

EXODUS

I. THE LIBERATION FROM EGYPT

A. ISRAEL IN EGYPT

The prosperity of the Hebrews in Egypt

1 **1** These are the names of the sons of Israel who went with Jacob to Egypt,
each with his family: ·Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, ·Issachar, Zebulun
and Benjamin, ·Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ·In all, the descendants of
Jacob numbered seventy persons. Joseph was in Egypt already. ·Then Joseph
7 died, and his brothers, and all that generation. ·But the sons of Israel were fruitful
and grew in numbers greatly; they increased and grew so immensely powerful
that they filled the land.

The Hebrews oppressed

8 Then there came to power in Egypt a new king who knew nothing of Joseph.
9 “Look,” he said to his subjects, “these people, the sons of Israel, have become so
10 numerous and strong that they are a threat to us. ·We must be prudent and
take steps against their increasing any further, or if war should break out, they
might add to the number of our enemies. They might take arms against us and
11 so escape out of the country.” ·Accordingly they put slave drivers over the
Israelites to wear them down under heavy loads. ·In this way they built the
12 store cities of Pithom and Rameses^a for Pharaoh. ·But the more they were
13 crushed, the more they increased and spread, and men came to dread the sons
14 of Israel. ·The Egyptians forced the sons of Israel into slavery, ·and made
their lives unbearable with hard labor, work with clay and with brick, all
kinds of work in the fields; they forced on them every kind of labor.

15 The king of Egypt then spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was
16 named Shiphrah, and the other Puah. “When you midwives attend Hebrew
women,” he said, “watch the two stones^b carefully. If it is a boy, kill him; if a girl,
17 let her live.” ·But the midwives were God-fearing: they disobeyed the command
18 of the king of Egypt and let the boys live. ·So the king of Egypt summoned the
19 midwives. “Why,” he asked them, “have you done this and spared the boys?” “The
Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women,” they answered Pharaoh, “they are
20 hardy, and they give birth before the midwife reaches them.” ·God was kind
21 to the midwives. The people went on increasing and grew very powerful; ·since
the midwives revered God he granted them descendants.

22 Pharaoh then gave his subjects this command: “Throw all the boys born to
the Hebrews into the river, but let all the girls live.”

B. EARLY LIFE AND CALL OF MOSES

The birth of Moses

1 **2** There was a man of the tribe of Levi who had taken a woman of Levi as his
2 wife. ·She conceived and gave birth to a son and, seeing what a fine child he

3 was, she kept him hidden for three months. •When she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him; coating it with bitumen and pitch, she put the
4 child inside and laid it among the reeds at the river's edge. •His sister stood some distance away to see what would happen to him.

5 Now Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe in the river, and the girls attending her were walking along by the riverside. Among the reeds she noticed
6 the basket, and she sent her maid to fetch it. •She opened it and looked, and saw a baby boy, crying; and she was sorry for him. "This is a child of one of the
7 Hebrews," she said. •Then the child's sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and find you a nurse among the Hebrew women to suckle the child
8 for you?" •"Yes, go," Pharaoh's daughter said to her; and the girl went off to find
9 the baby's own mother. •To her the daughter of Pharaoh said, "Take this child away and suckle it for me. I will see you are paid." So the woman took the child
10 and suckled it. •When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who treated him like a son; she named him Moses because, she said, "I drew him out of the water."^a

Moses escapes to Midian

11 Moses, a man by now, set out at this time to visit his countrymen, and he saw what a hard life they were having; and he saw an Egyptian strike a Hebrew, one
12 of his countrymen. •Looking around he could see no one in sight, so he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. •On the following day he came back, and there
13 were two Hebrews, fighting. He said to the man who was in the wrong, "What do you mean by hitting your fellow countryman?" •"And who appointed you,"
14 the man retorted, "to be prince over us, and judge? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was frightened. "Clearly that business has
15 come to light," he thought. •When Pharaoh heard of the matter he would have killed Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and made for the land of Midian.^b And he sat down beside a well.

16 Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and
17 fill the troughs to water their father's sheep. •Shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses came to their defense and watered their sheep for them. •When
18 they returned to their father Reuel, he said to them, "You are back early today!"
19 "An Egyptian protected us from the shepherds"; they said, "yes, and he drew water for us and watered the flock." •"And where is he?" he asked his daughters.
21 "Why did you leave the man there? Ask him to eat with us." •So Moses settled
22 with this man, who gave him his daughter Zipporah in marriage. •She gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom because, he said, "I am a stranger in a foreign land."

THE CALL OF MOSES

God remembers Israel

23 During this long period the king of Egypt died. The sons of Israel, groaning in their slavery, cried out for help and from the depths of their slavery their cry
24 came up to God. •God heard their groaning and he called to mind his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. •God looked down upon the sons of Israel, and he knew . . .

1 a. The residence of Rameses II in the Delta; either Tanis or Qantir. b. The exact meaning is uncertain.

2 a. Folk derivation of the name Moses from *mashah*, to draw out. b. Midian lies south of Edom and east of the Gulf of Aqaba.

III. THE COVENANT AT SINAI

A. THE COVENANT AND THE DECALOGUE

The Israelites come to Sinai

1 **19** Three months after they came out of the land of Egypt . . . on that day
 2 the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sinai.^a From Rephidim they set
 out again; and when they reached the wilderness of Sinai, there in the wilderness
 they pitched their camp; there facing the mountain Israel pitched camp.

Yahweh promises a covenant

3 Moses then went up to God, and Yahweh called to him from the mountain,
 4 saying, "Say this to the House of Jacob, declare this to the sons of Israel, 'You
 yourselves have seen what I did with the Egyptians, how I carried you on eagles'
 5 wings and brought you to myself. From this you know that now, if you obey my
 voice and hold fast to my covenant, you of all the nations shall be my very own,
 6 for all the earth is mine. I will count you a kingdom of priests, a consecrated
 7 nation.' Those are the words you are to speak to the sons of Israel." So Moses
 went and summoned the elders of the people, putting before them all that Yahweh
 8 had bidden him. Then all the people answered as one, "All that Yahweh has
 said, we will do." And Moses took the people's reply back to Yahweh.

Preparing for the Covenant

9 Yahweh said to Moses, "I am coming to you in a dense cloud so that the
 people may hear when I speak to you and may trust you always." And Moses
 took the people's reply back to Yahweh.
 10 Yahweh said to Moses, "Go to the people and tell them to prepare themselves
 11 today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothing and hold themselves in
 readiness for the third day, because on the third day Yahweh will descend on
 12 the mountain of Sinai in the sight of all the people. You will mark out the
 limits of the mountain and say, 'Take care not to go up the mountain or to
 touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain will be put to death.
 13 No one must lay a hand on him: he must be stoned or shot down by arrow,
 whether man or beast; he must not remain alive.' When the ram's horn sounds
 a long blast, they are to go up the mountain."
 14 So Moses came down from the mountain to the people and bade them prepare
 15 themselves; and they washed their clothing. Then he said to the people, "Be
 ready for the third day; do not go near any woman."

The theophany on Sinai

16 Now at daybreak on the third day there were peals of thunder on the
 mountain and lightning flashes, a dense cloud, and a loud trumpet blast, and
 17 inside the camp all the people trembled. Then Moses led the people out of
 18 the camp to meet God; and they stood at the bottom of the mountain. The
 mountain of Sinai was entirely wrapped in smoke, because Yahweh had descended
 on it in the form of fire. Like smoke from a furnace the smoke went up, and
 19 the whole mountain shook violently. Louder and louder grew the sound
 of the trumpet. Moses spoke, and God answered him with peals of thunder.
 20 Yahweh came down on the mountain of Sinai, on the mountain top, and Yahweh
 21 called Moses to the top of the mountain; and Moses went up. Yahweh said
 to Moses, "Go down and warn the people not to pass beyond their bounds to
 22 come and look on Yahweh, or many of them will lose their lives. The priests,
 the men who do approach Yahweh,^b even these must purify themselves, or
 23 Yahweh will break out against them." Moses answered Yahweh, "The people
 cannot come up the mountain of Sinai because you warned us yourself when

24 you said, 'Mark out the limits of the mountain and declare it sacred.'" "Go down," said Yahweh to him, "and come up again bringing Aaron with you. But do not allow the priests or the people to pass beyond their bounds to come up to Yahweh, or he will break out against them." 25 "So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them . . .

The Decalogue^a

¹/₂ **20** Then God spoke all these words. He said, "I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
³ "You shall have no gods except me.
⁴ "You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God and I punish the father's fault in the sons, the grandsons, and the great-grandsons of those who hate me; but I show kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.
⁷ "You shall not utter the name of Yahweh your God to misuse it,^b for Yahweh will not leave unpunished the man who utters his name to misuse it.
⁸/₉ "Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath for Yahweh your God. You shall do no work that day, neither you nor your son nor your daughter nor your servants, men or women, nor your animals nor the stranger who lives with you. For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that these hold, but on the seventh day he rested; that is why Yahweh has blessed the sabbath day and made it sacred.
¹² "Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that Yahweh your God has given to you.
¹³ "You shall not kill.
¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery.
¹⁵ "You shall not steal.
¹⁶ "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his servant, man or woman, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his."
¹⁸ "All the people shook with fear at the peals of thunder and the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the smoking mountain; and they kept their distance. "Speak to us yourself," they said to Moses, "and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we shall die." Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid; God has come to test you, so that your fear of him, being always in your mind, may keep you from sinning." So the people kept their distance while Moses approached the dark cloud where God was.

19 a. According to tradition, Mount Sinai was at Jebel Musa, in the southern region of the Sinai peninsula. b. But see ch. 29, which treats the investiture of priests as a later occurrence. 20 a. This is the priestly version of the Ten Commandments; another version, the Deuteronomic, is found in Dt. 5, and it is the second which has been adopted by the Church. b. Either in a false oath or irreverently. c. This section probably should be read after 19:19; the Decalogue itself is not linked to the narrative framework.