

## EXODUS

### PART ONE: LIBERATION FROM SLAVERY

#### Chapters 1-12

*[You are encouraged to read the biblical text before you read this commentary. Also, when it comes to group sharing of specific sections, you can always ask in addition to the questions provided: What spoke to you most in the above texts or verses?]*

The second book of the Pentateuch is called Exodus from the Greek word for “*departure*” because its central event revolves around the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. It continues the history of the chosen people from the point where the Book of Genesis leaves off. It recounts the oppression by the Egyptians of the ever-increasing descendants of Jacob and their miraculous deliverance by God through Moses, who led them across the Red Sea to Mount Sinai where they entered into a special covenant with the Lord.

The book of Exodus is regarded by all, scholars as *the* most important book of the Old Testament because it tells us about the two most important events in Israel’s history: how God *freed* the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and how he entered into a solemn *covenant* with them at Mount Sinai. In this book, Israel becomes a nation, and a people special to God.

**Religious epic.** As a piece of literature, the book of Exodus is often regarded as a religious epic filled with intense suspense and drama especially in the chapters that describe Moses’ encounters with Pharaoh, the crossing of the Red Sea, and Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai.

**Warrior God saves the oppressed.** While Moses plays a major role in the book of Exodus, the narrator’s primary purpose is to glorify the God of Israel, the “*Divine Warrior*,” whose strong, outstretched arm defeats the mighty Pharaoh and his great army.

The warrior image of God may offend our modern sensibilities “*but in a world where the weak had little protection and fewer rights, a God who can fight for his people and defend them is the God who receives worship. The Israelite story frankly praises God as a warrior. His military prowess is miraculous; he leads, he defeats enemies, he even marches triumphantly to his own holy mountain and receives*

*his people’s obedience and praise there.*” (Lawrence Boadt). All of this is summed up in the victory hymn at the Red Sea.

*Sing to the Lord for he is gloriously triumphant;  
horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.  
The Lord is a warrior. Lord is his name!*

*(Ex. 15:1-3)*

**Division of Chapters.** The forty chapters in the book of Exodus can be subdivided in different ways. One way is grouping them into three geographical regions in which God meets Israel.

- Exodus 1-12: *Land of Egypt*—God works wonders to free the people from slavery;
- Exodus 13-18: *Wilderness*—God guides the people to safety; and provides for them in the wilderness.
- Exodus 19-40: *Mount Sinai*—God establishes a community in covenant law and worship.

**Date.** Most scholars believe that the Exodus event took place around 1250 B.C. in an area northeast of present-day Cairo.

#### COMMENTARY

##### Chapter 1: Oppression of the Israelites in Egypt

*Then a new king, who knew nothing of Joseph, came to power in Egypt. He said to his subjects, “Look how numerous and powerful the Israelite people are growing, more so than we ourselves! Come, let us deal shrewdly with them to stop their increase.” (vv. 8-10),*

*The king of Egypt told the Hebrew midwives, “When you act as midwives for the Hebrew women and see them giving birth, if it is a boy, kill him.” (vv. 15-16)*

The opening verses of Exodus pick up where Genesis leaves off. It tells us that after Joseph dies, his family and his brothers’ families “*became so numerous and strong that the land was filled with them*” (1:6).

Verse 8 tells us that a new King comes to power in Egypt who knows nothing of Joseph. Because he fears the growing number of Israelites, he sets in

motion a plan to oppress them by means of forced labor. When that doesn't work, he orders the midwives for the Hebrew women to kill off all male-born children. When that fails, Pharaoh commands all his subjects "to throw into the river every boy that is born to Hebrews" (1:22). These verses are intended to show how badly off the Israelites were when Moses was born.

## Chapter 2: Birth of Moses and Flight into Midian

*Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river to bathe, while her maids walked along the river bank. Noticing the basket among the reeds, she sent her handmaid to fetch it. On opening it, she looked, and lo, there was a baby boy, crying! She was moved with pity for him and said, "It is one of the Hebrews' children." Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" "Yes, do so," she answered. So the maiden went and called the child's own mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will repay you." The woman therefore took the child and nursed it. When the child grew, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her son and called him Moses; for she said, "I drew him out of the water." (vv.5-10)*

In the ancient world, stories of great leaders were marked by the special circumstances of their birth. "The circumstances around Moses' birth alert us to the special place he will have in God's plan for Israel's deliverance. It is no coincidence that Saint Matthew, who painted a portrait of Jesus as the new Moses with his Gospel, told an equally ironic yet marvelous rescue of another endangered baby boy (see Matthew 2)." (William Parker C.S.S.R.)

Because of Pharaoh's new decree to kill all Hebrew infants, Moses' life has been in danger from the beginning. He is saved twice, first by his own mother, and subsequently, by Pharaoh's daughter. Verses 7-11 relate the adoption of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter and paying his mother to raise him. "This arrangement results in having the villain, Pharaoh, caught in his own trap. It is not simply anyone who rescues the baby boy – it is Pharaoh's own daughter" (John Cragham). God is working "behind the scenes" to, first of all, protect his future leader from death and, secondly, provide him with an education that will prepare him for his future role in God's plan.

**Pause:** Moses' rescue by Pharaoh's daughter was considered an act of "civil disobedience." How do you feel about people who engage in "civil disobedience"? What issue(s) might cause you to feel that way?

**Moses flees to Midian (2:11-22).** Though raised in Pharaoh's court, Moses is told about his Israelite ancestry. One day, while out and about, he witnesses how badly his people are being treated and he also notices an Egyptian striking one of his kinsmen. He becomes enraged and kills the Egyptian, believing no one has seen the event. His action makes him an enemy of his own people and of Pharaoh who now wants him killed. Fearful for his life, Moses flees to Midian, an area in the Sinai Peninsula. He goes into exile, becoming a stranger in a strange land, but his formation for his future mission continues. While out in the desert, Moses is welcomed by an owner of sheep named Jethro, into his home. Jethro gives Moses his daughter Zepporah in marriage, as well as a job tending sheep. So almost overnight, Moses' life changes dramatically. The young prince of Pharaoh's court suddenly becomes a minder of sheep out in the desert. In his book *Set My Exiles Free*, Fr. John Power writes: "So Moses, brought up in the luxury, lust and laziness of the Egyptian court, now leads the life of a poor, hard-working shepherd. This primitive existence, close to nature and in the silence of the desert, was a preparation of the spirit for the great function he was to fulfill in the salvation story. Just as the first period of his life was a providential preparation in the material elements, so this second period was a providential preparation in the spiritual elements. Because here, in the desert of Midian, Moses found God" (p. 41).

Commenting on this chapter in Moses' life. The Catholic Bible, Personal Study Edition (p. 64), states: "The story of Moses presents some striking contrasts and fascinating ironies: He is an Israelite, but his name and upbringing are Egyptian; the pharaoh orders the killing of all male Israelite babies, but by doing so he sets in motion the very circumstances that bring Moses into the royal family; his mother abandons Moses in order to save him, but later is hired to be his wet-nurse; Moses kills an Egyptian to protect one of his own people but soon is forced to flee because he fears betrayal by one of his own; the one who threatens to betray him angrily asks, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us?' and 40 years later, that's

exactly what Moses becomes; after fleeing, Moses takes refuge among foreigners and there, rather than with his own people, he encounters the God of Israel.”

Versus 23-24 tell us how the Israelites groan and cry out to God because of their slavery. This prepares us for the call of Moses to be God’s instrument in his work of liberating the oppressed slaves.

**Pause:** As you look back on your life, can you see how God was providentially forming you at one stage in your life to handle certain events at a later stage?

### Chapter 3: Call and Commissioning of Moses

*“There an angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in fire flaming out of a bush . . . Then the Lord said: Moses, Moses . . . I am the God of your father Abraham . . . I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt . . . I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people, the Israelites out of Egypt.”* (vv. 2-10)

“The story of Moses’ encounter with the God of his ancestors, and the intense inner struggle his God-given task aroused, is one of the masterpieces of the Pentateuch.” (Bernhard Anderson)

The chapter begins with Moses tending his flocks on Mount Horeb (later called Sinai) where he happens upon an extraordinary sight. He sees a bush on fire that is not being consumed and goes over to examine it. Fire is one of many images of God in the bible. No one can touch or grasp fire without getting burned—yet it gives light and purifies.

Then, from the midst of the burning bush, the Lord (no longer an angel) calls out: *“Moses! Moses! Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground”* (3:5). When God identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, his ancestors, Moses covers his face. God’s presence pervades the space and makes it holy. Moses acknowledges the sacred ground by removing his sandals and covering his face.

In verses 7 and 9, God tells Moses how he has heard the cry of the Israelites. He has come to deliver them from their misery and lead them to a land overflowing with milk and honey, a reference to the Promised Land which God pledged to Abraham and his descendants.

**Commissioning of Moses.** *“Come now, I will send you to the Pharaoh to lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt”* (3:10). While God will be the captain in the Exodus story, Moses will be his chief lieutenant to execute his plan.

**God reveals his Name (3:11-15).** In several of the “call stories” in the Bible (e.g., Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), a *four-fold pattern* emerges: 1) the call, 2) objection to the call, 3) God overcoming the objection with a sign or prediction, and 4) acceptance of the call.

In verse 11, Moses expresses the first of three objections he makes to God’s call: *“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and tell him to let my people go?”* We can only imagine the terror that went through Moses’ heart when God said to him: *“You are my man Moses. You are the one I have chosen to confront the mighty Pharaoh”* (3:10). Moses knows that he is a wanted man in Egypt; to go back there means certain death. God tells Moses—just as he told the patriarchs and just as Jesus told his disciples (Mt 28:29)—that he will be with him.

When Moses leads his people out of Egypt and worships God on Mount Horeb, he will clearly realize how much God is with him. But the assurance of God’s presence is not enough for Moses. He must know the *name* of the God who is sending him back to his people and to Pharaoh. *“If my people back in Egypt ask me, what is your name, what am I to tell them?”* (3:13). God replies: *“I am Who am.”* Then he adds, *“This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you”* (3:14).

For the ancient Israelites, a name was very important. The *Catechism* (203) states: *“To disclose one’s name is to make oneself known to others; in a way it is to hand oneself over by becoming accessible, capable of being known more intimately and addressed personally.”* The *Catechism* (207) further states: *“God who reveals his name as ‘I AM’ reveals himself as the God who is always there, present to his people in order to save them.”* Finally, the *Catechism* (206) tells us that the divine name is mysterious just as God is mystery: *“It is at once a name revealed and something like the refusal of a name....”* God’s mysterious name tells us that he is *living* and *personal*. He is very close to us and yet *“totally other”*—totally beyond our comprehension. In theology, these attributes of God are often referred to as *transcendence* and *immanence*,

the God who is beyond us and is at the same time very close to us.

In verse 16, God sends Moses to go and assemble the elders of Israel and to tell them that the God of their ancestors is about to deliver them from slavery and lead them to a land overflowing with milk and honey.

**Pause:** Moses' failure (crime) did not eliminate him from being chosen to do a great work for God. Should politicians' past moral indiscretions (whether repented or not) be a reason not to consider them for public office? Have you ever experienced being called by God to do a task you felt unprepared for?

#### Chapter 4: A Reluctant Moses Returns to Egypt

*"On the journey . . . God came upon Moses and would have killed him."* (v. 24)

As already stated, Moses objects three times to God's call and commission. This chapter opens with Moses' *second objection*. *"But suppose they will not believe me, nor listen to my plea? For they may say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'"* (4:1). Clearly, Moses does not want to leave his nice, simple life in Midian and take on the huge and frightening task of confronting Pharaoh. So he keeps telling God that he is not the man for the job. Spiritual directors would say that Moses was suffering from a huge dose of *resistance* to God's call.

To help Moses overcome his resistance, God works three signs that speak of his power—power that will transmit to Moses. Commenting on these three signs, the *Life Application Study Bible* states: *"God sometimes takes joy in using ordinary things for extraordinary purposes... Little did Moses imagine; the power his simple staff would wield, when it became the staff of God"* (p.101, footnote).

In verse 10, Moses comes up with his *third and final objection*. He says that he has never been a good speaker (an excuse that Jeremiah will also use when God calls him). God responds: *"Who gives one man speech and makes another deaf and dumb?... Go, then! It is I who will assist you in speaking and will teach you what to say"* (4:11-12). That is still not enough for Moses, so he says: *"Please, Lord, send someone else"* (4:13). Becoming a bit exasperated with Moses' excuses, God chooses Moses' brother Aaron to be his mouthpiece.

**Moses returns to Egypt (4:18-23).** After God responds to the three objections, Moses finally agrees to be God's messenger and instrument. But first he returns to Jethro to ask his permission to go to Egypt. Jethro replies: *"Go in peace."* As he travels with his wife and sons, God appears to Moses again and says, among other things: *"I will make Pharaoh obstinate"* (4:21). What are we to make of this? Was it fair of God to harden Pharaoh's heart? In those days, people did not distinguish between primary and secondary causes. They saw God as the cause of all things. Today, we would say God *permitted* Pharaoh to harden his heart. We would not say that God *caused* Pharaoh's heart to be hardened, no more than we would say God caused Hitler's heart to be evil. Later in the book, it will say that Pharaoh allowed his own heart to become obstinate (8:15, 9:34).

Then we read a very strange verse: *"On the journey, at a place where they spent the night, the Lord came upon Moses and would have killed him"* (4:24). Scholars are not sure what this verse means. The *Catholic Study Bible* (p.75) suggests that God is angry at Moses for having failed to keep the command about circumcision, given to Abraham by God (Gen 17:10). Moses' life is spared when his wife circumcises their son.

The chapter closes with a meeting between Moses and Aaron in which Moses shares with his brother all that he has just experienced on Mount Horeb. Then they both head off to Egypt, assemble all the elders, and Aaron has his first experience as Moses' spokesperson.

**Pause:** When invited to step into a leadership position, do you usually jump at the opportunity, say 'no, thank you,' or give a reluctant 'yes'? What aspects of leadership do you like and not like?

#### Chapter 5: Things Get Worse Before They Get Better

*"Increase their work, so that they keep their mind on it and pay no attention to lying words."* (v. 9)

During the economic downturn of 2008, politicians were often heard to say that things would get worse before they got better. This chapter of Exodus is certainly an example of this.

Verses 1-5 describe Moses first meeting with Pharaoh which does not go well. It is, in fact, a complete failure. Moses requests that the Israelites travel on a

three-day outing to the desert to worship God. Pharaoh claims that he has never heard of Moses' God and refuses to let the people go. Upset with Moses' request, Pharaoh increases the Israelites' workload. In addition to the daily quota of bricks they must produce, the slaves are ordered to find the straw needed for brickmaking. So things are indeed about to get worse for the Israelites before they get better. When the Israelite foreman complains to Pharaoh (5:15-16), Pharaoh tells him that Moses is to blame for their new situation. As a result, the foreman gets angry with Moses (5:20-21), and Moses, in turn, gets upset with God, saying: "*Lord why do you treat this people so badly? And why did you send me on such a mission? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has maltreated this people of yours, and you have done nothing to rescue them*" (5:22-23).

When it comes to having a real relationship with God, honesty with him about what we really think and feel is perhaps what we need the most. Highly regarded spiritual authors like William Barry, S.J., tell us that when our relationship with God goes flat or becomes boring, frequently the reason is that we are upset with God about something. Like Moses, we may think that God is not treating us right. But unlike Moses, we are not being honest with God about our thoughts and feelings. Learning to express our anger with God is one of the most important lessons in prayer (see the book *God and You* by William Barry).

**Pause:** Can you see how the failure to express our true feelings to God could cause our relationship with him to go flat? Is it easy or hard for you to express anger at God?

### Chapters 6:1 to 7:30: "I am a lousy speaker, Lord"

*"You made our name stink in the nostrils of Pharaoh."* (5. 1) (Knox translation)

Chapter 5 ends with a picture of a discouraged Moses. Chapter 6 opens with God telling Moses: 'You just watch me. You ain't seen nothin' yet. I am not only going to free the Israelites but also form them into my own special people and bring them to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'

But when Moses goes to the people, who are so over-worked and discouraged, they are in no mood to listen to him (6:9). Then God tells Moses to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the Israelites leave his land. Moses protests to God that he's got to be kidding; if his own

people won't listen to him, why will Pharaoh? Moses twice reminds God what a poor speaker he is (6:12 and 30).

In response to Moses' perception of himself as a poor speaker, God promises that he will make him seem like God in the presence of Pharaoh. God also tells Moses that even though Pharaoh will initially not listen to him, he should not worry for he is about to perform a mighty act. These verses prepare us for the big showdown that is about to happen between Pharaoh (who thinks all power resides with him) and Moses (God's human instrument).

In 7:8-13, we get a preview of the power God is about to unleash against Pharaoh. Notice verse 13 does not say (as 7:3 does) that *God* makes Pharaoh's heart obstinate. It simply says: "*Pharaoh, however, was obstinate and would not listen....*"

**Pause:** Can you recall a time when God asked you to do something you didn't think you could do, but after placing your trust in God, you surprised yourself at how capable you were?

### Chapters 7:14-11:1: The Plagues

The story of the ten plagues is one of high drama and suspense. The main actors are God and his two human instruments, Moses and Aaron, and Pharaoh. At the beginning of the narrative, Pharaoh believes that he is the most powerful man on earth. He is about to find out that there is someone much more powerful than him. In a way, we might say that the plagues are intended to answer the question raised by Pharaoh in 5:12, "*Who is the Lord that I should heed his plea and let Israel go?*"

Even though many scholars today believe that the plagues had natural causes, the biblical writer looked upon them as expressions of the power of the God of Israel. God's action is especially underlined by the description of how the plagues started and ended with the word spoken by God through Moses. John Power writes: "The plagues were a series of calamities that made the Israelites' departure from Egypt possible. Whether these calamities were natural or entirely miraculous, their ultimate cause was God. And to the Israelite mind they demonstrated that God was present and active in their midst. And was not this the very name he gave himself?" (*Set My Exiles Free* p. 47)

Each plague begins with Moses and Aaron requesting Pharaoh to let Israel leave Egypt to go to worship God. They tell Pharaoh that if he refuses to let Israel go, he and his people will experience a plague of some kind. The more stubborn Pharaoh gets, the more severe the plague, until God finally breaks Pharaoh's will. As the plagues become more severe, Pharaoh seems to relent—even admitting that he is a sinner (9:27). Nevertheless, he continues to be stubborn...until the tenth plague. We will notice that from the fourth plague onwards the Israelites who lived in the land of Goshen are spared.

The plagues are intended not so much to punish Pharaoh for his stubbornness, but rather to demonstrate God's extraordinary power, unequal to any of the gods of Egypt.

“When God opposes Pharaoh, it is not because God hates the Egyptians and favors the Israelites, but rather because Pharaoh represents the forces of death. In Exodus, we see that the Israelites were the victims of Pharaoh's violent and oppressive policies. Egyptians die in the story, not because God wills their destruction but rather because they persist in perpetuating deadly injustice. In essence those who lived by the sword died by the sword” (Clinton McCann).

“The plague cycle was edited and completed in such a way as to portray the foolishness and the terrible *price* of failing to acknowledge God as the one and only God, and to live in obedience to his commands” (William Parker, C.S.S.R.) Let us now look briefly at the individual plagues.

**First plague: River Nile is turned into blood (7:14-24).** Using Aaron's staff, God turns all supplies of water into blood (7:19). While this plague greatly burdened the ordinary people (7:29), it has little or no impact on Pharaoh (7:23). Even his own magicians are able to do what Aaron just did (7:22).

**Second plague: Frogs (7:26 - 8:11).** Frogs are everywhere, even in Pharaoh's bedroom, which get his attention. The miracle here is Moses' ability to halt the plague. Once God answers Pharaoh's prayer, he quickly forgets his promise to let the Israelites go and becomes stubborn again. Like the first plague, the Egyptian magicians are able to recreate the onslaught of frogs. (8:3). Pharaoh's magicians success at the beginning is a device by the narrator to underline their helplessness later on, and therefore their clear inferiority to the power at work through Moses.

**Third plague: Gnats (8:12-15).** The land becomes infested with gnats a feat Pharaoh's magicians fail to duplicate. In fact they tell Pharaoh: “*This is the finger of God*” (8:15).

**Fourth plague: Flies (8:16-32).** Flies invade the whole land but miraculously spare nearby Goshen where the Israelites live. When Moses prays, the flies disappear. With this plague, there is a noticeable softening in Pharaoh. He lets the Israelites go and offer sacrifice to the Lord, but only in the land of Egypt (8:21).

**Fifth plague: Pestilence (9:1-12).** This is the fifth time Moses goes back to Pharaoh with the demand to let his people go. Moses may have been experiencing a little discouragement, but he nevertheless continues to obey God. With this plague, the Egyptian animals are struck down with a severe pestilence. But even when Pharaoh's people tell him that not one beast belonging to the Israelites has died, he continues to remain obstinate (9:7).

**Sixth plague: Boils (9:8-12).** Festering boils afflicted man and beast alike. But again, Pharaoh does not relent.

**Seventh plague: Hailstorms (9:13-35).** Fierce hailstorms destroy slaves and animals left in unprotected areas and cause extensive damage to the crops.

In addition to breaking Pharaoh's will, the plagues are intended to teach Pharaoh that there is no one like God anywhere on the earth (9:14), and that the earth belongs to God (9:29). While this plague leads Pharaoh to admit for a moment that he has sinned against God (9:27), he remains stubborn and refuses to let the Israelites go. Sometimes when things get really bad in peoples' lives, they turn to God, confess their sins, and promise to be more committed to him and his ways. Then when things get back to normal, they forget all about their promise to God.

**Eighth plague: Locusts (10:1-20).** Locusts cover Egypt and devour everything left after the hailstorms (10:15). Again, after admission of sin, Pharaoh changes his mind and refuses to give in.

**Ninth Plague: Darkness (10:21-29).** Many of the plagues are judgments and attacks on the gods which the Egyptians worship such as the River Nile, certain animals, and the sun—the focus of this plague. These gods are rendered impotent by the plagues sent by the

true God and Lord of the heavens and the earth. Pharaoh is so angry at Moses because of this plague that he threatens to kill him if he visits again.

**Pause:** As we read through the plagues, we are amazed at Pharaoh's stubbornness. What can make our hearts stubborn when it comes to our relationship with God and others? Why is it that some people would rather self-destruct than admit that they were wrong?

**Tenth plague: Death of the First-born (11:1-10).**

Chapters 11-15 can be confusing because the narrative is interrupted several times with inserts about liturgical feasts and regulations. The following outline might help as we move through the next five chapters.

- 11:1-10 (narrative): Warning of the final plague
- 12:1-28 (liturgical): How to celebrate the Passover
- 12:29-42 (narrative): Death of the first-born
- 12:43-51 (liturgical): Directions for the Passover
- 12:1-16 (liturgical): Regulations for two other feasts
- 13:17-14:31 (narrative): Redemption at the Red Sea
- 15:1-21 (liturgical): Songs of Moses and Miriam

This mix of liturgical and narrative texts is an indication that these five chapters were read and sung in Israel's worship services.

**Chapter 11** opens with God telling Moses that this next and final plague will finally overcome Pharaoh's stubbornness. He will not only let the Israelites go; he will drive them out lest there be more disaster. Not only that, but the Egyptian people will be happy to share their belongings with the Israelites before they go (11:2-3).

The tenth plague brought on the death of every first-born child and animal. Moses speaks what the Lord has said: *"Every first-born of the Pharaoh, on the throne, to the first-born of the slave-girl, at the hand mill, as well as all first-born of the animal. Then there shall be loud wailing throughout the land of Egypt, such as has never been seen nor will never again. But among the Israelites and their animals, not even a dog shall growl, so that you may know the Lord distinguishes between the Egyptians and the Israelites (11: 5-7).*

Commenting on the tenth plague, *The Catholic Study Bible* states: "The last plague.... symbolically ends the universal leadership of Egypt, and transfers divine

favor to Israel's first-born who were spared" (p.120). We might add that if Pharaoh had not been so stubborn, he and his people would have been spared such a cruel blow. Even in our times, the subjects of powerful dictators suffer greatly because of the godless actions of their leaders, e.g., Hitler.

**Chapter 12: Israel's Passover**

*"This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution."* (v. 14)

The Passover ritual described in 12:1-28 became so important in Israel's history and memory that they are inserted into the middle of the actual event that it is intended to commemorate and make present. The ritual is actually a combination of two ancient feasts: one involving the killing of a lamb and sprinkling of its blood to ward off the destroyer demon that may negatively impact the growing crops in the fields, and a second ritual involving unleavened bread. These ancient rituals were injected with new meaning to help the Israelites celebrate their freedom from the slavery of Egypt. In 12:1-14, God gives Moses and Aaron very specific instructions about the new Passover event that is about to be inaugurated. God specifies who are to attend, what food to prepare and how it should be eaten, and how the memorial feast is to be passed on from one generation to another.

Verses 15-20 give instructions about unleavened bread and how households must be totally cleared of all leavened bread. Because the Exodus occurred with such haste, the ritual around unleavened bread is a reminder that the people did not have time to make their bread. The Passover event would be celebrated in the spring – on the twilight of the first full moon.

**Promulgation of the Passover (12:21-28).** In these verses, Moses gathers together the elders of Israel and passes unto them God's instructions on how this new Passover feast is to be celebrated. He stresses the importance of celebrating this ritual every year, and counsels the elders to explain to children its meaning and importance when they ask: *"What does this rite of yours mean?"* (12:26).

**Death of the first-born and the departure (12:29-39).**

In these verses, the tenth and most devastating plague is carried out, i.e., the death of the first-born of all the Egyptians, as well as the first-born of the cattle. But

wherever the blood of the *Passover lamb* was sprinkled on the doorposts, the angel of death passed over that house. The blood of the Passover lamb sprinkled on the doorposts which saved the first-born sons of Israel from immediate death was seen by the early church as a type or foreshadowing of the blood of Christ, our new Passover lamb, whose blood saves us from eternal death.

In verses 31-32, Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron in the middle of the night and says: *“Leave my people at once, you and the Israelites with you! Go and worship the Lord as you said. Take your flocks, too, and your herds, as you demanded, and be gone; and you will be doing me a favor.”* The Egyptian people likewise urge the people to leave. As the Israelites leave, they ask the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold, and clothing. We might say that on their way out of Egypt, the Israelites “took their neighbors to the cleaners,” adding insult to injury. In the final editor’s mind, it may have been one way to emphasize the extent of the slaves’ victory over their much more powerful oppressors.

**Pause:** How does Passover remind you of the Eucharist? How does it remind us of what God has done for us?