

### and DESERT WANDERINGS



*Crossing of the Red Sea* by Jacques Courtois

1. *In the episode of the burning bush, God introduces himself to Moses as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6). What does that tell Moses about God?*

For about three hundred fifty years, God’s people have been slaves in a foreign land, Egypt. Where is God? What about the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give them the land of Canaan? By telling Moses that he is the “God of Abraham ... Isaac ... and Jacob” at the burning bush, the LORD confirms that he is the same God who spoke to Abraham and made a covenant with him; the same God who miraculously gave Abraham and Sarah their son Isaac in their old age; the same God who watched over Jacob. By these words, God reassures Moses that his covenant promises will be fulfilled—that he has seen the plight of his people and is ready to make good on his Word.

2. *What important message do the ten plagues send to Egypt and Israel?*

Again and again, God says he performed a miracle so that both the Israelites and the Egyptians will know that he is the LORD. The original word that is here translated “LORD” is *YHWH* (or “Yahweh”), “I AM,” the name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush; the same God who made the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the plagues, the LORD reveals that he is greater than any of the “gods” of Egypt (i.e., that he is the Almighty God and that all other gods are nothing). Each of the ten plagues shows that a particular Egyptian god has no power at all.

3. *God tells Pharaoh that if he does not free Israel, God’s firstborn son, then he will kill the firstborn sons of Egypt. How does the LORD accomplish this? What is the name of the annual remembrance of this event?*

In the tenth and final plague, God sends the angel of death to strike down the firstborn sons of Egypt while “passing over” those whose doorways are signed by lamb’s blood in accordance with God’s command. This event is remembered every year in the Jewish feast of Passover.

4. **Think About It:** *In the Red Sea crossing, the children of Israel are freed from their enemy by passing through water. What sacrament of the New Covenant does this event prefigure? Explain.*

The crossing of the Red Sea prefigures the sacrament of baptism, in which we are freed from sin through the pouring (or immersion in) water. In baptism, we enter into Christ's death and rise again with him to new life.

5. *The first terms of the Sinai Covenant are what we know as the Ten Commandments. St. John Paul II called the Ten Commandments "the law of freedom: not the freedom to follow our blind passions, but the freedom to love, to choose what is good in every situation, even when to do so is a burden."<sup>2</sup> Think about the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20). What kinds of "false gods" do they free us from?*

Answers will vary. The Ten Commandments free us from the false gods of self, lust, power, money, and revenge. They free us to live as God created us to live, as his children, created in his image and likeness.

6. *Jeff describes the year at Mount Sinai as a "hinge point" for Israel, during which God gives the people three things. What are those three things?*

During the people's year of "formation" at Mount Sinai, God gives Israel three things that will mark their relationship with him: the Law (the Ten Commandments, given in the context of covenant); the Tabernacle and a pattern of worship; and the Levitical priesthood.

7. *What does the Tabernacle signify to Israel?*

The Tabernacle signifies the presence of God dwelling among his people. This is the first time we have seen this since God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It is a sign of—and a step toward—restoration of the broken relationship between God and mankind.

8. *Why does God make Israel wander for forty years in the desert? What is he trying to teach the people?*

When Moses sends twelve spies into the land of Canaan, they bring back a report that it is a fertile land and full of giants. Ten of these spies think the people living there are too mighty to defeat, while only two stress the bounty of the land and say that God will lead them. Despite the miraculous way God delivered them from Egypt, the people listen to the ten and do not trust God. As a result of their lack of faith, the LORD makes them wander a year in the desert for every day the spies spent in the land. This allowed a generation to grow up learning to trust God's providence entirely.

9. *St. Paul tells us that these stories have been "written down for our instruction" (1 Corinthians 10:11). What message do these stories hold for you today?*

Answers will vary.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, "Celebration of the Word at Mount Sinai," St. Catherine's Monastery, February 26, 2000.

## Home Preparation: Looking Ahead

The answers to the Home Preparation questions about this time period are listed below:

Period name: **CONQUEST AND JUDGES** Approximate dates: 1406 –1050 BC

Period color: Green Color meaning: The green hills of Canaan

Narrative books: Joshua, Judges, the beginning of 1 Samuel

List any names familiar to you and tell what you know about them:

Answers will vary. Some of the familiar names are Deborah, Gideon, and

Samson among the Judges; Samuel and Jesse, Rahab and Ruth.

Period name: **ROYAL KINGDOM** Approximate dates: 1050–930 BC

Period color: Purple Color meaning: The color of royalty

Key people: Saul, David, Solomon

What would you say is the key event? God's covenant with David