of them perish. ²²Even the priests who come near Yahweh must purify themselves lest Yahweh break out against them."

²³Moses answered Yahweh, "The people cannot ascend Mount Sinai because you yourself ordered us to put limits around the mountain, and set it apart as holy." ²⁴Yahweh replied, "Go down and bring up Aaron with you, but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to Yahweh or he will break out against them."

²⁵So Moses went down to the people and said to them...

The Decalogue

20 • ¹God spoke all these words. ²He said, "I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

– ³Do not have other gods before me.

– ⁴Do not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth; ⁵you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God; for the sin of the fathers, when they rebel against me, I punish

1S 6:19;
2S 6:634:10-27;
Dt 5:6-22;
Jer 34:13;
Mic 2:9;
Mk 10:19Mt 6:24;
Mk 10:18;
12:28;
1Jn 5:21Ps 81:10;
Lev 19:4;
26:11;
Dt 4:15;
27:15

asked that the believers might be the new People consecrated to God, priests of God in the midst of the world: John 17; 1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6 and 5:10.

In the Bible, the word "the Law" is used to designate all the laws that were related to the Covenant made at Mount Sinai.

The Law indicates, by itself, something weighty. The Hebrews had thrown off the yoke of slavery, but they could not progress without a Law. The educators of any child impose a discipline to form the will, to tame whims, to train in generosity. Likewise, the people of Israel needed to submit to a Law for

a long time before they would become mature enough to receive the Spirit. Submissive to the Law, they would discover how often they offended God.

Do not forget that here we speak of the preparation for the Covenant. The Covenant account is concluded in Chapter 24, after the laws given in chapters 20–23 that interrupt the account.

• **20.1** Moses went to the summit of Mount Sinai to receive the laws from God... and the text presents to us two bodies of law. The first, the shorter, contains the ten com-

the sons, the grandsons and the great-grandsons; ⁶but I show steadfast love until the thousandth generation for those who love me and keep my commandments.

– ⁷Do not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain for Yahweh will not leave unpunished anyone who takes his name in vain.

– ⁸Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. ⁹For six days you will labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath for Yahweh your God. Do not work that day, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter nor your servants, men or women, nor your animals, nor the stranger who is staying with you.

¹¹For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth and the sea

and all that is in them, but on the seventh day he rested; that is why Yahweh has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

– ¹²Honor your father and your mother that you may have a long life in the land that Yahweh has given you.

– ¹³Do not kill.

– ¹⁴Do not commit adultery.

– ¹⁵Do not steal.

– ¹⁶Do not give false witness against your neighbor.

– ¹⁷Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, or his servant, man or woman, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his."

¹⁸In the meantime, all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning and heard the blast of the trumpet

Mal 1:6;
Sir 3:1;
Mt 15:4;
Eph 6:2

Rom 13:9;
Mt 5:21;
Jas 2:11
Mt 5:27

Lev 9:11

Is 5:8;
Mic 2:2

34:7;
Num
14:18;
Dt 7:9;
Ezk
18:20

Lev
19:12;
Mt 5:33

23:12;
31:12;
34:21;
Num
15:32;
Lk 13:14;
Dt 5:12

Gen 2:2

mandments. The second or the longer one was written after the time of Moses and comes from the time when the Israelites were established in Canaan; it is called the Code of the Covenant. (Chaps. 20:22–23:33).

I am Yahweh your God. Important as the Ten Commandments or Decalogue are, what is still more important is the manner of presenting them. These two precepts: do not kill, do not steal, are taught in any civilized society. But here, Yahweh, the living and only God, speaks with the authority of one who has liberated Israel from its slavery and now wants to put it at his own service. And because he wants to make them free citizens of a free country, he imposes fundamental laws without which they will revert to slavery.

To begin with, God must be recognized as One, Holy, and Jealous: verses 3–11.

Do not have other gods before me. Yahweh is a jealous God, different from the gods of other people who allow rival divinities to set up shops side by side with them and answer petitions which they themselves cannot oblige. As people say, "If God does not listen to me in this church, I will go to ask in another." Then we have one god for war, another for rain, another for mothers with child. All these are gods for people who see in religion the means of obtaining healings and benefits. In this we see a kind of faith which hopes to obtain the maximum from God. Yahweh, however, is not "at the service of Israel," and not at our service; rather, it is we who are to serve God.

I punish the sons, the grandsons. The opposition between "children and grandchildren" and "a thousand generations" is a colorful way of saying that God, of course, does not leave sin unpunished, that he corrects the sinner, but even so, his mercy is measureless. This phrase clarifies the meaning of jealous God, which is frequently used in the Bible. It means that God does not close his eyes, that he will always restore justice, that he will not accept those who belong to him, betray their vocation.

See commentary on Deuteronomy 6:15.

Do not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven, or on the earth. Here are prohibited any images of creatures which might become gods and compete with the only One—and which require a worship (expressed in deeds and lifestyle) which was prohibited by God's Law. In that time the Cananean gods were honored with sacred prostitution; idolatry and immorality went together. The prohibition of images is linked to the former: *do not have other gods before me.*

Notwithstanding the prohibition against images, the Bible arranges that the Ark of God will rest among images: two cherubim or angels that covered it with their wings (1 K 6:23–28). How do you explain this contradiction? The answer is very simple: The cherubim were not considered gods and did not demand a separate worship; they were spirit servants of God. In the same manner, the Church today approves statues of Mary and of the saints,

and saw the mountain smoking. They trembled with fear and kept at a distance.

¹⁹Then they said to Moses, "You yourself speak to us and we shall listen. But do not have God speak to us, lest we die." ²⁰Moses answered

the people, "Do not be afraid, for God has come to test you, so that the fear of God may be with you, and that you may not sin again." ²¹So the people kept at a distance while Moses went forward to the cloud where God was.

19:9;
Ps 18:10

Dt 8:2

who are not gods but servants of the One God. We do not ask them for something that God does not want to give. Only He is Good (Lk 18:19) and from him proceeds all good (James 1:17). To give an example, we serve Mary only by living in imitation of Christ. We do not expect from her anything but what the Father himself decides to give us through her mediation.

But it is also prohibited to make images of Yahweh. That is because God surpasses everything we can imagine or think about him. In that sense, the Bible prohibits us also from forming God to our own way of thinking. We are inclined to imagine God according to our own concepts, and so the faith of many vanishes when God does not direct events in the way they thought he should.

Why, then, do we paint pictures of Jesus? Simply because centuries after these first teachings of God to Moses, God came to us in the person of his son. Paul himself does not hesitate to use the word "image" in the Letter to the Colossians, *Christ is the image of the unseen God* (Col 1:15). In him, the apostles saw God-made-man (1 Jn 1:1). The ferocious ban on any image was a necessary stage in the formation of Israel's faith. But Moses knew nothing concerning the coming of Christ: he was therefore unable to say anything about the mystery of Son and Father, even still less on the images of Jesus.

IDOLS & IDOLATRY: see commentary on 2 Kings 17; Isaiah 30:22; Ezekiel 23:5.

The Hebrews called *Sabbath*, that is, *Rest*, the last day of the week. They sanctified it mainly by the suspension of all activities.

On the seventh day Yahweh rested. In Deuteronomy 5:15 a somewhat different reason is given. See also Genesis 2:2-3 and the commentary.

We know that Jesus was raised on the day following the sabbath. That is why the apostles, conscious that his Resurrection initiated new times, established this Day of the Lord (on Sunday) as the Christian holy day, or rest, or sabbath. See Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10. The sabbatists who nowadays want to observe the Jewish day, forget that Jesus and the apostles had authority to inter-

pret and to reform the laws of Moses. They came from God, of course, but not directly (see Acts 7:38; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). See also Matthew 5:27-28 and 31-32; Galatians 5:4; Colossians 2:16.

In modern times, the workers had to fight so that Sunday would be recognized as a holiday. Perhaps those who easily work even on Sundays do not see the importance of rest for human and Christian life. In spite of the fact that Jesus, in the gospel, reacted against the too rigorous observance of the sabbath (Mt 12; Jn 5), the weekly rest corresponds to the will of God.

Do not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain. There are four ways of invoking the name of Yahweh in vain:

- Using it, as was done before, for magic formulas, like wishing to take the power of God by force. There are still people who use the Bible and Christian prayers as means to work miracles.

- Swearing by his name and not fulfilling the oath (Sir 23:9 and Mt 5:33).

- Blaspheming, that is, insulting the name of Yahweh, which incurred condemnation to death (Lev 24:10).

- Pronouncing or invoking the name of God without an important reason.

Honor your father and your mother. See Sirach 3:2.

Do not steal. So that there may be trust and unity within a community, it is necessary that everyone show the greatest respect for the rights of his neighbor, that he pay his debts and refrain from taking what he finds at hand. However, this commandment should not be invoked to justify any type of private ownership. The Bible teaches that the earth belongs to God and whoever occupies it is only its administrator. It is even less tenable that a nation lay hands on the land and natural resources of other people. The Bible does not agree that some group take possession of the national wealth and leave the masses in poverty (see Lev 25:13).

The Ten Commandments are commented on in the New Testament: Matthew 5:22; 5:33; 5:27; Mark 7:10; Luke 18:20; Romans 7:7; 13:9; James 2:11.

The Code of the Covenant

• ²²Yahweh spoke to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from the heavens. ²³Do not make any gods of silver or gold to stand beside me.

²⁴For me you are to make an altar of earth, and on it you will sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings, your sheep and your cattle. In every place where you come to remember my name, I will come to you and bless you. ²⁵If you build an altar of stone, do not make it of cut stones, for you will defile it by using tools on it.

²⁶And you will not ascend my altar on steps lest you expose your nakedness on it.

21 ¹These are the laws you are to set before them: ²When you buy a Hebrew slave, he will serve you for six years and in the seventh year he shall go free, with nothing to pay.

³If he came alone, he will leave alone. If he was married, his wife will leave with him. ⁴If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children belong to his master; he will leave alone.

⁵But if the slave says: ‘I love my wife, my master and my children, I will not go free,’ ⁶his master shall bring him to God; he will take him to the door or the doorpost, then his master will pierce his ear with an awl, and he shall serve him for life.

⁷When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she is not to go free as men slaves do. ⁸If she does not please the master who intended her for himself, he shall let another redeem her; he is not to sell her to foreigners because he has broken faith with her. ⁹If he intends her for his son, he will deal with her according to the rights of daughters. ¹⁰If he takes another for himself he will not diminish her food, her clothing or her marital rights. ¹¹If he fails her in respect of these three rights she is to go free without any payment of money.

¹²The man who strikes another and so causes his death shall die. ¹³If he did not want to kill him, but as it were, let it happen, then I will give you a place where he may find refuge. ¹⁴Instead, if a man willfully attacks another to kill him treacherously, you will take him away even from my altar and put him to death. ¹⁵Whoever strikes his father or mother shall be put to death.

¹⁶Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or is found holding him captive, shall be put to death.

¹⁷He who curses his father or mother shall be put to death.

¹⁸When men quarrel and one strikes another with a stone or with his fist so that the man is confined to bed, ¹⁹but after that he gets up and walks about with the help of a stick, the man who struck the blow will not be held as a criminal. He will, however, pay the in-

Lev 24:17; Num 35:16; Dt 4:42; 19

Jos 20:16; 1K 1:50

Dt 21:18

Lev 20:9; Dt 27:16; Sir 3:16; Mt 15:4

• 22. The decalogue (that is, the Ten Commandments) needs to be applied to concrete reality to direct people’s lives. When the Israelites were installed in Palestine and passed from the wandering life of shepherds to the settled life of farmers, they made a body of laws which we find in chapter 20:22 to 23:19. It is called “The Code of the Covenant.” Very possibly, it was solemnly adopted by the twelve tribes when they were reunited at the call of Joshua and renewed the Covenant with Yahweh (see Jos 8:30).

Let us not think that God dictated to his people everything that is in the Bible. One proof of that is seen in this particular body of laws. Part of them were taken from the people of Canaan and adopted by the Israelites, who found the laws just and good. Another part are laws proper to Israel, which had been written in accordance with Moses’ teaching. These lat-

ter are easy to recognize because they say “you” or begin with “He who.”

It may be noted that Israel had increased punishment for the one who kills a neighbor (Gen 4:15; 9:15): faith in God leads to respect and protection of human life. This may be seen as a judgment on the consumer society, (termed liberal) that hardly respects life where money is scarce. A case in point might be the question of abortion.

In presenting this code which was adapted to a primitive society, the Bible invites us to promote legislation suitable for our post-industrial society but inspired by the same spirit of human solidarity. It is not for the Church to resolve the complex problems of our times, but it can establish general principles of life that conforms to the will of God and adapt it to the present society.

jured man for loss of time and see that he is completely healed.

²⁰When a man strikes his slave or his servant with a rod and the man dies at his hands, he shall be punished. ²¹But if the slave survives for a day or two, he will not be penalized since the slave is his property.

²²If men are fighting and a pregnant woman is hit, so that the child is born prematurely but she is not injured, the one who hurt her will pay the fine demanded by her husband and allowed by the court. ²³But if there is serious injury you are to take life for life, ²⁴eye for eye, tooth for tooth, foot for foot, ²⁵burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

²⁶When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and the eye is lost, he will let the slave go free in compensation for the eye ²⁷or if he knocks out a tooth he will likewise give the slave his freedom.

²⁸When an ox gores a man or woman to death, the ox will be stoned and its flesh will not be eaten, but the owner of the ox will not be punished.

²⁹If the ox had gored someone in the past and its owner had been warned but had not kept it fenced in, and if later it kills a man or woman, the ox will be stoned and its owner put to death. ³⁰If the owner, however, is allowed to pay a fine to save his life, he must pay all that is demanded.

³¹If the ox gores a boy or a girl the same law applies. ³²If the ox gores a man or woman slave, the owner of the slave shall be paid thirty pieces of silver and the ox will be stoned.

³³When a man leaves a pit uncovered or when he digs a pit and leaves it open and an ox or a donkey falls into it, ³⁴the owner of the pit will make compensation to the owner of the animal by paying him money, but he may keep the dead animal.

³⁵When a man's ox injures the ox of his neighbor and it dies, they will sell the live ox and share both the money and the meat of the dead animal. ³⁶Or if it is known that the ox has been in the habit of goring and its owner has not kept it in, he must make good the loss by giving his neighbor a live ox but the dead ox will be his.

³⁷If a man steals an ox or a sheep and

either slaughters or sells it, he must pay five oxen for the ox, four sheep for the sheep.

22 ¹If a thief is caught breaking into a house and receives a mortal blow, the man who struck him will not be guilty of his death, ²but if it happened after dawn he will be guilty of murder. The thief must make full restitution. If he cannot do this he must be sold for what he has stolen. ³If what has been stolen is found alive in his possession, be it ox, donkey or sheep, he must pay double.

⁴If a man puts his animals to graze and lets them stray and feed in another man's field or vineyard, he must make good the loss with the best of his own crop and the best of his vineyard.

⁵When a fire breaks out and spreads through the thorn bushes and burns the grain that is either stacked or growing there, the one who started the fire must pay for the damage.

⁶If a man gives money or goods to another to keep for him, and they are stolen, the thief, if he is found, shall pay back double. ⁷Should the thief not be found, the man who owns the house must swear before the judges that he has not stolen the other man's property.

⁸Whenever there is a failure of trust whether it concerns an ox, donkey, sheep, clothing or any other lost object, the case shall come before the judges. The person the judges find guilty shall pay double to the other.

⁹If a man entrusts to his neighbor his donkey, cow, sheep or other animal, and the animal dies or is injured, or is carried off without being seen, ¹⁰an oath before Yahweh shall prove that the man has not stolen the other's property. The owner of the animal shall accept the oath and the other shall not make restitution. ¹¹But if the animal has been stolen from him, restitution shall be made. ¹²If the animal was killed by wild beasts, the man must bring the remains as evidence but shall not pay anything.

¹³When a man borrows an animal from his neighbor and the animal is injured or dies when the owner is not present, the man who borrowed must pay for it. ¹⁴But if the owner is present the borrower need not repay.

¹⁵If a man seduces a virgin who is not

Gen 4:23;
Mt 5:
38-42

2S 12:6;
Jer 2:34

Gen
31:39;
Am 3:12

Dt 22:28

betrothed and lies with her, he shall pay the “bride price” and marry her. ¹⁶If her father refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to that for a virgin given in marriage.

¹⁷You shall not allow a sorceress to live.

¹⁸Whoever has sexual relations with a beast shall die.

¹⁹Whoever sacrifices to any god other than Yahweh shall die.

²⁰You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

²¹You shall not harm the widow or the orphan. ²²If you do harm them and they cry out to me, I will hear them ²³and my anger will blaze and I will kill you with the sword, and your own wives will be widows and your own children orphans.

²⁴If you lend money to any of my people who are poor, do not act like a moneylender and do not charge him interest.

²⁵If ever you take a person’s cloak as a pledge, you must give it back to him by sunset, ²⁶for it is all the covering he has for his body. In what else will he sleep? And when he cries to me I will hear him, for I am full of pity.

²⁷Do not revile God or curse a ruler of your people.

²⁸Do not delay in giving me my share of your wheat and your wine.

You shall give to me the first-born of your sons. ²⁹It shall be the same for your cattle and sheep. The first-born shall stay with its mother for seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to me.

³⁰You shall be consecrated to my service. Do not eat flesh that has been torn by wild animals; let it be given to the dogs.

23 ¹Do not make false statements. And do not join hands with the wicked by being a malicious witness.

²Do not follow the majority when they do evil, or when they pervert

justice in a lawsuit. ³Do not be partial, not even to the poor.

⁴If you see your enemy’s ox or donkey going astray, take it back to him.

⁵When you see the donkey of a man who hates you falling under its load, do not pass by but help him.

⁶Do not deny justice to any of your poor in a lawsuit.

⁷Keep away from lies.

Do not slay the innocent or the just, for I will not forgive the wicked.

⁸And do not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the clear-sighted and perverts the sentence of the just.

⁹Do not oppress a stranger; you know what it is to be a stranger, for that is what you were in the land of Egypt.

¹⁰For six years you will sow your fields and reap their produce, ¹¹but in the seventh you will let the land rest and lie fallow. The poor may eat what it produces and what they leave the wild animals will eat. It will be the same for your vineyard and your olive grove.

¹²For six days you shall work but on the seventh you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may also rest and the son of your slave girl and the stranger as well may have a breathing space.

¹³Pay attention to all that I tell you and do not call upon other gods; don’t let their names be heard on your lips.

¹⁴Three times each year you shall celebrate a feast in my honor. ¹⁵You shall keep the feast of Unleavened Bread, as I commanded you, and eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for it was then that you left Egypt. And do not come to me empty-handed.

¹⁶You shall keep the feast of the Harvest with the feast of the first harvest of what you sowed in your fields.

Then the feast of Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labor in the fields.

¹⁷Three times during the year all your men shall present themselves before Yahweh.

Dt 22:1-4

Dt 27:25;
1S 8:3;
Ps 15:5Lev 25:1;
Dt 24:19

20:8

34:18;
Dt 16;
Lev 23Lev
19:33;
Dt 24:17;
27:19;
Jer 22:3Ezk 22:7;
Ps 146:9Lev
25:35;
Dt 23:20;
Ps 15:5;
Ne 5:1Dt 24:10;
Am 2:8

Acts 23:5

13:1

Lev 19:2;
Dt 14:21;
Ezk 4:14Lev
19:15

¹⁸Do not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread or let the fat of my feast remain until morning.

¹⁹The first of the first fruits of your soil you will bring to the house of Yahweh, your God.

Do not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

²⁰See, I am sending an Angel before you to keep you safe on the way and bring you to the place I have made ready.

Dt 26:1
14:19;
33:2;
Mal 3:1;
Is 63:9

²¹Be on your guard in his presence and listen to him; do not resist him for he will not pardon your wrong-doing, for my name is in him.

²²If you listen to him and do what I say, I will be enemy to your enemies and the opponent of your opponents.

²³My Angel will go before you and bring you to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; all these I will destroy.

²⁴You shall not bow down before their gods or serve them, or act according to their ways; rather you will destroy them utterly and smash their sacred stones.

²⁵If you serve Yahweh, your God, he will bless your bread and your water—and I will keep sickness away from you. ²⁶No woman among you will miscarry or be barren. I will fulfill the number of your days.

• **23.20** See, I am sending an angel before you. It is very difficult to speak adequately of God's Providence for us. Am I to say every moment: "This is the work of God?" Here the Bible speaks of the "angel" that God sent before Israel. It is a way of saying that God protected and guided his own people, availing himself of countless, visible and invisible intermediaries.

Smash their sacred stones. This "destruction of idols" has often been understood in past centuries in a fanatical way resulting in the disappearance of many pagan works of art. Doubtless it was impossible for this to be otherwise given the mentality of the time. What Paul says of meat sacrificed to idols could be equally said of works of art representing pagan

²⁷Now I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion all the people you encounter; I will make all your enemies turn and flee before you.

²⁸I will send hornets ahead of you to drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites and the Hittites. ²⁹I will not drive them out in a single year lest the land become a desert and the wild beasts increase and molest you. ³⁰I will drive them out before you little by little until your number increase and you are able to take possession of the land.

³¹I will fix your boundaries from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines and from the Wilderness to the Euphrates; for I will deliver into your power the inhabitants of the land and I will drive them out before you.

³²You shall make no treaty with them or with their gods. ³³They shall not live in your country lest they lead you to sin against me and to serve their gods. That would surely be a snare for you."

24 ¹Then he said to Moses, "Go up to Yahweh, you, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu with seventy of the elders of Israel, and let them worship from a distance.

²Moses alone shall go forward to Yahweh but not the others, nor shall the people go up with him."

Conclusion of the Covenant

• ³Moses came and told the people all the words of Yahweh and all

gods (1 Cor 8). Today we understand that the phrase refers to the worship and cult of the false gods of our age.

• **24.3** The most important events of the Bible are at times the most briefly related. At the foot of Mount Sinai the Covenant which would govern the life of Israel was signed.

Two scenes depict the celebration of the Covenant. First, Moses and the elders of Israel witness the Glory of Yahweh over Mount Sinai. Later, upon Moses' return, the people seal the Covenant by means of a solemn sacrifice.

Moses went up with the seventy elders. The Covenant was something of such supremacy, that it was not fitting that the commitment of the people be guaranteed only by

Dt 7:20;
Jos
24:12;
Wis 12:8

Jdg 2:6

1K 5:1;
Ps 72:8

19:20

Jos 24:
16-24

his laws. The people replied with one voice: “Everything that Yahweh has said, we shall do.”

⁴Moses wrote down all the words of Yahweh, then rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve raised stones for the twelve tribes of Israel.

⁵He then sent young men from among the sons of Israel to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice bullocks as peace offerings to Yahweh.

⁶And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins; and with the other half of the blood he sprinkled the altar.

⁷He then took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. They said, “All that Yahweh said we shall do and obey.”

⁸Moses then took the blood and sprinkled it on the people saying, “Here is the blood of the covenant that Yahweh has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

⁹Then Moses went up with Aaron,

Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel. ¹⁰They saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was what seemed like a pavement of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. ¹¹And he did not let his hand overpower these chosen men from among the sons of Israel; they looked on God and ate and drank.

Moses is given the Law

¹²Yahweh said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay there. I will give you the slabs of stone, the Teaching and commandment which I have written for their instruction.”

¹³So Moses arose with his servant, Joshua, and before going up the mountain of God, ¹⁴Moses said to the elders, “Remain here until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you; let whoever has a dispute to settle, go to them.”

¹⁵When Moses went up the mountain a cloud covered it. ¹⁶The Glory of Yah-

weh would forget the commitment from which the Slabs of the Law originated. They would consider the Ark as a miraculous object providing them with God’s protection (1 S 4:4). Therefore the Ark would lose its original significance and God would permit it to disappear in the midst of the national catastrophe.

According to the oldest account, Moses wrote on the slabs of stone while God dictated (Ex 34:28). Later stories amplified the event, as usual, and said: the writing was God’s (31:18; 32:16).

This contradiction should help us to understand what is God’s inspiration in the Bible. We know that the Bible is the Word of God, and yet it is also just as truly the work of those who have written it, each one in his own style, according to his culture and his temperament. We have already seen many strange details, primitive ideas characteristic of an era and a culture. Affirmations in one place should be balanced by those in another. Teaching that is valid at one time will be corrected when people have made further progress. God is responsible for the book as a whole, but not for details taken in isolation.

With the passage of time, the people of Is-

Jos 4:3-9;
1K 18:31

2K 23

Ps 50:5;
Mt 26:28;
1Cor
11:25;
Heb 9:19;
10:29

Rev 4:2;
Ezk 1:26

18:12;
Gen
26:30

34:28;
24:4;
31:18;
Dt 4:13;
9:9

weh rested on Mount Sinai and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day He called to Moses from within the cloud.

¹⁷The Glory of Yahweh appeared like a consuming fire on the top of the moun-

tain: so it was as it appeared to the Israelites.

¹⁸And Moses entered the cloud and went up the mountain.

• *Moses stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.*

THE HOLY TENT (1st Part)

25 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²“Tell the sons of Israel to set aside a contribution for me; you shall accept this contribution from every man who gives from the heart.

³The things you shall accept from them are these: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁴purple cloth of violet shade and red, crimson cloth, fine linen, goats’ hair; ⁵rams’ skins dyed red, fine leather, acacia wood; ⁶oil for the lamps, spices for the chrism and for the fragrant incense; precious stones and gems to be set in priestly vestments.

Ezk 40:4

⁷⁻⁸For they must build me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them, ⁹and you shall make the tabernacle and its furnishings following exactly the pattern I shall show you.

¹⁰You are to make me an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, one and a half cubits high. ¹¹You are to cover it with pure gold inside and out, and decorate it all

around with a gold molding. ¹²You will cast four gold rings for the ark and fix them to its four supports: two rings on one side and two rings on the other. ¹³You will also make poles of acacia wood covered with gold ¹⁴and pass the poles through the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark by these. ¹⁵The poles must remain in the rings of the ark and not be withdrawn. ¹⁶Inside the ark you will place the terms of the covenant that I shall give you.

24:12

¹⁷Further, you are to make the mercy Seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide.

Lev 16:12

¹⁸For the two ends of the mercy Seat you are to make two golden cherubim of hammered gold. ¹⁹Make the first cherub for one end and the second for the other, and fasten them to the two ends of the cover so that they may make one piece with it. ²⁰The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward so that they overshadow the mercy Seat. They must face

1S 4:4;
1K 6:23;
Ps 80:2

• 18. The continuation of this reading is found in 31:18. Chapters 32–34 were artificially put in the place they now occupy in the Bible for the purpose of separating chapters 25–31, wherein Yahweh orders the construction of the Sanctuary, from chapters 35–40, wherein Moses constructs the Sanctuary.

The Book of Exodus is apparently in disorder, due to the fact that its purpose was to combine elements of different ages. Ancient traditions clearly state the commandments of the Covenant (ch. 20 and 34:10): justice and service of the only God. But much later, when the Jews had returned from exile, it would consider that worship celebrated in the Temple of Jerusalem was the first duty of the nation. It was then that the long chapters 25–31 and 35–40 were inserted to show that cult was already at the heart of God’s revelation to Moses.

Centuries after Moses’ time, the traditions of the Hebrew people recalled how, in the

desert, the Ark of God was kept in a tent. The Ark was a box of precious wood that contained the slabs of stone on which the Law had been engraved, together with a little manna and other remembrances of the wonders God had performed in the desert.

When the priests of Israel wrote these chapters, the people of God had a wonderful Temple in Jerusalem where the Ark was kept. It pleased them to think that the Tent of the desert had some similarity with the Temple; deliberately, they gave it dimensions half the size of the Temple of Jerusalem and they thought that Moses had built that tent, following detailed instructions from God.

Later on, the verses 25:40 and 26:30 would be interpreted in a different way, as if Moses had been shown a heavenly Sanctuary of which the Tent in the desert, and then the temple of Jerusalem would be the earthly image. See Wisdom 9:8; Sirach 24:10; Revelation 11:19.

one another, their faces towards the mercy Seat. ²¹You must place the mercy Seat on the top of the ark. Inside the ark you must place the stone tablets with the terms of the covenant that I shall give you. ²²There I shall come to meet you; there, from above the mercy Seat from between the two cherubim on it, I shall give you all my commands for the people of Israel.

The table and the lampstands

1K 7:48

²³You are to make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and one and a half cubits high. ²⁴You are to cover it with pure gold and decorate it all around with a gold edge. ²⁵You are to surround it with a frame three inches wide, and decorate these with a golden edge. ²⁶You are to make for it four gold rings and fix these at the four corners where the four legs are. ²⁷The rings must be close to the frame to hold the poles for carrying the table. ²⁸You are to make the poles of acacia wood and cover them with gold. The table is to be carried by these. ²⁹You are to make dishes, cups, jars and bowls to be used for the wine offerings; you are to make these of pure gold. ³⁰On the table, before me, you must place the bread of continual offering.

³¹You are to make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand must be of hammered gold, both its base and stem. Its decorative flowers, including buds and petals, must be of one piece with it. ³²Six branches must extend from its sides, three from one side, three from the other. ³³Each of the six branches of the lampstand is to have three decorative flowers shaped like almond blossoms, each with its bud and petals. ³⁴The lampstand itself is to have four decorative flowers shaped like almond blossoms, each with its bud and petals, thus: ³⁵one bud under the first two branches extending from the lampstand, one under the next pair, one under the last pair: corresponding to the six branches extending from the lampstand. ³⁶The buds and the branches must be of one piece with the lampstand, and the whole made from a single piece of pure hammered gold. ³⁷Then you are to make lamps for it, seven of them, and set them so that they throw their light toward the front of it. ³⁸Tongs for extinguishing the burning lamps and trays must be of

pure gold. ³⁹You are to use seventy-five pounds of pure gold for making the lampstand and all its accessories. ⁴⁰See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

Heb 8:5

The Holy Tent

26 ¹The Holy Tent itself you are to make with ten sheets of fine twined linen, of purple wool, violet shade and red, and of crimson wool; you are to have these sheets finely embroidered with angels. ²The length of a single sheet is to be twenty-eight cubits, its width four cubits, all the sheets to be of the same size. ³Five of the sheets must be sewed together, and the other five, also. ⁴You must attach loops of violet wool to the border of the last sheet in one set, and do the same for the border of the last sheet in the other set. ⁵You are to put fifty loops on the first sheet and, matching them one by one, fifty loops on the border of the last sheet in the second set. ⁶And you are to make fifty gold clasps to draw the sheets together. In this way the Holy Tent will be a unified whole.

Heb 9:11

⁷You are to make sheets of goats' hair to form a cover over the Holy Tent. There will be eleven sheets. ⁸The length of a single sheet is to be thirty cubits, its width four cubits, the eleven sheets to be all of the same size. ⁹You must sew five of these sheets together into one sheet, the remaining six into another; the sixth you will fold double over the front of the cover.

¹⁰You must attach fifty loops to the border of the last sheet in one set, and do the same for the border of the last sheet in the second set. ¹¹You must make fifty bronze clasps and put them into one of the loops, so as to draw the two sets together to form one tent over the Holy Tent.

¹²One sheet will be left over, half of which is to hang over the back of the Holy Tent. ¹³This extra cubit is to hang over the sides of the Holy Tent as a covering for it.

¹⁴For the Holy Tent you will make further coverings, one of rams' skins dyed red, and to spread over this, another covering of fine leather.

¹⁵You are to make frames of acacia wood for the Holy Tent which will stand upright. ¹⁶Each board is to be ten cubits

long and one and a half cubits wide.
¹⁷ Each board shall have two arms that shall serve to fasten the boards in line; for all the frames of the Holy Tent you must do this. ¹⁸ There will be twenty boards for the southern side of the Holy Tent. ¹⁹ You are to make forty silver bases for putting under the twenty boards thus: two bases under the first board to receive its two matching arms, and so on for the other boards. ²⁰ The other side of the tabernacle, on the north, is to have also twenty boards ²¹ supported by forty silver bases, two bases under each board. ²² For the back of the Holy Tent on the west, you must make six boards, ²³ and also two boards for the corners at the back of the Holy Tent. ²⁴ These boards must be joined at the bottom and also at the top, up to the level of the first ring; and the same for the two boards that are to form the two corners. ²⁵ So there will be eight boards with their sixteen silver bases: two bases under the first board and so on.

²⁶ You are to make five crossbars of acacia wood to hold together the boards for one side of the tabernacle, ²⁷ and five to hold the boards that form the other side of the Holy Tent. ²⁸ They will run halfway up the boards, from one end to the other. ²⁹ The boards are to be covered with gold, and with gold rings on them to take the crossbars which you are to cover with gold. ³⁰ This is how you are to set up the Holy Tent according to the model shown to you on the mountain.

³¹ You are to make a veil of purple wool, violet shade and red, of crimson wool, and of fine twined linen; you are to have it finely embroidered with Cherubim. ³² You are to hang it on four posts of acacia wood covered with gold and furnished with gold hooks and set in four silver bases. ³³ You must hang the veil from the clasps and there behind the veil you must place the Ark of the Covenant and the veil will serve to separate the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. ³⁴ The mercy Seat you must place on top of the Ark inside the Holy of Holies. ³⁵ Outside the veil, you shall set the table and the lamp-stand on the south side of the Holy Tent, opposite the table, for the table will be on the north side. ³⁶ Finally, for the entrance to the Tent you are to make a curtain of purple wool, violet shade and red, and of crimson stuffs and fine twined

linen, the work of a skilled embroiderer. ³⁷ And you shall have for this curtain five posts of acacia wood covered with gold, with gold hooks; for these you are to cast five bronze bases.

The altar of the holocaust

27 ¹ You are to make an altar out of acacia wood, a square five cubits long and five cubits wide, its height to be three cubits. ² At its four corners you are to put horns, the horns to be of one piece with it, covering it with bronze. ³ For the service of the altar you are to make pans for the ashes for burning the fat, as well as shovels, sprinkling basins, fire pans; you must make all the vessels for the altar out of bronze. ⁴ You are also to make a grating for it of bronze network, and on the four corners of this put four bronze rings. ⁵ You shall set it under the altar's ledge, below, so that it reaches halfway up the altar. ⁶ And for the carrying of the altar you are to make poles of acacia wood and cover them with bronze. ⁷ These are to be passed through the rings, so that they are on either side of the altar when it is carried. ⁸ You are to make the altar of hollowed-out boards; in the same way that was shown to you on the mountain.

⁹ You are to make also the court of the Holy Tent. The hangings of the court on the side facing south are to be of fine twined linen, one hundred cubits long for one side. ¹⁰ Their twenty bronze posts are to be set in the twenty bronze bases and to have hooks and rods of silver. ¹¹ So too for the northern side there are to be hangings one hundred cubits long, and twenty posts set in twenty bases, with their hooks and rods of silver. ¹² Across the width of the court, on the western side, there are to be fifty cubits of hangings, carried on ten posts set in ten bases. ¹³ The width of the court on the eastern side facing the sunrise is to be fifty cubits. ¹⁴ On one side of the gateway there are to be fifteen cubits of hangings, carried on three posts set in three bases. ¹⁵ On the other side of the gateway there are also to be fifteen cubits of hangings, carried on three posts set in three bases. ¹⁶ The gateway to the court is to consist of a curtain twenty cubits wide made of purple wool, violet shade and red, of crimson wool and fine twined linen, the

work of a skilled embroiderer, carried on four posts set in their four bases. ¹⁷All the posts enclosing the court are to be connected by silver rods; their hooks are to be of silver, their bases of bronze. ¹⁸The length of the court is to be one hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, its height five cubits. All the hangings are to be made of fine twined linen, and their bases of bronze. ¹⁹All the furnishings for whatever use in the tabernacle, all the pegs of it and of the court, must be of bronze.

¹³ 3:3 ²⁰You are to command the people of Israel to bring you pure olive oil for the light, and to keep a flame burning there perpetually. ²¹Aaron and his sons are to set this flame in the Tent of Meeting, outside the veil that is before the Statement. It must burn there before Yahweh from evening to morning perpetually. This command is to be kept forever by the people of Israel.

The priestly vestments

¹⁰ Lev 8— **28** ¹Set apart of the sons of Israel your brother Aaron and his sons, and summon them to be priests in my service: Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ²For Aaron, your brother, you are to make sacred vestments to give him dignity and magnificence. ³You are to instruct all the ablest craftsmen (I myself filled them with wisdom), to make Aaron's vestments for his consecration to my priesthood. ⁴These are the vestments they must make: Breastpiece, Ephod, robe, embroidered tunic, turban and belt. Your brother, Aaron, and his sons will serve me with these sacred vestments. ⁵For them you shall use gold, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen.

⁶They are to make the Ephod of gold, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool and fine twined linen, the work of a skilled embroiderer. ⁷It must have two shoulder straps fitted to it to join its two ends together. ⁸The woven band on it to hold it on is to be of similar workmanship and to form one piece with it: this must be of gold thread, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen. ⁹You will then take two precious stones and engrave them with the names of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰six of their names on one stone, the remaining six on the other, in the order of their birth.

¹¹With the art of a jeweler, of an engraver of seals, you are to engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel, and mount them in settings of gold mesh. ¹²You are to fasten the two stones commemorating the sons of Israel to the shoulder straps of the Ephod. In this way Aaron will bear their names on his shoulders in the presence of Yahweh, that he may remember them. ¹³You must also make golden rosettes, ¹⁴and two chains of pure gold twisted like cord; you are to attach these cordlike chains to the rosettes.

¹⁵You are to make the Breastpiece of judgment, finely embroidered, of the same workmanship as the apron. You are to make it of gold, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen. ¹⁶It is to be square and doubled over nine inches wide. ¹⁷In this you are to set four rows of stones: sard, topaz, carbuncle, for the first row; ¹⁸emerald, sapphire, diamond for the second row; ¹⁹for the third row, hyacinth, ruby, amethyst; ²⁰and for the fourth row, beryl, onyx, jasper. These are to be mounted in gold settings. ²¹There are to be twelve according to the number of the sons of Israel whose names are engraved on them. They are to be engraved like seals, each with the name of one of the twelve tribes.

²²For the Breastpiece you will make chains of pure gold twisted like cords, ²³and also two gold rings and fix them to its two upper corners. ²⁴You must fasten the two gold cords to the two rings fixed on the corners of the Breastpiece. ²⁵The other two ends of the cords you must fasten to the two rosettes, so that they will be attached to the shoulder straps of the Ephod, on the front. ²⁶You are to make two gold rings and fix them to the two lower corners of the Breastpiece, on the inner hem, next to the Ephod, on the front. ²⁷You are to make two more gold rings and fix them low down on the front of the two shoulder pieces of the Ephod, close to the seam, above the woven band of the Ephod. ²⁸You must secure the Breastpiece by passing a ribbon of violet-purple through its rings and those of the Ephod, so that the Breastpiece will sit above the woven band and not come apart from the Ephod.

²⁹So when Aaron enters the sanctuary wearing the Breastpiece of judgment,

he will bear the names of the sons of Israel on his breast to call them to mind continually in the presence of Yahweh.

1S 14:41

³⁰ In the Breastpiece of judgment you will put the Urim and the Thummim by means of which he takes the decisions for the Israelites. Aaron shall have them on his breast when he goes into Yahweh's presence.

³¹ You are to make the robe of the Ephod entirely of violet-purple.

³² In the center it must have an opening for the head, with a border woven around the neck to keep the robe from being torn.

Sir 45:9

³³ You shall decorate the lower hem with pomegranates of purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen, ³⁴ and you shall fit gold bells between: gold bells and pomegranates will be alternately all around the lower hem of the robe. ³⁵ Aaron is to wear this robe when he serves before God, so that the tinkling of the bells will be heard whenever he enters the sanctuary and goes into Yahweh's presence, or leaves it; if he does not, he will die.

Zec 14:20

³⁶ You are to make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it 'Consecrated to the Lord.' ³⁷ You will tie this to the front of the headpiece with a ribbon of violet-purple.

³⁸ Aaron is to wear it on his forehead, and so take on himself any sins which the sons of Israel may have committed in any of their sacred offerings. Aaron must always wear this plate on his forehead, to draw down on the Israelites the goodwill of Yahweh.

³⁹ You shall also weave the shirt of fine linen, and make a headpiece of fine linen, and a belt, the work of a skilled embroiderer.

⁴⁰ You are to make shirt and belt and headdress for the sons of Aaron to make them dignified and beautiful.

⁴¹ You will put all these ornaments on your brother Aaron and his sons. You will then anoint and invest and consecrate them to serve me in the priesthood. ⁴² You are to make them linen shorts to cover their nakedness from waist to thigh.

⁴³ Aaron and his sons must wear these when they go into the Tent of Meeting and when they approach the altar to serve the sanctuary. If they do not, they will be guilty and die. This is a permanent rule for Aaron and for his descendants after him.

The consecration of the priests

29 ¹ This is the ceremony you must use when you consecrate them to serve me in the priesthood. Take one young bull and two rams without any defects, ² unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil, made from fine wheat flour. ³ You must put these things into a basket and present them in the basket, at the same time as the young bull and the two rams.

Heb 7: 26-28

⁴ Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting after they have been bathed. ⁵ Take the vestments and dress Aaron in the shirt, the robe over the Ephod, the Ephod and the Breastpiece, and embroidered belt. ⁶ Put the headdress on his head and tie on it the sacred plate. ⁷ Then take the chrism oil and pour it on his head, and so anoint him. ⁸ Next, bring his sons and clothe them with shirts, ⁹ pass the belts around their waists and put the headdresses on their heads. With this the priesthood will be theirs forever.

This is how you are to ordain Aaron and his sons. ¹⁰ You are to bring the bull in front of the Tent of Meeting. Aaron and his sons are to lay their hands on its head. ¹¹ Kill the bull there before Yahweh at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ¹² Then take some of its blood and with your finger put it on the horns of the altar. Next, pour out the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar. ¹³ And then take all the fat that covers the inner organs, the fatty mass which is over the liver, the two kidneys with their covering fat, and burn them on the altar. ¹⁴ As for the bull's flesh, its skin and its intestines, you must burn them outside the camp, for it is an offering to take away the sins of the priests.

¹⁵ Next you are to take one of the rams. Aaron and his sons are to lay their hands on its head. ¹⁶ You are to kill the ram, take up its blood and pour it out on the sides of the altar. ¹⁷ Next, divide the ram in pieces and wash the inner organs and legs and put them on top of the head and the other pieces. ¹⁸ Then burn the whole ram on the altar. This is a fire offering to Yahweh, a fragrant offering by fire.

Eph 5:2; Phil 4:18

¹⁹ Next you are to take the other ram. Aaron and his sons are to lay their hands on its head. ²⁰ You are to kill the ram, take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of

Aaron's right ear, on the lobes of his sons' right ears, the thumbs of their right hands, and the big toes of their right feet, and pour out the rest of the blood on the sides of the altar.²¹ Then take some of the blood that remains on the altar, together with the chrism oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his vestments and on his sons and their vestments so that he and his vestments will be consecrated and his sons, too, and their vestments.

²²You are to take the fatty parts of the ram: the tail, the fat that covers the inner organs, the fatty mass which is over the liver, the two kidneys with their covering fat and also the right thigh, for this is a ram for the clothing ceremony.²³ You are to take a loaf of bread, a cake of bread made with oil, and a wafer, from the basket of unleavened bread placed before Yahweh,²⁴ and put it all into Aaron's hands and those of his sons and make the gesture of offering before Yahweh.²⁵ Then you are to take them back and burn them on the altar, on top of the burnt offering, as a sweet-smelling offering which pleases Yahweh.

²⁶You are to take the breast of the ram and make the gesture of offering before Yahweh; this is to be your own portion.²⁷ You are to consecrate the breast that has been thus offered, as also the thigh that is set aside—the breast, that is, which has been offered and the thigh that has been set aside from the ram.²⁸ This, by perpetual law, will be the portion that Aaron and his sons are to receive from the sons of Israel; this is the portion set aside, a portion the sons of Israel are to set aside from their communion sacrifices, the portion they owe to Yahweh.

²⁹Aaron's sacred vestments are to pass to his sons after him, and they will wear them for their anointing and consecration.³⁰ The son of Aaron who comes after him in the priesthood and enters the Tent of Meeting to serve in the sanctuary must wear them for seven days.

³¹You are to take the ram used for the ordination and cook its meat in a holy place.³² Aaron and his sons will eat the meat of the ram, and also the bread that is in the basket, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.³³ They are to eat what was used in the ceremony of forgiveness during their ordination. No layman may eat these; they are holy things.³⁴ If any of

the meat from the ordination sacrifice, or the bread, should be left till morning, you must put what is left in the fire. It is not to be eaten; it is a holy thing.³⁵ For Aaron and his sons, you are to do exactly as I have commanded you: you are to spend seven days in ordaining them.

³⁶On each day of this week you are also to offer a bull as a sacrifice for sin, in atonement; by offering an atonement sacrifice for sin, you will take away sin from the altar; then you must anoint it, and so consecrate it.³⁷ For seven days you are to repeat the atonement sacrifice for the altar and consecrate it. So it will be extremely holy, and whatever touches it will become holy.

³⁸This is what you are to offer on the altar: two yearling lambs day by day continually.³⁹ The first lamb you must offer in the morning, the second in the evening twilight.⁴⁰ With the first lamb you must offer two pounds of fine flour mixed with one quart of purest oil, and pour out one quart of wine as an offering.⁴¹ The second lamb you must offer in the evening twilight; do this with the same amounts of flour, olive oil and wine as in the morning. This is a sweet-smelling offering which pleases Yahweh.⁴² This is the perpetual offering which is to be offered from generation to generation, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting in the presence of Yahweh.

That is where I shall meet you and speak to you.⁴³ There I will teach the people of Israel, and this place will be consecrated by the presence of my glory.⁴⁴ In this way I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and Aaron too, and his sons, to be priests in my service.⁴⁵ For I will remain with the people of Israel, and I will be their God.⁴⁶ And so they will know that it is I, their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt to live among them: I, their God.

The incense, the water and the anointing oil

30¹ You must make an altar on which to burn incense; you are to make it out of acacia wood.² It is to be one cubit long, and one cubit wide—that is to say, square—and to stand two cubits high; its horns are to be one piece with it.³ The top of the altar, its surrounding sides, and its horns, are to be covered with pure

Dn 9:27

Num 4:11;
1K 6:20;
Rev 8:
3-5

Is 6:6;
Lk 1:12

gold, and decorated with a gold edge all around. ⁴You are to put two gold rings on it below the edge on its two opposite sides: these are to hold the poles used for carrying it. ⁵These poles you must make of acacia wood and cover with gold. ⁶You are to set up the altar before the veil that protects the Ark of the Covenant opposite the ark and the mercy Seat from where I speak to you.

⁷On this altar Aaron must burn fragrant incense each morning when he prepares the lamps, ⁸and in the evening twilight when Aaron puts the lamps back, he must burn it again. You must make these offerings of incense before Yahweh unfailingly from generation to generation. ⁹You must not offer unholy incense on this altar or animal or grain offering, or pour out any wine offering on it. ¹⁰Once a year Aaron is to perform the atonement on the horns of this altar; he shall do this atonement with the blood of the victim to take away sins. And you shall do the same once a year in the generations to come. This ceremony will be extremely holy in the eyes of Yahweh.”

¹¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹²“When you take a census and make a register of the people of Israel, each is to pay Yahweh a ransom for his life, so that no disaster comes on them when the census is being made. ¹³Everyone subject to the census must pay the required amount of money, weighed according to the official standard, and this shall be set aside for Yahweh. ¹⁴Everyone subject to the census, that is to say of twenty years and over, must pay the sum set aside for Yahweh. ¹⁵The rich man is not to give more, nor the poor man less, when they pay this amount for their lives. ¹⁶You will use this ransom money given to you by the people of Israel for the upkeep of the Tent of Meeting. It will remind Yahweh of the people of Israel and will be the ransom for your lives.”

¹⁷Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁸“You must also make a bronze basin on a stand, for washing. You must place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water in it. ¹⁹In this, Aaron and his sons must wash their hands and feet. ²⁰When they are about to enter the Tent of Meeting they must wash in water lest they die, and when they have to approach the altar for their service, to burn

the offering burned in honor of Yahweh, ²¹they must wash their hands and feet lest they die. This is a lasting rule for them, for Aaron and for his descendants from generation to generation.”

²²Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²³“Take the choicest spices: twelve pounds of liquid myrrh, six pounds of sweet-smelling cinnamon, six pounds of scented cane and twelve pounds ²⁴of cassia (all weighed according to the official standard) and one gallon of olive oil. ²⁵These you are to make into a holy oil for anointing, such a blend as the perfumer might make. ²⁶With it you are to anoint the Tent of Meeting and the Ark of the Covenant, ²⁷the table and all its furnishings, the lampstand and all its accessories, ²⁸the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all its furnishings, and the basin with its stand. ²⁹In this way you shall consecrate them and they will remain extremely holy; and whatever touches them will become holy. ³⁰You must anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them, so that they may be priests in my service. ³¹Then you are to say to the people of Israel: ‘Such will be the oil of holy anointing from generation to generation. ³²It is not to be used in any ordinary anointing of the body, nor are you to make any other oil of the same mixture. It is a holy thing and you must consider it holy. ³³Whoever makes any like it or uses it on an ordinary person shall be outlawed from the people.”

³⁴Yahweh said to Moses, “Take sweet spices: storax, onycha, galbanum, sweet spices and pure frankincense in equal parts, ³⁵and make an incense, such as the perfumer might make, salted, pure, and holy. ³⁶Crush a part of it into a fine powder, and put some of this in front of the Ark of the Covenant in the Tent of Meeting, the place appointed for my meetings with you. You must regard it as most holy. ³⁷You are not to make any incense like it for your own use. You must hold it to be a holy thing, reserved for Yahweh. ³⁸Whoever copies it for use as perfume shall be outlawed from his people.”

The craftsmen for the sanctuary

31 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²“See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. ³I have filled him with the spirit of God, with

wisdom, understanding, skill, and ability for every kind of craft: ⁴for the art of designing and working in gold and silver and bronze; ⁵for cutting stones to be set, for carving in wood, for every kind of craft. ⁶Here and now I give him a partner, Oholiab son of Ahisamach, one of the tribe of Dan; and to all the men that have skill I have given more, for them to carry out all that I have commanded you: ⁷the Tent of Meeting; the Ark of Covenant and the mercy Seat that is on top of the ark, ⁸and all the furniture of the Holy Tent; the table and its furnishings; the pure lamp-stand and all its accessories; the altar of incense; ⁹the altar of burnt offering with all its furnishings; the basin with its stand; ¹⁰the beautiful priestly vestments, that is, the sacred vestment of Aaron the priest and the vestments of his sons, for the priestly functions; ¹¹the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the sanctuary. In this they are to do exactly as I have directed you.”

The sabbath rest

¹²Yahweh said to Moses, ¹³“Speak to

the people of Israel and say: ‘You shall keep my sabbaths carefully, because the sabbath is a sign between myself and you from generation to generation to show that it is I, Yahweh, who have made you my own people. ¹⁴You must keep the sabbath, then; it is to be held sacred by you. Whoever does not keep it, but works on that day, must be put to death. ¹⁵Work is to be done for six days, but the seventh day must be a day of complete rest, consecrated to Yahweh.

Whoever does any work on the sabbath day must be put to death. ¹⁶The people of Israel are to keep the sabbath, observing it from generation to generation: this is a lasting covenant. ¹⁷Between myself and the people of Israel the sabbath is a sign forever, since in six days Yahweh made the heavens and earth, but on the seventh day he rested and drew breath.”

¹⁸When Yahweh had finished speaking to Moses about all these things, he gave him the two slabs of the Statement, slabs of stone written with the finger of God.

Gen 9:9; 2:2

34:28; Dt 9:9; 1K 19:8

Ezk 20:12

THE MOLTEN CALF

32 • ¹When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain they assembled around Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us gods to walk ahead of us; as for this Moses who brought us out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”

²And Aaron said to them, “Take the gold earrings from your wives, your sons and daughters and bring them to me.” ³So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He took what they gave him and with a graving tool made the gold into a molten calf.

Jer 31:32; 24:18; Acts 7: 40-41

1K 12:28; Hos 8: 6; 10:5

• **32.1** Just as Adam disobeyed in the beginning, so too does Israel, after receiving the Law. The difficult relationship between Israel and its God now begins. He threatens, punishes and, after that, pardons.

Moses thinks that by using drastic measures, he will make Israel return to the right path and the people will be more responsible. But the years pass and the people continue to sin. Therefore, later prophets will become convinced that a Law does not suffice: mortals need a new heart: *see the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31.*

Make us gods. The Israelites have not really accepted Yahweh, the demanding and chal-

lenging God who commands them to conquer the promised land. They wish to return to their old religion which merely requires feasts and rites. The golden calf they fashion out of wood covered with gold (which Moses will burn), is the traditional figure of the Canaanite god El, a habitually good-natured god who puts the minds of the fearful believers at ease.

Their sin, then, is not only in making an image of God, but even more, in making a god which suits them. This same sin is committed by many believers today who look for a relaxing religion or spirituality free from the contradictions one finds when working with God in the world.

They then said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of Egypt."

⁵Now, when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before the molten calf and cried out, "Tomorrow will be a feastday for Yahweh."

1Cor 10:7

⁶So next day they rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. They then sat down to eat and drink and got up to make merry.

Jer 31:32

⁷Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.

⁸They have quickly turned from the way I commanded them and have made for themselves a molten calf; they have bowed down before it and sacrificed to it and said: 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt.'"

• ⁹And Yahweh said to Moses, "I see that these people are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰Now just leave me that my anger may blaze against

Gen 12:2;
Num 14:12

them. I will destroy them, but of you I will make a great nation."

¹¹But Moses calmed the anger of Yahweh, his God, and said, "Why, O Yahweh, should your anger burst against your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with such great power and with a mighty hand? ¹²Let not the Egyptians say: 'Yahweh brought them out with evil intent, for he wanted to kill them in the mountains and wipe them from the face of the earth.' Turn away from the heat of your anger and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the promise you yourself swore: I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land I spoke about I will give to them as an everlasting inheritance."

Jer 14;
Am 7:2;
Ezk 9:8Gen 12:7;
22:16

¹⁴Yahweh then changed his mind and would not yet harm his people.

¹⁵Moses then returned and came down from the mountain carrying in his hand the two slabs of the State-

24:12

• 9. *I will destroy them, but of you I will make a great nation.* When the people fail in fidelity, Yahweh asks Moses for an exceptional proof of his own fidelity. He suggests that his own descendants could very well form a new people of God to replace these irresponsible ones. But Moses has understood that this cannot be and should not be: God will never withdraw his promises to Israel. So Moses must sacrifice himself to the end to save these sinners. He will seek neither salvation nor spiritual gifts for his own descendants at the expense of the people who received the Covenant.

Moses succeeds and obtains pardon for Israel. God permits him to *stand before Yahweh* to appease his anger (Ps 106:23). In various parts of the Bible, Moses will be presented as an intercessor who had authority to ask in the name of his people, and who was, thus, the anticipated figure of Jesus, the only Mediator and Intercessor.

On going down, Moses hears the irresponsible answer of Aaron who lays the blame on

the people. Aaron has acted like an opportunist priest, anxious to please the people, but quickly forgetting the mission he has received from God, not from the people. Let us recall that Aaron was the patron and model of the Jewish priests. The priests who wrote these pages kept the teaching of Moses and claimed his authority but they were humble enough to present Aaron, their ancestor, as a common and sinful man, whose deeds did not match his high status.

The unfaithful people will not easily pay for their sin. The different accounts mixed in this chapter do not agree regarding what actually happened. Verse 35 makes us think of a punishment like the pestilence. Verses 25-29 indicate that not all participated in the rebellion. The men of the tribe of Levi were more faithful and helped Moses to re-establish his authority: they started killing the guilty ones.

That is why today he gives you the blessing. But do not let this make us think that God blesses violence: see how this ancient text praises those who have chosen God; they have

31:18;
34:28

ment, slabs written on both sides, back and front. ¹⁶These slabs were the work of God and the writing graven on the slabs was the writing of God.

¹⁷When Joshua heard the noise of the people who were shouting he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp." ¹⁸But Moses answered, "It is not a victory song, nor the cry of defeat that I hear, but the sound of singing."

¹⁹When he drew near to the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burst forth and he threw the slabs from his hands and shattered them against the base of the mountain. ²⁰Then he seized the calf they had made and burned it in the fire, grinding it into a powder that he scattered over the surface of the water, and this he made the Israelites drink.

²¹Moses said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you that you brought such a great sin on them?"

²²And Aaron said, "Don't let your anger be roused. You know this people and how evil they are. ²³They said to me: 'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' ²⁴I then said to them that whoever had gold was to give it over to me. I threw it in the fire and out came this calf!"

Num
25:7

²⁵Moses saw that the people were out of control, for Aaron had let them run wild, to a point that would make them an easy prey for their opponents.

²⁶Then Moses stood at the gate of

the camp and said, "All those for Yahweh, come to me." And all the sons of Levi rallied round him.

²⁷Then he said to them, "This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel commands: Let each one carry a sword at his side. Go back and forth from door to door and don't hesitate to kill even your brothers, your companions and your relatives."

²⁸The Levites did what Moses had ordered and that day about three thousand men fell.

²⁹Moses then said, "From now on your hands are consecrated to Yahweh for each of you has been able to turn against his very sons and brothers. Because of this, Yahweh gives you today his blessing."

Moses intercedes for the people

³⁰The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a very grave sin, but now I am going up to Yahweh; perhaps I will obtain pardon for your sin."

³¹So Moses went towards Yahweh and said, "Ah! This people has committed a very great sin; they made a god out of gold. ³²And now please forgive their sin... if not, blot me out of the book you have written."

³³Yahweh said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot him out from my book. ³⁴Go now! Lead the people where I told you. My Angel will walk before you and on the day of punishment I will punish them for their sin." ³⁵And so Yahweh punished the people with a plague because of the calf Aaron had made for them.

The mercy of Yahweh for the people

33 ¹Yahweh said to Moses, "Go now! Leave this place, you and the people you brought out from the land of Egypt and go to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when

Dt 33:9

Rom 9:3

Is 4:3;
Ps
69:29;
Dn 12:1;
Rev 3:5Num
10:11

shown their loyalty the way one only could and should in this primitive age. If they had acted then as one should in the 21st century, salvation history would have died in the cradle.

Many details in this story came from those

who wrote these pages centuries later. They were influenced by what happened in the sanctuaries of Bethel and of Dan, where king Jeroboam had yearling calves placed as images of Yahweh (1 K 12:26).

I said: 'I will give it to your descendants.'² I will send an Angel before you to drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites.³ But I will not go with you to this land flowing with milk and honey, for you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

⁴When the people heard these distressing words they were very sad and none of them put on any ornaments.

⁵Yahweh then said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you, even for a moment, I would destroy you! Now, take off your ornaments that I may know what I shall do to you.'"

⁶And so the Israelites gave up their ornaments before leaving Mount Horeb.

The Tent of Meeting

Num
12:4

• ⁷Moses then took the Tent and pitched it for himself outside the camp, at a distance from it, and called it the *Tent of Meeting*. Whoever sought Yahweh would go out to the Tent of Meeting outside the camp.⁸ And when Moses went to the tent all the people would stand, each one at the entrance to his tent and keep looking towards Moses until he entered the tent.

⁹Now, as soon as Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and remain at the en-

trance to the tent, while Yahweh spoke with Moses.

¹⁰When all the people saw the pillar of cloud at the entrance to the tent, they would arise and worship, each one at the entrance to his own tent.

• ¹¹Then Yahweh would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his neighbor, and then Moses would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua, son of Nun, would not leave the tent.

¹²Then Moses said to Yahweh, "You say to me: 'Lead this people up,' but you haven't told me who you will send with me and yet you have said that you know me by name and that I have found favor in your sight.¹³ And now if I have found favor in your sight, let me know your ways, that I may know you and so find favor in your sight. Look, this people is your own people."

¹⁴Yahweh said, "My Face will go with you and I will give you rest."¹⁵ And Moses said, "If your Face does not come with us, do not take us from here.¹⁶ And how will anyone here know that you look kindly on me and my people? Will it not be because you go with us? In that way, I myself and your people will be distinguished from every other nation on the face of the earth."

¹⁷Yahweh then said to Moses, "What you have said I will do, for I look kindly on you and I have known you by name."

Num 12:8;
Dt
34:10;
Jn 15:15

Heb 4:1

Dt 2:7

• **33.7** The tent called "The Tent of Meeting" was the first temple of God in the midst of his people.

Note that it is placed outside the encampment, at some distance, and only after the people have sinned is it spoken of. God no longer deals directly with Israel, but through the intermediary of his Angel (32:34 and 23:23).

• 11. God has come down from Sinai to speak to his people. However, he does not communicate in a personal way with those people who are still beginning their life of faith, in which obedience to the Law is primary. God communicates instead with Moses, *face to face* (33:1), that is spirit to spirit. This is different from inferior communications like dreams, visions and apparitions: Numbers 12:6.

The people agree to being accompanied by the *Angel of Yahweh*, that is, to count on his help and providence. Moses, however, thirsts for another kind of presence, since his role as chief and prophet has set him apart from his people and left him in great solitude. He desires the Face of God to be with him, that is, a personal presence by means of which God makes known his intentions.

Later Moses insists: *may your face accompany us*. That is: may God make himself also known to his people, so that they may be not only a people protected by God, but also a holy people who know God. The answer is positive, yet only with the passing of time will God make himself known with greater generosity. Jesus will ask for this knowledge for all those who compose his Church (Jn 17).

Yahweh passes before Moses

Jn 1: 14-18
3:14;
Rom 9:15;
Gen 32:30;
Dt 5:24

• ¹⁸Moses said, “Then let me see your Glory.” ¹⁹And He said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and proclaim the name of Yahweh before you. For I am gracious to whom I want to be gracious and I am merciful to whom I want to be merciful.”

Jdg 6:22;
Is 6:5

²⁰Then Yahweh said, “You cannot see my face because man cannot see me and live.” ²¹And he added, “See this place near me; you shall stand on the rock ²²and when my Glory passes I will put you in a hollow of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take away my hand and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

1K 19:9

34 ¹Yahweh said to Moses, “Cut two slabs of stone like the first, and I will write on the slabs the words that were on the former slabs that you broke.

²Be ready in the morning and come up to Mount Sinai and wait for me on the top of the mountain. ³No one will go up with you and no one is to be seen anywhere on the mountain. Even the sheep and the cattle are not to graze near the mountain.”

19:12

⁴So Moses cut two slabs of stone like the first. Then he rose early in the morn-

ing and went up Mount Sinai as Yahweh had commanded, taking in his hands the two slabs of stone.

⁵And Yahweh came down in a cloud and stood there with him, and Moses called on the name of Yahweh.

⁶Then Yahweh passed in front of him and cried out, “Yahweh, Yahweh is a God full of pity and mercy, slow to anger and abounding in truth and loving-kindness. ⁷He shows loving-kindness to the thousandth generation and forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin; yet he does not leave the guilty without punishment, even punishing the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”

⁸Moses hastened to bow down to the ground and worshiped. ⁹He then said, “If you really look kindly on me, my Lord, please come and walk in our midst and even though we are a stiff-necked people, pardon our wickedness and our sin and make us yours.”

The law of the Covenant

• ¹⁰Yahweh said, “I am making a covenant with you; in the presence of all the people I will do marvels never yet done in any land or nation so that all the people among whom you live may see

Num 14:18;
Dt 4:31;
Jl 2:13;
Jon 4:2;
Nh 1:3;
Ps 103:8

20

• 18. This paragraph is one of the most profound in the entire Bible. It speaks to us in a figurative way of how God agrees to make himself known in a personal and direct way.

Let me see your Glory. In reality God does not let himself be seen, but he himself will pronounce his Name, that is, he will let his Power and Glory be impressed on the one who wants to see him.

You shall stand on the rock. That is, you will wait for me here in solitude, detached, alert and available for the moment I wish, since I give my favors to whomever I wish.

I will cover you with my hand. When God wants to favor someone with mystical union, he becomes master of that person’s mind for a length of time. Then he removes from that person every word, every idea and every re-

membrance, and keeps him or her by force in an emptiness, in which that person clings solely to the presence of God, as if dead to everything outside: *I will put you in a hollow of the rock.* And thus he or she will remain until *the Lord has passed by.* Then *I will take away my hand:* then you will realize that you have been within God.

Yahweh, then, pronounces his Name, leaving it engraved in the depths of the spirit, and this Name is none other than the knowledge and experience of his infinite mercy. Upon ending this encounter, Moses no longer has any ambition or personal desire: it matters only that God’s plan to entrust to his people the *divine inheritance* be realized.

• **34.10** Here is another very old text, considered by Israel as one of those which ex-

how awesome is the work of Yahweh that I will do for you.

¹¹Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. ¹²Take care to make no treaty with the inhabitants of the country you enter, lest it be a snare for you. ¹³Rather shall you knock down their altars and smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles.

¹⁴Do not worship another god, for Yahweh whose name is jealous, is a jealous God! ¹⁵So make no treaty with those who live in the land, for they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them; otherwise they will invite you and you will eat of their sacrifices. ¹⁶Then you will take their daughters for your sons and as those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.

¹⁷Make no molten gods for yourself.

^{23:14} ¹⁸Keep the feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days in the month of Abib you are to eat unleavened bread, for that was the month you went out of Egypt.

^{13:11} ¹⁹All that first opens the womb is mine and every first-born male of your livestock, sheep and cattle. ²⁰You shall redeem the first-born of a donkey with a lamb. If you do not redeem it you must break its neck. Every first-born of your sons you shall redeem; and no one shall appear before me empty-handed.

²¹You shall work for six days and rest on the seventh day; even at the time of plowing and harvesting you shall rest.

²²Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with

the firstfruits of the wheat harvest and the Feast of Ingathering at the turning of the year. ²³Three times each year all your men shall appear before Yahweh, God of Israel. ²⁴I will drive out nations before you and extend your boundaries. No one shall covet your country when you go up three times each year to appear before Yahweh, your God.

²⁵Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me together with leavened bread and do not let anything from the Passover Feast remain until morning.

²⁶Bring the very best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of Yahweh, your God.

Do not boil a kid in the milk of its mother."

²⁷Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Write down these words, for these are the requirements of the covenant that I have made with you and with Israel."

²⁸Moses remained there with Yahweh forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. He wrote on the slabs the words of the Covenant—the Ten Commandments.

Moses comes down from the mountain

• ²⁹*When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two slabs of the Statement in his hands, he was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant after speaking with Yahweh.*

³⁰*Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw that Moses' face was radiant and they were afraid to go near him.*

pressed better the demands of God in celebrating the Covenant.

In the first generations after Moses, there was not "one" decalogue, but several groups of commandments put down at varied times and in various places. Each of them was meant to express the requirements of the Covenant and the rules of Moses. The most well known is in chapter 20 but here is found another and more ancient one.

While the first, "our" decalogue, gives priority to justice, these Ten Commandments of chapter 34, about rites and feasts, helped the Israelites keep their religious identity among pagan and foreign people.

In the ancient times, at least two accounts of Moses' ascent up Mount Sinai were kept.

This possibly explains why in the actual text of the Bible, Moses goes up a second time after having broken the slabs of stone. This literary fiction was a way of keeping the two accounts separate of the ascent of Moses as well as the two most important decalogues.

• *29. The skin of his face was radiant after speaking with Yahweh.* This exterior sign reveals the profound transformation worked by God in those who openly present themselves before him. This mystery will be clarified in Mark 9:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.

12:15-20

Mt 4:2

2Cor 3:7-4:6

³¹ But Moses called them, and Aaron with all the leaders of the community drew near, and Moses spoke to them.

³² Afterwards all the Israelites came near and he told them all that Yahweh had commanded him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

• ³⁴ Whenever Moses went before Yahweh to speak with him, he took off the veil until he came out again. And when he came out and told them what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the Israelites saw that his face was radiant. Moses would then replace the veil over his face until he went again to speak with Yahweh.

THE HOLY TENT (2nd Part)

35 ¹ Moses assembled the whole community of the people of Israel and said to them, “This is what Yahweh has ordered to be done: ² Work is to be done for six days, but the seventh is to be a holy day for you, a day of complete rest, consecrated to Yahweh. Whoever does any work on that day shall be put to death. ³ You must not light a fire on the sabbath day in any of your homes.”

The materials are collected

⁴ Moses spoke to the whole community of the people of Israel, “This is what Yahweh has commanded: ⁵ Set aside a contribution for Yahweh out of your possessions. Let all give willingly and bring this contribution for Yahweh: gold, silver, and bronze; ⁶ purple wool, of violet shade and red, crimson wool, fine linen, goats’ hair, ⁷ rams’ skins dyed red and fine leather, acacia wood, ⁸ oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; ⁹ precious stones and gems to be set in Ephod and Breast-piece. ¹⁰ Let all the most skilled craftsmen among you come and make all that Yahweh has commanded: ¹¹ the Holy Tent, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its crossbars, its posts, and its bases; ¹² the ark with its poles, the mercy Seat on the ark and the veil that screens it; ¹³ the table with its poles and all the furnishings for it, and the loaves of offering; ¹⁴ the lampstand for the light, with its accessories, its lamps, and the oil for the light; ¹⁵ the altar of incense with its poles, the anointing oil, the fragrant incense,

and the screen for the entrance to the Holy Tent; ¹⁶ the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles, and all the furnishings for it, the basin and its stand; ¹⁷ the hangings of the court, its posts, its bases, and the screen for the gateway to the court; ¹⁸ the pegs of the Holy Tent and of the court, together with their cords; ¹⁹ the beautiful priestly vestments for service in the sanctuary, that is, the sacred vestments for Aaron the priest and the vestments of his sons for the priestly functions.”

²⁰ Then the whole community of Israel withdrew from Moses’ presence. ²¹ And all those who wanted to give came, bringing their contribution for Yahweh for making the Tent of Meeting, for all its functions and for the sacred vestments. ²² They came, men and women, all giving willingly, bringing brooches, rings, bracelets, necklaces, gold things of every kind—the gold which each one had offered to Yahweh. ²³ All those who happened to own purple wool, of violet shade or red, crimson wool, fine linen, goats’ hair, rams’ skins dyed red, or fine leather, brought them. ²⁴ All who could contribute to the collection of silver and bronze brought their contribution for Yahweh. And all who happened to own acacia wood, suitable for any of the work to be done, brought it. ²⁵ All the skilled women set their hands to spinning, and brought purple wool, of violet shade and red, crimson wool and fine linen, from what they had spun. ²⁶ All the women willingly used their special skill

• 34. The continuation of remembrances about the Israelites’ life in the desert is in chapters 11–16 and 20–24 of the Book of Numbers.

and spun the goats' hair. ²⁷The leaders brought precious stones and gems to be set in Ephod and Breastpiece, ²⁸and the spices and oil for the light, for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. ²⁹All the men and women of Israel who wanted to contribute to all the work that Yahweh had ordered through Moses to be done brought their free offering to Yahweh.

The craftsmen for the sanctuary

³⁰Moses said to the people of Israel, "See, Yahweh has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. ³¹He has filled him with the spirit of God and given him understanding, skill, and ability for every kind of craft: ³²for the art of designing and working in gold and silver and bronze; ³³for cutting stones to be set, for carving in wood, for every kind of craft. ³⁴And to him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, he has given the gift of teaching. ³⁵He has filled them with skill to carry out all the crafts of engraver, weaver of fine linen, embroiderer in purple wool, of violet shade and red, in crimson wool and fine linen, as well as of the common weaver; they are able to do work of all kinds, and are skillful designers."

36 ¹Bezalel and Oholiab and all the skilled craftsmen to whom Yahweh had given skill and understanding to carry out all that was required for the building of the sanctuary, did their work exactly as Yahweh had directed.

²Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab and all the skilled craftsmen to whom Yahweh had given ability and who felt able to do the work. ³They received from Moses all that the people of Israel had brought as contributions for the work of building the sanctuary. In the meantime, the people continued each morning to bring their offerings. ⁴So the skilled craftsmen who did all the sacred work, besides their own work, ⁵went to tell Moses, "The people are bringing more than what is needed for the work which Yahweh has told us to do." ⁶Moses then sent this command throughout the camp: "Let no one, man or woman, do anything more toward the collection for the sanctuary." So the people were stopped from bringing any more; ⁷the

material they had was enough, and more than enough, to complete all the work.

⁸All the most skilled craftsmen among the workers made the Holy Tent. They made it with ten sheets of fine twined linen, of purple wool, violet shade and red, and of crimson wool, finely embroidered with angels. ⁹The length of a single sheet was twenty-eight cubits, its width four cubits, all the sheets being of the same size. ¹⁰They sewed five of the sheets together, and the other five also. ¹¹They attached loops of violet wool to the border of the last sheet in one set, and did the same for the border of the last sheet in the other set. ¹²They put fifty loops on the first sheet and, matching them one by one, fifty loops on the border of the last sheet in the second set. ¹³They made fifty gold clasps and with them joined the two sets into one piece.

¹⁴Next they made sheets of goats' hair to form a tent over the Holy Tent; they made eleven of these. ¹⁵The length of a single sheet was thirty cubits, its width four cubits; the eleven sheets were all of the same size. ¹⁶They joined five of these sheets together into one set, the remaining six into another. ¹⁷They attached fifty loops to the border of the last sheet in the first set, and fifty loops to the border of the last sheet in the second set. ¹⁸And they made fifty bronze clasps, to join the two sets so as to form one cover. ¹⁹They made another covering of rams' skins dyed red to be put over the Holy Tent and a covering of fine leather to spread over that.

²⁰The Holy Tent was made with boards of acacia wood, which stood upright. ²¹Each board was ten cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. ²²Each board was fitted with two matching arms; this they did for all the boards of the Holy Tent. ²³They made twenty boards for the southern side, ²⁴with forty silver bases to put under the twenty boards: two bases under the first board to receive its two matching arms, and so on for the other boards. ²⁵For the other side on the north, they made twenty boards ²⁶and forty silver bases, two bases under each board. ²⁷For the back on the west, they made six boards. ²⁸And they made two boards for the corners at the back of the Holy Tent. ²⁹These boards were joined at the bottom and also at the top, up to the

level of the first ring; this they did with the two boards that were to form the two corners. ³⁰In this way there were eight boards with their sixteen silver bases; two bases under each board. ³¹They made crossbars of acacia wood: five to hold the boards together that were to form one side of the Holy Tent, ³²five on the other side to hold the boards that were to form the west side. ³³They made the middle bar, fixed halfway up, to run from one end to the other. ³⁴They covered the boards with gold, and put gold rings on them to take the crossbars which they covered with gold.

³⁵They made the veil of purple wool, violet shade and red, of crimson wool, and of fine twined linen, skillfully embroidered with Cherubim. ³⁶For hanging this veil they made four posts of acacia wood and covered them with gold, with gold hooks, and they cast four silver bases for them. ³⁷For the entrance to the tent they made a curtain of purple wool, violet shade and red, and of crimson wool and fine twined linen, the work of a skilled embroiderer. ³⁸For the hanging of this they made five posts with hooks; their tops and rods they plated with gold; their five bases were of bronze.

37 ¹Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, one and a half cubits high. ²He covered it, inside and out, with pure gold, and decorated it all around with a gold edge. ³He cast four gold rings for the ark, attaching them to its four feet: two rings on one side and two rings on the other. ⁴He also made poles of acacia wood covering them with gold; ⁵and he passed the poles through the rings on the sides of the ark, for carrying it. ⁶Also he made of pure gold the mercy Seat, two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide. ⁷For the two ends of the mercy Seat he made two golden Cherubim of hammered gold, ⁸the first Cherub for one end and the second for the other, and fastened them to the two ends of the mercy Seat so that they made one piece with it. ⁹The Cherubim had their wings spread upward so that they overshadowed the mercy Seat. They faced one another.

¹⁰He made the table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a

half cubit high. ¹¹He covered it with pure gold, and decorated it all around with a gold edge. ¹²He surrounded it with a frame three inches wide, and decorated this with a gold edge. ¹³He cast four gold rings for it and fixed these at the four corners where the four legs were. ¹⁴The rings lay close to the frame to hold the poles for carrying the table. ¹⁵He made the poles of acacia wood and covered them with gold; these were for carrying the table. ¹⁶He made furnishings of pure gold for the table: dishes, cups, jars and bowls to be used for the wine offerings.

¹⁷He made the lampstand of pure gold, and made the lampstand, base and stem, of hammered gold. Its decorative flowers including buds and petals were of one piece with it. ¹⁸Six branches extended from the sides of it, three from one side, three from the other. ¹⁹The first branch carried three decorative flowers shaped like almond blossoms, each with its bud and petals; the second branch, too, carried three decorative flowers shaped like almond blossoms, each with its bud and petals, and similarly all six branches extending from the lampstand.

²⁰The lampstand itself carried four decorative flowers shaped like almond blossoms, each with its bud and petals: ²¹one bud under the first two branches extending from the lampstand, one under the next pair, one under the last pair: for there were six branches extending from the lampstand. ²²The buds and the branches were of one piece with the lampstand, and the whole was made from a single piece of pure hammered gold. ²³Then he made the lamps for it, seven of them, with tongs and trays of pure gold. ²⁴He used seventy-five pounds of pure gold for making the lampstand and all its accessories.

²⁵He made the altar of incense out of acacia wood. It was one cubit long, and one cubit wide that is to say, square—and two cubits high; its horns were one piece with it. ²⁶The top of it, its surrounding sides, and its horns, he covered with pure gold, and decorated it all around with a gold edge. ²⁷He fixed two gold rings to it below the edge on its two opposite sides, to hold the poles used for carrying it. ²⁸These poles he made of acacia wood and covered them with gold. ²⁹He also made the sacred anoint-

ing oil and the pure, fragrant incense, blending it as perfumers do.

38 ¹He made the altar of burnt offering out of acacia wood, a square five cubits long and five cubits wide, and three cubits high. ²At its four corners he put horns, the horns being of one piece with it, and covered it with bronze. ³He made all the altar vessels: caldrons, shovels, sprinkling basins, pans for the ashes, fire pans; he made all the vessels for the altar out of bronze. ⁴He made a grating for it of bronze network which he set under the ledge, below, so that it reached halfway up the altar. ⁵He cast four rings and fixed them on the four corners of the bronze grating to hold the poles. ⁶He made the poles of acacia wood and covered them with bronze ⁷and placed them through the rings on the sides of the altar for carrying it. He made the altar hollow, of boards.

⁸He also made the bronze basin and its bronze base from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

⁹He made the court. For the southern side of the court, facing the south country, there were one hundred cubits of hangings of fine twined linen. ¹⁰Their twenty posts with their twenty bases were of bronze, their hooks and rods of silver. ¹¹For the northern side there were one hundred cubits of hangings. Their twenty posts with their twenty bases were of bronze, their hooks and rods of silver. ¹²For the western side, there were fifty cubits of hangings, carried on ten posts set in ten bases, with their hooks and rods of silver. ¹³Fifty cubits, too, for the eastern side facing the sunrise. ¹⁴On one side of the gateway there were fifteen cubits of hangings carried on three posts set in three bases. ¹⁵On the other side there were fifteen cubits of hangings, with their three posts and their three bases. ¹⁶All the hangings enclosing the court were of fine twined linen. ¹⁷The bases for the posts were of bronze and their hooks of silver like the rods at the top. The tips of the posts were of silver and had rods of silver. ¹⁸The screen for the gateway of the court, the work of a skilled embroiderer, was made of purple wool, violet shade and red, of crimson wool, and fine twined linen. It was twenty cubits long and,

along the width of it, five cubits high like the hangings of the court. ¹⁹Its four posts with their four bases were of bronze. The hooks for the posts were of silver, like the plating at the top and like their rods. ²⁰The pegs for the Holy Tent and for the court enclosure were all of bronze.

²¹Here is the account of metals used for the Holy Tent—the Tent of Meeting—the account drawn up by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest, as Moses had ordered.

²²Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that Yahweh had commanded. ²³His partner was Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, engraver, weaver of fine linen, embroiderer in purple wool, of violet shade and red, in crimson wool and fine linen.

²⁴The amount of gold used in the work—the entire work for the sanctuary—(this was gold consecrated by offering) weighed 2,195 pounds, weighed according to the official standard. ²⁵The silver collected when the census of the community was taken weighed 7,550 pounds, weighed according to the official standard. ²⁶A census of all those of twenty years and over was made. They were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty; each of them paid a small silver coin. ²⁷The 7,500 pounds of silver were used for casting the one hundred bases for the sanctuary and the veil, 75 pounds for each base. ²⁸With the remaining 50 pounds of silver he made the hooks for the posts, the plating for their tops, and their rods. ²⁹The bronze consecrated by offering amounted to 5,310 pounds, ³⁰and with this he made the bases for the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, the bronze altar with its grating of bronze and all the furnishings for it, ³¹the bases for the enclosure of the court, those for the gateway to the court, all the pegs for the Holy Tent, and all the pegs for the court enclosure.

39 ¹From the purple wool, violet shade and red, the crimson wool, and the fine linen they made beautiful priestly vestments for service in the sanctuary. They made the sacred vestments for service for Aaron, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

²They made the Ephod of gold thread, purple wool, violet shade and red,

crimson wool, and fine twined linen. ³ They beat gold into thin plates, and cut these into fine strips to weave into the purple wool, violet shade and red, into the crimson wool and the fine linen, as does the weaver of fine linen. ⁴ For the Breastpiece they made two shoulder straps, joined to it at its two ends. ⁵ The woven band on it to hold it formed one piece with it and was of similar workmanship: this was of gold thread, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen, as Yahweh had directed Moses. ⁶ They fashioned the precious stones, mounted in settings of gold mesh and engraved, as a seal is engraved, with the names of the sons of Israel. ⁷ They fastened the stones to the shoulder straps of the Breastpiece, stones commemorating the sons of Israel, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

⁸ They made the Breastpiece, finely embroidered, of the same workmanship as the Ephod, of gold thread, purple wool, violet shade and red, and fine twined linen. ⁹ It was square and folded double, nine inches long and nine inches wide. ¹⁰ In this they set four rows of stones: sard, topaz, carbuncle, for the first row; ¹¹ emerald, sapphire, diamond, for the second row; ¹² for the third row, hyacinth, ruby, amethyst; ¹³ and for the fourth row, beryl, onyx, jasper. These were mounted in settings of gold mesh ¹⁴ and bore the names of the twelve sons of Israel. They were engraved as seals are, each with the name of one of the twelve tribes. ¹⁵ For the Breastpiece they made chains of pure gold twisted like cords. ¹⁶ They made two gold rosettes and two gold rings, ¹⁷ and they fastened the two gold cords to the two rings fixed on the corners of the Breastpiece. ¹⁸ The other two ends of the cords they fastened to the two rosettes; they were thus attached to the shoulder straps of the Ephod, on the front. ¹⁹ They made two gold rings and fixed them to the lower corners of the Breastpiece, on the inner hem, next to the Ephod. ²⁰ And they made two more gold rings and fixed them low down on the front of the two shoulder straps of the Ephod, close to the seam, above the woven band of the apron. ²¹ They secured the Breastpiece by passing a ribbon of violet-purple through its rings and those of the apron,

so that the Breastpiece would sit above the woven band and not come apart from the Ephod, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

²² Then they made the robe of the Ephod woven entirely of violet-purple. ²³ The opening in the center of it was like the neck of a shirt and around the opening was a border to keep the robe from tearing. ²⁴ The lower hem of the robe they decorated with pomegranates of purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen. ²⁵ They also made bells of pure gold and placed them all around the lower hem of the robe between the pomegranates, ²⁶ bells and pomegranates alternately all around the lower hem of the robe, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

²⁷ Then they made the shirts of finely woven linen for Aaron and his sons, ²⁸ the headdress of fine linen, the shorts of fine twined linen, ²⁹ the belts of fine twined linen, of purple wool, violet shade and red, and of crimson wool, finely embroidered, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

³⁰ They also made the plate, the holy plate of pure gold, and engraved on it "Consecrated to Yahweh," as a man engraves a seal. ³¹ They tied to this a ribbon of violet-purple to secure it to the top of the turban, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

³² So all the work of the tabernacle, that is the Tent of Meeting, was completed. In carrying it out the sons of Israel had done exactly as Yahweh had directed Moses.

³³ Then they brought to Moses all these things, the Tent of Meeting, and all its furnishings: its hooks, frames, cross-bars, posts, bases, ³⁴ the covering of rams' skins dyed red, the covering of fine leather, and the screening veil; ³⁵ the Ark of the Covenant with its poles and the mercy Seat; ³⁶ the table with all its furnishings, and the loaves of offering; ³⁷ the lampstand of pure gold with its lamps—the lamps that were to be set on it—and all its accessories; the oil, too, for the light; ³⁸ the golden altar, the anointing oil, the fragrant incense, the curtain for the entrance to the tent; ³⁹ the bronze altar with its grating of bronze, its poles and all its furnishings; the basin and its stand; ⁴⁰ hangings of the court with their posts and bases, and the curtain for the gate-

way to the court, its cords, its pegs, and all the furniture for the service in the Holy Tent, the Tent of Meeting; ⁴¹the beautiful priestly vestments for service in the sanctuary, that is, the sacred vestments for Aaron the priest, and the vestments for his sons for the priestly functions. ⁴²The Israelites had done all the work exactly as Yahweh had directed Moses.

⁴³Moses examined the whole work, and he could see they had done it as Yahweh had directed him. And Moses blessed them.

The sanctuary erected and consecrated

40 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²“On the first day of the first month you are to erect the Holy Tent, the Tent of Meeting, ³and place the Ark of the Covenant in it, screening it with the veil. ⁴Bring in the lampstand, too, and set up its lamps. ⁵Place the golden altar of incense in front of the Ark of the Covenant, and set up the screen at the entrance of the Holy Tent. ⁶Place the altar for burnt offerings in front of the entrance to the Holy Tent, the Tent of Meeting. ⁷Place the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and fill it with water. ⁸Set up the enclosure of the court and hang the curtain at the gateway of the court. ⁹Then, taking the sacred oil, anoint the Holy Tent and everything in it, consecrating it with its furniture, to make it a holy place. ¹⁰Anoint the altar for burnt offerings with all its furnishings; and consecrate the altar which, henceforth, will be a most holy thing. ¹¹Anoint the basin with its stand, and consecrate it. ¹²Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and see that they bathe. ¹³Then clothe Aaron with the priestly garments and anoint and consecrate him, to serve me in the priesthood. ¹⁴Next, bring his sons and clothe them with shirts. ¹⁵Anoint them as you have anointed their father, to serve me in the priesthood. This anointing of them is to confer the priesthood on them forever from generation to generation.”

¹⁶Moses did this; he did exactly as

Yahweh had commanded him. ¹⁷The Holy Tent was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year. ¹⁸Moses set up the Holy Tent. He fixed the bases for it, put up its frames, put its crossbars in position, set up its posts. ¹⁹He spread the tent over the Holy Tent and on top of this the covering for the tent, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ²⁰He took the Covenant and placed it inside the Ark. He set the poles to the ark in place and put the mercy Seat on it. ²¹He brought the Ark into the Holy Tent and put the screening veil in place; thus he screened the ark of Yahweh, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ²²He placed the table in the Tent of Meeting, on the north side of the Holy Tent, outside the veil, ²³and on it arranged the loaves before Yahweh, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ²⁴He put the lampstand in the Tent of Meeting, opposite the table, on the southern side of the Holy Tent, ²⁵and he set up the lamps before Yahweh, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ²⁶He put the golden altar in the Tent of Meeting in front of the veil, ²⁷and on it burned fragrant incense, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ²⁸Then he put the screen at the entrance to the Holy Tent. ²⁹Then he put the altar for the burnt offerings at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and on it offered the burnt offering and grain offering, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ³⁰He put the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and filled it with water. ³¹This was for Aaron and his sons to wash their hands and feet: ³²whenever they entered the Tent of Meeting or approached the altar they washed, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ³³Moses then set up the court around the Holy Tent and the altar and placed the screen at the gateway to the court. Thus Moses completed the work.

Yahweh takes possession of the sanctuary

• ³⁴Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and the Glory of Yahweh filled the Holy Tent. ³⁵Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because of the cloud

24:15;
1K 8:10;
Is 6:4;
Ezk 43:1

Rev 15:8

• **40.34** The cloud is a sign of God’s presence. Centuries later, when the Temple is inaugurated, the cloud will also fill it (1 K 8:10). The cloud will cover Jesus in his Transfigura-

tion and will hide him in his Ascension. The cloud accompanies the People in the desert. God is with them in a veiled but real way.

that rested on it and because of the Glory of Yahweh that filled the Holy Tent.

13:21;
Num 9:15;
Ps 78:14

³⁶At every stage of their journey, whenever the cloud rose from the Holy Tent the people of Israel would continue their march. ³⁷If the cloud did not rise,

they waited and would not move their camp until it did. ³⁸For the cloud rested on the Holy Tent by day, and a fire shone within the cloud by night for all the House of Israel to see. And so it was for every stage of their journey.