

# Lesson Three

## THE PATRIARCHS



Genesis 12-50

## AND EGYPT



Exodus 1-20

### MEMORY VERSE

*“The LORD will fight  
for you, and you have  
only to be still.”*

—Exodus 14:14

Moses utters this powerful promise to the Israelites who are in fear. They have just fled from slavery in Egypt, and the Egyptian army is in hot pursuit and closing in on them as they come to the Red Sea. It appears that they have no place to go and will soon be destroyed. It is in this moment that Moses reminds them with this verse that God is, indeed, still with them and they need only to believe.

You will have times in your life when you will feel afraid or trapped, as if there is no path or salvation in sight. In those moments, hold on to these words and believe that the same God who parted the Red Sea is there for you to call upon. He is still willing to fight the battle for you.

### OPENING PRAYER



*Heavenly Father, open our minds and hearts to your Holy Spirit. Teach us through your Sacred Word how we can better follow you. Show us what it means to have faith. Reveal to us those areas of our lives where we still do not trust you completely, and give us the courage to follow you more closely. Help us to grow in knowledge and holiness during this lesson as we dive more deeply into your Word. Amen.*

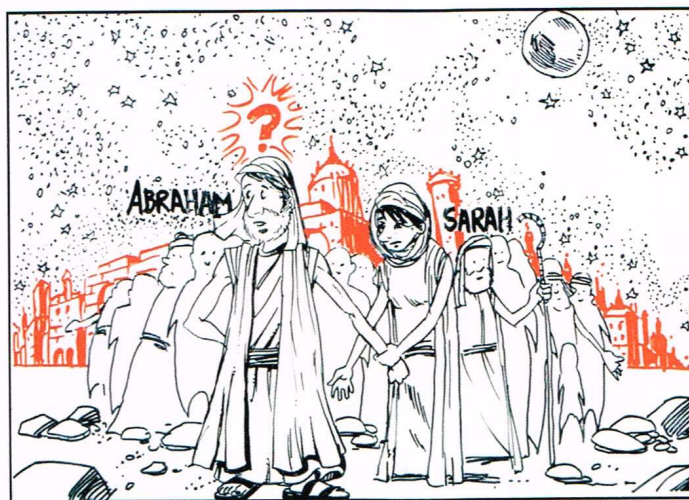
## TIME PERIOD OVERVIEW



### PATRIARCHS » EGYPT AND EXODUS

As we begin this lesson, it is important to understand when the events we are going to learn about took place. While it was not possible to assign dates to the stories that we studied in the last lesson (“The Early World”), the events that we will look at in this lesson (“The Patriarchs and Egypt”) are based on historical data that can be assigned approximate dates. As the scene opens in Genesis 12, we can confidently say that Abram and his wife, Sarai, lived approximately four thousand years ago, in 2200 BC.

In this lesson, we will see how God calls **ABRAM** to leave his home and travel thousands of miles to a new land that God has set aside for his people. God enters into a covenant with Abram, changing his name to **ABRAHAM**, meaning “father of a multitude,” and promises him a land, many descendants, and the blessing of all nations through him. We will also read about Abraham’s son **ISAAC** and Isaac’s son **JACOB**. And we will hear about their wives and children and grandchildren, the descendants of Abraham who go on to become the tribes and nation of Israel.



Many years after Abraham, during a time of worldwide drought and famine, the Israelites head south to find food, and the ancestors of Jesus end up in Egypt. At this point, we transition out of the time period of the **Patriarchs** and into a new time period called **Egypt and Exodus**, which takes place around 1800–1446 BC. (The exact dates are not as important as understanding what was going on in the story of salvation.)

By the time **MOSES** is born, the Israelites in Egypt have been enslaved for hundreds of years. The Egyptian kingdom, ruled by the mighty Pharaoh, is the strongest and predominant power in the world. But the Israelites are God’s firstborn children, and God cares for them. In the midst of their oppression and suffering, he hears their cries and their pleas for God to send them a redeemer, someone to come and rescue them.

God raises up the young Hebrew Moses within the Egyptian courts, where he develops a relationship with the pharaoh’s family, one that will be critical years later when God commands Moses to lead his people out of slavery and to the Promised Land.

Throughout both time periods, there will be a lot of genealogies. Many of the names in these lists may sound strange, and many of the places that you read about can no longer be found on a map. The key is not to get overwhelmed or distracted by the small details but to focus on the big picture and what we can learn from the main characters. There will be broken relationships, marital problems, lying, cheating, swindling, and battles with invading armies. There will be no shortage of action or sin. Find your story in theirs.

## Video Notes >>

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## Check Your Understanding

- The time period covering the Patriarchs begins about \_\_\_\_\_ years ago.
  - 10,000
  - 5,000
  - 4,000
  - 2,000
- God changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means \_\_\_\_\_.
  - "the great liberator"
  - "the freer of slaves"
  - "father of a multitude"
  - "the rock" (on which he would build his Chosen People)
- As a test of Abraham's faith, God asked Abraham to sacrifice \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a lamb without blemish
  - a full-grown heifer
  - one-tenth of his crops and livestock
  - his son
- God sent \_\_\_\_\_ to convince Pharaoh to let his people go.
  - earthquakes
  - ten plagues
  - foreign armies
  - volcanic eruptions
- In the Passover, the people placed \_\_\_\_\_ on the doorposts and lintels of their homes so that the angel of death would pass over them.
  - the Sign of the Cross
  - the name of God—YHWH
  - the oil of anointing
  - the blood of a lamb

## DIVE IN

As our first time period, the **Early World**, came to a close, we saw the pride and sin of mankind on full display. From the Fall in the Garden of Eden, the murder of Abel, and the sin of Noah's son to, ultimately, the construction of the doomed tower at Babel, we witnessed again and again what happens when people turn their backs on God. The covenants were broken, and over time, as the family of God grew bigger, sin grew all the more.

In the time period of the **Patriarchs**, we see God's plan come more clearly into focus. We can now be more precise about dates and can put the opening of this period right around 2200 BC. At this time (picking up the story in Genesis 12), God forges a new covenant with a good and righteous man named Abram. The earlier covenants were with a couple (Adam and Eve) and a family (Noah and his people); this one will be with an entire tribe: Abram, his wife, Sarai, and their relatives, workers, and extended family. God calls Abram to move his people from their home in Ur of the Chaldeans to a very important and valuable piece of land called Canaan, which lies beside the Mediterranean Sea.

As the story unfolds in Genesis 15, 17, and 22, we hear an amazing promise from God to Abram—that through this covenant, Abram's descendants will become innumerable, they will inhabit the Promised Land, and they will become a powerful and royal dynasty. As the new covenant is ushered in, God does something powerful and symbolic to signal the change in Abram and Sarai's essence and mission: He changes their names from Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah.

When God changes a person's name, it ought to get our attention.

It is at this point that we notice a “minor” problem, however, for Abram and Sarai are old, well beyond normal child-bearing age, and they have no children. In fact, when God's plan is communicated to them, Sarai, who is well aware of her advanced age, *laughs at God*. When their son is born, they name him *Isaac*, which is Hebrew for “laughter.”

With the birth of their son, we see God's faithfulness once again, and his desire to bless and grow his family on earth. In Genesis 22, when Abraham is called to sacrifice Isaac to prove his love for God, we see a foreshadowing (prefiguration) of how God will bless and save the world through his only Son, Jesus. Later, as Isaac and his wife begin their own family, we see the covenantal promises given to Abraham take shape as the family and tribe grow.

It is at this point that the patriarchs are introduced to us. A **PATRIARCH** is the male head of a family or tribe. God's blessing passes from the first patriarch, Abraham, to Isaac and then to Isaac's son Jacob. In time, Jacob “wrestles” with God, and his own name is changed from Jacob to Israel. His twelve sons—yes, twelve—and their families become “the twelve tribes of Israel.”

One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, becomes especially important in our story. In a series of unfortunate events, he is left for dead, taken into slavery, taken away to Egypt, and wrongfully imprisoned. Because of his righteousness and faithfulness to God, however, Joseph is eventually released from prison and appointed to a position of great authority.

When a drought forces his brothers south to Egypt in search of food, Joseph is faced with a choice between vengeance and mercy. As Genesis draws to a close, the time period of the **Patriarchs** comes to an end.

In the time period of **Egypt and Exodus**, fortunes turn for the children of Israel as they are enslaved by the Egyptian pharaoh. The Israelites spend the next few centuries calling out to God, their Father, begging him to save them. They are crying out for a redeemer. Soon God acts and yet again enters into a new covenant. This time it is not with a couple or family or even a tribe but with an entire nation. This new covenant is made through Moses.

As the book of Exodus opens, we see just how far God is willing to go to save his people. Moses and his brother, Aaron (a priest), go toe to toe with the mighty Pharaoh. They ask Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt, and he refuses. God proves his mighty power through a series of ten seemingly random and almost inexplicable “plagues”—you can read about them in Exodus 7–12. By the end of the plagues, Pharaoh finally says he will allow the Israelites to leave Egypt, but he has another change of mind and heart and sends his army in pursuit of them. This lesson culminates in a miraculous show of divine strength when God, once again acting through his servant Moses, parts the Red Sea to save his people, and they begin their journey (back) to the Promised Land.

## THE PARTING OF THE RED SEA

**A**fter releasing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, Pharaoh had a change of heart and pursued them with six hundred chariots, overtaking them at the Red Sea. Then God instructed Moses to lift his rod over the water, and God divided the sea so that the Israelites could cross on dry land. When they were safe on the other side, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea again, God closed the waters, and the pursuing Egyptians drowned.

An often-asked question is whether these events of the Exodus story actually happened. The answer is that the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea actually happened, although we cannot be certain about how it happened. While these stories of the Bible are more than mythical tales, they are also more than factual histories. The authors of Scripture wrote these stories from a particular point of view, which was intended to tell a fuller story of the event. Therefore, it is important to

keep in mind the literary, historical, and theological context in which the stories were written and to read them within the living tradition of the Church. In this way, the stories show us a movement from the earthly to the heavenly as the Israelites pass from slavery into the Promised Land.

Furthermore, the stories prefigure and are fulfilled by New Testament events. In this case, the waters of the Red Sea that destroyed the pursuing Egyptians and delivered the Israelites from slavery are analogous to the waters of Baptism that deliver us from the slavery of sin and death and give us new life in Christ. “The crossing of the Red Sea, literally the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, announces the liberation wrought by Baptism” (CCC 1221).





## THE PASSOVER AND THE LAST SUPPER

**B**efore Moses could lead the Israelites to the Promised Land, he had to get them out of Egypt, but Pharaoh refused again and again to let them go. God sent plagues upon the Egyptians, nine of them, but Pharaoh still refused.

The tenth and final plague was the death of all the firstborn in Egypt. To save the Israelites' firstborn, God instructed each Israelite family to sacrifice a lamb without blemish—that is, a lamb that was physically perfect and without spots. Then they were to put the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their home so that the angel of death would “pass over” the house. This was the first Passover.

This event in the Exodus story is a prefiguration of the sacrifice of Jesus, whom John the Baptist called “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29), who shed his blood on the Cross. It is through Jesus' sacrifice that we are saved from sin and death.

You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

On the night of the first Passover, God also instructed the Israelites to eat a ceremonial meal, which included the roasted flesh of the lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. Normally when bread is made, yeast is added to the dough so it will rise. But this process can take several hours or even an entire day. Since the Israelites had to be prepared to leave Egypt at a moment's notice, they did not have time to let the dough rise. Therefore, following God's instructions, they ate a flat, unleavened bread—bread made without yeast.

God instructed the Israelites to celebrate this Passover meal as an annual feast to commemorate their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. This is a ritualized meal that includes lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and four cups of wine along with special prayers, blessings, and songs. In faithful observance of God's command, Jews have celebrated the Passover from that first night in Egypt until the present day.

On the night before he died, Jesus and the twelve apostles also gathered to celebrate the annual Passover feast. During this meal, known to us today as the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, blessed it, and said, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). Then, taking the cup, he said, “This chalice is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:25).

It was here at the Last Supper that Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which the bread and wine, following the words of consecration, become his Body and Blood. Following the Lord's command, Christians from the beginning of the Church to the present day have celebrated the sacrament. The Eucharist is a representation of the sacrifice on Calvary, in which the faithful participate in Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross and receive the spiritual nourishment of his Body and Blood in Holy Communion. It is important to understand that the Eucharist does not “re-sacrifice” Jesus but rather “makes present” his one and only sacrifice on the Cross.

## TOUGH QUESTIONS

VIDEO 3.2

- Why was slavery allowed in the Bible?

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- Why were people allowed to have multiple wives back then? And if Abraham was so righteous, why did he have sexual relations with his wife's servant?

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- Why would God tell Abraham to kill his son, and why would Abraham go through with it?

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- Why would a loving God kill the firstborn of Egypt?

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- Are we supposed to believe that the story of the Red Sea actually happened, or is it just a legend or fiction?

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## THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC AND THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS ON THE CROSS



The sacrifice of Isaac tested not only the faith of Abraham but also the faith of Isaac, who willingly participated in what God was asking of his father. In this way, the sacrifice of Isaac prefigures the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. When compared side by side, there are many similarities between the two events.



SACRIFICE OF ISAAC	SACRIFICE OF JESUS
Isaac was conceived miraculously by a mother who was past childbearing age.	Jesus was conceived miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, the son of God's promise.	God the Father sent his only begotten Son to be sacrificed for our sins.
Isaac, who was at least a teenager, willingly cooperated with the sacrifice.	Jesus willingly gave his life as a sacrifice for our sins.
The sacrifice took place on Mount Moriah, which is in Jerusalem.	The Crucifixion took place at Calvary, near Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.
Isaac carried the wood of his sacrifice.	Jesus carried the wood of the Cross.
Isaac was bound to the wood of the sacrifice.	Jesus was nailed to the wood of the Cross.
An angel stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son. A ram whose horns were caught in a thicket of thorns was provided for the sacrifice instead.	Jesus, the Lamb of God, offered himself for the sins of the world. A crown of thorns was placed on his head before his crucifixion.



## TO THE HEART



How far are you willing to go for God?



Following God can be frightening at times. The Holy Spirit will lead you to people and situations and conversations that you might never, ever choose on your own. The Spirit will lead you well outside your comfort zone, which is important, because your comfort zone can often be a place where you hide to avoid things that will challenge you.

The Holy Spirit's job is not to make you "comfortable." The Holy Spirit's job is to make you *holy*. God desires your holiness. He desires to have you with him in heaven for eternity. Now, to help you grow in holiness, the Lord will sometimes challenge you, knowing that it will require you to pray more, to trust more, to become more dependent on him and more selfless in the process.



God desires your holiness. He desires to have you with him in heaven for eternity.

Notice how he moved in the lives of the people we learned about in this lesson. Each of the patriarchs was challenged to go a step beyond for God. Following God meant being willing to say or do uncomfortable things.

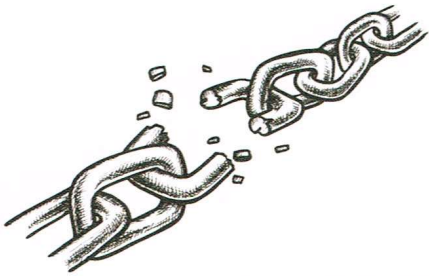
God can accomplish great things in and through you. In fact, you will never know how far-reaching God's plans for you are until you step out in faith and give God permission to lead you where he wants you to go.

### Ask yourself these questions:

- When have you stepped out in your faith and trusted God?
- What are some examples of times you have been "uncomfortable" for God?
- What are some friendships or situations you have been in where you should have been bolder about your faith or about God's truth?
- What would it take for you to let go of control of your life and future and follow God with total abandon?







## BIBLICAL CHARACTER PROFILE

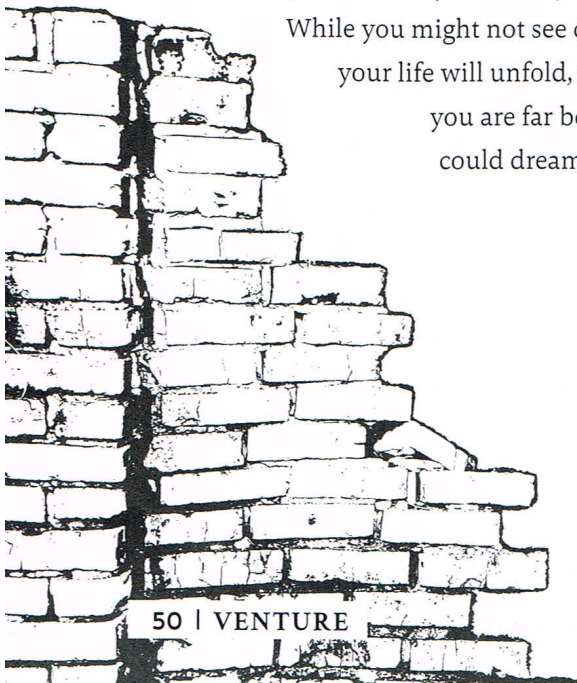
### Joseph

Joseph's story might seem difficult to relate to at first. However, it is a true story, a real story, and better than anything we can see on reality television. His brothers plotted to murder him, they sold him into slavery, his master's wife had him thrown into prison, he interpreted dreams (including those of the pharaoh), he rose to great power in Egypt, he made sure the Egyptians had food despite a worldwide famine, and in a moment of truth he was finally reunited with his family. But when we look a little deeper, past all the drama, what we are left with is a story of heroic virtue.

The story turns out well because God was with Joseph, and Joseph never turned his back on God. Joseph knew God had not abandoned him even when everyone else had and even when he suffered unjustly. Joseph loved God, and he loved his family. And he used his gifts to serve others.

Doing what is right is never easy, but doing what is right is always right. The suffering that comes from sin is painful, long-lasting, and deadly. But the suffering that comes from doing what is right, although it can be painful, brings joy and peace and freedom. Like Joseph, when you are feeling abandoned or alone, remember that the Lord made you and wants good things for you. He wants to bless you, and he will bless you if you are willing to follow his plan for your life instead of your own.

Joseph's story reminds us that even when things go wrong, God has a way of making them turn out very right if we are patient. Be patient with God. Be patient with your family. Be patient with yourself. While you might not see clearly how the story of your life will unfold, trust that God's plans for you are far better than anything you could dream up on your own.









## THE TEN PLAGUES OF EGYPT

**A**fter more than four hundred years of slavery in Egypt, God heard the cries of the Israelites and sent Moses to demand that Pharaoh let his people go. However, Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he refused. In response, God sent a series of ten plagues to convince Pharaoh to free the Israelites.

While these ten plagues may appear somewhat random at first, God chose each of them specifically to show Pharaoh and the Egyptians that he was the one true God who had absolute power over all the false gods of Egypt.

- 1. The Nile turns to blood** (see Exodus 7:14-24): *Hapi was the Egyptian god of the Nile and the father of all the gods.* The Egyptian civilization was built along the Nile, which was essential to their agriculture, transportation, and way of life, and the river was worshipped by the Egyptians as a god. By turning the water into blood, God was showing his authority over the “father” of their gods.
- 2. Frogs** (see Exodus 7:25-29, 8:1-11): *Heqet was the Egyptian goddess of frogs and goddess of resurrection and procreative powers.* The Egyptians worshipped frogs, yet God sent so many that the Egyptians could not walk outside without stepping on them. The only way to get rid of the frogs was to kill them, and in doing so, they showed disrespect to Heqet, the goddess of frogs.
- 3. Gnats** (see Exodus 8:12-15): *Geb was the Egyptian god of the earth and vegetation.* The presence of gnats, covering the earth and its produce, showed God's power over this Egyptian god.
- 4. Flies** (see Exodus 8:16-28): *Khepri was the Egyptian god of insects.* The Egyptian god Khepri could not control the flies, which showed that he was helpless before the one true God.
- 5. Death of livestock** (see Exodus 9:1-7): *The Egyptian god Apis was the god of bulls, and Hesat was the goddess of cows.* The Egyptians worshipped rams, oxen, and bulls. The death of these animals showed the powerlessness of their gods.
- 6. Boils** (see Exodus 9:8-12): *Imhotep was the Egyptian god of medicine.* The boils that erupted on the skin of the Egyptians showed that the Egyptian god of medicine was powerless.
- 7. Hail** (see Exodus 9:13-35): *Nut was the Egyptian goddess of the sky.* The hail that destroyed the crops showed the inability of the false gods to control the sky.
- 8. Locusts** (see Exodus 10:1-20): *Osiris was the Egyptian god of agriculture.* The locusts finished destroying all that the hail had left, showing the inability of Osiris to protect the fields.
- 9. Darkness** (see Exodus 10:21-29): *Amun-Re was the sun god.* The darkness throughout Egypt showed that he had no power against the true God.
- 10. Death of the firstborn** (see Exodus 11:1-10, 12): *Pharaoh was considered a god by the Egyptians, as was Pharaoh's firstborn son.* The death of the firstborn showed God's power over Pharaoh and his descendants.

While the Egyptians and many of the ancient peoples made gods of the natural elements and animals, we may be tempted, at times, to place more importance on created “things” rather than God, thus creating false idols in our own lives. When this occurs, God may permit certain situations or events to take these things away from us so that we can turn back to him, the one true God, who has lordship over our lives.

## WORDPLAY

**Abram/Abraham** – Abram means “father of many.” When God made a covenant with Abram, he changed his name to Abraham, meaning “father of a great many/a multitude.”

**Isaac** – A name derived from the Hebrew *itzah*, which means “laughter.” The elderly Sarah laughed when she learned that she would bear a child, thus prompting the name of her son.

**Jacob** – A Hebrew name meaning “one who supplants (or replaces one thing with another).” It is fitting because Jacob tricked and usurped his older brother, Esau, out of his natural birthright.

**Moses** – A name derived from the Hebrew word *moshe*, which means “to pull or draw out (of the water).” Moses was given this name because he was literally picked up out of the waters of the River Nile by the pharaoh’s daughter.

**patriarch** – From the Greek term *patriarkhēs* (*patria* = family, *arkhes* = ruling), a patriarch is the male head of a family or tribe. He is often the eldest or most respected in the family. The Patriarchs (venerated forefathers) of Israel are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**tetragrammaton** – From a Greek word meaning “four letters,” the sacred tetragrammaton is the Hebrew name for God, transliterated YHWH or JHVH. It was the unutterable name of God, not to be spoken aloud because it was so sacred.



### Read Genesis 32:22-32

Jacob wrestles with an angel in this scene and receives a blessing (but also a wound). The angel—though more powerful—allows himself to be beaten by Jacob in much the same way that Jesus allowed himself to be sacrificed on the Cross. Notice how Joshua’s name is changed, and remember that when God changes our name, he is changing our essence and often our mission.

## GOING DEEPER

### Read Genesis 22:1-14

As you move through the story, spot as many details or similarities as you can between the sacrifice of Isaac and the Passion of Jesus.

### Read Exodus 3:1-15

Notice how God refers to himself in this dialogue with Moses. Do those names look or sound familiar? Notice too that when Moses asks God’s name, God responds (with the sacred **tetragrammaton**). That name is the beginning of a deeper, more intimate relationship between God and his people.

Turn for more





### Read Exodus 7:14-21

God brought the plague, not through Moses but through the actions and staff of Aaron, the priest. When in your life have you seen a priest change one substance to another? At Mass perhaps?

### Read Exodus 12:1-8, 12-14

What were the stipulations about the lamb? Pay attention especially to Exodus 12:5. Also, was it enough just to sacrifice the lamb and mark the lintels and doorposts of their homes, or was another step necessary? See Exodus 12:8.

## CONCLUSION

Remember in the first lesson when we talked about how God is the author of life and we are all the characters in his story? Well, as we see in the lives of the patriarchs and thus far with Moses, God understands what we are capable of in this life far better than we do. He is the one who created us, and he knows well what our true potential is and what it will take for us to fulfill our mission here on earth.

These stories from Genesis and early Exodus are reminders that God is not only with us but also has big plans for us—plans that extend far beyond what we can initially see.

You do not know today what your future holds. You might not know where you will go to school or your future job. You may not have any idea what unexpected, exciting, or scary turns your life may take. These are the things you cannot control.

What we can take from the patriarchs and Moses, however, are examples of how great you can become and the mark you can leave on the world if you have the courage to follow God completely, even when you are not sure how things will turn out. Trust that the Lord is with you as he was with Abraham and Joseph and Moses and the rest. Believe that even if you are not in control, God is in control.

In the next lesson, we will see what unfolds as the nation of Israel sets out for the Promised Land. It turns out it is far easier to take the Israelites out of Egypt than it is to take Egypt out of the Israelites.



God knows well what our true potential is and what it will take for us to fulfill our mission here on earth.



## LIVING IT OUT

Pray about your future this week. Really be intentional about it. Journal about it. Take time to write out some of your talents. How has God blessed you? Perhaps you are a good student or a gifted athlete or a writer or a musician, or you are good with technology. Do not be bashful either—be honest. God gave you gifts, so list some of them. Ask your parents, too, what some of your personal gifts and skills are, and write them down as well.

Next, write out the things in life that you are passionate about. What brings you joy? What are some of the things you love to do and learn or are fascinated by or interested in? Write them down.

Third, spend some time in prayer and journaling. Ask God, “Why did you create me? For what purpose, Lord? What do you desire for me and from me in my life?” Then sit in silence. If you feel or “hear” something in your heart, write it down. Journal about whatever God puts in your heart.

Last, pray this prayer: *Lord, I give you permission to lead me wherever you want to lead me. Please reveal to me, Lord, what you desire for me, and teach me what it means to seek and to follow your will for my life. Amen.*

This does not mean you will hear God’s voice audibly or have the magic answer to your future in just one or two sittings. What it does mean is that you are inviting the Lord into a deeper conversation and relationship on the topic. In time, you will have more clarity about your future and the mission he created especially for you!



## CLOSING PRAYER



*Lord God, thank you for never giving up on us. Thank you for seeing more in us than we can see in ourselves. Thank you for calling us out of our comfort zones and closer to you. Bless us with the courage to follow you—and you alone—completely. Help us to strive daily to follow your will with abandonment, and teach us what it means to be a true disciple. Thank you for loving us and believing in us ... even when we fail and even when we fall. Amen.*