

# YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS

**THE BOOK OF EXODUS**

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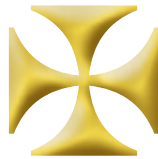
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AND GOD SPOKE all these words, saying,  
“I AM THE LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,  
out of the house of bondage.  
You shall have no other gods before me.  
You shall not make for yourself a graven image,  
or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath,  
or that is in the water under the earth;  
you shall not bow down to them or serve them;  
for I the LORD your God am a jealous God,  
visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children  
to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,  
but showing mercy to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”  
—the book of *Exodus* 20:1–6



# YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS

## THE BOOK OF EXODUS

### EXODUS 1:1–22

**1** <sup>1</sup>These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: <sup>2</sup>Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, <sup>3</sup>Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, <sup>4</sup>Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. <sup>5</sup>All the offspring of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. <sup>6</sup>Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. <sup>7</sup>But the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them.

<sup>8</sup>Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. <sup>9</sup>And he said to his people, “Behold, the sons of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. <sup>10</sup>Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” <sup>11</sup>Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens; and they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Raamses. <sup>12</sup>But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the sons of Israel. <sup>13</sup>So they made the sons of Israel serve with rigor, <sup>14</sup>and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor.

<sup>15</sup>Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, <sup>16</sup>“When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” <sup>17</sup>But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. <sup>18</sup>So the king of Egypt called the midwives, and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” <sup>19</sup>The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and are delivered before the midwife comes to them.” <sup>20</sup>So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong. <sup>21</sup>And because the midwives feared God he gave them families. <sup>22</sup>Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”



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## THE MORE THE PEOPLE ARE OPPRESSED, THE MORE THEY MULTIPLY

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**T**he Old Testament book of *Exodus* intersperses details pertaining to God's covenant laws with stirring narrative describing how the LORD delivered the descendants of Jacob out of slavery in Egypt. This dramatic account inspired Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 epic religious film *The Ten Commandments*. The first chapter in the book of *Exodus* sets the stage for the birth of Moses, whose arrival on the scene as a male Hebrew baby automatically condemns him to death—yet he survives in the first miraculous event connected to the Exodus. God's commitment to the covenant made with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is an underlying theme in the book, and the LORD's rescue of the sons of Israel (Jacob's descendants) is presented as evidence of God's great love for their forebears.

What situations can you point to in your own life that demonstrate God's love for you? What points to God's unwavering love for all of humanity? From what do you think such great love stems?

**1** **Read the book of *Exodus* 1:1–5.** The 70 persons referred to as offspring of Jacob can trace their lineage directly to the patriarch. What reason might the author of the book of *Exodus* have for focusing on Jacob's direct descendants? How did Joseph come to be in Egypt before his family moved there from the land of Canaan? If necessary, refer to the final 14 chapters in the book of *Genesis*.

**2** **Read the book of *Exodus* 1:6–7.** What information does this passage suggest about how long the descendants of Jacob had been living in Egypt? What does it disclose about how the Israelites have fared during their sojourn there?

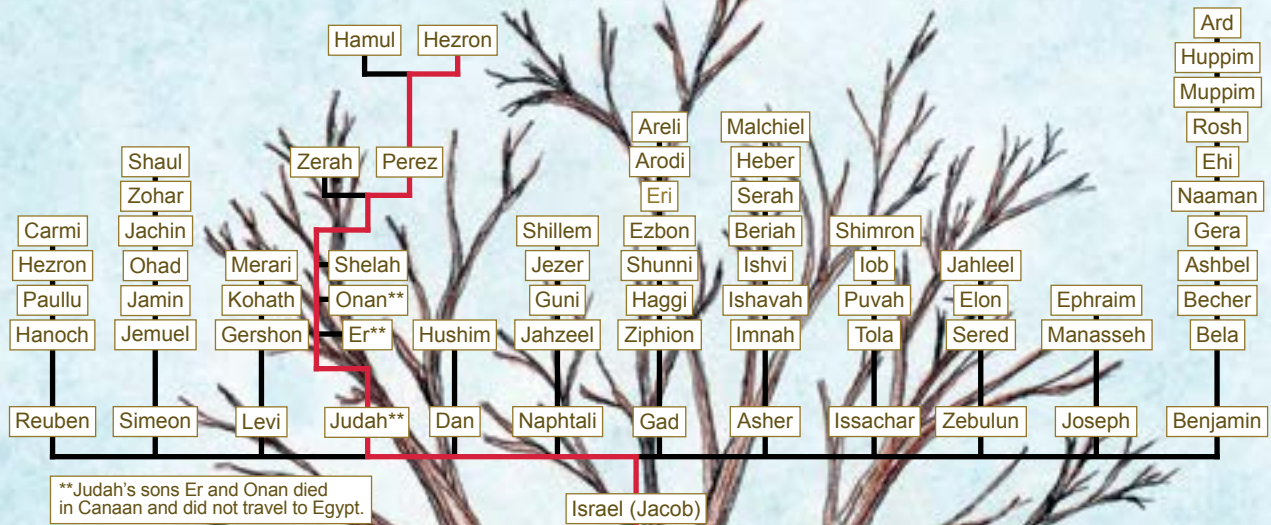
**3** **Read the book of *Exodus* 1:8.** Egyptian monarchs at the time of Moses called themselves “pharaohs,” a title that the author of the book of *Exodus* switches to later in this chapter. What might the author of the biblical text mean by recording that there is a new king in Egypt who did not know Joseph? Consider whether the author is implying that the pharaoh never had heard of Joseph.

**4** **Read the book of *Exodus* 1:9–10.** According to the biblical text, how does Pharaoh regard the sons of Israel who are living in Egypt? What does he fear that the Israelites might do in the event that Egypt were to go to war with another nation? Pharaoh also expresses concern about the Israelites continuing to multiply. Why might the fruitfulness of the Hebrews be of particular concern to Pharaoh? What does this fruitfulness suggest about God's people?

### ex•o•dus a way out

The English title for the book of *Exodus* comes from the ancient Greek ἔξοδος (*exodos*), combining *ex-*, meaning “out,” and *-hodós*, meaning “path” or “road.” **Exodus** literally is a “way out.” The biblical text describes how the LORD, through a series of dramatic events, leads the descendants of Jacob out of slavery in Egypt. As important as the original **Exodus** was for the Hebrews, it was equally meaningful later for Jews who saw it as foreshadowing their return from the Babylonian Exile. Christians see it as foreshadowing Jesus leading his followers out of bondage to sin and death and into the new Promised Land of eternal life.

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL GO DOWN TO EGYPT\*



**5** Read the book of *Exodus* 1:11–12. How does Pharaoh decide to oppress the sons of Israel? Consider whether oppressing God’s people is the best way to minimize any threat they might pose to the Egyptians. What effect does the oppression by the Egyptians have on the families of the sons of Israel? The biblical text records that the sons of Israel spread abroad, indicating that they spread out over Egypt. What effect does this have on the Egyptians?

**6** Read the book of *Exodus* 1:13–14. What tasks do the Egyptians give the sons of Israel to perform? Look up the meaning of the word “rigor,” which is used twice in this passage to describe the way in which the Egyptians forced the sons of Israel to do a variety of servile tasks. What does this word “rigor” disclose about the relationship between the sons of Israel and the Egyptians?

SONS & TRIBES OF ISRAEL

In Hebrew language the title *Exodus* is שְׁמוֹת (shemōt), which translates as “Names” and is taken from the book of *Exodus* 1:1: “These are the names of the sons of Israel, who came to Egypt with Jacob . . .” The actual names are listed in the book of *Genesis* 46:8–27.

Books of Scripture and Church encyclicals often are given titles based on the first word or words in the text. “Names” is not terribly relevant to the work’s meaning, which is why this book later started to be called the book of *Exodus*.

Other biblical texts are inconsistent in naming the 12 tribes descended from Jacob’s sons. Descendants of Levi often are omitted, and Joseph sometimes is replaced by his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, who occasionally are then referred to as half-tribes.

CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

AN ANCIENT BOOK THAT REMAINS RELEVANT

A few people debate whether the events described in the book of *Exodus* actually happened—also disagreeing about who recorded these events, when, and why. There is no question, however, that extremely unusual occurrences surely must have shaped the way in which the Hebrews and later the Jews thought about God. The book of *Exodus* lays the foundation for how Christians relate to God and to God’s commandments. Catholics understand the sacrament of the Eucharist in light of the way religious sacrifices are described in the book of *Exodus*.

\*The genealogy of Judah is indicated in red on the genealogical chart. Jesus will be born into the line of Judah, the fourth son of Jacob (Israel).

**7** Read the book of *Exodus* 1:15–16. In this passage, Pharaoh decides on a new policy regarding the sons of Israel. What is that policy, and how might the Hebrews be expected to react to it? Why might the author have chosen to include the names of the midwives Pharaoh instructed to carry out his policy? Consider why male and female babies are to be treated differently.

**8** Read the book of *Exodus* 1:17–19. How do the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah react to Pharaoh’s edict? What does the text suggest is motivating them to behave in a way that might put their lives in danger? How do Shiphrah and Puah respond when Pharaoh questions why they have been allowing male Hebrew babies to live? Consider whether it is likely that Pharaoh considers their explanation to be feasible.

**9** Read the book of *Exodus* 1:20–21. The author discloses that God seems to approve of the midwives’ actions. What specifically does God do for the people to indicate his approval? What specifically does he do for the midwives to indicate his approval? What does this suggest about the way in which Christians should respond to issues of life and death in the present day? What problems arise when humanity attempts to take control over life and death?

### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE EGYPTIANS?

Most Christians are familiar with events described in the book of *Exodus*, but the familial relationship between the Hebrews and the Egyptians often is overlooked. Descendants of Jacob are Hebrews, taking their name from Eber, great-grandson of Noah’s son Shem. The Egyptians are descendants of Egypt, son of Ham and grandson of Noah. The genealogies of Noah’s sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—are recorded in the tenth chapter in the book of *Genesis*.



## GOD IS THE LORD OF LIFE

The book of *Exodus* 1:15–20 recounts the reactions of Hebrew midwives to Pharaoh’s edict that all male Hebrew babies were to be killed. Lurking just under the surface of that edict is the notion that giving birth to a male child is somehow more desirable than bringing a girl baby into the world.

Plenty examples of this sort of thinking continue to beset humanity. Consider what may have prompted Pharaoh to wish to eliminate male Hebrew children but not the females. Why might he have expected such a policy to give him more control over the descendants of Jacob?

There is more to the story. Scripture abounds with instances in which men and women decide to get involved in life-and-death issues without taking God’s will into consideration.

The LORD’S interest in maintaining control over these areas of human existence can be seen as far back as the book of *Genesis* 3:22–24, in which God expels Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden to prevent them eating from the tree of life.

Arrogant human behavior surrounding life-and-death issues also can be seen at work in the present day. In all cases, God is not pleased when humanity ignores the fifth of the Ten Commandments, found in the book of *Exodus* 20:13 and repeated in the book of *Deuteronomy* 5:17: “You shall not kill.”

Paragraph 2258 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* focuses on Catholic teaching: “*Human life is sacred* because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: No one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.”

In the first chapter in the book of *Exodus*, the midwives who oppose Pharaoh’s edict are rewarded with families, considered a blessing in the ancient world. Shiphrah and Puah also receive the distinction of being among the few women whose names are recorded in Scripture.

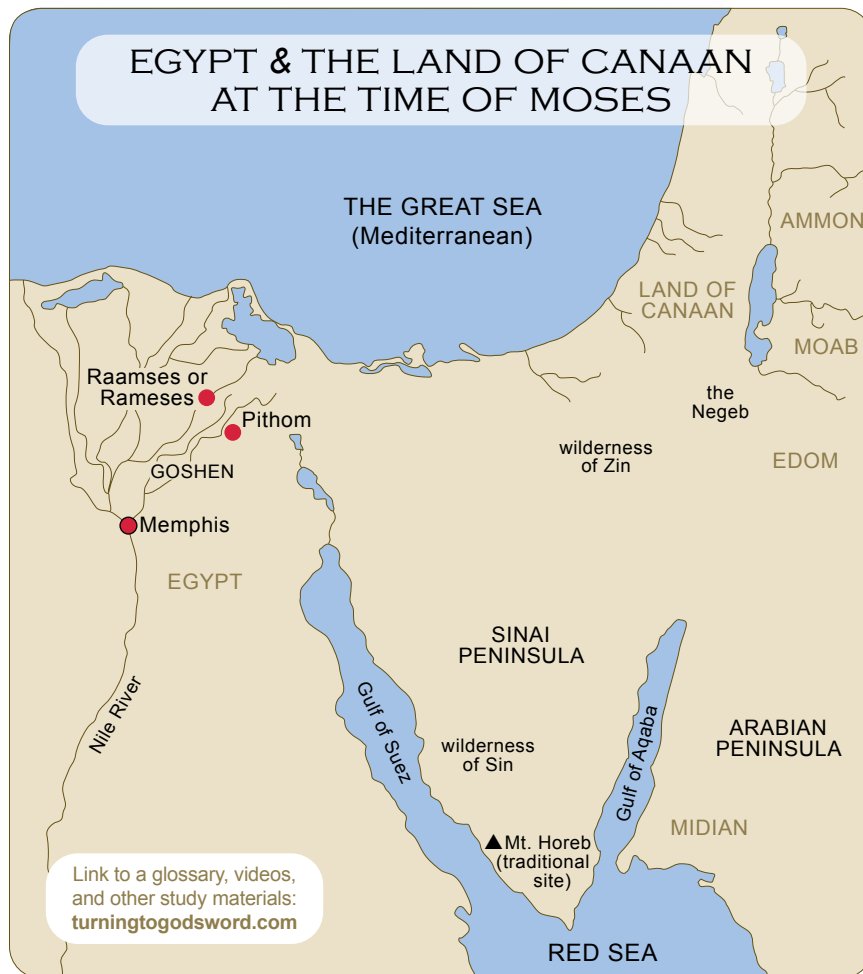


## WHEN DID THE EXODUS OCCUR?

The book of *Exodus* 1:8 quickly informs readers that it is set during a time when a new king had arisen in Egypt, one “who did not know Joseph.” Scholars have found it extremely difficult to determine which king (or pharaoh) might be referred to in the opening chapter, making it difficult to pin down an exact date for the events described.

The primary contenders for ruler at the time of the Exodus are Ramses II (often spelled Rameses or Ramesses) or his father, Seti I. Most scholars now think the Exodus began sometime between 1270 and 1250 BC, though a few hold to an earlier date of 1440 BC.

The book of *Exodus* picks up the story of salvation history where the book of *Genesis* left off—with the family of the patriarch Jacob settling in Egypt during a famine. The last 14 chapters in the book of *Genesis* recount how Jacob’s son Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers but then rose to great success in Egypt.



**10** Read the book of *Exodus* 1:22. Pharaoh continues his harsh policy against male children born into Hebrew families. Who does Pharaoh now enlist to see to it that Hebrew boy babies are not allowed to live? What does Pharaoh specifically ask be done to these infants? Consider the effect that Pharaoh’s policy would have had on the Israelites living in Egypt.

## WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF EXODUS?

Authorship of the first five books in the Old Testament traditionally has been attributed to Moses, but the description of Moses’ own death and burial in the book of *Deuteronomy* 34:1–8 presents a logical problem.

In the mid-1800s, biblical scholars postulated that the book of *Exodus*—and the books of *Genesis*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*—may be compilations of four different versions of events. These are labeled J (Yahwist—referring to God as YHWH or LORD), E (Elohist—referring

to God by the more generic term Elohim), D (Deuteronomist—focusing on the Old Covenant), and P (Priestly—displaying a strong interest in Hebrew liturgy and religious ritual).

Most scholars accept some version of this Documentary Hypothesis, although no ancient documents supporting it have been located. J sections are thought to be the oldest, dating to the 10th or 9th century BC, with E written after 900 BC, D compiled between the 7th and 6th centuries BC., and P added during the 6th and 5th centuries BC.

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All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching.... —the *Second Letter of Paul to Timothy* 3:16–17

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\*\*\*Jonah 1:17 (RSV2CE) = Jonah 2:1 (NABRE)

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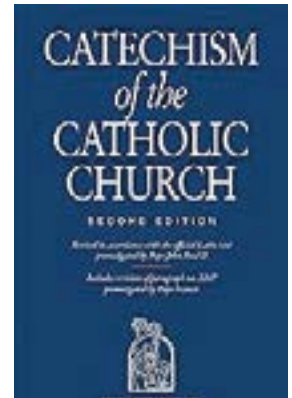
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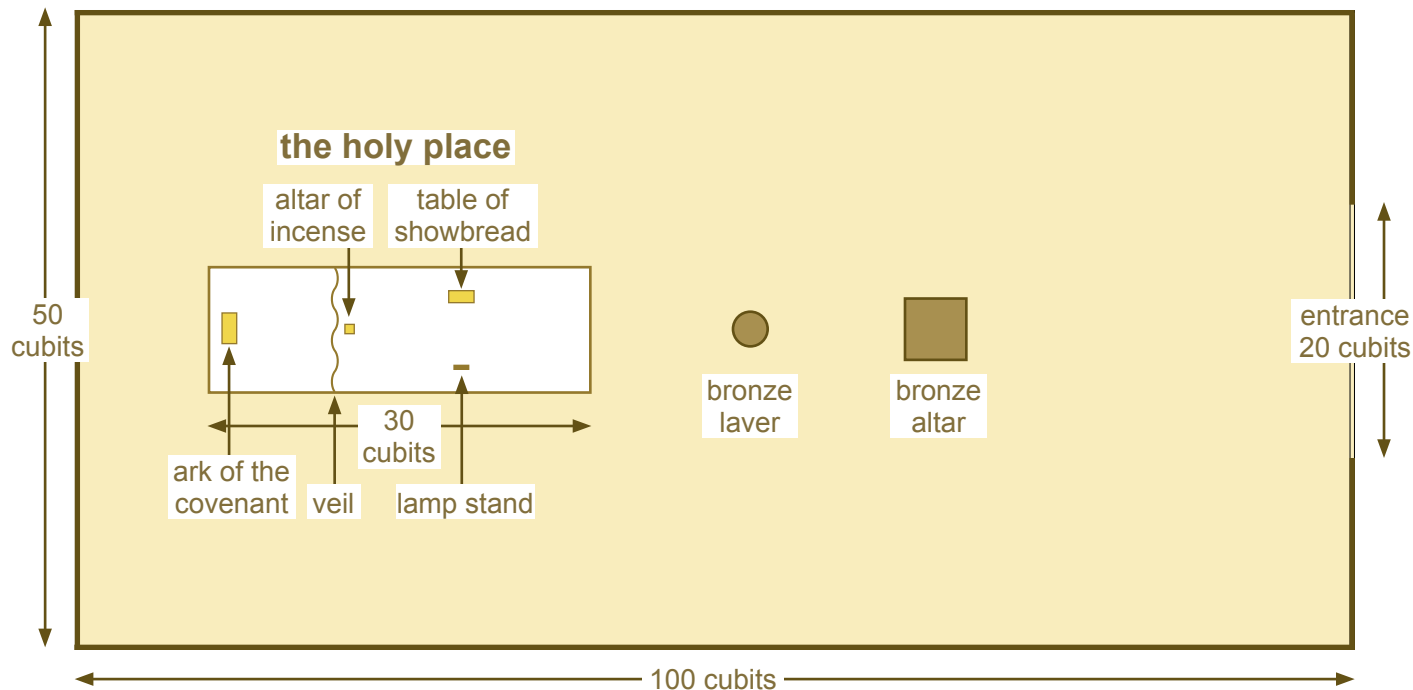
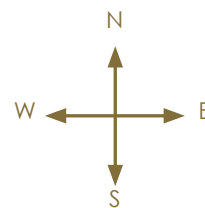
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- CCC 121** (page 14): The indispensable nature of the divinely inspired Old Testament.
- CCC 143** (page 73): A discussion of obedience of faith as it applies to Christians.
- CCC 144** (pages 35, 76 & 93): An explanation of the link between listening and the obedience of faith.
- CCC 207** (page 18): Teaching that in revealing his name God reveals his eternal faithfulness.
- CCC 208**: That the mysterious presence of God leads man to discover his own insignificance.
- CCC 238** (page 24): That the Christian meaning of God as Father is related to God's Hebrew identity.
- CCC 302**: Teaching that the world wasn't created in a state of perfection but is journeying toward it.
- CCC 332**: The presence of angels throughout salvation history.
- CCC 404**: How the sin of Adam is transmitted as original sin to all men and women.
- CCC 433**: That the high priest invoked the name of the LORD once a year for atonement of sin.
- CCC 436**: The meaning of the Greek word Christ and its relationship to the Hebrew word Messiah.
- CCC 441**: Various ways that the term son of God is used in the Old Testament.
- CCC 457–460**: The four positive effects for humanity that result from Jesus' Incarnation.
- CCC 555**: A discussion of the meaning of Jesus' Transfiguration.
- CCC 608**: The relationship between the Lamb of God and the Suffering Servant.
- CCC 613**: The two sacrificial meanings connected with the death of Jesus.
- CCC 659**: What's implied when Jesus ascends into heaven in a cloud.
- CCC 691** (page 61): The proper way to address the third person of the Blessed Trinity.
- CCC 694**: Church teaching regarding water as a symbol of Baptism.
- CCC 695**: Anointing with oil as a symbol of the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- CCC 696** (page 61): Fire as a symbol of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.
- CCC 697** (pages 61, 96 & 144): Why cloud and light are used as images of the Holy Spirit.
- CCC 698**: The three sacraments that leave an indelible mark on Christians.
- CCC 699**: The symbolism connected with the laying on of hands.
- CCC 702** (page 61): The presence and action of the Holy Spirit hidden in the Old Testament.
- CCC 705** (page 144): The difference between image and likeness.
- CCC 708**: The law given by God to lead men and women to Jesus Christ.
- CCC 760**: The startling teaching that the world was created for the sake of the Church.
- CCC 783** (page 108): That Jesus Christ has been anointed priest, prophet, and king.
- CCC 811**: The four characteristic marks that distinguish the Church.
- CCC 817**: Teaching that ruptures within the Church don't occur without human sin.
- CCC 820**: The Church's belief that the unity imposed on it in Christ never will be lost.
- CCC 845**: That Noah's ark represents a prefiguration of the salvation available only in the Church.
- CCC 901**: Regarding lay participation in Christ's priestly office and in consecration of the world.
- CCC 1008**: The covenant with God that stipulates death as a consequence of sin.
- CCC 1093** (page 55): That Church liturgy retains elements of Old Testament worship practices.
- CCC 1150** (page 52): The Church's view that the Old Covenant prefigures the New.
- CCC 1214** (page 116): How Baptism symbolizes dying with Christ and rising with him to new life.
- CCC 1288** (page 117): About the imposition of hands as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation.
- CCC 1289** (page 144): That Christians are marked as being anointed in the Holy Spirit.
- CCC 1324** (page 72): Benefits that accrue from participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist.
- CCC 1363** (page 51): Church teaching about the meaning of the word "memorial" in Scripture.
- CCC 1539**: About the special rite of consecration for priests in the Old Testament.
- CCC 1548** (page 111): Jesus as the source of all priestly acts in both the Old and New Testaments.
- CCC 1601**: The two goods toward which the sacrament of Matrimony is ordered.



- CCC 1723:** That Christian blessing brings with it confrontation with moral choices.
- CCC 1741:** How Jesus' Passion brings about redemption, liberation, and salvation.
- CCC 1820** (page 145): Teaching that the Beatitudes point Christians to the hope of heaven.
- CCC 1831** (page 117): The Church's list of gifts given to humanity by the Holy Spirit.
- CCC 1857–1859:** Paragraphs that explain the conditions of mortal sin.
- CCC 1867:** Church teaching regarding the "sins that cry to heaven."
- CCC 1900:** A discussion of how Christian obedience includes respect for authority.
- CCC 2042** (pages 84 & 116): The first three obligatory precepts of the Church.
- CCC 2042–2043** (page 128): A listing of all of the obligatory precepts of the Church.
- CCC 2043** (page 132): The fourth and fifth obligatory precepts of the Church.
- CCC 2058:** Church teaching that the Ten Commandments sum up and proclaim God's law.
- CCC 2068** (page 85): That the Ten Commandments are obligatory for Christians.
- CCC 2072** (page 82): Church teaching regarding the Ten Commandments as grave obligations.
- CCC 2085:** What it is that humanity gains when God reveals his glory.
- CCC 2113** (pages 84 & 122): Church teaching that idolatry presents a constant temptation.
- CCC 2130:** Old Testament exceptions to the rule against making religious images.
- CCC 2141** (page 83): That the veneration of sacred images by Christians is based on the Incarnation.
- CCC 2168–2188** (page 117): A *Catechism* section that examines the third commandment.
- CCC 2170** (page 55): That the Lord's day memorializes Israel's liberation from bondage.
- CCC 2171:** How keeping the sabbath is a sign of humanity's irrevocable covenant with God.
- CCC 2172** (page 116): Teaching that God's example of sabbath rest is a model for humanity.
- CCC 2174** (page 112): Church teaching about why Christian worship is on the first day of the week.
- CCC 2196:** Which of the Ten Commandments are reflected in Jesus' call to love our neighbors.
- CCC 2199** (page 84): That the fourth commandment addresses universal family relationships.
- CCC 2200:** The reward associated with observing the commandment to honor our parents.
- CCC 2214:** That the divine fatherhood of God underlies the fourth commandment.
- CCC 2257:** The danger to societies that ignore the *Gospel* message.
- CCC 2258** (page 8): That human life is sacred due to its connection to the creative nature of God.
- CCC 2261:** That the Church is morally opposed to the sin of murder.
- CCC 2267** (page 90): Updated Church teaching opposed to the use of the death penalty.
- CCC 2330:** Teaching that cultivating peace in all things is lauded as essential to holiness.
- CCC 2400:** That misuse of sex is seen as a grave offense to the dignity of marriage.
- CCC 2414** (pages 90 & 91): Church teaching forbidding anything that leads to enslavement.
- CCC 2463:** How Scripture encourages Christians to treat the poor with generosity and love.
- CCC 2504:** What allows Christians to keep from bearing false witness.
- CCC 2513:** That sacred art is intended to reflect and express the beauty of God.
- CCC 2533:** Church teaching connecting modesty with purity of heart.
- CCC 2565** (page 27): That in the New Covenant prayer is the living relationship with God.
- CCC 2574** (page 27): That the prayer of Moses is a striking example of his role as mediator.
- CCC 2575** (pages 16 & 27): That God's call from the burning bush is a primordial image of prayer.
- CCC 2576** (page 27): Regarding Moses' relationship with God as an image of contemplative prayer.
- CCC 2577** (page 27): Church teaching that Moses' strength is drawn from his relationship with God.
- CCC 2583:** The view that Elijah, like Moses, hides his face in order for God to pass by him.
- CCC 2666** (page 18): That Jesus' name contains everything important to know about Jesus.
- CCC 2728:** Suggestions for overcoming common obstacles to prayer.
- CCC 2795:** Heaven as it relates to the covenant between God and humanity.
- CCC 2810:** That from the covenant in the wilderness onward, the Israelites are God's own people.
- CCC 2836:** That "today" prayed in the Our Father refers to both human and divine time.

# THE PATTERN OF THE TABERNACLE\*



“And I will dwell among the sons of Israel, and will be their God.  
 And they shall know that I am the LORD their God,  
 who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt  
 that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God.”

—the book of *Exodus* 29:45–46

## THE TABERNACLE POINTS TO GOD’S LOVE

A large portion of the book of *Exodus* is taken up with descriptions of how to construct the tabernacle and its furnishings, what garments need to be made for the priests, and how Aaron and his sons are to be consecrated to the priesthood. This includes the twenty-fifth through the thirty-first chapters and the thirty-fifth through the fortieth chapters—roughly a third of the book. The purpose of the tabernacle was to allow

the LORD to dwell with the Israelites on their long trek out of Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan, which God had pledged to the descendants of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

What makes the tabernacle so important for Christians is that it is built on God’s desire for perfect union between humanity and divinity, something that became attainable through the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

\*The diagram of the tabernacle is drawn to scale. In the ancient world, a cubit represented the length from a person’s elbow to the tip of their middle finger. This measurement could vary widely—usually from 17 to 19 inches. Scholars consider a biblical cubit to represent a length of 18 inches.