

Lesson 5: The Holy Prophet Moses

Moses was the first leader that helped to make the Israelites a united people.

God appeared to Moses in a burning bush promising him of his presence with him all the time (*Ex 3:7, 10-12*) and revealing his name to Moses. He called himself Yahweh which translated means, "I AM". This tells us that God is the source of all that exists; it is he alone who has the power to do all things. It also reminds us that God is eternal; that is, his existence had no beginning and will have no end.

The Passover: Before sending the tenth and final plague (which was to be the death of every first-born Egyptian son and animal), God told Moses to have each Israelite family hold a special religious meal which would be a sign that they were members of his sacred people. Every family was to kill a lamb and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, standing, ready to leave on a journey. They were to sprinkle the lamb's blood on their wooden doorposts, for this would be a signal that the home was to be spared from the angel of death so that it would pass *over* the homes of God's people while carrying out the final plague. Thus the meal became known as the *Passover*. Even today, Jewish families gather together to celebrate the feast of the Passover; it is always celebrated near our Christian feast of Easter.

A lot of similarities can be drawn between the Passover meal and the HOLY Mass. The Israelites gathered together for the Passover by the command of God; we Catholics come together every Sunday for Mass as Christ commands us. The Israelites sacrificed an animal known as the Paschal lamb; we offer the Father the Eucharistic sacrifice of Jesus, who is the "Lamb of God" (Jn 1:36). At the Passover meal the Israelites are the sacrificed lamb; at every Eucharist we are invited to partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus in Holy Communion. The Israelites sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed lamb upon the wood of their doorposts so that death would not come to them that night; at every Holy Mass the precious blood of Jesus is *sacramentally* shed for our sins so that we might be saved from eternal death (Hell). Finally, because of the Passover ceremony and the tenth plague, the Israelites were freed from their slavery; because of Christ's sacrifice we are freed from slavery to sin and the devil.

Because these sacred ceremonies are so similar, the liturgy of the Church for Holy Week and Easter calls the Crucifixion and the Resurrection the "Paschal Mystery" (Passover) of the Lord Jesus.

God renews his covenant by giving them the Commandments of the Law. The Jews considered themselves good so long as they kept the Law. They had such a deep respect for the Commandments that they built a special container, called the *Ark of the Covenant*, in which the tablets of the Law were kept. They carried this with them as they journeyed to the Promised Land.

As another part of the renewed covenant, God commanded that the priests of Israel offer animal sacrifices to him in worship. A *sacrifice* is the act of offering to God something that is precious to us. These gifts were to be offered on an altar that was *consecrated*, set apart solely for this purpose. Each time a sacrifice was offered, the people would be reminded of the covenant and of their duty to obey the Law.

After forty years of traveling through the desert the people finally arrived in the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua who led the Jews in battle against the foreigners who had taken over their land while they had been enslaved in Egypt. After Joshua's death there was a new kind of leadership for Israel: the judges. These were not men who presided over courts of law as our judges do; they were military heroes who won great victories for God's people. The era of judges lasted only as long as

Israel needed military men to reconquer their land. Once the community was firmly established as a nation, the work of the judges ended, and yet another new form of leadership arose: the kings.

Saul was the very first king of Israel but proved to be an unworthy king and he soon died.

His successor was David, the greatest king Israel ever had. It was King David who made *Jerusalem* the capital of the Jewish nation and the center of their worship. God loved David and made a special promise to him: one of his descendants would reign as king forever! This was a prophecy about Jesus, who was a descendant of David and the true King of the Jews