

In Their Midst

Exodus: From Slavery to Covenant Presence

Session 6. Stand Firm and See

Reading: Exodus 13:17-15:21

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers how God brings a trapped people through the sea and turns fear into faith, freedom, and praise.

Catholic Touchstone

This session touches Baptism as the sacramental passage from slavery to freedom, the call to trust God amid fear, and praise as the fitting response to his saving action.

Israel leaves Egypt but is not yet ready to live as a free people. God leads them by an unexpected route, permits them to face an impossible situation, and opens a path they could never make for themselves. Keep the group close to the movement of the text: fear gives way to stillness, stillness to passage, passage to faith, and faith to praise. The crossing is a real act of divine deliverance and, in the Church's reading, a privileged figure of Baptism.

What You Need to Know

Freedom begins under God's guidance

God does not lead Israel by the shortest route. Exodus itself gives the reason: immediate war might cause the people to retreat to Egypt. The pillar of cloud and fire shows that the route is neither accidental nor abandoned. Israel may not understand where God is leading, but the Lord remains present.

The people are genuinely trapped

The narrative removes ordinary grounds for confidence. The sea is before Israel, Pharaoh's forces are behind, and the people possess neither the experience nor the strength to defeat Egypt. This prepares the central declaration that the Lord will fight for them. Israel must trust, but Israel must also move when God commands.

Divine action and human response belong together

Moses tells the people to stand firm, and God then tells them to go forward. These commands are complementary. Israel cannot manufacture deliverance, but trust is not passivity. God opens the path, Moses stretches out his hand in obedience, and the people walk through it.

Fear changes its object

At first Israel fears Pharaoh and expects death. At the end the people fear the Lord, believe in him, and trust his servant Moses. This fear of the Lord is reverent recognition of God's power and authority, not the despairing terror that drives them back toward slavery.

The song interprets the event

Exodus 15 does more than celebrate survival. The song names the Lord as Israel's strength and salvation, remembers what he has done, and looks ahead toward the holy dwelling he will establish. The

destination of the exodus is therefore larger than escape. God is forming a worshipping people whom he will bring into his presence.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Creation and passage through water

Genesis 1:2 presents the Spirit of God moving over the waters before God orders creation. In Exodus, God again exercises sovereign authority over waters and brings a people into a new manner of life. The parallel should not erase the historical sense of Exodus, but it helps the leader notice the new-creation pattern.

The flood and Baptism

Genesis 7-8 presents water as both judgment and the means by which Noah's household is carried into a cleansed world. St. Peter explicitly reads Noah's deliverance as a figure of Baptism in 1 Peter 3:20-21.

The sea crossing and Baptism

St. Paul says that Israel was baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5. The Church therefore receives the crossing as a divinely given figure of Christian Baptism. As Israel passes from Pharaoh's dominion into freedom under God, the baptized pass from slavery to sin into life in Christ. The analogy does not make sacramental grace automatic or magical. St. Paul's warning immediately recalls that members of the rescued people can still turn away through unbelief and disobedience.

Type and antitype

Christian fulfillment does not make Israel's deliverance unreal or unimportant. Biblical typology recognizes God's coherent action across salvation history. The historical rescue remains meaningful in itself while also preparing for the greater liberation Christ gives through his death, Resurrection, and the sacrament of Baptism.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. Ambrose, d. 397

Summary of his teaching: St. Ambrose presents Israel's passage through the sea as a figure of Baptism. Pharaoh and his forces are overcome in the water, while God's people pass through into freedom.

On the Mysteries 3.12.

How this is cited. This is a summary rather than a direct quotation. The cited section explicitly connects the Red Sea crossing with the mystery of Baptism.

For the group. Invite the group to see Baptism not merely as a religious label, but as God's act of liberation and incorporation into a new people.

St. Gregory Nazianzen, d. c. 390

Summary of his teaching: St. Gregory gathers Israel's passage through the sea, the cloud, manna, and water from the rock as anticipatory signs that instruct Christians about Baptism and the life that follows it.

Oration 40.25.

How this is cited. This is an honest summary of the baptismal typology St. Gregory develops in this section, not a quotation.

For the group. Baptism begins a journey of discipleship. Rescue from bondage is followed by dependence, testing, nourishment, and growth.

St. Thomas Aquinas, 1225-1274

Summary of his teaching: answering an objection about the kinds of Baptism, St. Thomas takes up St. John Damascene's list of figurative baptisms and affirms the crossing of the Red Sea among them, a figure of Baptism in respect of our deliverance from the bondage of sin, citing St. Paul's statement that Israel was baptized in the cloud and in the sea.

Summa Theologiae III, q. 66, a. 11, ad 3.

How this is cited. Summary, not a quotation. The claim sits in a reply to an objection (ad 3), where St. Thomas endorses St. John Damascene's enumeration of figurative baptisms; the article itself asks whether Baptism of Water, Blood, and the Spirit are fittingly distinguished.

For the group. The crossing helps the group name what salvation is freedom from, and also the new allegiance and life into which God brings us.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 1094. The Church reads the Old Testament through typology, recognizing in God's works under the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplishes in Christ.

CCC 1221. The crossing of the Red Sea, the liberation of Israel from slavery, announces the liberation brought about by Baptism.

CCC 1263-1264. Baptism forgives all sin and gives new life, while certain temporal consequences remain and the struggle against concupiscence continues.

CCC 2639. Praise recognizes that God is God and gives him glory for who he is, beyond thanking him only for particular benefits.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Why God brings Israel out (develop). Let Exodus 15:13 and 15:17 push the group beyond escape. God is leading a redeemed people toward his holy dwelling. Do not resolve the thread yet.

Deliverance through water (develop). The planted thread becomes explicit tonight. Let the group first observe the sea narrative, then discover the apostolic connection to Baptism for themselves.

Fear of God versus fear of rulers (develop). Contrast Israel's fear of Pharaoh in Exodus 14:10 with its fear of the Lord in 14:31. Ask what each fear produces.

God dwelling among his people (develop). Notice God's guiding presence in the pillar and the song's movement toward God's holy abode and sanctuary. The pillar is presence on the move, while the sanctuary remains ahead.

Mediators of deliverance (develop). Moses speaks, stretches out his hand, and leads in song, but the text repeatedly identifies the Lord as the one who saves. Preserve both truths.

Where is the lamb? (hold). Do not force the Passover thread into the crossing discussion. The sequence of lamb, blood, passage, and freedom can remain available for later fulfillment.

The sealed guess (hold). Do not reopen the guesses. Exodus 15:13 and 15:17 provide strong evidence that participants will need when the envelopes are opened in Session 8.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

How can the drowning of the Egyptians be presented as an act of God?

Do not minimize the severity of the text or celebrate human death casually. Exodus presents the event as judgment upon a regime that enslaved Israel, killed its sons, rejected repeated warnings, and pursued the freed people to recapture them. The song celebrates God's victory over oppressive power and Israel's rescue. The passage does not authorize personal vengeance, nor does it reveal the eternal destiny of each Egyptian who died.

Could the sea crossing have been only an ordinary natural event later described as a miracle?

The text includes a strong east wind, but it does not treat the event as independent of God. It repeatedly attributes the timing, divided waters, protection, passage, and defeat of the pursuers to the Lord. A reader may ask about natural means, but the narrative's own claim is that God intentionally acted to save Israel.

If the crossing prefigures Baptism, why do the rescued Israelites later sin?

That difficulty is already part of St. Paul's use of the event. The passage through water is real, but it does not abolish human freedom or make later fidelity unnecessary. Catholic teaching does not treat Baptism as magic. Baptism truly gives grace and new life, while the baptized must continue in faith, repentance, and obedience.

Session Goals

1. Trace the movement from divine guidance to crisis, deliverance, faith, and praise.
2. Compare Israel's fear of Pharaoh with its later fear of the Lord.

3. Identify what the text attributes to God, to Moses, and to the people.
4. Discover from the New Testament why the Church reads the sea crossing as a figure of Baptism.
5. Recognize that the goal of the exodus includes worship and God's dwelling among his people.
6. Give participants language for responding to fear with truthful prayer, obedient movement, and praise.

Time Note

Planned for 75-90 Minutes

Allow 8 minutes for prayer and Win, 13 to 15 minutes for the reading, 45 to 52 minutes for Build, 10 minutes for Send and Live It This Week, and 4 minutes for the memory verse and closing prayer.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Cut the Dig Deeper prompt under Question 5 first.
2. Shorten Question 9 by asking only for repeated subjects and verbs in the song.
3. Discuss only one Send question aloud and invite participants to reflect on the other privately.
4. If necessary, assign the third Live It practice without discussing examples.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you heard Israel's cry and led your people out of slavery. Open our eyes to what you have done, steady us where we are afraid, and teach us to trust your presence even when we cannot see a way forward. Send your Holy Spirit to guide our reading, guard our conversation, and lead us into the freedom of your truth. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. When have you discovered that the shortest route was not necessarily the best route?

W2. What kind of situation tends to make you feel trapped or unsure of your next step?

Keep this warm and brief. Participants may answer lightly or seriously, and no one needs to disclose a painful situation.

Read

Read aloud

Use three readers. Reader one reads Exodus 13:17-14:14, reader two reads Exodus 14:15-31, and reader three reads Exodus 15:1-21. Ask everyone else to mark changes in location, emotion, and response.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

Led into the crisis

1. In Exodus 13:17-22, what choices does God make about Israel's route, and what reasons or signs does the text give?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. List the route decision and the two signs of God's presence.

Ground. Ask what God appears to know about Israel's present weakness.

Depth. Consider why divine guidance does not always mean immediate ease or a transparent explanation.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God does not lead Israel by the shorter road through the land of the Philistines because the people might face war, change their minds, and return to Egypt. He leads them by the wilderness route and remains visibly present in the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. The indirect route is still a guided route.

Dig Deeper

What does the text allow us to say about God's guidance, and what questions about his guidance does it leave unanswered?

2. According to Exodus 14:1-9, how does the situation become a trap, and what does Pharaoh hope to accomplish?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God directs Israel to camp where Pharaoh will conclude that the people are confused and shut in. Pharaoh regrets releasing Israel, gathers his chariots and officers, and pursues the people in order to reclaim control over them. The crisis exposes Pharaoh's continuing refusal to release those he had enslaved.

Fear, stillness, and movement

3. Read Exodus 14:10-14 closely. What do the people see, feel, say, and remember? How does Moses answer each part of their fear?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The people see the Egyptians, become greatly afraid, cry to the Lord, accuse Moses, and reinterpret Egyptian slavery as preferable to death in the wilderness. Moses tells them not to fear, to stand firm, and to see the salvation the Lord will accomplish. He redirects their attention from Egypt's apparent power to the Lord's promised action.

Dig Deeper

Notice that the people both cry to God and accuse Moses. What does that mixed response reveal about frightened faith?

4. In Exodus 14:15-18, what does God tell Moses and Israel to do, and what does God say the Egyptians will know?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God tells Moses to direct the people forward, lift his rod, stretch out his hand, and divide the sea so Israel can pass through on dry ground. God declares that he will gain glory over Pharaoh and that the Egyptians will know that he is the Lord. Divine deliverance includes both God's sovereign action and obedient human participation.

5. What does the pillar do in Exodus 14:19-22, and what do these verses show about God's presence during the crossing?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The angel of God and the pillar move from Israel's front to its rear, standing between Israel and Egypt. The presence that guided Israel now protects it. The pillar comes between the two camps and holds the pursuers off through the night, and God divides the sea and gives Israel dry ground through the waters. Exodus 13:21, not 14:20, is where the pillar is said to give light.

Dig Deeper

Without erasing the differences, compare the waters and divine activity here with the ordering of the waters in Genesis 1:2.

The Lord saved Israel

6. In Exodus 14:23-31, who acts, who is saved, and what changes in Israel by the end of the chapter?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Find the verse that identifies who saved Israel.

Ground. Compare Israel's response in verses 10 to 12 with its response in verse 31.

Depth. Discuss why trust in Moses as God's servant does not compete with faith in God.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Egyptians pursue, but the Lord throws their forces into confusion and the returning waters overwhelm them. Moses obeys by stretching out his hand, yet the narrator says that the Lord saved Israel. The people see the Lord's great work, fear the Lord, and believe in the Lord and in his servant Moses. Their fear shifts from Pharaoh's power toward reverent recognition of God's power.

Build: Find the apostolic reading

Live discovery

Divide into two groups. One group reads 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 and the other reads 1 Peter 3:20-21. Ask each group to report the water event, the baptismal language, the kind of rescue described, and any qualification or warning in the passage.

Let them find it. 1 Corinthians 10:1-12; 1 Peter 3:20-21

7. The Church calls the sea crossing a figure of Baptism. Before discussing that claim, find how two New Testament writers themselves connect saving passage through water with Baptism. What similarities and warnings do you notice?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

St. Paul describes Israel as baptized into Moses in the cloud and sea, then warns that participation in these gifts did not make later infidelity impossible. St. Peter identifies Noah's deliverance through water as a figure of Baptism and grounds Baptism's saving reality in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ rather than in an outward washing of the body. Together, the passages show that baptismal typology comes from the inspired apostolic reading while also excluding a magical understanding that ignores faith and perseverance.

Press: Is this only a later symbol?

8. How would you answer the claim that Christians may use the sea as an inspiring symbol of Baptism, but should not call it a God-given sacramental figure?

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Exodus is about Israel's historical and political liberation from Egypt, not Christian Baptism. St. Paul's phrase about being baptized into Moses can be read as a rhetorical comparison, especially because he uses it to warn Christians rather than to teach baptismal regeneration. St. Peter's reference to Noah concerns a different event and distinguishes Baptism from an outward washing. Therefore, Christians may draw a devotional analogy, but the text does not require a Catholic sacramental reading.

Answering from the text. The Catholic reading first preserves the historical liberation rather than replacing it. Yet St. Paul does more than notice a loose resemblance: he uses baptismal language for Israel's passage through cloud and sea and treats the event as instruction for the baptized Church. St. Peter says that the flood prefigures Baptism and that Baptism now saves through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, while clarifying that it is not mere bodily washing. The warnings do not make Baptism unreal. They show that real sacramental participation does not abolish freedom or the need for perseverance. These passages may not contain the Church's whole theology of Baptism by themselves, but they establish that the typological reading is apostolic rather than an arbitrary later invention.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A strong answer should preserve both levels of the text. God truly liberated Israel from Egypt, and the inspired apostles also identify water deliverances as figures that instruct the baptized Church. The Catholic reading does not reduce Exodus to a code about Baptism, and it does not treat Baptism as magic. It receives the historical event as part of the divine pattern fulfilled in Christ and sacramentally shared with his people.

Freedom becomes praise

9. In Exodus 15:1-12, what names, images, and repeated actions describe the Lord? What does the song emphasize about Israel's deliverance?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The song calls the Lord Israel's strength, song, salvation, warrior, and incomparable holy God. Its dominant subject is the Lord, who triumphs, casts down the enemy, acts with power, and leads his people. Israel's praise is therefore grounded not in its own courage or military ability, but in what God has done.

Dig Deeper

What is the difference between praising God for his gifts and praising God for who he is?

10. Read Exodus 15:13-21. Where is God leading the people, and what do Miriam and the women add to the people's response?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. List the destination words in verses 13 and 17.

Ground. Compare the opening song with Miriam's refrain.

Depth. Ask how freedom becomes incomplete when it is understood only as escape from something and not as belonging to God.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God is leading the people he has redeemed toward his holy abode, the mountain of his inheritance, and the sanctuary established for his dwelling. The song therefore looks beyond escape toward worship and communion with God. Miriam and the women answer with music, movement, and repeated praise, drawing the wider community into the celebration of the Lord's victory.

Dig Deeper

How do verses 13 and 17 deepen the sealed question about why God is bringing Israel out of Egypt without yet giving its final answer?

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where are you being tempted to interpret fear as proof that God has abandoned you?

S2. What would one faithful step forward look like if you trusted that God is present even before you can see the whole path?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Read the sea-crossing account aloud once this week. Sit in silence for two minutes, name one fear honestly before God, and pray the memory verse over it.
2. When you enter a Catholic church this week, use holy water slowly and make the Sign of the Cross in grateful remembrance of your Baptism. If you are not baptized, observe the practice respectfully and ask a Catholic friend or priest what Baptism means.
3. Write a six-line prayer of praise. Make God the subject of each line by naming who he is or what he has done, rather than focusing only on what you want him to change.

Scripture Memory

Exodus 14:14

"The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be still."

Exodus 14:14

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord God, you make a way where your people cannot make one for themselves. Free us from the fear that sends us back toward slavery. Give us grace to stand firm when we must wait, courage to move when you call, and grateful hearts that remember your saving work. Lead us through Christ into the freedom of your children and teach us to praise you with our lives. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Exodus 13:17-15:21** God guides Israel, opens a path through the sea, defeats Pharaoh's pursuit, and receives the praise of the redeemed people.

Old Testament roots

- **Genesis 1:2** God's Spirit and sovereign ordering of the waters.
- **Genesis 7-8** Judgment through water and the preservation of Noah's household.

Apostolic fulfillment

- **1 Corinthians 10:1-12** Israel baptized into Moses in the cloud and sea; the explicit warning follows at 10:6-12.
- **1 Peter 3:20-21** Noah's preservation through water as a figure of Baptism, saving through Christ's Resurrection.

Terms

- **typology.** The recognition that God's earlier works and institutions prefigure their greater fulfillment in Christ and his Church.
- **type.** A real person, event, or institution within salvation history that God uses to prepare for a later fulfillment.
- **antitype.** The later and greater fulfillment to which a biblical type points.

Catechism

- CCC 1094. Old Covenant realities prefigure God's saving work in Christ.
- CCC 1221. The Red Sea crossing announces the liberation brought by Baptism.
- CCC 1263-1264. Baptism forgives all sin and gives new life, while certain temporal consequences remain and the struggle against concupiscence continues.
- CCC 2639. Praise glorifies God for who he is.