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*The
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The Bible Story

by BASIL WOLVERTON

Volume III

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INTRODUCTION

by Herbert W. Armstrong

In response to overwhelming demand, Volume III of *The Bible Story* is published. We are thrilled, and overjoyed, because of the enthusiastic acceptance of Volumes I and II.

Those who have read the first two volumes know that there has never been a Bible story book like this. There have, of course, been many Bible story books—too many, of a kind. But candidly they seemed, to me, to have no mission, except to entertain children. They seemed to try to compete with the exciting fiction of violence of which youngsters see entirely too much on television—or read in cheap novels or comic books.

These children's Bible story books were a series of disconnected blood-and-thunder stories drawn from certain Biblical incidents. There was no connection between one and another, or with the Gospel. They were shorn of their real meaning. They seemed to me to degrade the Bible in children's minds. The real connection of these Biblically recorded incidents with the *meaning* and *purpose* of life—of God's message to mankind—was ignored. Yet all these incidents are recorded in the Bible *because* they have real and deep MEANING. They teach vital lessons that ought to be made plain to children—and to adults as well!

Children *need*, as they need life itself, an awareness of the basic TRUTHS of the Bible, while these children are growing up. Years ago this realization plagued me. God had called me to an important ministry which He was blessing with rapid and constant growth. But the children were being neglected in this ministry. How could I supply this lack? For years it was a frustrating dilemma.

HOW could I get to growing children a real knowledge of God—of the Creator and His vast creation—of His power, authority, and rulership over all He created—of the very PURPOSE in having put humans on this earth—of the vital *connection* between these Biblical incidents and the meaning of life?

In due time God supplied the man for this important undertaking. Basil Wolverton is a nationally known artist in the United States. His work has appeared in more than fifty nationally circulated magazines. He is both an artist and a trained writer. He was converted through The WORLD TOMORROW broadcast many years ago. He is a student and teacher of the Bible.

In November, 1958, *The Bible Story* started, serially, in *The PLAIN TRUTH*. But it is *not* written *only* for children! We like to say it is written for children

from 5 to 105! Mr. Wolverton has written in simple, understandable language, easily read by children at the nine- to twelve-year-old level yet *interesting* to adults as well!

Very few seem to realize that a *continuous story-thread* runs through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. That is the story-flow that Mr. Wolverton is writing. With professional expertness, Mr. Wolverton makes this story gripping and thrilling in plain and simple words. Parents can read this book to four- and five-year olds, and, with a little explaining, make it understandable and also absorbing and interesting.

Mr. Wolverton has stuck tenaciously to the literal Biblical account. He has taken author's license to portray certain incidents in conversational style, or to fill in, for purposes of clarity and realism, a few "tomatoes on the window sill." Yet he has been zealously careful to avoid adding to, or detracting from, the real and intended meaning of the sacred Scriptures.

Volume I is, at the first printing of the present volume, out of print. An initial printing of fifty thousand copies of Volume I was immediately exhausted, and a second printing of fifty thousand ordered at once. Volume II was immediately exhausted in the first printing of one hundred thousand and a second printing of over seventy thousand was required. The first printing of the present volume is one hundred and seventy-five thousand.

The first volume contained thirteen chapters, as follows:

"In the Beginning; Thou Shalt Surely Die; Noah Builds the Ark; And the Flood Came; The Tower of Babel; Abram Journeys to Canaan; Abram Gives Up His Son; Esau Sells Jacob His Birthright; Jacob Falls in Love; Joseph's Adventures in Egypt; Joseph Becomes Ruler of Egypt; I Am Joseph; Seven Years of Famine."

The second volume contained chapters fourteen through thirty:

"Moses Flees Egypt; God Calls Moses; Moses and Aaron Meet Pharoah; The Plagues of Egypt; The Plagues Continue; The Worst Weather Ever!; Two More Plagues on Egypt; The Exodus Begins; At the Red Sea; Crossing the Red Sea; Safe at Last!; War with Amalek!; On to Sinai; The Ten Commandments; The Golden Calf; Moses Breaks Ten Commandments; Moses Returns."

The present volume picks up the story from there. It is presented to you as a ministry of love, without money and without price; and it is our fervent hope that it will bring to you and your children enlightenment, interesting reading, understanding, and abundant blessings from its original and TRUE AUTHOR, Jesus Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Herbert A. Tompkins." The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the text.

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The Bible Story

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE TABERNACLE BUILT

MOSSES told the people after he returned from atop Sinai that God had given him plans for a tabernacle. "Every detail of how the tabernacle should be built, I have with me," Moses explained. "Think how great an opportunity you are being given to show God your thanks for not blotting you out because of your sins."

"God has ordered us to build this tabernacle," Moses said to the crowd. "He will be pleased with us if we give generously and willingly of our materials, wealth, skills and labor. Every one can have a part in doing something for our Creator."

Shouts of "What can we do?" and "Just how can we help?" came from all parts of the vast congregation.

Moses answered by telling them that all who were willing and able should bring in gold, silver, brass, cloth dyes, fine linen, goats' hair, red rams' skins, seals' skins, acacia wood, oil, spices, incense and precious stones.

"There is also a need for willing workers who are skilled in carpentry, metal work, weaving, carving and all the crafts and arts necessary to build and decorate the tabernacle and everything connected with it." (Exodus 35:4-19.)

Moses didn't beg the people for anything. He simply told them what was required. The huge crowd broke up, and the Israelites returned to their tents.

"Do you really expect the people to come and offer all those things you mentioned?" Aaron asked Moses a short while after the crowd had melted away.

"You heard them shouting out to ask what they could do," Moses replied. "That seemed to be a good sign that they are willing to do what is right. But by now I shouldn't be surprised at anything they do."

Aaron knew that Moses was thinking of the golden calf, and he suddenly felt a little uncomfortable. But just at that moment one of Moses' officers shouted in to report that the tent was being surrounded by a growing crowd. Moses and Aaron leaped up and moved quickly toward the tent entrance.

"I trust that this isn't a mob to protest against giving materials for the tabernacle," Aaron murmured.

Emerging from the tent, Moses and Aaron looked out upon an increasing throng of Israelites holding various objects of all shapes and sizes.

Israelites Bring Many Valuable Offerings

"These people say they have come to give gifts for the tabernacle," an officer explained to Moses and Aaron. "What shall we do?" (Verses 20-29.)

"Assign men of good character to receive the gifts at once," Moses answered. "Summon skilled men to immediately set up tents and enclosures in which to store these things."

Moses smilingly gazed at the people eagerly swarming toward his tent with their offerings.

"I told you I shouldn't be surprised at anything they do," he said to Aaron. "Perhaps I was wrong. What surprises me now is that they have so quickly and earnestly responded to my requests."

For the next several days thousands of people came to give the things for which Moses had asked. Because the camps were spread out for several miles, it was far into the night when some of the gift-bearers arrived. They also wove diligently on their looms to produce the beautiful fabrics that were needed, and they brought daily that which had been finished. So generous were the people that more than enough was brought for the building of the tabernacle.

Moses was pleased at this great display of zeal, unselfishness and ambition by so many of the people. It was plain to him that thousands of them were anxious to make up for their past sins. Still too fresh in their minds were the unpleasant memories of their wanton prancing before the golden calf. But most of the people who came to give simply had a sincere desire to help because they realized that this was a wonderful opportunity to be of service to God.

There were also many craftsmen, laborers, craftswomen and maidservants who fervently came to offer their services. (Exodus 36:1-3.)

God had already told Moses on Mt. Sinai whom to choose to head this task of making the tabernacle, and Moses had already proclaimed to the people that Bezaleel, a grandson of Hur from the tribe of Judah, would be in charge. Bezaleel's assistant

was to be Aholiab of the tribe of Dan.

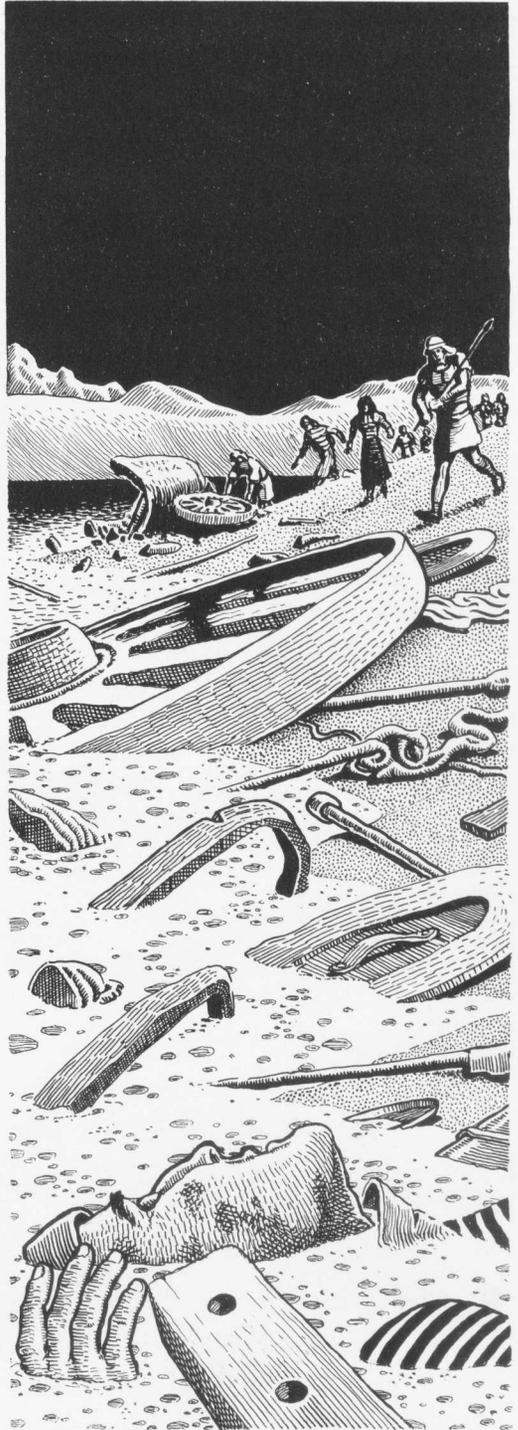
Israelites Work Industriosly

These two men were of good character, highly skilled in all the crafts of building and decoration, in teaching their helpers, and possessing good judgment and wisdom in the arts of material design and production. Moses had passed on to them the detailed instructions for building the tabernacle. (Exodus 35:30-35.)

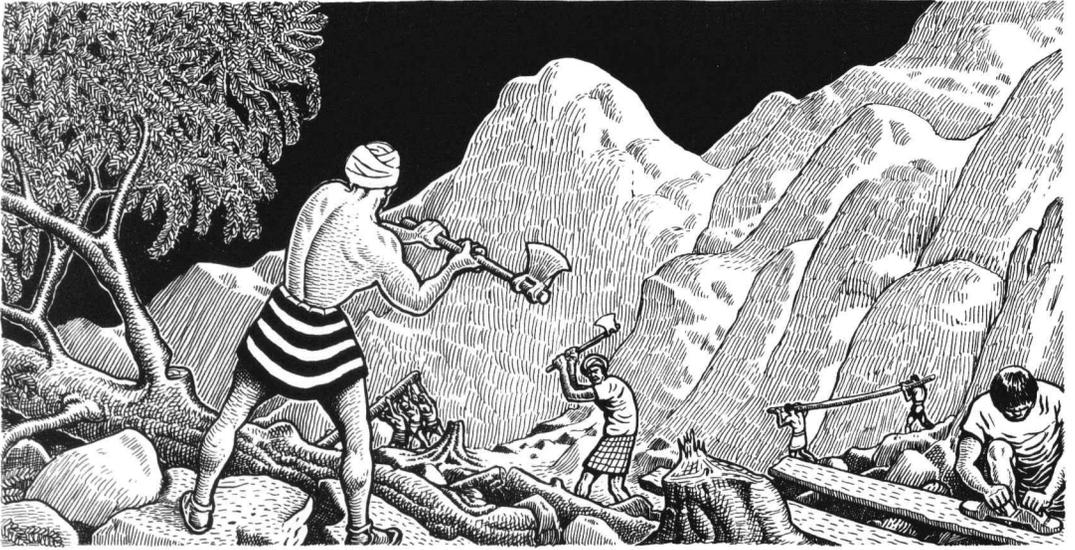
Knowing how much material was necessary, Bezaleel realized that more than enough had been brought in. Even so, the people kept on coming with more. Bezaleel spoke to Moses, who quickly made it known that nothing more should be given. But there were some who had put off giving their share, and who rushed their offerings in too late to be accepted. They were like so many of us who mean to do what is right, but postpone doing it until it is too late.

Bezaleel and Aholiab lost no time in teaching those who needed instructions and assigning craftsmen and laborers to their various tasks. Soon everyone was busily and happily working. Carpenters started hewing boards out of the acacia logs and planks that had been brought in. Metal workers melted down or pounded out the metals. Weavers and seamstresses worked on cloth. Gem-cutters planned how to use the precious stones.

However, the area around Moses' tent couldn't exactly be described as a beehive of activity. Workers weren't rushing



Some of the materials given by the Israelites for the tabernacle were from Egyptian army equipment washed ashore from the Red Sea.



A few of the Israelites went into the mountains to get acacia wood for the tabernacle.

feverishly about. Work on the tabernacle was something that couldn't be rushed. It required great care and skill, for everything that went into this project was to be made as close to perfection as human hands could make it. The men and women were very careful to perform superior workmanship in making God's tabernacle and its furnishings.

Bezaleel and Aholiab did much of the work themselves—especially on such objects as the chest that was to contain the two tables of stone on which the The Commandments are written, the altar on which sacrifices were to be made and the priests' garments. (Exodus 37, 38, 39.)

Even though the workers applied themselves ambitiously, it required about six months to build the tabernacle. That was because there was a need for so much intricate and detailed workmanship.

Tabernacle Richly Decorated

During that time, nearly fifteen tons of gold, silver and brass were used. The total cost of the tabernacle and the outer court, measured in terms of present American money, was over a million dollars. This represented only a small part of the wealth of the Israelites, which shows that the Egyptians must have given very liberally to them when the Israelites left Egypt a year previously. However, much of the wealth was picked up along the Red Sea gulf after part of Pharaoh's army and equipment had been washed up on the shore.

Among the last things to be made were the special clothes to be worn by Aaron and his sons in their service as priests at the tabernacle.

As each item was finished, it was brought to Moses for his inspection and approval. Much time was required for him to carefully examine all workmanship in every detail. When he finally finished, he was satisfied that everything had been made strictly according to God's instructions.

He called all the workers together and praised them for the excellent services they had performed, and asked God's blessing on them. (Exodus 39:43.)

Moses reminded them that God, who is perfect, is always pleased when men strive toward perfection in anything that is truly worthwhile, whether it is material, physical or spiritual. It is something to remember every time we put our minds and hands to a task. We are living in times when increasing numbers of people are trying to get more and give less. That is exactly the opposite of what pleases God. He likes things of high quality, and therefore we should put our best efforts into anything we set out to do.

By the time the tabernacle was finished, the Israelites had been gone a whole year from Egypt. God told Moses to get the tabernacle set up and ready for use on the first day of the second year of their journey from Egypt. (Exodus 40:1-4, 17.)

Just to the west of Moses' tent (the one in which he lived—not the distant one in which he talked with God) was an open area in the center of the camps of the twelve tribes. It was there that workmen erected the tabernacle. (Numbers 1:50-54; 3:38.)

An Enclosure for the Tabernacle

To give privacy to the priests who would preside there, a long curtain of fine linen was strung on brass posts about ten feet high. The posts were held firm by cords and tent pins. This fence enclosed an area about two hundred feet long and one hundred feet wide. The space between the tabernacle and the fence was called the court of the tabernacle. (Exodus 27:9-19 and 38:9-20.)

On the east end of the court an opening was left in the fence. It was the only gateway into the court. The altar was placed just beyond the opening. This special altar was about six feet high and about ten feet square. Every board in it was hewn from acacia trees that grew in the Mt. Sinai area, and every board was covered with brass. It was hollow inside. (Exodus 27:8.) Then it was filled so that the wood wouldn't catch on fire. (Exodus 20:24.) Wood and offerings were to be placed on the dirt altar. Ashes would be removed daily (Leviticus 6:8-13) with shovels and pans made for that purpose.

Like everything else, the altar was made to be carried. There were strong brass

rings on the corners of a brass grate that encircled the lower half of the altar. The boards of the altar rested on a narrow rim of the grate. (Ex. 27:4-5). Through these rings long poles were to be inserted for lifting the altar from the dirt filling and for conveying the altar whenever the Israelites were directed to move their camps. (Exodus 38:1-7.)

Between the tabernacle and the altar was a huge brass bowl called the laver. This was always to be full of water in which the priests were to wash their hands and feet before going about their duties at the altar. (Exodus 30:17-21.)

The tabernacle was put up in the west section of the court. It was about sixty feet long, twenty feet wide and with walls twenty feet high. The three walls were built of gold-covered acacia boards set on bases of silver. The front end was open except for a curtain. To keep out the rain, dew and strong sunlight, a heavy curtain of seals' skins was stretched over the top and the walls of the tabernacle. Underneath this heavy curtain were lighter curtains of rams' skins, goat hair and linen. The linen curtain could be seen from the inside of the tabernacle. It was made of fancy figured cloth in bright colors. As for the floor, there was no need of building one, inasmuch as level ground would serve as such wherever the tabernacle would be set up. (Exodus 26:1-25; 36:8-34.)

The tabernacle had two rooms. The first one, which was to be entered from the curtained east end, was about forty feet long and twenty feet wide. This gold-covered room, spoken of as the holy place, contained three important things: a gold-covered table on which were to be placed twelve loaves of bread to represent the food offerings of the twelve tribes of Israel, a golden lampstand with places for seven oil-fueled lamps and a golden altar on which incense was to be burned.

The second room was only half the size of the first room, or about twenty feet square. In this very sacred area, which was to be entered only by the high priest, only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, there was an object of great value. It was a wooden chest, covered with gold, called the ark of the covenant. This ark was about the size of a large trunk. It had a solid gold lid, called the mercy seat, on which were mounted two golden figures facing each other. Inside the chest were the two stone tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments. Aaron's rod was also kept there. Then there was a special container in which there was manna, holy anointing oil and other objects of special meaning. (Exodus 37:1-9; Heb. 9:3-8.)

This holy of holies, as the inner room was called, was the place designed by God in which His glorious Presence was to abide while He led the Israelites on their journey to Canaan.

The people were told when the tabernacle was to be set up, and a huge crowd formed to see what it would look like when all the many parts were put together. It

was a colorful and majestic sight to witness its erection. However, it wasn't possible to view the sacred rites that took place in ordaining the tabernacle, its contents and Aaron and his sons. The curtained fence around the court prevented the people from seeing inside.

Moses was the first to enter the court after workmen had set it up. He anointed the various articles and utensils in the court and the tabernacle. From that time on they were to be regarded as holy.

Moses then brought Aaron and Aaron's sons into the court. After they had washed their hands and feet in the laver, they put on the clothes they were to wear in their duties as priests. Moses anointed them with oil and they were ordained, by God's power, to be priests in the service of the tabernacle. This also meant that their following generations of men were also to be priests.

Everything was put in order in the tabernacle. Bread was placed on the table in the holy place. The seven lamps were lighted. Sweet incense was burned on the golden altar. A burnt offering and a meat offering were made at the large altar. (Exodus 40:17-33.)

The Israelites had become accustomed to seeing the cloud of God move from Mt. Sinai and descend on the tent where Moses went to meet God outside the camps. Many of them noticed that the cloud moved down off the mountain peak after Moses and Aaron and his sons had been inside the tabernacle for a little while. But this time the cloud didn't head for the tent outside the camps.

"Look at the cloud!" some cried out. "It's moving down this way!"

Moving directly toward the crowd around the tabernacle, the cloud appeared to be increasingly enormous. Most Israelites had never been so close to it before. They began to be aware of its beautiful, sparkling, silvery quality. It was like something glowing with strong, vibrant life.

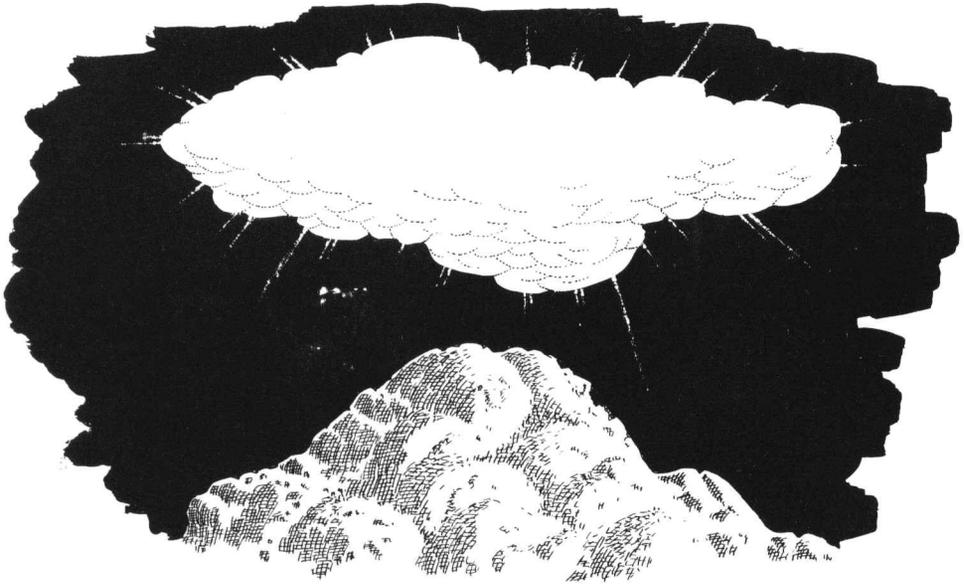
When it floated slowly down over the tabernacle, some of the spectators became so upset at this nearness to God that they fled away to their tents. Most of the people just stood and stared in silent awe.

Moses, Aaron and his sons were in the court of the tabernacle when the gleaming cloud suddenly descended on them. They found themselves enveloped in a luminous vapor which imparted to them a wonderful feeling of peace and energy. Moses had experienced this feeling before because of his closeness to God. To the others it was something so awesome that they respectfully backed out of the court through the curtained entrance in the east fence.

Moses stood where he was, waiting to see if God meant to speak to him. But there was only silence while the cloud became thicker and brighter. Blinding rays of multi-

colored light burst from the tabernacle. Even with his hands over his closed eyes the brightness was too much for Moses. He groped his way toward the entrance and joined Aaron and Aaron's sons outside the court. (Exodus 40:34-35.)

Many of the people, on witnessing the strange, brilliant light in the cloud over the tabernacle, began to realize how wonderful and merciful their God was, and they thanked Him for coming to lead them instead of slaying them.



CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

AFTER the tabernacle had been set up and Aaron and his sons had been anointed as tabernacle priests, Moses told them that they should remain seven days and seven nights at the door of the tabernacle.

"God will not allow you to enter completely into His tabernacle service until you have spent seven days in your appointed duties outside the tabernacle," Moses said to them. "Be sure you do these things exactly as God has directed. If you fail to do so, you may have to pay with your lives." (Leviticus 8:1-4, 31-36.)

Aaron and his sons faithfully performed their tasks for a week. On the eighth day Moses called the elders of Israel to assemble close to the tabernacle. He instructed Aaron and his sons to prepare to make special offerings the elders would bring to be made for the people. (Leviticus 9:1-4.)

Aaron and his sons obeyed. After these special offering ceremonies, Moses and Aaron entered the tabernacle. Later, they came out to walk through the court and go out to face the huge crowd of Israelites.

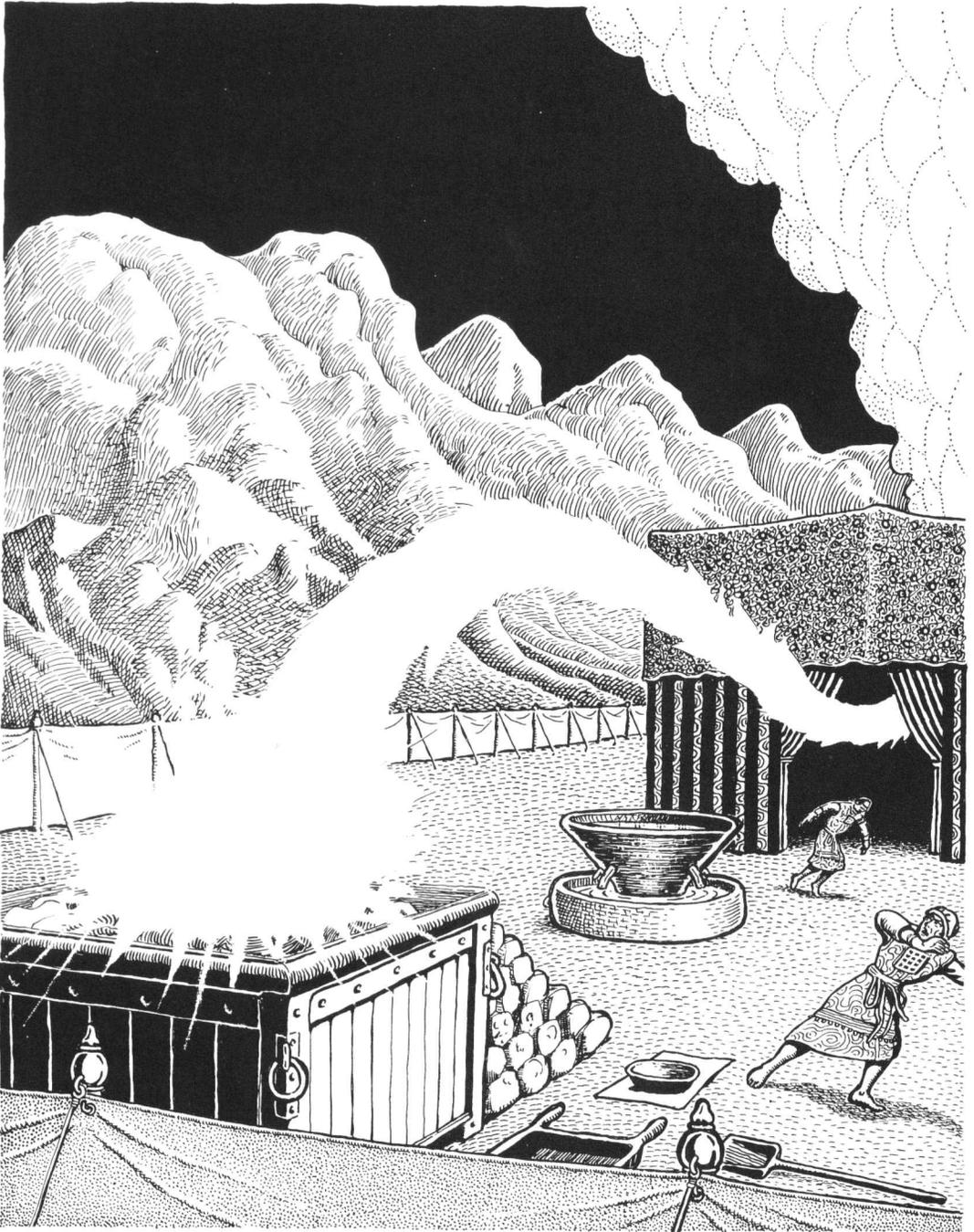
"God is pleased with the offerings you have made," they told the people. "He is always pleased when you obey Him, no matter how much or how little He asks of you." (Verses 22-23.)

Fire from God Supernaturally Burns Offerings

Suddenly a hissing bolt of fire shot out of the tabernacle, arched upward enough to be plainly seen above the curtained fence, and struck directly on the altar! The smoldering offering there was immediately consumed in brilliant, crackling tongues

of fire that flared upward more like lightning than like ordinary flames.

Although the Israelites had witnessed the flaming glory of God at other times in more awesome spectacles, this particular display somehow startled them so much



A terrifying bolt of fire roared out of the tabernacle and exploded directly on the great altar.

that they sent up a thunderous shout that echoed and re-echoed between the mountains. Some of them called out in alarm. Some shouted in surprise. Most of them yelled simply because they were thankful that God was proving that He chose to dwell close to them. (Verse 24.)

Whatever their reasons, most of them felt enough respect for God to fall forward with their faces to the ground. At the same time, there were many who did not want to be present. The Eternal God sternly ordered them to appear whether they wanted to or not. It was for their own good that they were commanded to assemble. (Leviticus 8:3-4.)

Out of the millions of Israelites who had left Egypt, there were many who had no desire to live obediently. These, along with some of the foreigners who had come with them, were the type of people who had caused the incident of the golden calf.

This kind of people, always living by their own violent and selfish desires, has always caused grief and trouble for peace-loving people. Perhaps you may wonder why God allows them, ordinarily, to live and prosper along with those who honor God's laws.

For one reason, God is more merciful and patient than we can imagine. Another reason is that God often deliberately allows us to fall into trouble with those who laugh at the belief that God exists or others who will admit that He exists, but have no regard for the Creator's laws. Becoming involved with such people can cause much ill will, arguments, fights and even murders and wars.

Nevertheless, God allows troublemakers to remain in the world so that we can learn to exercise and develop good character. If we never had troubles from those around us, we wouldn't have so much reason to ask God for help. We would rely less and less on Him, whereas we should learn to rely more and more on Him. Under such circumstances we wouldn't develop the strong traits of character that result from struggling to do the right things.

Before the fire on the altar died down, Moses told Aaron that it was a sacred fire from God, and that it was never to be allowed to die out.

"It is God's holy fire," Moses said. "It is a duty of your sons to see that it keeps burning every minute of every day." (Leviticus 6:13.) "Twice a day, morning and evening, you must fill a censer with live coals from the altar. Twice a day you must put sweet incense on the coals, and take the burning incense into the holy place and put it on the golden altar of incense." (Exodus 30:1-9.)

From then on the tabernacle was in constant use. Early each morning Aaron's sons came to put wood on the altar and remove the ashes to a spot outside the camp area. (Leviticus 6:10-11.) A healthy calf, kid, or lamb was then slaughtered and put

on the altar as a burnt offering for all of Israel. (Leviticus 1.) This was done again in the afternoon. These offerings were made twice every day so there was always an offering being burned on the altar. (Leviticus 6:9, 12-13.)

These unblemished animals used for burnt offerings typified the Messiah who would later come to die for the sins of the people instead of the people having to die.

Besides taking the burning incense into the holy place twice a day, Aaron filled the seven lamps with olive oil two times a day, and set them burning. (Exodus 30:7-8.) This lamp-filling and lamp-lighting was done in such a way that most of the seven lamps were always burning with the holy fire that had been brought in from the altar after God had struck it with a bolt of flame. While Aaron trimmed one lamp, the others were left burning.

Once a week Aaron placed twelve fresh loaves of unleavened bread on the table in the holy place. Each loaf represented a tribe of Israel. Also on the table were solid gold cups for wine and pure gold pans and dishes. These indicated that God was making this place his home so that he could be close to the Israelites. (Leviticus 24:5-9.)

Animal Sacrifice Did Not Forgive Sin

As for the offerings, there were several kinds. Every one was planned by God to distinctly remind the Israelites of their sins, and to give them an opportunity to worship Him with a feeling of close contact. *These offerings were given to teach Israel the habit of obeying God.* (Galatians 3:24.) *They also taught the need of a Saviour to come Who would pay for the sins of the world.* These offerings were not to pay for sin. Salvation never came through animal sacrifices. They were given to Israel until the coming of the Saviour (Galatians 3:19) and were to remind the people of the fact that One would come to shed His blood to pay for sins. (Hebrews 10:3, 4, 18.)

There were burnt offerings, food offerings, peace offerings, offerings for sins of ignorance, trespass offerings and others. For each one there was a special ceremony outlined by God to Moses and carefully passed on by Moses to Aaron and his sons. (Leviticus 1-5.)

For example, if a man wished to make a personal burnt offering as a gift to God or in recognition of the coming Messiah, he was to bring one of three things for a sacrifice. It had to be a healthy male animal from his cattle, a healthy male sheep or goat or turtle-doves or pigeons without any blemish.

There was a certain ceremony for each type of creature. If a man chose to sacrifice an ox, he was to bring it to the door leading into the court of the tabernacle, and place his hand on the head of the animal. The ox was sacrificed. Its spilled blood

was to remind its owner of the coming Christ who would shed His blood for sin!

The owner of the ox was then to slay it, and the priests were to use bowls in which to catch the blood that flowed from the animal. This blood was to be sprinkled over the altar, which was by this time to be loaded with wood. The carcass of the ox was to be quickly cut up into pieces, most of which were to be washed, and the priests were to place them over the wood on the altar. (Leviticus 1:3-9.)

The animal was then to be burned in the mounting flames and the sacrifice would then be completed.

Although most of the people who brought their offerings didn't realize it, these sacrifices pointed to a time when the Being in the silvery cloud above them would come to this world in human form and would be sacrificed for the sins of all people.

Animals, however, weren't the only things to be used in some of the sacrificial ceremonies. Olive oil, flour (made from wheat, rice, barley or rye), incense and corn were used. Some of these, if they were to be burned, were employed in combinations for such things as unleavened cakes and breads not sweetened by honey.

All of the many rituals that were carried out in connection with the tabernacle were to be done just as God had told Moses. No change could be allowed in the ceremonies. Nothing was to be added. Nothing was to be omitted. Through Moses, God had made it clear to Aaron and Aaron's sons that all matters were to be carried out in an exact, solemn and reverent manner.

Two Priests Rebel

One morning not long after the tabernacle was dedicated, Nadab and Abihu arrived early as usual for their duties as priests. The fire on the altar was barely visible. There were live coals on the metal rack, but they were almost hidden by a heavy layer of gray ashes.

The two men were eager to get the fire going, and so the first thing they did was toss wood on the coals and ashes and wait for flames to sprout up. However, the wood was moist from a heavy night dew, and didn't catch fire for a few minutes.

"It's almost time for our father Aaron to arrive to take the live coals into the holy place," Nadab murmured in a worried tone. "In our hurry to get the altar fire going, we've covered up the hot coals!"

"I'll get them," Abihu said, and picked up some long metal tongs.

However, Abihu wasn't successful. He tried to jam the tongs down between the heavy pieces of wood, but flames were now beginning to shoot up. He had to stand away to prevent his hands and sleeves from becoming singed.

"We must get live coals right away!" Nadab exclaimed impatiently. "Father will

be angry if we don't have them ready for him when he arrives!"

"Stop worrying about it," Abihu said, snatching up his censer. "I've just thought of something! There's a campfire burning just a little way outside the gate. Bring your censer, too, and we'll fill both of them with live coals from that fire!"

Knowing that the only fire to be used in the holy place was the sacred fire from the altar, Nadab started to protest. But he was so concerned about his father showing up for the live coals that he said nothing, and hurried along with his brother to get them from the campfire a short distance from the tabernacle fence.

Their censers filled, the brothers ran back inside the court. They were relieved to find that Aaron hadn't yet arrived. But now it was Abihu's turn to become worried.

"These little coals can't last much longer," he remarked. "If father doesn't come very soon to use them, they'll be nothing but ashes!"

The brothers waited a little longer, but still Aaron didn't put in an appearance. It wasn't a case of Aaron being late. It was simply that his sons had decided that it was easier to get live coals from a nearby campfire than it was to pick them from under the burning wood on the altar. The matter of failing to obey a single rule, though it might not have been considered too important by the two brothers at the time, was swiftly developing into something very grave.

"We can't wait any longer," Abihu said impatiently. "There's no choice now but to take the coals into the holy place ourselves. Surely it won't matter much if we take over a part of father's duties this one time."

"But what will he say when he finds what we've done?" Nadab asked, obviously more concerned with what his father would think than with what God would think.

"It's too late to worry about that," Abihu replied curtly. "If we delay any longer, we'll have nothing but ashes in our censers."

"All right!" Nadab agreed. "Let's get it done. Perhaps we can convince father that we were afraid that he would be too late to carry out his early duties in the tabernacle."

Carrying their containers of dying coals, Nadab and Abihu walked slowly toward the tabernacle, through the curtained entrance and into the holy place. A feeling of sharp uneasiness suddenly came over them. It was as though they had trespassed into a room where they were quite unwelcome, and where a thousand eyes were intently watching every move they made.

They saw the container of incense, and moved in discomfort across the room to pick it up and sprinkle part of its contents on the hot ashes in their censers. Neither spoke a word as they waited for the smoke to curl up from the ashes and slowly fill the room.

Little by little the terrible realization came over them that it was an awful thing

they had done in coming into the holy place with coals of fire from an ordinary campfire. Gripped by a sense of great guilt and alarm, Abihu and Nadab suddenly bolted toward the curtained entrance.

But they were too late.

Hissing blades of fire shot out of the inner room and plunged like daggers into the two men. They fell lifeless on the sandy floor under the curtains of the tabernacle entrance. (Leviticus 10:1-2.)



Deadly blades of fire shot out of the inner room of the tabernacle and plunged into Aaron's fleeing sons.

It was not long afterward that Aaron arrived at the tabernacle for his priestly duties. He was somewhat surprised to see that his sons were nowhere in sight, even though the fire on the altar was blazing vigorously.

Then Aaron saw something at the entrance to the tabernacle. He hurried across the court to investigate, and found Nadab and Abihu lying motionless just inside the tabernacle. As he reached down to examine them, he was startled by a stern voice.

"Don't touch them!"

Lesson in Obedience

Aaron glanced up to see Moses approaching and motioning him to stay away from his sons. Now came one of the greatest tests in Aaron's life.

"You can see that they're dead," Moses said. "Those scattered coals and empty censers on the floor make it plain that they disobeyed God by trying to take over a part of your duties. Besides, I was told on my way here that they came to a nearby campfire, just a short while ago, to obtain live coals for their censers. That means that they brought strange fire before God. He has punished them just as He warned that He would punish them if they appeared before Him without proper respect or without proper regard for His tabernacle rules." (Verse 3.)

Aaron straightened up and stood for a while in silent misery as his sad gaze rested on the two sons on which he had pinned so much hope. Finally he turned away, unable to look any longer on their flame-blackened skins.

Meanwhile, Moses went outside the court and sent for two of Aaron's cousins, priests, Mishael and Elzaphan, and instructed them to go to the tabernacle and remove the bodies of Nadab and Abihu to a distant spot far outside the camps of the Israelites. (Verse 4.)

There Aaron's two older sons were buried in the same clothes they had worn when they had been electrocuted by God. Their elaborate and costly robes weren't saved because they had been polluted by disobedience. Aaron and his two younger sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, were warned by Moses not to show any grief because of the death of Nadab and Abihu.

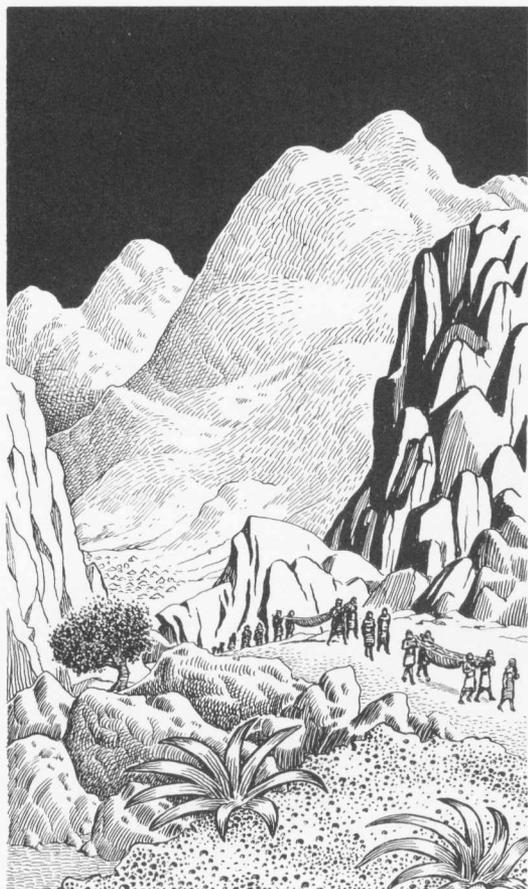
"If you mourn their death before God and the people," Moses told them, "it will be the same as showing that you feel that God has dealt unjustly with them." (Verses 6-7.)

Word swiftly went around that Abihu and Nadab had died by the direct hand of God, and the people were very sobered by the event.

But no funeral or any other event was to interfere with the regular ceremonies of the tabernacle and the great altar. Aaron had to carry on with his duties. His other two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, were now to do the tabernacle service in place of their dead brothers. At the same time God gave Aaron a new rule to be observed by him and his sons.

"Hereafter," God said, "no priest shall drink wine or strong drink while in service inside the tabernacle. If any priest does so, he could die as Nadab and Abihu died." (Verses 8-10.)

This new rule from God was to make more certain that the priests would always be as careful as possible in their work. Abihu and Nadab hadn't conducted themselves wisely. Knowing that a person's judgment and wisdom can often be affected by too much wine or strong drink, God wanted to rule out this possibility of their becoming careless.



The bodies of Nadab and Abihu were removed to a distant spot far outside the camps of the Israelites.

“They have made their offerings and served well today with this one exception,” he said to Moses. “It is my fault, not theirs, that the goat was burned. I gave them orders not to bring it to be eaten. Because of losing my two other sons, I have no appetite. I would have had to choke down the offering meat. Do you think such a thing would have been acceptable to God?” (Verse 19.)

Moses felt compassion for Aaron. He realized that he had done well to continue his duties while under the strain of losing Nadab and Abihu. And he also knew that God pardons human errors that are not wilfully committed. He put a comforting hand on Aaron’s shoulder, and nothing more was said of the matter. And inasmuch as God gave no indication of displeasure, He obviously forgave Aaron of this breaking of a ceremonial rule. (Verse 20.)

Nevertheless, matters didn’t go too smoothly immediately after that, even though Moses purposely reminded Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar of their various duties. A goat was used as an offering for the sins of the people. Rules of this ceremony called for the goat to be eaten—at least in part—by the priests in the holy place. Moses went to the holy place after the offering had been made, but there was no one there. Neither was the meat that was to be eaten. Going back to the altar, Moses discovered that the goat had been completely burned. He quickly sought out Eleazar and Ithamar.

“Why did you let the sin offering burn?” he angrily asked. “Why didn’t you eat it in the holy place? Don’t you realize that it was holy meat, given to you by God to bear the sins of the people?” (Verses 16-18.)

Eleazar and Ithamar felt guilty and embarrassed. While they silently tried to think of some reasonable answers, Aaron stepped up to the group.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

LAWS OF HEALTH

EVERYBODY should be healthy. God intended that His own people should not only know the truth but live radiant, healthy lives.

The Eternal chose the Israelites to know the truth and to be an example of a healthy nation. Only then could they perform the great work of helping carry out the Creator's wonderful plan. But they rebelled and have ever since refused to perform what God called them to do.

God long ago revealed His laws to them—laws which all the nations had long before forgotten. These laws included rules having to do especially with good health. They had been told that they should be a clean people, and this meant that their food should be clean. So now we come to a surprising part of the Bible which very few really understand.

What "Clean Food" Means

Food that is clean doesn't always mean food that has been washed well and is free from every kind of dirt. Food can be clean in that respect, but at the same time be quite unfit to eat. God made animals, birds and fish to be divided into two classes—those good for human food, and those unfit for human food. These the Bible calls "clean" and "unclean."

The clean and unclean had been known even before the flood—in the distant past. Noah knew about them. He knew what to do when he was told to take seven pairs of clean animals and birds into the ark along with a pair of each unclean animal and bird. (Genesis 7:2-3.) The complete knowledge of such things had been lost in

the centuries during which the Israelites had mingled with the heathen Egyptians who had no interest in obeying God.

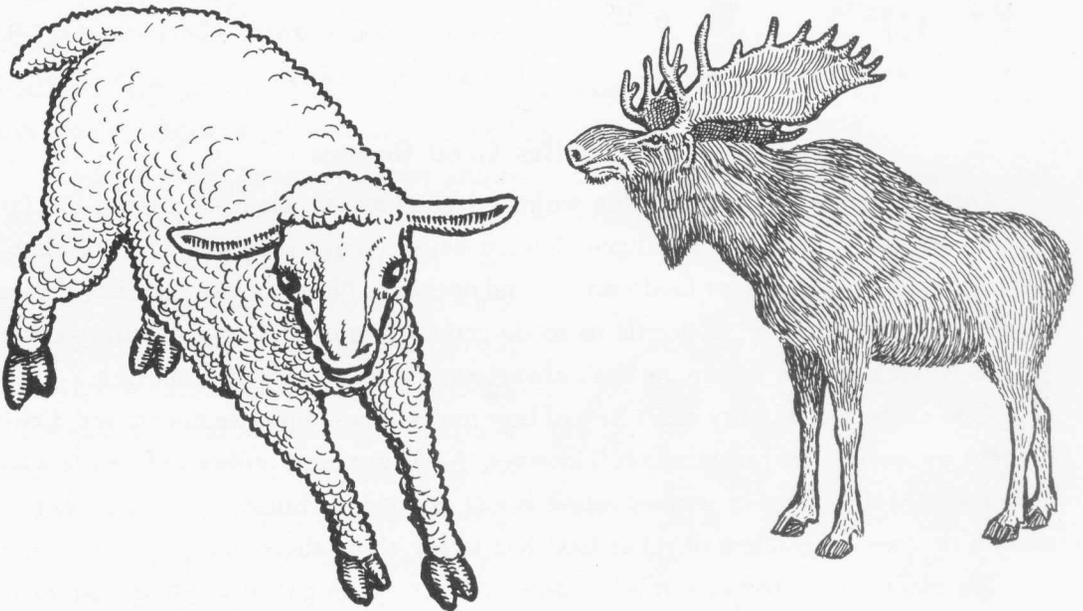
The same thing was true of the Ten Commandments. Adam knew what they were. So did Noah, Abraham and many others. Finally, at Mt. Sinai, they were brought to the Israelites so that they could *again* know what was God's will. To them went the responsibility of preserving the laws and keeping them free and clear of pagan beliefs, rules and traditions that have always been used to distort or replace God's laws. They can be forgotten in men's minds, but they can never actually be done away.

Starting with animals, God gave a simple rule by which the clean could be known from the unclean.

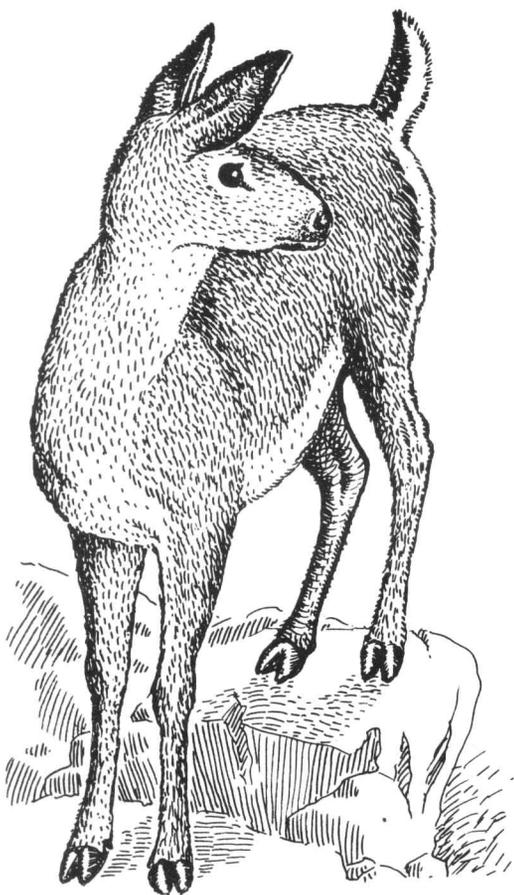
"You may eat any animal," the Creator told Moses and Aaron, "that has a parted hoof and chews a cud." (Leviticus 11:3-4 and Deuteronomy 14:6-8.)

Probably you have often seen cows lying in a pasture and making slow chewing motions with their jaws. You know they're not chewing gum. Yet they keep chewing on and on without taking a bite of anything. Cattle, as well as several other kinds of animals, eat their food without taking time to chew it enough. Later they can bring up bits of this hastily swallowed food back from their stomachs and chew them long after they have eaten. These bits of food brought up for chewing are called cuds.

The Bible also gives examples of unclean animals—animals *not* fit for food. The first mentioned is the camel. It chews the cud, but its hoofs aren't divided. Therefore



Lamb, left, and moose, right, are good for food.



Deer, a clean animal.

God says it is not fit to eat. The hoof of the camel is indented slightly in the front, and has a groove on its top, but it is not divided. Its bottom is entirely covered by a round, soft pad. You see, God created animals fit for human food with characteristics different from those which are unfit for food.

Another example of an unclean animal is the rabbit. It has paws with toes instead of a split hoof. Neither are horses fit to eat—nor are cats and dogs, although some poor savages who don't know any better sometimes eat them. Also raccoons, squirrels and opossums are not fit for food.

Still another example of an animal unfit for food is the swine, which we usually refer to as the hog or pig. A pig has divided hoofs, but doesn't chew a cud.

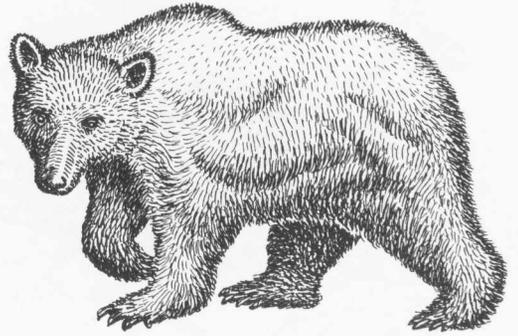
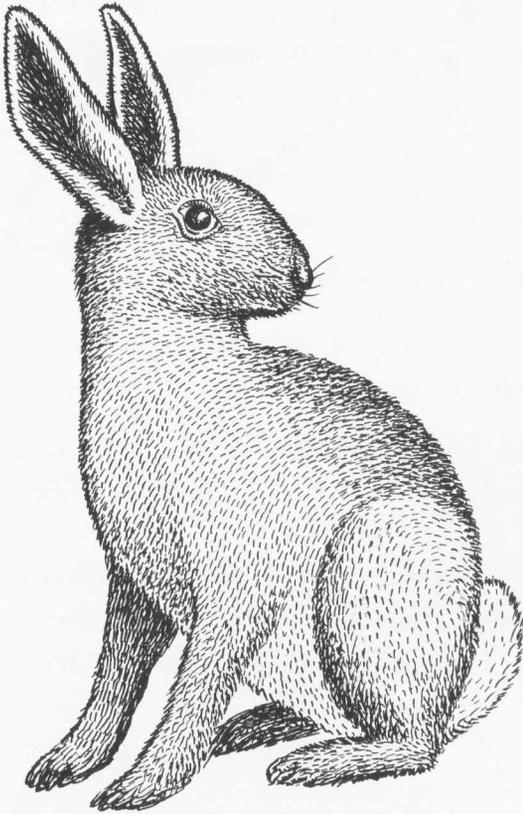
"You shall not eat swine or any other animals that do not part the hoof and chew the cud," God warned. (Leviticus 11:7-8; Deuteronomy 14:8.)

God Always Has Good Reasons

Our Creator never does anything without a good reason. God has a mind far, far superior to that of the most intelligent human being. Man's puny mind is unable to understand all the reasons for God's actions and decisions. Nevertheless, man has always sought to figure out why God tells us to do certain things. Unless man can uncover reasons which seem fair to him, he can't always see too much cause for obeying.

God expects us to obey regardless of how much or how little we understand. Only then do we receive His full blessings. However, there have been millions of people who have reasoned that horse or pork or rabbit is just as good for human food as is beef or mutton or deer—regardless of what God has to say about these things.

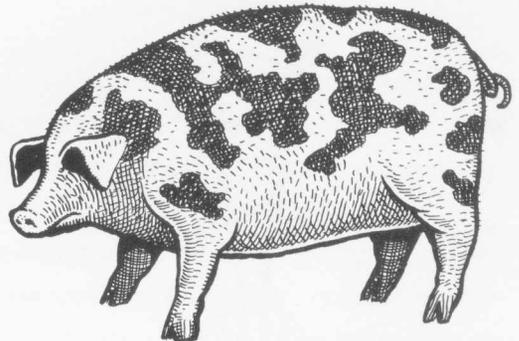
An easily discovered reason why some animals shouldn't be eaten is that their digestive systems don't carry off enough poisons. A hog digests its food in about three and a half hours. It requires twenty-four hours for a cow to do the same thing, during



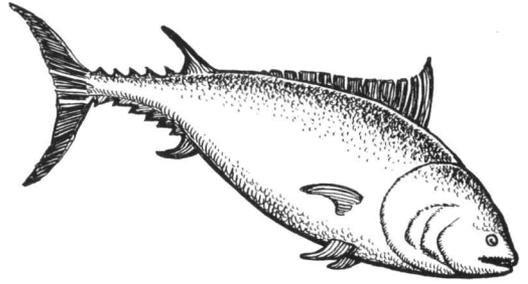
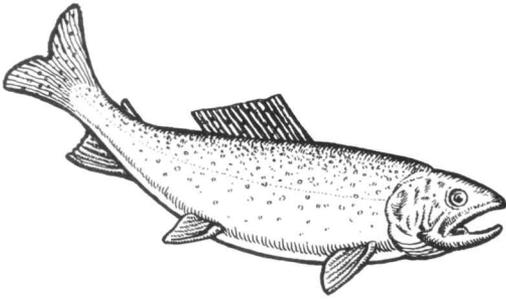
Animals unfit for food: rabbit, left; bear, upper right; squirrel, lower right.

which its food goes through two digestive processes. Thus impurities are screened out that would otherwise go into its flesh and its milk.

But the main reason why any animal is unclean is that it was not made to be eaten in the first place. Its meat was not made in such a way that it is good for human beings. God made some animals for food, some for beauty, some for work, and some for eating up waste products that would otherwise contaminate the earth. One thing to remember is that, if man could naturally prove that these animals were not fit for food, God would not have needed to tell us about them in the Bible. God had to put these laws in the Bible so that we could know certain creatures are harmful.



The hog is also unfit for food.

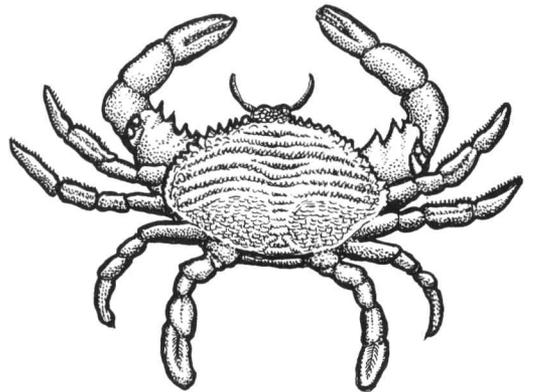
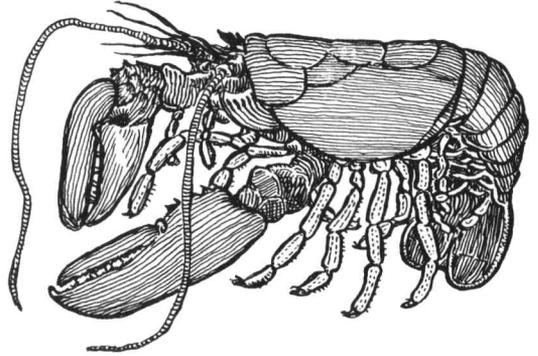
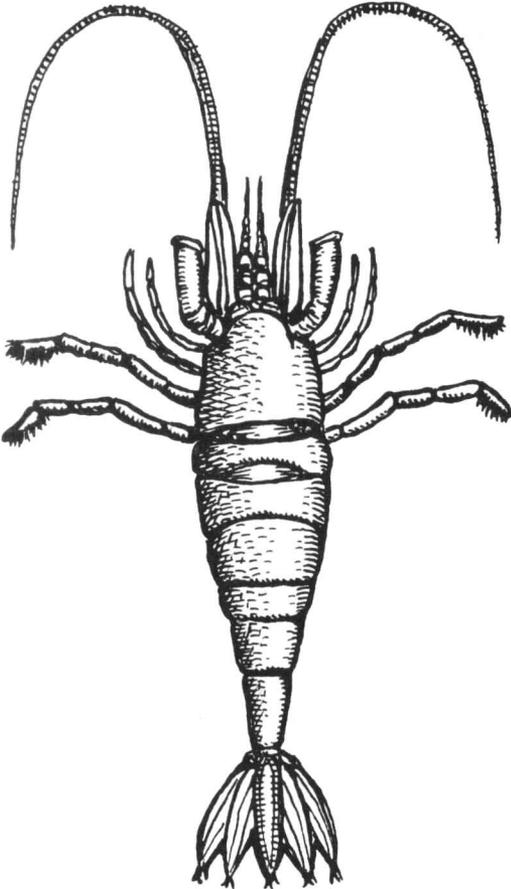


Trout, left, and tuna, right, are good for food.

Water Creatures Fit for Food

God also gave a simple way of knowing what water creatures were to be used as food. To be clean, they must have two features—fins and overlapping scales. (Leviticus 11:9-12; Deuteronomy 14:9-10.)

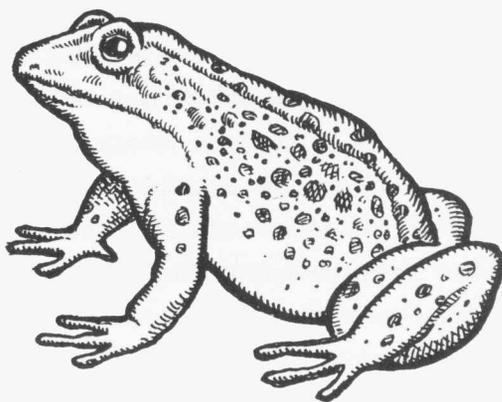
All live things inhabiting the waters are unclean and unfit for human food if they don't have fins and overlapping scales which can easily be scraped off. That includes a wide variety of creatures ordinarily considered as great delicacies. Crab meat,



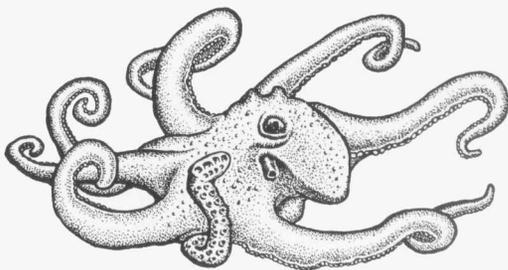
Unclean creatures from the sea: left, shrimp; above top, lobster; below, crab.

for example, is acclaimed around the world as a succulent delight. However, it is nothing more than the unclean flesh of huge sea spiders that feed mainly on decaying carcasses and other sea life.

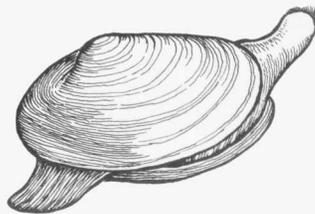
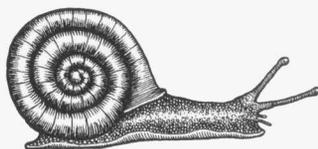
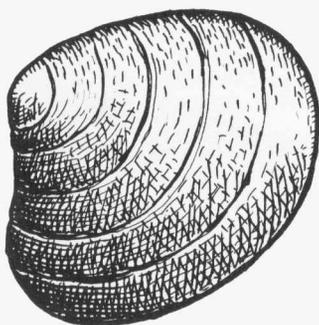
Other unclean denizens of the water include the frog, turtle, abalone, scallop, shrimp, shark, whale, eel, squid, various varieties of catfish, sturgeon, lobster, octopus, clam and oyster. Most of these are thought of as wholesome and nutritious food by millions of people, including most of those of our own Israelite nations. Whale oil is also used in foods by many who do not know it is unfit for food. All other common fish on the market are clean.



Frogs are unclean.



The octopus is unclean.



Other unclean creatures are oysters, snails, worms and clams.

Since Adam, the human body has greatly degenerated—has become weak and sickly. Probably we would be greatly surprised if we could become aware of just how much of that degeneration has been due especially to our eating unclean creatures of the sea.

The Bible doesn't directly give a rule by which clean birds can be recognized. It simply lists all different kinds of those that are unclean. Outside of mentioning the quail, the dove and the pigeon, God doesn't specifically name the clean ones. (Leviticus 11:13-19; Deuteronomy 14:11-18.)

Rules for Identifying Clean Birds

It is easy to learn which fowl are clean simply by noticing the characteristics of birds which are named as clean or unclean.

Studies of fowl have revealed some striking differences between the two kinds. Clean fowl have six unusual characteristics. One or more of these characteristics are lacking in unclean birds. For one thing, a clean bird has a craw or crop *and*, second, a gizzard with a double lining which can easily be separated. Two such digestive organs are doubly helpful in changing its food into meat that is good for humans. They also insure against poisonous waste matter going into its flesh.

Third, a clean bird does not prey upon nor eat other birds. Fourth, it does not devour food while flying. Fifth, its hind toe and middle front toe are both long. Sixth, when it stands on a perch, it spreads its toes so that three front ones are on one side of the perch and the hind toe on the opposite side. All unclean birds lack at least *one* of these characteristics. Clean birds have all these characteristics.

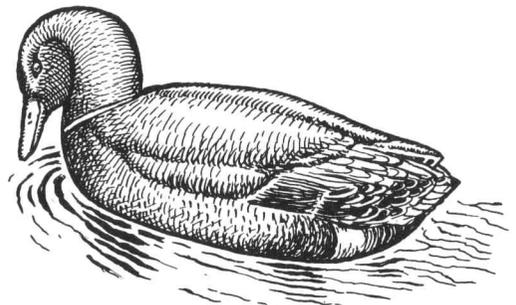
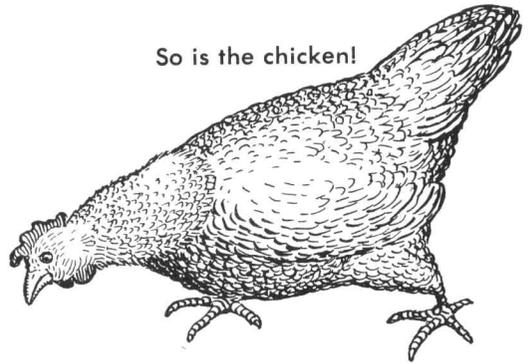
Clean fowl include the chicken, pheasant, peafowl, ptarmigan, guinea fowl, prairie chicken, pigeon, dove, partridge, grouse, quail, turkey, duck, goose, all song birds and the teal and swan. (The swan is named in the King James version as being unclean, but this is a mistranslation. The water hen should be mentioned instead.)

Unclean birds include the eagle, vulture, kite, buzzard, osprey, raven, crow, magpie, ostrich, owl, hawk, cormorant, sea gull, water hen, sandpiper, plover, pelican,

The pheasant is good for food.

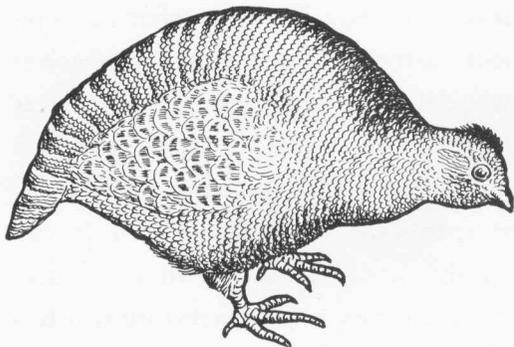
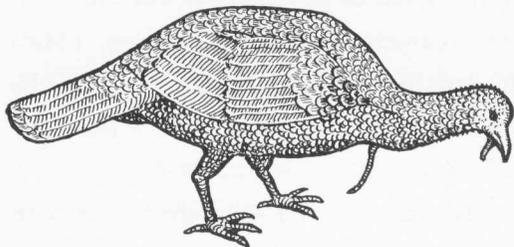


So is the chicken!



And the duck is good for food, too.

stork, coot, heron, bittern, crane, grebe, rail, roadrunner, woodpecker, penguin, parrot, albatross and bat.



Above, the turkey and the grouse are good to eat.

good to eat and a boon to their health. They often argue that the laws of clean and unclean creatures, which were definitely made for all time and all people, were merely “old Jewish laws” that were “nailed to the cross” by Christ at His death. These people want to live like the heathen used to live even though the Bible condemns such practices.

Some People Lust for Forbidden Food

To justify their eating unclean foods, many of these people turn to the fourth chapter of I Timothy, and point with triumph to the fourth and fifth verses, wherein Paul said:

“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”

This statement, taken out of its context, would ordinarily lead to one of two startling conclusions: Either Paul didn’t know what he was talking about, or God has changed His laws and is pleased to allow us, after all, to eat anything we please. If this second conclusion is true, then one should never hesitate to devour a meal of the filthiest creatures one can imagine—just so one asks God’s blessing on it!

God also named other creatures that are to be regarded as unclean and detestable. (Leviticus 11:20-23.) They are the weasel, mouse, lizard, snail, mole, snake and worm. Such were to be considered so detestable that anything their dead bodies touched, such as food or dishes, was to be regarded as unfit for use until thoroughly washed. (Leviticus 11:24-43.)

“Do not defile yourself with these unclean creatures,” God warned. “Keep yourselves clean and sacred, so that you will be more acceptable to your holy God.” (Leviticus 11:44-47.)

Regardless of what God said, millions of people, who claim to be faithful, obedient Christians, feel that if the vitamin content is high in anything, then it must be



The crow was not created to be eaten.

Of course this is absurd. Paul did know what he was talking about, and God is still displeased any time we consume unclean creatures. God never changes. (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8.) Neither do His laws that are for our own good. (Matthew 5:17-18.)

To understand I Timothy 4:4-5, one must read from the beginning of chapter four of I Timothy. Paul was referring to religious extremists—including vegetarians—who fall away from the truth (or never quite get to it) and foster wrong ideas such as not marrying and not eating certain foods God specifically created for them to eat. Thus the word *everything* in the fourth verse is referring to every creature which is “consecrated by the word of God”—and only the *clean creatures* were ever consecrated or approved as fit for human food!

One of the oldest tricks used to deceive people is that of picking certain words, phrases and sentences out of the Bible and adding them together to “prove” something that isn’t true, just as some read the two verses above that seemed by themselves to say that anything is good for human food. The truth can most always be readily found, however, by comparing scripture with scripture and carefully reading whole chapters to find the exact meanings of those certain words, phrases and sentences.

God Did Not Cleanse the Unclean Creatures

Another example of misunderstanding is in the tenth chapter of Acts, verses 9 through 16. If one will read that part of the chapter, and nothing else, one might receive the impression that Peter was told that unclean creatures had been cleansed by God, and that he, Peter, should eat them. These verses, plucked out of context, are constantly used by church leaders who refuse to give up lusting after unclean foods. Yet verse 17 shows that Peter knew God did not mean for him to eat unclean meat. Peter noticed that no animal’s nature had been changed, they were still unclean! So he began to wonder what the vision did mean! He did not jump to a hasty conclusion.

If you read all of the tenth chapter of Acts to get the whole story, you will discover

the true meaning of the verses mentioned above. Verses 28 and 29 get to the heart of the matter, and you will find that Peter's vision was simply to show him how he should regard no *man* as common or unclean who seeks to live rightly—regardless of nationality.

No matter what man thinks, says or does about clean and unclean creatures, the fact still remains that the difference is still there. The nature of unclean animals has not changed. They are the same today as they were before the flood, in Moses' day and in Peter's time. Those who obey the Creator in these things receive very definite blessings.



I shouldn't bite you and you shouldn't eat me.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

LIKE most people today, Moses wanted to know the PLAN of Salvation. But before the Eternal explained it to Moses, he first had to listen to special instructions that would make it clear *why* we need salvation.

Why We Need Salvation

Did you know that you would not need to be saved *from* sin, if there *were* no sin? People who say they don't need salvation don't know what sin is, or what life eternal really means. Christ will not forgive us until we repent—quit sinning.

We also need to know that we are mortal, subject to death, and that we need the Spirit of God as a gift to make it possible to live forever. So you see, we need to know what sin is and what man is. That is why God had to explain it to Moses before explaining all about salvation.

This new instruction was given by God to Israel, through Moses, about the time the tabernacle was erected. Almost all of Leviticus, the third book of the Old Testament written by Moses, has to do with rules and laws that were meant to keep Israel the most outstanding, the wisest, the cleanest nation on Earth. In this, as in other books of the Old Testament, God also made known certain temporary rituals which were required until the first coming of Christ. These were to teach the children of Israel the need of a Saviour and the habit of obedience. These temporary ceremonies are called the "works of the law" in the New Testament. They ceased when Jesus died.

But God also revealed part of His PLAN of Salvation in the book of Leviticus.

A reading of the book of Leviticus should make it obvious to anyone that the laws

of God, *which explain what sin is*, are wise, good, helpful rules that would be profitable for happy living for all people of all nations anywhere on this planet.

But many different religions, supposedly based on the Bible, have sprung up down through the centuries. Most of them have little or no place for what are wrongly termed "Jewish laws." Their followers are encouraged to ignore God's rules in the Old Testament, and to regard Leviticus, for example, as only an account of the ancient "Laws of Moses."

Today, more than ever, people regard the words *law, Jew, Moses* and *Israelite* with a certain indifference and often with contempt. Their religious leaders have either failed miserably in teaching them the truth or have deliberately withheld the truth from them. Those who have come with the truth—including Jesus Christ, the Creator of all men and all things—have been slain because that truth conflicted with the beliefs proclaimed by many religious sects. Human nature does not change. Men have always hated those who brought God's truth. (Matthew 23:29-35.)

Whenever you hear anyone speaking lightly of the Commandments given to Israel at Mt. Sinai, remind yourself that those were neither "Jewish laws" nor "laws of Moses." They were *God's* living laws, still alive and in full, powerful effect. Those who turn their backs on them or who sneer at them are inviting upon themselves the terrible results of sin and the wrath of God.

What's Wrong with God's Laws?

Many laws were given to the Israelites, through Moses, in the days following the dedication of the tabernacle. There is nothing wrong with them. *Because men have broken these laws Jesus had to die.* Here are some of them:

Everyone is forbidden to have anything to do with idols and foreign gods. (Leviticus 19:4.)

Making marks on the body, such as tattooing, is forbidden. (Leviticus 19:27-28.)

There are to be no evil sexual practices. (Verse 29.)

No one is to marry anyone with whom he or she is closely related. (Leviticus 18.)

Pagan holidays are not to be observed. (Leviticus 20:1-5.)

In giving financial help to a fellow Israelite or anyone journeying with the Israelites, no interest is to be charged. (Leviticus 25:35-38.)

No one is to go to a fortune-teller or medium to ask advice or to look into the future. No one is to have anything to do with a person discovered to be a wizard, fortune-teller or medium—those in contact with demons. (Leviticus 20:6-7.)

God again spoke to Moses, telling him to give more instructions to the people. For one thing, there were some who were still so influenced by the religious ways of



When Moses told the people the civil laws which God gave him, the Israelites recalled with shame the way so many of them had pranced before the golden calf.

the Egyptians that they secretly sought to consume blood when they ate their meat. (Leviticus 17:12-13.) He made it very plain that the life of all flesh is in the blood. "Anyone who kills or catches any beast or fowl that may be eaten must thoroughly bleed the creatures and cover up the blood. After the blood has drained out of a clean animal or fowl, its meat may be eaten. Furthermore, no one must eat any creature that dies of itself or is killed by other beasts." (Verse 15, first part.)

The only use of blood was as an atonement, by sacrifice, to remind Israel of their human sins and of the death of Jesus Christ as Saviour.

The PLAN of Salvation Revealed

To Moses alone God now gave special instructions about the Plan of Salvation. "Moses," God said, "I want you to pass on to Aaron and the other priests the knowledge of my PLAN of Salvation for all mankind. To keep you always in mind of this plan, I am going to require you and all My people to keep holy certain days each year."

Moses knew what God had in mind, because He had already commanded the children of Israel to keep the Passover each year.

“Moses,” God continued, “I want to explain to you about my yearly holy day called the Day of Atonement.”

The word “atonement” means to make “at one”—to bring about agreement and harmony.

The Day of Atonement, Moses was told, was ordained by the Creator to fall on the tenth day of the seventh month, Tishri. Tishri ordinarily covers the last part of September and the first part of October on the man-devised Roman calendar the world is using. When Christ comes again He will restore the use of God’s sacred calendar.

Inasmuch as any day in God’s reckoning starts at sundown, the Day of Atonement began at the sunset which ended the ninth day of Tishri and ended at sunset on the tenth day. It still does. During that period of twenty-four hours the people were not to work and were not to consume food in solid or liquid form. Very young children were the exceptions to this last rule. (Leviticus 23:26-32.)

It was the one day of the year on which the high priest was to enter the inner room of the tabernacle, or Holy of Holies, on ceremonial business. The Day of Atonement was the only time he was to enter on priestly business having to do with sacrifices. God warned Moses to warn Aaron that if Aaron came into the holy inner room without God’s permission, he would lose his life in the manner in which his sons had been struck dead.

Ordinarily, in performing his duties as high priest, Aaron dressed in the elegant garments designed by the Creator. But for the special ceremonies on the Day of Atonement he was told to bathe and dress in spotless linen clothes that designated simplicity and humility rather than high office. Only then could he approach God in the inner room where the ark and mercy seat were placed. (Leviticus 16.)

The special ceremonies held that day each year were planned by God to make clear to the people that they must, as sinners, come to Him, through His high priest, who represented the coming Saviour, to have their sins forgiven and to be reconciled to God. Otherwise, they wouldn’t be considered worthy to continue living. Today Christ is our High Priest and Saviour.

The first thing Aaron was to do was to sacrifice a bullock, or young ox, on the altar for himself and his family as a sin offering. He was to take some of the burning coals from the altar, sprinkle them with incense and bring them into the Holy of Holies so that the sweetened smoke would waft over the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. God told Moses that if the high priest failed to carry out this ceremony just as he was expected to, he would be subject to death. (Leviticus 16:12-13.)

Aaron was also to take some of the blood of the bullock into the inner room and sprinkle it before and upon the mercy seat. This was an act of atonement for

himself, his family and the other priests. Thus, first having his sins forgiven, he would be qualified to ask God to forgive the sins of all Israel.

The high priest was then to be presented with two goats. One of the goats was to be put on his left side and the other on his right side. A bowl containing two coin-like emblems, called lots, exactly alike in size and color, was to be brought to him. On one of the emblems was to be inscribed FOR GOD. On the other was to be inscribed FOR AZAZEL. You may not know that Azazel was one of the names of Satan, the devil. In many Bibles the original inspired Hebrew word "Azazel" is mistranslated as "scapegoat." Satan is no scapegoat. He is actually guilty of his sins.

The bowl was to be vigorously shaken, so that the positions of the lots inside it wouldn't be known to anyone. Aaron then was to reach into the bowl with both hands and take a lot in each hand. The one in his left hand was to be placed on the goat at his left. The lot in his right hand was to be placed on the goat at his right.

Thus God, who controlled the manner in which the lots would be picked up, was the One who decided which goat would represent the Lord and be sacrificed. That goat on which the FOR GOD lot was placed was to be killed and presented as a sin offering for all the people. This represented Christ's sacrifice to reconcile the world to God.

Again Aaron was to enter the Holy of Holies, this time to sprinkle the goat's blood before and upon the mercy seat. Thus he was to make atonement for all the sins Israel had committed. (Leviticus 16:14-19.)

After coming out of the inner room and back into the court, Aaron was to place his hands on the head of the goat that had been marked FOR AZAZEL and confess over it before God all the sins of the Israelites. Thus all the wrongdoings of the people were to be heaped upon the head of the goat that represented Satan, since it is Satan who is the author of sin and who deceives the people. The goat was then to be given to one who would lead it far out into the desert and set it loose away from the people. This was to represent the banishment of Satan who will be taken by force from the presence of all the people when Christ returns to make atonement or make all the world at one with God. (Revelation 20:1-3.)

The person who took the goat was to wash his clothes and bathe before he returned to camp. (Leviticus 16:20-22.)

Aaron was then to take off his special linen clothes, bathe and dress in his ornate priestly garments. Thus attired, he was to give his personal burnt offering of a ram. Next he was to give a ram as a burnt offering for the people. (Leviticus 16:23-24.)

All this was carried out for the first time just as God had said it should be done. Thus the Israelites, in spite of their weaknesses and sins, became aware that they

were the only people to whom God was revealing His Plan of Salvation as pictured by these special holy days. God had chosen them for the special task of preserving His truth, and was mercifully willing to forgive them their sins.

The Day of Atonement was then and there started as an annual Sabbath of rest, with fasting to be observed by all the people on and on, forever, into the future. (Leviticus 23:31.) This is what *all* the *people* were to do on this special holy day.

The *priests* alone were to perform the temporary physical act of sacrificing an animal. *Their duties were only to last until Christ came.*

No More Need of Sacrifices

The sacrificing of animals on that day was no longer necessary after Jesus Christ was sacrificed, many centuries later, as the Lamb of God who died because of the sins of all the people of this world. (Hebrews 10:4, 10-12 and 18.) When Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself there ceased to be any need to sacrifice animals as a reminder of sin. (Hebrews 10:3.)

Nevertheless, the Day of Atonement still remains a holy period of twenty-four hours during which God told His people to rest and fast. Why isn't it observed today in the churches of this world? If you were to ask any number of those in authority in the churches, you would receive just about the same answer:

"That is one of those ancient Jewish days. It was only for the Jews. We aren't to observe it because we are not Jews."

If you were to ask who the Jews are, you would probably be told that they were



The goat was led to the wilderness to picture the putting away of Satan for 1000 years.

the people known as the Israelites who came out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses. Then, if you were to remark that Jews are only of the tribe of Judah—one very small part of the twelve tribes of Israel—and that most Israelites are not Jews, either the conversation would end right there or you would receive any one of a number of stock answers, most of them rather evasive.

You see, most people have never really thought who the “lost” ten tribes of Israel might be or where they are. God purposely had their identity hidden until these latter days. The Bible tells us that we would learn, in the latter days, just which nations have descended from those ten tribes. Today, the “lost” ten tribes of Israel can be identified! Now this matter is crystal-clear to several millions of people who have found in their Bibles this truth. But religious groups in general refuse to recognize this discovery because it doesn’t fit in with what they have taught for so long.

It is time that our people be told who we are, though it could be startling to a Frenchman, a Swede, an American or an Englishman to be suddenly accosted with the words: “You are an Israelite!” The immediate reply would ordinarily be: “You are mistaken! I am not Jewish!”

The erroneous popular opinion now, as it has been for centuries, is that the two main kinds of people on the Earth are Gentiles and Jews, and that anyone who is not a Jew must be a Gentile. But this is not true. Sooner or later all the world must learn that the nations are made up of two general groups of people—*Israelites* and Gentiles. The Jews are of Judah—only one tribe of Israel. Being Israelites *we* are to do the things God commanded Israel to do forever. And any Gentiles who become converted are also to do what God commands. That is why you read of “the fast”—the Day of Atonement—being commemorated by the true Christians in Acts 27:9.

For the genuine Christian, the Day of Atonement pictures the very near future when sin will be placed on the one who originated it. That is Satan. Not until then will man come into true accord with his Creator. That time is only a few years away.

But in the meantime many things must occur before Christ comes to rule on Earth. Today, there are hundreds of false prophets who are crying out that Christ has already arrived or that He is about to arrive at any moment. They don’t know God’s true timetable and His Plan of Salvation because they have forgotten to keep holy the days He made holy.

Seven Steps to Plan of Salvation

The seven steps in God’s Plan are pictured by seven special holy periods of time. These special days are Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Festival of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Festival of Tabernacles, and the Last Great

Day. People who have forgotten these days have forgotten the *true* PLAN of Salvation which these days picture. They have come to believe in a *counterfeit* plan!

We have already learned the meaning of Passover when we read about the Exodus.

The Days of Unleavened Bread picture putting sin out of our lives. (I Cor. 5:7-8.) Leaven is a type of sin. A wave sheaf offering was made during the Days of Unleavened Bread after the Israelites reached the land God had promised them. (Leviticus 23:10-11.) This sheaf of grain pictured the ascended Christ when He was accepted by God the Father as the perfect sacrifice and as the very first of the first-fruits from the dead. (Compare John 20:17 with Matthew 28:9.) Very few people know that Christ ascended to Heaven and returned on the day after His resurrection.

Fifty days later, always on a Monday in May or June on the calendar we use, Pentecost was to be observed. Even the Apostles were keeping it after the Law of Moses ceased. (Acts 2:1.) This day points to the time when the Holy Spirit first came, after Christ's death, and to the time of the *first harvest* of souls—to be reaped at the return of Christ. Those who have forgotten this day have forgotten that this is only the time of the first harvest.

The Festival of Trumpets, another day of rest, was to be observed on the first day of the seventh month, Tishri, in the fall. (Leviticus 23:23-25.) It pictures the time mentioned in the book of Revelation when the last of seven trumpets will sound, and when Christ will come to meet those who will be resurrected to rule with Him on Earth. (Revelation 11:15-17; I Corinthians 15:52.) Not every nation will give in at the very hour Christ arrives, but every nation and government will soon be made aware that there is no choice but to accept Christ's perfect, loving rule. (Zechariah 14:16-19.)

Next is the Day of Atonement. It pictures Satan imprisoned 1000 years. Then comes the final time of harvest of souls pictured by the Festival of Tabernacles.

The Festival of Tabernacles, beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (sometime in September or October), was ordained to last for seven days. It is a time when God told His people to get together to worship Him after the last crops were harvested. The first day was (and still is) a holy day of rest. This festival foreshadows the thousand-year period when Christ and the resurrected Christians will rule the Earth. (Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6.) People such as Noah, Abraham, Moses and David—dead and with no knowledge of anything over many centuries—will be among those resurrected to eternal life. (Acts 2:34-35; Hebrews 11.) Millions not yet born will be saved during the millennium when Satan isn't around to deceive them.

After the seven days, there followed another special holy day of rest.

Today most people never think of observing the eighth, or Last Great Day, as a

time of rest, realizing that it is to commemorate the period after the millennium when millions who have died in the past, who have not had any opportunity to understand the truth, will be brought to life and be given their first opportunity to come to the knowledge of salvation. Just think of the joy to be experienced by those who never before heard or knew the truth. Those who do overcome will eventually join the joyous ranks of the immortal saints who will have met Christ at His second coming more than a thousand years before! (Revelation 20: 11-15; Matthew 12:42; Isaiah 65:19-25.)

Every human being who has ever lived or ever will live must have the opportunity of learning the truth of God's great Plan. (II Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:4.) Everyone will be dealt with in absolute justice by God. (Romans 2:11.) Everyone will have a full understanding of the right way and must make his own decision as to whether he will obey God. (Hebrews 8:11.) Many have already had their one and only opportunity today. There is no second chance.

Finally, the Earth will be enveloped in such a consuming fire that everything on its surface will be burned up. Even the seas will be completely evaporated by the intense heat. (II Peter 3:10-12; Revelation 21:1.)



The wicked will be consumed by fire.

Then God will come down from heaven in His gigantic holy city, which will descend to Earth. Many people refuse to believe what the Bible says about this shining city, whose dimensions will be 1,500 miles. Nevertheless, all things are possible with God, and from then on that mammoth, jewel-like city will be the headquarters and dwelling place of God and His children—now spirit beings—who will help Him rule the Universe forever. (Revelation 21:2-8.)

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

“CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY . . . ”

MAN was put on earth with the power to choose between good and evil. No mere animal has such power—or such a great responsibility to make the right choice.

But Man has to be told what is good and what is evil. God has to reveal it, that is why, again and again, God told Israel, generally through Moses, that the people must observe all the laws He had given them for their good. He promised them many wonderful things if they would faithfully keep the rules given to them for their own happiness and security.

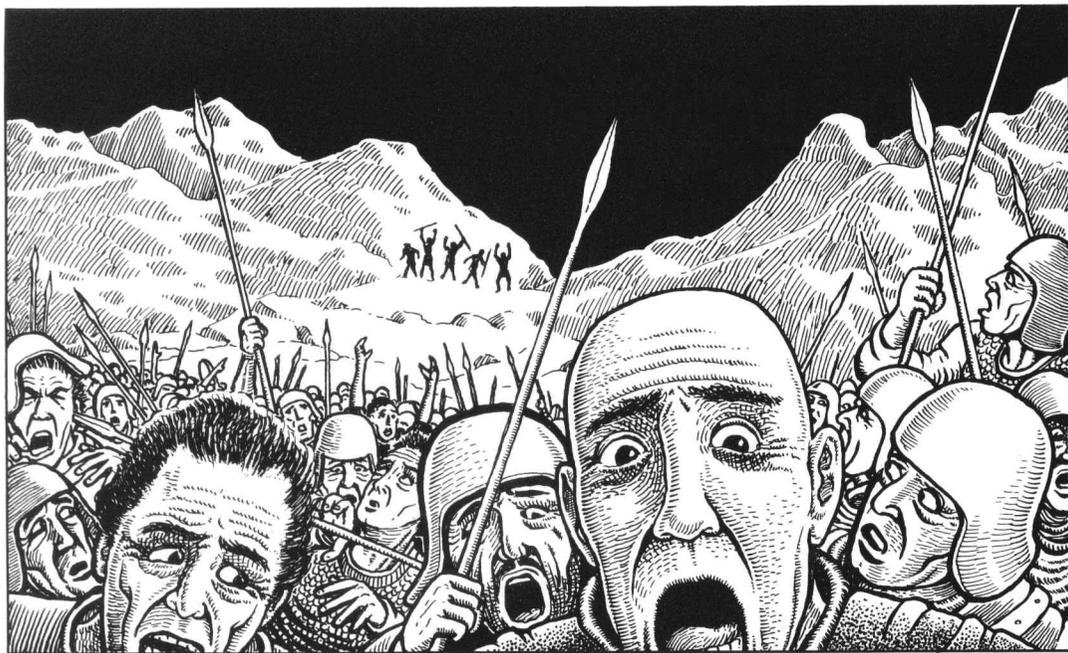
What God Has Promised

“If you will do as I have directed,” God said, “many worthwhile rewards shall come to you. You shall receive plenty of rain. The land you are coming to shall yield such large crops that your grain harvest shall last till the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last till it’s time again to plant grain. (Leviticus 26:3-5.)

“You shall have plenty to eat. I will drive all evil beasts out of your land. You shall be safe from your enemies. If a hundred of them try to attack you, it will require only five of you to chase them away. If ten thousand soldiers come at you, it will take only a hundred of you to cause them to turn and flee for their lives!

“I will respect you. I will cause you to have many healthy children and grow into a great nation. I will be pleased to continue dwelling among you.” (Verses 6-9.)

What else could any people ask for? Good health, plenty of good food, safety from enemies, safety from any evil creatures, good weather and peace of mind for obeying God—all these could be theirs on and on into the future. What would any nation give



God promised Israel that if the people obeyed, any five of them would be able to chase a hundred enemies.

right now in these troubled times to have all these good things?

One might name a list of things a mile long that any nation, including ours, would give. However, there is one thing that no nation is willing to give. Our nation could claim all those promises from God even yet if our people were willing to give that one thing. Unfortunately, as a nation, either we aren't willing to give it or we haven't been told enough about it. What is it?

It is *obedience* to the laws given to the Israelites at Sinai.

Getting back to Mt. Sinai and what happened there about four thousand years before our time, God went on to relate the terrible things that would come on the Israelites if they disobeyed.

Why Wrong Living Brings Hardship

"If you ignore my rules," God told them, "and if you refuse to live by them and break the agreement we have made, then your future shall be one of misery, hardship and despair.

"You shall become full of fears and constant worries. Your enemies shall kill you in great numbers. They shall win many battles and take over your homes and the crops you have sown. Your feeling of dread and danger shall be so great that you shall flee in fright even when no one is after you. (Leviticus 26:14-17.)

"If you still refuse to listen to me after all this punishment, then I will bring many other awful things upon you. I will send severe famines and horrible plagues. At the same time, your enemies will trouble you more and more.

"I will send ferocious wild beasts to destroy your livestock and eat up your children. So great shall be your fear of evil things to come on you that you shall even be afraid to venture out on the nearest roads or trails. (Verses 18-22.)

"If these things fail to convince you that I mean what I say, and if you continue to refuse to live by the laws that are best for you, then I will punish you even more severely!

"Your enemies shall completely conquer you. I will send terrible diseases on you. They shall spread among you when you gather together in your cities. Your supply of food shall dwindle down and down until you become aware that you are facing starvation!

"If you still feel that your ways are better than mine, your food shall become so scarce that many of you shall roast and eat your own children!" (Verses 23-29.)

It hardly seems possible that any of the Israelites would become cannibals. But just as God warned, it turned out that way in Jerusalem many years later when their enemies cut them off from their food supplies in the year A.D. 70.



God warned the Israelites that if they kept on disobeying Him, they would come into such terrible poverty that they would some day eat their own children!

One of the sins of some of the Israelites was the secret worship of idols—a habit many of them had fallen into while living with the idol-worshipping Egyptians. God made some terrible threats against any who would indulge in the worship of various objects, which included little images of most anything one could imagine.

What Idolatry Is

We might consider this adoration of objects as something done only by unlearned and primitive people. But in our Israelite nations today—as well as in other nations—there are millions of supposedly intelligent people who own or carry various articles such as coins, horseshoes, rabbits' feet, crosses, insignia, etc. They actually believe that these “lucky pieces,” as they call them, somehow have mysterious power to bring them good fortune. This is nothing less than a form of foolish idolatry. Any one persisting in it is breaking the first two Commandments.

It's also possible to have such high regard, desire and respect for some people, fine homes, money, cars, certain forms of pleasure and such things that they mean more to us than the One who caused them to be created. This, too, if carried to extremes, is idolatry in God's sight.

Concerning idols, God had this to say to the Israelites:

“I will destroy your idols and images and the places in which you worship them. I will wipe out your cities and make your fields into a barren wasteland. Your families, tribes and nations shall be broken up and scattered as slaves to the heathen nations. (Leviticus 26:30-33.)

“But if there are any who will realize that they have sinned and that those who have gone before them have sinned, and will become humble enough to admit that they have lived unwisely by doing that which is not good for them, then I will remember the covenant made with their ancestors and will be merciful to them.”

These wonderful promises and stern warnings surely should have been enough to help the Israelites make the right decisions for their future. For many of them it was a great inspiration for better living. But what most of them did many years later is an unhappy story. That story will come later, and will prove that God means what He says when He makes a promise or when He makes a threat.

Resentment Leads to Anger

Even while the civil laws were being given to Israel through Moses, an incident took place that brought still another new law from God—one which had to do with speaking evil of the Creator.

There was a man living among the Israelites whose father was an Egyptian,

and whose mother was an Israelite of the tribe of Dan. Because he was half Egyptian, he was regarded as an unwelcome outsider by some of the Israelites in that camp.

One day this man started to pitch his tent in a desirable spot amid the tents of the tribe of Dan. An Israelite saw what he was doing, and angrily strode up to him.

"Who told you to take the best tent site?" the Israelite indignantly asked.

The Egyptian-Israelite was greatly upset by these remarks. He stopped what he was doing and in loud and furious tones told the critical Israelite what he thought of him. People in tents close to that area, aroused by the shouting, came out to see what was going on.

The Israelite who had been so indignant began to wish that he had said nothing to rouse the anger of the man to such a high pitch.

"You hate me because my father was an Egyptian!" the angered man shouted. "Well, I hate all you because you're Israelites! And I hate the God of the Israelites!"

In his mounting rage he went on to yell out some terrible things about God. He cursed his Creator and called Him vile and awful names. Some of the Israelites who witnessed the scene were hardened men to whom profane language was commonplace. But such foul profanity applied to God was shocking to them.

"Seize him!" someone shouted. "Stop his mouth!"

Men rushed in from all directions, grabbed the cursing man and quickly cut off his words by a scarf tightly bound over his lips. He was held till Israelite officers could arrive to take him before Moses.

Witnesses went with the officers to tell what had happened, and to ask what punishment should be given to one who had so loudly mocked and reviled the Creator.

"Hold the man for now," Moses instructed them. "I must find out from God what should be done with him." (Leviticus 24:10-12.)

Why God Required Capital Punishment

Later, God told Moses exactly what should be done.

"The man who cursed is so evil he is unfit to live," God said. "If he is allowed to live he will cause others to sin and make themselves and their neighbors very miserable. Take him to a place far outside the camps. Let those who heard him gather there to place their hands on his head as witnesses to what he has done and to show that his blood should be on his own head. Then those witnesses must cast heavy stones on the curser until he is dead!"

Moses passed on these instructions to the people, who did as God commanded. The Egyptian-Israelite died soon afterward under the weighty blows of the stones. (Verses 13-23.)



The Egyptian-Israelite broke into a rage and began to curse the Creator.

6:6-7; 11:18-21.) Many parents back then probably failed to teach their children properly, just as other parents fail to do so now.

Thus a new rule came from the Eternal to force obedience to the Third Commandment. The penalty of death by stoning—a form of capital punishment—was to apply to any person who spitefully and hatefully pronounced vile and profane words against the One who had created him.

To punish by death for cursing God probably seems to be harsh and unjust treatment in the opinions of some readers. Some, after reading these accounts of what happened to the Israelites, might even think of God as a stern, sadistic monster, eager to see people suffer for even the slightest reason. It is a grave mistake, however, to doubt God's wisdom or His mercy. If God had not caused some laws to be enforced, evil people would have felt free to do any cruel thing they desired. The world would have become so evil that no one would be safe.

A careful reading of the whole Bible will bring out the fact that, rather than being cruel, God is far more merciful, just, patient and forgiving than any human being. If He were like you or me, He would have become so disgusted with mankind that He would have blasted every one out of existence many centuries ago.

One of the laws given to Israel was that no one should curse his parents. Those who spitefully and hatefully broke this law were subject to death. (Leviticus 20:9.) It was the responsibility of the Israelites to teach their children God's laws, just as it now is in God's church. (Deuteronomy

If one were subject to death for cursing his parents—which is breaking the Fifth Commandment—surely it wasn't less sinful to curse God, the Creator of *all* parents and the Creator Father of us all.

"If those laws are still in effect," many are certain to wonder, "then why do so many of today's law-breakers—murderers for example—often go free?"

The laws are still in effect. Back in the time of the ancient Israelites, God set up a system of quick and sure punishment to law-breakers, so that others would think twice before breaking the law.

Now, even in Israelite nations, we have all kinds of laws and court systems. Often it requires months or even years to finally decide if a person is innocent or guilty.

But God's laws never change. If a person is actually guilty of murdering another, and is set free because of false testimony or of dishonest public officials, that person is still guilty in God's sight. Sooner or later, by God's hand (because human agencies have failed to give an honest sentence) that person, if still unrepentant, will surely die. So will any unrepentant person who breaks any one of God's laws. (James 2:10.)

Our only hope to be saved is through Jesus Christ, who came to Earth for several reasons, including dying for our sins. If a murderer, therefore, or any sinner, would feel very sorry for his evil deed, tearfully call on God to forgive him and earnestly desire to live rightly from that time on, according to God's living laws, he would receive the wonderful gift of forgiveness. He could have a new start in life—all because of God's great mercy. He could then live a happy, useful life as a good citizen and a good neighbor, without committing the evils he used to do.

Whenever we see people about us doing wrong things and seemingly getting away without punishment, we shouldn't be discouraged. And we should never feel envious that others seem to be getting by with doing wrong. Why envy anyone who is asking for trouble and who is sure to get into a lot more of it than he ever expected?

The best thing to do is to read the 37th Psalm.

Moses Has Visitors

Perhaps you will recall that Moses was raised and educated in the palaces of Egypt, but that he later fled from there and went eastward to the land of Midian, where he became a herder of sheep. While he lived there he started writing the first books of the Bible. There, too, he was married to Zipporah, daughter of a priest named Jethro, the man for whom he worked. Two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, were born to Moses and Zipporah. (Exodus 2:21-22; 3:1; 18:1-4.) When Moses, at God's command, set out to return to Egypt, he took his family with him. (Exodus 4:20.) However, Moses later decided there were good reasons not to take his family, and he sent the three back to stay with Jethro.

More than a year had passed since Moses had seen his family. Although his wife and sons were living not far from Mt. Sinai, Moses was so busy with leadership of the Israelites that he didn't feel that he should use precious time to go after them. He had returned to plenty of grief after his stays on Mt. Sinai, and he wasn't inclined to leave the Israelites again unless God commanded him to do so.

One day a stranger rode into camp. He told alert guards who quickly surrounded him that he had a message for Moses. He was escorted to Moses' tent after the guards made certain he wasn't armed.

"I come in advance of the approaching caravan of your father-in-law, Jethro," the stranger told Moses. "He is camped not far from here with your family, and hopes to be here inside of another day."

Moses was so pleased to hear this that he decided to go back with the messenger to meet Jethro's caravan. Some of his officers went along. They found Jethro's tents pitched only a few miles from the camps of the Israelites.

Moses was happy to again be with his wife and two young sons. He greatly enjoyed a visit with them inside Jethro's cool tents. (Exodus 18:1-7.) Afterward, he had a long talk with Jethro, who was aware of the flight of the Israelites from Egypt, but who probably never would have believed that his son-in-law could have led that flight. But as one who obeyed God, Jethro had looked with great satisfaction on this historic event. He was pleased and highly interested to hear from Moses all about the plagues, the miracles, the parting of the Red Sea, God's dealings with the troublemakers and complainers among the Israelites, the manner in which God had provided for the people, the giving of the laws, the building of the tabernacle and other exciting highlights of recent months. (Verses 8-11.)

Jethro, who was of a priesthood family that served God, was especially interested in the tabernacle, and told Moses that it was his hope to personally make sacrifices and offerings on the great altar. Assured by Moses that he would be welcome, Jethro gave orders for the tents to be taken down. Accompanied by Moses and the Israelite aides, the caravan moved on and into the camps below Mt. Sinai.

Later, Jethro made a burnt offering and sacrifices to God. As a priest, he had an important part in the ceremonies. Afterward, Aaron and Moses and the elders joined him in a feast. (Verse 12.)

Jethro Sees Moses In Trouble

Early next morning, when Jethro came out of his tent, he was puzzled to see a crowd close to the tabernacle. In the middle of the crowd Moses sat listening to some of the people talking intently to him.

"Moses often sits there till sundown judging those who are having trouble with their neighbors," an officer explained to Jethro.

Jethro slowly shook his head, but said nothing about the matter until that evening when he could again visit the weary Moses.

"I am surprised," Jethro told Moses, "that you try just by yourself to hear all the cases of the people. See how tired you are now! If you continue in this manner, you will wear yourself down till you will be far from the healthy person you should be in God's service. Besides, the long lines of people become weary waiting for you to get around to them."

"What else can I do?" Moses asked. "Aaron has his work, and my various officers are busy with theirs."

"Let me suggest something," Jethro answered, moving his tent cushion closer to Moses. "Surely there are many hundreds of capable men among the tribes—men who have the eagerness and time to help you in this thing. Why not try to seek out a number of honest, unselfish, fair-minded men of good judgment? Place the best of these men as judges over groups of a thousand. Place men of lesser ability over groups of a hundred, and still others over groups of fifty and groups of ten.

"If a judge over ten people doesn't have the wisdom to decide a case, let him go to the judge of fifty who is over him. If the judge over fifty fails, let him go to the judge over a hundred. If even the judge over a thousand can't decide a case, let it be brought to you. Thus a great part of your task of judging could be on the shoulders of others, because surely most of the lesser problems could be judged or solved by other men whom you have instructed in God's ways of justice and fair conduct."

Moses sat in tired silence for some time. This idea had occurred to him before in a roughly similar way, but he had never given it much thought. Coming from a wise and devoted priest of God, however, it seemed to have much weight. It occurred then and there to Moses that God was suggesting this thing through his father-in-law, using human agencies as God has always done to such a great extent. (Exodus 18:13-23.)

Moses got up and strode about the tent for a minute or so while Jethro remained wisely silent.

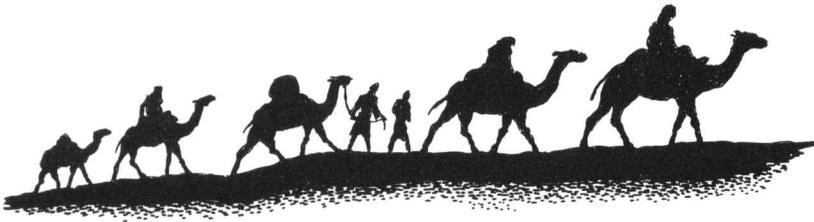
Moses Recognizes and Takes Sound Advice

"I believe God would have me do as you say," Moses finally declared. "Tomorrow morning I shall send out officers to summon the best leaders, from whom I can choose the kind of men who can help me!"

In the days that followed, Jethro's suggestion worked out well. Capable men were

named as judges, and they carried out their offices in a fair manner. It was a great relief to Moses, who couldn't have carried on and on with such a heavy load unless God had imbued him with tremendous, superhuman vitality. If that had happened, then the people might have begun to regard Moses as almost a god. (Verses 24-26.)

Although Moses wanted Jethro to go on with the Israelites, Jethro felt that he could be of greater service by returning to his people. Moses was sad when Jethro's caravan departed, but he was thankful for the advice and the joy that had come to him. (Verse 27.)



CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

ISRAEL BREAKS CAMP

A MONTH had passed from the time Moses had the tabernacle built and put into operation. It was almost a year since the Exodus. God now told Moses that there should be an exact account, tribe by tribe, of how many males of twenty years and older were among the Israelites. (Exodus 40:17; Numbers 1:1-3.)

The First Census

There were several reasons for taking this special census. One reason was that it was necessary to have an accurate record of tribes, families and individuals. Better order could thus be maintained whenever the people broke camp, moved, or made camp.

Accordingly, all males of twenty years and older were required to register at certain points, and to give information about themselves and their families. (Numbers 1:17-19.) This census wasn't to include strangers, men of the tribe of Levi, or any who were too old to go into battle in case the Israelites had to wage war against attacking armies. (Numbers 1:45, 47.)

When all were registered and their numbers added, the able-bodied male Israelites amounted to 603,550. (Numbers 1:45-46.) This was quite an increase over the seventy males who had gone down into Egypt when Joseph was ruler. Together with women, children, strangers and the tribe of Levi, there were at least two million people compactly camped near Mt. Sinai!

Imagine, if you can, how much food and water were required by that many people. Besides, there were many tens of thousands of animals to feed. Without obedi-

ence to God's plans of organization and to His laws, and without constant help from Him, it wouldn't have been possible for such a huge number of people to continue to exist in the desert.

Of the twelve tribes, Judah was the largest with 74,600 men. (Numbers 1:20-43.) It is today one of the smallest. The smallest tribe was Manasseh, with 32,200 men, but the tribe multiplied rapidly in later years and is today the largest! In these last days, Manasseh—the United States of America—has become the most powerful nation on Earth. Yet it is just one of the ten tribes of the "lost" House of Israel, which can no longer be considered as "lost." Nevertheless, there are many self-styled authorities who are struggling to keep the knowledge about the ten tribes hidden forever because true knowledge of them doesn't fit in with their narrow, erroneous doctrines. God said that the identity of the ten tribes would be made clear near the time of the end. It has long since been made clear to those who study the evidence with a desire to understand. Without that knowledge, one can't understand very much of the Bible or of God's great plan of salvation for the nations.

God Requires Order

The census having been completed, Moses and Aaron were instructed by God concerning the lay-out of the camps of the various tribes. Up to that time there was fair order, but God wanted precise order and arrangement so that from that time on there would be proper system and control wherever the people camped. (Numbers 2.)

Although the tribe of Levi wasn't included in the census that had just been taken, it was numbered later by God's order. Males were counted from a month old and upward, and were found to number exactly 22,000. (Numbers 3:39.)

Specific and definite duties were assigned to the various families of the Levites. There was no guesswork and no turn-taking. Every one learned what he was to do. God had planned all of it so that there wouldn't be any confusion. (Numbers 3:5-38; 4:4-33.)

Speaking of confusion, the Bible says that God is not the author of it. (I Corinthians 14:33.) That means that everything our Creator does is carefully thought out, systematic, orderly, true and perfect. He doesn't like half-truths, disorder, conflict, theories, guesswork, false doctrines, lies or propaganda.

Have you ever imagined what terrible confusion would result if it were possible to add up all the thousands of conflicting beliefs and doctrines practiced by the hundreds of different denominations claiming the name God and Christ?

God is the Head over Christ. Christ is the Head of His true church. (I Corinthians 11:3.) He has nothing to do with today's religious confusion except to draw

out from this confused world the individuals who are zealously seeking the truth.

Before Israel left Sinai, God also gave them the order in which the various tribes were to break camp and spread out in their vast caravan on the move toward Canaan. (Numbers 10:11-28.)

Meanwhile, there were other necessary instructions for that day from God. All unclean people—those with leprosy and other contagious diseases and those exposed to dead bodies—were to be separated within the camp or put far outside the camp to stay for various periods. (Numbers 5:1-4; Leviticus 13:1-8; 15:1-13; 21:1-3.) This was not only a health measure for the good of the people. It was also because God didn't want unclean persons existing so close to the holy area in which He was to dwell with the Israelites. These measures were necessary before the coming of the Holy Spirit. Cleanliness outside was to teach the people the need of God's power to clean the human being from within through the Holy Spirit.

At this same time God also made plain certain rules that were to be observed by those who were not Levites who wished to be set apart for a time to be of special service to God. Israelites who wanted to do this were called nazirites. They are not to be confused with the Levites. God honored the intentions of those individuals who wished to take nazirite vows and blessed them for their zeal.

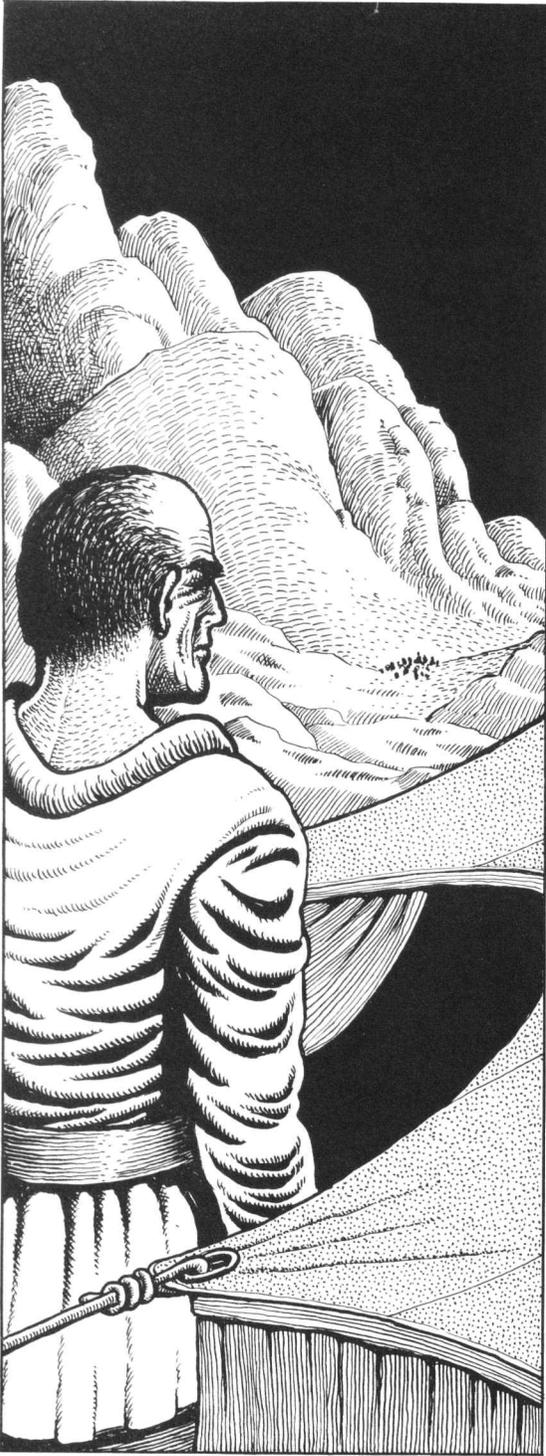
During the time people were nazirites they (men or women) weren't to shave nor cut their hair. They weren't to touch any dead body. They weren't to consume any wine. Neither were they to drink grape juice. Grapes, either fresh or dried, weren't to be eaten. (Numbers 6:1-8.) This was a *sign* of their special service.

Christ Was No Nazirite

Many people have believed that Jesus Christ was a nazirite because he was raised in Nazareth, a town in the district of Galilee about seventy miles north of Jerusalem. This is not true. People who come from or who are in Nazareth are called Nazarenes. They aren't nazirites unless they have taken the nazirite vow. Christ was not a nazirite. He drank wine. (Matthew 11:19.) If He had been a nazirite He could not have drunk wine without sinning and losing His place as our Saviour.

Some mistakenly claim that wine was grape juice—but even grape juice was forbidden to nazirites!

Because of assuming that Christ was a nazirite, many people have believed that He had long hair flowing down to his shoulders. Christ didn't have long hair! By-gone half-pagan artists, trying to make Jesus look pious, gave him a sick, sad, effeminate appearance, and even went so far as to add long hair in their vain imagination. No man knows how Jesus looked.



Moses was surprised one morning to see in the distance a large crowd with wagons approaching the tabernacle.

Inasmuch as Christ was a hard-working carpenter who ate only clean foods and observed the laws of good health, we know he was a very masculine fellow with great physical strength and endurance. Because he loved all people, he was a sociable, friendly, cheerful person who was thoughtful of others and courteous at all times. What matters most, however, is what Christ is like now, inasmuch as we shouldn't be trying to worship a Saviour who is merely a human being or who is dead. Hebrews 1:2-4 and Revelation 1:12-16 tell us of Christ's present power and appearance.

Transporting the Tabernacle

After the tabernacle had been erected, something was taking place of which even Moses probably had no knowledge. Each tribe—except the Levites—was preparing what was hoped to be a surprise.

One morning Moses was called out of his tent to see an unusually large crowd slowly approaching the tabernacle from a distance. But it wasn't the crowd that commanded his attention.

Six covered wagons, each drawn by two oxen, stood between the crowd and the tabernacle!

"Where did these come from?" Moses inquired of an officer. "I haven't seen wagons since we left Egypt."

"These are gifts from the heads of the twelve tribes," the officer answered. "Parts of them have been assembled from pieces of chariots picked up on the east

shore of the Red Sea gulf.”

“But what are they for?” Moses asked.

“They’re being offered to help carry the equipment of the tabernacle,” was the answer. (Numbers 7:1-3.)

Moses was a little puzzled as to whether or not he should accept the wagons for that purpose. He knew that the ark, for one thing, was to be carried on the shoulders of men, but God hadn’t yet made it known how most of the heavy equipment would be moved.

“The princes of the tribes await your inspection and approval,” the officer told Moses.

“Tell them I must return to my tent and dress for this unusual occasion,” Moses instructed his aide.

Moses was actually in doubt as to what should be done. If it weren’t God’s will to carry the tabernacle equipment in the proffered wagons, then Moses would have the unpleasant task of rejecting the gifts from the loyal and well-meaning Israelites. Back inside his tent he quickly knelt in prayer to ask God what should be done.

“Accept the gifts they have offered,” God answered. “Give the wagons to the Levites to use. This is as I have planned it to be.” (Numbers 7:4-5.)

Moses was relieved to hear this from God, and he was happy to realize that the gifts from the Israelite princes were of their own idea and free will.

After donning his best attire, Moses went out to the waiting princes of the twelve tribes. He happily accepted the wagons and the oxen, and turned them over to Aaron so that they could be put into special use by the Levites. (Verses 6-8.)

However, the wagons and the oxen weren’t the only gifts from the heads of the Israelite tribes. So many other things were brought in that the prince of each tribe was assigned a particular day in which to present his gifts and make his offerings. (Verses 10-11.)

The total from all the tribes amounted to twelve large silver dishes in which to knead dough for the shewbread, twelve deep silver bowls (all of them filled with fine flour mixed with oil) for receiving blood for sacrifices, twelve golden spoons filled with incense, twelve kids, thirty-six bullocks, seventy-two rams, sixty male goats and seventy-two lambs. (Numbers 7:12-23, 84-88.)

After the tribes had finished giving these things, Moses went into the tabernacle to thank God for what so many people had contributed out of desire to help. Thereupon a voice thundered out of the mercy seat. It was God’s voice directing Moses what he should tell Aaron concerning those matters having to do with the tabernacle and the Levites. (Numbers 7:89; 8:1-2.)

Among the instructions were those touching on the Passover. The Passover is always to be observed on the eve of the fourteenth day of the first month, Nisan. But for those away on a journey, those who for any reason are unable to keep it on that date the Passover is to be observed on the fourteenth day of the *second* month, Iyar. (Numbers 9:9-12.)

This also applies to the New Testament Passover memorial to be observed by Christians today, as recorded in Matthew 26:26-28. Those who for some special reason can't observe the New Testament Passover (with unleavened bread and wine as a memorial of Christ's death) on the original date should make every effort to observe it exactly a month later according to God's sacred calendar.

The sacrifice of the paschal lamb ceased at Christ's death for He was the Lamb of God offered for the sins of the world.

God also instructed that two long trumpets of solid silver should be made for use in contacting the people. The blowing of only one trumpet was to summon the heads of the tribes for a meeting. The blowing of both trumpets was either to call for a solemn assembly of all the people or was the signal to move out of camp. They were also to be blown in such varying manners that the hearers would instantly recognize an alarm to prepare for war, happy occasions, solemn days, beginnings of months and times of offerings. (Numbers 10:1-10.)

One might doubt that two trumpets, even large and long, could be heard by millions. But a horn of the type God wanted made, blown by a strong person of good lung capacity, could easily be heard for miles in the clear desert air in the vicinity of Mt. Sinai.

One morning shortly after the trumpets had been made and put into use, the Israelites came out of their tents to see that the cloud had moved away from the tabernacle during the night and was high in the sky!

It wasn't long afterward that the two silver trumpets, lustily blown by Aaron's two sons, blasted out the signal for the breaking of camp.

Israelites Resume the March

There was great excitement among the people. They had been encamped before Mt. Sinai for almost a year, and the signal to move on was no small matter to them. Men hurried to get their livestock and tents ready to move. Woodsmen and hunters rushed back from the mountains. Women worked feverishly to get the family belongings together. Excited at the thought of going somewhere, children ran happily about, but not to become lost or get in the way.

Meanwhile, men were swiftly working to take down the tabernacle and pack

it for moving. They had been so well-trained in this task that it was done in a remarkably short time. It was rather astonishing that millions of people were ready to move so quickly on such short notice.

In accordance with God's orders, the first tribe to move out of camp was Judah. Others followed in the order given them. The Levites, carrying the tabernacle equipment, were spaced in two different areas among the other tribes. The tribe of Naphtali was the last to leave. (Numbers 10:11-28.)

A few hours later the mammoth caravan had disappeared through the mountain passes to the northeast, leaving the Sinai valley silent and lonely.

Among the strangers who had stayed with the Israelites at Sinai was Hobab, Jethro's son. This brother-in-law of Moses, along with a clan he headed, had joined them when he came with his father to visit Moses and bring Zipporah, Moses' wife. As a native of the desert, he had a keen knowledge of the desert. Moses therefore hoped that Hobab and his people would go along with the Israelites.

"Come with us to Canaan," Moses said to Hobab as Hobab's mounted men rode along for a while with the Israelites. "God has promised us a fertile land there. It would be a good place for you to settle down. Meanwhile, you and your men can help us by being our scouts and by teaching us how to live in this wilderness."

"The desert has always been our home," Hobab replied. "I don't think we'd be exactly happy in farming regions."

"But you would learn to love the greener, more productive land," Moses pointed out. "There would be more food and water there. You and your family would be better off. (Numbers 10:29-32.)

Hobab, who loved God and saw that God's people needed him, joined his clan to the tribe of Judah, which always led the way when the Israelite caravan moved through the wilderness. In this way his men could use their knowledge of the desert in choosing the best pathway for the Israelites to use in following the cloud



Hobab was a man with keen knowledge of the desert in the Sinai peninsula.

and the pillar of fire. After the Israelites entered Palestine, Hobab and his relatives, the Kenites, settled down with the tribe of Judah, choosing for themselves a wilderness area that was similar to their old homeland. (Judges 1:16.)

In any event, probably Moses wouldn't have pressed him to go with them if Moses could have foreseen that they weren't going to reach Canaan until 39 years later!

For three days the vast line of humanity and animals slowly struggled across the dunes of drifting sand and the rocky plains and hillsides characteristic of that region. Moses uttered a public prayer each time they started out and each time they stopped to camp. (Numbers 10:33-36.)



The huge caravan left through a passage into the northeast, leaving the high valley of Sinai empty and silent.

After not having been on the march for a year, the Israelites soon discovered that there was hardship in traveling several miles a day across the blazing desert. Most of them were cheerful, each day looking forward to the cool night and the rest that came with it.

Complaining IS Rebellion

However, as usual, there were those who began to complain. Little by little these complaints grew. By the end of the third day from Sinai, there were many who were loudly voicing their grievances to those about them.

"This is worse than slaving for the Egyptians!" they yelled. "We all should join together and demand less travel and more rest! If we try to keep this up, we shall all die!"

Before Israelite officers could organize to quell the shouting, a peculiar thing happened. The pillar of fire, blazing in the sky above the ark, flared upward. The evening air felt as though it were suddenly charged with some tremendous force about to explode.



Deadly bolts of fire hissed down on the people who had complained.

That is exactly what happened. Throughout the whole camp, as though they had come out of nowhere, were strange, sizzling bolts of fire. They hissed and streaked in all directions—many of them ploughing into the people who had just been shouting so loudly. (Numbers 11:1.)

It happened so suddenly that most of the people hardly had time to be frightened. But now they froze in alarm as they found themselves staring at the lifeless, smoking bodies of those who had complained!

God meant business!

Human beings need to realize that complaining about how God directs His servants *is* rebellion against the Government of God!

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

QUAIL FOR TWO MILLION

A CRY of horror and grief went up from the people of Israel. God's sudden, awful punishment reminded them of the manner in which the Creator had struck during the time of the Passover one year previously. Then the victims had been Egyptians. This time there also were Egyptians, because Egyptians who had come in the mixed multitude with the Israelites were in part to blame. But a large number of the offenders were now Israelites.

Israel Cries for Mercy

Because the shooting, exploding bolts of flame struck offenders in every part of all the camps, Moses was quickly aware of what was going on. Immediately, however, there was a rush of officers from all the camps to tell Moses what was taking place, and to inform him that the people were screaming for mercy and asking for Moses to pray to God to stop the fiery explosions. (Numbers 11:2.)

When Moses learned that so many people had already been slain by the fire from God, he immediately went into his tent, fell on his knees and begged the Creator to stop killing the people.

The deadly spurts of flame gradually disappeared after Moses' diligent prayer. Terrified people who had raced wildly about the camps eventually returned to their tents to count their dead.

Next day was a bitter one for the Israelites. Many blackened bodies were buried in the shifting sands of the high desert country. God's wrath had such a deep effect on many of the people that they named the area Taberah, which meant "a burning."

But in spite of this terrible warning to complainers, many of the people continued to murmur about their conditions. Most of them were the strangers who were among the Israelites, but their bitterness spread throughout the camps like some awful, contagious diseases.

The main food of the people was still manna, a wonderful, energizing food direct from God. At Sinai, the gathering of manna wasn't much of a task, inasmuch as the people had plenty of time for doing it. But since leaving the Sinai valley, some felt that it was a burden to have to get up very early to gather the manna, and then start to travel. This, therefore, was one of the things the complainers began to be bitter about. Although those slain by God had been buried only a short time, manna became a subject loudly and sarcastically discussed by increasing thousands. The poisonous thought promoted by these complainers was that manna was a poor substitute for the food they had enjoyed in Egypt.

"Manna doesn't give us enough strength for this tiring journey," was the unhappy comment from the grumblers. "What we need is meat!" (Numbers 11:4.)

Mankind then, as now, was very prone to the power of suggestion. More and more Israelites who had the best of intentions fell victims to the influence of the lustful, untruthful remarks circulating about the camps.

"Manna can't take the place of the food we had in Egypt," the whiners kept saying. "If we don't have more of a variety of food, we'll lose our appetites and become



Some of the people loudly began to demand flesh to eat.

thin and weak! Probably many of us will even die!”

Such foolish remarks caused an increasing number of Israelites to doubt that manna was anything more than what was required to barely keep people alive. At the same time, the complainers kept reminding others of the wonderful foods they had enjoyed in the past.

“Remember the crisp, succulent cucumbers and the sweet, mellow, mouth-watering melons we liked so well in Egypt?” they asked of all who would listen. “If God can give us so much of this tiresome manna, why can’t He also produce foods like those? Why are we denied simple, delicious vegetables like garlic and onions? Or even leeks, those plants with the unusually luscious flavor? We need such things to build our morale, and we need meat to build our strength!” (Numbers 11:5-6.)

Bitterness Grows

When reminded by his officers of the ill feeling that prevailed, Moses was distressed. He knew that some of the people would always complain, regardless of what the conditions were. But so much complaint, right on the heels of the mass slaying by God, pointed to nothing but growing trouble.

The bitter attitude grew by the hour. Officers came to Moses more frequently with reports that there was even wailing and crying by Israelites who felt that God was being unmerciful to them by denying them the foods they craved—especially meat. A wave of self-pity and semi-hysteria seemed to be passing over all the camps.

Moses was sick with discouragement. He told his aides that he didn’t wish to be disturbed for a while, and went into the inner part of his tent to pray.

“What have I done,” he asked God, “to cause this trouble to come on me? How can I be a father to all these thousands of unruly people? Must I try to carry them, like babies, to the land You have promised them? How can I stop their growing demand for other kinds of food?”

“Do you feel,” God asked Moses, “that this task I have given you is too great?”

“I only know,” Moses replied, “that the wild demands of thousands of people are too much for me. I can’t see any way of taking care of what they ask for, or of handling them while they are in such an extreme state of mind. If I fail to give them the foods they are demanding, they are likely to get entirely out of control. If You allow that to happen, then please take my life now. I don’t want to be here to witness such rebellion.” (Numbers 11:10-15.)

“The people are overcome with false pity for themselves,” God told Moses. “You must not be likewise. If you feel that your responsibility is too great, then choose seventy of the strongest leaders and most honorable men among the older men of Israel

and have them come to the tabernacle. There I shall meet you, and shall give them the special understanding I have given you. They will then realize how you are being troubled by the people. They will help you by pointing out to the people that you are right in what you require of them, even though those requirements may at times seem harsh." (Verses 16-17.)

"Will this cause the people to cease their complaining?" Moses asked God.

"No," God answered. "But from then on none of them can honestly say that I haven't given them fair warning for anything that may come because of their disobedience. Warn them to stop their complaining and prepare for a feast of flesh. Tell them that this feast won't last just one day, two days, five days nor twenty days. Tell them it will last a whole month, and that they shall have so much flesh to eat that it will become sickening to them. Tell them that as they have complained so much because of not having anything but manna, they won't be able to hold the flesh on their stomachs."

"But how can you provide meat for over two million people for a whole month?" Moses inquired. "Must all our flocks and herds be slaughtered to take care of the appetites of the people for flesh? Or do You have some way of bringing in a huge amount of fish from the Red Sea?"

"Why do you seem to doubt that I have power to take care of these matters?" God inquired. "Go do as I have commanded, and you shall soon witness what I have planned." (Numbers 11:18-23.)

Moses at once told his officers to tell the people that God had been greatly moved by their complaints, and would send them so much flesh that they would wish they had never asked for it.

This news brought great excitement to nearly every camp. Many people ran from tent to tent, loudly and joyfully repeating what Moses' officers had told them. This, they imagined, was something to celebrate. Before long, musicians had gathered here and there, and there was singing and dancing in many areas.

Most of the celebrants were interested only in God's promising them meat for a whole month. Very few seemed to be concerned by His remark that they would regret asking for it.

Seventy Elders Chosen

Meanwhile, Moses chose the seventy elders who were the most capable, and called for them to meet before the tabernacle. After the group of carefully picked men had arrived, Moses went into the tabernacle and fell on his knees to await God's presence. It wasn't long before the cloud settled down over the tabernacle.

"From this moment on," God said to Moses, "the seventy men you have picked will have a special gift of understanding. They will have greater respect for Me. They will realize without any doubt that you are My chosen servant, and they will have greater respect for you. They will have a better attitude and more correct outlook on matters having to do with the people's reaching Canaan. They will have the ability to show at least some of the Israelites how wrong they are in complaining against you. Thus you won't feel that you are so alone in your struggle to keep the people obedient."

It happened just as God had foretold. The elders began to talk among themselves with great harmony and understanding. When Moses came out of the tabernacle to join them in hours of brotherly conversation, there was a most unusual spirit of harmony and wisdom. Later, when the elders went back to their various camps, their special understanding greatly enabled them to help the people in many matters. (Numbers 11:24-25.)

Two of the seventy elders chosen by Moses, Eldad and Medad, weren't able to get to the tabernacle. But they, as well as the others, were at the same time imbued with the special understanding that was a gift from God. Fired with inspiration, these two men walked out among the people and made moving remarks proving God's and Moses' authority.

"Why do you complain and why do you listen to those who complain?" they asked the people. "God is very displeased by what has been going on. Unless there is a great change of attitude soon among the people, many of you will die within a very short time!"

A large crowd gathered around Eldad and Medad. Bystanders regarded the two with anything from mild interest to amazement as the two elders prophesied of things that had to do with God's future plan for the Israelites, and in such a manner that very few listeners failed to show the greatest respect for them. (Verse 26.)

Months previously, when Moses had earnestly prayed for the Israelites to win in a long battle with attacking Amalekites, a young man by the name of Joshua had led the Israelites' army to battle while Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands as Moses prayed. (Exodus 17:8-13.) This same young man happened to be present when another young man ran and told Moses that Eldad and Medad were speaking to the people. Joshua realized at once that the two couldn't have spoken so well and in such an informed manner without inspiration from some source.

This troubled Joshua. He felt that two men making such an impression on the people might cause the Israelites to seek a new leader.

"You should send men to stop them, sir!" Joshua warned. "Otherwise, they could

cause many people to regard them as leaders, and this could cause trouble for you at this time when the people are showing so much disobedience.”

Moses wasn't worried, however. He realized that this was a case of God having given Eldad and Medad special understanding along with the sixty-eight other elders who had been chosen to help bear a part of Moses' responsibility.

“Don't be concerned that they'll be any trouble to me,” Moses told Joshua. “In fact, I wish every Israelite could be inspired with their God-given understanding of what it means to all of us to obey.” (Numbers 11:27-30.)

The Quail Arrive

After the elders had returned to their camps and Moses had gone to his tent, a strong southwest wind came up. It increased to such velocity that the people began to be concerned about their tents being blown down. Most of them forgot about their tents, however, when they noticed a peculiar dark streak gradually growing larger on the southwest horizon. This strange sight caused great concern among the people. Some thought it was merely a low cloud or a bank of fog, though fog in that desert area would have been quite unusual.

Even Moses was puzzled when his attention was brought to it. But when he noticed an increasing number of birds flying swiftly to the northeast, he abruptly realized how God was about to supply the meat the Israelites had been demanding. He remembered how God had sent flocks of quails (Exodus 16:11-13) when the people had first complained about having to steadily eat manna.

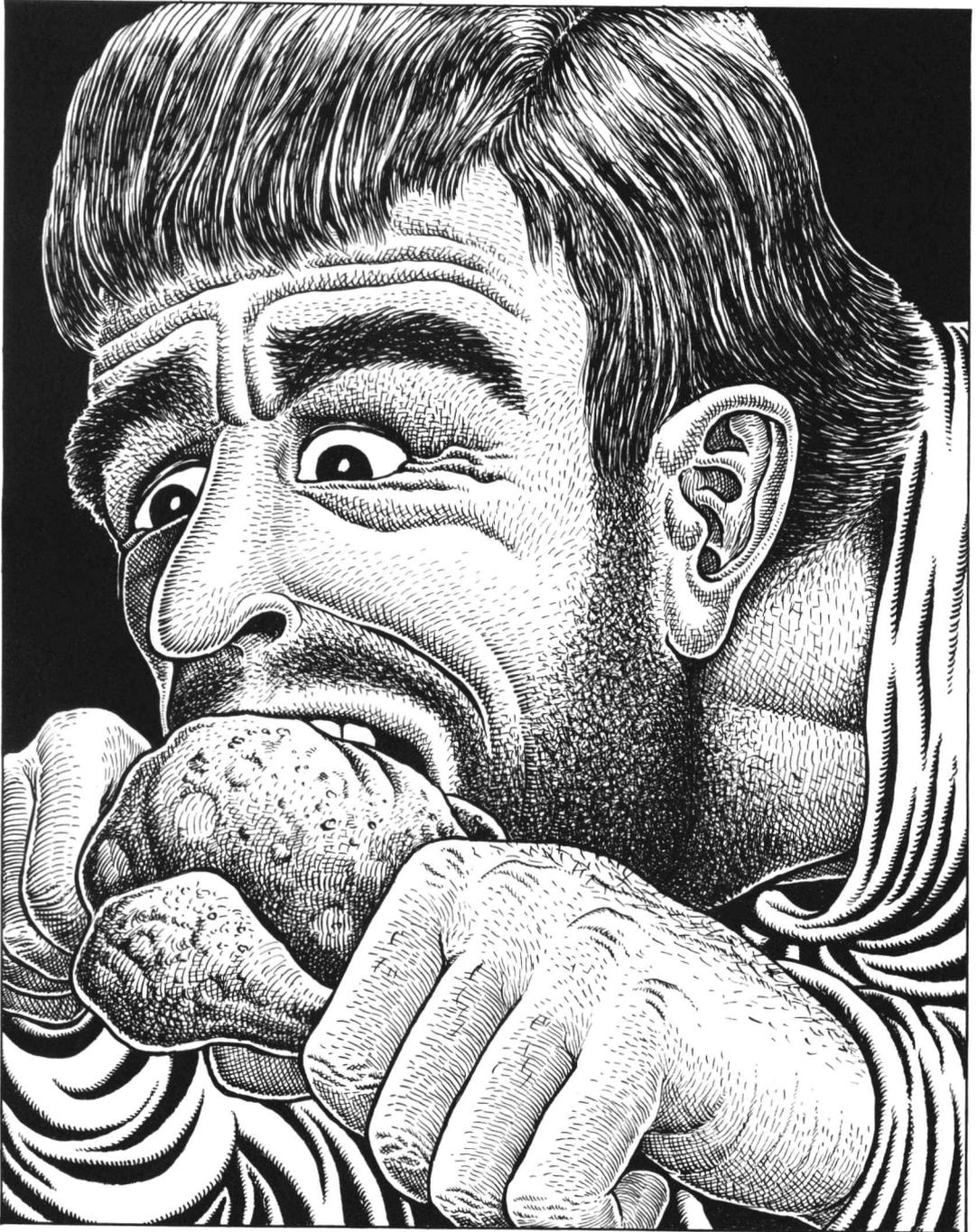
“Have it announced to all the camps at once that God is now providing all the flesh for which the people have been begging,” Moses instructed an aide. “Tell them that God isn't giving it to them to supply any need, but that He's giving it to them as a lesson of obedience they'll soon understand.”

The dark cloud grew more swiftly. It was only a little while later that the sky became blackened with a tremendous flock of quails. Many of them flew only three or four feet above the ground. Many fell to the ground exhausted and ran about the ground, trying to get their tired bodies into the air again.

When the amazed Israelites realized that they were being set upon by such tasty fowl, they seized the nearest useful objects, such as sticks and spears and boards, and started beating low-flying birds to the ground, and striking those exhausted birds which scampered about in all directions.

While some excitedly slaughtered birds, others hastily plucked them. In spite of the strong winds, the camps soon became alive with an unusually large number of fires over which quails were hastily roasted.

After months of existing mostly on manna, the Israelites were so excited because of receiving meat that they tore and bit and chewed at the flesh of the birds as though they had been starved. They took turns catching, roasting and eating, but it required



Many of the Israelites wolfed down the roasted meat as though they were starving!

many hours for all of them to get their fill of the roasted quail.

All that day the strong wind persisted, and flocks of quails passed over the camps continuously. The excited people flailed away at them, knocking the birds to the ground, snatching them up to swiftly prepare them for roasting or to pluck and salt them for eating later.

As sundown approached, it was expected that the wind would die down and that the birds—if they continued to pass over—would manage to fly at higher altitudes. But the strong wind continued all night. And all night, by the light of bright campfires, the Israelites went on batting down all birds within reach.

Next morning the wind still hadn't abated. Flock after flock of quails skimmed over the camps. There were so many fowl that they were seen fifteen to twenty miles on both sides of the camp areas. The wind continued all that day, and hordes of birds with it. There seemed to be no end to them. By this time many people were still downing them, but not with the eagerness of the preceding day.

Near sundown the wind finally started to subside. The flocks of quails became smaller and smaller, until no more, even single stragglers, were seen to pass over.

Thousands of weary quail-catchers slumped upon their beds. Regardless of their obvious desire to get even more fowl than they could use, they were relieved when there were no more to try to get. After two days and one night of bird-bagging, the camps were full of thousands and thousands of tons of fowl. Besides the millions of quails already eaten, there were piles of them between tents, countless numbers strung up to dry and huge amounts being roasted, boiled, fried or barbecued.

Not everyone had tried his hand at bagging the quails because not all the Israelites had lusted for meat. But there were more than a half-million able-bodied men in the camps, and few of them refrained from the sport of quail-catching. One can get some idea of the amount of fowl brought out of the sky by using the figure 500,000—the number of men who probably gathered the birds—and multiplying it by the *smallest* amount of birds bagged by anyone during the time the quails passed over the camps. The smallest amount was what ten burros could carry!

The taste of roasted, succulent quail flesh was a welcome treat to the Israelites. But perhaps it wasn't quite as wonderful as many had expected. When one builds up a lustful, consuming desire for something, it often turns out to be more desirable in one's imagination than it does as a reality.

Thus it was with so many of the lustful ones of Israel and their quails. Those who had been so bitter, unreasonable and anxious in demanding meat were the very ones who started gorging themselves even before the birds were ready to eat. They seized the half-raw, smoking fowl in both hands and set about devouring them as

starving vultures would attack a newly discovered carcass. There were even a few who were craving meat so strongly—and these were mostly among the strangers with Israel—that they tore the feathers off the birds as soon as they were caught and proceeded to consume them raw.

As for God's promise to supply the Israelites with meat for a whole month, the Creator more than kept His word. The huge amounts of birds bagged by the Israelites, if properly preserved, would have lasted much more than a month—even if eaten greedily by the more ravenous Israelites.

The Punishment Comes

But something began to happen to cause the Israelites to suddenly lose interest in quails.

People began to get sick.

From all points in the camps came the increasing moans and groans of those who had gorged themselves. Their digestive systems, used to the mild manna month after month, were heavily over taxed by the great amounts of half-chewed flesh that had been swallowed hour after hour.

To the horror of friends and relatives who helplessly watched them, the screaming, agonized victims rolled convulsively in their vomit, then lapsed into unconsciousness that was soon followed by death.

More and more died this horrible death as the hours wore on. By the time the self-inflicted plague had come to a halt, an area not far from the camps had become a vast graveyard!

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

TWELVE SCOUTS SEARCH CANAAN

PERHAPS you will remember the time when the Israelites who complained were suddenly, supernaturally electrocuted. At that time the people begged Moses to exhort God to have mercy on them. (Numbers 11:1-3.)

Later, when many died because of eating too much quail flesh, no screaming groups of people came to beg or demand of Moses that he again plead with God for them. Many were too ill to come to Moses, and those who weren't ill realized that the dead and the sick had brought these conditions on themselves.

Nevertheless, there were some here and there who even later persisted in eating quail flesh that was beginning to spoil. The result was more illness and a few more deaths.

Moses' Mistakes Cause Criticism

On the route to the promised land Moses again met an Ethiopian woman whom he had known over forty years before in Egypt. Without consulting God, and even though he was already married to Jethro's daughter, Moses now married the Ethiopian.

Because of these mistakes there developed a strong feeling of envy by Miriam, the sister of Moses and of Aaron. Instead of privately taking up the matter with Moses as she should have done, Miriam made a public issue of it.

"Moses had no business doing that. He is just upsetting everybody," Miriam complained to Aaron. "Moses should have consulted me."

Although he realized that Miriam was wrong in being envious and critical, and

that she was attempting to exert far too much authority, Aaron was inclined to agree that Moses shouldn't have made any great decisions without taking at least some of the matters up with him and his sister. But he was for letting the matter drop right there and discussing it in private with Moses. Miriam had no intention of doing that, however.

"I think we should take this matter to the people," Miriam went on. "Surely God is inspiring you and me as to what should be done. But Moses acts as though he is the only one in touch with God. Unless he's stopped, he'll take all authority to himself and do just as he pleases with the people."

"Perhaps you're right," Aaron mused. "The feeling of too much authority could have a bad effect on any man—even our brother Moses."

Nothing in this world has ever been done or thought or spoken without God knowing about it. Although Aaron and Miriam were chosen servants of their Creator, they displeased Him by their critical, envious and unkind remarks about another chosen servant who was above them in authority.

Alone in Aaron's tent, the two felt a peculiar sensation, as though someone were very close and watching them.

God Summons Miriam and Aaron

"Miriam! Aaron!" a stern voice startled them. "Go to the tabernacle!"

Fearfully they looked quickly about, but they saw no one, though the voice seemed to be right beside them.

"Could—could it have been God or an angel of God speaking?" Miriam stutered nervously.

"It must have been one or the other," Aaron murmured, swallowing with difficulty. "We had better go to the tabernacle right away."

Outside the tabernacle they met Moses, who also had been summoned there. Aaron and Miriam—especially Miriam—were uncomfortable in Moses' presence because of talking about him as they had done. The three of them stood in uneasy silence, waiting for something to happen. (Numbers 12:4.)

Slowly the cloud of God descended over the tabernacle. There was a blinding blaze of light from within the curtained inner room. The three Israelites shielded their eyes with their arms and backed away from the unusual brilliance. Then a voice boomed from inside the shimmering doorway.

"Now listen to Me! Lest there be any doubt as to the one through whom I choose to speak and direct in these times, be assured that Moses is the servant who is to bear the greatest responsibility. Let it be known that I, the Eternal, speak to him directly

as one being to another, and not in some mysterious or sly manner, or in dreams and visions, as I speak to ordinary prophets. You, Miriam, and you, Aaron, it is time you know that these things are so. Why, then, were you so foolish as to speak against Moses, my chosen servant?" (Numbers 12:5-8.)

Aaron's face was the color of ashes as God concluded His rebuke. Miriam cringed in fear. Moses was both embarrassed and angry to learn that he had been the object of wrong remarks by his brother and sister. Nevertheless, he felt a little sorry for them because he knew that God often acted with terrible swiftness when it was His intention to punish anyone.

Miriam and Aaron were relieved when they saw the blinding light in the tabernacle disappear. They were even more relieved when they saw the cloud float up from the tabernacle.

"God is departing," Miriam whispered to Aaron. "Surely He wasn't too displeased with us, or He would have done more than just talk." (Verse 9.)

"Don't speak like that!" Aaron warned, glancing uneasily at the departing cloud. "God doesn't forget. We should get back to our tents and pray for mercy!"

"Why should we pray for mercy if God doesn't choose to punish us?" Miriam asked.

Irrked by his sister's senseless question, Aaron turned to look searchingly at Miriam. That searching look caused him to draw back in horror.

The flesh of his sister's face, neck, arms and hands had suddenly taken on a sickly white hue! Aaron shuddered as he tore his eyes from her ghastly face.

He knew that she had suddenly become a leper! (Verse 10.)

"Moses!" Aaron called in a quavering voice.

Why God Rebuked Miriam and Aaron

Moses was slowly walking away at the moment. He turned and came back because he sensed the despair in Aaron's tone. When he saw Miriam's condition, he was very upset. Miriam for the first time noticed her hands. She gave a shriek and collapsed on the ground. Aaron quickly knelt down beside her and looked pleadingly up at Moses.

"Don't let God take her by this terrible disease!" he begged. "Ask Him to forgive our foolish sin and heal her." (Numbers 12:11-12.)

Moses knelt down, leaned over with his face to the ground and called out to God.

"Make her well now, God!" he cried out. "Be merciful and forgive her and Aaron of their sins! Remove this awful disease from my sister now!" (Verse 13.)

Then God suddenly answered Moses: "Because of her disrespect for authority,



Aaron drew back, horrified to see that Miriam had suddenly become leprous!

Miriam must be shut out of the camp and My presence for seven days.”

To her horror and disgrace, Miriam was led to a distant spot far outside the camp, there to sit and loathe herself in utter misery.

Meanwhile, the Israelites were prepared to start out again. But the cloud didn't move forward, and this obviously meant that God was delaying the march until Miriam would be brought back into camp healed. (Verses 14-15.)

After a week had passed, she was brought back into her tent. God had answered Moses' prayers and had healed her. She and Moses and Aaron were very thankful. At the same time, Miriam was sorry for having spoken out so boldly and wrongly against Moses. If she had failed to repent, God would have refused to take away her terrible leprosy, and it would soon have caused her death.

Miriam learned the lesson that all Christians should learn—that speaking evil of the servants God has chosen to work for or represent Him is indirectly speaking evil of the One who created the whole universe and every one of us. Only foolish and ignorant people dare to make unkind or wicked or untrue remarks about the Creator or His servants.

God tells us that wisdom begins with respect for Him. (Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10.) Those who don't respect God and His rules are actually the most foolish people, regardless of what their stations in life are. On the other hand, any humble,

poor, uneducated person—if he or she fears God and obeys Him—is much wiser than all “learned” God-denying people lumped together.

Journey to the Promised Land

After Miriam had been brought back into the camp at Hazeroth, the people moved northward for several days. Although it was late summer, they journeyed on through the hot desert country to Paran, eventually coming to a mountainous, secluded oasis area called Kadesh or Kadesh-barnea or Sela. (Numbers 12:16 and 13:26.)

It was still many miles to the promised land of Canaan, but at Kadesh the cloud came to a halt for more than a night. The people found several wells and springs in that region, and there was enough grass for their animals. It was evident that God meant the Israelites to camp at that place for at least several days. The tabernacle was erected just as it had been at Sinai, and the various tribes set up their camps in the same positions.

“Choose twelve capable men—one who is a ruler from each of the twelve tribes—for a scouting expedition up into Canaan,” God instructed Moses. “They are to bring back a full report on the land. Then the people will learn from their own respected leaders that it is a good land they are approaching.” (Numbers 13:1-2.)

Moses picked twelve outstanding men from the twelve tribes. These included Joshua, a young man who had previously been very helpful to Moses, and a man named Caleb of the tribe of Judah. Joshua and Caleb were chosen as leaders of the expedition. (Verses 3-16.)

“You twelve are to go up into Canaan as scouts,” Moses told them when they were brought together. “It’s up to you to find the best and easiest route there. Carefully observe everything. Notice whether the land is flat or hilly and what kind of crops it bears. Note the people, to find out how numerous they are, whether they are warlike, peaceful, strong or weak. Find out what their villages and cities are like, and what strongholds they have. Be sure to see where the best forests are located, as well as the best grazing and farming areas. Bring back some produce of the land. And don’t fear for your lives, because you can rely on God to protect you as long as you obey Him.” (Numbers 13:17-20.)

The Scouting Expedition Begins

Going to Canaan wasn’t simply a matter of packing a few things and leaving. The scouts needed some idea of the general lay-out of the land. This knowledge came from the Kenites—Moses’ father-in-law’s family—and from traveled strangers at Kadesh who had joined the Israelites. From them Moses obtained information concerning

the boundaries, mountain ranges, lakes, streams, forests and desert areas of Canaan. This was carefully studied by the twelve picked men, and maps were made for them to follow.

When at last the picked scouts had said good-bye to their families and friends, they set out to the northwest from Kadesh or Sela across the narrow Zin desert.

They proceeded on through the mountains northwest of the desert. After plodding wearily in the heat over many miles of rugged territory in the region of Edom, they topped a rise to gaze down on a vast expanse of water more than 4,000 feet below them!

Today this body of salty water is known as the Dead Sea. It is almost 1,300 feet below sea level—the deepest chasm on the Earth's surface. It is forty-seven miles long from north to south, and is nine and a half miles across at the widest spot. It is 1,300 feet deep at its greatest depth. The dimensions were slightly different back when the Israelite scouts suddenly came upon it.

"This must be what is known as the Salt Sea or the Sea of the Plain!" one of the men exclaimed, pointing to the whitish shoreline far below. "You know what that means!"

"It means we have reached Canaan!" Joshua shouted triumphantly. "We know from what we have heard that this large lake is part of the eastern boundary of the promised land!"

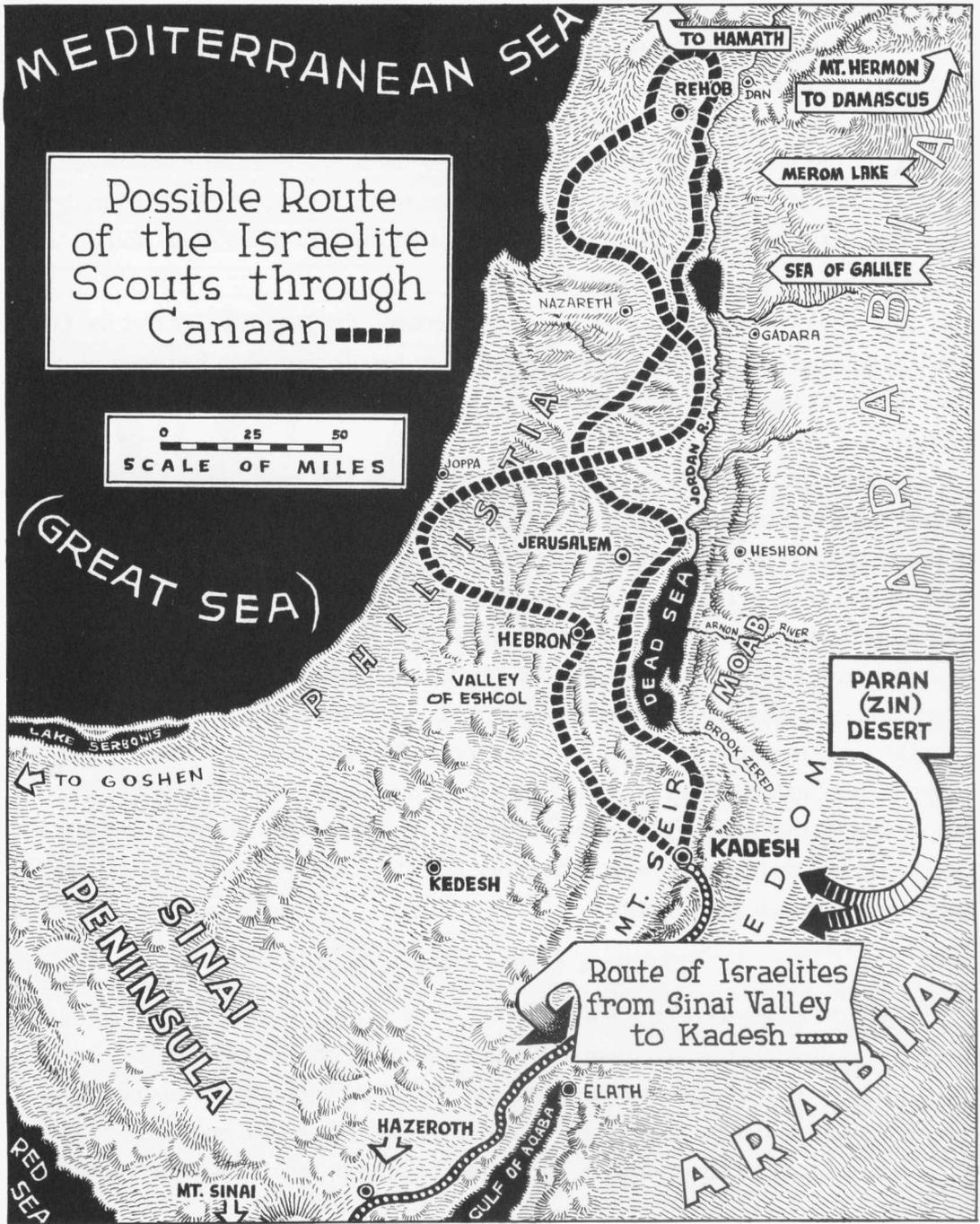
There was happy excitement among the twelve men. Having some idea of where they were, they felt successful and more secure. That night they camped on the towering area overlooking the water, and next morning started down from the mountains to skirt the west shore of the long lake.

For the next few days their progress was fairly easy. However, the midday heat was quite intense, and they found that it was wise to travel only in the mornings and evenings.

The Jordan Valley Visited

At the north end of the Dead Sea they turned eastward to come to the Jordan River, the main stream emptying into the Dead Sea. There in the river bottom region they saw that there were many beautiful farms and that the crops were excellent.

The scouts continued northward, sometimes following the Jordan River and sometimes veering off toward the mountain range to the west. They had purposely avoided the country east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea because the promised land was then from the Jordan River westward. (Numbers 33:51-53; 34:1-2, 12 and Deuteronomy 12:10.) The people they met stared suspiciously at them, probably regarding



them either as wandering traders, bandits, or vagrants.

A few days later they arrived at another body of water known today as the Sea of Galilee. It was known then as the Sea of Chinnereth. This lake, seven miles wide at the north end and thirteen miles long, was the one near which Jesus Christ would

spend much of his life. It is about 200 feet to the bottom at the deepest point. The hills back from its east shores jutted up to 2,000 feet. Its surface was about 700 feet below that of the Mediterranean Sea.

The scouts traveled on northward far past the Sea of Galilee to a town called Rehob, on the northern border of the promised land, in the land of Aram, known today as Syria. Having knowledge of where they were, the Israelites recognized that they were very close to the northern boundaries of the promised land, and so they turned back southward. (Numbers 13:21.)

Moving down through the fertile regions between the Jordan River and the Great Sea (the Mediterranean), the scouts saw even more people than they had seen near the river. Crops looked even better, trees bore more fruit and there were more signs of prosperity.

The scouting Israelites had been coming to more and more great cities teeming with people and bristling with fortifications. The people continued to stare at the twelve strangers as they trudged along the road. The Israelites made no effort to visit with them. It was wiser to keep to themselves than run the risk of getting mixed up with robbers or violent men. The scouts were well-armed for purposes of hunting, and their rugged, bearded appearance undoubtedly warded off more than one group of bandits who might otherwise have attacked them for whatever was in the Israelites' packsacks.

Deciding to move westward from the Jordan Valley, the scouts moved to the east shores of the Mediterranean Sea. They had heard awesome tales of how warlike the people were in that region. These, the Philistines, were the ones through whose land God had kept Israel from traveling when they had first left Egypt, even though it would have meant a much shorter trip.

The Scouts Meet the Philistines

There the scouts were especially cautious. They moved around the towns and villages instead of going through them. Here and there they noticed armed Philistine men who obviously were soldiers or civil officers. Once they spotted a whole platoon of such men at a distance, but the scouts weren't set upon, stopped or even questioned.

Crossing back to the southeast, they came to Hebron, one of the oldest cities in the world. It had been founded seven years before the founding of Zoan, the first city founded in post-flood Egypt. (Numbers 13:22.)

At Hebron the scouts were so curious to get a good look at the people and buildings and bazaars that they considered traveling right through the streets.

"I should like to go through the town as much as any of you," Joshua frowned thoughtfully, "but I think it's too much of a risk. If we all go together, we could be



Joshua and Caleb saw their path out of Hebron blocked by armed men.

looked on as a band of renegades, and officers might stop us.”

“How about splitting up into pairs?” Caleb suggested.

“That should help!” Joshua nodded. “But we can’t become too separated. Each couple must be far enough apart that we won’t be regarded as a group, but close enough to be within sight of each other at all times.”

Accordingly, the twelve divided into six pairs and joined a straggling line of all kinds of people approaching Hebron from the north.

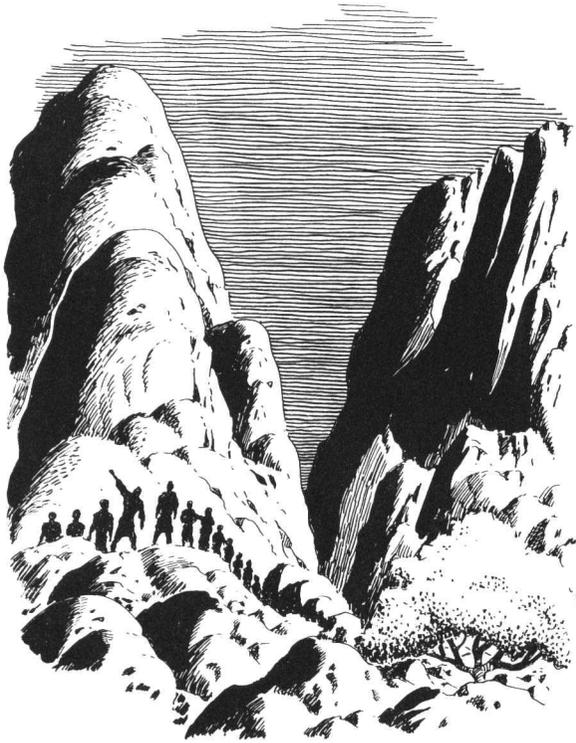
Hebron wasn’t a large city teeming with great crowds, but its narrow, stony streets were lined with shops where knots of rather drab humanity bobbed and shuffled in and out. Mixing in with the hodge-podge of people and pack-animals, the scouts saw and heard many interesting things. Shopkeepers called out their wares to them. Small, ragged boys begged them for hand-outs. Grinning, beady-eyed men, spotting them as strangers, slipped up beside them and offered to guide them to various places of amusement.

Intent on getting through Hebron, the Israelites weren’t halted by salesmen, beggars or men who had more than guide service to

sell. They moved through the bazaar area and into the southern fringe of town. Joshua and Caleb, who were ahead, saw several armed helmeted men pour out of a nearby building and station themselves menacingly in the street.

“We can’t go this way!” Caleb whispered. “Those soldiers mean to block our path!”

It was obvious that the scouts had at last run into serious trouble, and just when they had almost completed their trip!



The twelve scouts were exploring all of Canaan, from the low, hot valleys to the cool mountain heights.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

SCOUTS REPORT SEEING GIANTS!

THE ISRAELITE scouts sent out by Moses had traveled by foot over much of Canaan. They had looped around to arrive at Hebron, a city not too far from Kadesh. The rose-red city of Kadesh was the scouts' starting point, where the twelve tribes were encamped and awaiting reports from the twelve-man expedition.

On leaving Hebron, the Israelites suddenly found themselves confronted by several soldiers blocking the narrow street.

"We can't turn back now," Joshua said in a low voice to Caleb. "If we turn back, they'll probably take after us!"

Giants!

As the scouts neared the soldiers, they were amazed to realize that some of them were almost twice as tall as ordinary men! The towering soldiers saw the expressions of growing unbelief on the faces of the scouts, who now were close enough to notice the hostility on the faces of the soldiers. Suddenly the scouts realized that it was only mock hostility. The giant men broke into loud, hoarse laughter and stepped aside to let the six pairs of Israelites continue down the street. It was evident that a favorite pastime of the soldiers—the giant descendants of Anak—was to playfully startle strangers who had never before seen such tall men. (Numbers 13:22.)

The scouts breathed sighs of relief and thankfulness as they left the laughing soldiers behind them. They kept on to the south — where they saw numerous other giant tribes—until they arrived at a fertile valley known as Eshcol, through which ran a small river. This was grape country and time for harvesting grapes. The

Israelites were astounded at the great size of the grape clusters.

"We were instructed to bring back samples of the produce of Canaan," Joshua reminded the men. "So far we have gathered only a few things, and our trip is nearly over. This is perhaps our last opportunity to take some of the unusual fruit growing here."

Not wanting to invade a private vineyard, the men cut down a large cluster of grapes apparently growing wild. They hung the cluster on a pole for two men to carry it between them back to Kadesh. The grapes weren't so heavy that two men were required to lift them. It was a matter of letting the massive cluster hang free so that it wouldn't be crushed. However, the bunch of grapes was all of two feet long, and each grape was as large as a plum!

The scouts also plucked healthy fruits and luscious figs from the area. Burdened with their increased loads, they turned southeast toward Kadesh.

They crossed the Arabah and arrived at Kadesh on the border of Edom just forty days from the time they had set out. Although many people went out to meet them and to ply them with questions, the scouts reported at once to Moses. Knowing that the people were anxious to learn what their spies had seen in Canaan, Moses later called for the people to assemble close to the tabernacle. (Numbers 13:23-25.)

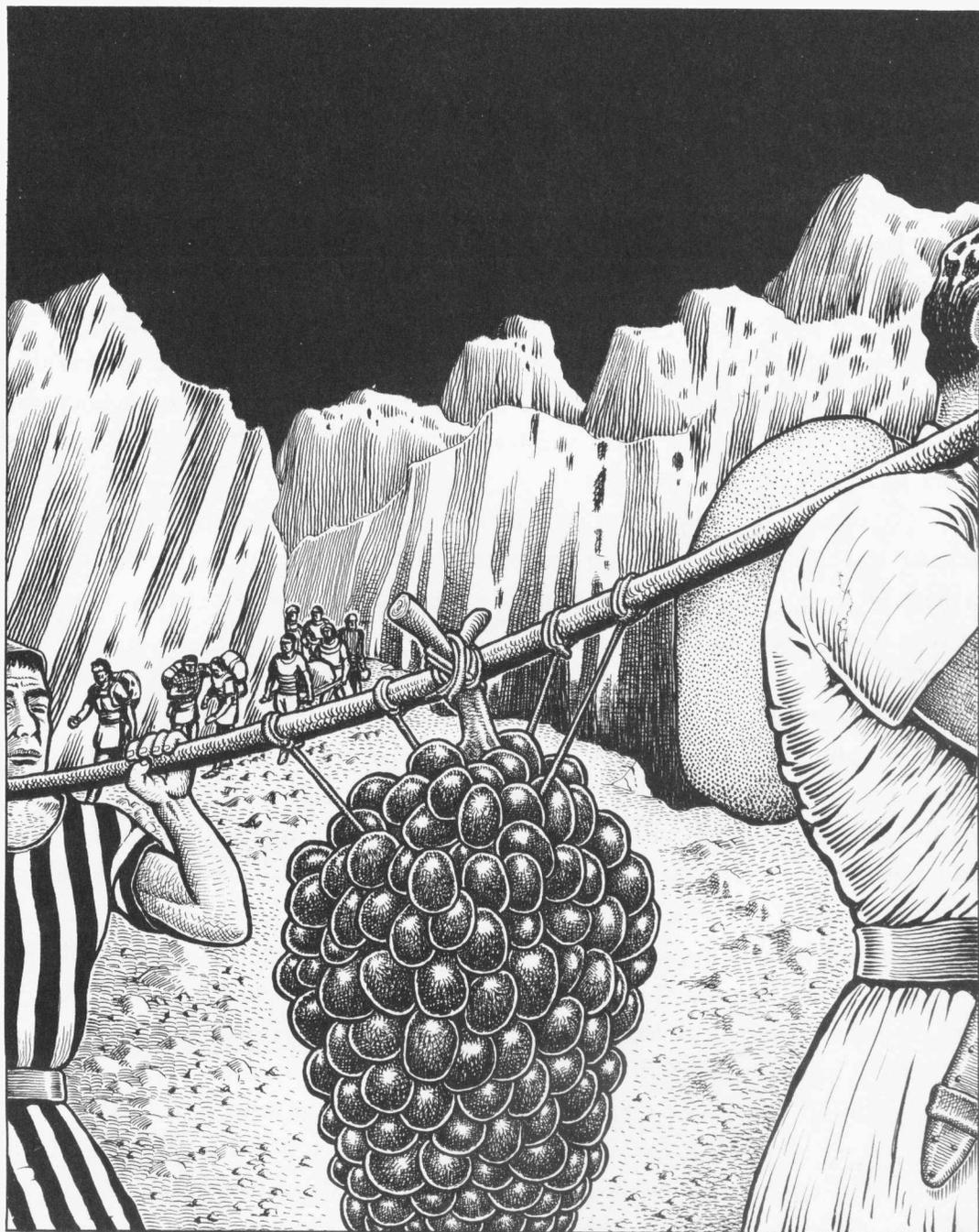
As a leader of the expedition, Joshua was asked first to give a public account of what had taken place. He came out on a high platform, so that the crowd could see him, and sketchily related what the men had seen and done.

Joshua's Report

"It is a good land," he concluded. "Large areas of it are very fertile, as many of you can see by this display of unusual produce. There is plenty of grazing country for our flocks and herds. We should thank God that all these good things are there for the taking when we move northward."

Meanwhile, all the other scouts except Caleb had gathered in a group and were earnestly talking. When Joshua had finished speaking, he asked any one of them to add to what had already been said. One scout, obviously chosen as a spokesman, came up to face Moses, Aaron and the throng of people.

"The land of Canaan is indeed fertile in some regions, just as Joshua has stated," the speaker said in a strong, clear voice. "However, when he spoke of our seeing a few very tall men, he failed to mention that all the people are very large and tall. He also left out the facts that all the cities have high, thick walls behind which are large, well-trained, powerful armies. It is foolish to even think of trying to enter Canaan. We would all be slaughtered!"



Bearing produce from Canaan, the scouts successfully returned to the rocky, mountainous area of Kadesh.

There was an awkward silence. Moses and Aaron, as well as most others, were greatly startled by what they had heard. Then the silence suddenly gave way to a growing murmur from the crowd. Joshua and Caleb exchanged anxious glances.

Caleb leaped on the platform and raised his arms for silence. The murmuring gradually subsided, but not completely.

"I ask you to hear me on this matter!" Caleb spoke out loudly. "This man whom you have just heard doesn't speak for all twelve of us. For some reason he has lied about the cities all having high walls, all the people being giants and all the armies being large and powerful. The truth is that God can surely overcome the inhabitants of Canaan for us!" (Numbers 13:26-33.)

The ten scouts quickly crowded onto the platform, shouting and gesturing.

"No! No!" they chorused. "This fellow is the one who isn't telling the truth!"

There was much confusion, both around the platform and throughout the crowd. After a few minutes Moses and his officers were fairly successful in restoring order. God does not like confusion.

"This has been a disgraceful exhibition, especially by men of your past good reputations," Moses said sternly to the ten scouts. "If you actually believe it would be a mistake to go into Canaan, then you must give more reasons than you have already stated, and with proof!"

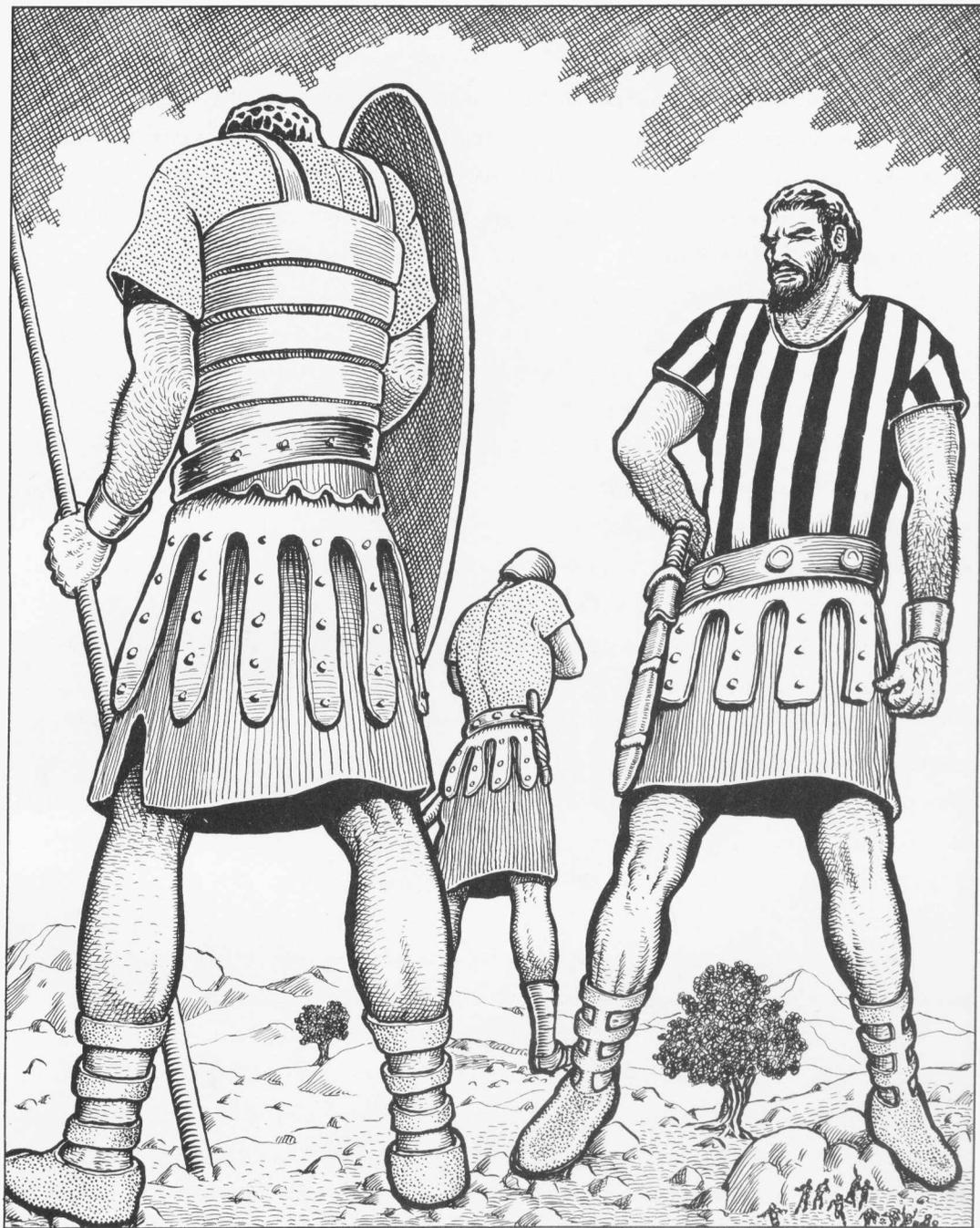
There was a quick consultation among the ten men, and again their spokesman stepped up to address the people.

"I'll admit that I didn't tell you exactly what conditions are in Canaan," the speaker shouted, "but neither did Joshua nor Caleb. The real truth is something none of us wanted to bring to you because it seemed cruel to fill you with complete dismay and disappointment. However, probably many of you won't believe what I am about to tell you."

Here the speaker paused, at the risk of being interrupted, so that the audience would be even more eager to hear his words. He was counting on Moses giving him a full chance to say what he had to say.

"Now here are the terrifying facts," he continued. "For some reason these two leaders probably won't back me up on these things. But nine other scouts will. In the first place, the climate of most of the land north of here is very bad. It has produced mostly desert territory. Water is scarce. Disease and pestilence have taken the lives of ordinary people like ourselves. The survivors—and they must number into many thousands—are all giants who are actually so tremendous that we were only as grasshoppers in their sight. They didn't pay any attention to us because they looked down on us as only insects. These people have descended from fierce Hamitic tribes. They are so mountainous and powerful that it would take only a few of them to stamp all of us into the ground!"

A great sound of discontent welled up from the crowd. At a command from



According to ten of the scouts, the Canaanites were so huge that the Israelites seemed as small as grasshoppers!

Moses, Joshua stood up to speak, but the growing noise from the people drowned out his words even to the nearest listeners.

“His lies have frightened the people!” Joshua said to Moses after leaving the

platform. "They don't even want to listen to me."

"Most of them know that they have listened to lies," Moses said. "They prefer to believe what isn't the truth so that they will have excuses to return to Egypt."

"Ten of my fellow scouts must be working with those who are trying to get the Israelites to turn back," Joshua remarked bitterly.

"It is very plain," Moses agreed. "This growing movement to try to return to Egypt is getting out of hand."

The Crowd Breaks Up

Moses soberly watched the yelling Israelites milling excitedly about, and shook his head in disappointment. In recent weeks, in spite of the trouble these people had given him, his hope had grown that his task of leading them to the promised land was about to end. An end to the journey now appeared about as possible as single-handedly herding millions of wild burros into a corral.

For a few moments he considered trying to address the people, to remind them how futile it would be to start back without God's help. But already the huge throng was breaking up. Officers were faithfully working to keep the crowd in order, but the people were too noisy and excited to listen to any more speeches.

Wailing, weeping and murmuring, the people milled around between camps and tents, loudly complaining that it would mean death to all if they were to set foot in what they referred to as a disease-ridden land of giants to the north. All night this noisy and childish exhibition went on.

Meanwhile, however, many thousands of the Israelites had no part in the demonstration.

By early morning many of the complainers were worked up into such a highly emotional state that they again formed into a crowd that advanced angrily toward the tabernacle. Some of the demonstrators went so far as to carry sticks and stones.

"We wish we had died in Egypt!" thousands of them yelled.

"We wish we had died in the desert!" other thousands chorused. "God has dragged us out to this miserable place only for the purpose of having us slain by giants! Our wives and our children will all die if we follow Moses any further!"

"We want to go back to Egypt!" was a common cry. "Let us choose a leader who knows what is best for us—one who knows the shortest and fastest route back to Egypt!" (Numbers 14:1-4.)

"We have already picked out those who can lead us!" some of the Israelites screamed. "Let us put down Moses and his officers so that our leaders can take over!"

Only the most rebellious and rabble-rousing dared suggest ousting Moses, and

not a great part of the Israelites fell in with such a suggestion of violence. However, it was plain to Moses that this unhappy situation could explode into a worse one within minutes. There was only one wise thing to do. Moses motioned to Aaron. The two of them mounted the platform. For a few seconds they silently regarded the clamoring crowd. Then they knelt down and bent over with their foreheads touching the floor of the platform. In this abject position they called on God to step in and take control of the people.

When the demonstrators saw their leaders bowing in prayer they quieted down to a low murmur.

Angered and shocked at the manner in which their fellow scouts had spoken and acted, Joshua and Caleb decided to take advantage of this quieter period to try once more to bring the truth to the people. Joshua once more went to the platform and walked out in front of Moses and Aaron.

"Fellow Israelites!" Joshua cried out. "I'm here again to assure you of what all twelve of us have witnessed—that Canaan is a good, productive land. There are no giants such as have been described to you, though there are some men who are several feet taller than our men. There is a good supply of water. We saw no unusual signs of disease or pestilence. Canaan is so much better than any land we have come through so far that it would be very foolish not to claim it. Let us not rebel against our Creator. Otherwise He might decide to withhold this promised land from us!"

People looked on with stony faces as Joshua stepped back and Caleb came forward to stand in front of the two men who were still prostrate.

"What Joshua has just told you is true!" Caleb shouted to the people. "God is offering us a wonderful future if only we obey Him. Surely He is already displeased by your attitude of refusal to go into Canaan and take what our Creator wants us to have for our own happiness. As for fearing the Canaanites, there is no reason for that. As long as God is with us, no people—even if they were all giants—can overcome us!"

As soon as Caleb ceased speaking, the murmuring from the crowd grew louder and louder. In spite of a number of alert guards surrounding the platform, the bolder and more excited ones in the crowd moved menacingly close. Out of the hubbub of shrieks and yells two chilling words became more and more distinct.

"Stone them! Stone them! Stone them!" (Numbers 14:5-10.)

Very soon the phrase became a monstrous chant from the lungs of the frenzied thousands. Still Caleb and Joshua stood on the platform with the kneeling Moses and Aaron.

CHAPTER FORTY

MOB ATTACKS MOSES

SUDDENLY the mob closed in, pressing the guards against the underpinning of the platform. A few small stones shot out of the crowd and bounced off the platform, where Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb stood.

Those who attempted to hurl heavier stones were hampered by the surging mass of human beings. A few men managed to squirm past the guards and climb onto the platform. They crouched around the four figures who were already there, eyeing them threateningly. It was evident that these intruders were waiting for more to join them for the purpose of seizing Caleb, Joshua, Moses and Aaron.

At that instant a blinding flash came from inside the tabernacle. Even though the curtains of the structure veiled its full brilliance, the brightness was so intense that people were temporarily blinded. A moment later an ear-splitting roar rumbled out of the tabernacle. The ground quaked as though a whole mountain had been dropped from the sky!

The intruders staggered off the platform and into the struggling mass surrounding it. The words "Stone them!" abruptly ceased from the crowd. The only sounds now were those of alarm in the frantic scramble to draw back from the platform and the tabernacle.

Realizing that God had intervened, Moses and Aaron gave thanks and got to their feet.

"Have the ten traitorous scouts arrested and brought to my tent," Moses instructed Joshua and Caleb. "I must go now to the tabernacle to talk with God."

At the tabernacle God asked Moses after he had knelt inside the tabernacle,

“How much longer will these people vex me with their evil ways? How many more signs must I give them to prove that I mean what I say? Now I should have nothing more to do with them except to blot them out of my sight forever. Then, starting with you, I should build up a greater and a mightier nation!”

Here is where the course of history would have been greatly changed if Moses had let his vanity get the best of him. With Israel wiped out, Moses would have claimed Abraham’s place as the “father of nations.”

“But if you destroy all Israel,” Moses replied, “the Egyptians shall hear of it. In fact, every nation on Earth will sooner or later know of it. Word has spread that you are the kind of God who dwells with His people, and Who leads them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When news goes abroad that Your people died in the desert, the nations will believe that You lacked the power to bring them safely into the land You promised to them. I beg you, God, to forgive these people of their sins, but I’m not asking you to let go unpunished those who have stirred the people into wanting to return to Egypt instead of going on into Canaan.”

There was a silence. It was painful to Moses, who couldn’t be certain how God would respond. He realized that his mentioning the preserving of God’s reputation in the eyes of other nations—especially Egypt—wasn’t necessarily a strong point. God, with His perfect memory and awareness, wasn’t in need of being reminded. Finally the Creator replied.

“Because you have prayed as you have for the Israelites, I shall forgive their sins as a nation. I shall not make a complete end of them. My reputation for mercy and power and glory will one day be known in every nation of the world.” (Numbers 14:11-21.)

Moses was greatly relieved and heartened to hear these words from the Creator. He remained for a little while with his forehead to the ground. But just as he raised his head and was about to utter his deep thanks, God’s voice boomed out at him again.

“I have just told you that I am willing to forgive the sins of the Israelites. At the same time, however, I will refuse them entrance into the promised land because they have broken their covenant with me. This means that those who have rebelled against me shall never come into Canaan! They shall die in the desert! This curse doesn’t apply to those who are under twenty years of age—the very ones whose fathers complained that they would surely die in the desert because I couldn’t protect them. Neither does it apply to obedient people such as Joshua and Caleb. But it does mean that most of Israel shall wander forty years in the mountains and deserts before reaching the land they have refused and hated. That is one year for every day required for the scouts to search Canaan!”

"But we have already spent most of two years coming to Canaan," Moses said. "Do you mean that we are to spend forty years going to a place that is only a few hours distant?"

"Inasmuch as you have already been nearly two years on the way," God replied, "it will require full thirty-eight more. That is My judgment on Israel because of their rebellion."

Just a few minutes previously Moses had felt as though a great weight had been lifted from him when he was assured that the people would not be suddenly blotted out. Now the dismal outlook of thirty-eight more years of leading the Israelites was something he could scarcely face.

"Where must we go from here?" Moses inquired wearily.

"You must leave tomorrow and start southward through the Arabah by Mt. Seir," God answered. "You must journey almost to the Gulf of Aqaba and then turn southwest into the desert where so many wanted to die. That is where the people over twenty years of age are going to die!" (Numbers 14:22-35.)

Told by God to carry this depressing information to the people, Moses and Aaron returned to the platform. A vast, murmuring throng was still present. Joshua and Caleb hurried to join Moses and Aaron.

The Ten Scouts Slain

"We didn't have to arrest the ten scouts," Joshua reported, pointing to a knot of people crowded around something on the ground. "They're all dead!"

"Dead?" Moses repeated in surprise. "How could it be that all of them would die at the same time?"

"We couldn't find out," Caleb explained. "Just a little while ago they were seen talking together over there. An instant later they were lifeless on the ground."

Moses quickly realized that God had taken their lives because of their false reports, but there wasn't time just then to be concerned about the scouts and their families. Moses had to tell the people at once what was in store for them. (Numbers 14:36-38.)

When he passed on to them what God had spoken, the people received the startling news with mixed emotions. Some were speechless. Others moaned and loudly complained. A small part of them were jubilant because of hoping to return all the way to Egypt. Most of them, sobered by the strange, sudden death of the ten scouts, were quite shaken by the outlook for the future. Many thought God wasn't fair. Only a fraction of them were willing to admit to themselves that by their bad conduct they had spoiled a wonderful future and had brought hardship down on their children.

“Remember,” Moses concluded, “that from now on we no longer have the priceless blessing of God’s guidance and protection. We are like a flock without a shepherd. Only yesterday God wanted us to go into Canaan. If we had obeyed, God would have scattered any Canaanites who might have tried to prevent us. But now we don’t even dare stay here lest the people just over the mountains to the north come down and slaughter us! Be ready at dawn, therefore, to move southwestward through the Mt. Seir range and start south by the highway of the Red Sea!”

Rebels Plot By Night

That night was a restless one for Israel. The more the people thought about God’s ruling to turn back, the more they wondered how they could make up for their sins. In fact, certain ones secretly met to plan what to do and how to organize the people into doing it.

Meanwhile, the Israelites were not the only ones aware of their blazing, all-night campfires. Alert and unfriendly eyes were peering down from mountain heights to the north, watching to see what the horde of people in the desert valley would do next.

Moses, too, was restless. He spent much of the night in thought and prayer. Very early in the morning he dropped asleep from exhaustion, only to be awakened by Joshua.

“People are breaking camp already!” Joshua exclaimed. “It isn’t even daybreak, but there are rumors that thousands are leaving!”

Moses stepped out of his tent. Most of the campfires were burning low at this hour, and it wasn’t possible, in the dense pre-dawn darkness, to see what was taking place. But in the still, cool air came the faint jangle of metal and the voices of men shouting commands to their shepherd dogs. Moses knew the sound well, and he sensed that a huge caravan was moving out. But why? And where was it headed?

“Should we call every available officer to try to stop them?” Joshua asked.

“No,” Moses answered, shaking his head solemnly. “We’re already in enough trouble without shedding blood among ourselves. Just try to find out where these early risers think they are going.”

Aaron joined Moses before Joshua could report back. The light of dawn streamed in rapidly from the east, making plain to Moses and Aaron a long column of thousands, with their flocks and herds, slowly moving out of the camps. Moses was hopeful that he would discover the column moving through a defile to the southwest—the direction in which God had said they should go.

To Moses’ dismay the light of dawn showed that the wide line of people was moving up a steep mountain pass to the north. This was the road to Canaan! This was the way these people had refused to take only hours before. Having been warned

not to go in that direction, thousands of the Israelites were disobeying by sneaking off that way. (Verses 40-43.)

"The Amalekites and Canaanites are just beyond that mountain!" Moses exclaimed, clapping his hands to his head. "Probably they're armed and waiting! This could mean a terrible slaughter for all those people!"

Moses and those with him watched in discouragement as the thousands of Israelites and their flocks dwindled from sight in the distant pass.

"Even if all the rest of our armed men went after them," Moses said, shaking his head, "it wouldn't make much difference. God will not protect those who have departed nor those who would go to their rescue." (Numbers 14:40-43.)

Moses then instructed his officers to see that the tabernacle was packed and ready to move, and that the people should start breaking camp at once. He knew there was a possibility that their enemies, undoubtedly hidden in the mountains, would stage an attack on the camp.

Before the sun was very high, the remaining greater part of the Israelites was moving through the defiles to the southwest. Many a person left Kadesh before he wanted to, however. Thousands had hoped to remain long enough to receive some word of what had happened to friends and relatives who had departed toward Canaan.



Alert and unfriendly eyes looked down from the mountains to observe the Israelites.

Meanwhile, the Canaan-bound Israelites and their plodding flocks and herds were close to the top of the pass that led northward from Kadesh. The way was rather narrow. Steep boulders lined the rough and rocky path over which the twelve scouts had passed only hours before.



Rebels Are Ambushed

Suddenly hundreds of armed men leaped out from behind the trailside boulders! Shouting as though demented, they came running and sliding down the slanting sides of the ravine that formed the pass, and charged at the startled Israelites with spears and swords. Hundreds of Israelites died even before they could get their weapons ready for action. Shrieking women and children turned and tried to run back down the trail, only to trip helplessly over one another. To add to the confusion, the herds stampeded and the flocks swarmed wildly in all directions.

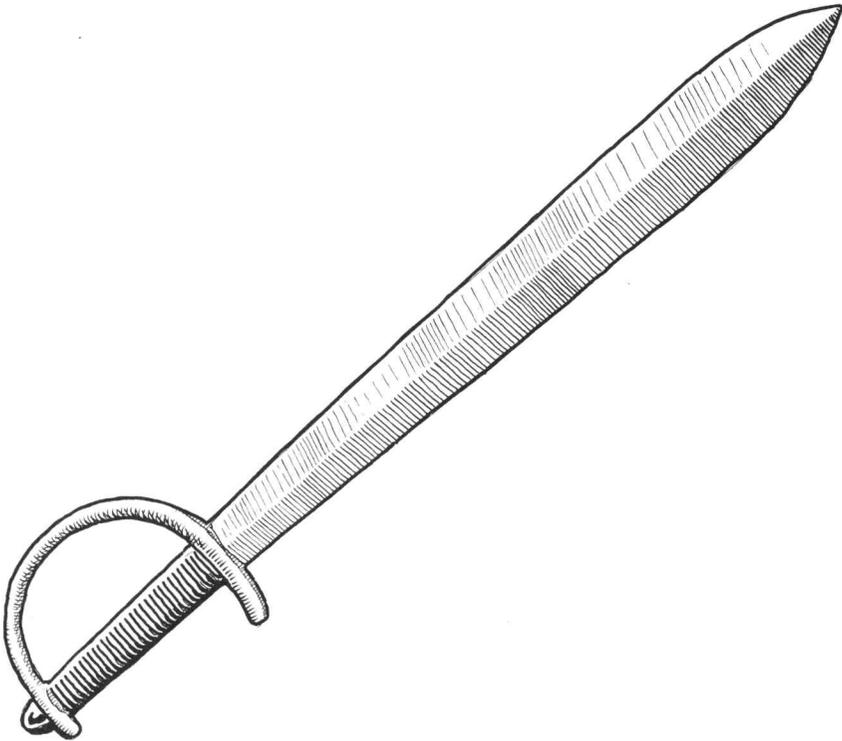
The main body of Israelites gradually began to move backward. But by now a great number of the enemy—Canaanites and Amalekites—had almost sealed off

The Canaanites leaped from behind boulders and fiercely closed in on the surprised Israelites.

their retreat by thronging across the pass below and south of the agitated column of Israelites. The Israelites had walked squarely into a vast death trap! (Verses 44-45.)

The slaughter that resulted was frightful. Even animals fell by sword and spear, though most of them escaped into the mountains. The people were not so fortunate. Within only minutes the pass was littered with the bodies of men and women. But because their numbers were so much greater than those of their attackers, part of them escaped and fled back toward Kadesh. The Amalekites and Canaanites took after them, pursuing some of them quite a distance to the south. Most of those who escaped hid among the rocks until the enemy was gone. Then they set out to try to catch up with the main body of Israelites that had departed to the southwest from Kadesh, which was also called Bene-Jaakan—named after the sons of Jaakan or Akan, black folk who then lived there. (Numbers 33:31 and Genesis 36:27.)

About sundown the Israelites made camp at a place called Hor-hagidgad, which was a few miles southwest of Kadesh. Hours later, when most campfires were either out or very low, there was great excitement from the north side of the camp. Weary, footsore escapers were beginning to arrive. Many who returned needed their wounds dressed. Some died. Others gave horrifying accounts of the bloody affair.



CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

REBELS CHALLENGE GOD'S GOVERNMENT

THE REBELS who had escaped the Amalekite ambush were a pitiful sight indeed.

"You who have been spared," Moses told them, "should thank God that He chose some to be able to return here so that the rest of us can be reminded what can happen to people who don't have God's protection. Otherwise, you would now be captives or dead."

As was common with the Egyptians and not uncommon with the Israelites, there was much weeping and wailing and loud expressions of sorrow and regret the rest of the night. A part of the people seemed to be getting a picture of how bleak and uncertain their lives would be without God's guidance and protection.

The cloud and the pillar of fire were not removed, because it wasn't God's intention to entirely forsake Israel. (Deuteronomy 1:31-33; Nehemiah 9:19-21.)

It was a case of the Israelites breaking their agreement with God, which meant that God was no longer bound to give them the help, guidance and protection that He had promised to give if they would obey Him.



After the manner of Egyptians, the Israelites wept and wailed all night because of those who had been killed trying to reach Canaan.

From then on for nearly forty years God decided the movements of Israel by such things as the lack of abundance of water, the presence or absence of grass for their animals, the state of health of the people and many other factors.

They camped at Hor-hagidgad only long enough to lick their wounds and then continued southward through several more stopping places to a spot called Jotbathah. (Numbers 33:32-33.) From there they moved on south to Ebronah, and from Ebronah they journeyed once again back into the desert area west of the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba and northeast of Mt. Sinai. This was the area where, on their way north from Mt. Sinai, so many of them had complained so harshly against God. (Numbers 11:1-3.) They had said that they would rather die there than go on. This was the place where a great part of them would eventually die.

Sabbath Broken Again

Fall had arrived, and the nights in the desert were becoming colder. Campfire material was rather scarce. For some, the collecting of fuel was fast becoming a full-time job. The people had to go farther and farther out from the camps to obtain it if they stayed in one spot very many days.

One Sabbath a man was seen spending the day busily gathering dried sticks and branches far outside the camps. Most Israelites respected the Fourth Commandment and feared to labor on the Sabbath. Thinking that perhaps the man wasn't aware that it was the seventh day of the week, a few people went out to warn him.

"I don't care what day it is!" the man growled, hardly looking at them. "I worked all week getting food for my family and animals. There wasn't time to gather fuel, and so I have to do it now. If God wants me to get all my work done before the end of the week, He'll have to add more days to it. Meanwhile, I'm not going to just sit in my tent and twiddle my thumbs just because some fancifully robed priest says it's wrong to support my family on the Sabbath!"

This matter was reported back to



A man was reported to be spending the Sabbath gathering wood for his fire.

camp. Before long two officers went out to talk to the man.

"You are an evil example to others," the officers told him. "People who see you freely laboring all Sabbath without instant punishment might try to do likewise. Then they would receive the punishment you will eventually receive."

The fuel-gatherer glowered at the officers and swung his load of sticks from one shoulder to the other.

"Why should I be punished for trying to keep my family warm?" he snapped. "I can decide what is best for me and mine without any meddling from you or God!"

This arrogant display of rebellion brought on a hasty arrest by the officers, but it was no small task to take the man back to camp. He struggled and fought and cursed all the way.

When Moses was told of the matter, he wasn't certain just what should be done. Many Israelites had secretly wished the Sabbath were just another workday. But none of them so far had outwardly shown such strong feeling against God and authority as this man had shown.

Moses knew that this matter would quickly become known by all the people. He also realized that if they found that one could succeed in being so defiant about breaking the Sabbath without quick and heavy punishment, numberless Israelites might attempt the same thing.

This was a problem Moses had to take to God. As usual, God quickly made clear to Moses what was to be done.

Next morning, acting on orders from Moses, officers led the offender back into the desert. A huge crowd silently followed, constantly enlarged by a flow of grim-faced people who had heard what was going on. Acting on instructions from Moses, they stripped the offender of his outer clothes, then stoned him to death. (Numbers 15:32-36.)

The apostle Paul explains in Romans 13:1-7 that God ordained that criminals be punished. God takes no pleasure in seeing wicked men die (Ezekiel 33:11), but He knows that law-breakers are better dead than left around to harm others or lead others to do evil. God in His mercy sees that evil men are better off punished than left alive making themselves and others miserable and unhappy.

Discontentment Grows Again

Not long after the Israelites left Kadesh, another wretched event took place that resulted in another great disaster. This situation developed because a state of envy existed in the minds of some of the people who wanted to be priests or who wanted cer-

tain of their friends to be priests and leaders instead of Levi's family.

Foremost among such men was a man named Korah, one of Levi's great grandsons and a first cousin to Moses and Aaron. He strongly felt that he should have been chosen for a high office. In fact, he had the idea that he should be in Moses' position as head of Israel. He was joined in this ill attitude by three Reubenites, Dathan, Abiram and On. They were of the opinion that Moses was favoring his family too much, and was not properly distributing the offices of authority. These men thought all the congregation should have a voice in government. (Numbers 16:1-3.)

For a long time these men had been seething with discontent and planning how they could move in to take over the priesthood for themselves. This scheme against Moses was the same as scheming against God (Numbers 26:9), but these men were desperate for power. Gradually they managed to persuade high-ranking Israelites that their cause was right. Eventually two hundred and fifty Israelite leaders agreed to join these influential, smooth-talking schemers in the hope that all would move into higher rank with greater power and more income.

One morning when Israel was camping at a stopping place on the way southward, all these ambitious men gathered before Moses' tent. With Korah, their best speaker and worst schemer leading them, they came to demand of Moses that some changes be made in the priesthood. When Moses was told that a crowd of high-ranking men had come to demand some changes in government, he wasn't surprised. He had sensed for weeks that this kind of trouble was brewing. Now, as he came out of his tent, he expected to see only a handful of men. He was rather startled to see more than two hundred and fifty, and he was considerably upset to recognize so many trusted men of high rank among those who now stood before him with unfriendly expressions. (Numbers 16:2.)

"Why are you here?" Moses asked.

Korah Wants More Authority

"We are here because we believe you are taking on too much power for one man," Korah answered. "You and your priests act as though you are holier than any of the rest of us. If we are God's chosen people, then *all* of us are holy. That means that all of us have equal rights in matters of government. However, you use your authority to put men who are your friends in the best positions in government. (Verse 3.) We demand that you yield some of those offices to the congregation so we can choose our own officials." Korah, being a good speaker, knew he could be elected to a high office if the people were allowed to choose their own leaders.

What Korah really was after was complete control of all Israel. Leaders of

nations have always been the objects of envy by greedy men. Seizing leadership has always been a selfish, bloody game, with the greatest losers generally turning out to be the citizens. Even Israel, God's chosen nation, wasn't free of this kind of ambitious trouble makers.

Moses was shocked by this blunt demand from Korah. He could see that the men weren't just bluffing. It was plain that they were willing to go to extremes to gain what they had set out to do. Setting armed soldiers on them would only mean bloodshed. Besides, most of the Israelites would sympathize with victims of the soldiers, since they were popular, well-known leaders, and the situation would become worse.

Without even going back into the privacy of his tent, Moses knelt forward with his head to the ground and asked God for help. A few of those assembled became uncomfortable as they stood in the presence of a humble man calling on his Creator for aid. They included On, one of the Reubenites. He wanted no more of the matter, and slipped out of the scene. Other onlookers merely smiled at what they considered an attempt by Moses to gain their sympathy by appearing pitifully pious.

"This is no time for a show, Moses!" Korah called out. "Stand up and explain why at least some of us shouldn't be priests in place of some of those who are now in service merely because it was your whim to put them there." Korah, a Levite, already had a high office, but he wanted an even higher office—the priesthood that was given to Aaron. (Verses 8-11.)

Moses slowly came to his feet. Those who watched him couldn't know that God had just inspired him to know what to say. Ignoring Korah, Moses addressed Dathan and Abiram.

Moses Tries to Save Rebels

"Before you carry this matter further, let us discuss it in my tent," Moses said, thus giving them an opportunity to separate from Korah.

"There is no reason to talk with you," Dathan and Abiram replied. "We refuse to listen to your excuses for leading us from the good land of Egypt and into a desert where we are to die. Your only aim has plainly been to control the people, no matter what becomes of them." (Verses 12-14.)

These untruthful charges upset Moses. He was tempted to summon soldiers to slay every rebel before him. But he knew this was not according to God's plan of dealing with them, and he controlled himself.

"You have started something you will have trouble finishing," Moses declared to Korah in a voice that reached the whole crowd. "Your belief that just anyone can be in the priesthood without being ordained by God is not a true one. However, if all

of you insist on trying to force your way into such offices, every one of you should be here tomorrow morning with incense and with a censer filled with hot coals. Aaron and his sons will also be here with their censers. God will make it known which ones he will choose as priests and their helpers." (Verses 4-7.)

Korah smiled when he heard this. He lacked respect for God, and he felt that he had bluffed Moses into giving in to the extent that he and his followers could gain a foothold in wresting power from Moses.

Rebels Challenge Moses

Next morning the crowd of two hundred and fifty, plus Korah, Dathan and Abiram, appeared before the tabernacle. Every man carried a censer filled with hot coals to show his readiness to go at once into priestly service. Korah had spread the word throughout the camps that he was going to challenge Moses, and that there would be a showdown to free the people from what was wrongfully referred to as Moses' unfair leadership. As a result, a growing crowd of curious people built up behind Korah's men.

Moses came out to face Korah. With him were Aaron and Aaron's sons, all of whom held censers with hot coals. The elders of Israel were also present.

There were minutes of strained silence. God hadn't told Moses what to do beyond asking the men to show up with censers. Moses didn't know what would happen next, but he was certain that God would somehow make it very clear which group would be in power from then on.

Suddenly there was a brilliant flash from the tabernacle, followed by a second and a third. It was plain to most that God was in the tabernacle. (Verse 19.) Some of them drew back, fearful of what might happen. Even a part of Korah's followers appeared to be ready to leave, but Korah told them to stand firm. Korah had become so rebellious that he actually doubted that God would hinder him and his men from gaining leadership of Israel, and the blinding display of light from within the tabernacle didn't move him from his ambition.

Realizing that God wanted to give them some message, Moses and Aaron stepped



"You have purposely led us out into the desert to die!" Dathan and Abiram accused Moses.

away from the others and approached the tabernacle.

“Remove yourselves and the priests and elders from these people who face you,” God commanded in a voice that only the two men could hear. “I want you at a safe distance because I intend to wipe all the others out of existence!” (Verses 20-21.)

Moses shuddered at this alarming remark from God. The Creator had threatened to do the same thing before, but Moses had begged him not to, and God answered Moses’ prayer. There was nothing to do now but again ask God to spare the people. Moses and Aaron bowed down in fervent prayer.

“Look at him!” Korah exclaimed to those about him. “He’s trying again to gain the sympathy of the people by appearing pious!”

On the contrary, Moses wasn’t concerned at that moment what the people thought. He was concerned for their lives, and he pleaded with God not to be angry with many people because of the evil deeds of a few. (Verse 22.)

God Spares the People

“I shall do this much,” God said. “I shall spare the congregation if you can succeed in getting the people back to their homes and away from the tents where Korah, Dathan and Abiram live. Any who go near the homes of those three men will risk losing their lives.”

Encouraged by this merciful statement from God, Moses sent his officers out to warn the crowd to break up and return to their tents, and not to go near the tents of Korah, Abiram and Dathan. Slowly and a bit unwillingly the people sauntered away.

“You said that God would choose His priests if we would assemble with censers,” Korah called out to Moses. “You have only proved to the people that you are not a man of your word, because nothing has happened. Tomorrow we shall return. The people will think this matter over, and tomorrow they will be ready to back us up in what should be done about your authority.”

“You should remember this in the meantime,” Moses replied. “If you live till tomorrow, then you can know that I will not continue to be the leader of the Israelites.”

This strange remark was ignored by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who returned to their respective homes, which were close together on the south side of the Tabernacle. (Numbers 2:10 and 3:29.) Korah felt that he had made another successful step, and that it would be only a matter of a day or two before the mass of Israelites would swing over to his side. As for his two hundred and fifty followers, they also left and went back to their various camps.

Later, Moses and Aaron and the elders went to make certain that people were

not congregated around the homes of the three main offenders. They found their residences free of visitors, which was as God wanted it to be. Moses then warned them that because they persisted in a scheme to take over the government, God would cause the ground to open up and swallow them. (Verses 23-30.)

Dathan and Abiram came out of their tents, along with their wives and children, to hear what more Moses had to say.

"Now he's trying to threaten us with an earthquake," Dathan scornfully shouted to Abiram. "Can you think of anything more fantastic?"

"I'll believe it only when it happens—and maybe not even then," Abiram shouted back with a grin.

Too Late to Repent!

"We have given these men fair warning," Moses said to those with him. "Perhaps God would spare them if they would repent, but since they refuse to repent, it's obviously too late now. Let us leave here before something dreadful happens."

Almost as soon as their backs were turned there was a growing rumble from within the Earth. The ground trembled, then heaved upward directly between the tents of Abiram and Dathan and the tent of Korah, which was close by in another camp!



Korah smiled to himself, certain that he was well on the way to take over the leadership of Israel.



The ground near the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram began to heave upward!

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

“THE EARTH OPENED ITS MOUTH!”

SCREAMING, terrorized people of all three families—Korah, Dathan and Abiram—rushed wildly and aimlessly in all directions. Then the quivering mound of ground suddenly collapsed and fell back into a deep, yawning chasm! Tons of soil and rock slipped off the vertical sides of this horrifying hole and thundered down into dark oblivion, taking people, tents, animals and most everything that belonged to Korah, Dathan and Abiram. (Numbers 16:31-33 and 26:10.) It was as though a gigantic mouth had opened in the Earth’s crust for the one purpose of swallowing the rebellious men and their possessions!

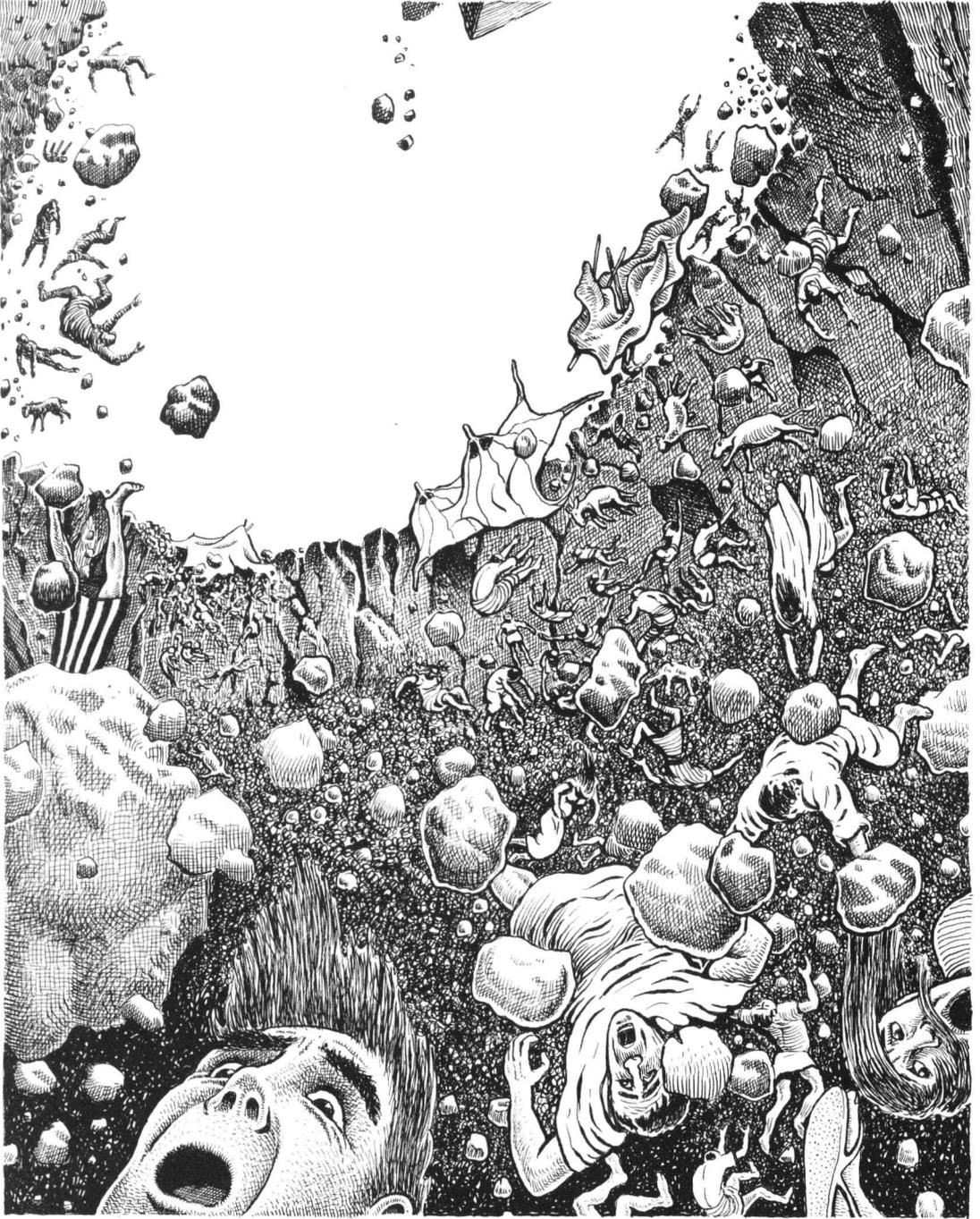
Children Miraculously Escape

The only ones spared in this unusual catastrophe were the children. (Numbers 26:11.) God miraculously saved their lives by causing them to run in the directions in which they could escape. That way God could keep His promise to take all the children safely into the Promised Land. (Numbers 14:31 and Deuteronomy 1:39.)

For a few seconds the ground thrashed and rolled, churning the victims into the black depths. Then the sides of the pit crashed together with a mighty roar, dirt and sand spewing high into the sky in a dusty cloud. The pit closed so firmly and so evenly that there was little evidence left to show that three homes, their families and all their flocks had peacefully existed there only a few seconds previously. God had struck with such quick punishment that the victims were both slain and buried in one devastating event!

This calamity was witnessed by a horde of inquisitive Israelites who madly scat-

tered in horror from the scene of destruction, fearful that the ground would open up again and swallow all of them. (Numbers 16:34.) People and tents were trampled



People, animals and tents plunged into the yawning chasm!

in the chaotic mass stampede to flee from where the Earth had opened and closed so suddenly.

Among those who fled were the two hundred and fifty men who had followed Korah and who had brought their censers to see if God would choose them as priests. There were many among them who had begun to regret going along with Korah. But when they witnessed the dreadful end of their champion, they were filled with terror. Most of them fell in with the shocked people streaming away from the scene of destruction.

Even though they were soon scattered among thousands of others, all two hundred and fifty men suddenly met death by bolts of fire, shooting down from the sky. (Verse 35.) People around them shrieked in abject fear as they saw the bodies of Korah's followers burst into dazzling flames, glow brightly and then shrivel into masses of charred shapeless coals.

Later, God told Moses that one of Aaron's sons, Eleazar, should gather up all the censers carried by those destroyed men because the censers had been consecrated for priestly service.

"The metals in those censers have been hallowed for service to Me," God explained. "Save them so that they will be used in forming special plates with which to cover the altar of burnt offerings. Then let those plates be a reminder to the people that no one except the descendants of Aaron is to offer incense before Me. Anyone who does otherwise will be subject to the fate of Korah and those who followed him with their foolish ambitions." (Verses 36-40; II Chronicles 26:14-21; and Hebrews 5:4.)

Many of the Israelites who had fled from the scene of terror didn't stop until they had reached the bases of the mountains that were not far distant. Most of them gradually returned to their tents that same night, however, after it seemed evident that there probably wouldn't be another horrible opening of the ground. Nevertheless, there was little sleep that night for many who vividly remembered the terrible events of that day.

Next Morning—

Next morning, however, the general attitude of the people began to swing back to that of their usual rebellion. There were still many who wanted to see Moses and Aaron lose leadership. They spread tales that the earthquake and the sky fire of the day before were brought about by some kind of terrible magic. They blamed Moses and Aaron for using the magic to kill all those who had died.

This foolish gossip caught on like fire in a windy field of dry grass. By afternoon

a sullen and growing crowd was milling around close to Moses' tent. Moses was dismayed when he came out of his tent and the crowd began to shout.

"You have murdered the people who should have been put in God's service!" they chanted. (Numbers 16:41.)

The attitude of the people in the crowd showed that at least part of them actually doubted that the events of the day before were entirely God's doing. Otherwise, they should have feared to make such a strong, untrue accusation. At first Moses thought that only those gathered before his tent were blaming him for what had happened. He was more distressed when his officers began bringing in reports of people talking accusingly from all parts of the camps.

Moses went back into his tent to confer with Aaron, leaving the shouting crowd to be handled, if it were possible, by loyal Israelite officers. As soon as Moses entered his tent the crowd quickly became silent.

"The cloud is covering the tabernacle!" someone outside shouted excitedly. "A bright light is glowing from inside the tabernacle!" (Verse 42.)

Moses and Aaron knew that this meant that God wanted to talk to them. They hurried out of the tent, strode swiftly to the tabernacle and prostrated themselves before the piercing light.

"Get out of this vicinity at once!" God spoke to them. "I intend to snuff out the lives of all these people because of their sinful attitudes, their ugly disrespect!"

Moses and Aaron were very fearful for all Israel when they heard these words from God. On their knees, with their foreheads bowed all the way to the ground, they begged Him to be merciful and spare the people.

But even while they prayed, an officer rode in from an outlying part of one of the camps to announce that people were falling dead by the hundreds where he had just been. The news spread throughout the crowd, which then began to break up. Those who didn't hurriedly leave started to moan and groan so loudly that Moses and Aaron were roused from their praying.

When Moses heard what was happening, he was more fearful than ever. "God has already started to wipe out Israel with some kind of terrible plague!" he exclaimed to Aaron. "Perhaps God's wrath will subside if we humble ourselves by making a special atonement for the people. Take a censer, get hot coals from the altar and some incense and hurry out among the stricken people with it!"

Aaron quickly did as Moses commanded. He ran all the way to the camp where the deaths were taking place, and elbowed his way through knots of excited, shouting, moaning people who were hurrying in all directions.

"Don't go near them!" Aaron heard someone shout, and saw a man pointing a

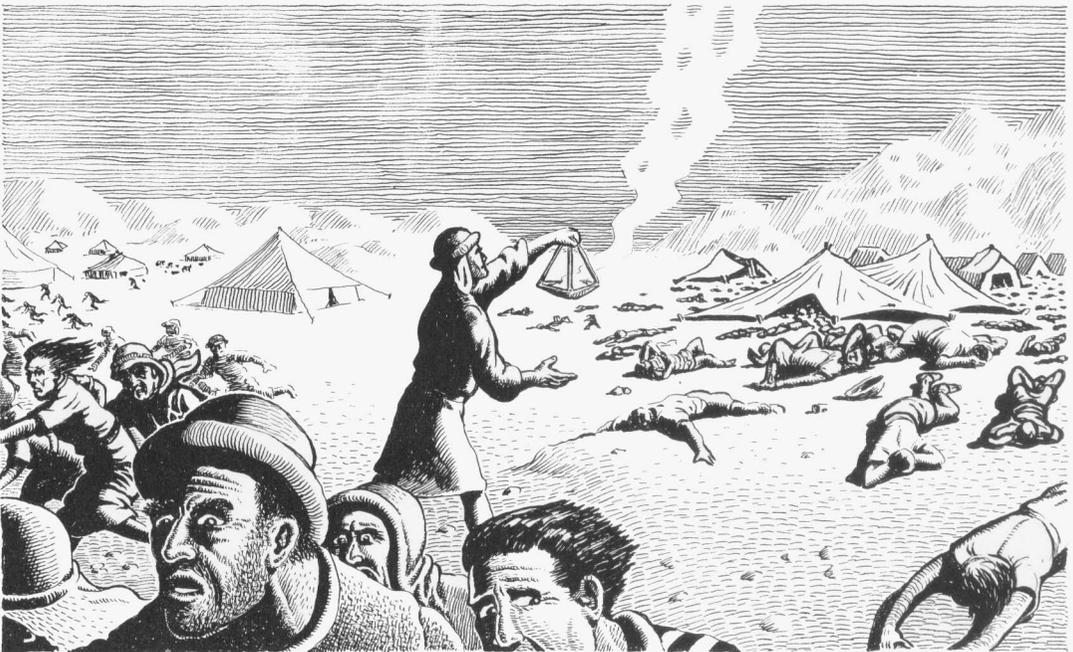
trembling hand at some figures gasping on the ground. "They have some awful disease that is causing them to suddenly choke to death! It's spreading to other people!" (Verses 43-46.)

Aaron quickly scanned the scene of horror before him. People were strewn everywhere. Some were motionless. Others were tossing and struggling, clawing feverishly at their own throats. Most of those attempting to flee from the dying masses were stumbling to the ground, only minutes later to fall victims to the mysterious force that was causing people's throats to tighten shut.

Aaron's Prayer of Faith

Realizing that God was dealing with these people, Aaron stepped into the area between the dead and those who fled. He held his censer up and sprinkled incense on the glowing coals. As the perfumed smoke drifted upward, he uttered in deep sincerity a prayer for God to forgive the Israelites and stop the plague.

All around him people were stumbling down, overcome by the throat-clutching plague. But when Aaron finished praying and looked about, he saw that none of those fleeing were falling to the ground. They were leaving the dead far behind. It was plain to Aaron that God was allowing the people to escape, and that meant that the plague



Aaron hurried to the area between the dead and the living and held up his censer.

was stopped! (Verses 47-48.)

As a result of the faith of Moses and Aaron, God had decided at the last moment to spare the people. If Moses and Aaron hadn't earnestly prayed to Him, the whole history of Israel and the world would have been altered!

This is one of the outstanding examples of all time of how answered prayer can change the course of history. There have been many other times—more than most people realize. God is always ready to listen to the appeals of those who faithfully obey Him.

However, God is not what some might term a soft-hearted push-over. There is more love and mercy in His character than human beings can understand, but that mercy is tempered by judgment and justice. God's mercy extends in much greater measure than we can imagine to those who are willing to let God rule them. But He does punish the wicked for their own ultimate good.

Once again a great number of Israelites were sobered by their close brush with death, though far from all of them realized just how near they had come to being completely wiped out.

It was no small task to remove the victims of the short-lived plague. 14,700 bodies were taken from the camp and buried at a distance in the wilderness sand. This figure did not include any who were taken because of the rebellion of Korah and his supporters. (Verses 49-50.)

All this loss of life had come about mostly because of the greedy desire of ambitious men to take over the high offices of the nation. Although God had performed astounding miracles to show that the wrong people wouldn't be allowed in the priesthood, there were still men who coveted those high positions, and many more who were yet to be convinced that the Levites weren't to be replaced by others outside their tribe.

One More Miracle

God wanted to settle this issue once and for all, by performing one more miracle in which a few leaders would have a part. He was now going to convince the last of the doubters.

Carrying out instructions from God, Moses commanded each of the twelve tribal princes to bring him the official staff or rod of his respective tribe. These rods had been in the various families for a long time. They had been fashioned from straight tree limbs that had become hard, seasoned and polished. The rod for the tribe of Levi was the one used by Moses in Egypt to perform miracles. It was later presented to Aaron.

On each of the rods was inscribed the name of the prince of the tribe to which it belonged. Aaron's name was inscribed on his staff for the tribe of Levi. In the

presence of the princes Moses took all the rods and placed them in the tabernacle close to the ark. (Numbers 17:1-7.)

“Tomorrow I shall go back after the rods,” Moses told the leaders and the crowd behind them. “One of those rods, even though they are actually nothing but hard, dry sticks, will tomorrow be budded out as though it were a green branch. The rod that is budded will indicate in which tribe the priesthood will exist from now on!”

There were smiles and expressions of doubt on all the faces except Aaron’s. The tabernacle was guarded all that night. Next morning when Moses brought the rods out of the tabernacle for inspection, those expressions of doubt turned to that of amazement.

All the rods were the same as when they had been put in the tabernacle the day before; that is, except the staff with Aaron’s name on it representing the tribe of Levi. It was studded with live limbs ending in tender buds, green leaves, reddish blossoms and even a few almonds ready to pick! (Verses 8-9.)

“Now deny the evidence that God wants the priesthood to remain only in the tribe of Levi!” Moses told the astonished leaders. Heads nodded in silent agreement as the crowd broke up. At God’s command, Moses put Aaron’s rod back in the ark of the covenant as a stern reminder to would-be rebels. From that time on there were no more great efforts to take over the priesthood. (Verses 10-11 and Hebrews 9:4.)

The people were so impressed by this latest miracle that they told Moses they finally realized that they didn’t dare go anywhere near the tabernacle in an effort to get the priesthood because God would slay them all if they did. (Numbers 17:12-13.)



The doubters were silenced.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

ON TO CANAAN AGAIN!

GOD SPOKE to Aaron once again during those trying 38 years of wandering. This time it was to remind him of several very important matters. One was the subject of tithing.

God Explains Tithing

A tithe is a tenth part of anything, especially the tenth of one's increase, whether it be in wage income, livestock or crops. A tenth part of anyone's increase belongs to God.

God uses it for His work. In Old Testament times the Levites did His physical work. So God paid them for their work by His tithes. This tithe, which is actually God's, became the only inheritance of the Levites, inasmuch as they were not to own farming land on which to earn an income. They were to live and carry on God's work with this tenth, and in turn were to tithe a tenth of what they received from God by giving it to Aaron's family, which held the high priesthood. (Numbers 18: 8-32.)

This was the simple but effective system God gave to the Israelites for financing God's physical work and all things that had to do with the tabernacle. Today the tithe still belongs to God and He uses it for His work today—the preaching of the gospel. This doesn't mean that present-day organizations falsely calling themselves Christian are to receive our tithes. They are not connected with God or the true Church. God's spiritual work of preaching the gospel has replaced the physical duties of the Levites and tithes are to go only to those who represent it.

Ordinarily it would be a simple matter to figure what a tenth of money wages

would be. But some might wonder how one whose increase was only a sheep would give a tenth of a sheep, or how one who had only a small garden would give a tenth of his crop. The answer is that the value of the sheep was determined and a tithe or tenth of the value of the sheep was paid to God.

Tithing Is for Our Good

So often, when the subject of tithing is brought up in these times, the same remark is heard: "If I gave a tenth of my income, my family would starve!"

People who carelessly make this remark do not realize that just the opposite is true. Perhaps most people don't realize or appreciate that everything they think they possess is not really theirs. It is God's. God merely allows them to use or enjoy it for a while. When we stop to consider this fact, isn't it plain that the Creator is quite generous in requiring that we turn back only a tenth for financing His work?

The tithing law was not instituted for God's benefit. He owns the world and everything in it. (Psalms 24:1 and 50:10.) God gave the tithing law for our good. Our responsibility for handling some of God's money as His stewards helps us to learn to love others and enjoy *giving*. This develops in us God's type of character and trains us for eternal life's true riches. (Luke 16:1-11.)

To add to His generosity, God has made a sacred promise that He will increase our material wealth if only we are faithful in paying Him what we owe. (Malachi 3:10-11.) Can you imagine one person telling another that if he will pay what he owes that the creditor will see to it that the debtor will receive a large financial reward? That's what God has told us, in so many words. Where can one find a better deal than that?

What it all amounts to is that *no one can afford not to tithe!* God has told us that if we don't tithe we are robbing Him. If we are robbing God—and millions of people are doing just that in our own nations—we can have no part in the financial blessing that God has decreed for those who are faithful in tithes.

This doesn't mean that others may not temporarily prosper who want to have no part of God and His laws. God is allowing many of them to have the good things only in this life—the only life some of them will ever have. Surely no wise person would want to be in the position of such people. It is far better to prosper in this life by God's special blessing—*plus* living forever by the gift of eternal life in surroundings and circumstances that would show worldly millionaires' lives to be dull and miserable!

Have you ever noticed that some religious organizations who don't believe in obeying God are often in such desperate need that they are forced to promote the principle of tithing? They use all sorts of arguments and ideas as to why people should tithe, but why they don't need to keep the Ten Commandments. In most cases these arguments

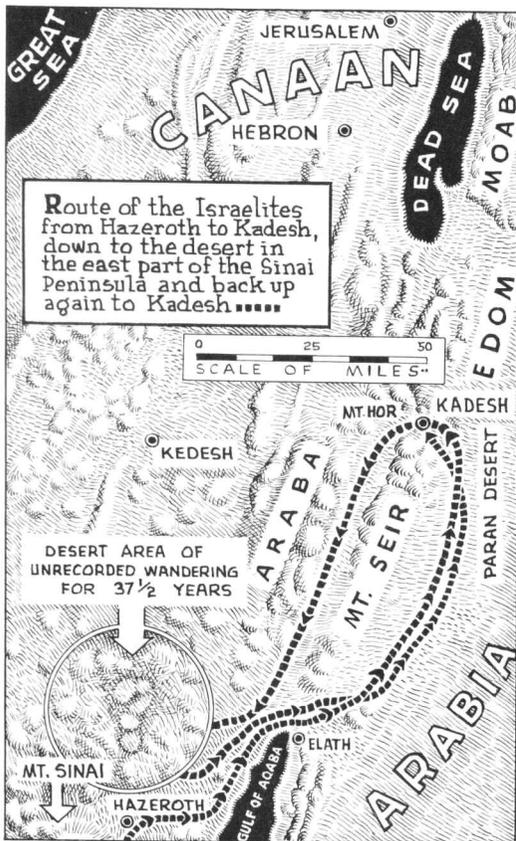
carefully avoid any mention of tithe as referred to in the Old Testament. There is seldom any reference to the reason why God established the tithe and when. That is because there is an increasing disbelief in the Old Testament. Yet they need money—and that is why they claim to teach tithing.

Those who claim that the Ten Commandments were cancelled by Christ's death and are no longer in force can hardly be expected to point out that God *commanded* that a tenth of everyone's increase should go to God's servants. If they did, that would contradict their teaching against God's Ten Commandments.

God is the Author of tithing. It began long before the time of Moses. Abraham and Jacob paid tithes long before Moses' time. (Genesis 14:18-20; Hebrews 7:4-10; Genesis 28:20-22.)

Many people who believe in giving a tenth of their increase make a practice of giving it to their favorite charities or needy families. Giving to those in need is good, but that first tenth is to go to no one except God. (Malachi 3:10.) The only way that is possible is to give it to the true representatives of God—those who are in God's service in His work.

On to Canaan



The next thirty-eight years after the Exodus were spent by the Israelites in wandering aimlessly and often miserably from place to place in the desert regions of the Sinai peninsula west of the Gulf of Aqaba. The Gulf of Aqaba is a finger of the Red Sea bordering the east side of the peninsula.

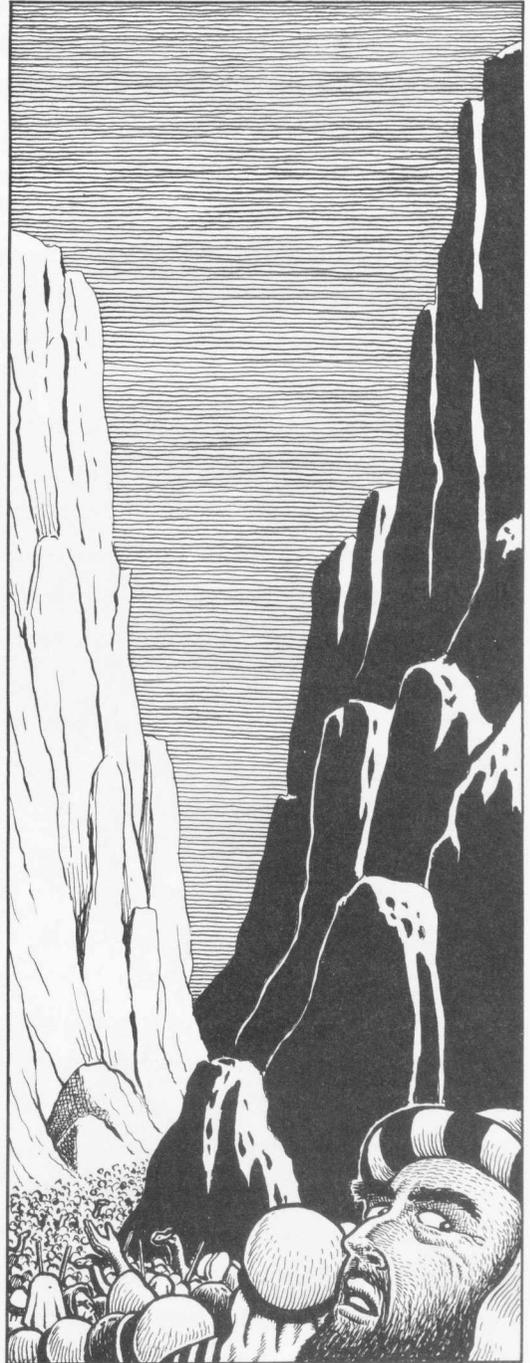
There is little record in the Bible pertaining to where they camped and what they did throughout most of this time until more than a generation later—when they started back to the northeast on the same route they had taken right after they left Egypt.

During those thirty-eight years people died by thousands and thousands. A whole new nation had grown up. During these thirty-eight years God was causing the deaths of all those men who com-

plained when the scouts returned from searching Canaan. Only their children would be permitted to cross over Jordan into the Promised Land. (Deuteronomy 1:35-39.) Several generations of livestock had long since died. Not all the older people had died since the Israelites had set out in their aimless wanderings, however. Some still living were Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Caleb and Joshua.

Once more, after a lapse of nearly four decades, the tremendous caravan of millions moved up to the city of Kadesh, the rose-red city of rock from which the twelve scouts had been sent north to get a good look at Canaan. It must have been a sobering thought to the people that they were still many miles from Canaan after plodding about for most of thirty-nine years and looping around and around over the same country for thousands of miles. But they couldn't rightly blame God for their misfortune. If they and those who had gone before had obeyed Him, they would have arrived in safety and prosperity in Canaan almost four decades sooner.

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, died right after Israel encamped at Kadesh the second time. (Numbers 20:1.) She was about one hundred and thirty years of age at her death, and was buried in a high cliff area of Kadesh sometimes referred to as Petra. This rugged region could be the place where Christians will be preserved during an Earth-searing war to come.



The vast caravan of over two million moved northward to come into the rocky area of Kadesh for the second time.

When Israel had stayed at Kadesh the first time, there was plenty of water. Conditions changed in thirty-eight years, however. Some of the springs had dried up. Others couldn't produce enough water to continue to provide for the vast needs of the Israelites and their livestock.

Israelites Complain Again!

Shortly after Miriam's death the water shortage became so serious that a loud, complaining crowd gathered around the tents of Moses and Aaron.

"We want water! We want water! We want water!" they chanted over and over for hours. (Numbers 20:2.)

Moses and Aaron were accustomed to this sort of childish mob treatment. They hoped that the noisy crowd would tire and break up, but the situation grew worse. Fearing that violence might result, Moses asked Aaron to appear with him before the crowd.

When the people saw the two leaders standing before Moses' tent, they broke into such a loud roar of discontent that Moses couldn't make himself heard when he tried to address them. The roar finally died down, only to give way to loud accusations from leaders of the mob.

"Why have you dragged us here to die along with our livestock?" one man screamed. "We would have been spared great misery if we had died with our brethren who died in God's plagues years ago!"

"What is your reason," someone else yelled, "for stopping in this rocky, sandy waste where no grass nor vines nor trees grow, and where there is only enough water to make death more painful and lingering?" (Verses 3-5.)

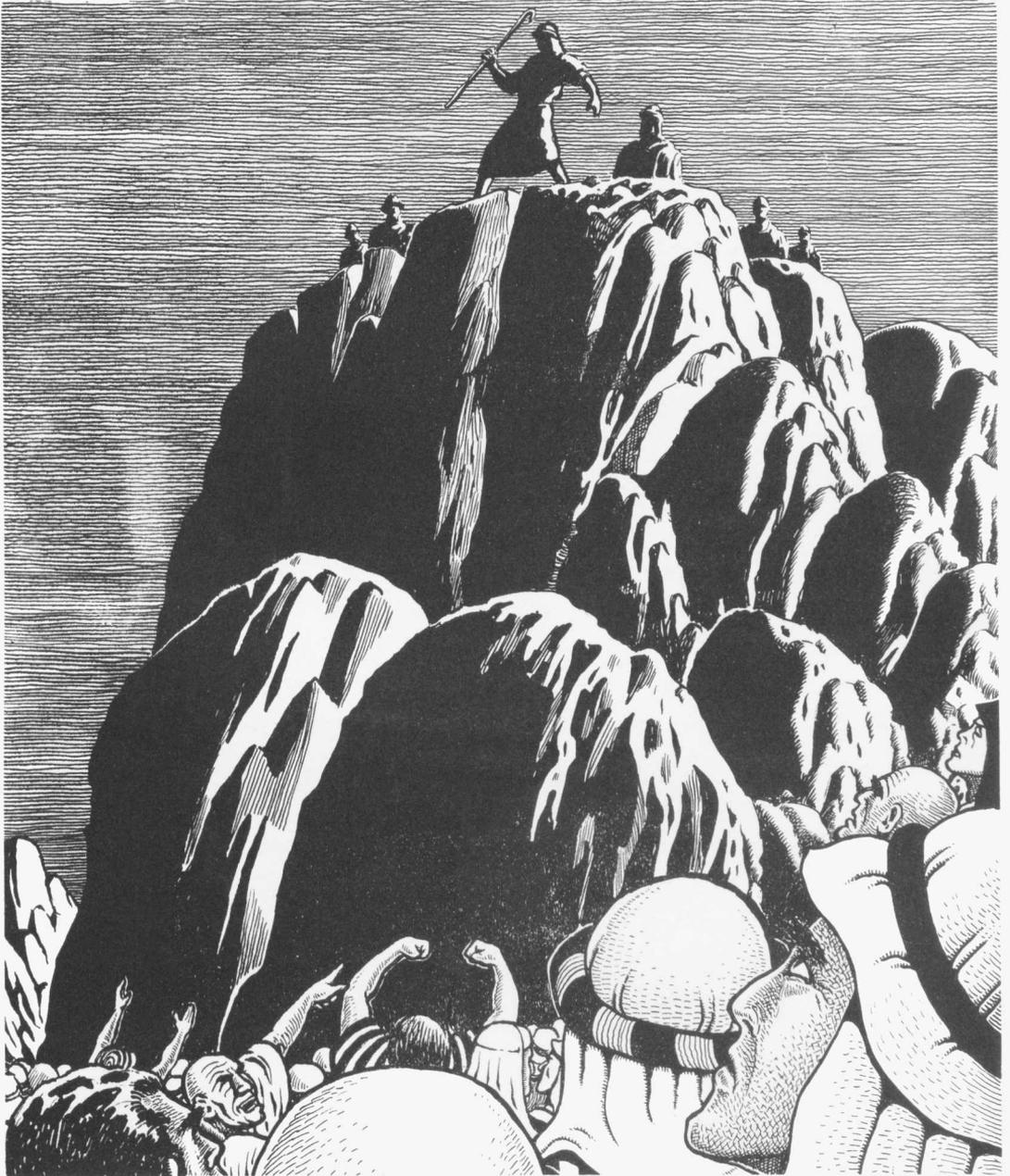
The crowd was angrier than Moses had realized. Officers hovered around to quell any outbreak of violence, but it was plain that the officers wouldn't have been capable of managing the crowd if it were to break out in a rampage. There was only one thing to do. Moses seized Aaron's arm and, accompanied by loud jeers and hoots from the crowd, the two of them hurried to the tabernacle.

As soon as they entered the sacred tent, a light came from the inner room. It became brighter and brighter as Moses and Aaron bowed with their faces to the ground and made their problem known to God. (Verse 6.)

"Take the rod from here in the tabernacle and go with Aaron out to that high rock that is close to the camps," God told Moses. "Call for the people to gather there to witness what will happen. Then speak to the rock, commanding it in My Name to give forth water. After you have done this, plenty of water will come out of the rock. There will be more than enough to take care of the needs of all the people and their animals." (Verses 7-8.)

Moses took the rod—the one that had budded out to show that Aaron’s family should retain the priesthood—and set out with Aaron. It wasn’t difficult to attract a crowd. The murmuring mob was still milling about. It noisily followed Moses and Aaron, who were surrounded by a number of officers as they strode off to a certain tall rock that jutted up out of the sand close to the Israelites’ camp.

“I have become weary of this mob foolishness over the years,” Moses remarked to



Moses struck the rock with his staff, but no water came out. Some began to jeer.

Aaron. "Again the people have gone too far with their threats and demonstrations. It is time we show them again what great power can come through us!"

"I agree," Aaron answered, glancing uneasily at the mob that was closing clamorously in on them. "It would be wise to use the power through the rod more often to cause these troublemakers to have more respect for us."

This was a wrong attitude on the part of Moses and Aaron. They should have been more concerned with showing *God's* power and causing the crowd to respect *Him*. Both men had been under more strain than usual because of the death of their sister and more complaints than usual from the people. As leaders, however, they were expected by God to exercise great control and wisdom under all circumstances.

This wrong attitude continued when Moses, standing with Aaron atop the rock God had indicated, looked down with disgust on the shouting crowd. He hoisted the famous rod as high as he could hold it until the people's shouting and shrieking died down.

Moses Loses His Temper

"Listen to me, you rebels!" Moses shouted. "You have been whining and complaining about a shortage of water. Why do you complain when you know we have the power to give you water? Don't you know that we can cause this rock to open up and spew out all the water you need?" (Verse 10.)

The crowd became completely silent. Thousands upon thousands of eyes were focused on Moses as he stood there on the rock, plainly etched against the bright sky. The Israelite leader was in an increasingly bad mood as he thought of all the insolence and disobedience he had struggled through for years. Now he harbored a strong desire to once and for all stop their complaining by proving to them that he could, with the rod, perform any kind of miracle.

God had told Moses this time to speak to the rock, commanding it, through the power of the Creator, to give forth water. But instead of speaking to the rock, Moses spoke unadvisedly and in anger to the people. (Psalm 106:32-33.)

"You are only a howling mob undeserving of water!" Moses cried out. "Nevertheless, you shall receive it, if only to remind you that your demonstrations are childish!"

God had not instructed Moses to use the rod to strike the rock. It was to be carried by Moses and Aaron as a symbol of their Levitical authority in using God's tremendous power. But Moses drew the rod back over his head and brought it down sharply on the rock. The crowd gazed in expectant silence as long moments passed.

No water came out of the rock.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

THE TROUBLESOME ROAD TO CANAAN

WHEN Moses struck the rock at Kadesh and no water came out, painful moments passed.

Some of the people began to hoot and jeer. Moses and Aaron glanced nervously at each other. Vexed and impatient, Moses did the very next thing that came to his mind. He lifted the rod and again whacked it down on the rock with even greater force.

The crowd went silent, waiting for something to happen. Moses was almost crushed by a heavy feeling of embarrassment because no water was forthcoming from the rock.

In his strong feeling against the mob, he had either forgotten or ignored the instructions God had given him. He had chosen his own way, and now he seemed to be unable to make good his boast that he had power to supply water to all those Israelites.

God Brings Water

"If water doesn't come out of this rock after what you've promised," Aaron shakily remarked to Moses, "the people will be so angry that they'll probably go completely out of control. If a miracle doesn't occur within the next minute or two, there'll be plenty of trouble!"

Moses knew Aaron was right. In his unhappy situation all he could think to do was strike the rock a third time. Before he could do so, however, the boulder shook as though an explosion had taken place within it. Moses, Aaron and the few officers stand-

ing farther back on the rock were all but thrown off their feet. When they recovered their balance, they realized that a strong stream of clear water was noisily gushing from the base of the boulder below them! (Numbers 20:7-11.)

A tremendous shout came from the crowd. People rushed toward the rock to dip into the cool water, but were forced back as it surged speedily forth to spread into a swift stream that coursed toward the camps of the Israelites. Even before the stream had flowed into a definite course and had lost its muddiness, people and livestock thronged to it to get their fill. Then started the task of filling millions of pots, jars and goatskin bags with the precious fluid.

Moses and Aaron were greatly relieved to see the life-giving water flowing from the rock. Another crisis had passed. One more rough spot had been smoothed out.

Nevertheless, Moses knew that all was far from right. Now that water had come to the people, he had a gnawing feeling of guilt.

"We should return to the tabernacle to thank God," Moses muttered uneasily to Aaron.

At the tabernacle God's voice spoke out in such an angry tone that Moses and Aaron trembled as they bowed their heads to the ground.

God's Just Punishment

"You have failed to act with wisdom," God told them. "You, Moses, let your temper get the better of you in front of the people. Then, instead of *speaking* to the rock as you were instructed, you struck it. In fact, you struck it *twice*, as though it were necessary to keep on flogging it in order for something to happen. You also gave the people the impression that it was through your power, and not Mine, that a miracle would produce water. And you, Aaron, spoke and acted in agreement with your brother's wrong attitude.

"Because you have acted with such independence, and have tried to take credit for a miracle that only your Creator could perform, you have failed to honor Me before the people. Therefore neither of you shall be permitted to reach Canaan with your people!" (Numbers 20:12-13, 23-24 and Numbers 27:12-14.)

Moses and Aaron remained kneeling in stunned, painful silence. This pronouncement from God felt like a sudden death sentence! It meant that they would not be allowed to enter the promised land for which they had been striving for so many years. Moses and Aaron repented of what they had done. God forgave them. But that did not mean God would remove the penalty in this life. Some sins we still must suffer from even though God has forgiven us.

A few minutes later, when they were certain that God had nothing more to say on the matter, they got up and trudged off to their tents. It was plain to them that God had no favorites, and that He would punish the disobedient in high offices no less than He would punish the disobedient of the lowest rank.

A fact worth remembering is that the more one is educated and trained in God's service, the more God requires of that person.

Greater responsibility goes with greater Bible understanding. (James 4:17.) True Christians can't afford to stare piously down their noses at anyone—even the most brutal dictator or the drunken skid row character lying in the gutter. Instead, they should pause to thank God for choosing them to be given understanding, but not in such a way as to compare their real or fancied "righteousness" with the conduct of others. (II Corinthians 10:12.) Christians should have compassion and understanding for those whom God has not yet chosen to be allowed to understand, but that compassion should never mean that there is any approval of their sins.

Moses and Aaron Repent

Even though Moses and Aaron were denied the privilege of entering Canaan with their people, they repented and will undoubtedly reach a much richer promised land—that of the future. When Christ comes to rule the world only a few years from the time this is written, those resurrected for service under Christ will surely include Moses and Aaron.

Whatever Moses and Aaron thought about their future, their duties still existed. Aaron faithfully continued as high priest. Moses had to make daily decisions as usual.

The greatest decision while the people were in Kadesh was how the Israelites should proceed toward Canaan from that point.

There were three routes to Canaan from Kadesh in Mt. Seir. One way had been attempted almost four decades earlier by many of the Israelites when they had been set upon by Amalekites and Canaanites, and when so many Israelites had lost their lives. Another way was to cross to the southwest over the Mt. Seir range of mountains and then proceed north between the Mt. Seir range and the Arabah range. The third way was to proceed eastward and then north into Edom by way of what was referred to as the king's highway.

This great highway was a major road leading up east of the Dead Sea. It had been constructed across swamps and deserts and mountains hundreds of years previously by local governments, and had since been used and kept in fair condition as a route for armies and merchant caravans.

Moses already knew God would not lead Israel by the way where so many had

been slaughtered years before, even though it was the most direct route. Neither did he think it wise to pass to the west and struggle north through the cradle of heat between two mountain ranges.

Even though it was a longer route, Moses recognized it would be to the advantage of the Israelites to travel north by east on the king's highway through the land of Edom. Once they were through Edom and Moab, they could enter Canaan by turning westward.

Opposition from Edom

Realizing that it was necessary to receive permission to pass through the nation to the north, Moses sent messengers to the ruler of Edom. The letter carried by the messengers pointed out that the Israelites, as cousins of the people of the Arabian desert, had struggled through many years of hardships in their efforts to come out of Egypt, and that they would like to be regarded as friendly relatives passing through the territory of the Edomites.

"Please let us pass through your country," Moses continued in the letter. "We promise not to tramp through your fields nor through your vineyards. We won't use even your water. Our desire is simply to reach the king's highway and proceed northward." (Numbers 20:14-17.)

The Israelite messengers returned only a few hours later with word from the ruler of Edom.

"The Edomite king told us to tell you," the messengers reported to Moses, "that if we start through his land his army will attack us!" (Verse 18.)

Moses was disappointed. He hadn't expected such a hostile reply.

"Perhaps the Edomites don't believe that we won't use their water," Aaron suggested. "They might agree to our moving through their land if we would offer to pay for any water we should use."

"The idea is worth trying," Moses remarked after pondering a few moments.

Later, another set of Israelite messengers returned from Edom with an answer to Moses' second request.

"The king wants you to know," the men reported to Moses, "that our people can't come through his land under any circumstances. He said that while he is king two million strange people and their animals won't go stamping across Edom."

Moses was again disappointed. He had hoped that his second appeal to the ruler of Edom would result in success. Before he could express his thoughts, however, an officer arrived to excitedly announce that Edomite troops were approaching from the north. (Verses 19-20.)

Right after the messengers returned, one of Moses' officers shouted to look back to the northeast. Moses and those about him turned to see a vast line of figures silhouetted against the sky atop the ridge in the area where the pass trail led into Edom and toward the king's highway. Sunlight reflected in strong glints from those distant figures indicated that they had swords, spears and armor.

The Edomite army had arrived!



An army of Edomites, brandishing swords, spears and bows, suddenly appeared on the horizon.

A Narrow Escape

"Sound the signal to break camp!" Moses ordered. "Tell the people to be ready to leave in order within the hour—to move into the mountainous defiles near Kadesh. Warn the men to prepare themselves for a possible attack!"

There was sudden action among the Israelites. The same scene, strangely, had been enacted by them or their ancestors almost two generations before when a part of them had tried to get into Canaan against God's will. Now, however, they were not divided, and they worked faster than before to get ready to leave.

Once again the more than two millions of people and their flocks and herds moved westward off on the trail that led into the desert valley between the Arabah range and the long, lofty ridge of rock and soil known as Mt. Seir.

Whether the Edomites planned to attack or whether they intended only to protect their borders is something we probably won't learn until God makes it known

in the future when He will undoubtedly reveal all the facts of the past history of man. In any event, Israel managed to leave Kadesh in time to avoid any trouble with the army of Edom.

The first stopping point after leaving Kadesh was at Mt. Hor, a high peak of the Seir range just west of Kadesh, or Petra. There God gave a special message to Moses and Aaron. He instructed them to come up to the top of the mountain. Aaron was to dress in his priestly robes, and was to bring one of his sons, Eleazar. (Numbers 20:22-25.)

The people quickly sensed that some special event was to take place on the mountain, and many of them watched the three men ascend the sandstone mountain to its height of six thousand feet.

Aaron Dies on Mount Hor

After the three arrived atop Mt. Hor, Aaron gazed silently down on the Israelite camp he knew he would never join again. Looking upward, he could see to the south a part of the mountains and deserts through which the people had struggled. He turned his gaze to the northwest, but could not quite see the promised land just over a range of mountains. Regretfully he remembered God's pronouncement that he and Moses would not go into that promised land because of their wrong attitude when they sought to bring water to the people out of a rock. He realized that he had come to the end of his life.

According to God's instructions,



Dressed in his priestly robes, Aaron stood on the mountain and gazed toward Canaan, the promised land he knew he would not live to enter.

Moses removed the priestly attire from Aaron and put it on Aaron's son Eleazar. As soon as this was done and Eleazar was anointed into Aaron's office, Aaron sat down, leaned back on a ledge and closed his eyes. It was at that moment that he drew his last breath. There was nothing to be done to prevent him from the peaceful and painless death that came to one of God's servants at the age of one hundred and twenty-three years. (Verses 27-28; Numbers 33:37-39.)

There was great mourning among the Israelites when they learned of Aaron's death and burial. The mourning continued for thirty days—the length of time spent in expressing grief in those days—because of the passing of a person of high rank. (Numbers 20:29.)

Under Attack Again

Meanwhile, a Canaanite king whose small domain included an area of south Canaan heard that the Israelites were about to invade his territory to the northwest of the Mt. Hor region. This king felt that it was wiser to attack than to be attacked. Not to be outdone, he sent mounted troops to the south to rush in on the camps of the Israelites.

So swift was the attack that some of the Israelites were whisked away as prisoners before anything could be done. The Israelites were so upset by what had taken place that they made vows to God that they would wipe out the towns from which the attackers had come if only God would help them. God quickly answered their pleas and Israel proceeded safely northward in the Arabah. (Numbers 21:1-3.)

After leaving the Mt. Hor area and defeating the Canaanites, the Israelites turned north to move through the valley between the Arabah range and the Mt. Seir range. This route was called the way of the Red Sea because it led southward to the gulf of Aqaba.

Traveling through this huge desert cradle was difficult because of the heat and the arid conditions. A number of people began to complain, especially because of the manna, which they disliked because of their bad attitude. Their state of mind was like a contagious disease. It spread so swiftly that it was only a matter of hours before a pounding wave of discontent disrupted the camps. (Verses 4-5.)

As usual, the head complainers organized throngs to gather before Moses' tent with their loud and childish demonstrations. Their remarks were so profane against Moses and against God that God was angrily moved at once to punish the offenders.

Even as noisy crowds shouted against their Creator, screams of pain and terror began to rise from all parts of the camp. Thousands of snakes were suddenly wriggling into the tents, angrily biting the people on the feet and legs, injecting a death-



God was so angry with the complainers that He sent deadly poisonous snakes into the camps to attack the people.

dealing poison that would quickly mean the end of life for their victims! (Verse 6.)



CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

WAR WITH THE AMORITES

IT WAS at Punon in the Arabah, south of the Dead Sea, that the invasion of snakes into the camps of the Israelites occurred. At first they caused more terror than pain. It wasn't long, however, before those who were bitten became very feverish and ill. Their bodies became inflamed and swollen. Agonizing death soon followed.

The number of victims grew swiftly as the hours passed, and Israel began to understand that it was possible that all the people could be wiped out by a horde of poisonous snakes! (Numbers 21:4-6.)

Israelites Repent

Frantic, worried Israelites gathered in a sombre crowd before Moses' tent. This time they didn't yell and chant and scream insults at their leader. This time they came to humbly plead with Moses for his help.

"We are sorry about the wrong things we said about you and the complaints we made against manna," a spokesman from the crowd anxiously told Moses. "Would you please ask God to forgive us and take away these terrible snakes?"

Even as Moses was being addressed there was a loud and violent commotion in the crowd. Snakes had slithered in among the assembled people, and many of them were bitten.

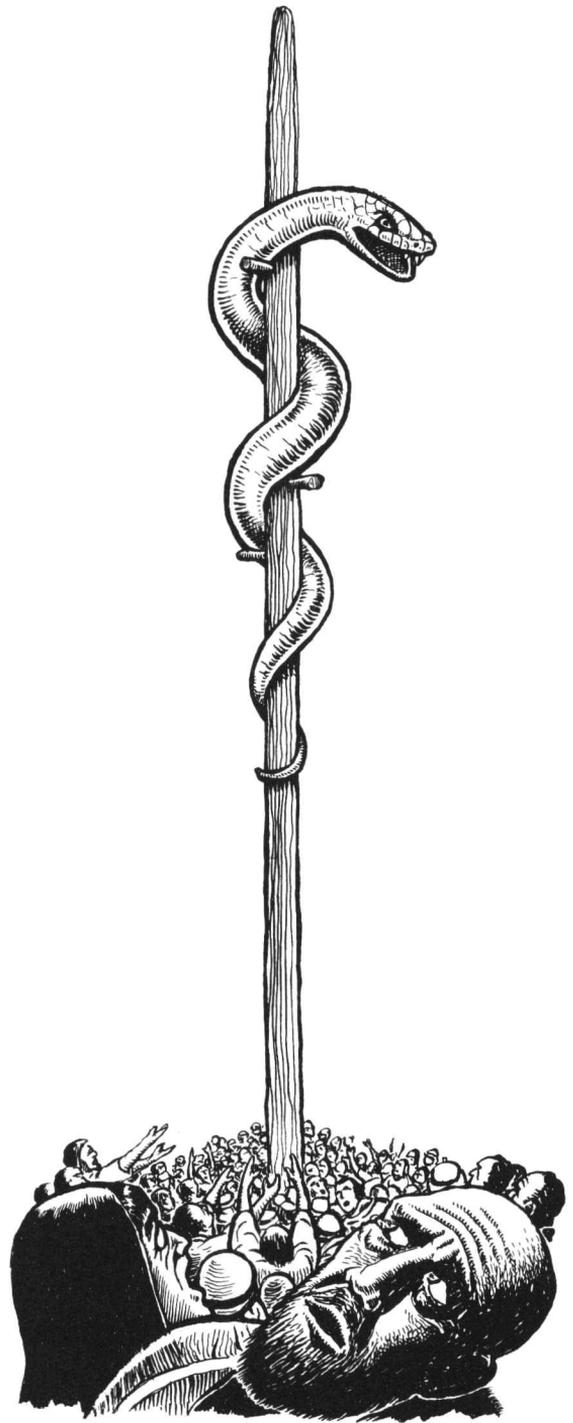
Moses was convinced that most of those who had complained and had made spiteful remarks against God and against him were truly regretful of what they had done. He went at once to the tabernacle to entreat God to have mercy on the people and spare them from the poisonous bites of the serpents. (Verse 7.)

“Instruct your best craftsmen to mold a brass serpent that looks like the type of serpent that is plaguing the people,” God told Moses. “Have them mount it on a long pole, and erect the pole in the center of the camps as a sign of My healing power. Then tell the people that any who have been bitten will be healed and spared from death simply by gazing on the brazen serpent.” (Verses 8-9.)

Moses hastily obeyed, and very soon the metal snake was raised on a pole close to the tabernacle and the people told what it was for. Throngs of suffering victims gathered to peer at the brass serpent.

Before God’s orders could be carried out, however, thousands more had been bitten by snakes in the surrounding dry, rocky areas. This resulted in an increasing crowd of frantic, sick and groaning people to gather within sight of the brass snake. Thousands had died before it was made but all those who lived long enough to view the snake on the pole were healed.

God caused the poisonous serpents to depart from the area in which the Israelites were camped. The plague was ended because the offenders regretted what they had done and because of Moses’ prayer to God. The removal of the serpent plague was entirely a matter of repentance, prayer, obedience, and faith. The serpent on the pole represented the penalty of sin being taken away. It reminded the Israelites of a coming Savior who would be beaten and then crucified on a pole to pay for the sins of the world. (John 3:14-15.) However,



Thousands of snake victims came to gaze at the metal serpent erected on a high pole.

in later times the people of Judah did worship that serpent until righteous King Hezekiah destroyed it, reminding the people it was only a piece of brass with no power. (II Kings 18:4-5.)

After the serpent plague, the Israelites continued to move northward by the route called the Way of the Red Sea, passing across the route taken by the scouts who went into Canaan almost thirty-eight years previously. The scouts had at that time followed a course to the west of the Dead Sea, but Israel now turned to the right.

One of their campsites was close to a small river called Zared or Zered. Here was plenty of fresh, clear water supplied by spring rains in the mountains to the east in Edom. The stream flowed westward into the south end of the Dead Sea. Here Israel was at the northern border of Edom and the southern border of Moab, a nation extending about halfway up the east side of the Dead Sea.



The Israelites were happy to camp near the Zared River, a stream of clean cool water that flowed from the mountains to the east.

After crossing the Zared river, the Israelites had no more to fear from the Edomites. Their next important campsite was just beyond another mountain stream about thirty miles to the north. Arnon river, like Zared river, was a small stream in the dry season. In fact, it was possible in extremely dry seasons for it to dry up almost entirely where it flowed into the Dead Sea, but in the area where Israel passed over, there was sufficient water, fresh from the mountain springs that fed it, to take care of the Israelites'

needs. The Arnon river was the north border of the land of the Moabites and the south border of people to the north called Amorites. (Numbers 21:10-13.)

From there the Israelites continued northward. At one area, where they were short of water, God told Moses where the people could find water. They dug down a few feet and found plenty of water for the millions of people and their vast herds and flocks.

The people were so thankful for this needed supply of clear, cool water that they expressed their thanks to God through a great concert of voices and musical instruments. (Verses 14-18.)

Moses felt that Israel shouldn't progress very far into Amorite country without permission. Already the caravan was headed along the edge of the high plain country just east of the Abarim mountains, and was running the risk of encountering Amorite soldiers.

Moses knew who the Amorite ruler was, and which city was the capital. He sent messengers to the king, whose name was Sihon, to ask for passage through his country. Moses assured him that no wells nor fields nor orchards would be touched by the Israelites, but that if the Amorites wished to sell them food or water, Israel would be pleased to pay whatever price was asked. (Verses 21-22; Deuteronomy 2:26-29.)

An Enemy Appears

When king Sihon learned that millions of people and animals were intending to pass through his little nation, he became quite excited. He sent the Israelite messengers back at once with the blunt reply that Israel would not be allowed to pass through the land under any circumstances. (Numbers 21:23; Deuteronomy 2:30.)

Moses was discouraged when he received the message. If the Amorite king could successfully block Israel from going farther north, it would mean that the giant caravan would almost certainly have to turn around to the south and go back over its path with little hope of reaching Canaan except by swinging westward around the south end of the Dead Sea and again facing the Canaanites who had once dealt them such a hard blow.

Moses realized that the Amorite king probably wouldn't be satisfied by merely refusing passage to Israel. It was more likely that he would take advantage of this opportunity to attack the Israelites for the purpose of taking their possessions. Moses thanked God that the people were still encamped amid the eastward sloping ridges of the rugged Abarim mountains. This meant that the Israelites had to protect only one side of their vast encampment and made it possible for many thousands of armed Israelites to station themselves on the south sides of the sharp ridges to the northeast

of the camps of Israel.

This situation was inspired by God, who made it known that Israel would have divine help in battle and in crossing the Arnon river, which was the south border of the land east of the Jordan that was later to be given to Israel.

“I shall help you win the battles to come in this land,” God told Moses. “Furthermore, I shall wipe out the wicked nations occupying this territory, and Israel shall be the sword by which it will be done!” (Deuteronomy 2:24-25, 31-32.)

Within only a few hours after the Israelite messengers had returned from king Sihon, a heavy force of armed men appeared on the north. The hidden Israelite soldiers waited until the oncoming enemy was well up on the ridges behind which the Israelites waited. Then they leaped out and fell on the Amorites in wave after wave of men with such sudden and surprising force that all the attackers, including king Sihon, were either slaughtered or put to flight.

After this encounter, Moses was certain that the best of Sihon’s army had been wiped out. Nevertheless, he directed the Israelites to quickly break camp and move swiftly toward the cities of the Amorites before their occupants could group themselves for defense. The Israelite soldiers reached the main Amorite city of Heshbon, only a few miles distant, to find that it was almost defenseless. They moved quickly in to slaughter all the people, including the family of king Sihon.

God Renders Justice

From then on the Israelites moved swiftly over the land to take over every city and town, slay the people and seize the animals and any other valuable things that could be taken with them. Within only a few days they became the conquerors and destroyers of this small nation. (Numbers 21:24-26; Deuteronomy 2:33-36.)

Many wonder why God had Israel to wipe out certain nations. The reason is that they were so miserably sinful that they would be better off dead. In Abraham’s time, their iniquity had not reached such a peak. (Genesis 15:16.) By the time the Israelites arrived, however, God said the Amorites should no longer live. This does not mean they are eternally lost. They, like the people of Nineveh, Sodom, Gomorrah, and all the world, will come up in a judgment period and will have an opportunity for salvation. (Matthew 12:41-42; Mark 6:11; Revelation 20:11-13.)

For a while, after conquering the Amorites, the Israelites rested in the conquered land, then continued to move northward.

In spite of the fact that they had gained a quick reputation for tremendous strength in battle, a king of the region northeast of the Dead Sea came out with his army to attack them. His name was Og, and he was a man of gigantic stature—prob-

ably nearly twelve feet in height. The Bible mentions that the bed in his palace was about eighteen feet long and eight feet wide. (Deuteronomy 3:11.)

Og was one of the last of the strain of giants of eastern Canaan. Some of his soldiers were also very large, and they presented a frightening sight as they charged against Israel.

“Tell your soldiers not to be afraid of these fierce-looking men,” God had told Moses. “Remind them that the soldiers of Israel cannot fail because I am with them to help destroy their enemies.” (Numbers 21:33-34; Deuteronomy 3:1-2.)

Victory Given by God

Og’s forces were vicious, brutal, blood-thirsty men lusting for the opportunity to kill. The Israelite soldiers were almost the opposite, but when they closed with the enemy, a strange thing happened. The attacking giants suddenly seemed to lose their desire for battle. They cringed, ducked, dodged and attempted to turn and run. They suddenly seemed to sense that they were in for certain defeat.

This abrupt cowardice by the enemy made it possible for the Israelite soldiers to swarm over Og’s soldiers in a crushing tide of death. Only minutes later Og and his blustering military men were things of the past.

Again Moses directed his soldiers to move swiftly about the nation to try to take Og’s cities in the manner of taking the cities of the Amorites. It turned out that most of Og’s forces had gone into the attack. Every city was lightly guarded by small numbers of soldiers, but many of these cities were surrounded by high walls in which there were strong, heavily barred gates.

Using knotted ropes thrown up and looped over the wall spikes, the Israelite soldiers swarmed over the walls and overcame the few fighting men who resisted. Then they unbarred the gates and flooded into the cities to slay all the people that were there. Only flocks and herds were spared, and these were taken, along with food, gold, silver, jewels and whatever wealth the Israelites found and wanted.

Sixty cities were taken. These centers of habitation weren’t mere villages surrounded by thin, short walls. They were fairly large centers of population whose well-built stone buildings and streets were large and wide. Solid stone walls were as much as eighteen inches thick, and were constructed of rock of that region almost as hard as iron. (Numbers 21:35; Deuteronomy 3:3-11.)

So many well-equipped, strongly constructed places of living wouldn’t ordinarily be found in a small country—much of it semi-arid, though fertile—so far from rivers or oceans or major highways. Some scholars used to think the Bible account of these cities was a work of some writer’s imagination. Nevertheless, those cities did exist.



The sharp swords, swift spears and catapulted stones of the Israelites quickly put an end to the giant Og and his army. However, it was possible only because of the fear that God had instilled in Og's fighting men.

Many of their ruins still clutter the plains of Moab and Ammon (ancient Moab and Ammon extended far to the north of what was Moab at that time) and the land east of the Jordan River up to the Mt. Hermon range.

Besides these sixty solidly fortified cities, Israel also took over many centers of habitation that weren't protected by walls. That region was far more populated than the Israelites had expected. Unless God had willed that Israel should have His aid in the task of taking over these lands and their spoils, the Israelites would have been utterly wiped out by the military-minded occupants.

With God as their champion, it required only a few days for the Israelites to sweep over the land east of the Jordan. The soldiers of Israel were even more surprised at what they had done than were those who were their victims. Armed forces of the past had never dealt such swift and deadly destruction against such strong armies and so many well-fortified cities. It was a miracle that impressed at least a part of Israel more than certain miracles God had brought about at other times.

At this point a question will probably come up in the minds of some readers when they read of the Israelite soldiers slaying the women and children of enemy nations. It would be natural to conclude that all this slaughtering of human beings was nothing

less than a mass disregard for the Sixth Commandment, which plainly states that we should not kill.

God is neither fiendish nor unjust. He has referred to Himself as the potter and human beings as the clay. The potter decides how to use the clay and what part of it is to be discarded.

God chose to get rid of the wicked, idol-worshipping nations east of the Jordan because they were so awfully sinful that they could not possibly live normal, happy lives. Besides, the land was not theirs anyway. He could have wiped them out with plagues or earthquakes. However, He chose to do it through Israel as His instruments. Who should question why the One with infinite wisdom chooses to do something?

God has told us that we shouldn't murder. Many centuries after Israel entered Canaan, Christ explained that law in more detail by explaining that a Christian shouldn't take a life even to protect his own or the lives of others, and that even the desire to murder meant breaking the intent of the Sixth Commandment.

In the case of the destruction of Israel's enemies, God told Israel to slay them. It was a matter of obedience, just as it was when the Levites slew worshippers of the golden calf. As Author of all spiritual and physical laws, God is the only One who has wisdom to decide when a person or nation is sinful enough that death is a blessing.

It's been a long time since God has told any military organization to destroy human life. It would be breaking God's Commandments to go out and take the lives of others without God's specific orders. (James 4:2.) And no such orders will be given again until Christ returns to rule the earth. (John 18:36.)

After conquering the Amorites, Israel's tribes gathered together and encamped for several weeks of peace in an area a few miles northwest of Heshbon, the former Amorite capital.

Moab Plots Against Israelites

Meanwhile, news of what had happened swiftly spread to the surrounding nations, whose rulers were somewhat shaken to learn that such a powerful army had suddenly emerged from the south. Probably the most worried ruler was Balak, king of Moab. He hadn't realized, when Israel had quietly passed along his nation's east border, that these people possessed such a great military force.

Balak feared that Israel would turn back southward and swallow up Moab as it had done to the land of the Amorites. After much meditation and scheming, he decided that there was only one way of certain security. That was to hire some professional wizard to pronounce a curse on Israel!

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

KING'S RANSOM TEMPTS A PROPHET

TOWARD the ancient land of Mesopotamia, by the upper Euphrates valley, lived a prophet named Balaam. This man was known in many areas as one who had such a special gift of prophecy that he could pronounce wonderful blessings and great curses on people—pronouncements that seemed to be amazingly inspired. He knew about God, but was a tool of the devil. He was a high priest of the pagan religion of Babylon. Balaam always wanted to see how far God would let him have his own way.

A King's Evil Design

Balak, the heathen king of Moab, had heard that Balaam had the power, through God, to bless people, and to curse them. Such a power, he thought, might be much greater than that of any wizard or enchanter who worked through spells and magic and strange mixtures.

"If this man Balaam could be hired to pronounce a curse on all of this upstart nation of Israel," Balak told his officers, "those trespassing people might be so crippled that we could drive them out or even destroy them. We must try every possible means to keep those Israelites away, and therefore I want Balaam to be brought here." (Numbers 22:1-6.)

The king immediately sent several of his princes eastward into Midian, where they were joined by Midianite princes. The caravan then moved on northward to the city of Pethor where Balaam lived.

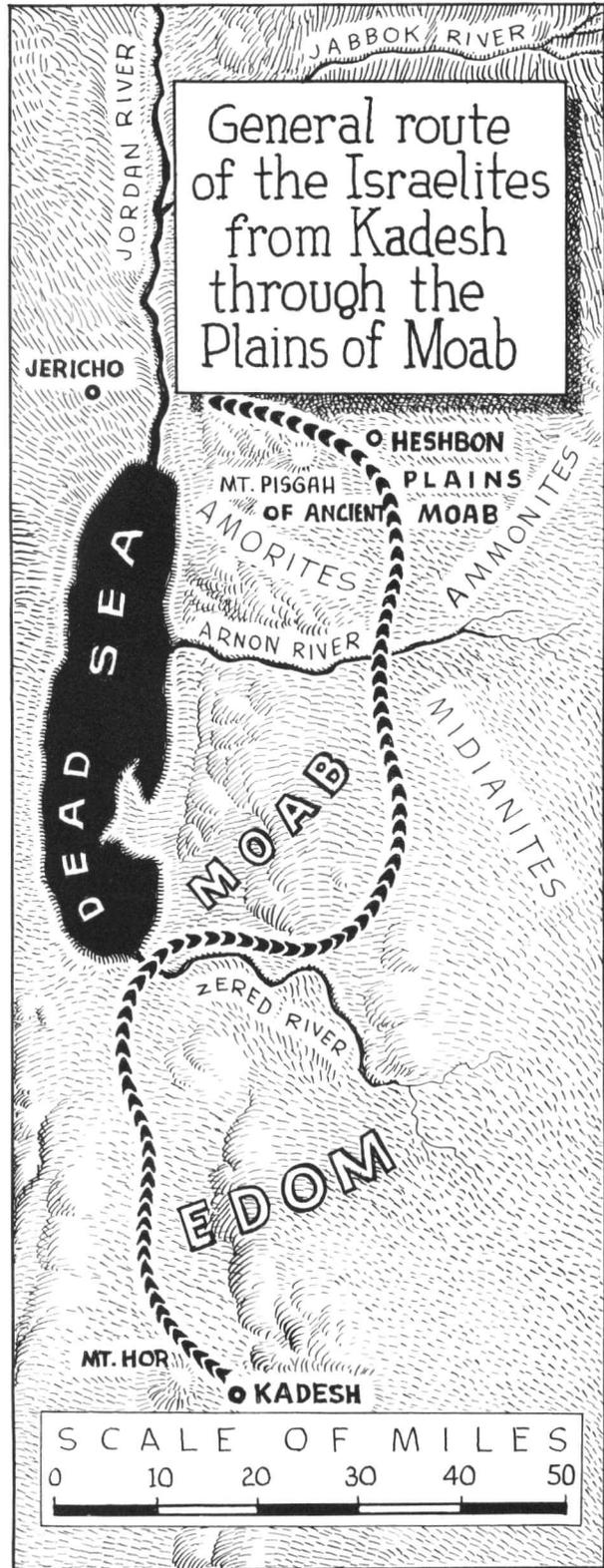
When Balaam was told by these men of high rank why they had come to him, he felt very honored but quite uneasy.

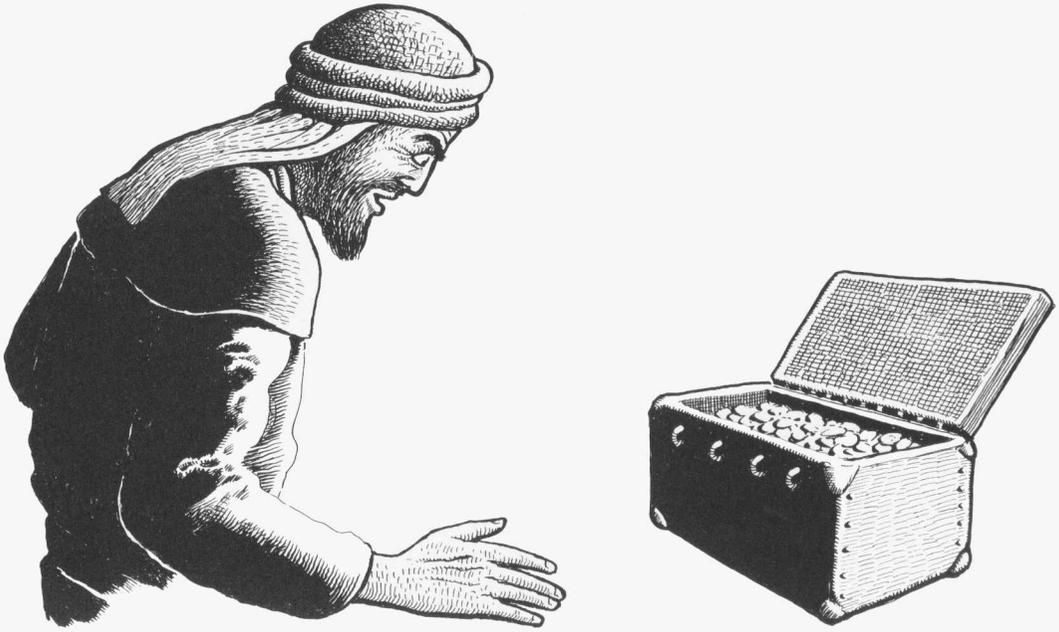
"I am a prophet of the most high God," Balaam slyly said. "If it pleases God to inspire me to pronounce curses and blessings, so be it. But I cannot curse whom He would bless."

"Perhaps you should make certain what you are allowed to do before you give us a final answer," one of the Moabite officers said. "We haven't come here to ask you to do something without a proper reward."

The officer clapped his hands, and in came two servants almost staggering under the weight of a metal-strapped box. The lid was lifted, disclosing a huge amount of pieces of silver and gold. Balaam's eyes widened at sight of this unexpected display of wealth. Nothing more was said, but Balaam knew that this fortune would be his if he would accompany the princes back to Moab and pronounce a curse on Israel. He began to hope that God would allow him to reap those riches. In his heart this wicked man began to covet the reward passionately.

"I certainly must consult God about this matter," Balaam finally spoke up after an awkward silence. "I should like to talk to you more about it tomorrow if you would be pleased to lodge here





The prophet stared covetously at the box of gold and silver that had been brought to buy his services.

overnight in the spacious inn just down the street.”

The Moabite and Midianite officers took this to mean that the sight of such a rich reward had speedily caused Balaam to give in to their wishes, and they departed with satisfaction for the inn which was one of Pethor’s best. (Verses 7-8.)

That night God spoke to Balaam, asking him the identity of the men who had come to visit him. God already knew, but He wanted to test Balaam’s wicked heart. Balaam was afraid not to tell the truth.

“You must not go with these men to curse the Israelites, for they are blessed,” God told him.

Next morning Balaam met with the princes, whose faces fell when they heard what he had to say.

Balaam Speaks Deceitfully

“God has refused to let me go with you to do what you ask,” Balaam announced. “There is nothing more to be said or done about the matter except for you to return to your countries.”

As Balaam later watched the caravan depart from Pethor, he couldn’t help but regret that a fortune in precious metals was slipping through his fingers. He wasn’t exactly certain that he had been wise in turning down this opportunity to become

wealthy overnight, and he hoped Balak would send more messengers and persuade him so forcefully that he would have to go with them.

After the caravan departed, Balaam's mind often dwelled on that chest of gleaming gold and silver. Balaam felt that if only his fear of God wasn't so great, he could have become possessor of the chest. Instead of desiring a king's ransom, Balaam should have repented.

A few weeks passed. Then another caravan suddenly showed up at Pethor. It was made up of Moabite and Midianite princes of even higher rank than those who had come before. (Num. 22:15.) There were more servants and more animals. The people of Pethor were excited and honored to welcome another assemblage of men of high rank, and were proud that a resident of their city was famous enough to attract such a group of officers from other nations. Balaam's sudden increase in popularity made him even more desirous of the offered wealth.

He was quite impressed with the visitors, especially when some in the caravan turned out to be musicians and dancing girls who performed in the street in front of the prophet's home. He began to realize that if Balak made him rich, he could afford to have his own private musicians and dancing girls. Balaam's love of money was leading him into all sorts of evil desires. (I Timothy 6:10.)

Following the street performance, the head princes met with Balaam to inform him that the king of Moab had been greatly disappointed because his offer had been turned down, but that he was so needful of Balaam's services that he would give him great rank besides anything he asked if only he would come to Moab and call down a curse on Israel.

Playing With Temptation

This was a severe temptation to Balaam. All that he had to do to be wealthy the rest of his life was to go to Moab and utter a few words against Israel in the name of God. What bothered him was the question of just how long his life would last if he continued to disobey God's will. He hoped circumstances would work out so that he could please Balak without directly disobeying God.

"I can't do anything God tells me not to do," Balaam told the princes. "Even if your king were to give me a whole house full of gold and silver, I cannot do any more or less than God allows. However, I will contact God tonight to see just how far He will allow me to go in having my own way. If it pleases you to stay overnight in our city, there is good lodging in the adjoining place down the street. I shall be in touch with you tomorrow to report what I am allowed to do." (Num. 2:16-19.)

It was plain to see by the expressions of the princes, as they filed out, that they were gravely disappointed in the answer they received.

Balaam wondered later if they would ever return. Then God again spoke to Balaam. "If these men from Moab and Midian come to you in the morning, I won't stop you from leaving with them," God said. "If it turns out that you do go with them, remember that I am warning you not to say anything to them except what I tell you to say." (Verse 20.)

Balaam Disobeys

Balaam got up very early next morning to prepare for the possible return of the princes. When a little time dragged on, and no one showed up, it seemed like hours. Balaam was worried. He desperately wanted to go to Moab because of the rich reward that could be his, but he feared to displease God. Finally he reasoned around God's command by saying to himself, "God said if they came for me I should go with them; and they came for me yesterday." So he decided to go with the princes without waiting longer for them to come for him. After all, the princes may have given up the idea of hearing from him, and started preparing to return to their native lands. Balaam's decision was direct disobedience, because he was commanded originally not to go unless the princes came for him that next morning.

"Go quickly to the lodging place of the princes," Balaam instructed a servant. "If they are yet there, tell them that they need wait no longer for word from me. If they have already gone, overtake them and tell them that I shall join them."

A little while later the servant returned to report that the caravan was about to leave Pethor, and that the princes were surprised, but looking forward eagerly to Balaam joining them on the trail.

Balaam instructed his servants to prepare a burro for him and provisions for a long journey for three people—himself and two servants. (Verse 21.) A short time later Balaam's group joined the caravan on its way to Moab and Midian.

Suddenly Balaam's burro lunged off the trail and into a field, almost throwing its rider. Angered by the animal's unusual action, Balaam lifted the rod he was carrying, and violently struck the burro on one of its flanks to force it back onto the trail. The animal, however, kept on heading out into the field. Balaam was furious.

His fury would have swiftly melted away if he could have been aware of what had startled the burro. An angel bearing a sharp sword was standing in the road! He had made himself visible only to the burro, which finally, because of Balaam's angry shouts and gouging heels, started back toward the road. The angel swiftly moved and stationed himself before the donkey between two vineyard walls border-

ing a pathway leading back to the road. (Verses 22-24.)

To bypass the angel, the burro lunged to the side, this time painfully jamming her master's foot and crushing it against the wall. Balaam vengefully struck the burro on the neck with his staff, as the animal staggered fearfully forward. The angel again stationed himself further down the narrowing path. When the burro saw it could not get by the angel, it collapsed with fright and nervousness at being so close to the ominous figure of an angel of God. What little patience Balaam had left came to an abrupt end. He leaped up and brought the staff down on the animal's back with all his strength.

The Burro Speaks!

With God all things are possible. (Mark 10:27.) The burro opened her mouth and spoke her thoughts as though with a human voice!

"What harm have I done to you to cause you to strike me so violently these three times?" the animal asked Balaam.

Balaam stepped back, his mouth falling open in astonishment. It was too much for him to believe that this animal had actually spoken, yet he somehow felt obliged to reply.

"I—I struck you because—because you have made me look ridiculous by tossing me around and shoving me against that wall. Besides, you are delaying me in an important trip," Balaam nervously but angrily answered. "If this staff of mine were a sword, I would jab it through you!" (Num. 22:25-29.)

Balaam stared at the burro, wondering if he had been wrong in thinking that she had spoken in the first place. Then the animal's mouth quivered again, and Balaam was unhappily certain that it was actually the burro that was talking.

"Years ago you chose me as your favorite animal for riding," the burro said. "I have served you faithfully all this time. Have I ever treated you so badly as you have treated me just now?"

Balaam was still a little stunned because of the human voice that came from the mouth of his burro.

"—uh—no!" he finally managed to mutter. (Verse 30.)

God gave Balaam the ability to suddenly see the angel. The prophet staggered back, his eyes popping in amazement. In dreams and visions he had heard and seen angels, but this was the first time he had ever seen one while awake. Because of his feeling of guilt, he fell forward to prostrate himself before the powerful being from God.

"What good did it do to beat your donkey?" the angel asked Balaam. "I was stand-

ing in your path, and when the animal saw me there, she tried three times to dodge around me. Were it not so, I would have used this sword to kill you—though not your donkey—because of your disobeying God by joining the caravan returning to Moab!” (Verses 31-33.)

Groveling with his face in the soil, Balaam realized how wrong he had been in coveting the fortune offered him to curse Israel. How unwise he had been in not fearing God enough to refuse to disobey. He realized he should have stayed at home, since the princes did not come for him in the morning after God instructed him.

“I have sinned!” he cried out. “I didn’t know that God would go so far as to send one of His angels to slay me. Please spare me! If you don’t want me to continue, allow me to return to my home!”

“I shall spare you,” the angel told Balaam, “but not to return to your home. Now that you have begun this journey, God wants you to rejoin Balak’s caravan. However, when you arrive in Moab, you are to declare only the things I tell you to speak.”

God was giving Balaam another opportunity to refuse wealth and choose to obey Him. If God had sent him back home, Balaam would not have had another such test of character. Balaam was greatly relieved not to be punished. He gladly agreed to God’s terms, remembering the wealth of Balak. Accompanied by his two servants, who had excitedly watched and heard his strange experience from only a short distance, he hastily rejoined the caravan of princes headed back toward Moab. (Verses 34-35.)

After the caravan was well under way, a messenger using the swiftest beast in the caravan was sent ahead to inform king Balak that Balaam was already on the way with the caravan.

When the messenger reached the Moabite capital, the king was satisfied to learn that the prophet was coming. Balak ordered a caravan to be organized to take him



Balaam staggered back, his eyes popping in amazement at sight of an angel with a gleaming sword!

to meet Balaam and the princes. The caravan set out at once, and stopped at a town in the northeast corner of Moab—about as close as Balak could get to the caravan coming from Pethor without going into another nation. This town was on the well-used trail to Pethor and the Euphrates river region, and it was there that the two caravans met. (Verse 36.)

Balaam Continues Lusting

“Why didn’t you come to Moab the first time I sent for you?” king Balak asked Balaam a little impatiently. “Didn’t you realize that I am able to give you a high and honorable position in my government, as well as the treasure my men offered you?” Balaam was happy to hear the treasure mentioned again. He had again begun to think more about it and less about the warning God gave through His angel.

“It was difficult for me to leave Pethor when your first caravan arrived,” Balaam replied. “Here I am at last, but I want you to know that I have no power to curse or to bless any nation unless God gives me that power. I can speak only what I am told to speak.” (Verses 37-38.) Balaam was careful to speak in such a way that king Balak would not give up, but would keep trying harder to buy his services. He had become greedy for the reward Balak promised. (II Peter 2:15-16; Jude 11.)

As Balaam hoped, his statement didn’t discourage Balak. The king was convinced that the prophet somehow could manage to bring down God’s wrath on Israel. He correctly believed that Balaam’s statement perhaps meant that the price would be higher than anything Balak had already offered. Whatever the price, the king was willing to pay and was pleased to take Balaam with him farther into Moab, to the town of *Kirjath-huzoth*, which means “a city of streets.” Its many fine streets made it a good place for a festive occasion to celebrate Balaam’s arrival.

Because the king and princes of Moab and Midian were present, there was a great celebration that night in the town where rugged men who dealt in sheep and cattle often came for business and entertainment. Kirjath-huzoth was something like an ancient Middle East version of an American cattle town of a century ago. Streets were ablaze with torches. Carefree, pleasure-seeking shepherders and cattledrivers whooped and yelled as they moved in and out of the various establishments of the town.

The festive feeling was further promoted when the king ordered his musicians, entertainers and dancing girls to perform their best and loudest in the streets and market place. Although Balaam realized that this festivity was at least partly in his honor, he was uncomfortable. He reasoned he was better than those boisterous Moabites. He was even less at ease when he noticed a huge fire being built at a street intersection, and was told that the Moabites were about to sacrifice oxen and sheep to their

gods, and that generous portions were being brought to him and the Midianite princes with him. (Verse 40.)

“We seek protection from our enemies by pleasing our gods with sacrifices,” Balak explained to Balaam. “If you wish to offer sacrifices to yours at the same time on this altar, I shall see that you are supplied with any kinds of carcasses you need. Of course I hope that you will at the same time implore God to curse Israel.”

“I am sorry to disappoint you,” Balaam answered, “but God has forbidden me to do what I would like to. So I can’t join you in this ceremony.” Balaam wanted to please the Moabites for a reward. But the devil, who at times possessed and spoke through Balaam, knew that God had forbidden him to utter through Balaam a curse on Israel.

So Balak was again disappointed.



CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

BALAAAM'S FOUR PROPHECIES

NEXT morning after the feast king Balak of Moab sent his entertainers back to their homes. But he continued onward to the west with Balaam, Balaam's two servants and the Moabite officers and servants. The caravan journeyed on to a mountain overlooking the site where the hosts of Israel were camped. (Numbers 22:39-41.)

Balak Is Jealous

"There you see all those powerful people who have swept up from the south to swallow up our nations," Balak said to Balaam. "Camped there as they are, they appear peaceful. When they move, however, they seem to sweep up and devour everything in their path like locusts. They must be stopped. Otherwise every nation, including mine, could fall before them."

Balak knew that what he said was not true. God had forbade Israel to attack Moab. (Deuteronomy 2:5, 9, 19.) Balak was jealous of Israel.

Balaam knew of this strange nation that had come out of Egypt, and he knew that the God of the Israelites was the only true God—the One he was afraid of. He realized that he had run into a very serious situation. If he were to ask God to curse Israel, he would be asking God to crush the nation the Creator had chosen for a very definite reason. Balaam didn't completely understand why God was with Israel, but before he went any further for Balak, he decided to try to get in touch with God.

"Have your men build seven altars on this mountain," Balaam told Balak. "Have them bring seven oxen and seven rams to sacrifice as burnt offerings."

King Balak was willing to do whatever Balaam asked. The altars were quickly set up and the sacrifices were made. While ceremonies were in progress, Balaam slipped away to a higher part of the mountain, hoping that he could get in touch with God.

Because God was using Balaam for a purpose—and not because of the sacrifices Balaam had asked Balak to make—God spoke to Balaam from the rocks of the highest part of the mountain, instructing him just what to say to Balak when he returned. When Balaam finally arrived back at the site of the seven altars, Balak and the high officers of Moab stood by the sacrifices and anxiously awaited what he would have to say. They hoped that he would at last utter a curse on Israel.

Balaam hesitated a little before saying anything, because he suddenly realized that what he was about to speak would startle the Moabites. (Num. 23:1-6.)

Balaam Prophecies

“As all of you before me are aware,” Balaam began, “I was summoned all the way from my home in Aram in the mountains of the East by king Balak. The king’s wish has been that I call down the wrath of God on Israel, the nation that has recently come up out of Egypt to destroy the Amorites. If God’s wrath would suddenly come on Israel for sin, then how much more would it fall on the nation of Moab? God is the God of Israel. It would be impossible for me to bring a curse by God on a nation that He has already blessed. It would be most foolish, in fact, for any one or any nation to try to go against any nation that God is not against and is protecting.

“Even now we are able to look out and see these people God has chosen for some great purpose. Israel shall always stand out above other nations, and it shall be one whose numbers can be compared to the numbers of specks of dust in the ground. I trust that when I die, my death shall be as honorable as that of those people we see below who have been chosen for some high purpose!” (Verses 7-10.)

Balak was surprised and irritated by the unexpected speech from Balaam. He had hoped for a curse, but Balaam’s words, which God required him to speak, amounted to a magnificent blessing rather than a curse.

Balak strode up to Balaam, planted his fists on his hips, and frowningly regarded the prophet.

“Why have you spoken these good things about Israel instead of what I expected?” the king angrily asked. “I didn’t bring you here for this sort of thing. How could you do the opposite of what I have counted on your doing—especially when you consider the rich rewards that could be yours?” (Verse 11.)



"I brought you here to curse Israel," Balak angrily reminded Balaam.
"You sounded as though you were doing just the opposite."

Balaam Speaks Dishonestly

"Don't I have to say what God told me to say?" Balaam asked. "What else could I do?" (Verse 12.) Balaam intended these words to soften the blow of God's prophecy and encourage Balak to keep trying to bribe Balaam with bigger sums of money.

Balak was discouraged by this answer, but, as Balaam hoped, he didn't intend to give up. He reasoned that Balaam had been so awed by the vast spread of Israelites that he feared to utter a curse on them.

The Moabite king quickly decided to take Balaam to another mountain from where only a part of Israel could be viewed. Balak was well aware of how the camping Israelites appeared from all directions, what with his spies having carefully watched them ever since they had come out of the south.

Regardless of God's instructions that Balaam should speak only good things concerning Israel, the prophet went with Balak to a flat section of a high ridge known as Mt. Pisgah. (Verses 13-14.)

"There you again see those intruders," Balak said to Balaam. "Why not implore your powerful God to punish them?"

"I still must obey what God tells me to do," Balaam answered. "To approach Him again, we must once more build seven altars and offer a ram and a bullock on each altar. Then I'll seek another meeting with God to inquire if He will allow me to curse Israel."

At a command from Balak, seven altars were set up on Mt. Pisgah, and a bullock and a ram were sacrificed on each of the altars. Meanwhile, Balaam again went into a remote section of the mountain to try to contact God. Once more he was successful, but only because God purposed to contact him. Even though Balaam was still greedy for Balak's reward, God was very patiently waiting to see if Balaam would finally repent and quit serving himself and the devil. Though he was afraid of God he did not repent.

"Tell Balak what I am about to tell you," God said to Balaam, and Balaam, out of dread of punishment, memorized what God had to say.

For the second time Balaam returned from a mountain visit with God to report to king Balak.

"I have been in touch with God," Balaam called to Balak, "and He has told me more things to tell you."

"What has God spoken?" Balak calmly asked, though anxiously hoping that either God or Balaam had undergone a change of mind. (Verses 15-17.)

More Inspired Prophecy

"He has said that you, Balak, should listen to Him," Balaam replied. "He has said that you should learn that He does not lie, as does a mortal man, and that He will surely carry out any purpose or promise He had made. God has blessed Israel, and I have been instructed to carry on according to that blessing. It would be impossible for me to change God's blessing into a curse.

"You should know that God has not regarded the shortcomings of Jacob, the forefather of Israel, as something so evil that all of Jacob's descendants should be cursed into oblivion. God brought Israel out of Egypt, and gave that nation the strength of the giant wild bull. No prayer, no art, no craft nor enchantment from outsiders can affect Israel. In time to come people will marvel at how this nation was kept alive under God's protection. In fact, Israel shall become known as a strong young lion that doesn't rest until he has eaten well of his prey, and that prey will be nations that can be compared to gazelles, deer and other animals much weaker than the lion." (Verses 18-24.)

Balak stared in shock at the prophet. Balaam was wearing the king's patience to an end. If he hadn't been so desperate for help against Israel, he would have ordered the prophet out of his presence.

"If you won't curse the Israelites now," Balak muttered wearily, "then at least you can refrain from pronouncing a blessing on them!"

"Didn't I tell you," Balaam replied, "that I would have to speak whatever God would tell me to say?" Balaam should have flatly refused to help Balak, but he didn't. He still hoped he could please Balak, without being punished by God.

If Balaam hadn't feared God's great power, he never would have spoken or acted in such a manner. But he still had a desire for the reward that Balak was willing to give him, if he could only influence God to change His mind.

Balak refused to give up what he had set out to do through the prophet. Immediately he suggested that they go to Mt. Peor, which was a high point of the Abarim range. From there all of the camp of Israel could be seen. Balak hoped that there was a chance that Balaam might break down and pronounce a curse on Israel if he could be convinced that such a large and powerful nation might well move eastward and destroy Balaam's home town.

Later, when the Moabite caravan and those with it viewed the Israelites from Mt. Peor, Balak was dismayed to hear Balaam ask for the third time that seven altars should be built for sacrificing animals. Balaam was fearfully aware that invisible

angels were listening to all his words and watching everything he did. But he again thought he could influence God to let him curse Israel so he could obtain Balak's reward. Balak gave orders to carry out Balaam's wish. The Moabite king didn't want to do it, but he was still interested in getting Balaam to curse Israel. (Verses 25-30.)

In spite of his hopes to earn favor and fortune from the Moabite king, Balaam realized it would be useless to continue hoping God might curse Israel for Balak. His



Balak, King of Moab, hoped to convince Balaam that Israel was a dangerous nation that should be destroyed.

recent contacts with God made it quite clear that it was impossible to tempt God to change His mind.

For this reason, Balaam did not even go to seek another vision as he had previously done.

As the prophet looked down from Mt. Peor on the Israelites camped in their orderly manner on the plains of Moab, he was suddenly required by God to speak another clear and vivid prophecy to Balak and those about him.

Moabites, Midianites and even Balaam's two servants gathered around in curiosity as the prophet's voice rang out from the mountain top to tell them marvelous things they hadn't expected to hear.

"I, Balaam, the son of Beor, have been given understanding by God in matters I am about to relate," Balaam declared.

He then went on, to the growing discomfort of most of his audience, to speak of Israel and what would happen to that nation.

Israel's Future Unfolded

"How fine is the array of colorful tents and tabernacles of Israel on the plain below!" Balaam exclaimed. "They are spread out as watercourses from the mountains, as gardens by a river, as sandal trees and cedars of Lebanon growing naturally in rows beside the streams.

"Israel shall have plenty of prosperity. His descendants shall be uncountable. His king shall have more power than any other king, and the kingdom of Israel shall become the strongest one in the world. God brought this nation out of Egypt and gave it the strength of the giant wild bull. This people will swallow up its enemies after breaking their bones and piercing them with deadly weapons!

"Israel is like a great lion that people fear to bother. Those who bless Israel shall be blessed. Those who curse Israel shall be cursed!" (Numbers 24:1-9.)

This was exactly the opposite of what the king of Moab hoped to hear. He felt that Balaam had betrayed him, and he violently struck his hands together, an action in those times that indicated great anger.

"I offered you handsome rewards to come here to curse my enemies!" Balak shouted as he strode up to Balaam. "Instead, you blessed them! Now take your servants and get out of here without the reward God has prevented you from receiving!" (Verses 10-11.)

"Perhaps you have forgotten," Balaam calmly reminded the king, "that when your messengers first came to me I told them that a whole house full of gold from you would not cause me to do anything in this matter but what God allows me to do.

Didn't I say then that I had to say exactly what God requires me to say?" (Verses 12-13.)

Then God ordered Balaam to utter another astonishing prophecy: "Now, before I leave, I should tell you what God says Israel will do to your people in the future. An Israelite king will come into power who will strike your nation with such force that it will be smashed at once. Those Moabites who remain alive will be taken as servants of Israel!"

The king of Moab sensed that Balaam spoke the truth, and his haughty expression quickly turned to one of uneasiness.

"When—when is this supposed to happen?" Balak asked, forcing a tone of command into his voice.

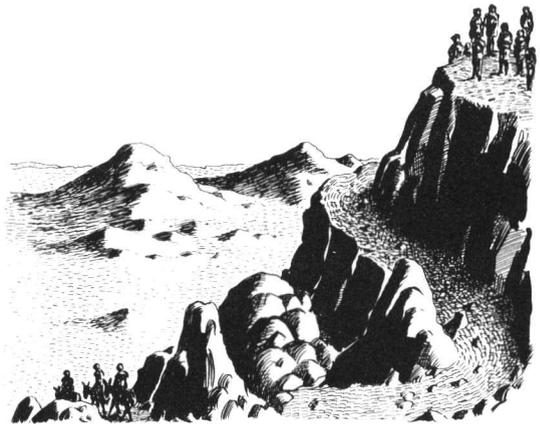
"You will not live to see that day," Balaam answered. "But it will happen as surely as the sun is in the sky. As for Edom and Seir, those countries shall also fall to Israel. Even the powerful Amalekites shall go down before Israel, and shall disappear forever as a nation. The Kenites in the rock-city of Kadesh shall also be taken captive, though they live in the rocky strongholds of the mountains.

"The climax will bring frightening changes in many parts of the world. Nations from across the seas will attack and be attacked. There will be great trouble in time to come. Israel, the nation God has chosen for carrying on His purpose in the world, will end the most glorious nation!"

There were only low murmurs from the Moabites and Midianites as Balaam and his two servants mounted their animals and rode away on the trail that led down Mt. Peor. (Verses 14-25.)

Balak was sobered by what Balaam had said, but, lest those about him should notice his fear, he shrugged his shoulders and managed a smirk of derision that would have faded quickly if he could have foreseen his nation being overcome by a future Israelite king by the name of David. (II Samuel 8:1-2.)

Most of the prophecies made by Balaam were for Old Testament times. Some are yet to come true in these latter days because God always does what He promises to do!



There was an uneasy silence from the Moabites and Midianites as Balaam and his two servants rode down Mt. Peor.

Balak returned to the city from which he ruled Moab, but Balaam never got back to his home town. He continued to lust after the reward he had missed. He began to devise a plan he thought might get him a part of it. So he stopped in the land of Midian.

Knowing that the Midianites as well as the Moabites wished to see Israel destroyed, Balaam sold to their leaders an evil scheme. His plan was to promote sin between Israelite men and the pagan women of Midian and Moab. He reasoned that this sin would bring down God's curse on all Israel.

The Israelites continued to stay on the verdant plain that was partly shaded by many acacia trees. It was a pleasant, fruitful area in which to camp and the Israelites were in the midst of plenty. But an exceedingly unpleasant matter soon began to develop.

Some of the men of Israel were attracted to some of the Moabite, Ammonite, and Midianite women. This situation swiftly grew into a mountainous problem. More and more Israelite men married these pagan women, something forbidden by God. Israel was not to intermarry with outsiders—especially those who were heathen. Besides, due to Balaam's teaching, many Moabite women and Israelite men were taking the physical privileges of married persons, although unmarried. This



Many of the Israelite men went with Moabite women to take part in shameful rites by which certain pagan gods were worshipped.

meant they were breaking the seventh and tenth commandments. (Rev. 2:14.)

What was more, the Moabite women were leading their Israelite husbands and lovers into Sabbath-breaking and worshipping pagan gods. (Numbers 25:1-6.) These gods included Astarte or Ishtar, a deity giving her name to "Easter" eggs. This idolatry was later brought into so-called Christian churches, by the modern successors of Balaam, and came to be known as Easter. One sin led to another then just as it does today.

God's fierce anger was aroused when He noticed these things continuing and growing. He was angry because so many Israelite men were mixing with Moabite and Midianite women. The men were allowing themselves to be drawn by these foreign women into taking part in worshipping pagan gods and into mixed marriages.

Today, the same sins are being repeated.

"Seek out and punish by death the individuals who have committed these sins before it spreads further," God told Moses. "If you don't, I will curse the whole nation of Israel!" (Numbers 25:1-4.)

Balaam's wicked project was beginning to pay off for Midian and Moab.

"This is the kind of sin that can destroy a whole nation if allowed to continue. Tell the heads of the twelve tribes to seize the lesser tribal leaders and the better-known men who have so heedlessly gone against My warnings not to mingle with strange nations," God told Moses.

"The leading tribal chiefs must themselves stone the law-breakers and have them hung on poles for a whole day to show what can happen to those who follow evil leaders and ignore My rules! This matter, however, isn't going to end with merely a warning. I am going to bring a plague on all the other offenders," said the Eternal to Moses, "and unless this taking of foreign women stops at once, the plague will spread to all of Israel!" (Verses 4-5.)

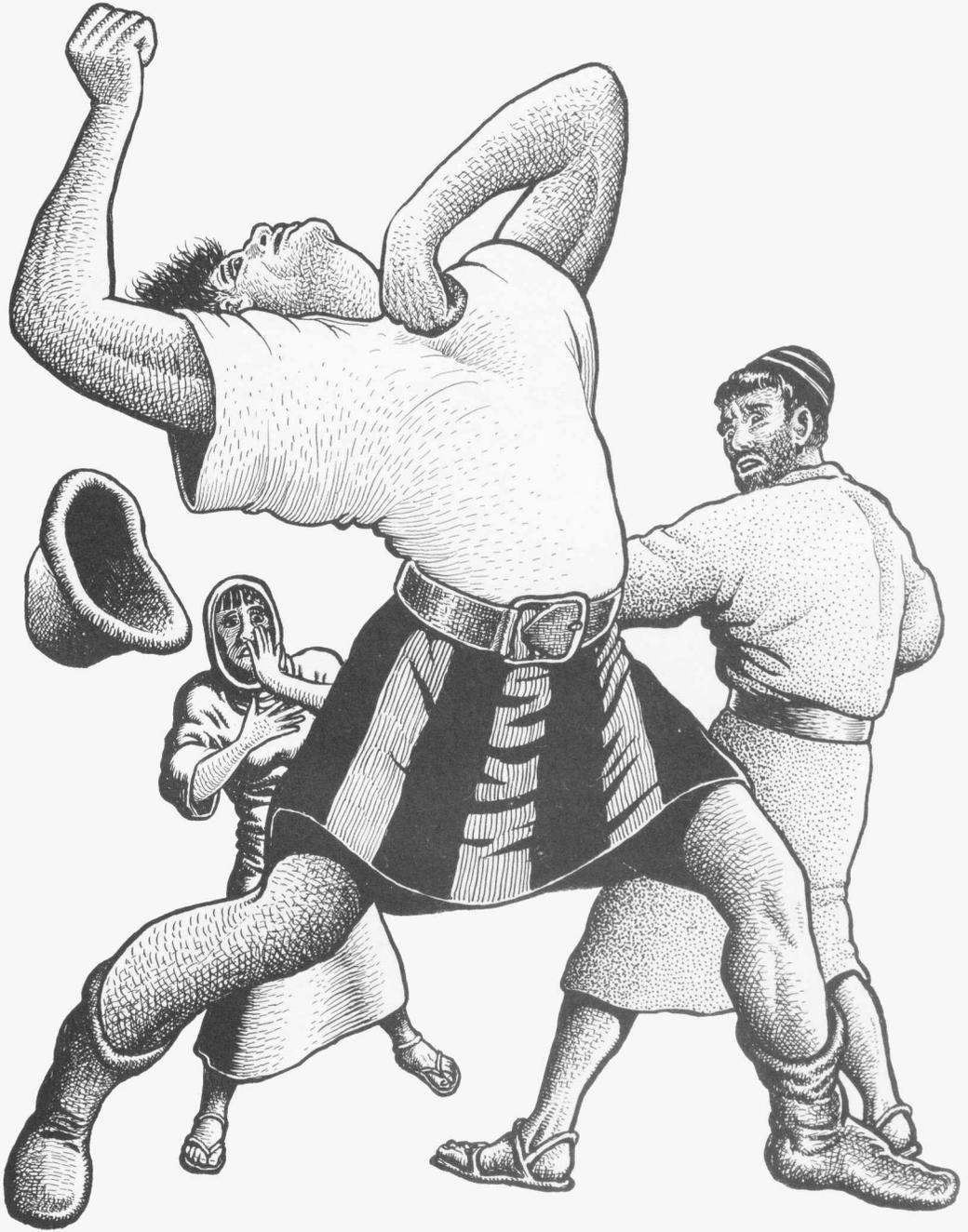
Instantly Moses acted.

The order was carried out, and within only a few hours the corpses were hanging on poles erected close to the center of the Israelite camps. These gruesome reminders and Moses' stern rebuke shocked the people. There was much loud wailing and moaning, a habit acquired from the Egyptians. Most of the Israelites truly regretted what had happened, and from them there were genuine groans and weeping of shame and repentance. (Verse 6.)

Last Wilderness Plague

At the same time an amazingly dreadful thing began to happen to thousands of Israelite men who were guilty of being involved with Moabite and Midianite women

and their pagan sacrifices. In all the camps offenders were abruptly overcome by terrible pains in their chests. They thudded to the ground as though they had been stoned



Thousands of Israelite men fell dead from a mysterious, painful condition in their chests!

with invisible stones. It was as though angels had stoned the offenders that the tribal chiefs of Israel had failed to stone. The victims were able to gasp only a few tormented breaths before dying.

When news of this reached the mourners near the tabernacle, the groaning and shrieking reached higher peaks, and there was growing sorrow and shame in the homes of the men who were stricken, because everyone knew they died for their shameful conduct. Some of these men were sons of respectable parents and tribal leaders. Others were fathers whose wives and children had no idea—until their sudden deaths—that foreign women had drawn these men into trouble.

All this heartache and grief came because Balak was jealous of Israel and because Balaam lusted so much after the wages promised by Balak that he taught the pagans how to lead rebellious Israelite men into sin. (II Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14.)

Even in the face of these abrupt and terrible developments there were those who were so scornful of God that they refused to put aside the women of these pagan nations.

A Rebel Prince

Such a one was Zimri, a prince of the tribe of Simeon. Even at the height of the time of mourning and repentance, Zimri came into the tabernacle area with a Midianite princess named Cozbi. The couple brazenly passed through the mourning Israelites and on to a private tent in the camp of Simeon.

Zimri was plainly recognized by many, including Moses, who assumed that officers would quickly go to Zimri and find out from him the identity of the strange woman. Because of Zimri's high rank, however, officers who should have detained him allowed him and his Midianite princess to go their way without bothering them. (Numbers 25:6.)

Phinehas, one of Aaron's grandsons, took particular notice of where Zimri and Cozbi went and noticed the officers' hesitancy in punishing them. Acting according to God's special order that offenders in this matter should be slain, Phinehas seized a spear that had been put down by an Israelite soldier, and followed the couple to the tent they had entered. Phinehas jerked the tent flap open, then hurled the spear with such force that it pierced the bodies of both Zimri and Cozbi.

From that moment on no one else died of the mysterious lung-crushing plague that had come on Israel. Till that time, however, twenty-four thousand Israelite men lost their lives—twenty-three thousand in one day—including about a thousand who were stoned as examples to warn Israel of the heavy penalty of mixing with foreign

nations. (Verses 7-9, 14-15.) God had this shameful and tragic episode recorded to teach us that we should not lust after dishonest money and should not marry or follow the practices of evil women, and that we should worship only God. (I Corinthians 10:6-11.)

“Phinehas, by his loyal action, has proved that there are those who stand for justice,” God told Moses. “Because of his zeal to punish offenders and atone for the sins of his people, others will now fear to disobey. Therefore, My wrath against Israel has been stopped. Furthermore, I extend to this man an agreement of peace. I assure him that I shall spare him from any Midianites who would try to avenge the Midianite princess, and that those after him shall remain in the priesthood forever!” (Numbers 25:10-13.)

The next few days were ones of misery, shame and sorrow in Israel. At the same time, though most people weren’t aware of it to the full extent, they had reason to rejoice and be thankful because of God’s anger having been turned from them.

This didn’t mean that God was satisfied with the way matters turned out. He was well aware that the Midianites and Moabites—especially the Midianites—had plotted to use their women to wrongly influence men of Israel. He planned to punish Midian, but not until He had accomplished some other things. (Verses 16-18.)

One of those things was the taking of a census. It had been over thirty-eight years since the people had been numbered. During that time there had been changes in the tribes. Now that Israel was obviously about to take over Canaan, it was necessary to know the number of people in every tribe so that the leaders would know the size of the army and so the land could be divided in a manner that would be fair to all. (Numbers 26:52-54.)

Only the males from twenty years of age and up were numbered. The men of the tribe of Levi were counted separately and in a different way because they were not in the army and they had no inheritance as did the men of the other tribes. (Numbers 1:47-49; Numbers 2:33.)

At the time of this second census, not one man remained to enter the Promised Land who was numbered in the first numbering, except Caleb and Joshua, who were faithful to God. (Numbers 14:29-30; Deuteronomy 1:34-35.) However, Moses, Eleazar and Ithamar (Aaron’s sons) and some other Levites who were alive at the time of the first census remained alive because the Levites were not condemned to die in the wilderness with the over 600,000 soldiers who complained when God told them to go in and occupy the Promised Land. The Levites had remained faithful to God even when all the rest of Israel worshipped the golden calf. (Exodus 32:25-29.) Because of their faithfulness, the Levites were given special blessings. (Deuteronomy 33:8-11.)

This miracle of destroying the older generation of murmurers was one of the many great wonders and miracles by which God proved His power to Israel while they wandered forty years in the wilderness. (Acts 7:35-36.) But God had been faithful to the other half of His promise and had saved alive those who had been under twenty years of age when Israel murmured against Him. (Numbers 14:31; Numbers 26:11.)

The Promised Land was now in sight when God finished wiping out the older generation of condemned rebels, leaving a new generation of men who were under sixty years old. Now there would be no more plagues on Israel until God had fulfilled His promise to take the new generation across the Jordan river into Canaan. God was now bound by His promise to perform miracles when necessary in order to take all these people into the Promised Land.

When the figures of the second census had been totalled, they showed that some of the tribes had increased and some had decreased. Not including the Levites, who had increased by only a thousand, there were 1,820 less men (over twenty years of age) than the first census showed. If Israel had been obedient in the past, the census would have shown an increase of thousands and thousands in all the tribes. Besides, they would have been dwelling safely and in good health in Canaan.

Inheritance Law Explained

Right after the census was taken, five sisters brought a problem to Moses and Eleazar. They explained that because their father was dead and because they had no brothers, their father's inheritance and name would be lost if they were not permitted to inherit in the place of sons. (Numbers 27:1-5.) This was due to the fact that property that was passed on to following generations could be claimed only by those registered in the census. Those didn't include women.

Moses and Eleazar realized that there could be many such cases among the millions of Israelites. They felt that the matter was important enough to bring to God, especially at this time when Canaan was obviously about to be divided up as an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.

When Moses brought the cause before God, the Creator told him that the five daughters had done well in speaking out, and that His law concerning this situation should be made known to the people.

"Let it be recorded," God informed Moses, "that if a man dies who has no sons, his property shall pass on to his daughters. If he has no daughters, what he owns shall go to his brothers. If he has no brothers, his estate shall go to his father's brothers. If his father has no brothers, his property shall go to those who are of the closest relationship." (Verses 6-11.)

Shortly after this new law was established, God told Moses that he should climb to the top of one of the nearby Abarim mountains so that he could view the land the Israelites were to possess.

"After you have seen Canaan from afar, your life shall end on that mountain," God said. "You are not to enter into the Promised Land because of your disobedient attitude in getting water out of the rock at Kadesh." (Verses 12-14.) This decree was no surprise to Moses, since God had refused his request to enter Canaan just after conquering Gilead and Bashan. (Deuteronomy 3:4, 10, 23-27.)

Although Moses had expected this, it shocked him to learn that he would die so soon. He realized that God meant what He said, and that it would be futile to beg to have his life spared. What mattered most was how Moses would be replaced. When Moses finally spoke, that was foremost in his mind.

Joshua to Take Moses' Place

"Your will be done," Moses said. "But before I come to the end of my days, I should like to know that you have set a man in my place so that your people will not be as sheep without a shepherd." (Numbers 27:15-17.)

By this request Moses didn't mean that he felt that God couldn't get along without him or someone to take his place. But Moses understood that God had always worked to a great extent through human beings. It was only natural that he would want to know through whom God would next lead Israel, and to have that man established in office.

"Joshua shall succeed you," God told Moses. "Call the congregation together to witness the transferring of some of your honor on Joshua before Eleazar the priest. From the time that Joshua takes your place, he must consult Eleazar, who will come to me in the tabernacle. I have spoken to you directly, but this is the way in which Joshua shall receive instruction on how to lead Israel." (Verses 18-21.)

Later, before Eleazar and a huge crowd of Israelites, Moses put his hands on



Moses had realized that he would soon die, but he was filled with sudden sorrow when God told him where his death would happen.

Joshua's head and lifted his voice to God.

"As a chosen servant of You, the God of Israel," Moses prayed, "I am willing to give up the power and honor of my office whenever I am taken from this life. I pray that even greater power and honor will go to Joshua, the man You have chosen to follow me. Thank you for giving me this wonderful opportunity to be of service. Now I ask your very special blessing on this man, that he would be inspired with the strength and character and wisdom to rightly lead your people. By your authority I now charge him with the responsibility of the office that has been mine." (Numbers 27:22-23; Deuteronomy 3:21-22, 28; Deuteronomy 31:14-15, 23.)

Although Moses' office had in a sense been transferred to Joshua, full authority was not to go to Joshua as long as Moses lived. Moses was busy for some time afterward receiving instruction from God having to do with offerings, holy days and civil laws. All these things were recorded and passed on to the people to preserve for us today. (Numbers 28, 29, 30.) It was during these trying times that the first four books of the Bible were completed by Moses.

