

MOSES – “THE MAN OF GOD”.

Old Testament Series Number 4.

By Father Felix, O.F.M. Cap., L.S.S.

CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY of Ireland No. Dd1114 (1945).

INTRODUCTION.

This booklet will study that part of the history of the Old Testament under the leadership of the great Moses.

[This booklet is from the superb Old Testament series, which is such a boon for Catholics who are seriously endeavouring to understand the truths of Sacred Scripture. The great Capuchin, Father Felix has written an important series of pamphlets on the Bible for the benefit of educated Catholics and those others who are interested in this fascinating topic. It must be stressed that, though these pamphlets are of an earlier generation of Catholic scholars, NOTHING has been discovered since his day that would undermine the philosophical and theological foundations upon which Father Felix drew his conclusions. A strong case can be made, and IS being made by ‘conservative’ Catholic and Evangelical Bible scholars, that archeological and other studies, since his time, have only reinforced the reliability and integrity of the Biblical record.]

[Father Felix uses the names common in English Catholic Bibles of his time. These (Douay) names are based on the Latin Vulgate translation of the Greek rendering of the Hebrew. Modern Catholic scholars now generally prefer to use English translations taken straight from the Hebrew. An appendix has been added to this pamphlet to list the various names used where they differ. Please consult this list if you are unsure as to the identity of the Proper Names in this pamphlet.]

###

INTRODUCTION.

We left the **House of Jacob** happily situated in Egypt under the protection of the Patriarch Joseph, but at the beginning of the Book of Exodus, a sad change has come about: "*there arose a new king over Egypt that knew not Joseph.*" (Exodus 1:8). There is much meaning in that phrase **knew not Joseph**, as the context shows. A new Egyptian dynasty is in power, and a new policy in force. The Hebrews, who had been protected and favoured formerly, are bitterly persecuted now, and viewed as aliens and enemies by the ruling powers. In a word, the invading Hyksos have been expelled; the native Egyptians have recovered possession of the Delta.

(Footnote: For details of the earlier history of the Chosen People, see Number 3 of this Series at <http://www.pamphlets.org.au/ireland/ctsidd1497.html>).

THE PERSECUTION.

The opposition to the Hebrews was cleverly organised, and the persecution cruelly carried out. Pharaoh first stirred up the racial prejudices of the Egyptians. Then he imposed forced labour on the Hebrews, appointed Egyptian task-masters over them, and thus reduced them to slavery. Pithom and Ramesses, two "*cities of tabernacles*" (Exodus 1:11), that is, cities containing storehouses for food and munitions of war, were built by the Hebrews under these circumstances.

(Footnote: Pithom is believed by some to have been discovered by Monsieur Edouard Naville in 1883 at Tell-el-Maskhuta; others place it at Tell Artabi or Tell er-Rebata. The site of Ramesses is even less certain.)

To slavery was added the malignant hatred of the Egyptians, expressed in mockery and open insults. Then when the Hebrews only increased in numbers under the persecution, Pharaoh ordered that all Hebrew children, of the male sex born thenceforth should be drowned in the river Nile.

MOSES.

A husband and wife, named Amram and Jochabed, of the tribe of Levi, had a daughter, Miriam (the original Hebrew form of Mary), and a son, Aaron. A second son was born to them after the edict of Pharaoh. He was "*a goodly child*" (Exodus 2:2); and natural affection prompted the mother to risk defiance of the cruel edict. She hid him in her home for three months, but it was impossible to continue the evasion. Then she devised a bold plan.

"*She took a basket made of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and pitch; and put the little babe therein, and laid him in the sedges by the river's brink, his sister standing afar off, and taking notice what should be done*" (Exodus 2:3-4). (Footnote: The basket made of bulrushes would be probably a *coffin* made of the papyrus plant. The coffin would deceive the officers of Pharaoh. The papyrus was coated with *bitumen* (slime) mixed with pitch, which mixture "forms a hard glossy wax, perfectly impervious to water." *The Land and The Book*, by W. M. Thompson, D.D., London, 1859, page 224.)

It cannot have been by chance, that the basket coffin was put at the very place in the Nile where the king's daughter came to bathe, and in such

a position that it attracted her attention. The princess sent one of her maids to fetch the little ark. When she opened it and found within an infant crying, her best human feelings were stirred and she determined to save the life of the infant, although she knew him to be a Hebrew. Miriam, who had been anxiously watching the whole scene, now came forward, and offered to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the child. The princess agreed, and the girl went at once to bring her mother. So the child was reared by his own mother until he was old enough to be admitted into the royal house of Pharaoh; and then he was accepted by Pharaoh's daughter as an adopted son. She named him Moses. The sacred writer says expressly that he was so called because he was taken from the water (Exodus 2:10), thus deriving the name from the Hebrew *mashah*, 'to draw.' Originally, however, the name was Egyptian, and probably means 'the infant.' There is no contradiction involved; for primitive peoples a proper name is never without a meaning, and the Hebrews would naturally seek a derivation of their own for the Egyptian name, Moses. (See: *Les Hebreux en Egypte*, by Alexis Mallon, S.J., *Orientalia*, Number 3, Rome, 1921, page 133.)

From his Hebrew home Moses brought religious zeal and sympathy for his own people, while at the court of Pharaoh, he received the best administrative, political and military training of the time. In this way did divine providence prepare him for the arduous mission in front of him. "Moses fills a triple role in Israel. A Prophet filled with the spirit of God, whose compeer Israel has not seen for the familiarity with which God treated him and the marvels which he wrought (Deuteronomy 34:10), he enriched the religion of ancient Israel with new and decisive revelations; a political genius of the first order, he grouped together tribes till then with no great cohesion and made of them a solidly organised people; lastly, he was a legislator of broad views, the promulgator of a law which in its essential content kept its value intact until the mission of Israel was accomplished." (See the Article 'Christus', in *Manuel d'Histoire des Religions*, by Joseph Huby and others; and *La Religion d'Israel*, by John Nikel, Paris 1927, 5th edition, page 876.)

CHAPTER 1.

THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT.

(Exodus 2:11-18:27).

Exodus comes from two Greek words, and means 'a going out'. It is used for the migration of the Jews from Egypt.

Moses grew to manhood in royal surroundings while another generation of his people groaned in servitude: He saw their sad condition, and his sympathy with them grew. When he was forty years old, he saw one day an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew worker and he could restrain himself no longer. Seeing no one near he thought himself unobserved, so he attacked and slew the Egyptian and buried the corpse in the sand. On the following day, however, when he tried to make peace between two Hebrews who were quarrelling, one of these taunted him with the killing of the Egyptian. Whether the Hebrew on whose behalf he had intervened had told, or another whom he had not noticed, the

affair had become public. Pharaoh soon heard of it, and Moses had to flee to save his life. He went to Midian in Arabia, where he married Sephora, the daughter of Jethro or Raguel. (Jethro is described as a priest. Raguel, which means 'friend of God', was perhaps an official title.) They had two sons, Gersam and Eliezer. Moses spent forty years a shepherd with Jethro.

THE PHARAO OF THE OPPRESSION?

"Now after a long time the king of Egypt died."

(Exodus 2:23).

This text has a close bearing on the question of the date of the Exodus. Reigns of longer than forty years are few. In fact in the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties of Egypt (and the Exodus falls in one or other of these for a certainty) there are only two such reigns; Thutmose (or Thutmose) III, of the eighteenth dynasty ruled for fifty-four years, and Ramesses II of the nineteenth dynasty for sixty-six or sixty-seven years. From the numbers in the Bible the Exodus would seem to be dated at 1449 B.C. (See: *Chronologia Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, authored by Ernesto Rufini, Rome, 1924, page 90.)

But biblical numbers are a subject for textual criticism; and on the other hand, scholars differ as to the dates of the dynasties in Egypt. Consequently we have no certainty: At first opinion was strongly in favour of Ramesses II as being "the Pharaoh of the oppression," and his successor Menephtah (or Merneptah) I "the Pharaoh of the Exodus." (See: *La Bible et Les Decouvertes Moderne*, by F. Vigouroux, S.S., 10th Edition, Volume 2, Paris, 1879, pages 208-211. On page 208 he states that all Egyptologists of the time were agreed in placing the Exodus in the nineteenth Dynasty, the only question being under which Pharaoh of the eighteenth. Today we are less certain of this.)

Later, opinion shifted to Thutmose (Thutmose) III and his successor Amenhotep II, the fourth and fifth Pharaohs of the eighteenth dynasty. (Father Cornely gives this as the probable opinion in his day. See: *Compendium Introductionis in U. T. Libros*, Paris, 1914, 8th Edition, page 713. More recently, this is the opinion favoured by John Garstang in *The Foundations of Bible History*, *Joshua, Judges*, London, 1931, page 344. He places the Exodus in 1447 under Thutmose III; similarly John Nikel, Sir Charles Marston and many others. We may take this as probable.)

But in recent times, there is a reaction to the old Ramesses-Menephtah theory. (Thus Father Mallon, S.J., while insisting strongly that it is only a *hypothesis*, gives good reasons for the Ramesses II-Menephtah theory in *Les Hebreux en Egypte*, pages 178-182. But then his dates differ from those of Vigouroux. The wise reader will use great reserve in dealing with theories advanced in popular books. The problem is vast and far from solution.)

THE BURNING BUSH.

At all events, that Pharaoh died – be he Thutmose III or Ramesses II – from whose displeasure Moses was an exile. After which when Moses one

day led his sheep as usual to the mountain range called Horeb he noticed some distance away a bush burning but not being consumed; and he went towards it to seek an explanation. It was a miracle; and God spoke to him revealing Himself as the One True God, Who had spoken to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses was commissioned to return to Egypt and to lead his people to freedom and to the conquest of the land of Chanaan. For all his preparation, Moses was diffident of himself. But God assured him of His divine protection; He revealed to him the Divine Name – Yahweh.

The Divine name, *Yahweh*, is a noun from the Hebrew verb ‘to be’, (hawah). The meaning of it, therefore, is ‘the being’ or ‘he who exists (of himself)’; in terms of philosophy *ens a se*. For three centuries before Christ, the Jews, through reverence would not pronounce this name, but substituted for it *Adonai* (Lord). Yahweh, or sometimes spelt Jahwe, (not Jehovah) is now accepted as the correct form.)

God promised to endow Moses with miraculous powers, that his words would be divinely inspired, and that Aaron, his brother, would be given to him to support him in his mission. Moses then bade farewell to Jethro and with his wife and their two sons set out for Egypt.

Moses found Aaron, and together they went to Pharaoh and demanded that the Hebrews be allowed to go a three days' journey into the neighbouring Arabian desert – there to offer sacrifice to God. Pharaoh refused. Then Moses and Aaron organised the people into making a united demand. This only enraged Pharaoh; and he retorted by oppressing them still more. The people now complained bitterly against Moses. He had recourse to God; God assured him of success and sent him back to Pharaoh – this time with power to work miracles. But again, his mission was a failure: "*Pharaoh's heart was hardened*" (Exodus 7:13).

THE TEN PLAGUES.

To vanquish Pharaoh's obstinacy God visited Egypt with ten plagues each of increasing severity. First, the water of the Nile and of its tributaries, lakes and cistern was changed into blood. The second was a plague of frogs; the third of mosquitoes. (The exact nature of this third plague has long been a problem. Our (Douay) Version calls it the plague of *sciniphs*, which is only a transliteration of the Hebrew word *kinnim*. Brown-Driver-Briggs (Hebrew Lexicon) translate it as *gnats*. Vigouroux, Fillion, and Mallon think there is question of mosquitoes.)

The fourth plague of flies, and the remaining six plagues differed from the first three in that they did not affect Gessen where the Hebrews lived. At the fourth plague, Pharaoh was thoroughly frightened, and he began to offer concessions. He would allow the Hebrews to offer sacrifice but in Egypt. Moses refused this condition because, he pleaded, they must sacrifice animals, which the Egyptians held sacred. Pharaoh surrendered, and promised to allow them to go three days' journey into the desert if only the plague would cease. But when Moses removed the plague, Pharaoh broke his promise.

Then followed promptly the fifth plague of a murrain among the cattle of Egypt; the sixth of boils on men and beasts; the seventh of thunder and lightning, and hail, which killed men and animals, and destroyed herbs and trees. Again, Pharaoh surrendered, but only to relent as before. The courtiers intervened now, and Pharaoh was forced to recall Moses and Aaron. He offered this time to allow the men of the Hebrews to go; but the women and children, the flocks and possessions were to be left behind. Moses rejected this condition. The eighth plague of locusts resulted only in another broken promise from Pharaoh. After the ninth plague of darkness, he was willing to allow the people to go, but not their flocks and herds.

THE PASCH AND THE TENTH PLAGUE.

The tenth plague – the death of the first-born of every family in Egypt from Pharaoh's to the least of his subjects – was the most appalling of all; and it broke down finally the king's resistance. Very special preparations were made for this visitation. God commanded that in each household of the Hebrews a lamb was to be killed, roasted whole, and eaten without the breaking of a bone. The day was appointed – the fourteenth of the Hebrew month, Nisan. (Nisan would correspond to the later half of our March and the first half of our April approximately.) With the lamb were to be eaten bitter herbs (symbolical of the bitter persecution they had endured in Egypt), and unleavened bread. They were to eat standing, with their loins girded and staff in hand – this and the unleavened bread were symbols of hasty preparations for a journey. The blood of the lamb was to be sprinkled on the lintels and doorposts of the Hebrew houses. At midnight, the destroying angel passed through Egypt and slew the first-born in every house which was not sprinkled with the blood of the lamb.

The same manner of killing and eating the lamb with the same ritual was appointed to be observed annually on the same date (14th Nisan). The festival was called the **Phase** or **Pasch** (Passover) (from the Hebrew word pesah – a passing over.)

THE EXODUS.

Pharaoh now summoned Moses and Aaron and bade the Hebrews depart; while the Egyptians, terrified by the plague, urged them to go speedily and presented them with gold and silver vessels and clothing. Seventy persons of the House of Jacob had come to Egypt; now after 430 years they had increased to about two millions.

Led by a miraculous pillar of cloud by day which at night became a pillar of light the immense multitude took their journey from Ramesses to Socoth. From this their natural route would be due eastward, but under divine guidance they went southward instead of Beelsephon. (This is the only one of these stages in the journey for the locating of which we have anything like certitude. It would be at the north-western point of the Gulf of Suez.)

By this time, Pharaoh had perceived to his intense disappointment that they were not returning to Egypt. He located their position, and with his army set out in pursuit. "Humanly speaking, the Israelites were lost: before them to the south rose Gebel Attakah; from north and west came the Egyptian army; on the east was the Red Sea." (*Histoire De L'Ancien Testament*, by Monsignor J.B. Pelt, 7th Edition, Paris, 1922, Volume 1, page 222.) They fully realised this themselves, and bitterly reproached Moses for leading them into a death trap. All this, however, was designed to make the miracle of their rescue the more impressive. Moses stretched his hand over the Red Sea. The water divided, and a passage was made through the sea for the people. Meantime the pillar of cloud moved to the rear of the Hebrew host giving them light but keeping the Egyptians in darkness. When all the Israelites had crossed safely to the other side, the Egyptians followed in pursuit. But when these were between the divided waters, Moses stretched forth his hand again. The sea flowed back; 'the waters returned, and covered the chariots and the horsemen of all the army of Pharaoh, who had come into the sea after them, neither did there so much as one of them remain' thus the army were drowned.(Exodus 14:28).

The journey was now southward along the Arabian shore of the Red Sea; to Mara, Elim, and on to the desert of Sin. Here the people murmured again, and God sent them quails for food and also miraculous bread, which they called **manna**. At Raphidim Moses struck with his staff a rock of the Horeb range of mountain, and water came copiously to relieve their want. Here also a new obstacle appeared: the Amalecites, a wild desert people, attacked the Hebrews. Moses appointed Josue to lead the fighting men while he with Aaron and Hur went to the crest of a hill in full view of the battlefield to pray for victory for his people. The Amalecites were routed. Jethro came to meet Moses here, and advised him on the manner of organising and ruling the people.

MIRACLES.

In the attacks made by the rationalists on the Catholic doctrine of miracles generally these miracles of which we have just been treating received special attention. A miracle is an extraordinary occurrence, perceptible to the senses, wrought by divine power **outside** (that is, beyond or above) the ordinary natural laws. To argue that a miracle is impossible because it would denote a change of plan in the divine mind shows a wrong idea of a miracle and a wrong idea of God. A miracle is not **against** the ordinary providence of God – it is **above** or **beyond** it; and God is a free agent, eternal, omnipotent, unchanging. Miracles are part of the plan of this order, which unfolds itself successively in time to us, but which is foreseen in its entirety to the infinite wisdom of God.

As to the miracles in **Exodus** in particular: in the Sinai peninsula of Arabia there is a natural effect produced by climate, sun and wind combined, which at a distance resembles a burning bush. In Egypt, the Nile rises yearly and floods the Delta country, the water becoming a reddish brown from the mud, which is carried in solution. This mud in turn when deposited is a breeding-ground for frogs, mosquitoes and flies. Then there is the Egyptian *khamassin*, a hot wind from the desert, which brings sand and causes dense darkness. Natural manna is found in Arabia, and water is found under rocks in the most unlikely places. Hence, it is argued, the events above are natural events used by Moses

for his purpose.

Such argument not merely ignores but goes directly contrary to the text and context of the biblical narrative. The Red Nile appears yearly in July; Moses turned **all** the waters of Egypt into blood in February. (We can date this from the tenth miracle – 14th Nissan.) From the Burning Bush God spoke to Moses and confided to him his mission – a mission, which not only was he not expecting, but was very slow to undertake. The plagues began and ceased at the command of Moses. The manna was provided in great quantity at the prayer of Moses when the people required food. That these miracles reproduce certain features natural to the countries where they occurred is part of the **divine economy of miracles**: "An additional recommendation of the Scripture miracles is their appositeness to the times and places in which they were wrought; as, for instance, in the case of the plagues of Egypt, which . . . were directed against the prevalent superstitions of that country." (*Essays on Miracles*, by [Blessed] John Henry Cardinal Newman, 8th Edition, (of Longman's), page 25. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile; also frogs, bulls and serpents.)

CHAPTER 2.

MOUNT SINAI AND THE LAW.

(Exodus 19-30; Leviticus; Deuteronomy 5-30).

Three months had passed since the Israelites quitted Egypt, and now they were at Mount Sinai. Through Moses as mediator, God proposed to make a solemn covenant here with His chosen people; and the people agreed. Three days were spent in religious preparation; and on the morning of the third day thunder, lightning and dense clouds on the peak of Sinai proclaimed the presence of God to the awe-stricken multitude in the valley below. Moses went to the top of the mountain to hear the divine instructions.

THE DECALOGUE.

“Decalogue’, that is, the ten commandments, comes from the Greek *deca* (ten) and *logos* (word). They are called “*the ten words*” in Deuteronomy 10:4 and Exodus 34:28.)

The law given to Moses is very extensive and detailed, but at the outset, a summary of the whole moral code is given in the Ten Commandments. These contain the primary precepts of the natural law; they answer to the purpose and needs of man's rational nature; consequently, they can no more change than human nature can. Our Lord renewed them in the Sermon on the Mount: "*Do not think that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill*". (Saint Matthew 5:17). What Our Lord did was to interpret them more clearly and more fully. The Ten Commandments direct human conduct in our relations with God, ourselves, our fellow-men. Thus,

they are the foundation of true piety, of civic peace, of social order and of domestic harmony. "They have always been esteemed as the most precious rules of life and are the basis of all Christian legislation." (See the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, under the word 'Commandments'.)

With the Ten Commandments, Moses, under divine inspiration, gave the Hebrews many laws, which are a development of the moral code contained in the Decalogue; detailed regulations for divine worship (especially for sacrifice and a priesthood); and wise rules for the civil government and social organisation of the nation: in a word, moral, ceremonial and civil laws.

THE PENAL CODE.

The death penalty was decreed for idolatry; for blasphemy; for violation of the Sabbath; for striking or cursing one's father or mother (this law is quoted by Our Lord in Saint Matthew 15:4); for murder; for adultery and certain other gross sexual crimes. The long list need cause no surprise when it is remembered that we are dealing with ancient times and with people whom Moses, their leader, described as "*stiff-necked*," (Exodus 32:9), that is, incorrigible. Indeed, compared with ancient codes generally the Law of Moses is exceedingly mild. Thus in the penalty of scourging the number of strokes must not exceed forty (Deuteronomy 25:3), whereas in ancient Roman law (rightly regarded as the best of all human codes of Ancient times) there was no such limit imposed, and slaves were sometimes flogged to death. (Cicero gives a concrete instance, *In Verrem*, 5, 54.) In practice, the number in Jewish law was thirty-nine, through fear of exceeding the legal number: 'of the Jews five times did I receive forty stripes, save one' (2 Corinthians 11:24).

MORAL LAWS.

Kindness to strangers and hospitality are recommended in several places; and benevolence to widows and orphans: "*If you hurt them they will cry out to me and I will hear their cry*" (Exodus 22:23). Almsgiving and thought for the poor are encouraged; the grain-fields and the vineyards are not to be stripped bare at the harvest time so that the needy may have the gleanings (Leviticus 19:9-10).

There are humane rules for the treatment of animals: "*If you meet your enemy's ox or ass going astray, bring it back to him. If you see the ass of him that hates you lie underneath his burden, you shall not pass by, but shall lift him up with him*" (Exodus 23:4-5). "*You shall not plough with an ass and an ox together*" (Deuteronomy 22:10). "*You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out your grain on the floor*" (Deuteronomy 25:4). (Grain was threshed by walking oxen over it, often dragging a threshing board.)

Necromancy, sorcery, divination, calumny, detraction, hatred, theft, extortion, fraud and usury are severally and sternly condemned: "*Let the balance be just and the weights equal; the bushel just and the pint-measure equal*" (Leviticus 19:36).

MARRIAGE.

It was forbidden to the Israelites to marry those outside their own nation, and especially the Chanaanites, on account of the danger of perversion. The reality of this danger is clear from a concrete instance in Leviticus 24:10-14, where the son of a Hebrew mother named Salumith and an Egyptian father had to be executed for blasphemy. They were required furthermore to marry from their own tribes – this to maintain intact the lands and possessions of the several tribes. For this same end, the levirate law was renewed by which her brother-in-law must marry a widow who had no son to inherit the family name and property.

Polygamy and divorce were practised by the surrounding peoples, and these evils against the unity and indissolubility of matrimony had crept in among the Hebrews also. Moses could fight these abuses only indirectly. In Genesis 2:22-24 he makes prominent statement of the divine decree concerning the unity of matrimony and its indissolubility; and all through the law the ideal of matrimony as one, permanent and holy is in evidence.

To check divorce he instituted the "*bill of divorce*" (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), which was intended "to make the husband desist from his intention (of divorcing) by creating delay and bringing the matter before the scribes who would dissuade him." (We quote Saint Augustine, *Contra Faustam*, Book 19, chapter 26.) Then a woman divorced a second time could not re-marry her first husband, "*because she is defiled, and is become abominable before the Lord.*" (Deuteronomy 24: 4) ("The existence of the practice of divorce is assumed and restricted. Not merely does it receive no positive sanction, but it is tacitly reprobated. The Hebrews were not as yet fitted for anything higher. Among barbarous people, a wronged husband often holds it to be his strict right to kill his unfaithful wife. It was better that an Israelite should believe himself free in such a case to put away his wife, than that he should adopt the far more criminal alternative.' (*Christian Marriage*, by George Hayward Joyce, S.J., London, 1933, page 273.) Our Lord restored marriage to its original ideal unity: '*Because of the hardness of your heart* (that is, combined ignorance and obstinacy), *Moses wrote you that precept* (of making out a legal form of divorce). . . . *What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder*'. Saint Mark 10:5-9.)

SLAVERY.

An Israelite could become a slave for theft when unable to restore; or for debt. But he was never a slave in perpetuity. He became free again when the debt was paid; or when the sabbatical or jubilee year came, every seventh and fiftieth year respectively. This is in contrast to ancient pagan codes of law.

THE CEREMONIAL LAW.

Unlike the moral law, the ceremonial was only temporary, giving figures of the realities to come with the Redeemer: "*a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things*" (Hebrews 10:1). Detailed instructions were given for the appointment and consecration of priests; the building of a sanctuary; public and private worship of God; sacrifices and festivals. Aaron was divinely chosen to be the first high

priest; his sons were appointed priests; and the office was to be hereditary in their families. The men of the tribe of Levi were to serve the sanctuary; and the Book of Leviticus a special code of laws for the duties of priests and Levites, and the order of sacrifices and ceremonies.

THE TABERNACLE.

The sanctuary – the first church raised to the One True God – of necessity took the form of a tabernacle (literally – a tent) or moveable house since the people were (and were to remain for forty years) nomads without fixed abode. A rectangular space, 150 feet by 75 feet, was first fenced about but open to the sky. This was "*the court of the tabernacle*" (Exodus 27:9); and as far as the entrance to the tabernacle it was open to all the Israelites. At the western end was the roofed tabernacle, or sanctuary proper, 45 feet by 18 feet, with a *veil* or curtain at the entrance. (The dimensions follow those according to Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3,6,3. But the reading is uncertain; another reading gives 45 feet by 15.)

This again was divided by a second veil into "*the Holy (place)*" and "*the Holy of Holies*" that is, the most holy place (Hebrews 9:2-3). Priests and Levites could enter the holy place, but only the high priests could enter the inner sanctuary, and that only once a year on "*the day of atonement*" (Leviticus 23:27), the tenth of the Jewish month Tishri. (*Tishri* would correspond to our mid-September to mid-October.)

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT.

In the *holy of holies* was the *Ark of the Covenant*, the most sacred possession of the Hebrews, the throne of Yahweh where He visibly manifested His presence. It was a chest or oblong box of acacia ('setim') wood, 3 feet 9 inches long by 2 feet 3 inches broad and high, covered with a golden plate called *the propitiatory*, (or 'throne of mercy') ornamented with a crown of gold and two figures of angels. In the Ark were placed the two stone tablets of the Decalogue, and near it a written copy of the whole law of Moses. In the Holy Place were the altar of incense, the golden seven-branched candlestick, and the table for the twelve loaves of the proposition (the 'face-bread' or bread of continual offering before the face of God) (Exodus 25:30). In the court were the altar of holocausts and the "*brazen laver*" (Exodus 30:18), a large vessel of bronze for the ritual washings.

LEGAL CLEANLINESS.

The prohibition to eat blood was renewed (Deuteronomy 15:23); also the law of circumcision on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3), a law which seems to have fallen into neglect even in the case of Moses' own son (Exodus, 4:25). The distinction between clean and unclean foods was also renewed and clarified (Leviticus 11). Various causes gave rise to legal defilement, for example, touching a corpse. Leprosy, ever the scourge of eastern countries, was given in charge to the priests because medical science was unknown. The priests diagnosed the disease or certified to its cure. (This illustrates the incident in the Gospel (Saint Luke 17:12-19) where Our Lord commanded the ten lepers: "*Go, show yourselves to the priests.*")

Many of these ceremonial laws are directed to hygiene and public health, but underlying them is always the divine purpose of keeping the Hebrews separate from the surrounding idolatrous nations: "*I have separated you from other people that you shall be mine*" (Leviticus 20:26). Also there is the higher purpose still of educating them to holiness by means of these distinctions between clean and unclean in material things. Take, for instance, the prohibition (in Deuteronomy 14:21; Exodus 23:10; and 34:26): "*You shall not boil a kid in the milk of its dam.*" This practice is regarded as brutal; it is also "a gross unwholesome dish," (*The Land and The Book*, by W. M. Thompson, D.D., page 95) and lastly it is used in the heathen worship of Asherat, the Phoenician god of fertility. (This is clear from the inscriptions on the Ras Shamra tablets discovered in Northern Syria in 1929. See *Verbum Domini*, Volume 16 (1936), pages 142-148 and 174-183.)

THE CIVIL LAW.

The Hebrews of the Old Testament had a unique political constitution – they were a **theocracy** (from the Greek *Theos* for ‘God’ and *Krateia* for ‘government’.) God was the supreme and sole ruler, judge and lawgiver; Moses and those who succeeded him (even the kings) were but deputies of Yahweh. They were the **Chosen People** of God; their civil laws were religious laws; all the legislation of Moses was inspired. This does not mean that all the civil laws were new. No, what was good in the patriarchal code and tribal customs was retained and re-enacted. This is the reason that there are many points of resemblance between the laws in the Bible concerning property, the administration of justice, social and national policy, and the laws on the same matters in the code of Hammurabi, the great law-giver of Babylonia. (The code of Hammurabi is not entirely an original either. ‘It is also the codification of customs, which had long been in use in Babylonia and the countries of Asia Minor where Babylonia had an influence. See Christus, referenced earlier, at page 891.)

The Hebrews had their origin in Babylonia, and had brought these tribal laws thence. But in no human code is found anything approaching in dignity, simplicity, depth and comprehensiveness the sublime summary of the whole moral law contained in the Decalogue of Moses. (. . . The code of Hammurabi is purely a civil and penal code of law, in which the author is guided by utilitarian principles solely; his principal object is to protect property.” *Christus*, page 891.)

CHAPTER 3.

IN THE DESERT.

(Exodus 30-40; Numbers; Deuteronomy 1-4 and 31-34).

(Desert here and in the Bible generally, means merely land which is not cultivated and irrigated; by no means, however, a sandy waste. Compare in the parable of the lost sheep: ‘*Does he not leave the ninety nine in the desert? . . .*’ Saint Luke 15:4.)

Moses first committed the moral code to writing. Then he had an altar raised at the foot of Mount Sinai and victims slain in sacrifice. Half of the blood of these victims was poured on the altar. Moses read the law to the people, and then the remainder of the blood he sprinkled on the book of the law and on the assembled people. This done Moses went up to the summit again to receive further revelations; and after six days spent alone in prayer, God called him into the cloud which was the sign of the divine presence. There he remained for forty days alone with God.

The forty days were nearly ended, but when Moses was not returning the people in the plain beneath became restive, and clamoured to Aaron that he should make them an idol, which they might worship. The idolatry with which they were familiar in Egypt had a fatal attraction for them, which at first sight causes surprise. But the formula used in Holy Scripture to describe idolatry sheds light on the matter: *the people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play*" (Exodus 32:6). The word *play* in the original means 'to laugh' or 'to jest' ; it has reference to the lewd songs and dances, the wild uncontrolled mirth in which the idolaters indulged when they had sated themselves with the victims killed for the idol. Idol-worship had no seriousness, no reverence about it. It consisted of feasting and coarse merriment alternately.

THE GOLDEN CALF.

In a moment of weakness, Aaron yielded to the popular clamour; he took the ear-rings of the women, and had the gold in these fashioned into the image of a calf. This they set up on a pedestal as an idol, and proceeded to adore. Moses was made aware of what had happened by a divine intimation, and he was commanded to go down and intervene. He hastened down to the plain where the people were. He had with him the two stone tablets, which he had received from God – the Ten Commandments divinely engraved on them. When he came face to face with the idolaters his indignation and disgust overcame him; and he flung the tables of the law from him and broke them – a sign that the covenant was broken to which they had so recently given their approval. The first law of the ten was violated; the law which is the foundation of all the others: "*I am Yahweh your God. . . . You shall not have strange gods before me*" (Exodus 20:2-3).

Moses seized the idol; smashed it to powder; threw the powder in the stream, which supplied them with water, and made the people drink it. Next Aaron was severely rebuked for his weakness. Then Moses rallied the fighting men of his own tribe (of Levi), and sent them to put the ring-leaders to the sword. About 23,000 were slain. But Moses still loved his people – stiff-necked as they were; and he pleaded with God in moving words for their pardon: "*either forgive them this trespass, or if You do not, strike me out of the book that You have written*" (Exodus 32:31-32). God therefore commanded him to procure anew two stone tablets. With these, he went up to the summit and remained again for forty days; and God inscribed once more the Ten Commandments. The covenant was renewed.

The people contributed generously the materials for the Tabernacle and its furnishing; and Beseleel of the tribe of Juda with a group of chosen craftsmen set to work according to the directions given to Moses on the mount. All was completed on the first day of the second year, that is to say a year after the Exodus from Egypt. Moses dedicated the sanctuary and consecrated Aaron and Aaron's four sons to the priesthood. The

visible sign of God's approval was given at the rite when the pillar of cloud moved and rested over the Holy of Holies. The holocaust or whole-burnt sacrifice offered after the consecration of Aaron and his sons was consumed by a miraculous fire. The Ark of the Covenant was henceforth to lead them in their journey; the miraculous fire was to be kept continually renewed. At a later period Nadab and Abiu, two of Aaron's sons, were slain by God for using in their censers fire which had been taken from another source than this sacred fire. (Leviticus 9:24-10:3).

THE MARCH FROM SINAI.

On the twentieth of the second month, the Hebrews left Sinai – the Levites in front carrying the Tabernacle and all its furniture. They came to Haseroth where Moses was again annoyed by the complaints of the people who had grown tired of the sameness of the manna and now clamouring for meat. God sent them flocks of quails to silence their complaints. While they were encamped here a more petty annoyance (but so terribly human!) fell to Moses: Miriam and Aaron quarreled with him "*because of his wife the Ethiopian*" (Numbers 12:1). (Ethiopia is a vague designation; here it must refer to Madian, the country of Sephora, whose mother was perhaps a pure Ethiopian.) Miriam (who apparently was chiefly to blame) was stricken with leprosy, and cured only at the prayer of Moses.

Arrived at the desert of Pharan, Moses sent from Cadesbarne a man from each tribe to view the country of Chanaan, with an eye especially to its defences. The spies returned after forty days bringing grapes of the country, and full of admiration for its fertility; but ten of them (all except Josue and Caleb) gave a discouraging account of the possibility of conquering the inhabitants. Fresh murmurs arose against Moses; the people proposed to choose a new leader to bring them back to Egypt; and when Josue and Caleb tried to hearten them, the multitude became angry and threatened to kill them. For this distrust in God's promise of protection, they were condemned to wander in the desert for forty years, that is, until all those over twenty years (except Josue and Caleb) would be dead. Next, they were ordered to go southward, but again they disobeyed, and this time insisted on attacking the Chanaanites. They had gone only a short distance, however, when the Amalecites and Chanaanites swooped down on them and drove them to flight as far as Horma.

CORE, DATHAN AND ABIRON.

Still another trouble arose for Moses. He certainly had to endure much contradiction from those for whose salvation he had devoted his life at the call of God; and Scripture tells us that "*Moses was a man exceeding meek above all men that dwelt upon earth*" (Numbers 12:13). At the same time, it must be remembered that of his long period of thirty-nine years in the desert we have not a complete history, but only a few selected incidents. These incidents, moreover, were selected for a religious purpose, namely, to teach future generations; and hence they are mainly cases of sin followed by retribution.

This time Core, Dathan, Abiron, abetted by Hon and two hundred and fifty others, wished to usurp the office of the priesthood. Their

punishment was swift and terrible: the earth quaked beneath them and destroyed Core, Dathan and Abiron with their tents and possessions; while fire came from the sanctuary and killed Hon and his adherents. Even this did not end the matter. On the morrow, the people attacked Moses and Aaron for having caused the slaughter of the previous day, and to punish this rebellion, a plague cut off more than 14,000. To end the schism once and for all, Moses then placed the rod, the symbol of office, of the head of each tribe (including Aaron's, as head of the tribe of Levi) in the sanctuary. On the following day, Aaron's rod was found to have grown miraculously and put forth leaves and blossoms; while the others were unchanged. This was the divine proof that the priesthood was exclusively for the family of Aaron.

DEATH OF MIRIAM AND AARON.

A second time they came to Cadesbarne, and here Miriam died and was buried. Again, the people murmured – this time for lack of water. Moses and Aaron had recourse to God; and Moses was commanded to strike the rock with his rod of office. Moved by some imperfection of will (the nature of which is not clear, but which would seem to be impatience) Moses struck the rock **twice**, and for this, he was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. Soon after Aaron died at Mosera (also known as Moseroth); and his son Eleazar, succeeded him in the office of high priest. (Deuteronomy 10:6 and Numbers 20:22-29.)

BALAAM.

Further attempts of the Israelites to reach Chanaan were frustrated by the Edomites from the southeast and the Chanaanites from the south. They were thus compelled to change their route so as to avoid the Edomite territory, and this took them to the east of the Dead Sea through the Syrian desert and on to the boundary of Moab. It was at this stage of their journey that serpents were sent to punish them for another outbreak of rebellion, when Moses erected a bronze serpent and all who looked on it with faith and repentance were cured.

From this point onwards, the fortunes of war are decidedly in favour of the Hebrews. Sehon, king of Hesebon (the Capital of the Amorrhites) who had lately conquered Moab, came to oppose them; but he was defeated and slain in battle. A similar fate befell Og, the king of Basan, who fought them at Edrai. They now moved into Moab. Balac, the king of Moab, not yet recovered from his defeat by Sehon was thoroughly frightened by the arrival of Sehon's conquerors. He sent all the way to Mesopotamia to a soothsayer named Balaam, asking him to come and to curse the Israelites for him. Balaam, warned by God, hesitated to come. A second embassy brought him; but on the journey God rebuked him first through means of the ass which he was riding, "*the dumb beast used to the yoke, which speaking with man's voice, forbade the folly of the prophet*" (2 Saint Peter 2:16); and then through means of an angel. Then God sent him, unworthy though he was (for God is free to choose and use His instruments); but compelled him to **ble**ss the Israelites instead of cursing them. God compelled him also to foretell the glorious future of the Messianic nation:

“A star shall rise out of Jacob and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel. . . .” (Numbers 24:17). (This is a Messianic prophecy. But

whether it refers directly to Christ; or directly to David, and indirectly to Christ, of whom David is a type or figure, is a question among Catholic scholars. The former view is defended in *Institutiones Biblicae*, Rome, 1928, Volume 2, Book 1, pages 182-183.)

BEELPHEGOR.

The Hebrews now came to Settim on the eastern side of the Jordan nearly opposite Jericho. Near them was the city of Peor or Phogor, the centre of the degraded and sensual cult of the Moabite god Baal – whence the city, was named Beelphegor (the god of Phogor – or the lord Baal’s temple of Phogor). The Israelites were lured into joining the Moabites in their hideous worship, and for this crime, 24,000 of them were slain.

THE DEATH OF MOSES.

The chosen people were almost in sight of the Promised Land; the forty years were ended; a new generation had grown up and were ready to conquer Chanaan. But a new leader must cross the Jordan with them, because Moses was not to finish the task which he had begun, for his strange failure at Cadesbarne. God revealed to him now that his work was soon to be ended, and mercifully promised him a view of the long desired Promised Land. Nowhere does Moses appear so great as here. He accepted the divine will without a murmur; his only thought was for his people that they would have a good leader in his stead; and he asked God to designate the man. Josue was appointed to succeed him. Moses summoned the people and in the presence of the high priest formally named Josue to the supreme command of the nation; exhorted the people to follow him, and to keep the divine law: "*I call heaven and earth to witness this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose therefore life. . . .*" (Deuteronomy 30:10). He blessed the twelve tribes of Israel severally as Jacob had done before. One last mission remained. He ordered the people to attack the Madianites who had led them into idolatry. The battle was a complete victory for the Israelites; the opposing forces were completely routed, leaving all the spoils of war in the hands of the victors. Among the slain were five kings of the Madianites, and Balaam, the soothsayer.

The territory thus conquered together with that of Sehon and Og Moses permitted to be occupied by the tribes of Ruben and Gad and half of the large tribe of Manasses, on condition that the fighting men of these tribes would take their part in the conquest of Chanaan.

Moses then went up to Mount Nebo in Moab, and from the peak Phasga viewed long and wistfully the "*land flowing with milk and honey*" (Numbers 14:8) which God had promised to the descendants of Abraham. Then he died. He was a hundred and twenty years old, but "*his eye was not dim, nor was his natural vigour abated*" (Deuteronomy 34:7). (Translation rendered according to the Hebrew text. By a strange reading, the Latin Vulgate (referring to the unusual retention of natural teeth in one so old,) has: “. . . *neither were his teeth moved.*”) He was buried by angels "*in the land of Moab over against Phogor and no man has known of his sepulchre until this present day*" (Deuteronomy 34:6). His tomb was concealed by God probably to prevent the Israelites from worshipping him with divine cult. The people

mourned him for thirty days, and "*there arose no more a prophet in Israel like to Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.*" (Deuteronomy 34:10).

CONCLUSION.

1.

No event in their history appealed so forcibly to the religious and national sentiments of the Jews as did the Exodus from Egypt. It gave a name to the second book of the Bible; it was commemorated annually in the greatness of the festivals of The Old Law – the Pasch; it is recalled frequently in the Psalms: it is mentioned in the first of the ten commandments as a claim of God on His Chosen People, second only to His claim on them as Creator: "*I am Yahweh, your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house (that is, place) of bondage*" (Exodus 20:1).

2.

The Exodus has a very special appeal for Christians also: "*All these things happened to them in figure: and they are written for our correction (that is, admonition), upon whom the ends of the world (that is, the last, the New Testament, epoch) are come*" (1 Corinthians 10:11). The deliverance from Egypt was a figure or type or historical prophecy of the Redemption; the Slavery in Egypt of the bondage of sin; Pharaoh of Satan; Moses of Christ. The manna was a figure of the Most Blessed Eucharist: "*Moses gave you not bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. . . . I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven: that if any man eat of it, he may not die*" (Saint John 6:32 and 6:48-50). The Paschal lamb is a figure of Christ – the perfect sacrifice of the New Law:

"Now Christ our Paschal Lamb is slain.
The Lamb of God that knows no stain."

Hymn for Vespers in the Divine Office for Easter.

3.

For the same twofold reason, therefore, because He is our Creator and our Redeemer, does God demand of us homage and worship, gratitude and love; the observance of the commandments which He promulgated in the thunders of Sinai, and of which Our Lord said: "*till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled*" (that is, till the end of time for the Decalogue, or for Christ's ascension to Heaven for much of the lesser legislation)" (Saint Matthew 5:18). These Ten Commandments are reducible to two: love of God and love of our fellowmen: "**Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and your whole soul, and with your whole strength**" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Service to God is

incomplete and impossible without service of our fellowmen; and so the second is: "**You shall love your neighbour as yourself**" (Leviticus 19:18).

(Footnote: Our Douay Version in Leviticus has *friend* for *neighbour*: but that it should be *neighbour* is clear from the original and also from comparison with the Gospels – Saint Matthew 22:39 and Saint Mark 12:31. See *Verbum Domini*, Volume 1, 1921, pages 27-28.)

An Appendix of Proper Names.

(D) refers to a word in the Douay translation of the Bible.

(H) refers to a word used in English Bibles based directly on Hebrew phonetics.

Abihu (H) – Abiu (D).

Abiram (H) – Abiron (D).

Abiron (D) – Abiram (H).

Abiu (D) – Abihu (H).

Amalecites (D) – Amalekites (H).

Amalekites (H) – Amalecites (D).

Amorites (H) – Amorrheans (D) or Amorrhites (D).

Amorrhites (D) or Amorrheans (D) – Amorites (H).

Amorrheans (D) or Amorrhites (D) – Amorites (H).

Baal-peor (H) or Baal of Peor – Beelphegor (D).

Baal-zephon (H) – Beelsephon (D).

Basan (D) – Bashan (H).

Bashan (H) – Basan (D).

Beelphegor (D) – Baal-peor or Baal of Peor (H).

Beelsephon (D) – Baal-zephon (H).

Beseleel (D) – Bezalel (H).

Bezalel (H) – Beseleel (D).

Cades (D) – Kadesh (H).

Cadesbarne (D) – Kadesh-barnea (H) see Cades.

Canaan, Canaanite (H) – Chanaan, Chanaanite (D).
Chanaan, Chanaanite (D) – Canaan, Canaanite (H).
Core (D) – Korah (H).
Cush (or Cushite) (H) – sometimes Ethiopia or Ethiopian (D).
Edrai (D) – Edrei (H).
Edrei (H) – Edrai (D).
Ethiopia (D) – sometimes Cush (H).
Gersam (D) – Gershom (H).
Gershom (H) – Gersam (D).
Gessen (D) – Goshen (H).
Goshen (H) – Gessen (D).
Haseroth (D) – Hazeroth (H).
Hazeroth (H) – Haseroth (D).
Hesebon (D) – Heshbon (H).
Heshbon (H) – Hesebon (D).
Hon (D) – On (H).
Horma (D) – Hormah (H).
Hormah (H) – Horma (D).
Jochabed (D) – Jochebed (H).
Jochebed (H) – Jochabed (D).
Joshua (H) – Josue (D).
Josue (D) – Joshua (H).
Juda (D) – Judah (H).
Judah (H) – Juda (D).
Kadesh (H) – Cades (D).
Kadesh-barnea (H) – Cadesbarne (D) see Kadesh.
Korah (H) – Core (D).
Madian, Madianite (D) – Midian, Midianite (H).
Manasseh (H) – Manasses (D).
Manasses (D) – Manasseh (H).
Mara (D) – Marah (H).

Marah (H) – Mara (D).
Mary (D) – Miriam (H).
Messiah (H) – Messias (D).
Messias (D) – Messiah (H).
Midian, Midianite (H) – Madian, Madianite (D).
Miriam (H) – Mary (D).
On (H) – Hon (D).
Paran (H) – Pharan (D).
Peor (H) – Phogor (D) and see Baal-peor.
Phogor (D) – Peor (H) and see Baal-peor.
Pharan (D) – Paran (H).
Pharao (D) – Pharaoh (H).
Pharaoh (H) – Pharao (D).
Phasga (D) – Pisgah (H).
Pisgah (H) – Phasga (D).
Raguel (D) – Reuel (H).
Raamses or Rameses (H) – Ramesses (D).
Ramesses (D) – Rameses or Raamses (H).
Raphidim (D) – Rephidim (H).
Rephidim (H) – Raphidim (D).
Reuben (H) – Ruben (D).
Reuel (H) – Raguel (D).
Ruben (D) – Reuben (H).
Salumith (D) – Shelomith (H).
Sehon (D) – Sihon (H).
Sephora (D) – Zipporah (H).
Settim (D) – Shittim (H).
Shelomith (H) – Salumith (D).
Shittim (H) – Settim (D).
Sihon (H) – Sehon (D).
Sin (D) – Zin (H).

Socoth or Soccoth (D) – Succoth (H).

Succoth (H) – Socoth or Soccoth (D).

Zin (H) – Sin (D).

Zipporah (H) – Sephora (D).

* * *