

# CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE STUDY

Catholic Scripture Study Notes written by Sister Marie Therese, are provided for the personal use of students during their active participation and must not be loaned or given to others.

## SERIES II

### THE PENTATEUCH

**Lesson 12 Commentary Exodus 4:18 – 7:13**

**Lesson 13 Questions Exodus 7:14 – 12:36**

### MOSES RETURNS TO EGYPT

**Exodus 4:18 - 7:13**

#### I. MOSES RETURNS TO EGYPT (Exodus 4:18-31)

**A. Moses Leaves Jethro (Exodus 4:18-23).** Moses could not reveal all the messages God had given him—to Jethro the priest, his father-in-law, who had been so kind to him when he arrived in that area—homeless and in need. Now he asks permission to go to Egypt to visit relatives. The gentle and familiar blessing came, “Go in peace.” The writer of Exodus presents Jethro in a very favorable light. The mountain where he worshipped is the same as the mountain where God revealed Himself to Moses: Horeb, or Sinai, call the “mountain of God” in these pages. Some commentators believe that the word Yahweh originates in the language of that area, that Jethro was perhaps the first priest of Yahweh, His first worshipper. Here, it is not only his mountain that becomes important, but his farewell becomes the one used by the priests of the New Law to those who return to God through them.

Here in Midian, God speaks again to Moses and gives a message for Pharaoh, which coupled with a phrase in 5:1, the enslaved blacks of our South sang to God, giving the world the famous

NEGRO SPIRITUALS, and their haunting melodies. Because these words are so fitting here, we will sing them now.

1. When Israel was in Egypt’s land, LET MY PEOPLE GO!  
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, LET MY PEOPLE GO!

Go down, Moses, ‘way down in Egypt’s land,  
Tell old Pharaoh, LET MY PEOPLE GO!

2. “Thus says the Lord,” bold Moses said, LET MY PEOPLE GO!  
If not, I’ll smite your firstborn dead! LET MY PEOPLE GO!

God foretold that Pharaoh would be stubborn; an older translation uses “I will harden his heart.” Some interpret this as God causing this behavior, but in fact, the messages and judgments of God were the occasion rather than the cause of the hardening. God’s ways and words harden only those who choose to harden themselves. Note in Exodus 7:14, “Pharaoh is obdurate” and 8:15, “remained obstinate.” God never deals unjustly with His creatures. Their free actions are always

the cause of their downfall and punishment (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). The sun shining on wax, softens, but on clay, hardens. The same sun affects according to the nature of the object.

**B. Moses' Ordeal with God (Exodus 4:24-26).** Moses has to undergo a mysterious ordeal of an unknown kind, in order to qualify for his mission. Because Gershom is not circumcised, God has been disobeyed. If Moses is to be God's spokesman, and to be a lawgiver for the nation, Moses must first observe the law himself. By Ziporah's circumcising the child and touching Moses with the blood, Moses is cleansed and reinstated.

**C. Aaron Goes to Meet Moses (Exodus 4:27-28).** Now Aaron gets a message from God—go to meet Moses. We can learn much from this passage: the courtesy of God to arrange that the brothers meet in a secluded area; that Moses, who had such trouble accepting this assignment, have his brother's help before he had to do any of it. This is a help to us in understanding God.

## Commentary

The great mystical doctor of the church, John of the Cross, writes about this passage, which helps us know how to interpret what we think God wants of us.

Moses was so weak and doubtful about his mission that he did not possess the courage to truly believe it until God heartened him through his brother Aaron. At these words of God, "Aaron is coming to meet you; speak and tell him all my words; I will be in your mouth and in his so that each of you will receive certitude through the mouth of the other" (Exodus 4:14-15).

St. John of the Cross adds: "this is the trait of a humble person; he does not deal with God independently, nor can he be completely satisfied without human counsel and direction. God is desirous of this, for to strengthen truth on the basis

of natural reason, He draws near those who come together in an effort to know it. That is why Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered to consider about me, there I am in the midst of them, clarifying and confirming truths in their hearts." ...God says that He does not want the soul to believe only by itself the communications it thinks are of divine origin, nor that anyone be assured or confirmed in them without the Church and her ministers. For God does not bring confirmation of the truth to the heart of one who is alone. Such a one remains weak and cold about truth."

Perhaps this is the cause of the proliferation of disagreement among Protestants, and among some Catholics, too. We do well to heed such lessons from scripture and doctors and saints of the Church, and, of course, those given authority over the Church.

Try to see in your own life, who your Aaron is, sent by God; one inspired to go looking for you, even if you are in a desert, but also, like Moses, at the mountain of God.

**D. The Elders and People Believe (Exodus 4:29-31).** Moses happily told Aaron all his messages from God, and Aaron confirmed and believed them. A next step also can teach us: They then told God's message "to the elders," and Moses courageously performed the signs; a thing that was hard to do in public for the first time! The first time, he and God were alone! Then the people believed. The process is one observed in the Church down to our time. The people see the "signs" (miracles of God) and believe (See John 2:11). The Jews hear that God is concerned about them, hear the words to Moses, and bow down in worship.

## II. PHARAOH'S STUBBORNNESS (Exodus 5:1 - 6:27)

**A. Moses and Aaron Visit Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1-5).** Moses and Aaron took courage from the belief of the people, and brought God's

message to Pharaoh. They asked for a three-day trek for a feast of their God. Then they added that if they were refused, their God might send a pestilence or the sword to them. This was a ruse and Pharaoh recognized it.

His reply must be the first agnostic faith in history. “Who is the Lord? I do not know the Lord.” And in his colossal pride as sole king in Egypt, he adds, “And if I did, I would not let Israel go.” Who does that sound like? Didn’t Satan know God and refuse to obey? Obedience is Pharaoh’s problem. It is an authority issue. God or Pharaoh? Today we have totalitarian governments, yes, but sometimes, the state, even in democracies, makes light of God’s commands and laws.

Pharaoh’s building program is in danger. Business comes first; what do you mean, Moses and Aaron, by asking for time-out for the LORD? What about our trend in the U.S. to abolish laws protecting the Lord’s Day, making it instead an ordinary working day, even for those who wish to keep it as a day of worship, family, and rest?

### **B. Increased Labor (Exodus 5:6-13).**

Pharaoh now exhibits tyranny. He orders the taskmasters, who are probably Egyptians, to add gathering the straw from the fields to the Hebrew slaves.

All through this chapter, we again have candid conversations, very lifelike and written with skill. There is also an interesting organization here. The writer seems almost a dramatist, for like the great Greek tragedies, we have antagonist versus protagonist. The chapter begins with the antagonist, Pharaoh, in full power, for three dramatic scenes. Then a central section begins, with Moses going to God and God answering. God, the protagonist, ends in complete control, and Pharaoh is doomed little by little by the mighty works that God promises so majestically here to a man who claims no power.

Pharaoh’s power at the beginning, and God’s at the end might be shown in a diagram, as also the organization described above. They look like this:

5:1 Pharaoh vs. Moses and Aaron

5:10 Pharaoh vs. the People

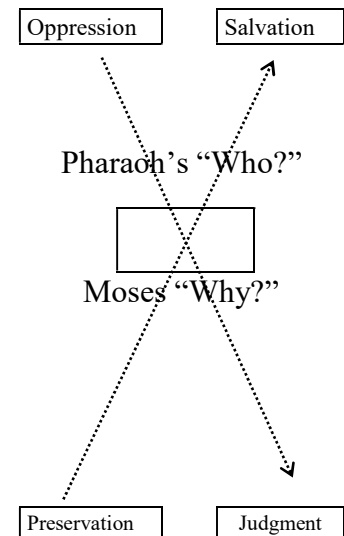
5:15 Pharaoh vs. the Foreman

5:22-6:5 God and Moses

6:6 I AM - God

6:6ff

I will... I will... I will...  
I will... I will... I will...  
when I... and when I...



In the account, the Hebrews were probably the foremen, who after going to Pharaoh, then went to Moses. The people were now at the end of their self-sufficiency. Pharaoh would not help them; Moses could not, and they could not. Only God could. When they had to come to that point is when He did! “Now see what I will do.” God has to bring us to this attitude again and again in our lives; we try to assume control again. We must remember that most of Scripture parallels our own lives and deliverance from bondage to evil, to God’s antagonist, Satan. God, as one writer says, devises the “blood plan:” those marked with the Lamb’s blood are saved.

In the chart above, God contrasted His strength with Pharaoh’s, then He showed Moses (vv 3-5) that his salvation was absolutely sure; it rested on His immutable promise. He reminded Moses that He had not revealed His name to the patriarchs, but to His enslaved people, to whom He would be a REDEEMER.

**C. Moses and Aaron's Genealogy (Exodus 6:14-27).** Exodus 6:14-27 adds the genealogy of Moses and Aaron, through Jacob's first two sons, then their own ancestor, Levi, the third son. This shows their blood line straight from the patriarchs, the founders of the family, and now the nation. Exodus 6:28 - 7:13 is a Priestly account for what the Elohist and Yahwist account gave in

Exodus 3 through 4:17. (Your copy of the Introduction to CSS explained this.)

When what God has asked of you, of us, seems too hard and we are without help, wait for Him to act, complain like Moses, if you will, but continue to serve. You will know later how much depended on it.

\* \* \* \* \*

**QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 13**  
**Exodus 7:14 - 12:36**

Day 1      Read the Notes.

- a. What impresses you the most in them?
  
  
  
  
  
- b. If you learned something new to you, share it with the group.

Day 2      Read Exodus 7:14-24, also Psalm 78:43-51, and Wisdom 11:5-10.

- a. How did Pharaoh react and why?
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Read Exodus 7:14 - 8:11 and Psalm 78:45. What life-giving element did these first two plagues affect?

Day 3      Read Exodus 8:12-28, Psalm 105:31, and Wisdom 16:9.

- a. What do the next two plagues attack instead of the water?
  
  
  
  
  
- b. What is an example of the power of prayer in the fourth plague?
  
  
  
  
  
- c. When a plague was lifted by Pharaoh's request, did he change his ways? Do we, under a cross sent by God to change us, often return to the same pattern? Comment on this.

Day 4      Read Exodus 9, Romans 9:17.

By now, what are the plagues attacking? Although these troubles seem grievous (imagine them happening in your city!), what can you learn about God?

Day 5 Read Exodus 10, Deuteronomy 6:20ff.

- a. Do you see an increase in the harm? What is now the victim of Moses' God?
- b. Whose authority is growing and whose is being lessened?
- c. What was so frightening to the Egyptians in the 9th plague? (Who was their "god"?)
- d. What is the attitude of Pharaoh's magicians now? Meanwhile, what has been happening to the Jews in the 9th plague?
- e. What does this show us about God? Can you think of such a protection in your own life? Share it if you like.

Day 6 Read Exodus 11, also Exodus 3:21-22 and Exodus 12:29-36.

- a. How does the Lord provide for His people in Exodus 11:1-3?
- b. In your life, has there been a providence that seemed disastrous, but proved a good? (See Matthew 5:5, 6, 10) How?
- c. Read Exodus 12:1-16 and 21-28. Compare this with what you know about the sacrifice of Jesus.