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*The
Bible
Story*



The Bible Story

by BASIL WOLVERTON

Volume I

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INTRODUCTION

by Herbert W. Armstrong

Never has there been a Bible story book like this. That is not a rash statement indulging in superlatives. It is the truth. I would like to explain the reason.

For years, in my ministry, I felt an overpowering sense of responsibility, mingled with a feeling of inadequacy, for getting the proper teaching to children. It was a frustrating consciousness, for my time was so completely filled in the ministry to adults.

I picked up many of the run-of-the-mill type of Bible stories for children. They failed utterly to solve the problem. I could not endorse or press into use any one of them. They seemed to have only one objective—to compete with exciting fiction of violence which youngsters heard on radio, later on television, and read in cheap novels or comic books. They consisted of dramatized blood-and-thunder stories of certain Biblical incidents. The murder of Abel by his brother, Cain; the cataclysm of the flood; young David killing the giant Goliath; the seducing of strong-man Samson; Daniel in the lions' den; all these disconnected stories, shorn of their real meaning, degraded the Bible in plastic young minds to the level of nursery myths like Jack killing the giant by cutting down the beanstalk.

Bible stories up to now, it would seem, have had no mission but that of providing exciting entertainment. Biblical incidents are taken out of context, their real connection with the very PURPOSE of life ignored.

I knew that all these incidents commonly seized upon as exciting child-fiction material actually have deep *meaning*, contain vital lessons, are directly connected with the revelation of God's purpose and the true Gospel. But if the true Gospel of Jesus Christ has been hidden from adults by perversion, deception, and injection of pagan superstitions, how could blinded adults write interestingly for children the vital truths they themselves do not comprehend?

There was an even more important reason for this sense of responsibility toward children.

In my research into the history of education, the truth emerged of the diabolical master-conspiracy for deceiving the whole world. This world-deception has been accomplished through the system of education. It begins with infants and children of elementary school age. Long before Christ brought the Gospel, the pagan multiple-

deity-worshipping Plato introduced the first school of organized curriculum, called the Academy. The system developed with passing generations. In the era of Christianity's earliest appearance, the Roman Empire was dotted with these pagan schools.

These schools taught pagan philosophies and ways of life diametrically opposite to Christ's teachings. Participation in pagan holiday exercises, and pagan customs, was a required part of the curriculum.

During first-century apostolic evangelism, many converts received into their very hearts the eye-opening Gospel TRUTH and rejected the pagan heresies. They were truly converted—*changed*, in mind and belief and ways of living. But their children were victims of the established system of education. A second generation became nominal Christians only. A third, reared in basic paganism, accepted the addition of certain Christian beliefs and the *NAME* of Christ.

It was impossible for church leaders, during the second, third and fourth centuries, to set up real Christian schools. The printing press had not been invented. There were no textbooks except the pagan texts. And by that time even the church leaders themselves were largely the victims of the secular paganized education.

One crux factor dominates this entire educational process—always has. The child is not graded on ability to prove whether the teaching is true or false. He is graded on willingness to accept without question, memorize and absorb whatever is taught. Educators have, as Paul wrote, been reluctant to retain God in the knowledge they disseminated (Romans 1:28).

The new-born infant knows nothing at birth. Humans must learn and be taught. Born in a predominately paganized world, the infant is taught from birth in the customs and ways of society. It would never occur to him to question them. They are simply absorbed—taken for granted—accepted.

This educational system produced the natural and inevitable falling away from original TRUTH, as instituted by Christ. This "mystery of iniquity" was already working to undermine the faith once delivered, even in the Apostle Paul's day (II Thessalonians 2:7). By the time Jude wrote, he was inspired to exhort sincere people to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered (Jude 3). Already the apostacy had set in.

It became fashionable to belittle original TRUTH with the epithet "*primitive* Christianity." Succeeding generations were told that they were advancing from the "primitive." They were—into the darkness of superstition and error. More and more the pagan beliefs and customs were accepted into a professing organized Christianity. It still carried on its label the *NAME* of *Christ*. They still professed, as Jesus Himself foretold (Matthew 24:5), that Jesus was the Christ, and thereby *deceived the many*.

The "Reformation" failed to reform by getting back to the faith once delivered. It threw off the shackles of papal political authority. It rejected some of the pagan teachings and rites while clinging to others. It restored some portions of original truth, while at the same time adding new errors of its own.

Today's children are born into a confused, mixed-up, divided religious babylon. The hundreds of organized religious denominations and sects cannot agree on *what*

the Gospel is; on who or what God is; on whether Christ was human, divine, or both; whether there is a devil; what salvation is; what or where the reward of the "saved" shall be; or how one may obtain it. Each one seems to take for granted whatever brand of religious belief has been taught him from childhood.

In such a world there is little or no Biblical teaching in the schools. They have eliminated God from the knowledge they inject into unsuspecting and immature minds.

It is ten times more difficult to *unlearn* error than to learn TRUTH. This, then, is the dilemma that challenged me: children, still today, are being reared in the same old secular pagan philosophies and customs, with the addition of the so-called "scientific approach" that has arrived with the acceptance of the theory of evolution. This atheists' attempt to explain the presence of a creation without the existence of a Creator has become the basic concept by which all causes, origins, and purposes are explained. By the time these innocent children have been inoculated with this anti-God poison and reached maturity, most of them have too much to UNlearn before their minds can accept original truth. An inborn prejudice has been set up. And prejudice is an absolute barrier to the entrance of TRUTH into the mind.

But what could I do about it?

Children need, as they need life itself, an awareness of the basic TRUTHS of the Bible *as they are growing up!* If only we could get to them the knowledge of God—of the Creator and His vast creation—of His authority and rulership over the creation He brought into being and now sustains—of the invisible yet inexorable spiritual laws He set in motion to regulate relationships and produce happiness, peace and everything good—of the knowledge that the Bible definition of sin is simply the transgression of these laws operating for our good—of the basic knowledge of God's purpose being worked out here below, and of His plan for working it out—of the Biblical revelation of Christ, and what He means to us today—of the vital connection of case histories, incidents, experiences so often seized upon as material for the "blood and thunder" type "Bible Stories" with God's over-all purpose, and with the Gospel—if only growing children could be possessed of this knowledge, they would not be deceived and misled by the teaching of the secular school systems.

But none of the children's Bible story books I could find even remotely filled this purpose.

In His own due time God supplied the man for the job—a man equipped by natural talent, training, experience and profession for this all-important mission.

Basil Wolverton is a nationally known artist. Three times LIFE magazine has devoted multiple-page sections, editorially, to him and his work. The news magazine TIME has written him up a number of times. His work has appeared in more than 50 national magazines.

Mr. Wolverton also is a trained writer, experienced through long years in writing for children.

He is a member of the Board of Trustees of Ambassador College, and an elder in The Radio Church of God. He is a student of the Bible, has taught a Bible class.

He accepted this very important commission.

The Bible Story has been running serially in *The Plain Truth* since November, 1958. Our purpose is to publish it in book form, in whatever number of volumes may be required.

The Bible Story is definitely *not* a series of disconnected stories of excitement and violence with no special meaning. Our purpose is to tell simply, in language children can read and understand, plainly, yet interestingly, the plain story of the Bible itself. It begins at the beginning. A continuous story thread runs through the entire Bible. Not many have ever grasped this amazing yet important fact. Most people read a verse here or a chapter there, failing to properly connect them, or understand the true continuity of the Bible story.

This book is not merely written for children. We like to say it is for children from age five to a hundred and five. Adults by multiple thousands have followed the installments avidly in *The Plain Truth*. Adults will gain an understanding of the WHOLE BIBLE—of its continuous storythread—from this book as they have failed to understand it before. It has proved a new and thrilling experience to countless thousands.

Mr. Wolverton has written in language of about the nine- to twelve-year level. This makes it interesting reading also for adults. As written it is a little advanced for younger children when read by themselves, but parents may read it to children as young as four or five, and, with a little simplified explanation of portions they would not comprehend clearly by themselves, it will become quite understandable, interesting, and profitable.

Mr. Wolverton has stuck tenaciously to the literal Biblical account. He has, where it has been felt necessary, taken author's license to portray certain portions or sequences in conversational style, or to add a few of what my High School English teacher of more than fifty years ago would have called "tomatoes on the window-sill" for purposes of clarity and realism—but he has been zealously careful not in any way to "add to or detract from" the real meaning and truth of the sacred Scriptures.

Between the first and second verses of Genesis 1, tremendously important events occurred which are related in *other* parts of the Bible. Mr. Wolverton includes these events in their actual time-order. The reader may have a complete exposition of these events by written request for the free article-reprint "Did God Create a Devil?" and another, "How Long Were the Days of Creation?"

It is our fervent hope that this first volume of *The Bible Story* in book form, presented to you as a ministry of love, without money and without price, will bring you and your children abundant blessings.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Herbert Armstrong", with a horizontal line underneath.

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The Bible Story

CHAPTER ONE

“IN THE BEGINNING”

HAVE you ever looked down on the Earth from a high hill or a mountain or an airplane? From such high places the planet we live on looks very huge, even though we can see only a small part of it.

Perhaps it is difficult for you to imagine how something so big could be built. But someone planned and built it, just as someone planned and built the house you live in.

Wouldn't you like to be whisked back into the long ago, and see some of the amazing things that happened before the Earth came to be the way it is now? And wouldn't you like to learn about who lived on this planet long before men lived here? And how and why *you* came to be here?

A Time Machine

Then let's suppose we have a wonderful machine by which we can tune into the Stream of Time—and a machine that can show on its screen things that happened long before now and things that will happen in years to come!

Let's suppose that you live in a small town in the Middle West or Mountain or Pacific coast areas of the United States, or in Canada, and that you would like to know what that town was like in the year 1800. You just press a button on the time machine and you say into the machine's microphone what you want to see.

The screen lights up with a picture you don't recognize. It shows mostly a deep forest. This machine just doesn't work the way it is supposed to, you think.

Another scene flashes on the screen. It shows the same thing as before, but from a different spot. Now you do see something familiar—the big hill just south of your town. And the water is the river that flows by it!

But there are no buildings there. And no streets and no cars. Instead, there is the

heavy forest. But what are those things in the little clearing at the river's edge?

Teepees!

Now you spot some figures moving slowly about, and as the image on the time machine zooms forward for a closeup, you plainly see—Indians!

Now you realize that your town hadn't even started to be built back in 1800.

Just as there was a time when your town and your parents and you didn't exist, there was also a time when the planet we now live on didn't exist.

And just as there was a reason for the Earth coming into being, there was a reason for *you* coming into being. Do you know what it was?

If you know the exciting answer to that question, then you have a wonderful piece of wisdom that most people do not have. Most men who are thought of as being very wise cannot give you the truth about it.

Let's Find Out

To find out what really did happen a long time ago, let us speak into the time machine and ask to be shown how things looked before there was anything in the vast space where our universe is now.

Our minds cannot imagine such a long period of time.

But if your mind *could* understand how far back it was, what would you expect to find then? So-called cave men who looked like gorillas? Vast seas full of wriggling worms that later were supposed to develop into human beings? Tremendous blobs of white-hot lava shooting through space to form new planets?

Look at the time machine screen. It is inky black, as though every light in the universe were turned out. You are gazing out into cold, empty, black space as it was *before* the stars and planets were put there!

At first the screen looks black. But our eyes are used to seeing only *material* things. Now, as they focus more strongly on the screen, we begin to be aware of a hazy, strange glow that is not like any material thing we have ever seen before. (I John 1:5; John 1:4.) It emanates from a Personage *you cannot see*, and gradually spreads out and becomes brighter and brighter, filling entirely the great expanse of nothingness that was at first before us. When we first looked into that inky darkness, there seemed to be nothing at all. But now we know there is something not material out there after all. WHO could it be?

It is GOD.

"In the Beginning—GOD"

God had to be there first because He made everything that ever was. (Genesis 1:1.)

Probably one of the first things you wonder about God is where He came from. He didn't come from anywhere. He has *always existed!* It is hard for us to understand. We must remember that "the *secret* things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever" (Deuteronomy 29:29). God always was and He always will be. (Revelation 1:8.)

What is God like? We know what people are like because we can see them. Your parents and brothers and sisters—if you have brothers and sisters—are a family of human beings made of flesh and blood in the image or shape of God. (Genesis 1:26.)

God is not just one person, but is really a family (Ephesians 3:15) of very special persons made of spirit. (John 4:24.) Spirit is something we human beings can't usually see or feel or hear. That's why you can't see God by looking into the space of millions of years ago, even though God was all that existed then. However, we can often see the things that God produces.

We know of at least two spirit beings now in the God Family. One is God the Father. The other is Jesus the Son. Each Person in the God Family is called God, just as each human person in your family is called by your last name. God the Father and Jesus are both composed of Spirit, and they are holy and perfect. Their Spirit, like their light which radiates from them, goes out from them everywhere, and is called the Holy Spirit. (Psalm 139:7.)

Now we know that we have gone back in time as far as we can go and still learn something. Next we should ask our time machine to show us something of what happened between that time and now—an era when God created the great universe in the vast expanse of space.

We don't know just when the universe was made nor how long it took to make it; so instead of asking the time machine to take us back any certain number of years, we'll simply ask it to show us a picture of the universe as it appeared after God created it. This could have been millions of years ago. But we do not know for certain.

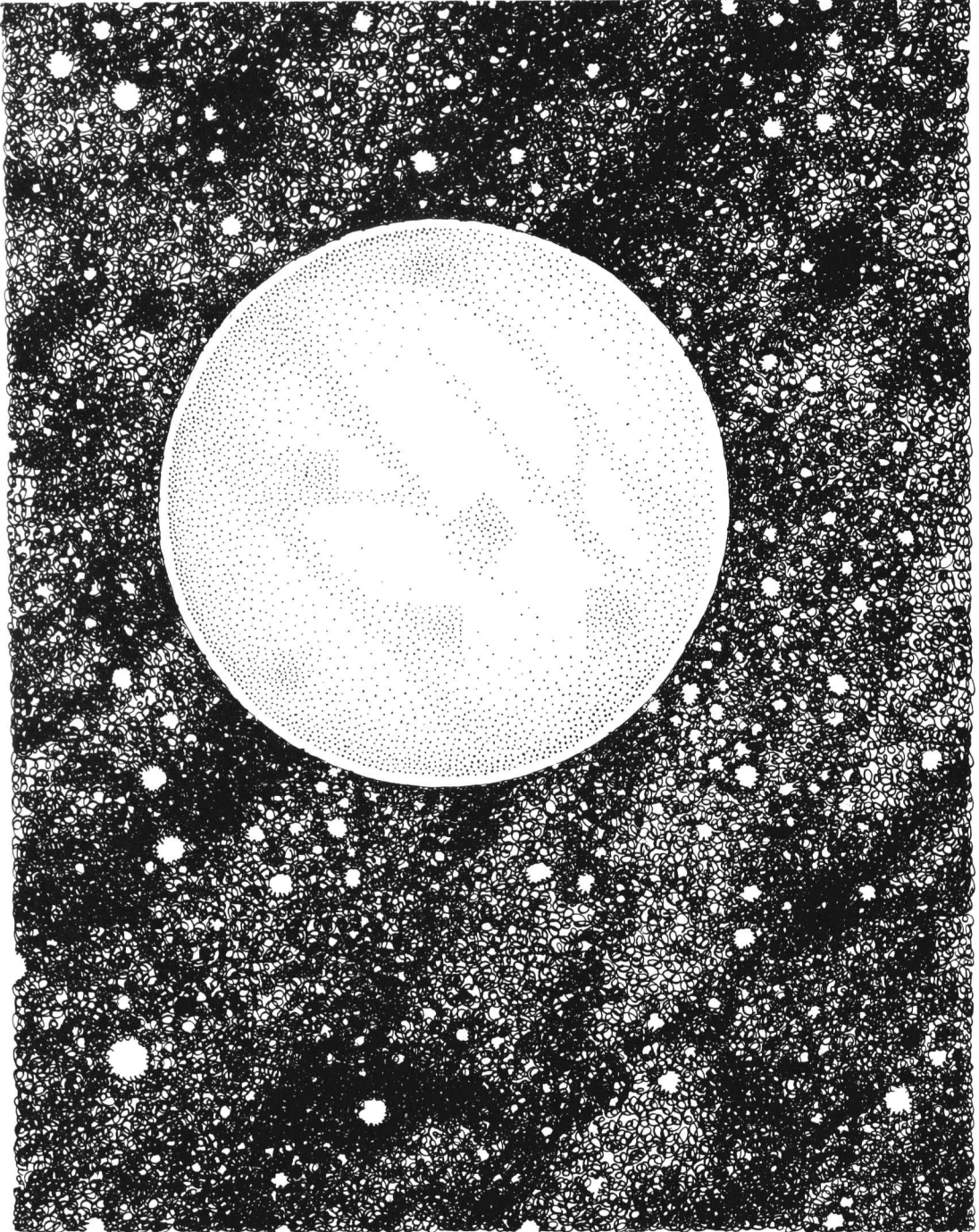
Now Look!

Look at what is coming on the screen! The black curtain of depthless space is now jeweled by millions of specks and patches of light of various colors. Each one of those specks of bright light is a gigantic, flaming sun thousands upon thousands of miles across. And though those suns, or stars, look as though they are grouped together like clusters of diamonds in priceless brooches, they are many billions of miles apart! (Isaiah 54:2.)

The universe is so big that we cannot see but part way through it. Its tremendous size is something our human minds cannot even begin to understand. This should

give us some idea of how much wiser and more powerful our Creator is than we are.
(Job 22:12 and 38:4-6.)

Somewhere in those bright clusters of beautiful stars our Earth was created. Men



Among millions of bright stars in the vastness of space our Earth was created.

have thought up various ideas of how it came to be there. Some have even been foolish enough to state that our world, as well as the other bodies in the skies, just happened to be made without God having anything to do with creation. This silly idea is even taught in some of the most famous schools throughout the world. (Psalm 53:1.)

Just *how* God created the Earth should not be as important to us right now as *why* He created it.

If we were to ask our time machine to show us a picture of it after it was made, we would see a gigantic, blue-green globe hanging in breath-taking beauty against that wondrous, star-studded, black curtain of space. You wouldn't recognize any of our planet's continents or markings, because when it was first formed it was quite different.

What did God use to create the stars, planets, comets and other objects of the universe? He had to have material, just as the carpenters or your father needed material to build the house you live in. (Hebrews 11:3.)

God Himself is composed of Spirit, as you already know. His Holy Spirit emanates from Him everywhere in the universe, just as light shines from a lamp throughout a room. It is a mysterious and wonderfully powerful something we human beings can't describe because our minds are not able to grasp very much about it. The Holy Spirit is something that is everywhere. It is the very essence of God flowing out from Him. By it God created and now controls and rules the universe and everything and every one in it. Everything that exists was made by it. It is the most important thing there is.

Angels!

When our Creator used His Holy Spirit to make the universe, He didn't do it just so He would have something vast and beautiful to gaze upon. (Isaiah 45:18.) He also created millions of spirit beings, or angels to live in it. Many of them served Him in the place He made for His throne, called heaven. We don't know where heaven is, but possibly it is somewhere in the northern sky. (Isaiah 14:13.) On the other hand, it could be very close to us. (Isaiah 66:1.) We do know that it is probably invisible to human eyes, just as spirit beings cannot be seen by us.

A long time ago there was in heaven a chief angel whose name was Lucifer. That name means *Light Bringer*, or *Shining Star of the Dawn*. God created Lucifer very wise, good and capable. Lucifer was perfect in his ways when God created him, and brilliant in knowledge and beauty. (Isaiah 14:12.)

Therefore God made Lucifer ruler over the newly created Earth, where millions of angels were sent to dwell. Lucifer's throne was in a place called Eden, where later the first human beings came into being. From this place Lucifer governed the angels

of the Earth by carrying out all of God's orders and laws.

You see, God is the Supreme Ruler over the whole universe, because God created it all, and it all belongs to Him. When He made Lucifer ruler over the Earth, Lucifer was to obey God and carry out every rule and instruction. (Ezekiel 28:13-15.)

Lucifer was perfectly obedient in these things. He did all that God commanded. There were years and years of great happiness and contentment among the angels while they and their king, Lucifer, obeyed every one of God's laws. This is because of the fact that God's laws are given to make beings happy.

Then one day Lucifer permitted a wrong thought to come into his mind.

Pride Enters

"I am king over millions of angels," he said to himself. "From them I could form a great army powerful enough to attack God and His angels. If I could seize His throne in heaven, I could take God's place as supreme ruler of the whole universe!" (Isaiah 14:13-14.)

The mere thought of conquering God and making himself ruler of the universe caused great pride to grow in his mind. And the more he let his mind dwell on this greedy idea, the more anxious he became to do something about it.

What had started out as only a wrong thought in time grew into an evil plan that was to plunge our planet and universe and even heaven into a terrible storm of trouble.

At last Lucifer made his evil plan known to his subjects. He made tempting promises to any who would follow him in his scheme. By telling many of his angels that he would make them rulers over other worlds in far-flung space, and others that they would be given high offices under him in heaven, Lucifer managed to bring a third of the angels into his army. (Revelation 12:4 and Job 4:18.)

Most of the angels stayed loyal to God, however, and refused to turn against the Eternal One who had brought them into being.

The pride and greed that had grown from his evil idea caused Lucifer to lose some of his great wisdom. Otherwise, he would have known for certain that he could not possibly be successful in any war against his Creator.

But Lucifer's wrong thinking caused him to believe something that wasn't true, and from that time on Lucifer's thinking has been false. Filled with the belief that he could really conquer his own Creator, Lucifer decided to carry out his plan. With millions of angels willing to obey him, instead of God, he swept up to heaven with them for the attack. (Jude 6)

The war that resulted between millions of spirit beings must have been an awful

thing. Probably they used great forces and strange and awesome powers we human beings know nothing about. Today some people think that hydrogen and cobalt bombs and rocket ships blasting into space show the greatest powers that exist. But these things are puny and weak compared to the powerful forces at God's command.

God has always been the most powerful being to exist. No human being or spirit or army of human beings or spirits has any power to move Him in the slightest.

God RULES!

In this war that happened in heaven, perhaps God allowed Lucifer to have a very small bit of success in warfare—just so Lucifer would think that he was about to win. Thus sudden and awful defeat would be even more bitter.

Awful defeat was what Lucifer ran into. The terrible power of the Creator was loosed upon Lucifer and his angels with such terribly destructive force that he and his followers were blasted out of heaven and back down to Earth. (II Peter 2:4 and Isaiah 14:15.)

God wasn't done with His attackers, however. Lucifer's great sin of rebellion against the rule of God turned him into a devil. His name was changed to Satan, which means *enemy*. (Revelation 12:9.) Those evil angels who had followed him were from then on known as demons. Demons are hateful, bitter, unhappy spirit beings whose pure spirit light has gone out forever, and who therefore have nothing but a miserable, hopeless future.

Satan was allowed to keep his rule over the angels who had become demons (Luke 4:5-6), but he lost his power over the angels on Earth who had not sinned by following him.

Awful Penalty of Sin

Whenever God's laws are broken, suffering and trouble and destruction are certain to follow. Therefore, during that great battle when Satan and his millions of demons tried to conquer God, a great and awesome change came over the planet. (Genesis 1:2.)

What had long been a beautiful planet, our Earth, was turned into a cosmic wreck. At first terrific winds came up, flattening vegetation everywhere. Seas were whipped into rolling mountains of water. Earth's crust shook and buckled under the pressure of the raging elements.

Here and there the crust split open and flames and lava spewed high into the sky. The atmosphere was filled with smoke so thick that nothing could live in it. Huge, flying reptiles that soared through the skies in those days were dashed to the ground. Thundering herds of dinosaurs, or giant lizards, came to sudden death. Many of them,

fleeing from roaring, lava-belching volcanoes, plunged to their end in deep chasms that opened up by terrible earthquakes. The flattened vegetation, covered by whole seas of boiling water and lava, was turned into what we know today as coal.

The raging elements on land and in the sea and sky were churned up with a force that plowed up all of Earth's surface. It was as though a million hydrogen bombs had been set off all over the world. Probably nothing lived through that terrible time. Animal and vegetable life was crushed out. (Psalm 104:29.)

The only living things left upon the planet were the evil, restless demons whose lawbreaking had broken the perfect balance, harmony and beauty of the world God had lovingly created for His creatures.

For a time our planet stayed buried in a deep sea of gases, smoke and water vapor. There was no longer any dry land. Oceans covered the whole Earth. The gases and smoke and vapor were so thick that no light could reach the seas that covered the planet.

How long this condition lasted we do not know. But at last came the moment when God started preparing for a very important event in His great plan—bringing human beings into existence.

Now there are several other planets besides Earth swinging around our sun, and it is quite likely that there are even many more planets here and there in the universe. But as far as we know, Earth was the only planet God chose and prepared to be the home of human beings patterned after His image.

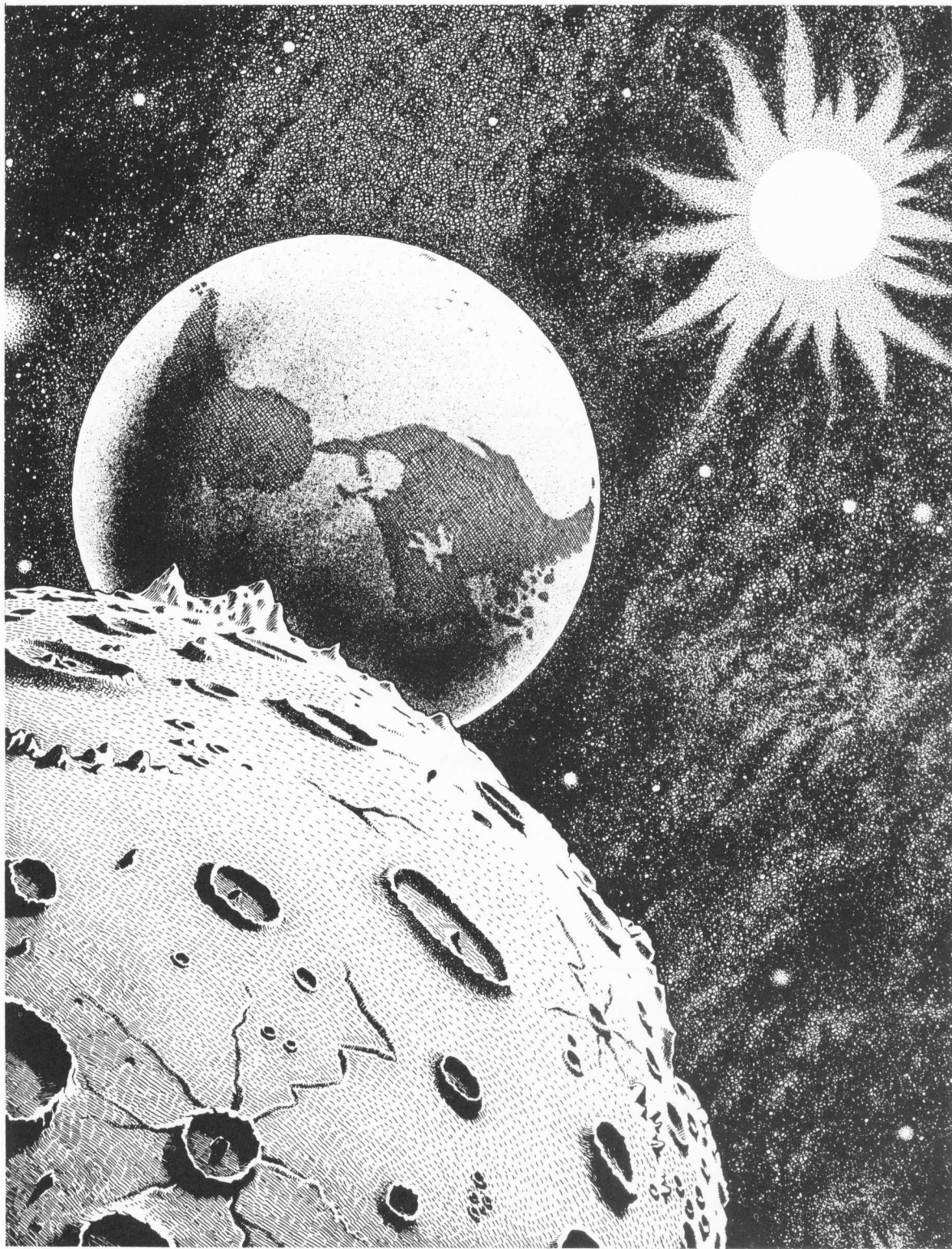
How God Creates

For five days God worked at making Earth over into a place that would be just right to support human life. (Genesis 1:23.)

Can you imagine what great power and awesome forces it took to change the whole surface of our planet in less than a week?

Remember, God is not just one Person, but the Divine Family. The Father does the supreme planning. He decided what to do. Then He told the second Person of the God Family to do it. This second Person is called the Word of God because He is the Spokesman who does the speaking, as the Father commands Him. This second Person is the one who later was born as a human, and became Jesus Christ. So this second Person, or the Word, commanded what God the Father decided to do. Instantly the mighty and all-powerful Holy Spirit produced whatever the Word commanded. That is how God created and formed everything by Jesus Christ. (John 1:3.)

On the first day of reforming Earth's surface, God prepared periods of night and day by clearing away much of the smoke and gases surrounding the whirling planet.



The moon, sun and stars appeared on the fourth day.

Thus a little light came through to Earth for the first time since Satan and his demons were cast back down from heaven, when deep, heavy blankets of dark clouds were formed from the wrecking of the world. At that time those clouds had cut off all light rays from the sun, moon and stars. (Genesis 1:3-5.)

On the second day God formed a vast layer of fresh air over the Earth. This caused much of the water vapors to seep upward, like steam out of a teakettle, and to form great, billowing, clean clouds high in the sky. This air, a combination of healthy gases, is known to us as the atmosphere. (Genesis 1:6-8.)

It was very necessary to prepare the atmosphere, because man has to breathe air in order to live. He actually lives in a deep, heavy sea of gases, much as sea creatures live in the deep oceans.

Three Heavens

God called this atmosphere Heaven. (Genesis 1:8.) However, He also spoke of two other heavens. One is the vast space beyond our atmosphere. (Genesis 1:14.) The other is where His throne is. (Acts 7:49.) He doesn't tell us just where that is, and astronomers can't find out because it isn't visible to human eyes.

On the third day, our Creator molded Earth's crust so that some of it was high and some of it was low. The great layer of water covering the planet drained into the low areas, causing deep seas. Large areas of land were left above water, forming continents. (Genesis 1:9-10.)

On the continents God planted all kinds of vegetation—trees, bushes, flowers, grass—everything that could grow out of the ground. And in that same day the lands of Earth began to be green with plants of all kinds springing up from the soil. (Genesis 1:11-13.)

On the fourth day God cleared away the last of the dust and harmful gases from the sky, thus letting the sun, moon and stars shine in their full brilliance and splendor upon the lands and seas. (Genesis 1:14-19.)

On the fifth day the Creator planted in the sea whales, fish, eels, octopi and many, many other water creatures. On that same day He also formed various kinds of birds to fly through the air. From these sea creatures and air creatures came many others of their kind, and in time the seas and the skies were swarming with living things. (Genesis 1:20-23.)

Now God had renewed the whole face of the Earth in five days, and at last the planet was ready for God to create man to live on it.

But before He created man on that sixth day, God formed other creatures to live on land. Elephants, cattle, lizards, worms, insects—every kind of thing that walks or

creeps was brought into being that day. (Genesis 1:24-25.)

MAN Created!

At last God performed the most important task of physical work. Using the material from which He formed the Earth, He made a human being! (Genesis 1:26-28.)

This first human being was fashioned in such a way that he looked very much like God. It was as if God were a sculptor, making a statue of Himself in flesh and blood and bone. Actually, He made this first man out of the dust of the ground, then caused him to breathe air and to become alive—and he became the first living soul of his kind. (Genesis 2:7.)

God named this first human being Adam. Adam was the first living, mortal man on this planet. (I Corinthians 15:45.)

The Creator had already planted a beautiful park for Adam to live and work in. This park was in Eden, a land on the other side of the world from what is now the United States of America.

God knew that Adam would become lonely if he were the only human being. He took one of Adam's ribs, while he was sleeping, and by His creative powers formed it into a woman. God gave her to Adam for a companion. Adam named the woman Eve. (Genesis 2:18-22.)

All this God made and created in six days of work. Each day then was just twenty-four hours long and had a night time and a day time just as it has now.

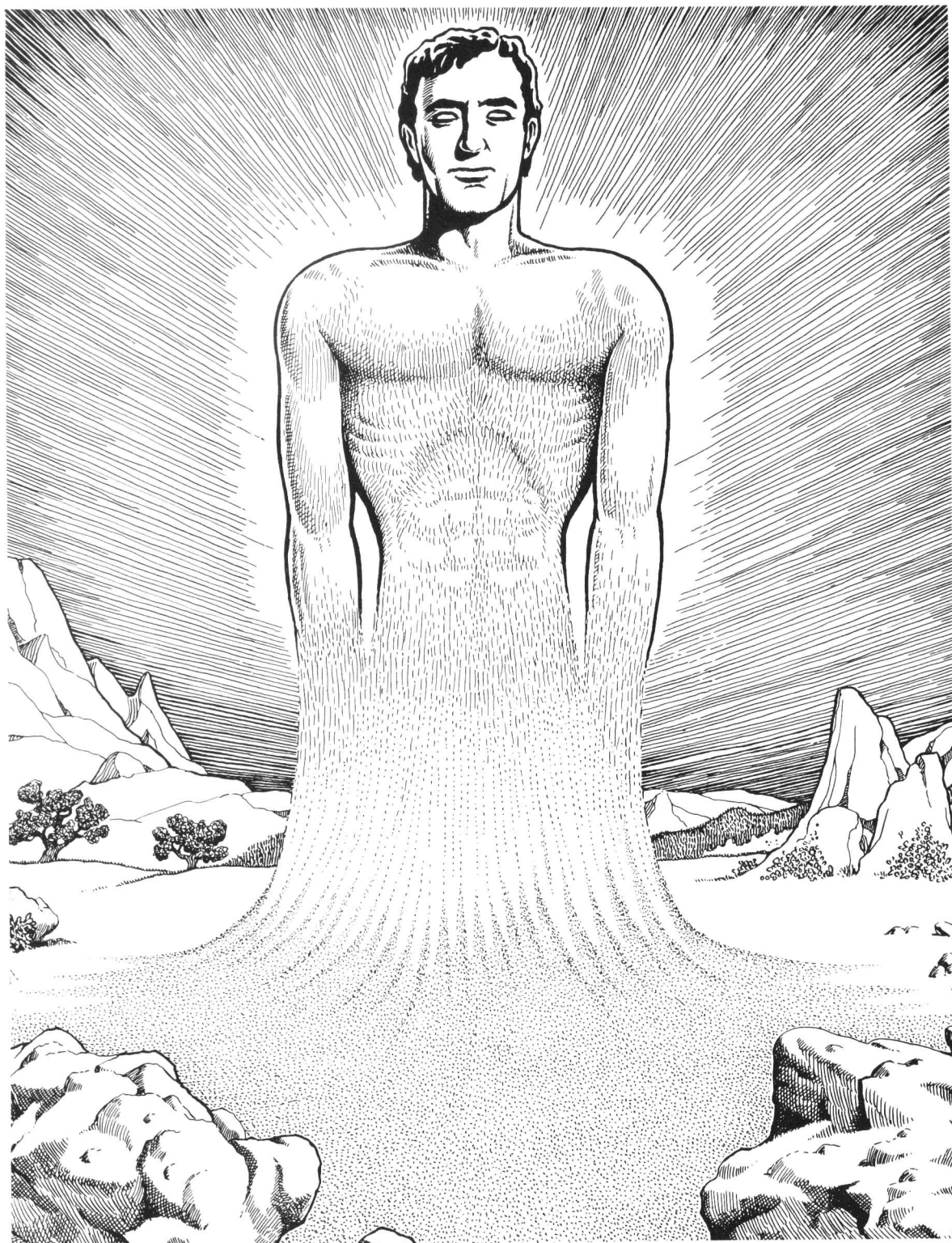
HOW the Sabbath Was Made

But God had not yet finished His week of creating. On the seventh day He *rested* from His work, and therefore created the Sabbath day by resting instead of working. (Genesis 2:2-3.)

Thus ended the first week in the history of the refashioned planet on which we human beings have lived for almost six thousand years.

The seventh day, on which God rested, He called the Sabbath. (Exodus 16:26.) He blessed it as a special day of rest, and set it apart as His very own day, belonging to Him. He made a law that man should always observe that holy day every week by resting and assembling in church for worship. God made that day holy time, and commanded all people to always *keep* it holy. He gave the other six days to man for man's work and play, but the last day of the week He kept for Himself. (Exodus 20:8-11.)

You will probably remember that the last time we used our time machine was when we wished to see the whole Earth as it was in the distant ages during which



"God formed man of the dust of the ground."

angels happily lived there. Now let's turn to the machine again to get a view of part of the beautiful Garden of Eden, the park where Adam and Eve lived.



Contentment in the beautiful garden in Eden

GOD'S Beauty

You probably see on the screen a deep green, grassy slope leading down to a stream of brilliant, sparkling, blue water. The slope is decked with graceful shade trees, fruit trees and colorful clusters of plants and flowers. Beyond the fern-banked stream is a towering cliff of red and yellow agate, over which falls a foamy ribbon of glistening water. At one side, in the distance, are rolling hills covered with green groves of leafy trees and flowering bushes. In the distance on the other side is a lush jungle of amazingly beautiful vines trailing thickly between graceful, tall palms. (Genesis 1:31.)

Some close-ups on our time machine screen show strange birds of bright hues flying from tree to tree. Their songs fill the air with a soothing music that seems to tell us that here is real peace and happiness.

Another view shows us Adam and Eve beside the stream. They are watching with amused interest the antics of fish, turtles and other water creatures playing in the clear, cool water.

Now our time machine picks up a view of Adam and Eve happily busy—Adam dressing and pruning the lush shrubs, vines, and flowers and joyfully singing praises to God—Eve preparing a delicious meal full of eye-appeal as she beams in delight over what she is doing. They are very happy in their work. But they also enjoy pleasurable hours of walking and talking with God—and there is time, too, for healthy, relaxing walks through nature.

Perhaps the first thing you will notice about Adam and Eve is that their bodies are perfectly formed. Adam is straight and muscular and handsome. Eve is beautiful and graceful. It is not hard for you to see this, because they are unclothed.

You see, no clothes were needed by Adam and Eve because it wasn't cold in the park. Besides, there were no thistles or thorns to scratch them. They didn't realize that there was such a thing as being naked, and therefore they were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:25.)

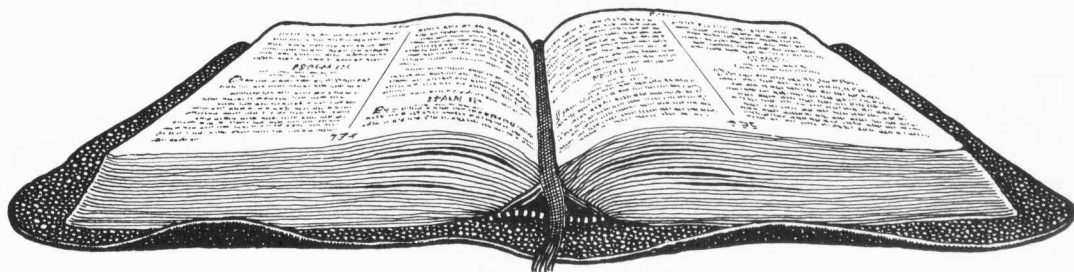
Look at the screen again. A huge lion has moved out from the deep shadows of the thick trees, and is slowly moving up behind Adam and Eve! The two human beings are so interested in the water creatures that they have no idea the great beast is so close to them. But in the next moment Adam's keen sense of hearing causes him to turn and see what is almost upon them. He swings his strong, right arm out to seize the lion's heavy mane—and then playfully scratches the head of this beast who has simply come for a friendly visit!

Before Eve was created, God asked Adam to name all creatures. (Genesis 2:19-

20.) In this time of perfect peace, all creatures were friendly and harmless—just as they will again be in the time of peace that will come to the world in just a few years. (Isaiah 11:6-9.) In looking at these scenes from the distant past, probably you have paid little attention to the time machine itself. But now look at it closely.

It's the BIBLE!

Perhaps for the first time you realize that it is shaped very much like an open book. On closer examination, you note that what you thought was the machine's viewing screen is actually the open pages of the most important of all books—the Bible!



CHAPTER TWO

“THOU SHALT SURELY DIE!”

LONG AGO God put true facts into the minds of a few men whom He chose. These men wrote out those facts in words God put into their minds. It was like God writing by using human minds.

God does not lie. He does not make mistakes. Therefore every word written by those men was true. Since then the Bible has been put into many other languages, and the meanings of a few of its words have changed a little in time. But the Bible as it was written in the beginning is entirely true and without mistakes. Many men who thought they had great wisdom have tried to point out mistakes to prove that the Bible is not true, but all of them have failed. If they had been truly wise, they would have recognized that the Bible is the *only* true book that has ever been written.

If we study the Bible with the idea of gaining wisdom for a better way of life, it can tell us a great deal about what happened long ago, what is happening now in the world and a lot about what is going to happen.

Many people whose minds have been poisoned by wrong teaching in schools and colleges do not believe that God wrote the Bible. They do not even believe in the God who caused their own bodies to be born. They laugh when someone mentions something that is in the Bible. Some of them are ashamed to be seen even reading or holding a Bible—even though it is the most valuable of all books.

Those who do read the Bible and live by the rules in it are by far the wiser and happier people.

Although the Bible wasn't written until long after the days of the Garden of Eden, the Creator gave rules of good living to Adam and Eve. Obeying those rules

meant that the two human beings would keep happy and healthy and close to God.

Among the rules was a warning not to touch the fruit of a certain tree that grew in the park.

"Eat the fruit of any of the other trees," God's voice spoke, "but if you eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall die!"

This voice that spoke was the voice of the Word, who later was born as Jesus Christ.

For a little while Adam and Eve obeyed every law, and so lived happily in the park. They enjoyed their work as well as the other wonderful and exciting things, though they didn't work on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was the happiest day of all, for then they rested and talked with God, and were in His glorious presence.

The First Sin

Let us not forget that Satan and his fallen angels were still roaming the Earth in the form of evil spirits. God allowed Satan to still be the demon ruler of Earth, though Satan's power was much less than it had been before he sinned.

Having become God's enemy, Satan was far from pleased when God created human beings and put them on Earth to have power over all other living creatures in the world. Therefore Satan wanted very much to find some way of turning Adam and Eve against their Creator, so that he would become their master.

Satan waited for his chance. One day it came when Eve walked off by herself in the park. Suddenly she came upon a snake. There was nothing unusual about that, because all the animals were friendly, and they always obeyed Adam and Eve. What surprised Eve was that the snake, who was Satan in disguise, spoke to her!

"Did God tell you that you would die if you should eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil?" asked the snake.

"He did," answered Eve, as soon as she could recover from her surprise. "We don't want to die, so we haven't touched the tree."

"But you have an immortal soul, and therefore you can never die," lied the snake. "If you eat the fruit of that tree you will receive great wisdom—not death. You may even become as wise as God."

The more Eve thought about what the snake said, the more she wanted to eat some of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Finally she could resist no longer. She went to the tree and plucked some of the fruit. It was pleasant to taste, so she took some to Adam and he ate of it, too.

After that, Adam and Eve felt guilty. They knew they had disobeyed God. They also knew they were naked, and they felt ashamed. They wanted to cover themselves,

so they sewed fig leaves together to make aprons to put around them.

Because they had disobeyed God's wonderful law by eating the fruit they had

Eve reaches for the forbidden fruit.



been told not to eat, Adam and Eve committed the very first sin. That simple wrong act changed the life of every human being who has been born since then.

Do you remember how Lucifer, the mighty super-angel, turned against God? Because he refused to carry out God's rule over the Earth, he was no longer fit to be God's king over this planet. Trying to rule by his own wrong ideas only brought trouble.

Human beings must live by certain rules, or they get into trouble, too. The rules and laws we must obey come from those who are over us in power. The act of causing people to obey rules is called government. God's laws and His government are LOVE. (Romans 13:10.) His rules are that people must first of all love God by obeying Him, worshipping Him, praying to Him, trusting Him and keeping His Sabbath holy.

Next to those most important laws are the laws that people should love other people. To begin, children should respect and obey their parents. (Ephesians 6:1-3.) They must never hate or kill or try to harm others. Instead, they should love every one—even their enemies. They must be true to others, honest, and always tell the truth. They must not want to take anything away from others. They should remember that it is better to give to others than to take from them. (Exodus 20:12-17.)

Why the World Is Unhappy

After Satan began thinking wrong thoughts in his mind, he soon came to believe just the opposite of God's laws. His way of life has come to mean that children should disobey their parents, and not respect them. More than that, it means disobeying God and having no respect for His laws. It means taking away what one wants from others, and lying and cheating and stealing. (John 8:44; I John 3:8.)

You can see that God could not let Satan go on ruling the Earth forever, because Satan's way of ruling would bring only unhappiness and suffering. God decided that Satan could have power over the beings of Earth only until God should create a MAN who would obey God, carry out His orders, and prove that he was worthy to rule the Earth.

God made Adam the father of all people who have ever been born. Because Adam was the first man, God gave him the chance to rule the Earth—if he would obey God and rule the Earth with God's laws instead of Satan's. (Genesis 1:28.)

Satan knew all this. He knew Adam would take his place as Earth ruler if Adam obeyed God. He hated Adam, and therefore schemed to tempt him to disobey God. His clever plan was to get Adam to believe that the wrong way was the right way.

God had made the man to be the head of his wife and his family. (Ephesians 5:23, 25.) Just as God rules with love over angels and human beings, so must the

man rule with love over his own house. If any man fails in this, so would he fail in becoming a ruler in the Kingdom of God that is coming to Earth very soon.

God had told Adam that he must be the head over Eve. Satan knew this. That is why he waited to catch her alone.

Finally, when he had tempted her to pick the fruit which she was not to touch, she then tempted Adam. (Genesis 3:6.) Adam was not strong enough to keep from disobeying along with Eve. This proved that he could not be strong enough to obey God in all things, and therefore was not worthy to be ruler of the Earth.

Satan Still the Unseen Ruler

The way it turned out, Satan got to continue as the unseen ruler of the world until one should come who would conquer him by obeying God and never sinning. That man finally did come, but you will find out about him shortly. (Luke 4:5-8.)

God let Satan stay on Earth, but God did not let him have any power to force anyone to sin. Thus today Satan has power only to try to lead or tempt people. As for human beings, God gave each of us a mind to think for ourselves and to decide whether we will obey God or whether we will obey Satan. (James 4:7.)

Ashamed that they had believed the things that Satan had spoken through the snake, Adam and Eve tried to hide in the park. But God knew where they were. (Genesis 3:8.)

"Have you disobeyed Me and eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil?" asked God.

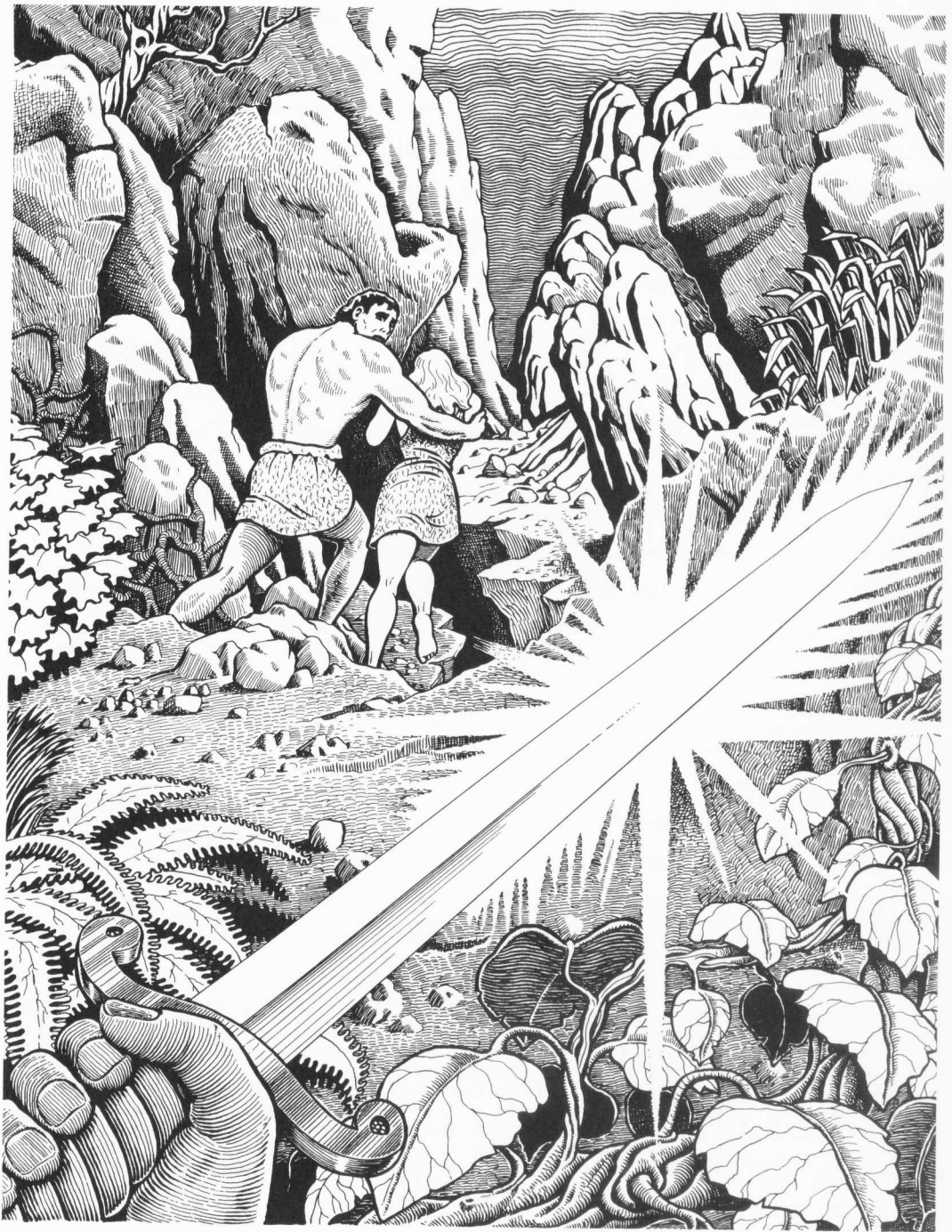
"Eve gave me the fruit to eat," Adam said, trying to put the blame on his wife. (Genesis 3:12.)

Of course God was very disappointed. But He had allowed the man and woman to make their own choice, to decide whether to obey Him or Satan. In the same way God allows you and me to make the same choice for ourselves. We can choose God's right way of LOVE, and be happy, or we can choose Satan's wrong and false way of pride and of taking things we shouldn't take, and be punished and unhappy. (Deuteronomy 30:15-19.)

God always punishes those who do not obey him, and so Adam and Eve were punished. They were given some leather clothes to wear (Gen. 3:21), and were put out of the beautiful park. (Verse 23.) God knew that if they were to stay there, they might also eat of the Tree of Life, and that would have meant that they would have lived forever in unhappiness and shame. (Verse 22.)

To keep them from returning to the park, God placed a moving, flaming sword

at the only entrance. (Verse 24.) Also, God told Eve that because she had sinned and caused Adam to sin, she would suffer pain any time she gave birth to a child. So



A flaming sword guards the garden of Eden against man's re-entrance.

it has continually been with mothers since babies have been born. (Genesis 3:16.)

Thus the first human beings, because of believing Satan instead of their Creator, lost the right to live forever in perfect peace and happiness and good health. Just imagine how wonderful it would have been if they had obeyed God and then could have eaten the fruit of the Tree of Life! They would have lived forever in perfect peace and happiness!

Earth Is Cursed

Furthermore, because of their sin, God put a curse on the ground outside of the park, so that weeds and thistles grew out of it. (Gen. 3:17.) This made it more difficult for Adam and Eve to grow eatable things out of the soil, and they had to grow something out of it or starve.

What was worst of all to bear was knowing that they would surely die. They didn't know when it would be, but now they believed that God meant what He said. They were very sorry that they had listened to Satan—the one who has been lying to people ever since that day in the Garden of Eden.

After a time a son was born to them. They named him Cain—the very first baby in the world. Later they had another son whose name was Abel. (Genesis 4:1-2.)

God had also told Adam that if he, Adam, did not prove to be a fit manager of his family, then long after he was dead a MAN would be born who *would* obey all of God's rules.

"You may not understand this now," God later told Adam and Eve, "but because you have disobeyed and because those living after you will disobey, this MAN who is coming will *die* to save all of you."

He went on to explain that the MAN who would give His life would be their own Creator, who would be named Jesus Christ, and that therefore His life was worth more than any or all human lives. (Philippians 2:5-8.)

God pointed out that when He would come to Earth to die, He would in a way pay for all the punishment that should be put upon human beings for the wrong things they do. Then men who would be thoroughly sorry for the wrong things they had done could be forgiven, and could be free of sin and could talk to God the Father and receive help from Him in being obedient the rest of their lives.

"It would be better for human beings to die than to suffer more and more because of their sins," said God to Adam. "But just as your Creator will one day become MAN, and die and be brought back to life by God the Father to live and rule forever, so will those human beings who are willing to obey Me!" continued the Eternal.

How Sacrifices Began

Adam and Eve were also told that their Creator would be killed like a meek little lamb is killed—by the loss of the blood that gives it life. (Acts 8:32.)

“To help you remember what is to come,” said God, “and to remind you of your sins and that you should ask to be forgiven of them, you should at times kill a lamb and burn its flesh on an altar. Teach your sons to do this, too.”

Because of their parents’ sin, Cain and Abel had to work hard when they grew older. Cain became a farmer, and raised fruits, vegetables and grain. Abel was a shepherd, and raised sheep. (Genesis 4:2.) They had no real closeness to God such as their father and mother had enjoyed before disobeying Him. But they learned to make sacrifices to God on stone altars, and this was their way of contacting God and asking forgiveness of things they did that were wrong.

Of course today we don’t make sacrifices. Jesus Christ, their Creator, came almost two thousand years ago to die for all of us, just as God promised. Today, if people are sorry because of disobeying God, they can show it by repenting and being baptized. Then God puts the power of His Holy Spirit into their minds so that they can understand and obey God’s rules and laws. And today they can be close to God, and know that He hears them when they speak to Him by what we call prayer, and that He speaks to them when they read the Bible.

But it was different with Cain and Abel.

One day Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices to an altar. (Genesis 4:3-4.) Abel believed what his parents had taught him about why he should make sacrifices. He picked out from his flock the best lamb he could find. It was a little animal he had grown to love, but he was willing to give it up.

Although Cain raised mostly fruits and vegetables, he had a few animals, too. Among them was a lamb he prized very highly, because he knew it would grow into an especially fine sheep—if he didn’t kill and eat it.

“Why should I give up my lamb?” Cain thought. “I don’t see why it wouldn’t be just as good for me to sacrifice some of the vegetables and fruit I have grown. That ought to be good enough for God.”

Cain’s heart wasn’t right. He didn’t want to obey God. He was sure that God’s way was not the best way for him. He did what seemed right in his own mind.

Do you know that is the very thing that most people have been doing ever since? The Bible tells us that the way that seems right to a man is nearly always wrong, and that it will only bring him death. (Proverbs 14:12.) We should learn that God’s way is always right, whether or not it looks right to our minds. That is a

lesson not learned yet by many highly-educated people. If you can learn it now, it is worth more than most college educations.

The First Murderer!

Of course God could not accept Cain's sacrifice, which wasn't offered the way God said it should be. (Gen. 4:5.) When Cain realized that his sacrifice wasn't accepted, he became very envious of his brother. The envy turned to anger, then to hatred. Later, when the two brothers were out in a field away from other people, Cain turned on Abel and struck him with such violence that he killed him. (Gen. 4:8.)

Thus the first baby born in the world became the first murderer!

When Cain saw what he had done, he tried to hide. But God's voice came to him.

"Where is Abel, your brother?" asked the Eternal. (Gen. 4:9.)

Can you guess what Cain said? Did he confess that he killed Abel? Just as people today try to deny doing wrong things by putting the blame on others, so Cain tried to cover up his crime.

"I don't know where Abel is," lied Cain. "Do you expect me to know all about what my brother does and where he goes?"

To talk to God the way Cain did was very disrespectful. When anyone does a very wrong thing, he should confess it and pray to God right away for forgiveness. If he tries to cover up what he has done, he tells a lie and adds another sin to the first one.

Satan must have felt very successful, because his lie to Eve was bringing on more and more unhappiness. Think how unhappy it made Adam and Eve when they lost their second son, and learned that their first son was a liar and a murderer!

As punishment for what Cain had done, God put a curse on him. He told him that from then on he would be a wanderer on the Earth, and that he would have to leave his relatives.

Furthermore, God put a mark on Cain to show that he was a murderer, but that Cain should not be murdered by anyone else. Instead, he was to live on with the miserable thought that he had murdered his own brother. (Gen. 4:11-15.)

Adam and Eve had more children, and those children grew up and had children. Cain, who had married one of his sisters, also had children. (Gen. 4:16-17.)

Another son born to Adam and Eve was named Seth. He, too, married a sister, and they had many children and grandchildren.

Thus, as the years passed, many people came into the world. But most of them were not in touch with their Creator, and therefore it was not a very happy thron

Cain slays his brother Abel in the heat of anger.



of people. Men became mean and greedy. Instead of working for things they needed or wanted, people cheated and robbed and killed.

Adam lived in these days a lot longer than any of us live. He was nine hun-

Violence begins to fill the earth.



dred and thirty years old when he died! That's only seventy years short of a thousand years. But he did die—just as God said he would if he were to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. (Gen. 2:17.)

Wars Begin

By the time Adam died, there were many people living on Earth. But with all the space there was on the planet, they banded together in towns and cities instead of spreading out as God intended. (Gen. 4:17.)

Huddled together by the hundreds and thousands led only to more strife and misery, men were so much against God's laws that it wasn't possible for them to dwell together and still love one another.

The more people gathered in cities, the more men banded together in small armies to protect themselves. Others banded together to attack towns and cities and to seize the wealth from these places. Nothing was safe from greedy men.

So it was that wars started on Earth. Man became so evil that killing hundreds of human beings at a time was a sport in which many loved to take part. (Gen. 6:5.)

CHAPTER THREE

NOAH BUILDS THE ARK!

GOD looked down with sorrow on these human creatures He loved. It so displeased Him that they would not abide by His rules of happy living that he decided to do an awesome thing.

He would blot them out of the world by a mighty flood! (Genesis 6:7.)

He knew that if human beings were to go on and on in their evil ways they would soon destroy themselves in all kinds of cruel, painful ways—and without any hope of living again.

It was a loving and merciful thing God planned, because He would be bringing them back to life thousands of years later when Jesus Christ would be ruling Earth. Then they would be brought to see how much wiser, safer and happier they could be by obeying their Creator.

At the time when God decided to do away with the people of the Earth by a mighty flood, there was one man who lived according to God's laws. His name was Noah. (Genesis 6:8.)

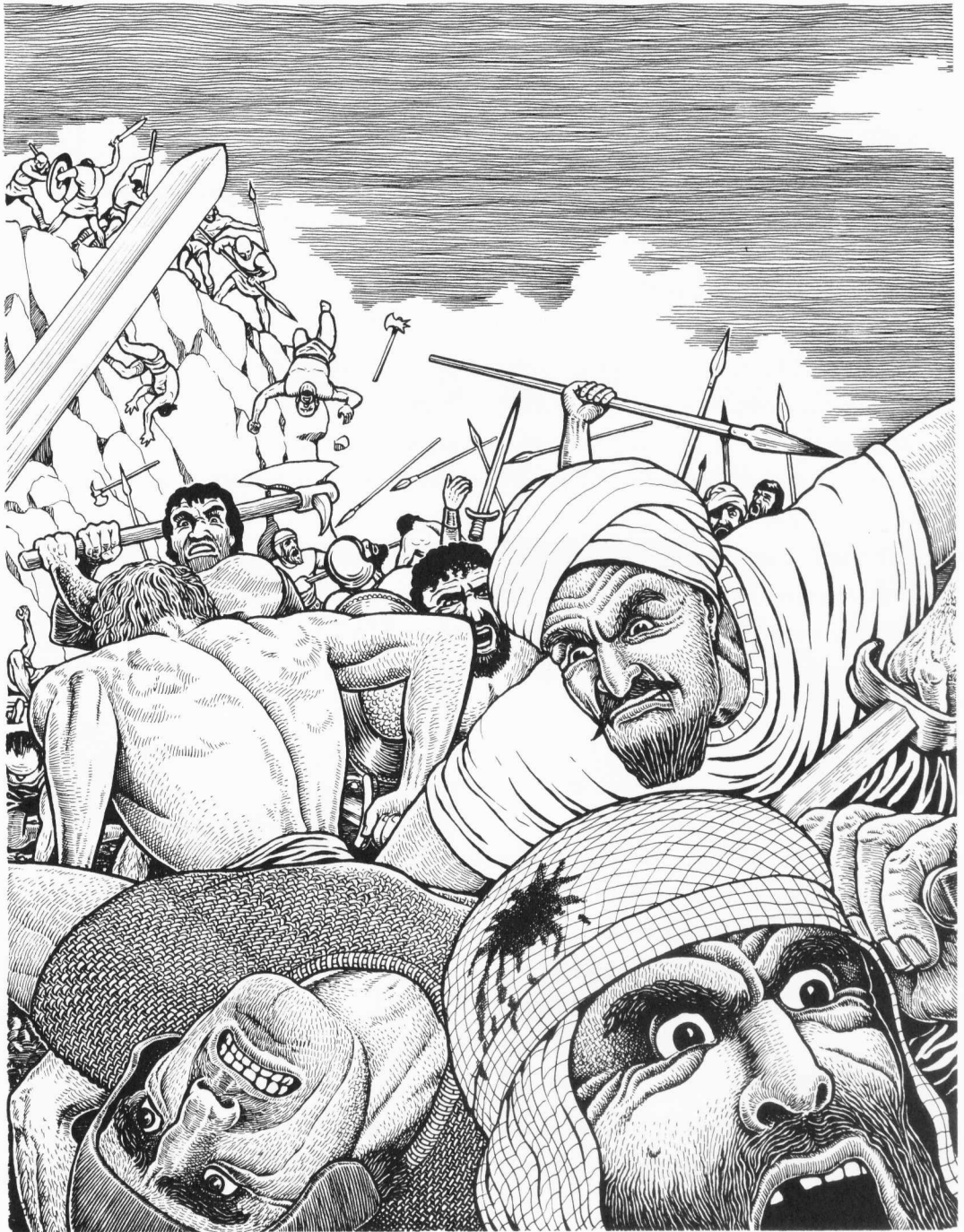
Noah knew that the growing misery among men was due to their disobedience. (Gen. 6:5.) He told the people who lived around him that they should feel sorry for doing the wrong things, and start living according to God's ways. But people wouldn't take him seriously.

One day Noah was startled to hear the Eternal speaking to him. Said God, "Because man has disobeyed me and become so evil, and because people's lives are so miserable and unhappy in all their violence and fighting, I am going to take away their lives for now. But I shall bring them all back to life again in the future when my Son

Jesus will be ruling Earth, and when people will live by my rules and be happy.”

At first Noah could hardly believe what he had heard. He wondered if God

Violence filled the earth in those days.



really meant to strike him dead in the next instant along with every other human being on Earth. But God is neither harsh nor cruel. He is far more loving and merciful than any human being.

"I am going to spare you and your family," God told Noah. "You have learned how to enjoy a happy and healthy life by obeying me. Therefore you shall keep on living. All other people will be drowned in a great flood that will cover the whole planet."

"But if the world is to be flooded, how shall my family and I escape?" asked Noah.

"You must build a large ship," God replied. "It must be large enough to hold at least one pair of every kind of creature on Earth. I shall tell you just how to build the ship." (Gen. 6:14-16.)

Noah Builds an Ark

Although Noah was about four hundred eighty years old at this time, he, and some years later his three sons, obediently began the great task. (Gen. 5:32). You see, people who lived back in the early time of human beings generally lived to be much older than we do now because their bodies were closer to being as perfect as were the bodies of Adam and Eve.

It wasn't long before people found out what Noah and his sons were doing. They came from many miles around to watch the laying of the keel of the great boat.

"Who ever heard of building a boat that size?" most of them laughed.

"They must be crazy," others said. "There's no water to float it in for miles and miles."

"They think there will be a great flood that will cover all of Earth," others scoffed. "Now where would so much water come from?"

Years passed. The ship, or ark, grew larger. The closer it came to being finished, the more people jeered. Today, people build large ships in only a few months. But that is with many men and powerful machines. Probably only Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, worked on the ark at the start though there may have been other men helping from time to time. For nearly a hundred years they carefully carried out the ship plans by which God directed them!

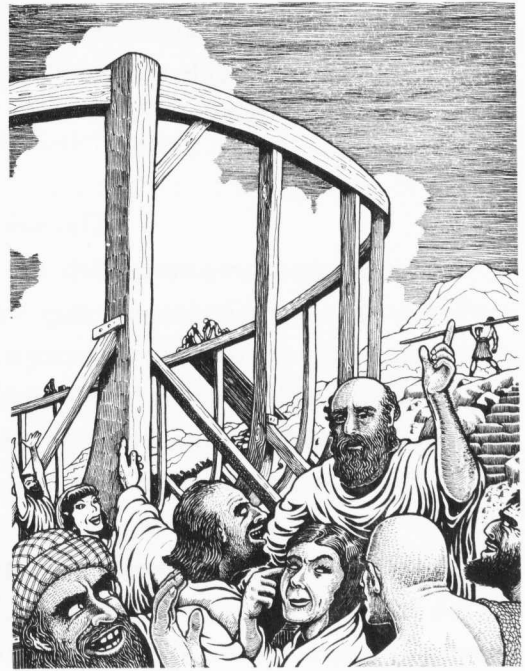
Meanwhile, Noah patiently kept on telling those who made fun of him that the flood would come in due time. He believed God without asking God for proof.

"It will come because you have been paying no attention to God," Noah told them. "However, if you will turn from your wrong ways and obey God's rules, He will spare you from the flood."

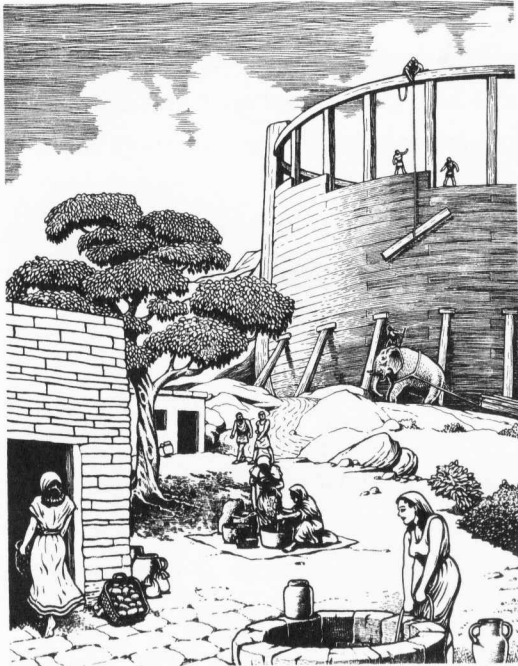
But no one outside of Noah's family believed what he said.



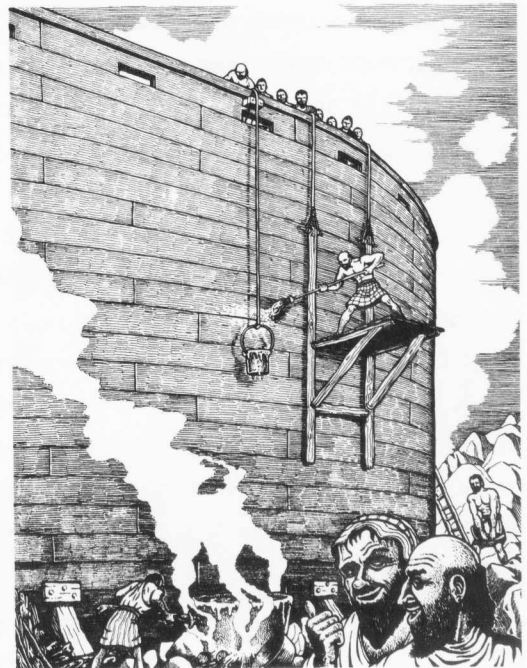
Cutting timber with which to build the ark.



Noah warning people who have come to see the ark being built.



Ark being built—with residences nearby in which women in Noah's family are preparing food.



Applying pitch to the hull.

“You have been saying that for a hundred years, and there still isn’t the slightest sign of a flood,” people sneered. “You are only a religious crackpot who wants to create a lot of attention!”

The Ark Is Finished

Twenty years more passed (Gen. 6:3) while Noah and his sons listened to the scoffing of onlookers. At last the ship was finished. God had given people one hundred and twenty years to think about their sins and decide to live differently. (II Peter 2:5.) No one could say that God wasn’t patient.

People must have admired Noah and his sons, however, for their ability to build such a ship. It was higher than a four-story building, and ten times as long as it was high!

Inside, it was divided into stables and cages for the many creatures that would go into it. It was to be a huge, floating zoo. There were many rooms for supplies. There were stairways, ventilator shafts, feeding troughs and everything that would be needed for the strangest live cargo ever to ride a ship.

When at last the ship was smeared inside and out with pitch to make certain it would not leak, Noah was almost six hundred years old! His sons were then older than most people are today when they die.

But work wasn’t over yet. There was the big task of gathering food for the animals that would be aboard the ship. Tons and tons of hay, grain, dried fruit and dried meat were hauled from the surrounding country and stowed aboard the ark. Huge tanks of fresh water were also stored.

Still people came to laugh and make fun of Noah. They could not and would not believe that world-wide disaster was coming upon them. Instead, they felt there was a glorious future for man as he spread out to conquer the whole Earth.

It was much as it is today, when a few men chosen by God are warning all nations of great calamity that will sweep the whole world within only a few years. Instead of heeding these warnings, people are looking forward to a push-button life in which there will be less work and more money and marvelous trips to the Moon or Mars or some other planet. And just as man’s hopes were shattered in Noah’s time, so will they be shattered again. Even a little child who will heed the warnings is wiser than the college professor who shakes his head at them.

It wasn’t easy for Noah and his family to listen to the unkind remarks scoffers made. No one likes to be sneered at by other people.

“Where are all the animals you are going to take for a boat ride?” was the question jeeringly put to Noah so often. Then the scoffers would add, “It will take you an-

other hundred and twenty years to round up enough animals to fill that thing you've built!"

Even the Animals Seek Shelter!

Nevertheless, Noah believed God. He built a road up to a large door in the side of the ark, so that animals could walk right into it.

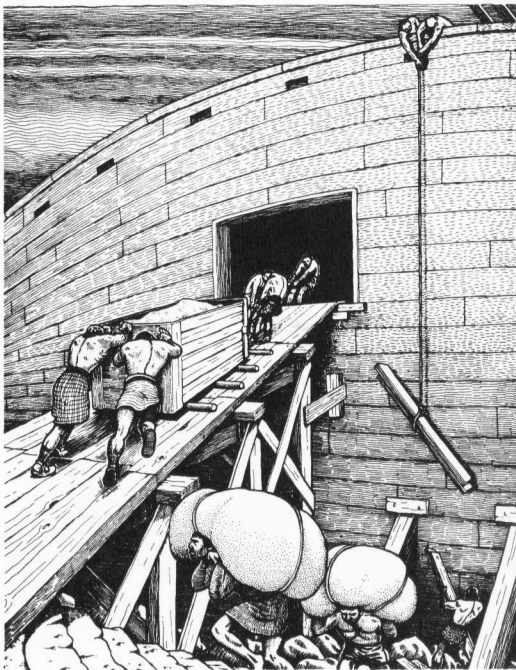
We don't realize how great a test this was of Noah's belief in God. Noah had spent a hundred and twenty years of his life preaching and preparing the ship. He was a man who was well-known and had been highly respected in his part of the world. It took courage to stand up for what seemed foolishness in the minds of other people.

One day those who came to scoff suddenly failed to scoff. They just stood and stared at what they saw.

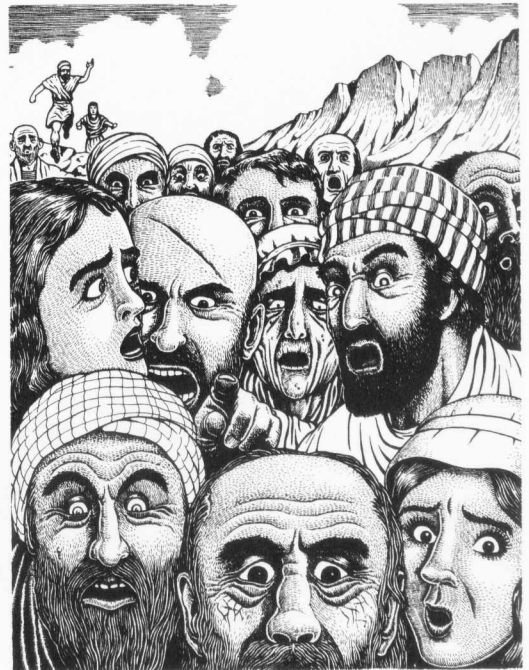
All kinds of animals and birds were gathering around the ark! (Gen. 7:8-9.)

If they expected Noah and his men to have a lot of trouble getting the creatures into the ship, they were wrong. God gave the creatures an impulse to seek out the ark, and they came obediently, though many of them were wild and very ferocious by nature.

Of all creatures on Earth clean enough to be eaten, seven pairs entered the ship. Of all unclean creatures, one pair entered—a male and a female of each. Soon they were



Food being brought into the ark.

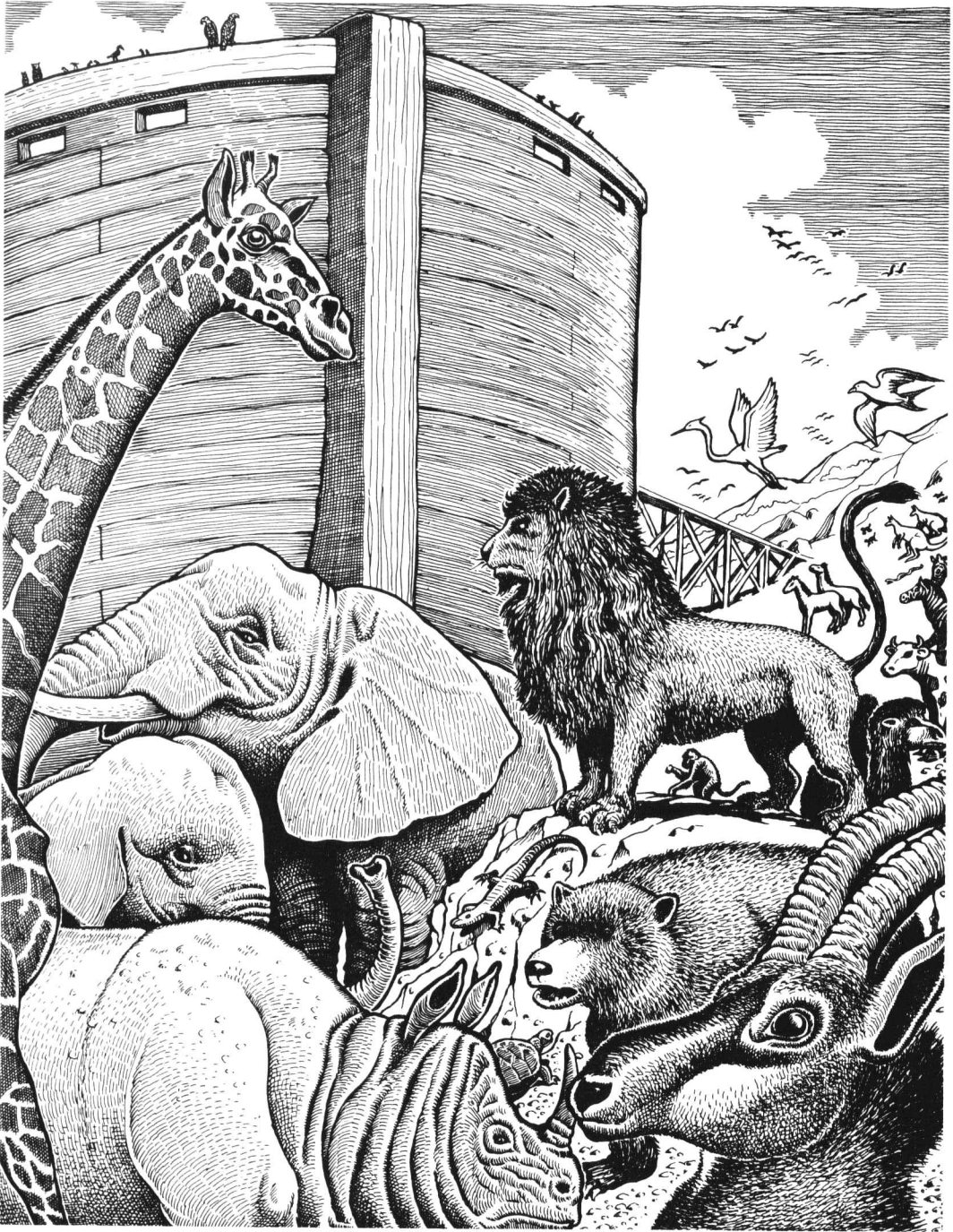


People express shocked surprise at seeing animals gathering around ark.

safe within the cages and stables that would be their homes for many months.

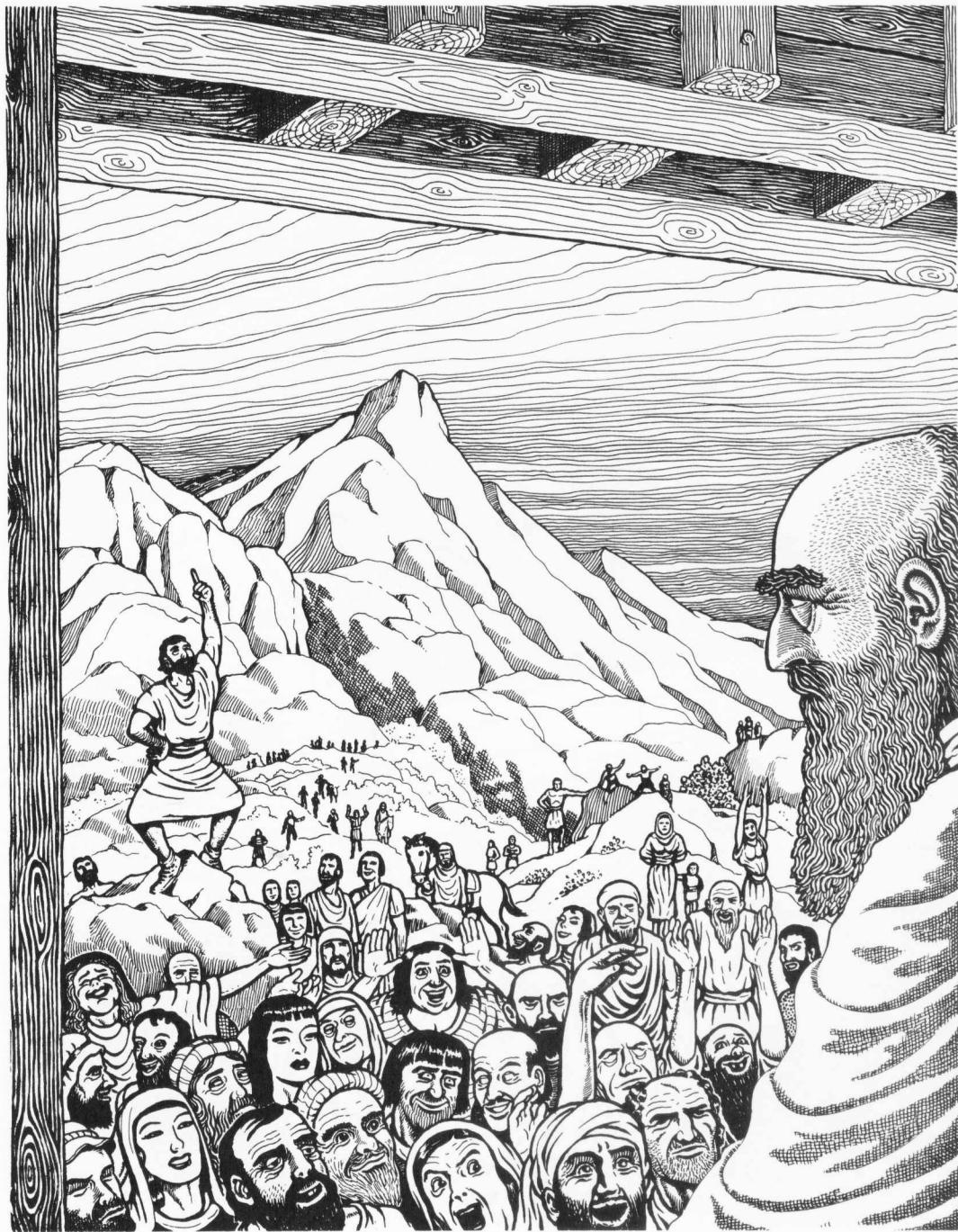
After this great throng of creatures had entered the ship, Noah and his wife and

Animals and birds assemble to enter the ark.



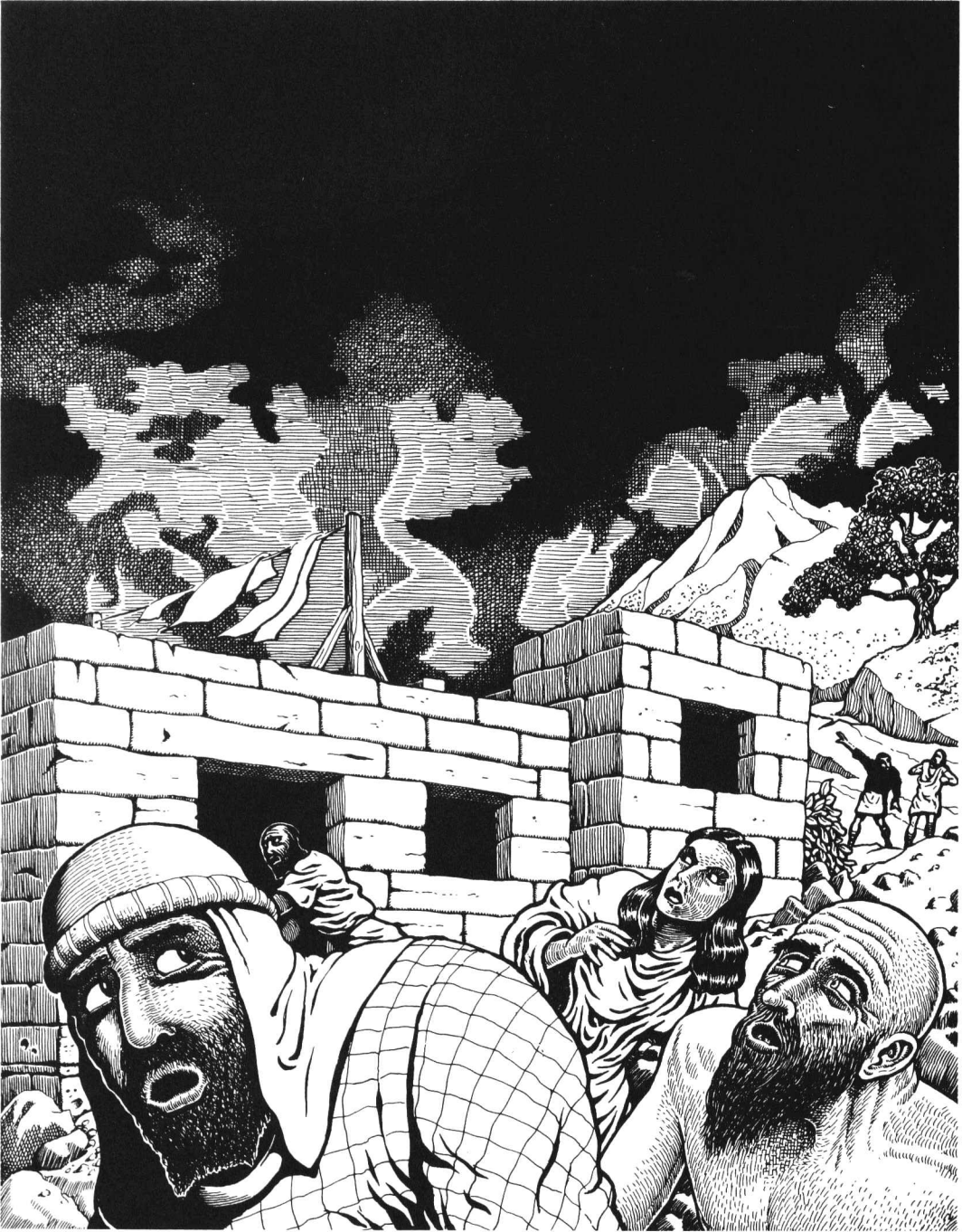
their three sons and their wives took a last look at the world that was to be drowned. Most of the people who had gathered to see what was happening were still jeering. A

Onlookers jeering Noah before he disappears into the ark.



few were so amazed to see the animals entering the ark that they began to wonder if Noah's warnings from God were true. But most of them were like the people of today

Heavy, water-laden clouds suddenly form during strong winds. Could Noah have been right after all?



who will not believe what the Bible itself tells about how our very own America will be destroyed or be taken captive. People then, like people now, could not recognize the truth because they did not want to obey God.

A day passed. Then another and another. Still there was no sign of a flood. Almost a week went by. (Gen. 7:4.) Many of the onlookers went away laughing. Others joined the crowd for the first time, for news of this great ship had spread everywhere, and people were curious.

Noah and his sons had prepared a door to close up the opening in the side of the ark. God caused it to be closed and sealed. (Gen. 7:16.) If there were people around at the time to see this happen, they must have been very startled.

“A week in there, and they’ll be yelling for us to bring axes and chop them free!” some one yelled, and there were shouts of laughter.

CHAPTER FOUR

“AND THE FLOOD CAME”

THE DOOR of the ark was now closed for the last time. Outside were hundreds of curious people—some jeering, some just waiting to see what would happen next.

Then the Flood Came!

Perhaps no one noticed that on that particular morning the wind was a little stronger than usual. By noon there were violent gusts that later grew into a gale. People were forced to shelter. Strong winds weren't very unusual, but when a swift-moving mass of dark, awful clouds boiled up over the horizon, people began to worry.

To add to their growing concern, there were strange rumblings within the ground, as though something terrible were happening down deep in the Earth.

The darkness grew worse. The rumblings became so strong that the ground quivered. Then, just seven days after God had told Noah to go into the ship, Earth's crust broke open here and there, and giant streams of water shot out of the ground. (Gen. 7:11.) At the same time, huge waves roared in from the seas and spread over the coastal areas. Lightning flashed and cracked, followed by horrible roars of thunder. Torrents of water burst from the black skies.

This, at last, was just the start of the terrible thing Noah had said would come upon the world!

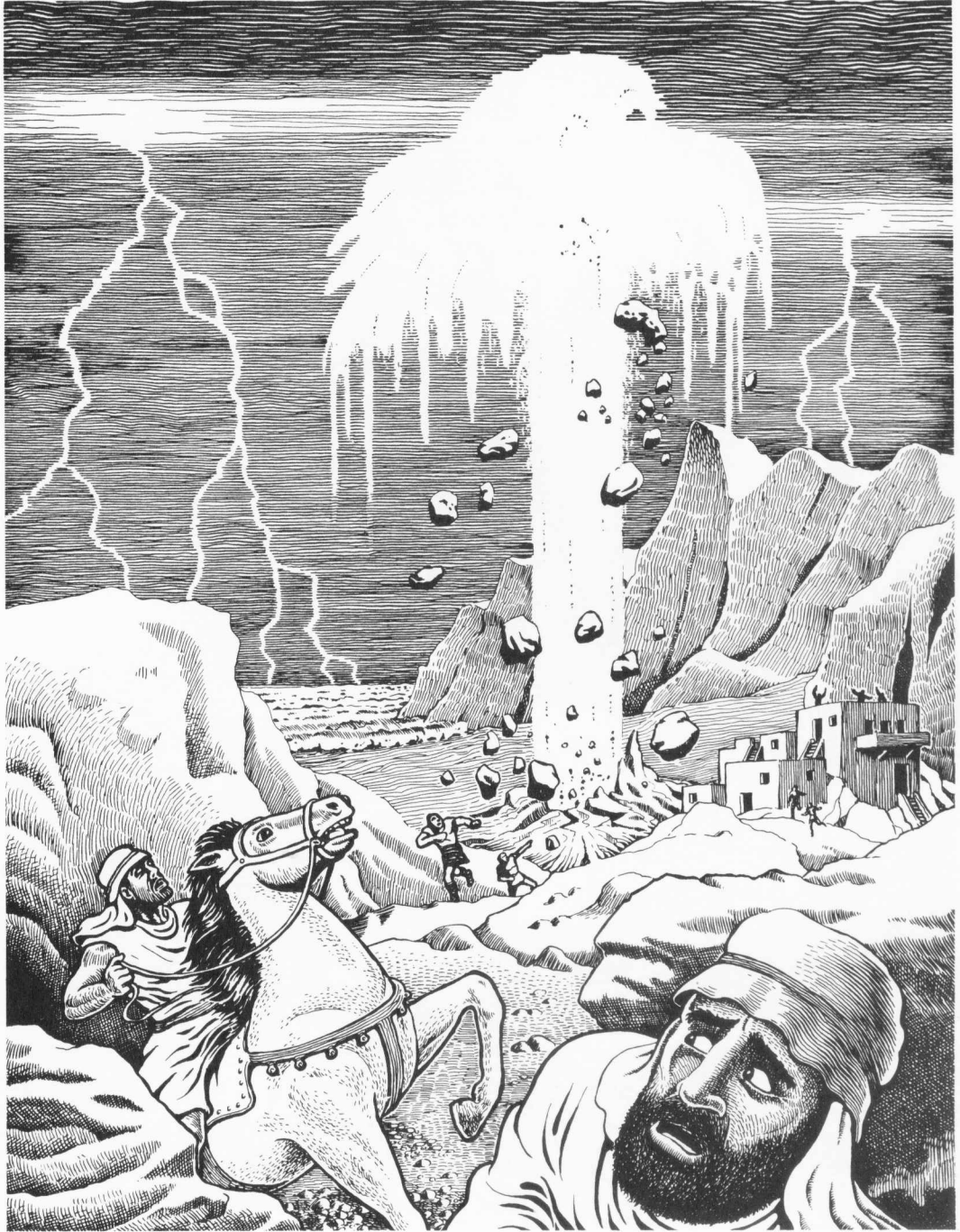
It was the most awful thing that had happened to the world since Satan's sin had resulted in the whole surface of the planet being torn up so that nothing could live on it.

By now most people were becoming crazed with fear. No matter what they did or where they went, water came at them from all directions. No one could live with-

out shelter, and even the best shelters were soon flooded by the torrents of water.

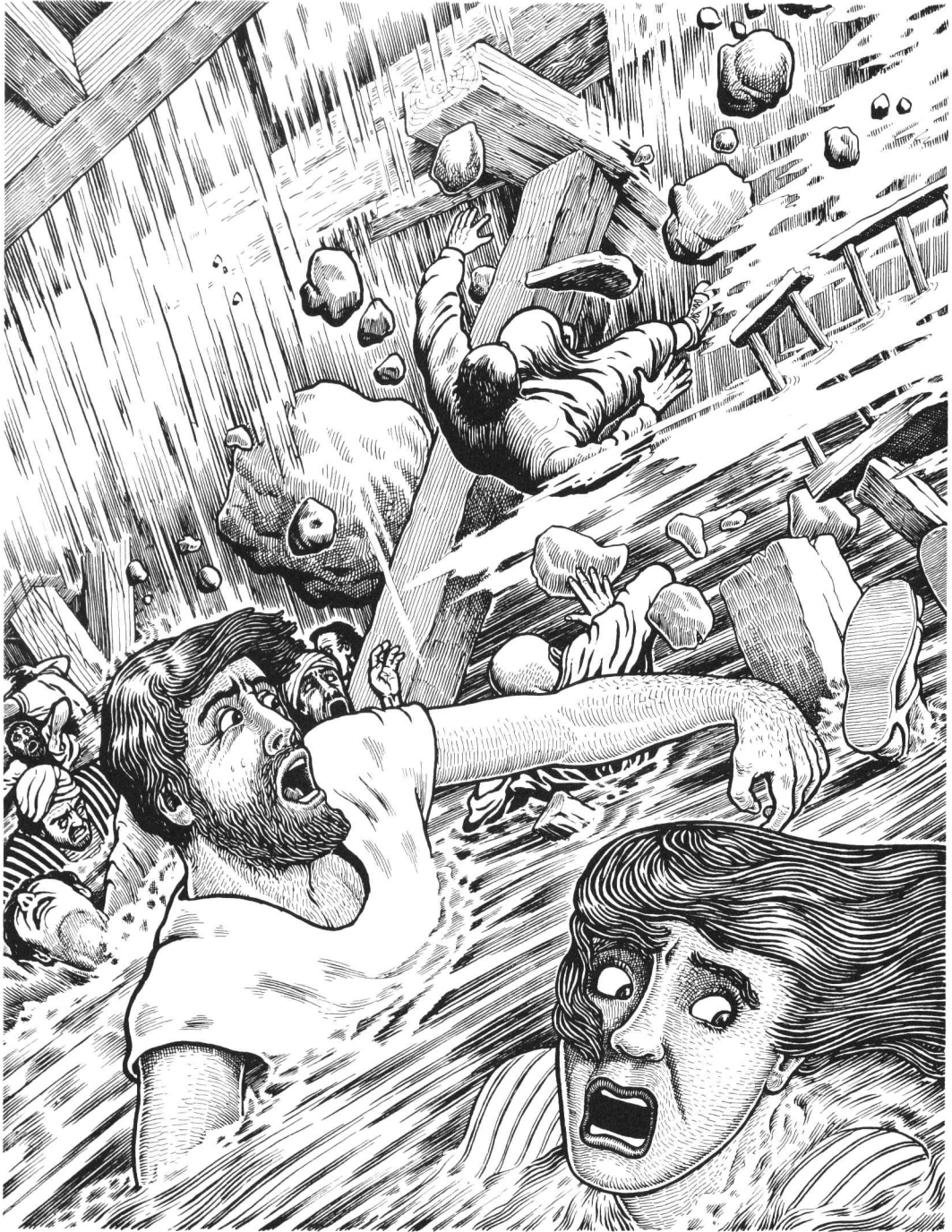
Rivers quickly overflowed, covering the valleys where most people lived. It was

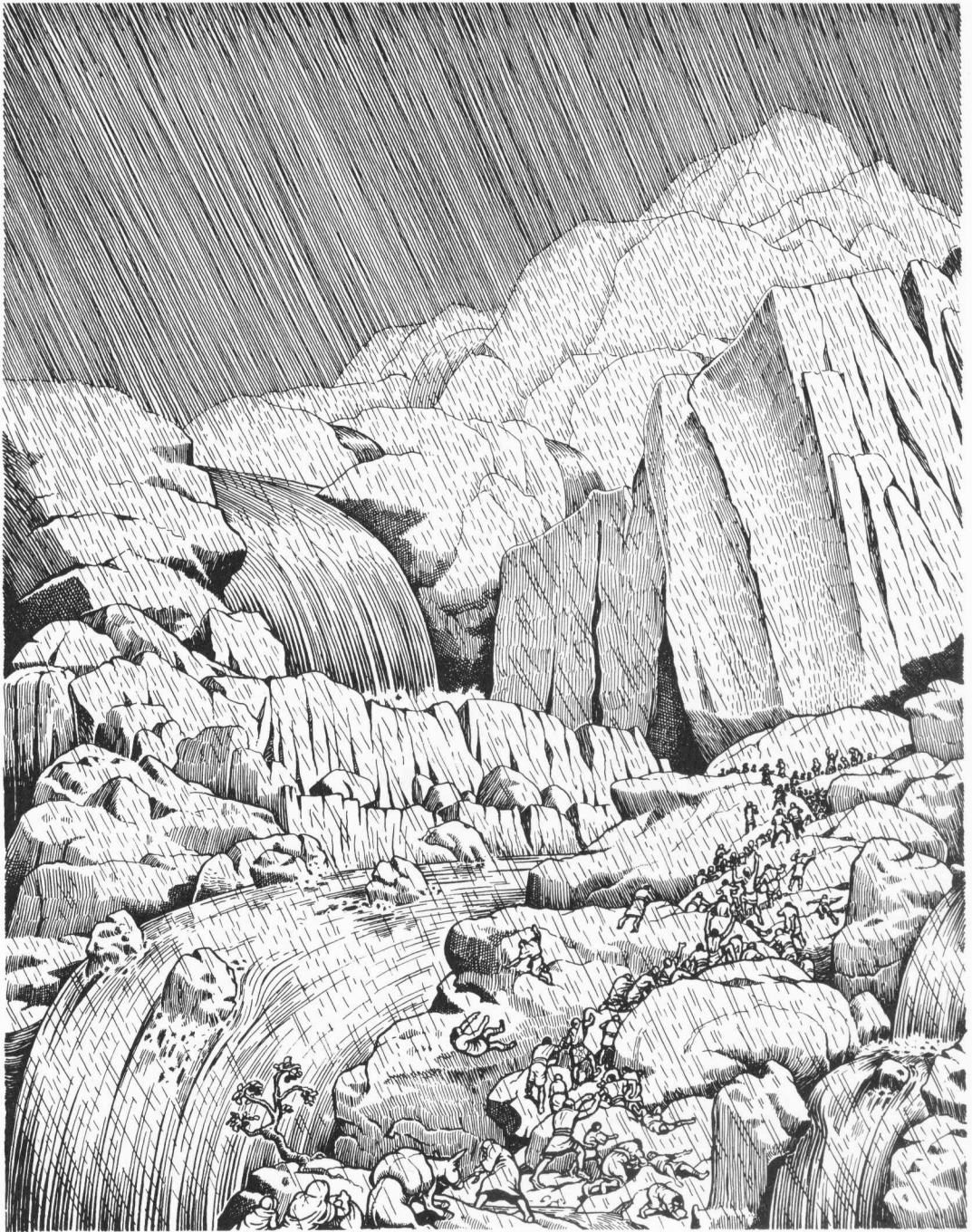
Giant streams of water burst through the Earth's crust.



plain to all that they would have to go up into the mountains or drown. But climbing to the higher elevations wasn't easy. Because of heavy cloudbursts, water thundered

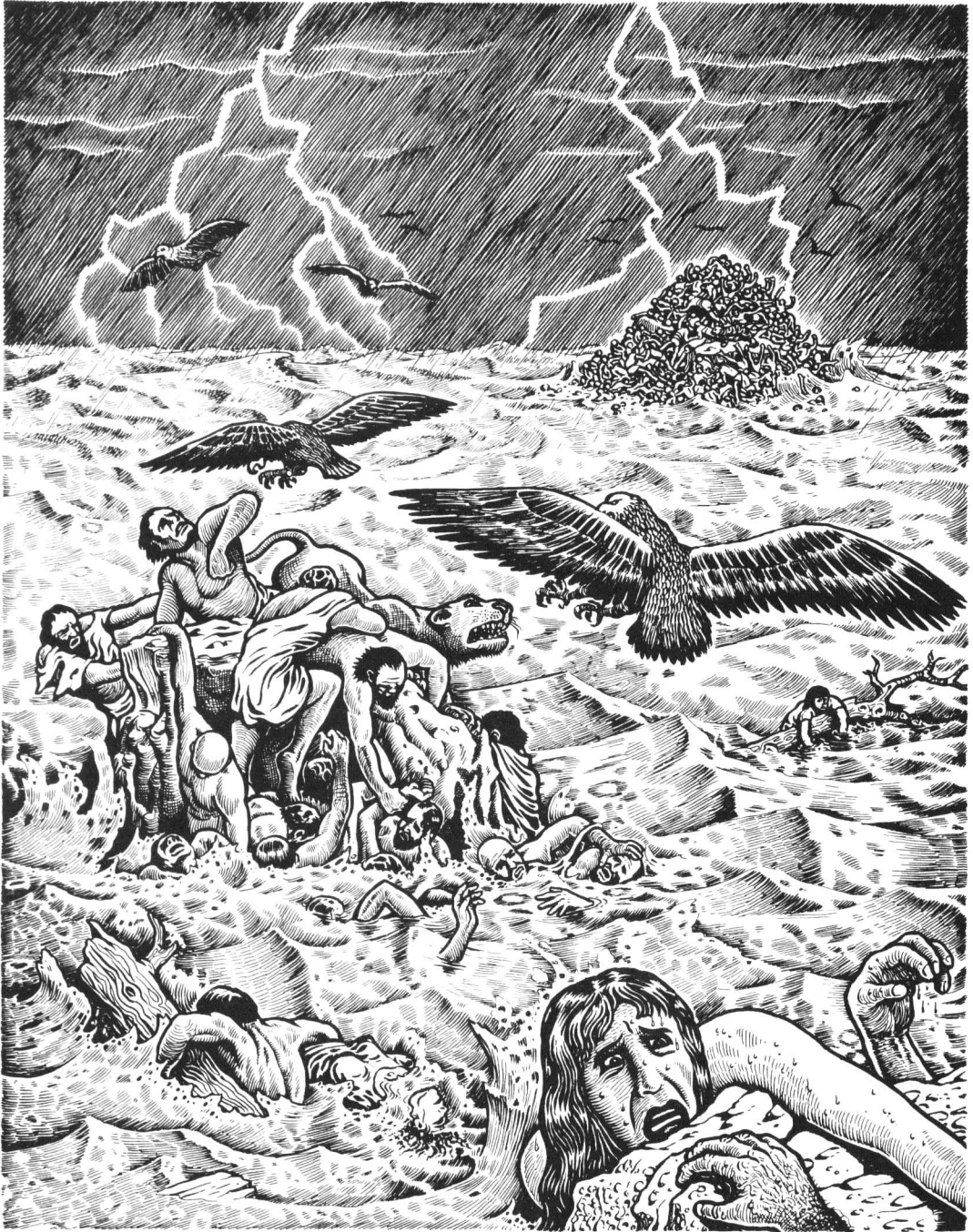
Huge waves roared in from the sea, spreading over coastal lands.





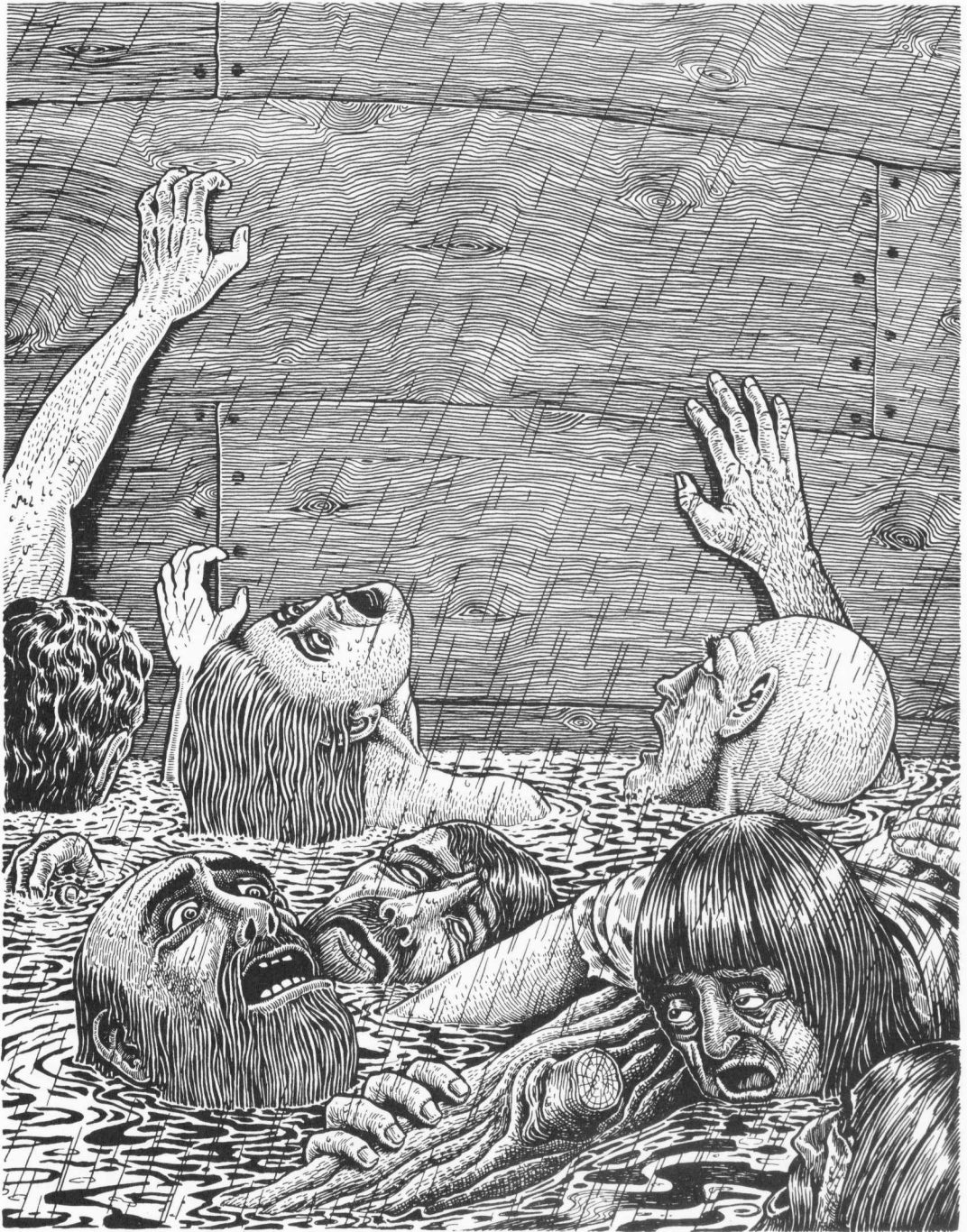
Those who could, fled to the mountains to escape the rising waters.

down in swift, muddy avalanches from the hills and mountains. Brush, trees, rocks, mud and people—all were swept down into the rising waters below.



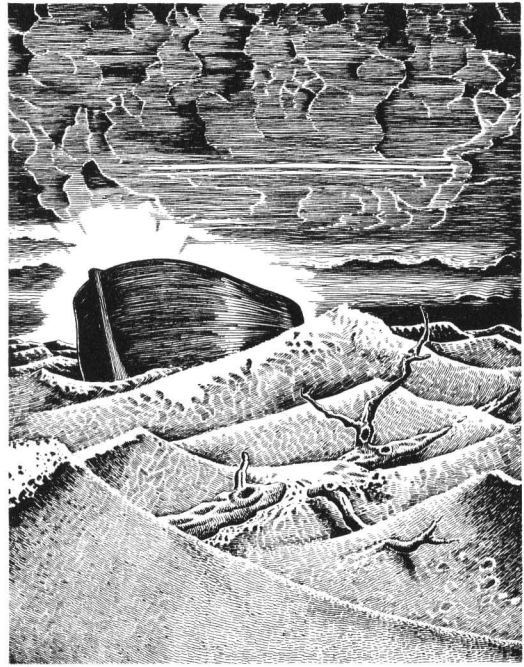
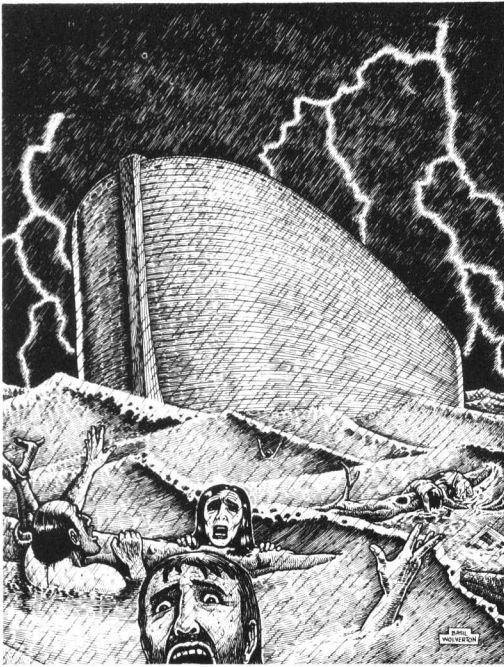
Some of the strongest reached the tops of nearby mountains, only to perish in the swirling, rising waters!

Only the strongest people were able to battle their way up the slopes around the walls of water and tons of matter that came crashing down through every ravine.



Frantic hands claw at the planks of the ark.

Meanwhile, water swirled up around the ark, and slowly lifted it off the ground. (Gen. 7:18.) Many who had jeered at Noah now realized that the inside of the ship



A few find safety on floating logs, but the icy waters quickly swallow them up. All but the eight in the ark perished!

was the only safe, dry place left. A few who hadn't been able to escape elsewhere waded up to the ship and screamed for Noah to let them in. But with rain falling in torrents on the ark, probably Noah and his family couldn't even hear the frantic yells of those about to drown just outside. As the water grew higher and the ship came up off its resting place, desperate hands clawed feebly at the pitch-smearred planks. Then the hands disappeared in the muddy water, and there were no more screams.

God's Mercy

In His great mercy, God had given the people one hundred and twenty years to heed His warnings through Noah. And for one hundred and twenty years people ignored Noah, which was, in a way, the same as ignoring their own Creator.

Now it was too late for people to change their evil ways. It was too late even for earnest, frantic prayer—just as it is so often too late to expect God to help us if we wait too long to seek help.

Hour after hour, day after day, the water kept on rumbling out of the ground and out of the gloomy sky. It swelled to the tops of the highest mountains. People and animals who were strong enough to fight their way that far, fought among themselves for the last gasp of air before they were swallowed up.

Within a few weeks the water was so deep that even the highest mountain peaks were below the water. (Gen. 7:20.) Every person on Earth was drowned except the eight in the ark. Every land animal and bird was drowned except those in the ark.

For forty days and forty nights water gushed from inside the Earth and from the huge cloud layer. Then the rain stopped and water ceased coming out of the ground.

By this time the blanket of water covering Earth was several miles deep in many places. But Noah and his family and cargo safely floated above Earth's sunken surface as high as some of our passenger planes now fly above the clouds!

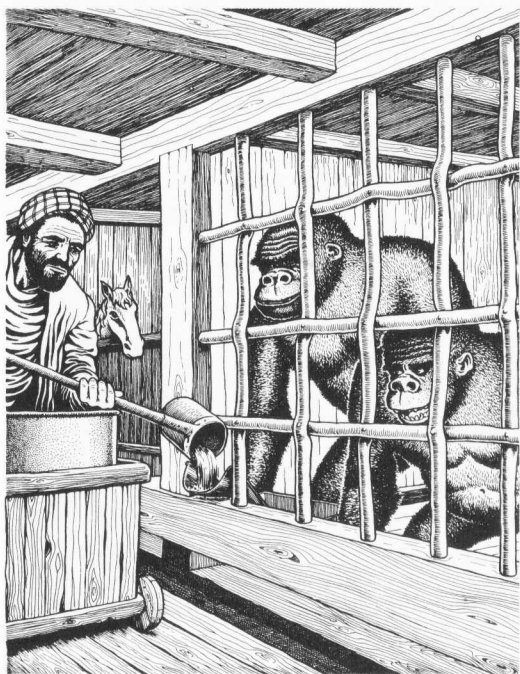
For a hundred and fifty days the water stayed at its deepest. (Gen. 7:24.) During this time, the people in the ark weren't idle. Perhaps God caused some of the animals to fall into a kind of sleep like bears go into during winter months. But even if that did happen, there was much work to do inside the ship.

Whatever the tasks, they must have been hard to perform, for several weeks the ark pitched and rolled through the great waves pushed up by the wind. God, you-see, had caused a strong wind to blow over the water, so that it would evaporate into the air.

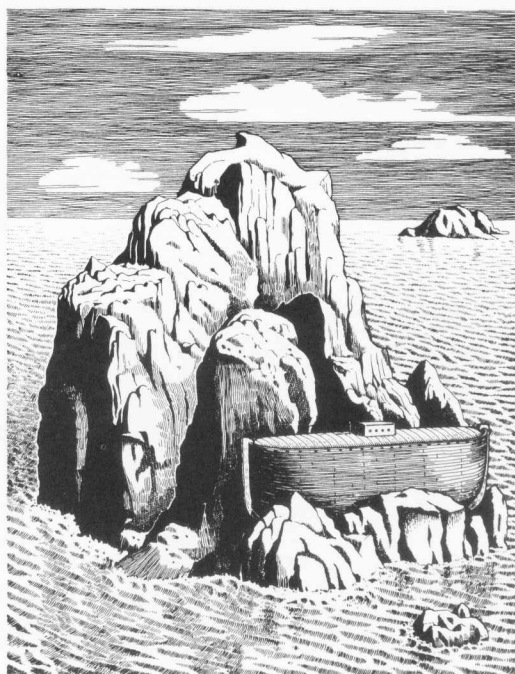
The Waters Lower

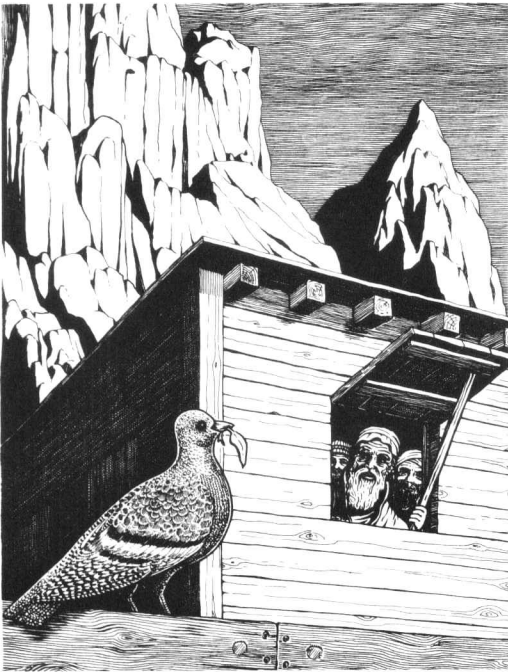
Then one day the tops of the highest mountains began to appear above the water.

Many hours of work was needed to feed and care for the creatures in the ark.

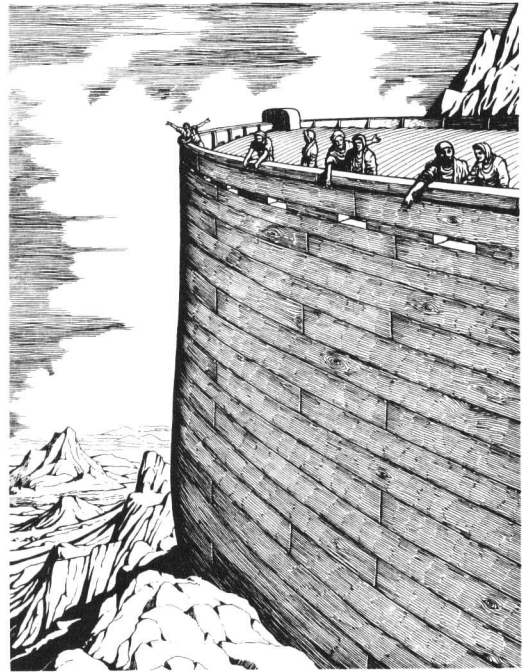


After about five months afloat, the ark drifted onto one of the mountains of Ararat.





A dove which Noah let out returns with a fresh olive leaf.



Noah and his family come out to view the land for the first time.

The ark drifted up against one of the mountains. (Gen. 8:5.) The water kept on getting lower, leaving the ship stuck high on the side of the mountain!

Noah waited more than two months while the level of the water continued to drop. After that he sent out birds to see if the distant land below were still flooded. At last one of the birds returned with a green leaf in its beak, after which it flew away and did not come back. This proved to Noah that the water had already drained off and evaporated to the point where plant life had started developing, and that the valleys were ready to live in again. (Gen. 8:11.)

The men opened the top of the ark. The only eight people left on Earth came out on the top deck to view land for the first time in more than a year. (Verse 13.)

A New Life Begins

After being cooped up in the ship for so many months, the mere sight of dry ground was a wonderful and welcome thing to Noah and his family.

But it must have seemed strange to look down on a silent world where there was no living thing to meet them or no one to scoff at them as people had done for so many years.

"Come out of the ark," God told Noah. "Bring the creatures with you. I want all

living things to spread out over the Earth and produce families." (Verse 17.)

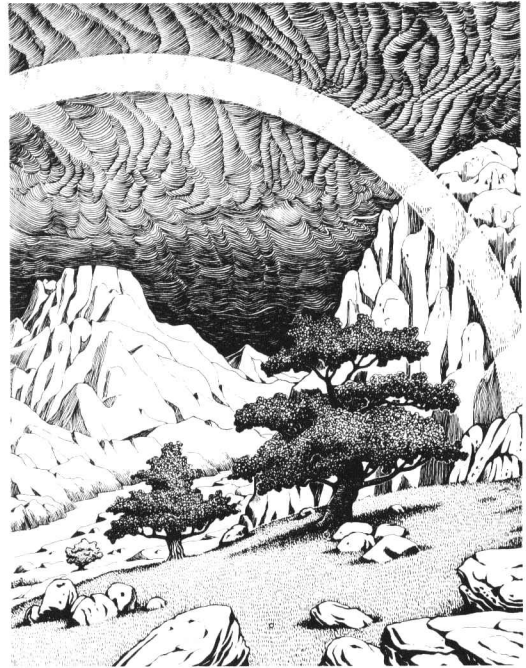
The large door in the side of the ship was broken open, and a runway was built

All the animals, birds and insects left the ark to repopulate the Earth.





Noah offers a sacrifice to God to thank Him for having preserved them through the terrible flood.



The rainbow becomes a sign that no flood will ever again destroy man or beast from the earth.

from the opening to the ground. Then all the creatures in the ark were freed from their stables and cages.

Possibly more creatures left the ark when Noah let them out than went into the ship more than a year before, because it is likely that many baby animals were born and many baby birds hatched.

Whatever the number, they were happy to be free again to return to a new life in the new fields and forests.

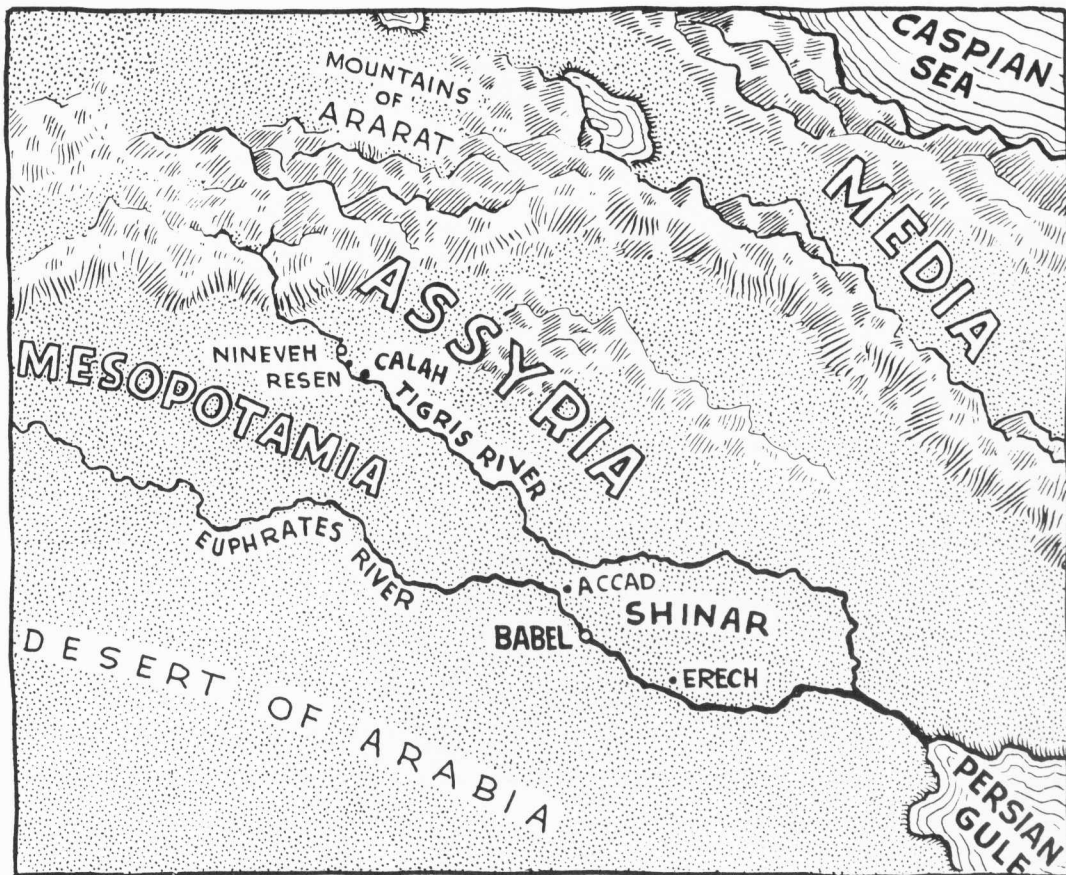
But Noah didn't set all the animals and birds free. He kept some of the clean beasts and fowl. He was so thankful to his Creator for sparing him and his family that he built an altar on one slope of the mountain, and sacrificed some of the clean creatures as an offering to God. (Verse 20.)

God was pleased with Noah. He blessed him and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. God told them to rebuild their homes and raise children, so that many people would again live in the world from which the disobedient had been washed away.

"I shall never again bring a flood over the whole planet," God told them. (Gen. 9:11.) "As a promise to you that it will not happen again, look at this sign that will be seen in the sky!" (Verses 12-17.)

Thereupon the Eternal caused a beautiful arc of light of many colors to appear

from horizon to horizon. Whenever you see this colorful arc, which we call a rainbow, you are seeing the sign of the promise God made to Noah and all people more than four thousand three hundred years ago!



The land of Shinar became the center of civilization shortly after the Flood.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TOWER OF BABEL

NOAH and his family journeyed down from the mountains where the ark rested to start a new life in the nearby plains.

From then on, all the people who came into the world were started by Noah's three sons and their wives. (Genesis 9:19.) After some years had gone by, there were many people in the plains area south of where the ark had landed. Some of them kept on moving farther down into the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates, the two main rivers of the ancient land of Assyria. As the years passed and people increased in numbers, many of them moved southeast and over the lower plains toward what is now known as the Persian Gulf. There the soil was rich, and wonderful crops sprang out of it. The ground was at its best in the region where the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers flowed closest together in a land called Shinar. (Genesis 11:2.) More and more families chose that area to live in. There were very few rocks or trees there. Probably no great city would have been built there if it hadn't been discovered that much of the soil was just right for making excellent bricks. These were made by pressing the moist clay into block shapes and baking them around hot fires or even in the sun.

Furthermore, there were places where a thick, pitchy liquid oozed from the ground. This liquid, now called bitumen, was the very thing needed to hold the bricks together. (Genesis 11:3.)

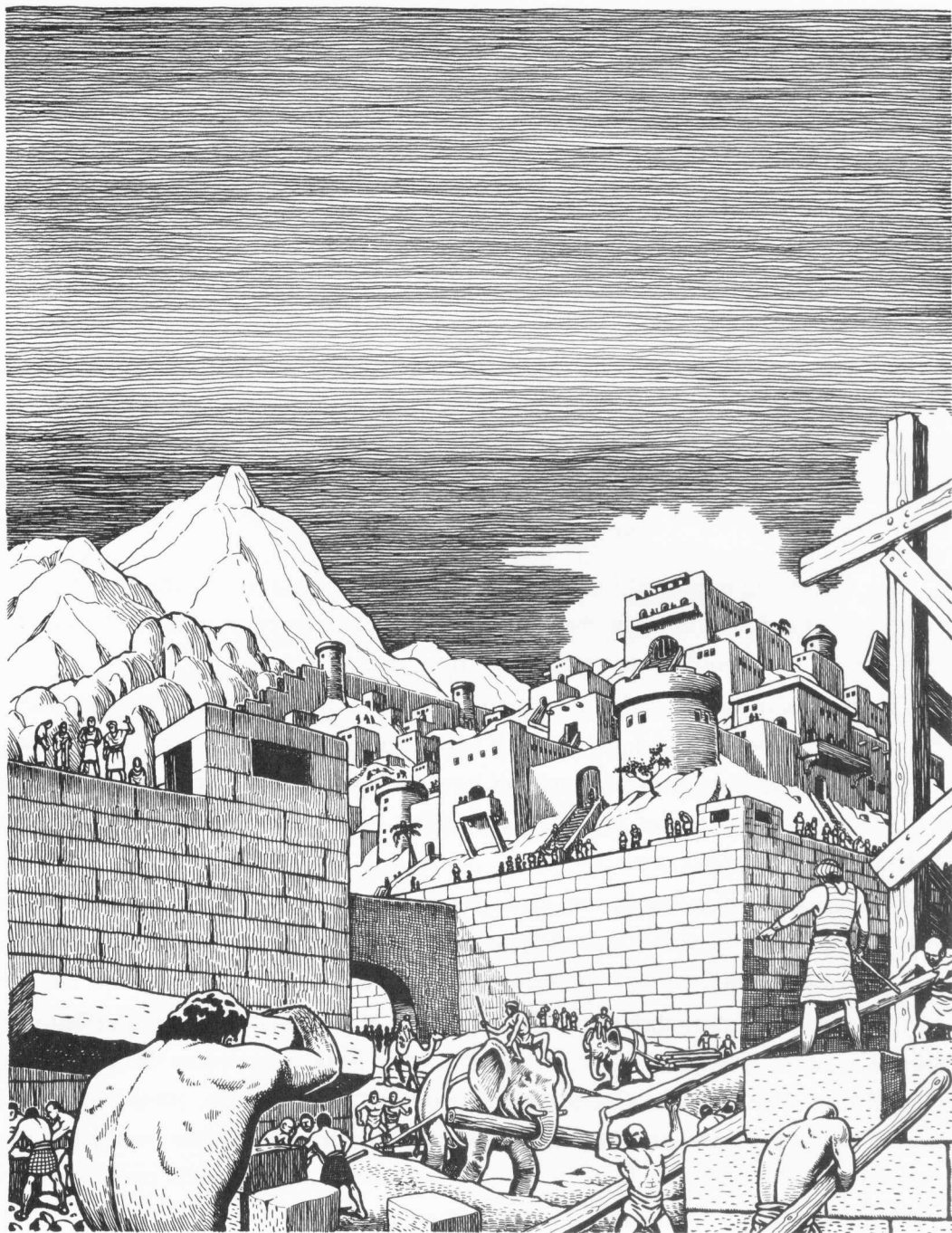
Human Beings Huddle Together

Men began putting up homes, barns, warehouses and all kinds of buildings. Before long a good-sized town was sprawling out over the plain of Shinar. People were

massing together again just as they had done before the flood.

This did not please God. He knew that when human beings huddled together

After the Flood people went contrary to God's wish by crowding into newly built cities.



in crowded buildings they failed to get the best out of the good things He had created for men to find in the fields, the forests, the mountains, the streams and even in the seas and the deserts. Besides, men were more likely to break God's rules of happy living when they existed in masses. God had told Noah and his family that people should spread out over the Earth.

Noah lived for three hundred and fifty years after the flood. (Genesis 9:28.) During that time he probably proclaimed God's wishes every time he had the chance to do so. It was also through Noah that God told people who lived after the flood about the Man who would some day come to Earth and die for human beings so that they would be free of wrong ways of living—free from sin. This man, God told them through Noah, would be brought back to life and return to Heaven, the place from which God rules the universe and all in it.

Most men were living further and further from God, and didn't care much about their Creator. However, many of them, through Noah's efforts, understood something of God's laws and plans. But one thing they didn't know was just when this Person who was to give his life for them would come to Earth. Today we know that the Man was Jesus Christ, God's Son, and that he came to our planet as a human being about two thousand three hundred years after the flood. (Luke 1:32, 43.)

Nimrod Becomes a Hero

But something happened back then to cause men to believe that the son of a god had come to Earth shortly after the flood. Satan, ruler of demons, planted the idea so that he could lead people into worshipping false gods.

This evil plan started with a man who came down from one of Noah's sons, Ham. The man's name was Nimrod. He went by various other names as the centuries passed. Most of Earth's inhabitants today wouldn't have any idea who this man was, although he has in one way or another had a powerful effect on the life of most every one who has lived in the past four thousand years.

Nimrod was a very large, strong, fierce man with very dark skin. Because of his power and skill as a successful hunter of the wild beasts that attacked people, he became a hero and a leader among his tribesmen. (Genesis 10:8-9.)

Like most others of his time, Nimrod knew of his Creator's laws. But Nimrod hated those laws. Just as many other people today have been led to believe, so he believed that if he lived by God's rules he wouldn't enjoy life. He lived by his own laws, and tried to prove to others that they would be happier if they would live the same way.

Nimrod became chief over the people who grouped together in that sprawling

town in the land of Shinar. Probably there were many families that didn't like the way he ordered them to do this or that. But whenever wild animals attacked, Nimrod and his warriors fought to protect the townspeople. Later, Nimrod had a wall built around the growing town. Deeds like these helped make him a strong leader, and caused more and more families to move in and settle under his rule.

Before many more years had passed, the town had grown into a city. It was the first large city to be built on the Earth after the flood, and it was such a wonder that people came from afar to gaze upon the vast mass of buildings and high walls. That country later came to be known as Babylonia, and the name of the city was Babel or Babylon. (Genesis 10:10.)

Nimrod Begins Idol Worship

Meanwhile, Nimrod was not only ruler of Babylon, but he had become the most feared man in the land. His power and wealth grew as people moved into or near Babylon.

He made the laws, and those laws decreed that Babylonians should not look to the God of Noah as their ruler, but should be ruled by human governments. Nimrod also taught them that Satan should be honored by their worship of objects they could see, such as the sun and snakes and other kinds of things. (Romans 1:21-23.)

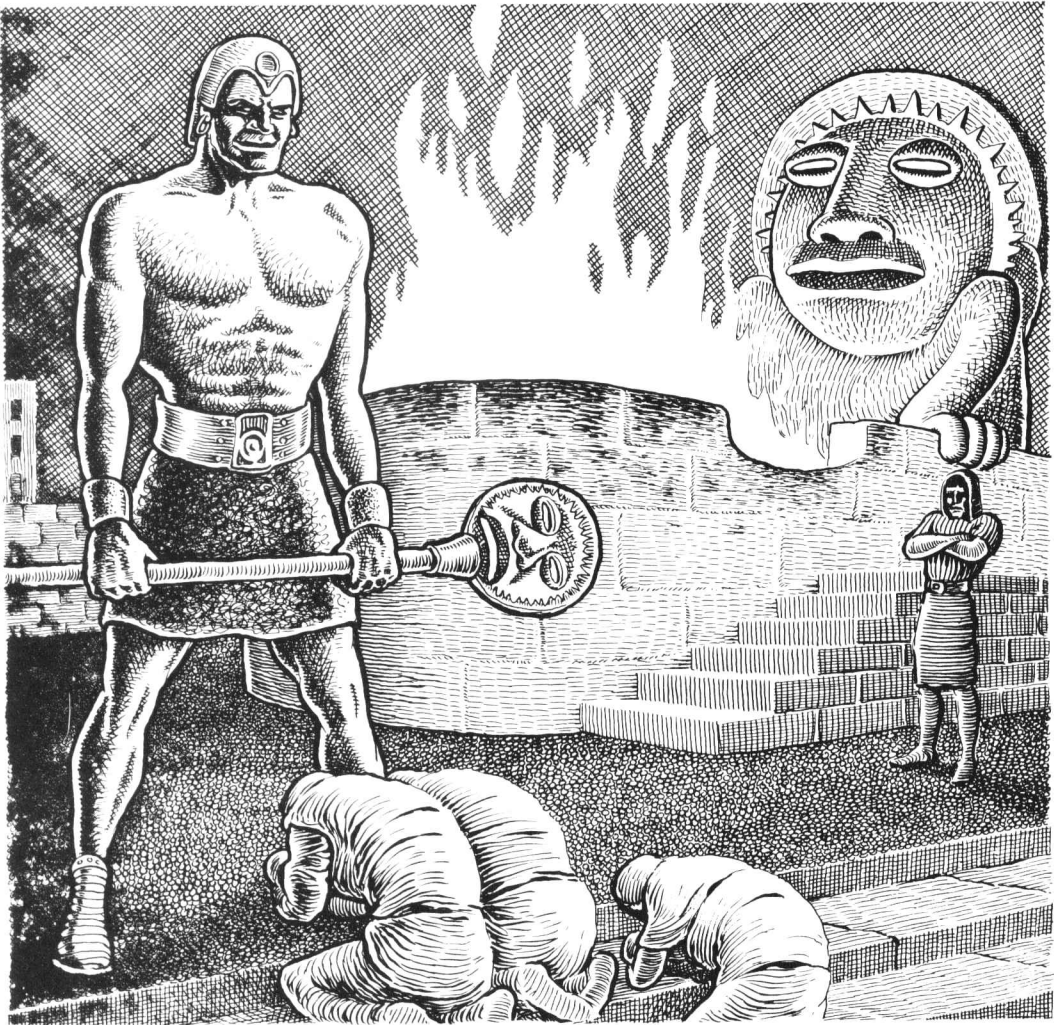
Nimrod called Satan "Merodach"—meaning "Lord" or "Master." (Jeremiah 50:2.) In the Hebrew language the name was "Baal." He was the sun-god. He was considered the chief god among the many idols. Nimrod strengthened his power over his subjects by making himself the high priest of Merodach or Baal.

There, in ancient Babylon, were born the false beliefs that have wormed their way into almost every religion. Even today millions and millions of people who may want to live according to the right ways are not aware that their manner of worship follows very closely that of ancient idol worship and pagan rites begun at Babel.

One of Nimrod's schemes to hold people together under his rule was to build a tower so gigantic that it would excite everyone's awe and wonder. It was to be a temple, a monument to the sun-god, and the center of a world-ruling human government. Nimrod intended that it would be the greatest tower ever built. (Genesis 11:4.)

Men slaved for a long time just to erect the base of the tower. Then little by little, as workers swarmed over it month after month, the temple took shape toward the sky. Nimrod's plan for a brick monster to loom up over the plains was working out very well.

Then God stepped in. He saw that Babel was only the beginning of what men would do. God knew that if the people continued their efforts, "then nothing would be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do." (Genesis 11:6.) God had to



Babylonian mothers bowing before Nimrod, high priest of the sun-god, present their babies to be purified by being sacrificed in fire.

step in to stop men from doing then the things which men are now beginning to do for the first time. Think what it would have been like if men such as Nimrod would have been able to possess weapons like we have today in order to enslave the whole Earth!

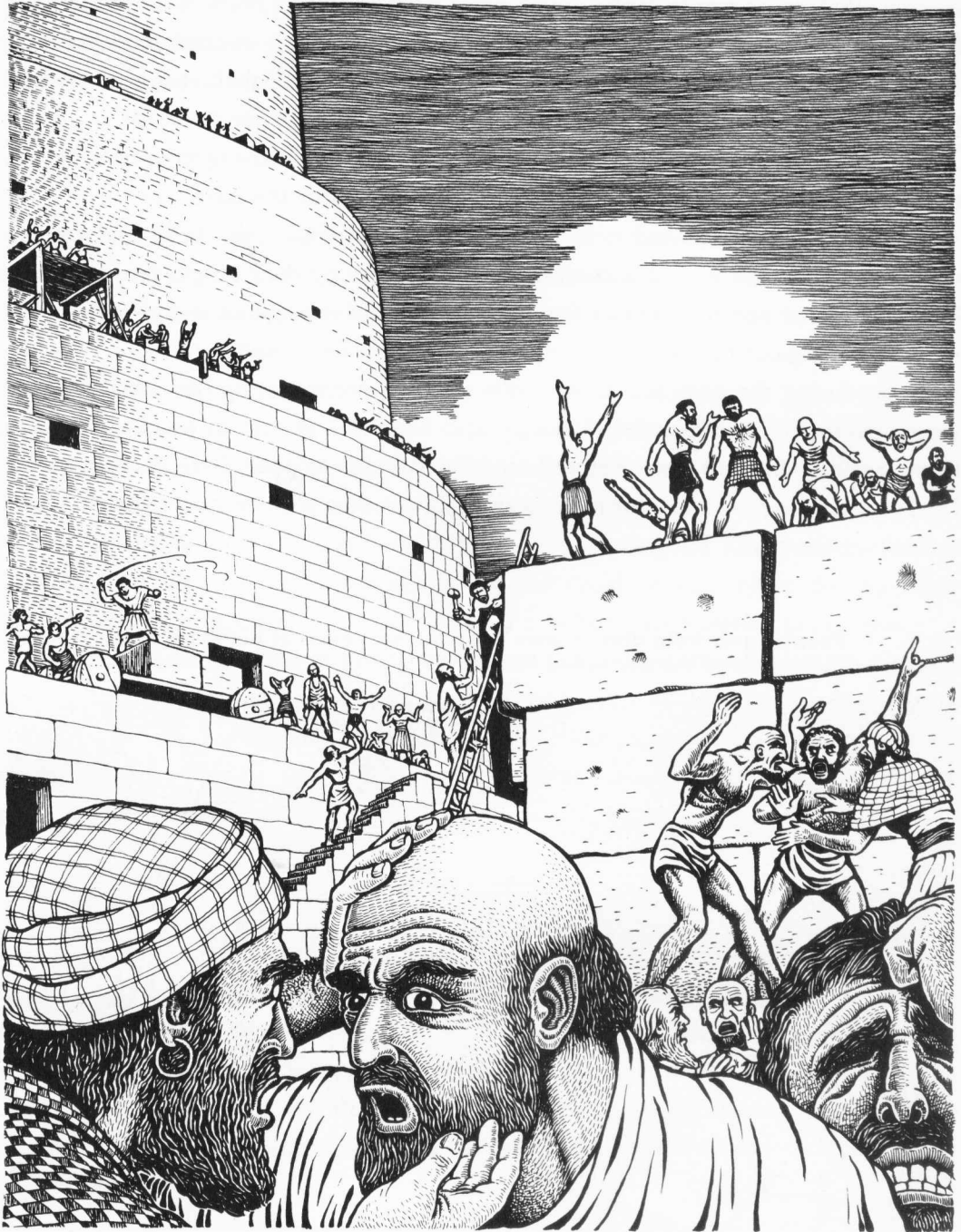
Many Languages Begin

Up to that time there was only one language. Men hadn't moved apart in different tribes long enough to start speaking in different ways as do the people of today in different sections of the Earth. (Genesis 11:1.)

But something happened to the men working on the tower. They began to

accuse each other of not talking plainly. Some talked one way, while others talked other ways. The less they understood one another, the more they argued. Arguments grew

God confused the language of the nations at the Tower of Babel.



into fights. Work came to a halt on the tower. (Genesis 11:7-8.)

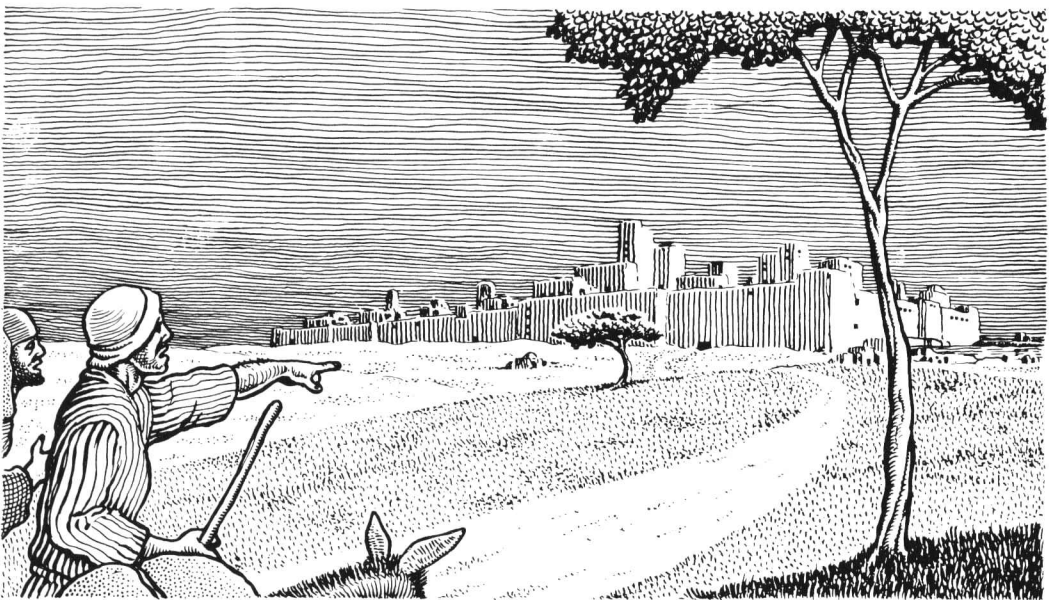
Can you imagine what it would be like if each one in your family would start speaking in a language of his own? Not understanding each other would lead to much trouble, and it would be hard to live together. So it was with the men who were working under Nimrod on the tower that came to be known as the "tower of Babel." Not every workman necessarily spoke a different language, but so many ways of speaking developed through God's influence that there was too much confusion to continue erecting the tall temple. The tower was thereafter called "Babel" because "Babel" meant "confusion" in the language Noah spoke.

Not understanding their neighbors, many of the families living in or near the city of Babylon moved away to seek a living in distant parts of the land.

This was what God had intended for them to do. (Genesis 10:25 and Deuteronomy 32:7-8.) His way of scattering them by confusing their language was a great blow to Nimrod and his schemes for quick growth of his kingdom and greater control over man's religious habits.

But during the next few years, while people were scattering out over the lands, those who stayed in or near Babylon were also becoming greater in numbers. Besides, many families who had never before been near Babylon stopped there in their travels. In time, there were so many men again living there that Nimrod once more put men to work on the city of Babylon.

People came from afar to gaze upon the vast mass of buildings and high walls of the city called Babylon.



But it was not God's will that the tower would ever be finished—and it never was.

Nimrod Plans to Rule the Earth

With the passing of years, Nimrod built other cities on the plains of Shinar in Babylonia. He spread his kingdom into Assyria, into the continents of Asia and Europe and even down into the land of Egypt and Ethiopia in the continent of Africa. Everywhere he implanted the evil custom of worshipping the devil in the form of a snake or as the sun-god. Nimrod claimed that Satan the devil had secret knowledge which he alone was able to open up to his fellowmen. Nimrod's followers therefore called him "Peter," which means the "opener" in the language of Babylonia.

Meanwhile, many of Earth's inhabitants had little or nothing to do with Nimrod's ways. Some tribes had traveled so far beyond Babylonia that they didn't even know about the start of idol worship. Others didn't care much about God or about idols.

A small part of the people still chose to obey their Creator. Shem, one of Noah's sons, was a leader among God's followers. For many years he worked against the wave of idol worship that spread out of Babylon. Ancient writings in stone have shown that Shem warned the Egyptians of Nimrod's evil plans. As a result Nimrod fled from Egypt to Europe where he hid out at Rome until he was killed. And that is how the story of Nimrod or "Peter" being killed at Rome began over four thousand years ago.

Nimrod's death was a shocking surprise to his followers. They couldn't understand how or why the high priest of the sun-god could be allowed to die. So many subjects lost faith in their hero that Nimrod's religious system started to crumble.

But Satan had no idea of giving up his struggle to turn man against his Creator. He worked in a very shrewd way to use Nimrod's death to shock men into going on with their worship of idols. Satan had a plan to make pagan religions something that would not only become more and more popular at the time, but which would cause them to last for thousands of years!

Nimrod's Wife

To understand how this happened, we must know something about Nimrod's wife, Ishtar. Many people called her Semiramis. When her husband was killed, she became the ruler over his kingdom. But because many of her subjects believed that Nimrod wasn't the god-like being he had claimed to be, Semiramis feared that she might lose control over them. She knew that she must think of something that would appear to be a great miracle—something that would fill the people with awe and show them that Nimrod was really a god.

Some time after Nimrod's death, Semiramis gave birth to a baby boy. This was just

what this evil woman needed to carry out her greedy plan! Immediately she commanded the following news to be proclaimed throughout the land:

“Our queen has just given birth to a son. This baby has no human father, but was brought into being by a magic beam of light from the great sun-god! You have heard that someday one would be born who would be like a god, and have the power to save all people. This baby who has been born to our queen is that god! He is Nimrod’s son come to restore his father’s government!”

This terrible lie was probably too much for some to believe. Nevertheless, the queen succeeded in keeping control of the kingdom. Nimrod was looked upon more and more as the sun-god. Furthermore, because of more of her efforts, Semiramis began to be worshipped as the mother of god. She was also known as “The Virgin Mother” and “Queen of Heaven.” (Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:17-19, 25.) She was the first religious ruler of the world.

All this happened more than four thousand years ago. It was the very beginning of various pagan religions, and it had such a strong effect down through the centuries that even today many people worship a “Queen of Heaven,” even though there never was such a person.

Satan worked in such a crafty way that those ancient idol-worship symbols, dates, customs, ideas and traditions have become mixed in with the manner in which most of us worship today. These things from the past, spoken of in the Bible as “hidden mysteries,” still hide the truth from millions who truly want to obey God.

Pagan Holidays Observed Today

God tells us through His scriptures not to learn the customs of idol-worshippers. (Jeremiah 10:2 and Deuteronomy 12:30-31.) On the other hand, many religious leaders sincerely tell us that it would be pagan *not* to observe the twenty-fifth of December as a holiday. The twenty-fifth day of December is the day celebrated by those ancient pagans as the day of the birth of Nimrod, god of the sun! Christ’s birthday was sometime in the autumn, not in December.

Semiramis claimed that on December twenty-fifth an evergreen tree grew up overnight from a dead stump in Babylon, and that Nimrod would secretly return at that same time each year to leave gifts on the tree. This was the real beginning of Santa Claus and what is celebrated now as Christmas!

Another time observed by world-wide religious festivals is that of the birth of Semiramis or Ishtar. She falsely claimed to have lived as a spirit before the flood, and to have come down from heaven in a huge egg dropped into the Euphrates river. The god-

dess in the Ishtar egg (Easter egg) was none other than Semiramis under another name!

You will find Easter mentioned in the King James Bible. (Acts 12:4.) However, it was wrongly put there by translators in place of the word "Passover." Passover is one of the times God wants us to observe, whereas Easter Sunday, with its ancient sunrise services, is entirely pagan. (I Corinthians 5:7-8.) Later on we will tell you how Christ came out of his grave late Saturday afternoon, and had no connection with the fable that a savior arose on what is wrongly called Easter Sunday.

Among the popular beliefs that have come down to us from ancient idol-worship and have been mixed in with our religions is the one that each of us has a spirit that will live forever. The Bible tells us that one can live forever only if given eternal life as a gift from God. (Romans 6:23.) Those who continue to disobey God when they know the right thing to do will die. (Ezekiel 18:4, 20.) However, people are still taught, through the influence of false religions, that those who are wicked will be sent to a fiery place inside the Earth, there to live forever and ever. (Malachi 4:1.)

Now you can begin to understand how Satan worked through Nimrod and Semiramis to cause human beings to believe lies (Revelation 12:9), just as he caused Eve to believe the first lie.

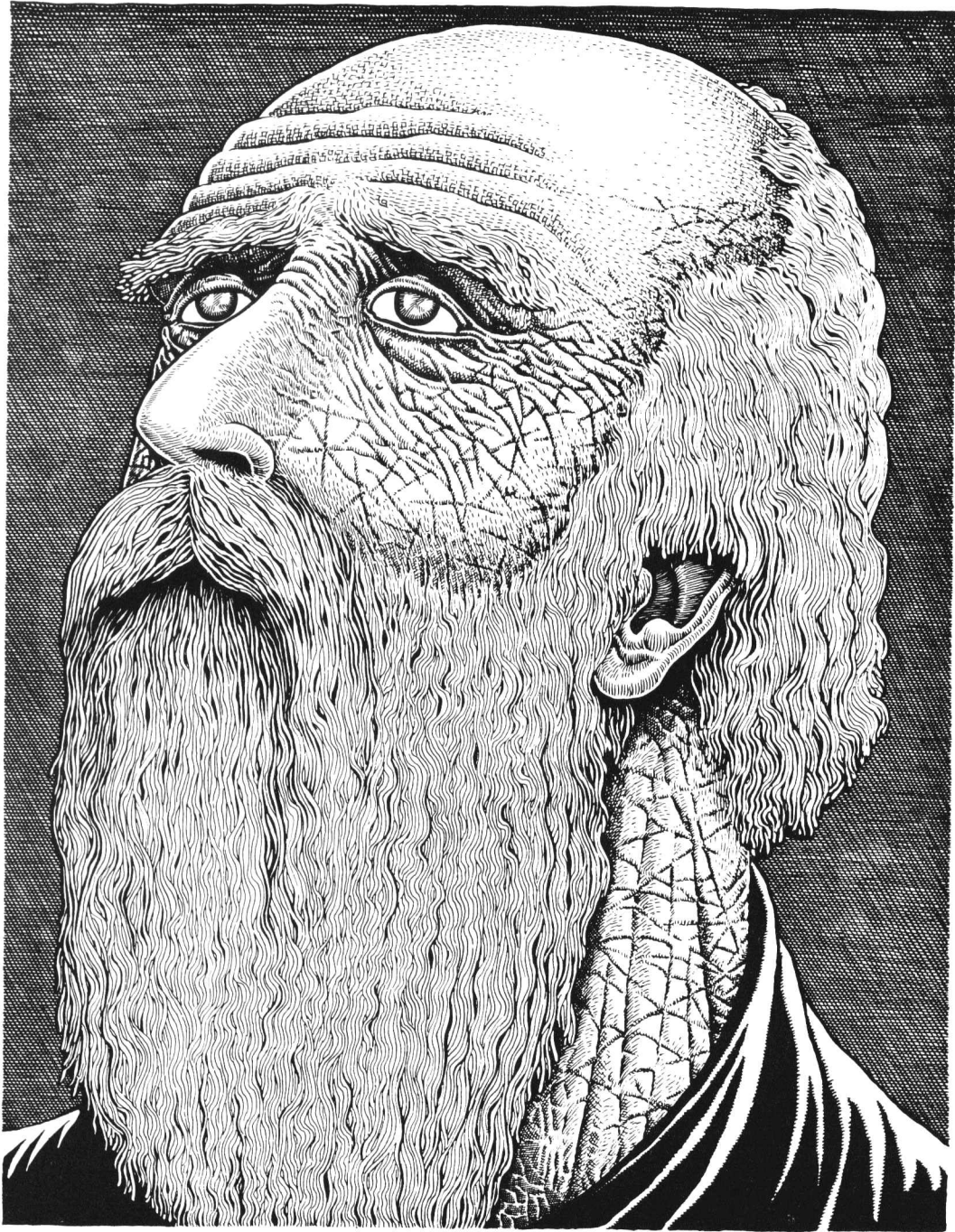
However, Satan will not always be able to deceive human beings. The time is soon coming when his power will be cut off for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:1-3.) Then the false religions will be blotted out, and the world will happily receive all the truth—much of which has been kept from us for so long. But that is another story to come later.

Noah Dies of Old Age!

At the time Nimrod's kingdom had spread all the way into Egypt, Noah was still living! He was over seven hundred years old when God scattered men from Babylon. Still he was not feeble, and because he remained faithful to God, God gave him many more years of life. He became a successful farmer, and was nine hundred and fifty years old when he died!

That is a long, long time to live, especially when we consider how short a time we live in these days. Yet those who are wise enough to turn from the wrong kind of living in order to seek the ways God has given us will enjoy even longer lives. They will get to live forever as spirit beings (I Corinthians 15:44-45, 53), and many of them will start that long life by ruling the Earth soon with Jesus Christ for a thousand years! (Revelation 2:26-27 and 5:9-10.)

Later, they will dwell in a beautiful, jewelled city God will send down from heaven to earth. (Revelation 21:2.)



"And all the days of Noah were 950 years; and he died."

This is one of the many wonderful things God has prepared for those who love Him.

CHAPTER SIX

ABRAM JOURNEYS TO CANAAN

TWO YEARS after the flood, when Noah's son Shem was a hundred years old, Shem had a son called Arphaxad. (Genesis 11:10.) When Arphaxad was thirty-five years old, he had a son named Salah. (Gen. 11:12.) Several generations went by in this manner. When about three hundred years had passed, a man by the name of Abram was born. (Gen. 11:26.)

Abram was brought up in a city in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2) called Ur, not very far from the spot where the Ark landed. (Gen. 11:28.) Like Noah, Abram learned to obey God's laws.

Once again the people of that world were worshipping idols and living further and further from God's ways. Abram was one of the few who learned not to take part in pagan ways, and so when he was about seventy-five years old God spoke to him and told him to take his family and move to another country.

Abram Obeys God

God promised Abram that if he would obey all His instructions, Abram would become the father of the most famous nation on the whole earth, and that in time this nation would enjoy some very special blessings.

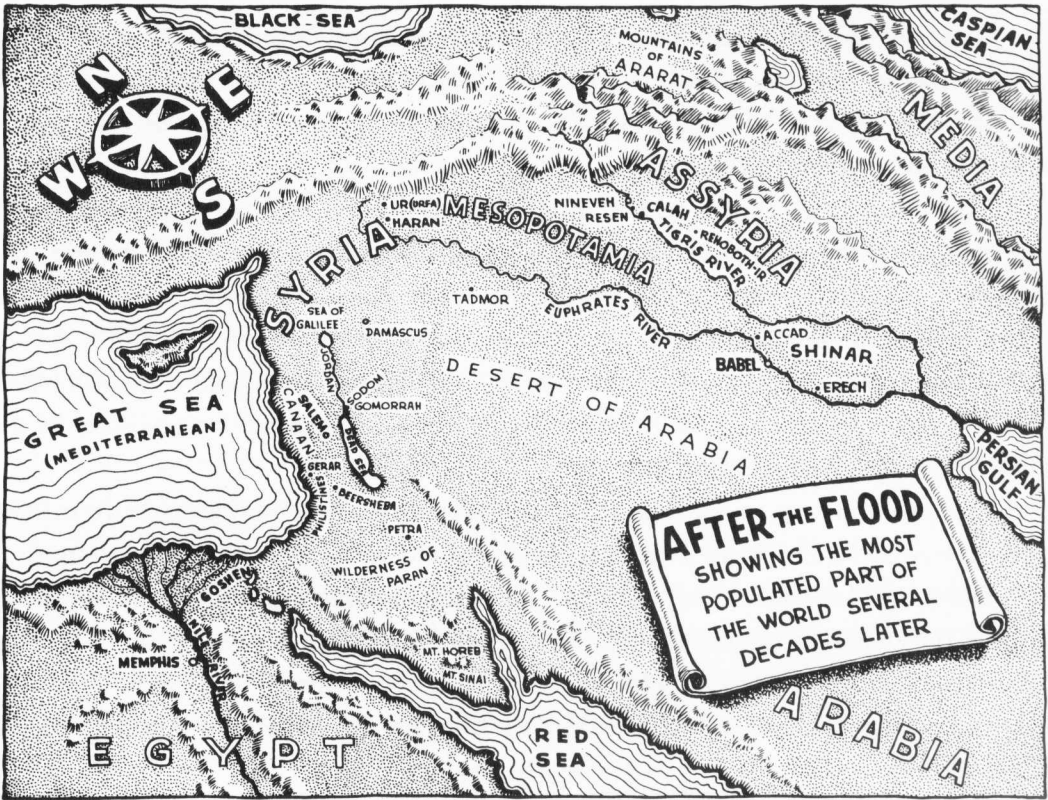
Abram didn't know what the land he would go to would be like, and he didn't know what the blessings to his people would be, but he trusted God and obeyed.

Besides his wife, Sarai, he took along a nephew named Lot, Lot's wife and herdsmen to take care of flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. It was no small task for Abram to move on foot to a distant land. (Gen. 12:4.)



God speaks to Abram, telling him to leave Haran and go to the land of Canaan.

After weeks of travel, they arrived in the land of Canaan, where God had said Abram should go. (Gen. 12:5.) Canaan was a very fertile land, where there was good



soil and plenty of growing things. But the people of the land were wicked, and for that reason God caused a famine to come on that area. This famine happened just after Abram reached Canaan. (Gen. 12:10.)

Lack of rain caused the fruit trees, vegetables and grass to dry up, and there was little food for the flocks which Abram and Lot had brought to Canaan. And without cattle or sheep, there wouldn't be enough food for Abram and those with him.

Abram Goes to Egypt

Reports came from travelers that down in the land of Egypt there was no famine. Therefore Abram and those with him journeyed down into Egypt to save their flocks.

In the land of Egypt a great civilization had grown up since the flood. The Egyptian kings, or pharaohs, had become very powerful and wealthy, although they worshipped false gods and idols. They enjoyed all the good things that came from the earth, and whatever they wanted they took from others.

Realizing that his wife, Sarai, was a very beautiful woman, and that the Egyptian ruler might see her and want her for one of his many wives, Abram asked Sarai to pose as his sister instead of his wife. (Gen. 12:12-13.)

Actually, Sarai was only Abram's half-sister, because her father was Abram's father, but her mother was not Abram's mother. Abram told this half truth because he feared that if it were known that he was Sarai's husband, the Egyptians might kill him so that Sarai would be free to be married.

The thing that Abram feared soon happened. Sarai, although about sixty-five years of age, still appeared as a young and beautiful woman. She was of lighter skin than the Egyptians, and before long it was reported to Pharaoh that this unusual woman had journeyed in with a group of other people.

The king commanded that the woman be brought to his palace, and thinking that she was unmarried, he had her lodged in a place where the future brides of the king were prepared for marriage.

The pharaoh was so pleased at the prospect of Sarai becoming his wife that he gave many gifts to Abram, including livestock and servants and a fine place to live.

But it did not please God that Sarai would become Pharaoh's wife. He sent great plagues on Pharaoh's house. We don't know what those plagues were, but they must have been something to cause Pharaoh and those about him great misery. Whatever happened, Pharaoh soon realized that these things were coming on him because of Sarai, who, he soon learned, was really Abram's wife!

Pharaoh was displeased. He had Sarai taken back to Abram, and then he scolded Abram for allowing Sarai to pose as a sister. God must have protected Abram by causing Pharaoh not to be angry enough to have him slain for such a deed. God was pleased that at least Abram was willing to tell the whole truth to Pharaoh about Sarai.

As it was, the king gave orders to his men to help Abram and his band depart from Egypt. (Gen. 12:14-20.)

Back to Canaan!

Abram and Lot and their wives and servants then moved their flocks back into the land of Canaan. Abram went to a spot there where he had built an altar to God when he first came to Canaan. There he called upon God to forgive him and to strengthen him. (Gen. 13:1-4.)

By the time Abram and Lot and their families had returned to Canaan, the famine was over. Again their flocks, which were now greatly enlarged, could feed upon the lush grass. But because their flocks were so large, there was trouble between Lot's herdsmen and Abram's herdsmen. They began quarreling over the spots where there was the most grass and water.

Abram did not wish to have trouble with Lot's herdsmen. He suggested that they choose separate regions in which to dwell.

God had promised this land to Abram, and it was Abram's right to choose the part where he wished to have his herds graze. But he unselfishly told Lot to take the first choice. Lot looked down on the rich land in the Jordan valley, and chose to go there. That left the upper lands to Abram. But Abram was satisfied because Lot was satisfied. (Gen. 13:5-13.)

After Abram and Lot separated, God again spoke to Abram. He told him that all the land he could see in all directions—and Abram was standing in a high, mountainous area at the time—would forever belong to him and those who came after him. Also, God told him that his descendants would be so many that their number would appear to be equal to that of the number of specks of dust on the earth. (Gen. 13:16.)

This was indeed a great promise to Abram, for at that time he was nearly eighty years old, and had no children.

After coming down from the mountains, Lot and his family pitched their tents near the city of Sodom in the rich Jordan valley. Lot thought he had made a wise choice in coming to the valley lands. But he didn't realize what trouble he would experience with the people who dwelt there. They were a wicked people, and Lot, who was a Godly man, should not have come in among them.

War Breaks Out in Canaan

Shortly after he moved close to Sodom, a war broke out between the kings of the five cities of the Jordan valley and four kings who lived in the land of Assyria and in Shinar where Nimrod first began his kingdom.

The four distant kings beat the five Jordan Valley kings in battle. The people of the two main cities, Sodom and Gomorrah, were pursued to the mountains, where some of them escaped. But most of them were taken prisoner, to become slaves of the victors.

Among those prisoners were Lot and his family. All Lot's goods were taken, too, and then Lot realized that his decision to choose the valley lands was very unwise.

Some of those who had escaped to the mountains got word to Abram about what had happened. At once Abram gathered together all his men, three hundred and eighteen, and set out in pursuit of the kings who had taken Lot and his family as prisoners. (Gen. 14:14.)

As the world's population was still small Abram did not need more than his own men with which to attack the victorious kings who were carrying off slaves and riches. However, it must have taken great courage for Abram to make the attack against what were at least many hundreds and perhaps even thousands of trained soldiers.

But God was with Abram in his race to rescue Lot and Lot's family. By the time

Abram and his men finally spotted the enemy forces, it had become dark, and the four kings and their men were camping for the night. Abram had his men quietly encircle the camp, then gave the signal to attack.

The kings and their men were taken by surprise. In the darkness, they couldn't tell how much of a force was attacking them, nor did they stop long enough to find out. They fled to the mountains near Damascus, leaving all their loot and all their prisoners they had taken from the cities in the Jordan valley. (Gen. 14:13-16.)

Thus Abram rescued Lot and his family and all his goods.

Then the king of Sodom came with his men to honor Abram for what he had done. This meeting took place at a spot near the city of Salem, which later was called Jerusalem.

Melchizedek, the king of Salem, also came out to meet Abram. Melchizedek had his servants bring out bread and wine for Abram and his men. (Gen. 14:17-19.)

Now probably you don't think there is anything very unusual about a king providing food and drink to tired soldiers. But the unusual part about this bit of history is the fact that this king is a most unusual person. The Bible doesn't say very much about him, but it does say that he was also "King of Righteousness." (Hebrews 7:1-3.) There are no completely righteous beings except those in the God-family. Therefore Melchizedek must have been Jesus in human form!

Melchizedek blessed Abram for rescuing the people who had been taken captive by the four attacking kings. Abram then gave Melchizedek one tenth of all the goods that had been left behind by those kings when they fled even though Abram did not keep any of it for himself. (Gen. 14:20-24.) This was according to God's tithe law, which says that we are robbing God if we do not give one tenth of what we earn to God's priests, or ministers. (Malachi 3:8-11.)

All we have or earn really belongs to God in the first place, and so to honor Him by "giving back" only one tenth is a wonderful bargain for us, don't you think?

The king of Sodom offered to reward Abram for all he had done, but Abram refused to take any reward. He preferred God's blessings to the riches that an earthly king could give him.

The Lord Makes a Promise to Abram

Some years later, when Abram was again living peacefully in his tents in the hill regions above the Jordan valley, the Lord spoke to him in a vision. Abram knew who He was because he had seen Him at Salem shortly before. He told Abram again that he would become the father of a great nation as a reward for learning to live the right kind of life.

But Abram was getting to be an old man, and his wife was also elderly. It was difficult for him to understand just what God could mean by His promises.

Therefore Abram reminded God that he had no children, and that the nearest person he had to a child was a servant or steward born in his house. (Gen. 15:1-3.)

God replied to Abram that no servant would take the place of a son. God then showed him the stars, and told him that if he, Abram, could count them, he would know the numbers of people who would in time be born from his own son!

Abram believed God in this matter, and God blessed him for his belief. (Gen. 15:6 and Romans 4:20-22.) But God thought it would be good to show Abram a sign that the promise would be kept. He told Abram to slaughter some clean animals and birds and lay them out as though for an offering.

Abram obeyed.

A little later a deep sleep fell on Abram. He dreamed he was in dreadful darkness, and that God's voice came to him out of that darkness, telling him things that would happen many years later after Abram would die. (Gen. 15:8-12.)

"The people who live after you shall continue to be as strangers in the land," the Voice said. "And they shall later become slaves for four generations to a foreign nation. But in about four hundred years they shall come back with great possessions to this land." (Gen. 15:13-16.)

Abram awoke to see a strange, smoking flame passing between the animal and bird carcasses he had laid out for an offering. When he saw this amazing thing, his faith in the presence of God became stronger than ever. (Gen. 15:17.)

Ever since the time of Adam, God has promised good things to those who obey Him. This promise to Abram is one that has had a great effect upon the whole world for thousands of years. We who are Abram's descendants today are being affected by it right now, because, for one thing, we are enjoying great material blessings, like our nice homes and automobiles and our clothing and the food we eat, and the radio and television sets, electric lights and many other things.

Abram's First Son

Sarai, Abram's wife, was now about seventy-five years old, and she didn't believe that it was possible for her to have a child, therefore she couldn't see how it was possible for Abram to become the father of children that would in time grow into millions of people.

Sarai had an Egyptian maid, Hagar, who was a much younger woman. Sarai told Abram that he should take Hagar as a second wife, with the hope that Hagar would have a child for Abram and for Sarai. In those times a man often had more than one

wife. Abram did as Sarai suggested, and in time Hagar did have a son, whose name was Ishmael. (Gen. 16:1-16.)

Thirteen years passed. Abram came to be ninety-nine years of age. Then one day a figure appeared before him and said:

"I am God Almighty! Live according to my laws!" (Gen. 17:1.)

Trembling, Abram fell down with his face to the ground while God continued talking. God told him that because he was learning to obey His laws, He would keep the promises that He, God, had made years before. He told Abram that his name would now be changed to Abraham, which meant *father of many people!* (Gen. 17:3-6.) Sarai's name, God said, would be changed to Sarah, which meant *princess.*

Then God promised Abraham that Sarah herself would surely have a son, even though at that time she was already eighty-nine years old. God said that their son would be called Isaac. (Gen. 17:15-16, 19.)

Abraham Learns that Sodom Is to Be Destroyed

Not long after that, three strange men came to Abraham's tent. Perhaps Abraham didn't know it at the time, but two of these men were angels, and one was Jesus appearing in the form of a man. (Gen. 18:1-2.)

In those days, when there weren't so many people in the world, it was the custom to offer refreshment to travelers, who generally had to journey long distances to get from one town or village to another or even from one tent to another.

Abraham invited the three to rest and eat. He had a fine meal prepared for them. (Gen. 18:3-8.) After they had eaten, the men told Abraham that within the year Sarah would have a son. This was wonderful news to Abraham and Sarah. Sarah, especially, could hardly believe it. (Gen. 18:9-15.)

The three strangers didn't come just to tell Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child. Jesus had come down with two angels to visit the city of Sodom, to see if its wickedness was so great that it should finally be destroyed. (Gen. 18:16-22.)

The two angels went down to Sodom. The third one, who was Jesus in a man's form, stayed with Abraham and told him what He was planning to do to Sodom.

When Abraham learned that the city might be destroyed, he asked if the good people were to be killed along with the wicked ones.

"If you find fifty good people there, won't you spare Sodom so that those fifty won't die?" Abraham asked.

"If I find fifty good people in Sodom I will not destroy it," Jesus replied.

Then Abraham asked if the city would be spared if only forty-five good people could be found there.

"If I find forty-five good people there, I will not destroy it," was the answer. Abraham kept on asking his God about this matter, each time making the number of good people smaller. Finally Abraham was told that if only ten righteous men could be found in Sodom, then the city would be spared. (Gen. 18:23-33.)

Lot, the nephew whom Abraham had rescued from the kings who had attacked Sodom, had unwisely returned to that city to live. He, however, took no part in the idol worship and other wicked ways of the Sodomites. But it was not good to live so close to people who had no use for God's laws.

That evening, the two angels who had been with Abraham arrived at Sodom. One of the first persons they saw was Lot, who was seated by the gate at the entrance of the city. (Gen. 19:1.)

Lot greeted the two, and invited them to come to his place to eat and stay for the night. He didn't know they were God's messengers. It was his manner to be helpful to strangers.

At first the angels refused. But Lot begged them to stay at his house, and when they saw that Lot was not like the other people around them, they agreed.

Lot had a special meal prepared for his guests. Then, as they were about to go to bed, a great, noisy crowd surrounded Lot's house. These people knew that Lot had two strangers in his home. The crowd yelled in and told Lot to put the two out into the street, so that they could treat them in a terribly evil way which came into their minds. (Gen. 19:4-5.)

Lot went outside and pleaded with the crowd to go away. He was so worried about his two guests that he even offered to send his two daughters out for the crowd to treat as they pleased—if only they would leave his house.

The shrieking, evil crowd wouldn't listen to Lot. Some of the men rushed at him, pushing him against the door. The angels inside the house reached out, yanked Lot inside, and slammed the door shut. (Gen. 19:6-10.) The mob stormed against the door to break it in—and then a strange thing happened!

Those who were crowding against the door suddenly began to stagger in all directions, rub their eyes and yell out that they couldn't see. (Gen. 19:11.)

God's messengers, with powers that only spirit beings have, had caused sudden blindness to come upon the wicked men who were trying to harm Lot and break into his home!

When the howling mob saw that something awful had come upon those who were at Lot's door, the mob drew back from the house. But something worse was about to happen.

All the men in the city were in that evil mob surrounding Lot's house. (Gen.

19:4.) The angels could therefore plainly see that there weren't even as many as ten good men in Sodom. That meant that there was no reason for God to spare Sodom as He promised to Abraham that He would do if there were ten good men there.

God would now destroy the city!

"If you have relatives you want saved, tell them to get out of Sodom at once!" the angels said to Lot. "This city and the people in it are about to be burned up!"

Lot hurried outside to find the three young men who had married his daughters. He told them what was about to happen, but they would not believe him. (Gen. 19:14.)

Lot was very disappointed that the three men would not believe him. He came back into his house, but he made no attempt to leave. The angels told him again that he must leave. Lot still lingered. (Gen. 19:15-16.)

Then the angels seized him and his wife and two other daughters and forced them outside the city.

"Hurry to the mountains!" they warned Lot. "Do not stop or even look behind you at what is about to happen to this plain!" Still Lot hesitated.

"It is too far to the mountains," he argued, "but there is a little city over there in the valley we can reach sooner. Let us go there instead!" (Gen. 19:17-22.)

This was asking quite a favor of God, who, for the sake of his servant, Abraham, was holding back the destruction so that Abraham's nephew would not die with the wicked people.

Lot and his family set out at once, remembering the warning not even to look back. The sun was just coming up as they reached the edge of the little city of Zoar.

Back in Sodom and in Gomorrah, the other main city on the plain, people looked up to see a frightening, vast black cloud settling down over them. Perhaps they thought that a heavy thunderstorm was suddenly coming upon them. But no rain came! Instead, blobs of smoking, hissing fire belched out of the black cloud!

At this early hour probably most of the people were asleep or in their homes, and didn't have any warning of what was falling out of the skies. It wouldn't have mattered much, because there were no ways to escape.

Those few who were in the streets or out in the fields hardly had time to run in shrieking terror for the nearest buildings. People who were caught in the open were burned at once in the rain of flame and white hot sulphur and rocks!

For those who managed to reach buildings or were already in them, it was like being trapped in hot ovens, for even stone houses became glowing hot under the horrible heat roaring down from the sky!

It was an awful sight, this destruction of two cities and all the people in them! Even the vast plain on which Sodom and Gomorrah were built withered in the fan-

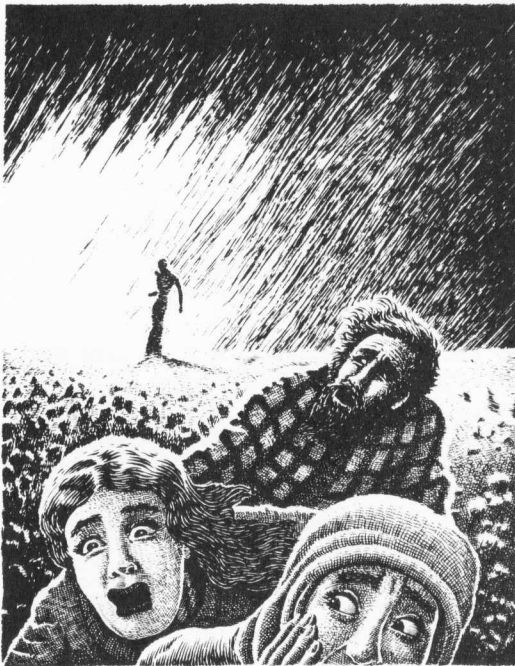
tastic flames, so that nothing—not even a blade of grass—was left alive. This was due to the fact that the plains were then pitted with holes lined with flammable materials that had been in the ground since before Adam. (Gen. 19:24-25.)

Thus God dealt with the evil people of that place because they were living in their wicked ways instead of by His laws.

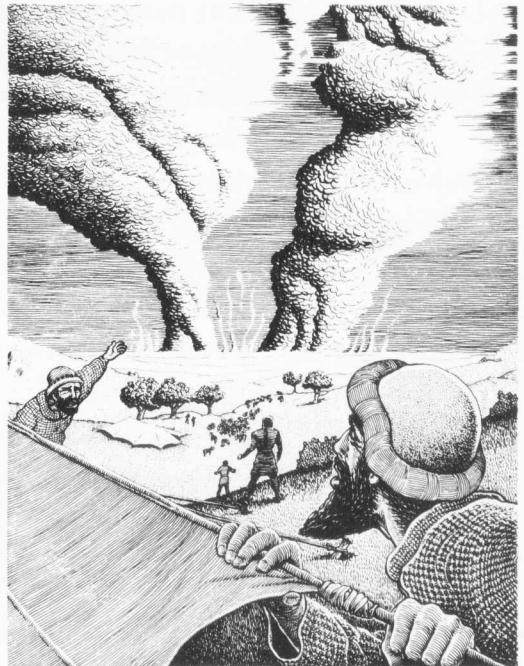
At the beginning of the fire storm, just as Lot and his family were about to enter Zoar, Lot's wife was so curious to see what was happening that she turned and looked upon the terrible scene. Lot and his two daughters hurried on into the city and to safety. But Lot's wife never arrived with them, for she had been turned into a pillar of rock salt just the size and shape of a human being! (Gen. 19:26 and Luke 17:29-32.)

The angels had not said what would happen to any one who disobeyed the warning not to look back. But when God gives a warning, He means that if we do not heed it, something mighty unpleasant is sure to happen to us.

Thus it was that Lot lost his wife. Even though he was a good man, he had failed to use wisdom by choosing to live in a city of sinful people. God was indeed merciful to him in sparing his life and the lives of his two daughters.



Lot's wife looks back on the destruction of the cities in the Jordan Valley, and is turned to a pillar of salt.



Abraham views the smoke of burning Sodom, Gomorrah and neighboring wicked cities of the Jordan Valley.

Abraham Views the Frightful Scene

Safe in his peaceful tent home in the mountains, Abraham got up early to look down upon the plain to see if God had moved to destroy the city where Abraham's nephew, Lot, had dwelt.

He must have been startled to see great clouds of smoke rising above the blackened plain and its cities. (Gen. 19:27-29.) It was plain to Abraham, then, that God had not found as many as ten good people in Sodom.

At first Abraham must have thought that his prayers for Lot had been for nothing. But later he must have learned, to his great joy, that God had indeed answered those prayers when it became known that the little city of Zoar, though it was on the plain with Sodom and Gomorrah, had been spared so that Lot would have refuge.

Realizing that by staying in Zoar he would still be dwelling among people who had no respect for God, Lot and his daughters soon fled to the mountains. (Gen. 19:30.) How much richer Lot would have been and how much less trouble and grief would have come to him if only he had abided by God's wish and had moved out away from the crowded cities in which so much evil took place.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ABRAHAM GIVES UP HIS SON

AFTER the destruction of the cities on the plain of Jordan, Abraham moved southward to a land called Gerar. Just as God promised, a son was born to Abraham and Sarah. An angel had already told them to name the baby Isaac. Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born. Sarah was ninety years old. (Genesis 21:1-3.)

In those days it was a custom to hold a feast in honor of a child between two and three years old. Therefore, when Isaac was that age, Abraham held a great feast because his son, Isaac, had grown out of babyhood and into a little boy.

Abraham had become an important and respected man in the land. No doubt he invited many other important men to the feast—quite likely even the king of Gerar.

When Hagar and her son Ishmael saw what great attention Isaac was receiving from so many people, they were jealous. Ishmael, you will remember, was Abraham's first son. Such a grand feast had not been given in his honor when he was that age. (Gen. 21:8-9.)

Even while the feast was in progress, Ishmael and Hagar made some unkind remarks about little Isaac. Isaac's mother overheard some of the things they said, and she became very angry.

Ishmael Leaves

For a long time Sarah had not cared to have Hagar and Ishmael living in the same tents with them. One reason was that Hagar, her handmaid, had given Abraham his first son, Ishmael.

Sarah went at once to Abraham and told him to send Hagar and Ishmael away.

This made Abraham sad. He had no wish to part with them. But he knew that this could never be a happy family with two jealous mothers living in the same household. It was a great problem to Abraham.

Then God spoke to him, telling him not to feel sorrowful because of Hagar and Ishmael.

"Do as Sarah wishes and send them away," God said. "I shall take care of them. Isaac, and not Ishmael, will be your heir. But from Ishmael I will make a whole nation!" (Gen. 21:10-13.)

This promise made Abraham feel better. He obeyed God. Early the very next morning he prepared food and water for an early journey for Hagar and Ishmael. He hoped that by starting early they might reach some camp or place where they could rest and escape the hot afternoon sun. Probably he also hoped that they would not go too many miles distant to live.

While it was yet cool in the early morning, Hagar and Ishmael took the food and water and started out on foot from Abraham's tent. Hagar, who was an Egyptian, probably planned to return to Egypt. (Gen. 21:14.)

But the country through which they had to walk was a desert. Hagar believed that if only the two could reach the caravan trail that led south to the land of Egypt, they might meet southbound travelers who would take them along.

Somehow the two lost their way. Hagar could not find the caravan trail. What was worse, she found that they had drunk all their water! It was already the middle of the day. The sun shone upon them with such fierce heat that by the middle of the afternoon Ishmael could walk no farther. He fell to the hot sand, and was unable to get back up on his feet.

Perhaps you think it strange that a strong, young man of sixteen years would become weak and helpless while his mother still had strength to walk. Growing boys often need more food and water than people who are much older. So it was that Hagar came to realize that unless she could find some water very soon, her son would soon be dead!

But it seemed impossible that there would be any water in that sea of hot sand and rocks. With every passing minute Ishmael was suffering more and more with thirst. By the middle of the afternoon, when the heat was at its worst, he was in great pain, and could hardly move.

Hagar knew then that Ishmael was close to death. The best she could do was roll him under the weak shade of a desert shrub. There she left him, and walked a short distance away where she couldn't watch him die.

For many miles around there were only two human beings on that vast, hot

desert. And in the burning silence were only two sounds—the painful groans of a dying boy, and the bitter sobs of his wretched mother.

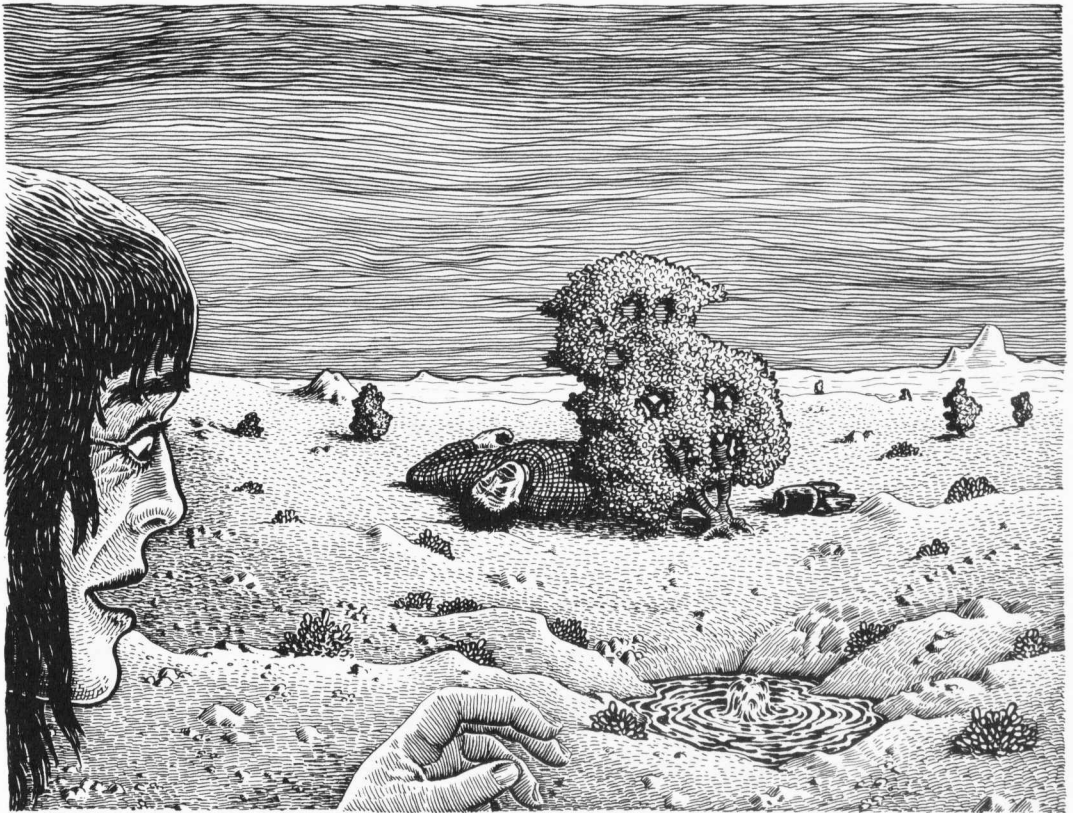
Ishmael Rescued

Then came a startling, different kind of sound—the voice of an angel speaking to Hagar!

“Don’t worry, Hagar,” said the voice. “Go help your son. God will cause a great nation to come from him!” (Gen. 21:17-18.)

Hagar looked up. She didn’t see an angel. But she did see something she hadn’t noticed before—clear, cool water bubbling out of the ground just a short distance away!

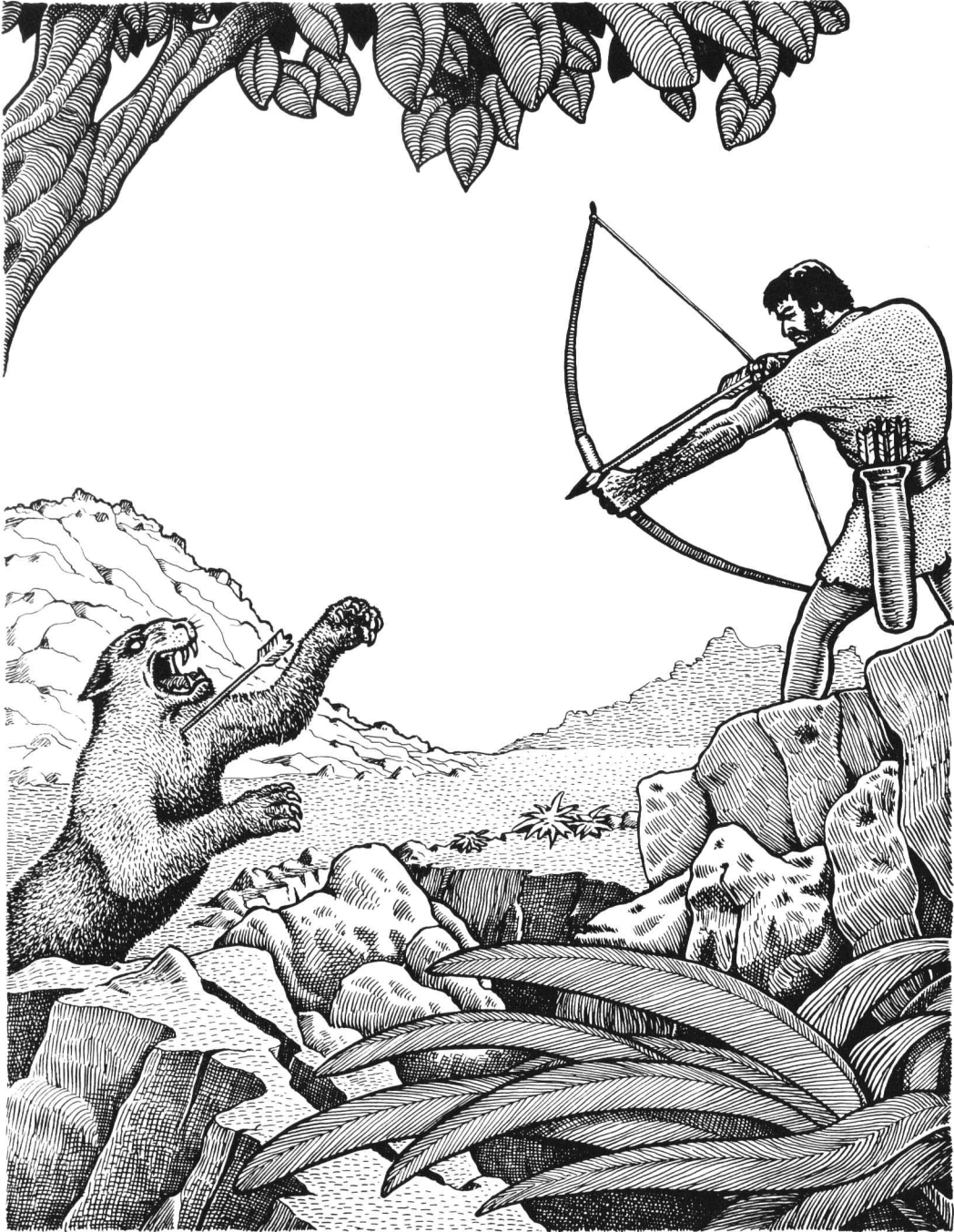
Hagar looked up to see water springing out of the dry desert ground.



Hagar hurried to the spring, filled her empty leather bottle, and thankfully poured some of the water between Ishmael’s parched, feverish lips. Ishmael’s life was spared—just as God had promised Abraham that He would look out for Ishmael!

From that time on, Hagar and Ishmael moved southeast and lived in the desert. Ishmael became very skillful with the bow and arrow, with which he shot

Ishmael learned to hunt with bow and arrow, and became an expert archer.



many kinds of birds and animals for food. (Verse 20.)

Ishmael spent so many years living away from people that he became almost like a wild man. (Gen. 16:12.) His mother brought him an Egyptian woman for his wife. Ishmael and his wife had children, and those children had children. In time, a whole nation sprang from Ishmael—just as God promised. (Gen. 21:21.)

Today we know those people as those who roam the desert countries of Asia and Africa—the Arabs!

Abraham Put Through His Greatest Test

Down through the years Abraham had shown by obedience and right living that he was indeed God's servant. But God planned to put him to one more test—one that was the hardest of all.

At that time Abraham was living at a place called Beer-sheba, south of the land where Hagar and Ishmael had gone into the desert. Isaac had been growing up. Abraham was pleased with his son, and was thankful that God had given him this fine, young man.

Therefore Abraham was all the more shocked one day when he heard God call to him and say: "Take your son Isaac to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering!" (Gen. 22:2.)

Abraham could hardly believe what he had heard. But he obediently listened to God's instructions.

Early next morning Abraham had his servants prepare for the journey. He felt very sad when he saw them splitting the wood on which he was to offer his own son. The materials and provisions for the trip were loaded on a burro. Then Abraham and Isaac and two servants and the burro set out for Moriah.

Abraham had told Isaac and the servants that he was going to make a sacrifice to God. But he didn't tell anyone what that sacrifice was to be.

For more than two days they walked toward a certain high hill where Abraham had been told the sacrifice should take place. (Gen. 22:4.)

Meanwhile, many thoughts went through Abraham's mind. God had promised that through Isaac there would become nations whose people would be as many as the stars in the sky. But if Isaac weren't to live, how could this be? Would God bring Isaac back to life? And why should God ask him to give up this son in the first place? The sacrificing of sons and daughters was a terrible ceremony begun by Nimrod and practiced by certain idol worshippers in those days. Could it be that God wanted His followers to do the same?

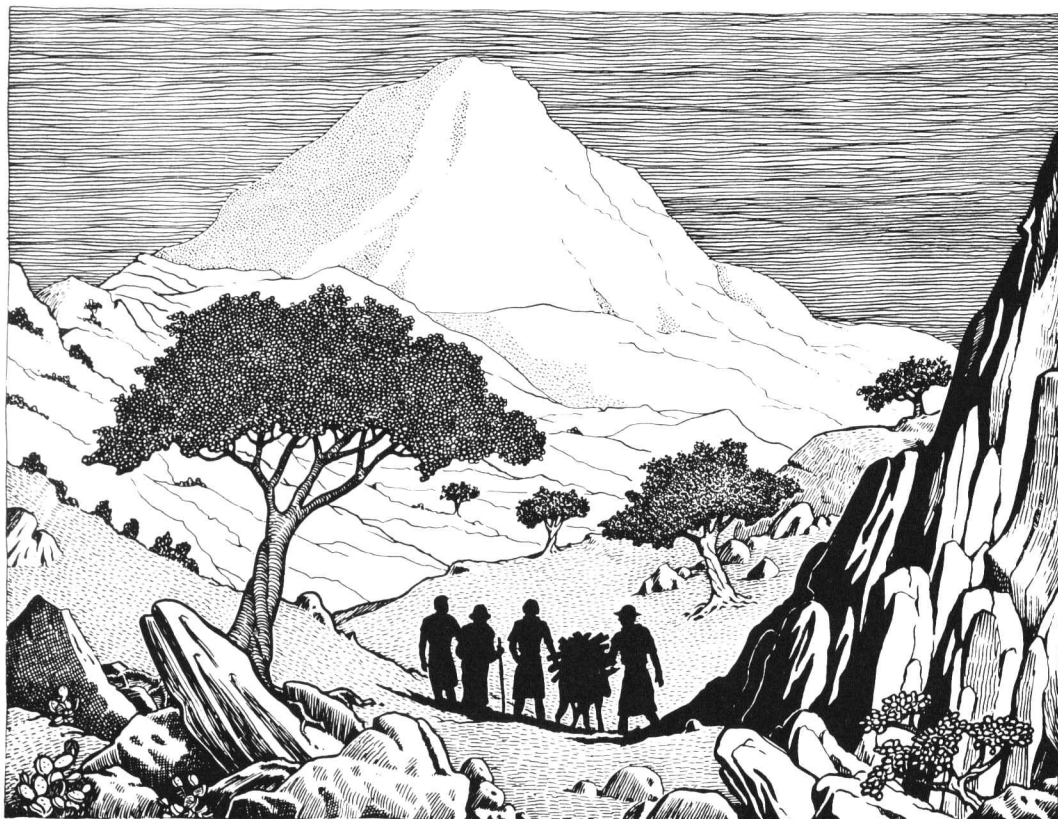
The more Abraham thought about these things, the more sorrowful he became.

But he did not argue with God or try to give excuses for not wanting to sacrifice his son. He knew that God was far wiser and more merciful than any human being, so he simply obeyed, no matter how he felt about what he was asked to do.

Abraham Obeys God Without Question

After two days of slow travel, Abraham sighted the high hill on which the human offering was to be made. After the group had reached a point close to the

On the third day of their journey, they sighted the mountain where Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac.



base of the hill, Abraham said to his servants, "You two stay here with the burro. My son and I will go alone to worship." (Gen. 22:5.)

Carrying a knife, a torch, some rope and the wood for the fire, father and son set off for the top of the hill. Not knowing just what part he would have in the sacrifice, Isaac began to wonder what was to be offered.

"We have the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering," he asked his father. (Verse 7.)

"God will provide the lamb, my son," Abraham replied. (Verse 8.)

When they reached the top of the hill, Abraham picked out a brush-lined spot where the servants they had left behind could not see what would take place.

"Bring stones for the altar," Abraham said, and together they built up a flat pile of stones large enough for a person to lie upon. Abraham then arranged the wood on top of the stone altar.

At this point the Bible doesn't tell us exactly what happened. All the Bible tells us is that Abraham bound Isaac and put him on the altar. (Verse 9.) It appears likely that Abraham told Isaac at the last moment that he, Isaac, was to be the sacrifice, and that Isaac willingly let himself be put on the altar.

If Isaac did agree to lie upon the altar and be slain, then he was a most unusual and obedient young lad. If he didn't agree, it must have been quite a task for an old man well over a hundred years old to overcome a strong young man a hundred years younger.

However it happened, Abraham was the one who suffered most. With his son lying bound on the wood of the altar, he picked up the sharp knife with which to slay his son.

Isaac stared at the white knuckles of his aged father's shaking hand as it lifted the knife. Then he tore his gaze from the sharp point of the knife to his father's face. It was a sad face, because Abraham felt sure that within the next few minutes the son he loved so much would be dead. Abraham would have chosen to slay himself—but that was not what God had asked. And Abraham knew that no man can do better than to obey his Creator, no matter how hard it may be.

Isaac Rescued

Abraham tensed his arm for the blow.

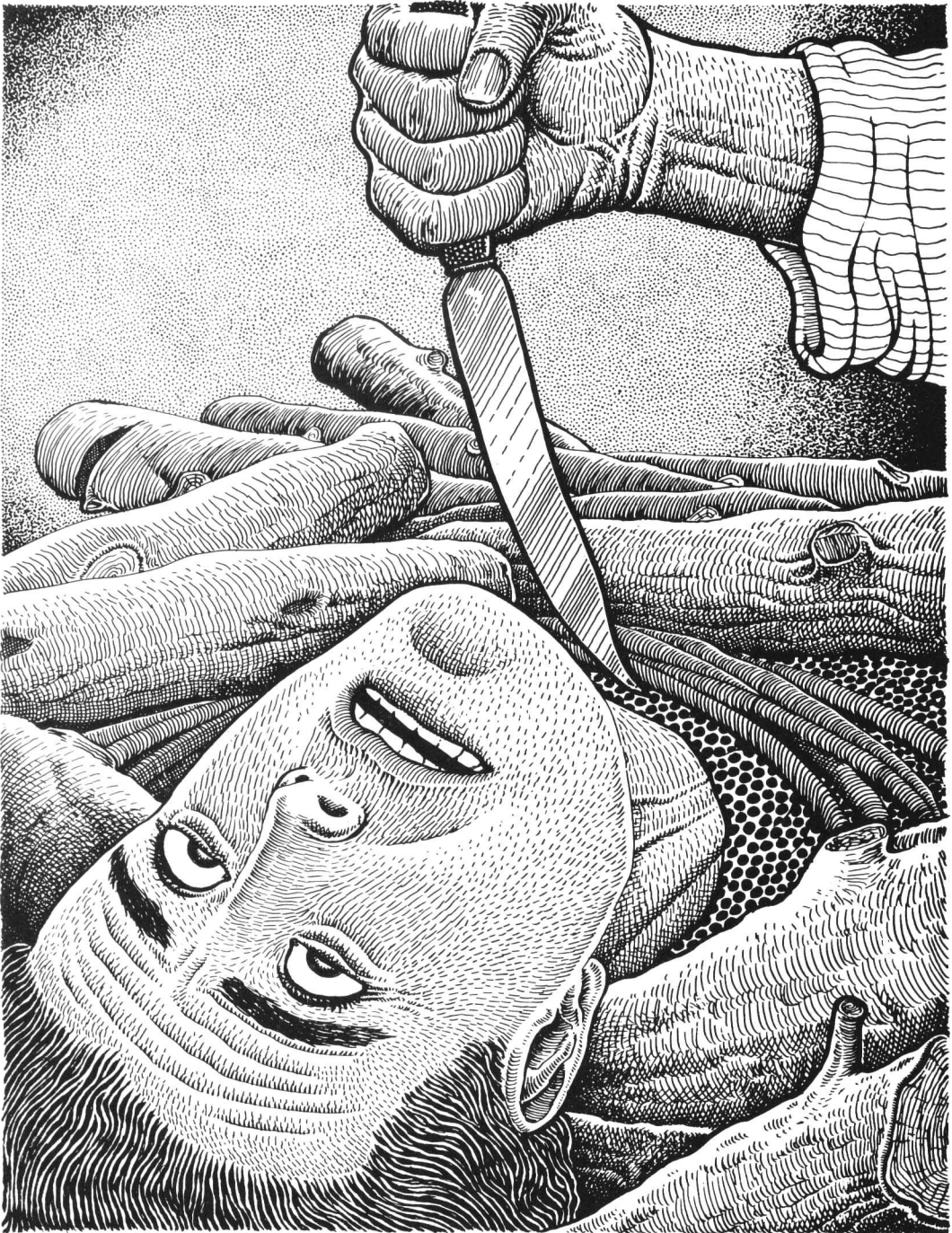
Then, just as he was about to run the knife blade into the flesh, a strong, clear voice called out Abraham's name!

Abraham stood motionless and listened.

"Do not harm Isaac," said the voice. "Because you have been willing to give up your son, I know that you fear me!" (Gen. 22:10-12.)

Abraham knew that God was speaking through an angel to him. He fell upon his knees, overcome with tears of joy and thankfulness that God had spared his son.

When at last he looked up, he saw a ram thrashing about in the brush nearby. The ram's horns were caught in the brush, so that it could not escape. Abraham knew God had provided the ram for the sacrifice in place of Isaac. (Verse 13.)



Abraham's quivering hand raised the sharp knife above Isaac's throat.

Isaac was a very thankful young man as his father slashed the ropes that bound him. Together, then, they prepared the ram and offered it to God.

Perhaps one might think that it was cruel of God to cause Abraham to almost slay Isaac. But God has always been loving and merciful—never cruel. Sometimes He gives some very hard tests to those who choose to obey Him, to prove their obedience or wisdom just as sometimes your school teacher or your parents give you tests to show how much you know and how willing you are to learn the right things and the right ways.

In Abraham's case it proved that Abraham loved God more than any other thing or person—even his own son. God already knew this. The proof was good for Abraham—and a good example for millions of Christians who would later learn and read of this event. It also pointed to a time two thousand years later when God Himself would be willing to give His only son, Jesus, to be killed because of all the evil things done by man.

But this is not all of the story!

Abraham's Descendants Promised GREAT Prosperity

Before Abraham and Isaac started back down the hill, the angel spoke again to Abraham:

"Because you have been willing to give up your son for Me," promised God, speaking through an angel, "I will indeed bless you. Your descendants will be *as many as the stars of the heavens* and as the sands of the seashore. They shall be able to conquer their enemies. All the nations of the world shall seek to be as PROSPEROUS as those who descend from you—and all because you have obeyed Me!"

Abraham's children are today numbered in the hundreds of millions, but most of them have forgotten who they are and why they are so prosperous today! Did you know that before?

Abraham and Isaac then walked back down the hill to where the two servants were waiting. They set out at once back to Beer-sheba, where Abraham and his family lived for quite a number of years. (Gen. 22:16-19.)

Later, Abraham moved to Hebron in the southern part of the land of Canaan. It was there that Sarah died at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven years. (Gen. 23:1-2.)

Not long before this happened, Abraham had bought a large field in that region. There was a cave in the field, and there he buried Sarah—the mother of many millions of people now living on this planet.

Perhaps you wonder why Abraham, who was a wealthy man with a great number of cattle, sheep and working animals, moved from one place to another so often. You might think that he would have been better off with a large house and huge



Abraham and his family didn't stay long enough in one place to mingle with idol-worshippers.

barns. For one thing, it was sometimes best to move from one location to another for the sake of the flocks. If there was not enough rain, the animals didn't have enough grass to eat. In that case Abraham simply pulled up his tents and herded his flocks to greener pastures.

The more important reason why Abraham lived in tents and moved about was that God directed him to move from one place to another. Most of the people in those countries didn't know much about God. They worshipped idols, and God didn't want Abraham or any of his family to fall in with the heathen ways of those people.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ESAU SELLS JACOB HIS BIRTHRIGHT

ABOUT three years after his wife Sarah had died, Abraham began to think more and more about Isaac getting married. At that time Isaac was forty years old, and Abraham knew that Isaac might pick a wife from among the Canaanites, who were idol worshippers.

Abraham therefore told his chief servant to take men and camels and provisions and go to Mesopotamia, Abraham's native land, and bring back a wife from among Abraham's own people. (Genesis 24:3-4.) It was the custom then, as it still is in some countries, for the parents to choose whom their children would marry.

Abraham felt sure that there were many of his own tribe still in Mesopotamia who worshipped God, because his brother, Nahor, had settled there at the time Abraham had left for Canaan many years before. (Genesis 22:20-24.) And Abraham knew that God wanted the people of his tribe to marry only those of the same tribe from which he came.

Abraham's Servant Finds Rebekah

After several days' journey to the northeast, Abraham's servant and his caravan arrived in the evening at a well just outside the city of Nahor. (Gen. 24:10.)

In those days the women went to the wells to draw water. Abraham's servant prayed that among the women coming to that well would be one that would be a good wife for his master's son.

Abraham's servant also prayed that God would point out a good wife for Isaac by causing the woman to want to draw up water for him and his caravan. But what

woman would want to draw up water to fill ten thirsty camels?

Even before the servant's prayer was finished, a beautiful young woman approached the well. A little later, as she drew up water, Abraham's servant came up to her and asked for a drink of water.

At once the young woman held out her water jar. (Gen. 24:11-15.)

"Drink, my lord," she said.

"This could almost be an answer to my prayer," thought the servant, "because she is willing to give me a drink. But surely she won't want to go to any more trouble than that."

Perhaps you can imagine how surprised Abraham's servant was when he heard the young woman say, "I will draw water for your camels, too! I'll be glad to give them as much as they can drink!"

This was a direct answer to the prayer he had made to God only a few minutes before.

Abraham's servant was sure that this was the woman for Isaac. He wanted to honor her, so he gave her a gold ring and gold bracelets of great value. (Gen. 24:22.)

When the servant asked the young woman her name, he received another surprise.

"I am Rebekah," she told him. "I am the daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son."

Nahor was Abraham's brother, so this young woman was a second cousin to Isaac! It was good news to the servant to learn that he had found a woman who was of Abraham's people, and one who probably knew about the one true God. The servant thanked God at once for helping him.

Laban Invites Him In

Rebekah ran to her home to tell her family what had happened, and to show them the ring and bracelets. When her Brother, Laban, saw the costly jewelry and heard Rebekah's story, he ran to the well to invite Abraham's servant in. (Gen. 24:29-31.)

The servant was glad to be invited in, but first he made sure that his camels were unloaded and fed and given straw to lie on.

Abraham's servant and the men with him were given water to wash their feet in. This was a custom in those days, and still is in those lands where the traveler's sandal-covered feet become dusty and weary.

Then food was set before them. But the servant would not eat until he had told them why he had come there. (Verse 33.)

The servant told Rebekah's family about what had happened to Abraham since he had left Haran many years before. He told how Abraham had obeyed God in the lands where other people would have nothing to do with God, and how Abraham had become wealthy and the happy father of an obedient son, Isaac.

When the servant told them about his prayer for a good wife for Isaac, and how Rebekah had fitted right in with things he had asked for, Rebekah's father and brother agreed that God had led Abraham's servant to Rebekah.

If you think it was strange that Rebekah had little or nothing to say about all this, we must remember that in those times wives were often picked in a much different way. But in this case God had a hand in the matter, and so it was certain to turn out right.

"We believe it is God's will that Rebekah become Isaac's wife," Rebekah's father and brother said to the servant. (Verse 50.)

The servant was so pleased to hear this that he again thanked God. Then he had gold and silver jewelry and beautiful clothes brought out for Rebekah, and costly presents for her family. (Verse 53). Then, at last, they all enjoyed a happy feast.

Next morning, Rebekah's family asked if she could stay a few more days at home. Abraham's servant reminded them that because God had so quickly led him to Rebekah, no part of the matter should be put off. Rebekah said she was quite willing to leave at once, so the caravan set out with Abraham's men and camels and the camels carrying Rebekah and her nurse and maids.

The people of Rebekah's family were sorry to see her go, but they were happy that she was to have a good man for a husband. (Verse 61.)

Isaac Meets His Bride

Several days after that, as Isaac was meditating while out walking in a field, he looked up to see a caravan approaching. He went out to meet it, hopeful that this was the one his father had sent out. (Verse 63.)

When Rebekah saw a man approaching, she asked who he was.

"That is Isaac, the man you are to marry," she was told.

Rebekah quickly put on a bridal veil, and alighted. (Verse 65.) The servant presented her to Isaac, who was so struck by her good manners and her beauty that he fell in love with her at once.

They were married shortly after that, and both were very happy. (Verse 67.) Through them, God moved one step nearer starting the nation that would do some very important work in the world through all succeeding generations.

At this time Abraham was one hundred and forty years old. He was probably



Isaac gazed at Rebekah and knew at once that he loved her.

quite content to leave matters to Isaac, who managed his father's business well.

Thirty-five years later, at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years, Abraham died. (Gen. 25:7.)

We know that Abraham had eight children, all of them sons. If he had other children, the Bible doesn't mention them. (Gen. 25:1-4.)

Two of those sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried their father in the same cave where Sarah had been buried. (Gen. 25:9-10.)

Thus ended the life of one of the most important men who ever lived on the earth. Because of his obedience to his Creator, Abraham became wealthy and lived a long time.

There was one thing God promised him that Abraham didn't receive, however, even though God always keeps His promises. Can you guess what that thing was?

It was everlasting life in God's kingdom, which will come to earth only a few years from now. At that time Abraham will become one of the mightiest rulers along with others who obey God. (Hebrews 11:8-14.)

In that time, strange as it may seem, many of you who read these words will get to meet Abraham and talk with him.

Although Isaac and Rebekah were happy, the years passed without their having any children. As time went on, they became more and more disappointed. At last Isaac asked God to send them a child. (Gen. 25:21.)

God answered Isaac's prayer, and after twenty years of marriage, Isaac and Rebekah realized that at last they would soon become parents.

At the same time, Rebekah became ill with unusual pains. She prayed to God about the matter. God told her, probably in a dream or a vision, that she would give birth to two nations. One nation would be stronger than the other, she was told, and the first one born would serve the other.

This must have been hard for Rebekah to understand at the time. But God gave her strength to continue in her condition until she became a mother—of twins!

The twins turned out to be boys. The first one born was called Esau. The second was named Jacob. (Gen. 25:22-26.)

As they grew, it was plain to their parents that they were very different in manners and habits, even though they were twins.

Esau loved to hunt and roam about, as did his uncle, Ishmael. Jacob wanted to follow his father's kind of life by raising flocks and crops. Isaac liked the delicious meat that Esau brought home, and so Esau became his favorite son. Rebekah's favorite was Jacob because he chose to do the things that kept him close to home. (Verses 26 and 27.)

Esau Sells His Birthright

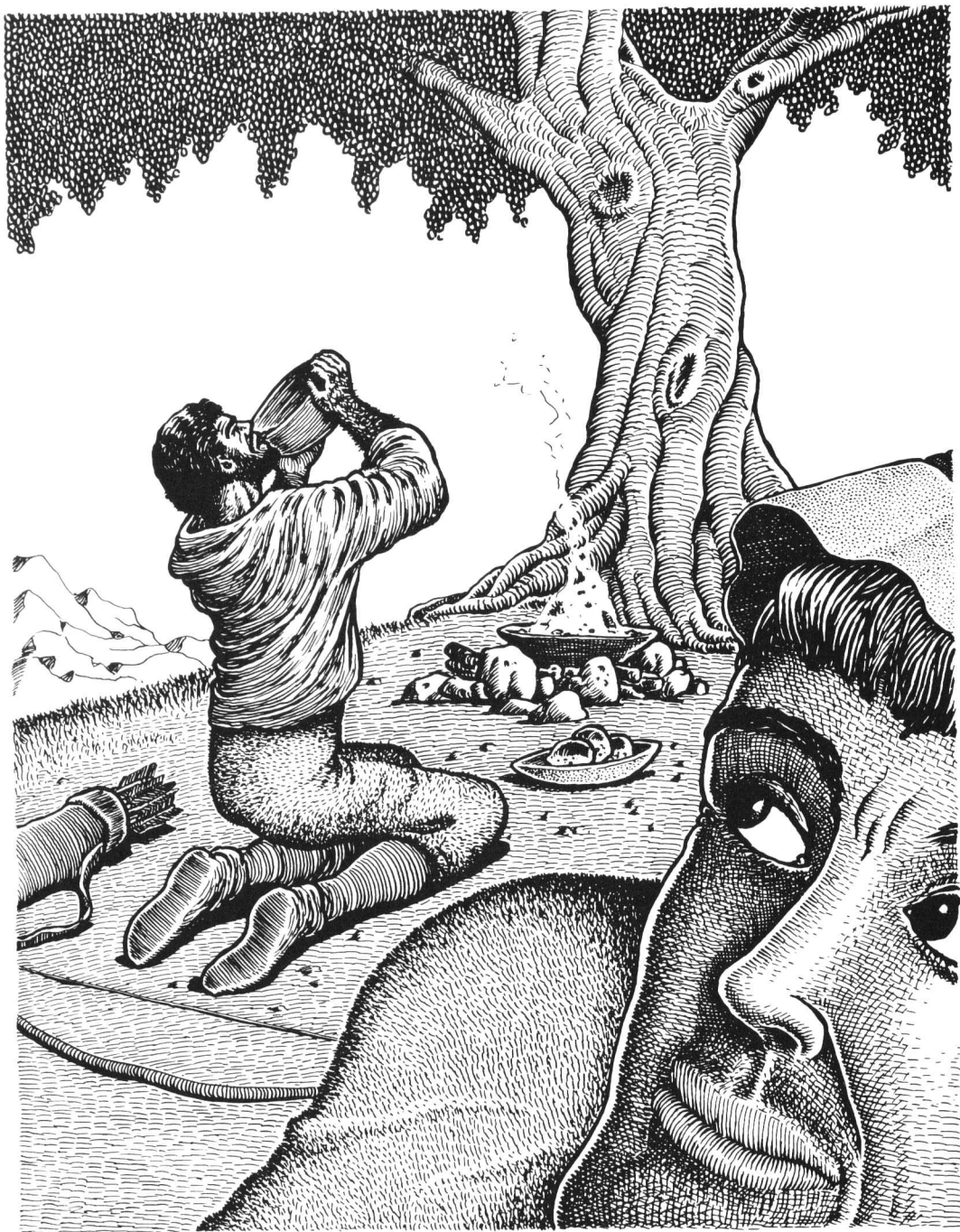
One day Esau went on a long hunting trip. He went so far away that by the time he returned he was staggering with weariness. On arriving home, he saw that Jacob had prepared a savory lentile soup. Esau was so weak and the soup smelled so good that he begged Jacob to give him some at once lest he faint from hunger.

Now it was a custom in those lands that the first son born in a family would receive many more gifts and rights than any children born later. And because Esau was born first, he naturally had what was called the birthright. This meant that if the father died, the birthright owner would inherit a larger share of the father's property than any other children in the family. In this case, it also meant that the oldest son would receive the greatest share of the promises God made to Abraham and those who came after him.

Jacob knew the great value of the birthright, and he selfishly wanted it. Here, he thought, was a chance to get it, so he said to Esau:

"I will give you all you want to eat if you will in turn promise to sell your birthright to me." Jacob smiled shrewdly.

Jacob smiled triumphantly to himself as he watched his brother bolt down the food that cost Esau his birthright.



Esau was so hungry that he thought he would faint any minute from lack of strength. In this condition, his birthright didn't seem very valuable to him. Food was mostly what counted at the moment. Just the delicious aroma of the steaming lentiles bubbling in garlic and butter was enough to sway Esau in deciding what to do.

"I promise to sell you my birthright for those lentiles," Esau told Jacob. (Verses 29-33.)

Then he greedily bolted down the bowl of soup and the bread Jacob handed to him. After a while his strength returned and he strode away, not caring very much about the great price he had paid for something to eat. (Verse 34.)

Isaac and Rebekah didn't know about this matter at the time. Otherwise, Isaac especially would have been greatly displeased, because Esau was his favorite son.

Years later, Esau did bring grief to his parents by marrying two wives. In those days it wasn't unusual to have more than one wife. But the worst part of this matter was that the wives Esau took were Canaanites. The Canaanites had very little knowledge of God. Most of them worshipped idols. (Gen. 26:34-35.)

Nevertheless, Isaac loved Esau more than he loved Jacob.

Jacob Steals the Blessing

One day when Isaac was well past a hundred years of age, and had become feeble and blind, he called for Esau and said to him:

"I'm getting old. Death could come to me at any time. Before that happens, I want to ask God to bless you. Take your bow and arrows and go out after a deer. Then cook the meat as I like it. After I have eaten, I shall give you the blessing that should be upon the son who has the birthright."

If Esau had been honest, he would have told his father that the birthright really belonged to Jacob. Instead, he set out to hunt for venison. (Gen. 27:1-4.)

Rebekah heard Isaac talking to Esau. She wanted Jacob, her favorite son, to receive the blessing Isaac would ask from God. She believed that Jacob was much better fitted to be Isaac's heir. A plan came quickly into her mind, and she hurried to Jacob to tell him about it.

"Do as I say, and you will receive the blessing your father is about to ask upon Esau," she said to Jacob. "Go out to the flocks and get two young goats. I'll cook them just the way your father likes meat cooked. Then take the food to him. He'll eat it and then give you the blessing before Esau returns!" (Gen. 27:5-10.)

To Jacob this didn't seem to be a very good idea. He knew there was too much difference between him and his brother. For one thing, Esau was a very hairy man. In fact, hair was so thick on his body that his skin felt almost like that of a goat. "I can't

trick my father so easily," Jacob argued. "When he feels my smooth skin, he'll know I'm not Esau. Then I'll probably receive a curse instead of a blessing."

"Don't worry about that," his mother said. "I'll take care of matters. Just go get those kids. If there's a curse, let it be on me, not you."

Jacob didn't know just what his mother intended to do, but he thought that if she were willing to take the blame for anything wrong, then he should be willing to do as she asked. Therefore he brought two kids in from the flocks. Before long, Rebekah made from them a meat dish cooked and seasoned just the way Isaac liked it.

Next, she took a coat that belonged to Esau and put it on Jacob. And over his hands and his neck she wound the soft, hairy skins from the young goats that had just been slaughtered.

"Now take this meat and bread to your father," she said to Jacob. (Verses 11-17.)

Jacob must have felt that this was a rather wild scheme to get a blessing. Nevertheless, he went to Isaac's tent and tried to sound like Esau by calling "Here I am, father!"

"Who is it?" asked Isaac.

"I'm Esau," Jacob replied. "Sit up and eat this meat I've brought for you. Then give me the blessing you promised."

Isaac was surprised that Esau should return so soon from hunting.

"How is it you have brought a deer back so quickly?" he asked.

"God showed me where to go to find one," Jacob lied. (Verses 18-20.)

Isaac was puzzled. This didn't seem to him to be Esau's manner of talking.

"Come near so I can place my hands on you," Isaac said.

Jacob stepped close to the bed. Isaac reached out and moved his aged hands over the hairy goat skins on Jacob.

"Your voice is like Jacob's, but your hands feel hairy like Esau's," said Isaac. "Are you really Esau?"

Again Jacob lied by saying that he was Esau.

"Give me the food, and I shall eat it and then bless you," Isaac promised. (Verses 21-22.)

Jacob suddenly felt great relief, though at the same time he felt guilty because of lying and because of tricking his father with the goat skins. Quickly he put the steaming meat before Isaac, and brought bread and wine. (Verse 25.)

When Isaac had finished eating, he asked Jacob to come close and kiss him. When Jacob did so, Isaac noticed that the robe Jacob was wearing smelled like the grasses and aromatic herbs of the fields. It would naturally smell that way, because it was Esau's robe, and Esau spent so much time in the open. Thus there was no doubt left in Isaac's mind that this person was Esau. (Verses 26-27.)

Isaac then asked a blessing upon Jacob, in which he said:

"God, give to my son, who smells of a field you have blessed, many well-watered, fertile fields. Give him plenty of grain and fruit of the vines. My son, I ask God to cause people to serve you and nations to bow down to you. Rule over your brothers. May a curse be upon any who will try to put a curse upon you. And may a blessing be upon any who would bless you." (Verses 28-29.)

Esau Comes in From the Field

Having received the blessing, Jacob left at once. And only in time, too. For meanwhile, Esau had shot a deer and had cooked some of it for Isaac.

"I have returned with the dish of venison you asked for," Esau called out as he came near Isaac's tent. "Sit up, father, and eat it." (Genesis 27:30-31.)

Blind Isaac was just leaning back on his pillow, content in thinking that he had performed an important duty before his death. The sound of Esau's voice caused him to sit up suddenly. In that moment he knew that something was not as it should be. He found himself trembling so hard that he could scarcely speak.

"Who are you?" Isaac asked.

"I'm Esau, your first-born son," Esau replied. (Verse 32.)

"Then where is the one who brought food to me and just now left?" inquired Isaac. "He said he was Esau. I asked God's blessing on him. And God will bless him!" (Verse 33.)

Esau was so stunned to hear what his father said that he almost dropped the food he was holding.

"Ask a blessing on me, too, my father!" Esau begged.

"But your blessing has been stolen by your brother," Isaac told him.

"So it was Jacob who did it." Esau exclaimed bitterly. "He has cheated me twice. First he took my birthright. Now he has stolen my blessing. Can't you ask God for anything for me?" (Verse 36.)

"I have asked for all good things for Jacob," Isaac said. "I can't ask for the very same things for you."

"But surely there is something for me, your first-born son!" Esau cried out in a shaking voice. Then he broke down and wept aloud, even though he was a strong man. (Verse 38.)

Isaac felt much pity for his favorite son.

"Here is what shall be for you, Esau my son," Isaac said. "God shall give you and those who live after you a land far away from the best things this earth has to offer. You will have to hunt and fight even for what you get. You and your people will

serve your brother and his people. But there will come a time when you will be free of them.” (Verses 39-40.)

Esau should have been thankful for at least some of the things his father asked for him. Instead, he was very angry because Jacob had received the greater blessing.

Esau Plots to Murder Jacob

“My father Isaac will soon die,” Esau thought. “Then I will kill Jacob for what he has done to me.” (Verse 41.)

In his anger, Esau must have told someone what he planned to do. His mother heard about it, and was afraid for Jacob. She told Jacob what Esau intended to do, and begged Jacob to leave the country at once and go stay with her brother back in the land of Mesopotamia at Haran, where she had been born. (Verse 42.)

“But I don’t want to go away from here,” Jacob argued. “This is my home and my country.”

Rebekah became so worried about Jacob’s safety that she thought up a plan to get him away from home. In the first place, she knew that Jacob would probably do anything his father told him to do. Therefore she went to Isaac about the matter, but she didn’t tell Isaac her real reason for wanting Jacob to leave.

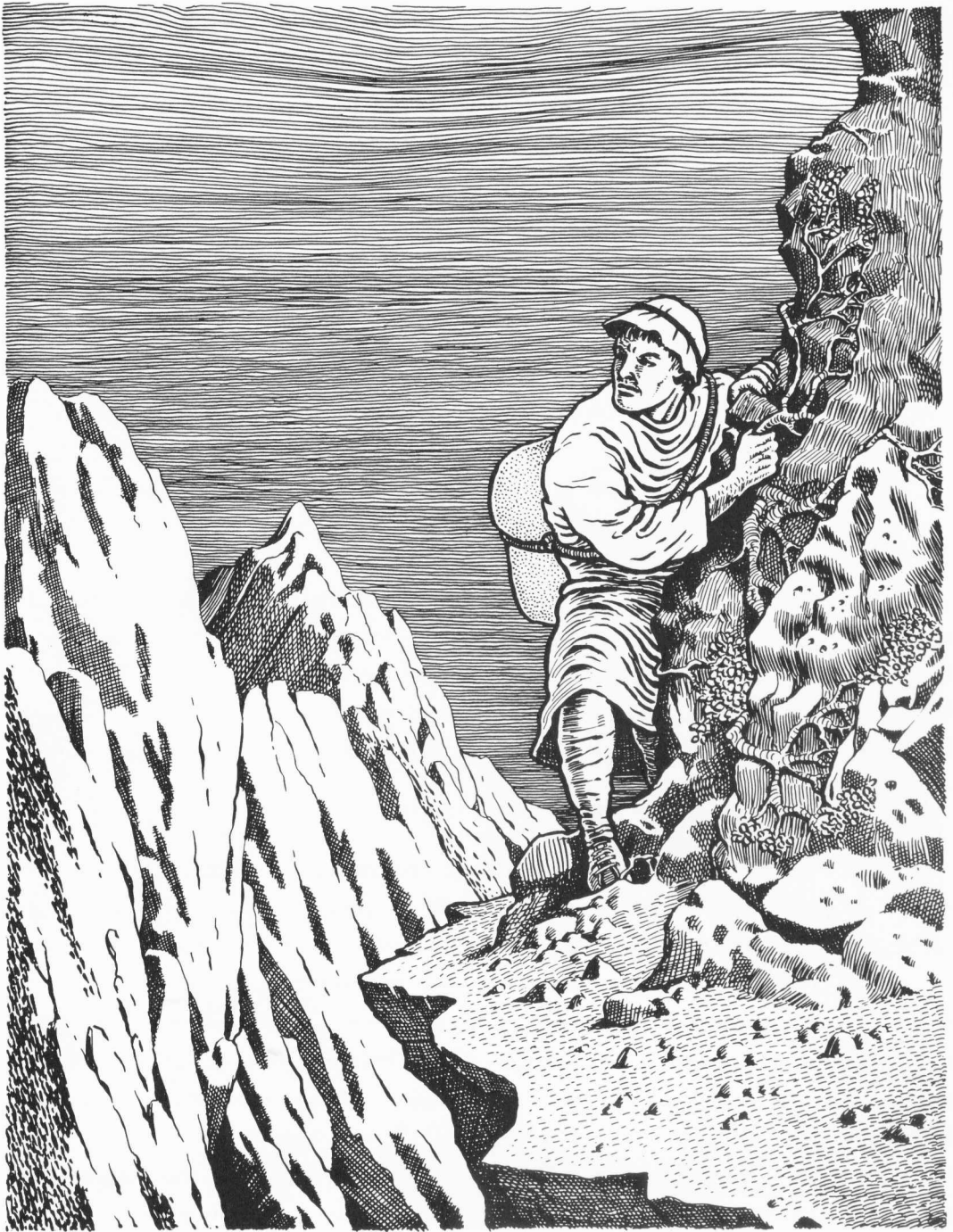
“If Jacob lives here much longer, he is very likely to marry a Hittite woman,” she told Isaac. “I think you should send him to Haran to choose a wife from our own people before he is trapped by some woman from among the heathen idol worshippers around us.”

Isaac had been greatly disappointed before because his favorite son, Esau, had taken wives from among the people who didn’t worship God. He didn’t want Jacob to do the same thing. Probably Jacob had no idea of doing such a thing. But Rebekah had put the thought into Isaac’s mind, and Isaac became worried. After some time he called Jacob to him.

“Do not take a wife from the Canaanites,” Isaac told Jacob. “You should choose a wife from your own people. Your mother thinks you should go to her home in Haran and stay a while. Perhaps you will find a wife there. May God bless you and cause you to have many children and much good land when you return!”

Jacob then started off for Haran by himself with only the few provisions he could carry. It wasn’t easy to cross the desert alone. But he was anxious to escape from his angry brother, Esau.

Instead of taking the most direct road to Haran, Jacob chose side trails that made his journey more difficult. By doing this, he hoped to make it impossible for his brother to catch up with him.



Fearing that his angry brother would pursue him, Jacob chose difficult side trails on his way to Haran.

CHAPTER NINE

JACOB FALLS IN LOVE

ISAAC had just sent away his son Jacob to stay with Uncle Laban in Haran for a while. With Jacob gone, his brother Esau did not take the trouble to pursue his brother. Instead, he tried to please his parents by marrying a woman who was not a Canaanite, as were his previous wives. This third wife Esau chose was from Ishmael's family, and that still wasn't very pleasing to Isaac and Rebekah. (Genesis 28:6-9.)

Jacob Stops at Bethel

As for Jacob, he continued on through the mountains. When he was about fifty miles from home, he stopped for the night on a lonely, rock-covered slope. There he slept on the ground with his head resting against one of the stones.

Jacob was very weary because of his long walk during the day. Perhaps that was partly why he dreamed of some very unusual things. He dreamed that he saw a huge stairway that rested on the earth and went very far up into the sky. Many angels moved up and down the stairway, at the top of which stood a very powerful looking being.

"I am the God of Abraham and of Isaac," came a voice from the Figure at the top of the stairway. "I will go with you in your journey, and I will protect you. The land on which you lie will become yours, and those who come after you will own it. They will spread out over the earth, and through them all nations will receive a blessing. I will bring you back to this land again. I will keep all the promises I am making to you now." (Gen. 28:19-15.)

When Jacob awakened from his dream, he was filled with a strange fear. He felt

that it was really God who had spoken to him for the first time. The unusual experience left him weak and trembling. (Verses 16 and 17.)

Using a stone for a pillow, the weary Jacob dreamed of a huge stairway leading from heaven to earth.



Jacob believed that this was such an important event in his life that he should mark the spot where the dream occurred. Therefore he anointed the stone against which he had rested his head, and set it up as a special pillar and a landmark.

Jacob there promised that if God would protect him, provide for him and bring him back to his father's house, then he would give God a tenth or tithe of all that came to him. (Gen. 28:18-22.)

Probably Jacob knew that the first tenth of what any man earns should be returned to God. After all, it is God who really owns all things, and whatever we have comes to us as gifts from our Creator. Even the very air we breathe is a wonderful gift because it keeps us alive.

In asking us to give back only a tenth of what we earn, God is being very generous. On top of that, He promises that He will provide well for those who are faithful in giving back a tithe, or tenth. (Malachi 3:8-11.)

Jacob Falls in Love

With the pleasant feeling that from there on God would protect him, Jacob continued on his way. After days of trudging over stony mountain trails and hot desert sands, wading across cold streams and crossing the great River Euphrates, he came into the land of Mesopotamia.

Finally, in the distance, he saw a city. Not far away were some shepherds and their flocks of sheep gathered about a well that was protected by a huge, flat stone.

Jacob came up to the shepherds and asked, "Where are you men from?"

"We're from Haran," they answered, pointing to the city in the distance. (Gen. 29:1-4.)

Jacob was happy to learn that his long, wearying journey was almost at an end.

"Do you know a man there called Laban?" he asked. "His grandfather's name was Nahor."

"We know him," the men replied.

"Is he well and prosperous?" Jacob inquired.

"He is," they answered, and pointing to an approaching flock, they added, "Here comes one of his flocks. The girl you see herding them is Rachel, Laban's daughter." (Verses 4-6.)

When Jacob heard this, he was anxious to meet Rachel alone. Meeting one of his own family was such a special event that he didn't want strangers around.

"It's only the middle of the day," Jacob reminded the shepherds. "Why don't you take your flocks back to the pastures?"

"We can't do that till we've watered them," the shepherds answered. "And we

can't water them till Rachel gets here with her flocks so that all the animals can be watered at once."

By that time Rachel's flock was close by. Jacob helped the other men move the stone top from the well. Then he drew water for Rachel's sheep.

All the while Jacob couldn't help noticing how beautiful Rachel was. When he had finished drawing water, he stepped up to her and kissed her. (Verses 9-11.)

"Are you really Laban's daughter?" he asked.

"I am," she replied.

Jacob was so thankful that God had led him to his people that he wept with joy and thankfulness.

"I am Jacob, your cousin," he told Rachel. "My mother is Rebekah, your aunt."

Rachel was so surprised and pleased that she took her flock and hurried to tell her father about Jacob.

When Laban, her father, heard what had happened, he hurried out to meet Jacob and welcome him to his home.

Jacob visited with his uncle's family for a month. During that time he did his part in the work that had to be done around Laban's home and in the fields.

The more he saw of Rachel, the more he loved her. Rachel had an older sister, Leah, who was closer to Jacob's age. But Jacob was interested only in Rachel.

Laban could see in the time that Jacob stayed that he would be a good addition to the family. But Laban couldn't expect Jacob to keep on working for no more than meals and a bed. (Verses 12-14.)

"If you wish to keep on working here, I would like to give you fair wages," Laban told Jacob. "Tell me what you think would be fair pay."

Probably Laban would have been glad to have Jacob continue working for only food and bed. But he was afraid that Jacob might leave, and so he knew he would have to offer Jacob something.

"I shall work for you for the next seven years if you will then give me Rachel for my wife," Jacob said. (Verse 18.)

Laban was pleased at this suggestion. Seven whole years of service from a good worker was like an offer of a great deal of money.

"You shall have her for your wife," Laban heartily agreed. "I would rather have her marry you than some stranger."

Jacob Marries Someone Else!

Seven years is quite a long time. But to Jacob, who was happy in seeing Rachel every day, time went by quickly.

When the seven years had passed, Jacob reminded Laban that it was time for the marriage. Laban gave a great marriage feast that lasted a whole week. Many people were invited, and it was a time of much celebration.

On the evening of the day of the ceremony Jacob was married to his bride. She was covered with a long, heavy veil that almost hid her from view. This was the custom in those times in that country, and it still is in some eastern nations.

Jacob was very happy. It was well worth seven years of labor, he thought, to finally have Rachel as his wife. But later, when the veil was removed so that he could look upon the woman he had married, his happiness suddenly left him.

It was not Rachel. It was Leah! (Gen. 30:23.)

Filled with anger, Jacob went at once to Laban.

"Why have you cheated me this way?" he demanded. "I asked for Rachel to marry, not Leah!"



The bride drew back her heavy veil, and Jacob was amazed to see that he had married Leah—not Rachel

"I'm sorry, my nephew," Laban explained, "but it is a custom of this land that the older daughter must marry first. I couldn't change that custom. I had no choice but to give you Leah."

If Laban had been fair, he would have told Jacob about that custom long before. But he wanted to get Leah married, and he chose this dishonest way to do it.

Jacob was very unhappy and disappointed. This trick his uncle had put over on him reminded him of the way he had tricked his brother and his father in order to get a birthright and a special blessing. Perhaps Jacob realized then that it was only just that he should now be the victim of a dishonest act.

"If you must have Rachel for your wife, I will give her to you if you will do two things," Laban told Jacob.

"What are the two things?" Jacob asked, wondering if Laban had some other trick in mind.

"If you will be a good husband to Leah for the remainder of the marriage feast during this week, then you shall have Rachel to wed at the end of the week," Laban replied.

"I am willing to do that," Jacob said. "But that is only one thing. What is the other thing?"

Laban hesitated a little before answering. He was hoping that Jacob loved Rachel enough to agree to what he was about to ask.

"You must work for me seven more years for Rachel," Laban said.

Jacob was stunned by Laban's words. For a while he said nothing, leaving Laban to wonder if he had asked too much of Jacob.

"I agree to both things," Jacob suddenly replied. "Surely Rachel is worth more to me than fourteen years of work!" (Verses 27-28.)

Perhaps the remainder of the first seven days of feasting seemed almost as long to Jacob as were the seven years of service to his uncle. At the end of the week, he and Rachel were married. Thus he had two wives, which was a common thing in those times. Rachel was the one he loved, however.

He willingly carried out his promise to work seven more years for Laban, whose scheme to marry off both his daughters later brought grief to this deceitful man.

Six More Years of Work

By the time his fourteen years of labor for Laban were finished, Jacob had little more to his name than a large family and tents to live in. As it happened, only one son of his eleven boys was thus far born to him by Rachel.

Meanwhile, because of Jacob's careful planning and willingness to work hard,

Laban became wealthy in flocks. Jacob could see that there wasn't much reason for him to keep on working for Laban, so he told him that he would like to take his family and return to Canaan to visit his elderly father, Isaac, who was still living.

Laban was very upset when he learned what Jacob wanted to do. He didn't want to lose such a valuable man.

"If you will continue working for me," he told Jacob, "I shall pay you any wage you ask."

"I don't want wages," Jacob replied. "In return for my continuing looking after your flocks, let me have any of the cattle or sheep or goats that have spots or ring marks on their hides."

"I agree to that," Laban said. (Verses 31-32.)

But before Jacob could get around to separating one kind of animal from another, Laban had his workmen remove most of the animals Jacob claimed. These he turned over to his sons, who kept them at a distance where Jacob wouldn't notice them. (Verses 35-36.)

You will remember that God had promised Jacob that He would look out for him. God kept that promise. During the next six years, while Jacob managed Laban's flocks, God miraculously helped him by greatly increasing the numbers that had rings or spots on them. This was the opposite of the usual habits of cattle breeding. (Gen. 31: 11-12.)

Thus so many of the cattle and sheep and goats became Jacob's that he soon became wealthy. By carefully trading and buying, he also acquired many camels and burros and tents and much other expensive equipment.

At the same time, Laban's flocks were not increasing as he wanted them to. It had long been plain to him that he, Laban, had become prosperous because a man who relied on God was managing his business. But now that God was causing Jacob to prosper, Laban was not pleased. He feared that Jacob would leave at any time, now that he didn't have to worry about making a living.

Jacob Leaves Laban Secretly

Laban became less friendly toward Jacob, causing Jacob to have a greater desire to leave. Then one day God spoke to Jacob and told him to return to Canaan. (Gen. 31:13.) Jacob feared that Laban might not let him leave, so he waited till a time when Laban had gone several miles away to oversee the shearing of his sheep. Then Jacob had his workmen take down his tents and pack them and all his belongings on camels and burros.

Jacob was careful not to take anything that belonged to Laban. With all his serv-

ants and family and flocks, it was a big moving job. The animals had to be herded, and thus the caravan couldn't move very fast. (Verses 17-18.)

As for Leah and Rachel, they were glad of the chance to leave. They felt that their father hadn't been fair to them or to Jacob.

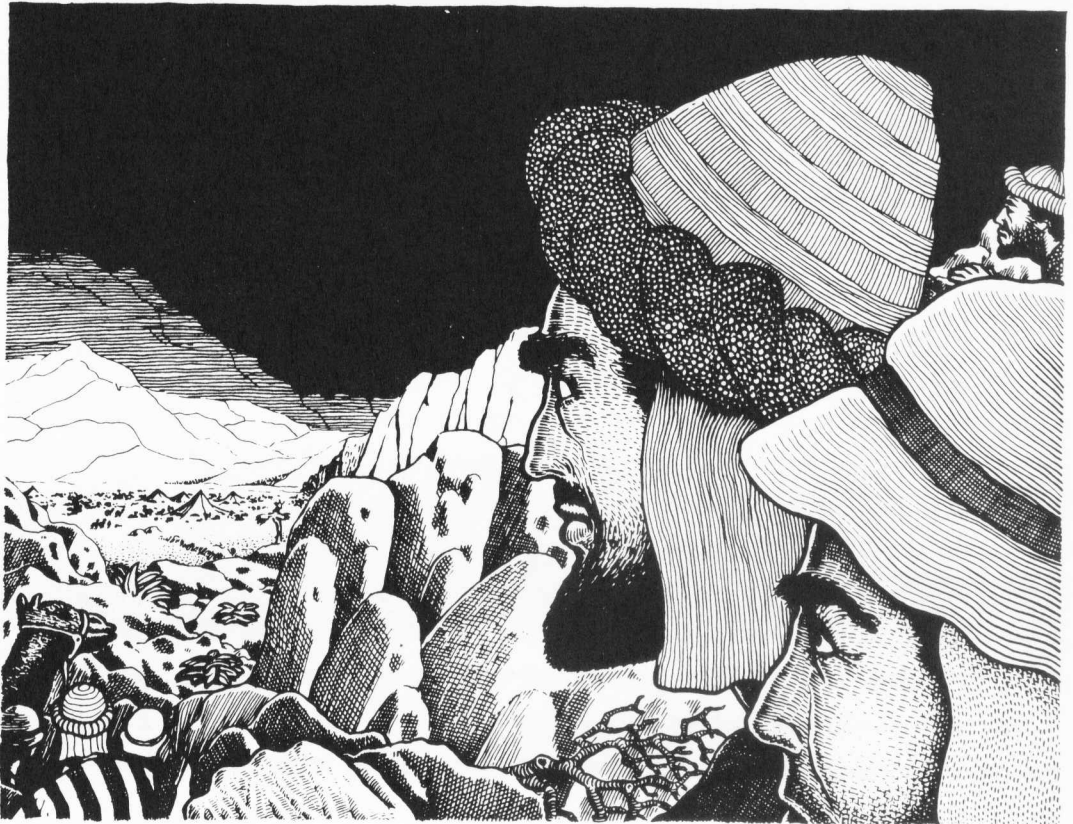
It was not until three days after Jacob had left for Canaan that Laban found out what had happened. (Verse 22.) He was very angry at the thought of Jacob leaving him without a word. Then he found that a number of small idols which he prized highly were also missing from his tents. He felt certain that Jacob had taken them.

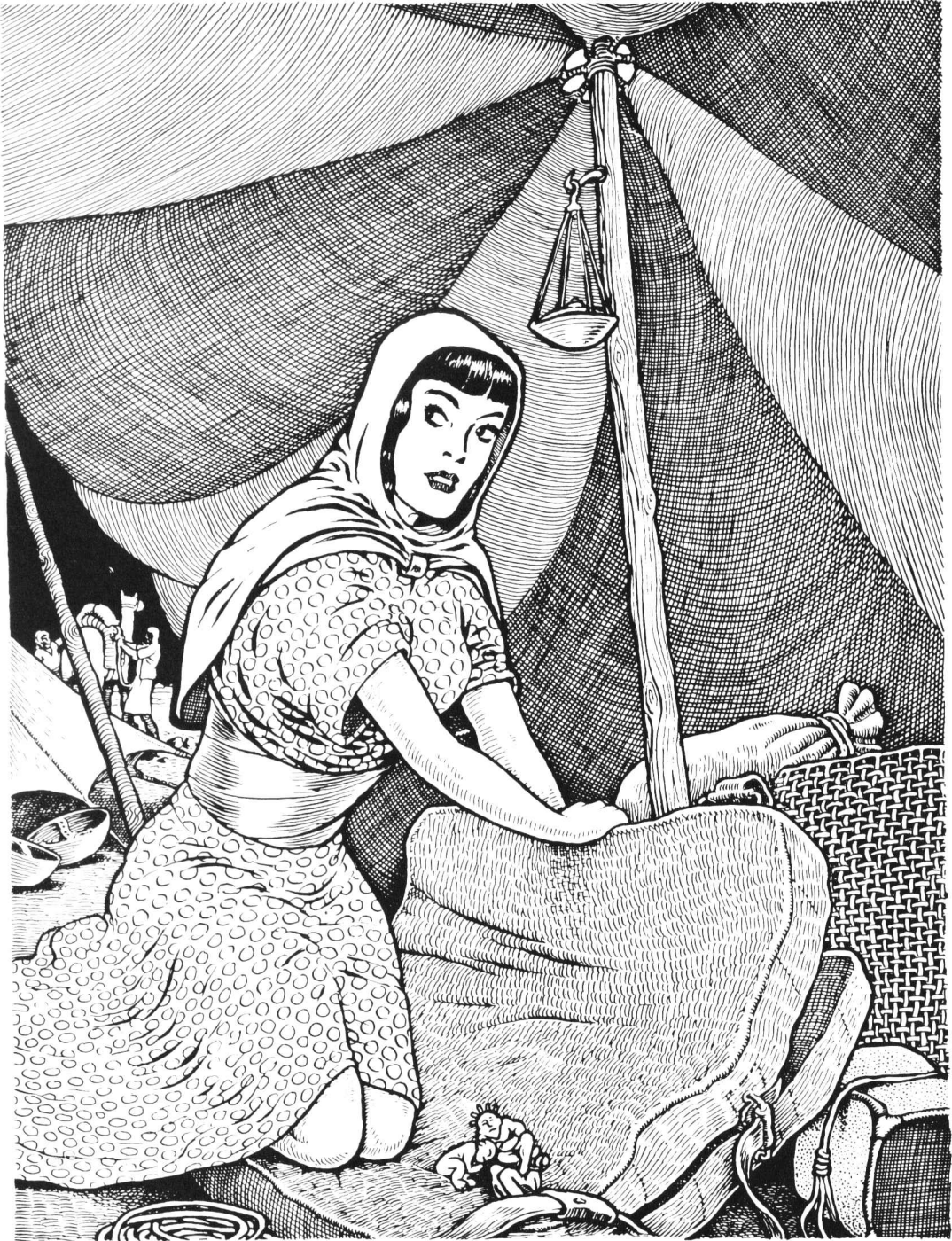
"Gather my best men together for a fast trip!" Laban roared at his foreman. "Saddle the fastest camels! I will overtake this Jacob if I have to go all the way to Canaan!"

After seven days of hard travel, during which the camels were forced to move as fast as possible, Laban and his men came within sight of Jacob's caravan, which had encamped for the night. (Verse 23.)

"We'll camp back here tonight out of their sight," Laban told his men. "Early

After a week of hard, fast travel on camels, Laban and his men came within sight of Jacob's caravan camped for the night.





Rachel went to her tent and hid her father's little idols under a camel saddle.

tomorrow morning we'll overtake them. Then Jacob will learn that he was most unwise to leave as he did!"

But by next morning Laban wasn't so intent upon revenge, for God spoke to him in a dream. (Verse 24.)

"Do not harm Jacob in any way," God warned. "If you do, I shall suddenly act against you!"

Laban was greatly disturbed by the dream. Perhaps he wasn't absolutely certain that it was God who had warned him. But he felt he couldn't take any chances.

Early in the morning, when Laban overtook Jacob's caravan, his anger had almost gone.

"Why did you do this to me?" he demanded of Jacob. "If you had told me you were going, I would have prepared a great feast. As it happened, I didn't even get to tell my daughters and grandchildren goodbye." (Verses 25-29.)

"I left while you were away because I knew you might otherwise force your daughters to stay with you," Jacob answered.

"I have enough men with me to force them from you right now," Laban went on. "And I would do it now if it weren't for a dream I had last night. I dreamed that God warned me not to harm you."

"It is good that you are obeying that warning," Jacob answered. "No one can stand against God."

"Probably that is so," Laban said. "I respect your belief. But it is plain to me that you don't respect mine. Just before I started out after you, I found that certain little images that mean much to me were missing from my tents. Some one in your caravan stole them, and I want them back!"

"If you think we have your images, then search our tents and belongings," Jacob said. "If you find them with the property of any person in my caravan, then let that person die!"

Jacob was certain that Laban had come searching in the wrong place for the images. He didn't know that Rachel had stolen them from her father's tent because she knew that Laban looked to them for advice the same as many people even today look to images, crystal balls and other lifeless objects for advice. (Verse 32.)

Rachel didn't want her father to pursue Jacob. She was fearful he would find out through his idols which route Jacob's caravan had taken. Perhaps she realized that relying on idols and sorcery and such things can sometimes result in getting in touch with demons that will make known some surprising things.

While Laban and his men searched for the images, Rachel was resting at her tent seated on a camel saddle. It was there that she had hidden her father's little idols.

Soon Laban came to her tent and searched.

"Get up from that saddle, so that I may look there," Laban said.

"I'm sorry, father," Rachel said to him, "but I'm not feeling well. Please excuse me if I stay here and rest."

When Laban went to Jacob to admit that the images couldn't be found, Jacob was angry. He demanded to know why Laban, who had not been fair to him through Jacob's twenty years of honest service, had come to treat him like an enemy.

Laban knew that Jacob deserved better treatment. Therefore he suggested that they make an agreement that there would be no more wrong feeling toward each other. Their men piled up stones as a monument to their agreement. Then they ate a meal together as a further sign of friendliness.

Next morning Laban said goodbye to his daughters and their children, and returned to Haran. (Gen. 31:55.) At the same time, Jacob's caravan moved on toward Canaan.

Jacob Tested by the Lord

The closer Jacob moved to Canaan, the more he worried about meeting his brother, Esau. For a long time Esau had lived in the rough, wild country of Seir, and Jacob's caravan would have to travel near that area to reach Canaan. Jacob feared that there would be trouble if Esau heard of his brother coming that way.

"My brother is probably still angry because of the way I tricked him twenty years ago," Jacob thought. "He said then that he would kill me. Unless he has changed his mind, he'll probably attack my caravan if he hears I'm passing this way."

In an attempt to find out how Esau felt about him, Jacob sent messengers on ahead to try to get in touch with Esau. They were instructed to tell Esau that his brother was about to pass through the land with much wealth from Haran, and that Jacob hoped that they could meet as friends.

Not long afterward the messengers returned to report that they had met Esau, and that he was not far behind them with four hundred men! (Gen. 32:3-5.)

This report shocked Jacob. He knew that all the people in his caravan couldn't stand against four hundred men led by a man who had promised to kill him. Jacob at once gave orders for the caravan and flocks to divide into two groups and to separate. He reasoned that if one group suffered an attack by Esau's men, the other group might escape. (Verses 7 and 8.)

Then Jacob did the thing that was more helpful to him than anything else could be. He asked God to spare him and his family from any attack by his brother. He admitted to God that he wasn't worthy of protection, but he reminded God that he had been promised protection.

God wants us to look to Him for help. But if there is anything we should do at

the same time to help or protect ourselves, He expects us to do it. God doesn't like laziness. Therefore Jacob just didn't sit idly by and wait for his Creator to do what he should do. Probably God inspired him to act as he did. He brought his flocks to a halt. Out of them he picked five hundred and fifty of the choicest goats, sheep, camels, burros and cattle. Then he divided each kind of stock into groups, and each herded group was sent out at a different time to approach Esau as one of several gifts.

"Tell my brother that I hope he will accept my presents," Jacob instructed the men who departed with the stock in the direction from which Esau had been reported to be approaching. (Verses 13-21.)

Thus Jacob hoped to make Esau feel kindly toward him. After the herds intended for Esau had gone on, Jacob sent the two sections of his caravan on ahead a short distance to encamp for the night. (Verses 22 and 23.) He remained behind at a certain spot to be alone and pray.

Before the next day dawned, he had a peculiar experience. That night a strange man seized him, as though to keep him from completing his trip to Canaan. The man began a wrestling match with Jacob!

Jacob soon realized the man was a messenger or angel sent from the Almighty God. (Verses 24-25.) Years later the prophet Hosea was inspired to write that the angel or messenger with whom Jacob wrestled was none other than the Lord—the One who later became Jesus! (Hosea 12:3-6.)

Jacob proved that trying night that he was not a quitter. He wrestled all the night and would not let the Lord go until He had blessed him. (Verse 26.) As morning dawned the Lord blessed Jacob and praised him because he was not a quitter like his brother Esau had been. Jacob was determined to strive with all his might in order not to lose God's blessings and eternal promises. Jacob proved by his *physical* wrestling that he had the strength of character to overcome his *spiritual* problems. That wrestling match was a test of character!

As Jacob found favor with God, his name was changed. The name Jacob meant that he supplanted others by taking advantage of them unfairly. But Jacob's God could not give the Birthright and His blessings to the man who had taken them from his weaker brother Esau unfairly. So the Lord appeared as a man and gave Jacob a chance to prove himself with one who appeared as his equal.

Jacob proved that he was as determined as the Lord! He would not let the Lord go until He blessed him! That is why he was now called "Israel." He overcame every obstacle that stood in the way of receiving God's blessing. In the Hebrew language that Jacob spoke, the name Israel means one who prevails, or overcomes, or proves to be a champion with God. (Verses 28-30.)

When that dawn came, Jacob found that he was very sore in one hip—a proof that God's blessings do not come without suffering and hardship. (Verse 31.)

Later, when he joined his caravan, he was troubled to see a growing cloud of dust in the distance. There was no doubt that it was Esau and his four hundred men swiftly riding toward the caravan.



Jacob put all his strength into the all-night struggle with the Messenger from Heaven.

CHAPTER TEN

JOSEPH'S ADVENTURES IN EGYPT

JACOB was now on his way back to Canaan to see his father. But he was very much afraid of what his brother Esau would do. For Esau had planned to kill him when he left Canaan twenty years before.

Fearing the worst, Jacob arranged for Rachel and her son Joseph to stay the greatest distance behind. That was because Rachel was the wife he especially loved, and Joseph was his favorite son. Then Jacob moved up past the other groups of his family and servants and went out to meet Esau. (Genesis 33:1-2.)

Esau and his four hundred sturdy men pulled to a halt a short distance from the front of Jacob's caravan. Jacob, ahead of the others, was so close that he could see his brother staring at him.

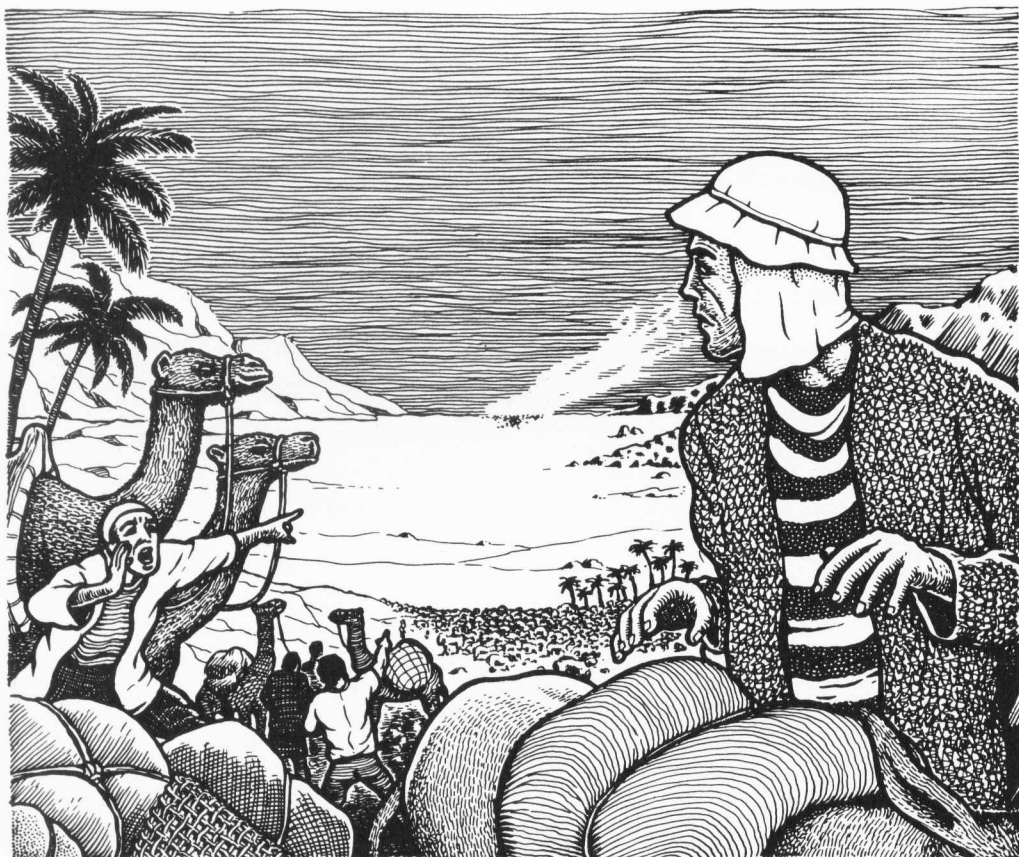
Would a spear or an arrow hiss out from those warriors and find its mark in his chest?

Trusting in God that no harm would come to him, Jacob bowed seven times toward his brother, as was the custom then when one party wished to give respect to another party. After each bow, he moved a few paces closer to Esau.

After the seventh bow, he straightened up to look squarely at his brother for the first time in twenty years. (Verse 3.)

Jacob Meets Esau Face to Face

For a few moments there was silence, and nothing happened. Then Esau, who had dismounted from his camel, rushed forward to seize Jacob—and hug him! They were so happy to see each other that they wept.



Jacob was troubled to see a growing cloud of dust in the distance. There was no doubt that it was Esau and his four hundred men.

Thus God answered Jacob's prayer.

When Jacob's family saw that Jacob and Esau had met as happy brothers, the wives and children and servants came near Esau and bowed.

"Who are all these people?" Esau asked.

"God has been good to me," Jacob replied. "These are my two wives, my twelve children and my wives' handmaids and our servants and workmen."

Esau was pleased at sight of the crowd of courteous people. Looking about, he saw the flocks of sheep, goats, cattle and many camels and donkeys. Looking behind him, he could see the flocks of stock he had passed on the way to meet Jacob. They were returning because Esau had not stopped long enough to learn that they were intended as a gift for him from Jacob.

"What are those flocks I passed on the way here to meet you?" Esau asked.

"I wanted you to think well of me," Jacob replied. "They were gifts for you."

"But I don't need more animals," Esau said. "I have plenty. Keep them for yourself."

"Please accept them," Jacob said. "I am so thankful that God has spared you and caused you to be friendly with me that I want to give you these things."

Esau could see that Jacob would be unhappy if he didn't accept the animals, so he took them. (Gen. 33:10-11.)

Esau then suggested that both their caravans go together back to Seir, where Esau lived. But Jacob knew that Esau and his men liked to move swiftly. Because there were small children in Jacob's caravan, and flocks to be herded, Jacob would have to proceed slowly. When Esau realized how matters were, he left for his home with the understanding that he would meet Jacob later.

At the same time, Jacob's caravan set out behind Esau, but continued on to Canaan, where Jacob bought land and settled down. (Verse 17.)

After Jacob returned to Canaan, he had one more son, named Benjamin. It was wonderful to have so many sons, but when this twelfth one was born, his mother died. Jacob was very sad to lose the wife he especially loved. (Gen. 35:16-20.)

He had other sorrows while he lived in Canaan. His daughter, Dinah, had got into trouble when she attended a pagan festival of the Canaanites. This, in turn, brought trouble to her grown brothers, who wrongly thought they had reason to act brutal and dishonest at times. (Gen. 34:1-2.)

Joseph's Adventures

Meanwhile, Jacob's favorite son, Joseph, grew into a young man. By the time he was seventeen he was working hard helping take care of his father's livestock. His brothers did the same kind of work, but they weren't friendly with Joseph because their father did special favors for him. (Gen. 37:3) Joseph told his father about some of the wrong things his older brothers had done, and that caused them to dislike him.

To make matters worse, Joseph dreamed some dreams that seemed to show that he would some day become an important person, and that his brothers would come to look upon him with much greater favor. (Gen. 37:5-11.)

Not long after these things took place, Jacob's ten older sons moved the flocks about sixty miles away from home. After they had been gone several days, and no word had come from them, Jacob began to worry. Because of some of the cruel things Simeon and Levi had done, the brothers were not liked by the other people in that region, and for that reason Jacob feared that they might have been attacked. Therefore he sent Joseph to try to follow them and to return to him with any news.

It was a long trip on foot for a lad of seventeen, but a few days later, after making inquiries from people in that area, he came upon his brothers herding their flocks.

When they saw him coming, their hatred and jealousy toward him grew even more. They didn't want him to be keeping an eye on them and then making a report to their father.

"We should kill him," muttered one of the brothers whose name was Simeon.

"I'm all for that," said another.

"We could throw him into a den or a hole and say that a wild beast attacked him," one of them suggested.

"Let us not shed blood," spoke up Reuben. He pointed to a deep pit that had once been a well. "It would be better to put him down there and let him starve."

Reuben wasn't as cruel as the other brothers with him. His plan was to later rescue Joseph from the pit and send him back to his father.

"We'll do it your way, Reuben," the others agreed.

Excited to at last find his brothers, Joseph hurried happily toward them, shouting their names. But he halted when he came close enough to notice their deep scowls.

"Well, if it isn't Joseph the dreamer!" one of the brothers sneered.

Suddenly Joseph found his arms pinned behind him and held tightly by those who had stepped up to seize him.

"Rip his coat off!" someone yelled.

The coat that Joseph was wearing was a special, many-colored coat his father had given him. It was just one more reason why the other sons were envious. The coat was jerked off him, and he was lifted up and dropped into the pit Reuben had shown to his brothers.

Joseph landed on the loose, dry gravel and dirt at the bottom of the old well, and so was unhurt. He got to his feet and tried to scramble out. But the loose soil only fell in when he touched it, and he could see that it was useless to try to climb out.

Joseph thought at first that his brothers were playing a trick on him. He couldn't believe that they would really be cruel enough to leave him in the old well to die. After a while he called up to them to let him out, but they only laughed and continued eating their noon-time meal.

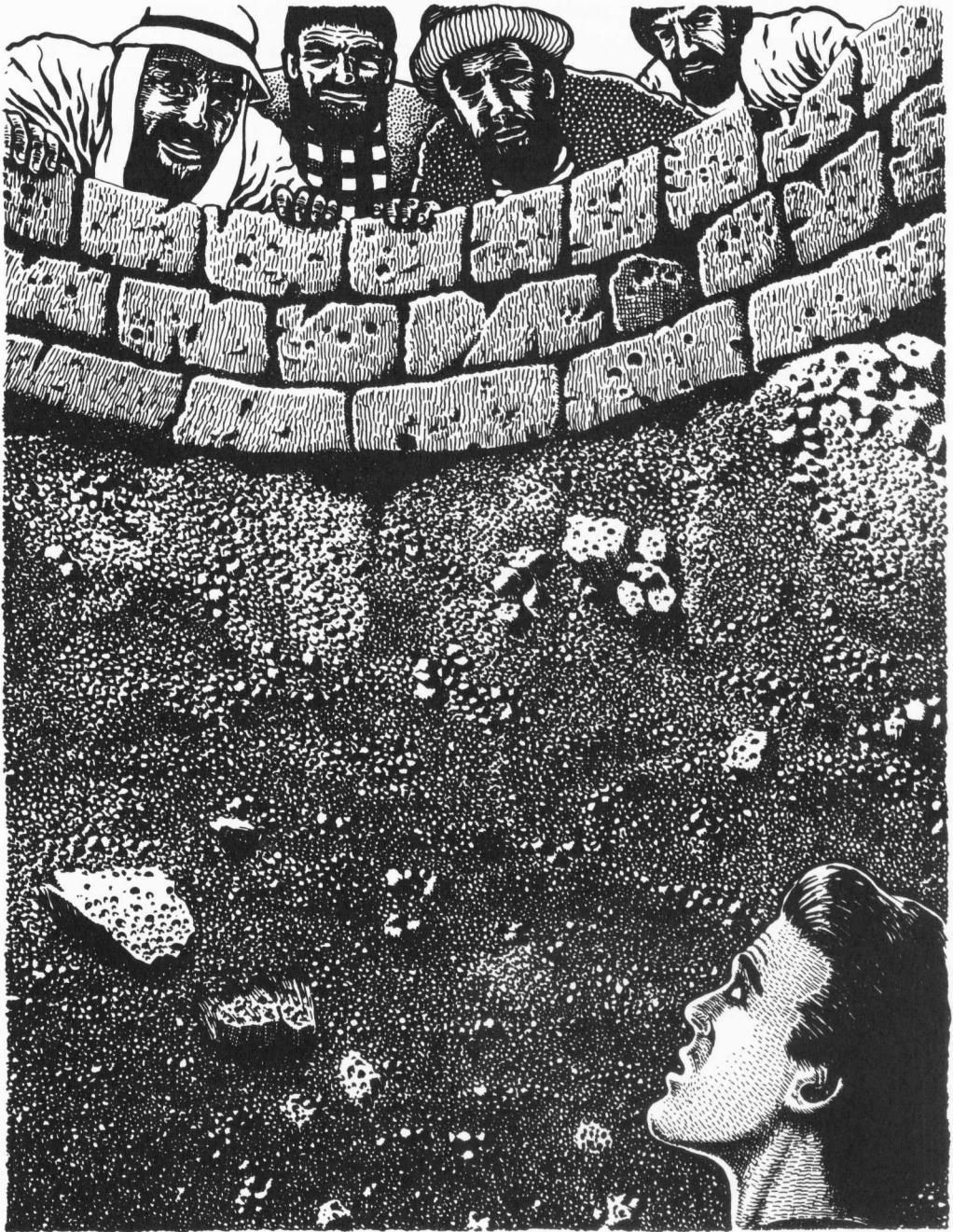
However, Reuben was not among those who laughed at Joseph. He had gone to watch the flocks while the others ate, and he planned to return after the others had gone out to their flocks. Then he would rescue Joseph.

But Reuben didn't see the caravan of Midianites who approached. (Gen. 37:28 and 25:2.) They were on their way to Egypt to sell spices. When the other brothers saw the caravan, an idea came to one of them.

"These Midianites buy and sell most anything, including slaves," said Jacob's son

Judah. "Let's sell Joseph to them and they can sell him in Egypt as a slave." The brothers agreed. Some of them waved to the approaching caravan to get them to stop. The brothers told them that they had a young man in the nearby pit they would like

Some of the Midianite slave traders got off their camels, walked to the well and peered down at Joseph.



to sell to them. Some of the caravan got down off their mounts and looked into the pit.

After much arguing and bargaining, it was agreed that the Midianites would pay for Joseph what would be equal to about fifteen dollars in our present money.

Imagine selling a human being for only fifteen dollars! But hatred causes many evil things, and the hatred toward Joseph by his brothers was an example of what terrible things can happen when people let hate, instead of love, come into their minds.

After the Midianites had given twenty pieces of silver for Joseph, a rope was lowered and Joseph was pulled out of the pit. Then they seized him and tied him on the back of one of the camels. Right after that the caravan moved on.

Things had happened so quickly that Joseph wasn't sure what was going on. But when the caravan continued on toward the south, he shouted to his brothers to rescue him. But the brothers just stood and watched the caravan move away, glad that at last they were rid of the brother they didn't like.

Reuben Returns to the Well

A little while later Reuben returned to the old well into which Joseph had been thrown. By this time, the other brothers had gone back to their flocks. On finding that Joseph wasn't in the pit, Reuben hurried to his brothers to find out what had happened.

"Don't worry about Joseph," they told him. "He's still alive. We sold him to a caravan of Midianites headed for Egypt."

Reuben was so filled with grief to hear this that he ripped apart some of his clothes.

The brothers knew that they would have to explain to their father what had become of Joseph. They took the coat they had taken from him and dipped it in the blood of a goat that they butchered. A few days later, when they returned to Jacob's place, they acted very sad.

"What is the matter?" Jacob asked as he hurried out to meet them. "Where is Joseph?"

"Is this Joseph's coat?" asked one of the sons, holding out the blood-stained garment so his father could see it.

"It is Joseph's coat!" exclaimed Jacob, staring fearfully at the blood stains. "I had it made for him. Where did you find it?"

"We found it in the desert," was the reply.

"My son has been killed by some wild beast!" Jacob cried.

Jacob was so sad at the thought of losing his favorite son that he was very close to illness for many days. Meanwhile, his other sons tried to comfort him. But they didn't

dare tell him the truth about what had happened to Joseph. It was a cruel way to treat their father. Each feared to tell the truth because of what the other brothers would do to the one who would tell. And all of them feared what Jacob would do if he learned that his son had been sold as a slave.

Joseph Reaches Egypt

While Jacob was feeling sorrowful about what he thought was his son's death, Joseph was taken down into Egypt by the Midianite traders. There, in a slave market, he was put up for sale to any one who would pay the best price.

Among those who needed a healthy, young male slave was a man named Potiphar. He was captain of the guard in the service of the king of Egypt, and, as such, was a powerful and important man. (Gen. 37:36.)

Potiphar bought Joseph and put him to work in his household doing all kinds of tasks. As the days passed, Potiphar noticed that Joseph was more capable and trustworthy than his other servants.

Because Joseph followed God's laws and was honest, hardworking and anxious to do his best, he was put in charge of all the servants in Potiphar's household. You will remember that God's blessing was on Laban's household because Jacob served God. Now there was a blessing upon Potiphar's household because of Joseph's obedience.

Meanwhile, God was causing certain events to take place with Joseph because He had a plan in mind that, through Joseph, would affect the whole world for thousands of years. You will see what that plan was as you continue reading what happened to Joseph and those who lived after him.

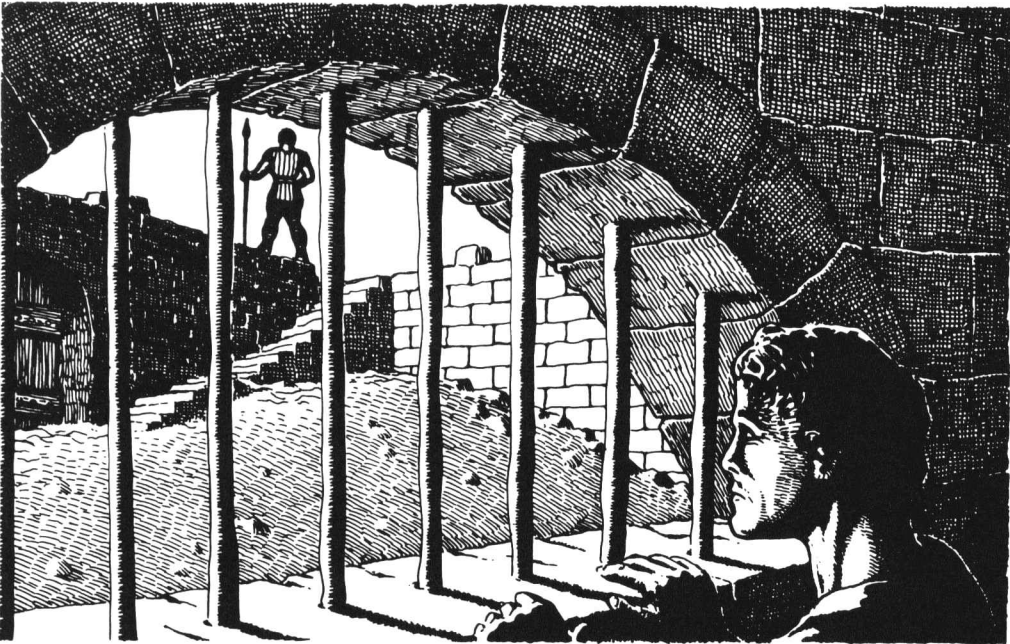
Matters went well until Potiphar's wife began to like Joseph. It wasn't long before she thought as much of him as she did her husband. Joseph knew that such a thing shouldn't be, and one time he told her so. (Gen. 39:7-8.) This made her so angry that she snatched off Joseph's jacket as he was leaving. Then when servants were close at hand, she called out to them for help. When they rushed to see what the matter was, she held up Joseph's jacket and told them that Joseph had been cruel to her, but had fled when she cried out. When Potiphar came home, she told him the same untrue story. Potiphar was very angry. He ordered soldiers to seize Joseph at once and put him in the king's prison. (Verses 16-20.)

Time passed, during which the man in charge of the prison noticed that Joseph was obedient to prison rules, and that he was an intelligent person who could well help to keep order in the prison. (Verses 21-23.) Here God stepped in again to cause Joseph to find favor with the head jail keeper. Before long Joseph was in charge of prison



Potiphar's wife tried to get Joseph to fall in love with her, but her efforts were in vain.

matters under the head jail keeper. However, he had to go on living in the dungeon, even though he enjoyed a fairly high office.



Because of the lies that were told about him, Joseph was put in the Egyptian prison.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JOSEPH BECOMES RULER OF EGYPT

AT THE time Joseph was in prison in Egypt there was a plot to poison Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. As a result, two high-ranking men of the king's court were put in prison. One was the chief butler, who had charge of the royal vineyards, the wine cellars and the serving of wines. The other was the chief baker, or chef. He had charge of preparing and serving all the food for the king's royal table.

There was no proof that either one of these men was guilty of having some part in trying to poison the king, and so for the time they were given good treatment. Potiphar himself, who probably by that time began to think that Joseph wasn't guilty, came to Joseph and told him to look after the two new prisoners. (Gen. 40:4.)

After they had been in prison for some time, and Joseph had become well-acquainted with them, he one morning noticed that both appeared worried. When Joseph asked them why they were troubled, they told him of disturbing dreams that had come to them the night before.

"Tell me your dreams," said Joseph. "Perhaps there is a meaning to them that God wants known to you." (Gen. 40:5.)

"I dreamed of a vine with three branches that blossomed and gave forth ripe grapes," the butler told Joseph. "I pressed the juice from the grapes into a cup, and gave the cup to the king."

This strange dream would have been difficult for Joseph to understand through his own thinking. But he had asked God for wisdom, and God helped him to understand what the dream meant.

"Your dream shows that within three days you will be taken from prison and

will be given back your office as head butler to the king," Joseph said. (Verse 12.)

When the chief baker heard this happy meaning to the butler's dream, he was anxious to tell Joseph his dream, hoping that it would also have a happy meaning.

"I dreamed," the baker told Joseph, "that I was carrying three baskets of food to Pharaoh on my head. Hungry birds swarmed down and snatched up all the food from the baskets."

When Joseph realized the awful meaning of this dream, he didn't want to tell the chief baker about it, but he knew he would have to speak out what God had given him the wisdom to know.

"I don't like to tell you this," he said to the chief baker, "but within three days Pharaoh will hang you, and birds will pick the flesh from your bones." (Verse 19.)

Probably the two men didn't completely believe what Joseph had told them. But three days later was Pharaoh's birthday. It was a day of feasting and great celebration, and on which certain prisoners from the king's jail were brought forth and pardoned.

On that day the chief butler was brought up from the dungeon, given a pardon and restored to his former office—just as Joseph said would happen.

On that same day the chief baker was brought up from his cell and publicly hanged out where the vultures came to eat his flesh—just as Joseph said would happen.

When Joseph told Pharaoh's chief butler what would happen, he asked the butler to remember him when the butler was again in Pharaoh's court.

"If you get the chance, please tell your king that I am an innocent Hebrew prisoner who has been held here unfairly for a long time," said Joseph. "Perhaps he will free me." (Verse 14.)

But the chief butler forgot all about speaking to the king for Joseph. (Verse 23.)

Joseph Leaves Prison

Two more years passed, and one night Pharaoh dreamed two dreams which troubled him. He believed they held some meaning he should know, and therefore sent for men who were supposed to have magic powers to understand strange signs and unusual dreams and visions. Pharaoh told his dreams to these men, but none was able to give any meanings of them.

It happened that the chief butler was serving the king when this took place. Suddenly he remembered Joseph. He realized that he would find great favor with the king if he could direct one to Pharaoh who could show the meanings of the dreams. He told Pharaoh about Joseph, and how he had been able to give the true meanings of the dreams of the chief butler and the chief baker. (Gen. 41:9-13.)

Very shortly guards came to Joseph and told him to prepare to meet Pharaoh.

This was the chance for which Joseph had prayed so long! He was escorted up out of the dungeon and to a place where he could shave and dress in better clothes to meet the ruler of Egypt. Thus prepared, he was taken before the throne. (Verse 14.)

"I have dreamed disturbing dreams," said Pharaoh to Joseph. "I want to know their meanings. I have been told that you have the power to interpret dreams."

"I don't have that power," Joseph answered. "But God does, and He will give you an answer through me."

Pharaoh probably wondered at that remark. However, the king was anxious to try any method of getting what he wanted.

"I dreamed that I stood by the Nile river and saw seven fine, fat cows come up out of the water," said Pharaoh to Joseph. "As these cows fed upon the heavy grass at the edge of the stream, seven thin cows came up from the river and ate up the seven fat cows. But even so, the thin cows were just as thin as they had been before eating."

"I dreamed again, and saw seven plump heads of grain growing out of one stalk. Seven thin heads of grain, looking as though they had been withered by a hot east wind, came out of the stalk and ate up the seven plump heads of grain."

"I have told these things to other men who claim to be wise in such matters," Pharaoh added, "but none has any answer. Now what do you say?"

"I have an answer," Joseph replied. Both dreams have the same meaning, the reason being that God wanted to make doubly sure that His warning would be heeded. The seven fat cows and the seven plump heads of grain mean that the next seven years will bring very good flocks and crops to Egypt. There will be far more food than people can eat. The thin cows and the withered heads of grain mean that right after the seven good years there will come seven years of famine. Your herds will die because there will be so little grow out of the ground. It will be such a miserable time that people will even fail to remember the seven good years."

Pharaoh and those around him stared in stunned silence at the young foreigner who had come up from the prison dungeons to tell what would happen to their nation in the next fourteen years. There was something about his earnest manner that caused them to believe him, though they didn't want to believe what he had said about a famine.

"If what you have told me is true," Pharaoh finally said, "then perhaps you have the wisdom to know what my country should do when the famine comes."

"You should choose a wise and capable man to take charge of matters during the seven years of plenty," Joseph replied. "That man should carry out a gigantic plan to store up a large part of the crops while they are good. Then, when the seven lean years arrive, there will be enough food for all." (Gen. 41:33-36.)

After this Pharaoh and his officers and advisors gathered to talk over what Joseph had said.

"I believe this young Hebrew is being guided by God," Pharaoh said. "If what he says is true, it would be foolish not to act by his suggestions."

There was a chorus of voices agreeing with the king, not only because he was the king, but because all those who had heard Joseph looked upon him with awe and with a certain respect.

"If I should choose a man to take care of matters having to do with a coming famine, what better man is there than this Joseph?" Pharaoh asked.

Joseph Appointed Ruler

Again there was a chorus of agreeing voices. But even if Pharaoh's advisors hadn't agreed, Pharaoh probably would have decided that Joseph was the person he wanted. The Egyptian king on the throne at this time was wiser than some who ruled before him and after him. Like a good king should, he wanted to do what was best for his land and his people.

When next Joseph was brought before Pharaoh, he received a great surprise for a person who had spent so much time in the king's dungeon.

"From now on," said Pharaoh to Joseph, "because your God has given you so much wisdom, you will be the ruler over my house and over all Egypt. Though I will be over you, your word will be law in all my realm." (Gen. 41:39-41.)

That was how God answered the prayers of Joseph, one who was living by His laws. Not only was Joseph released from prison, but he was made second in rank to the powerful Pharaoh of Egypt. He was given a ring for stamping important government papers, a gold neck chain to show his very high position, expensive clothes and a costly carriage that was second only to Pharaoh's. Besides, he was given beautifully furnished rooms to live in and servants to take care of all his needs.

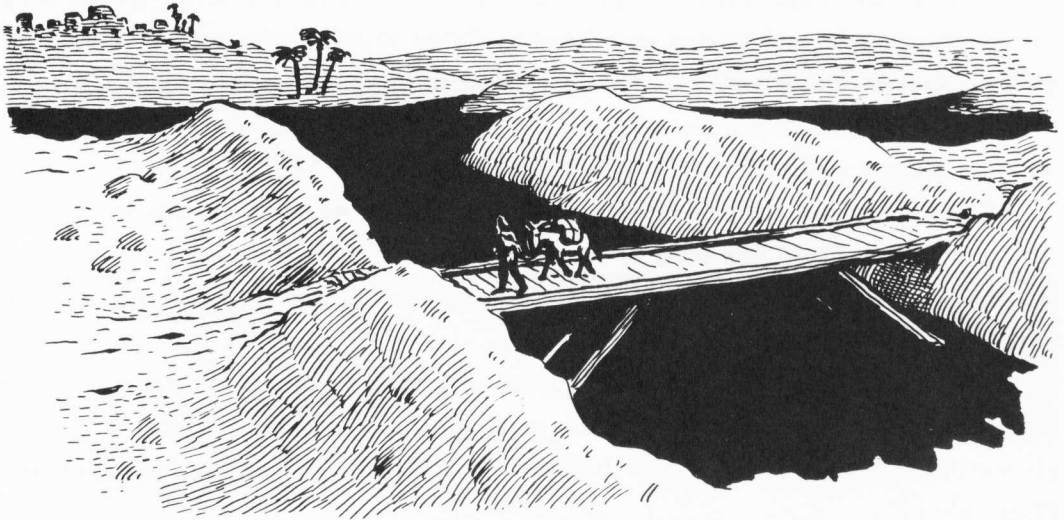
From the time Joseph was sold as a slave at the age of seventeen, he had come up in thirteen years, now at the age of thirty, to be the real ruler of Egypt—the most powerful nation on earth at that time!

To further show his royal esteem for Joseph, Pharaoh arranged for him to meet Asenath, the daughter of a high official of Egypt. Joseph quickly grew fond of Asenath, and they were married. (Genesis 41:45.)

For a long time after that, Joseph traveled around Egypt. Everywhere he went, he saw wonderful crops and fat herds. It was clear that God was carrying out His promise to bless the nation with the best that could come out of the ground.

Most of Egypt was usually dry, sandy desert. Without water from the Nile river,

that land would never have amounted to very much. But during those seven years of plenty, there was much more rain than usual, so that areas far from the Nile gave most unusual crops.



Under Joseph's direction, the Egyptians dug giant ditches to convey water to arid regions.

Joseph Orders Granaries Built

After finding out where the best places for grain storage should be, Joseph gave orders for many granaries to be built in various regions of the nation. Later, he started a system by which a fifth of the crops was gathered to store in the granaries. So much grain was stored up in the seven years that all record was lost of just how much was taken in. (Verse 48.)

Meanwhile, Joseph became the father of two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. His life was now so full that he almost forgot the years he had spent in Pharaoh's dungeon. (Verse 50.)

Seven good years passed. The next year there was a gradual change in the weather. Showers came further and further apart. Streams became smaller. Hot east winds from the desert blew in more often, and with each one the green fields turned a little bit more to yellow. Within a few months it was plain that crops were going to fail.

Joseph's prophecy was being proved. The time of famine had arrived!

Before long there were reports that in some regions of the nation the people no

longer had grain for their flocks or for bread. Then Joseph sent out orders to begin to open up the store houses.

As demands from the people for grain grew greater, it was plain that if the big crops hadn't been stored, probably many tens of thousands of Egyptians would have starved even in the first year or two of the famine period. (Verse 54.)

The famine wasn't only in Egypt. It was everywhere, and so it wasn't long before other peoples and nations were begging Egypt to sell them some of the stored grain. Joseph gave orders to sell to all who were in great need. (Verses 55-57.)

Jacob Sends His Sons to Egypt for Food

Back in Canaan, Joseph's father, Jacob, was one of many thousands worried by the lack of rain. There was little or no grass for the flocks. Continued dry weather would mean the animals would die. There would then be neither grain nor meat to eat.

Jacob had heard reports that the Egyptians had grain to sell. Therefore he sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy grain. He kept Benjamin, his youngest son, with him. He remembered all too well how he had lost young Joseph by sending him on a trip. (Gen. 42:1-4.)

Taking camels and donkeys to bring back the loads they hoped to buy, the ten sons journeyed down into Egypt to find that they should bring their request for grain to the governor, who was next in power to Pharaoh. In due time they were brought before the governor. Not having any idea that he was the brother they had sold for a slave many years before, they bowed low to him.

Joseph knew them as soon as they came before him, however. When they bowed down before him, he remembered the dream he had dreamed as a lad—that his brothers were bowing down to him. At last that prophetic dream had come true. (Verse 6.)

Joseph wanted to welcome them and tell them who he was. But instead, he decided to be harsh to them for their own good!

"Where are you from and why are you here?" he asked sternly.

"We have come from the land of Canaan to buy food," they replied.

"Don't ask me to believe that!" Joseph said, frowning. "I think you are spies. Probably you secretly think that Egypt is weak because of the famine, and you have come to see if your armies can crush us!"

"Oh, but we are not spies, sir!" they quickly replied in worried tones, as though they expected royal guards to seize them. "We are all the sons of one man who needs food. In fact, our father had twelve sons. The youngest is with him now. The other is dead." (Verses 9-13.)

Joseph wanted to ask about his own young brother whom he hadn't heard about for so long, but he had to remain stern.

"I still think you are spies," he said. "It might be wise to keep nine of you in prison and send one of you to bring back this young brother you claim you have. That might convince me you aren't spies!"

The ten brothers stood helplessly before Joseph while he continued frowning at them.

"On second thought," said Joseph, "I believe it would be better to send you all to prison to give you a chance to think matters over and decide to tell the truth."

"But we are telling the truth!" they called to Joseph as guards roughly led them away to a dungeon. (Verse 17.)



Joseph's ten brothers were filled with fear when they were told that they would be jailed.

Three Days Later

Three days later Joseph had his brothers brought before him again. "Do you still say you are not spies?" he asked.

"We are not spies," they chorused. "We have come only for grain."

"You will get your grain," Joseph surprised them by saying.

The brothers looked at each other in relief. It looked as though this governor had decided to believe them.

"However," Joseph added sternly, "one of you will stay here in prison until this young brother you speak of is brought to me!"

The brothers' faces fell when they heard this. Each feared he would be the one to be jailed.

"This trouble has come upon us because of that terrible thing we did to our poor brother Joseph," they murmured fearfully among themselves.

"I told you then it was a terrible thing to treat him the way you did," Reuben spoke up. "Now we may pay for it."

All the talk between Joseph, who spoke in the Egyptian language and his brothers, who spoke only in Hebrew, had been through an interpreter—one who spoke both languages. (Verse 23.) But Joseph still remembered his native tongue, and when he heard his brothers talking excitedly among themselves, he understood every word. He felt so sorry for his brothers, even though they had been wicked, that he turned his head from them and wept.

But Joseph knew he would have to act harshly.

"The soldiers will now take one of you to prison," he told them.

Joseph looked slowly over the tense faces before him. Finally his eyes settled on Simeon, the one who had suggested killing him when he, Joseph, was only seventeen years old. "Take that man to the dungeon!" Joseph snapped, pointing to Simeon.

Egyptian soldiers seized Simeon, bound him with chains, and dragged him away, leaving the other nine brothers very worried. It was plainer and plainer to them that God was having a direct hand in their affairs.

"Leave now," Joseph told them. "You will be told where to pick up your grain and how much to pay."

The Brothers Hurriedly Leave Egypt

Later, the brothers bought the grain, loaded it on their animals, and gladly left the place. At nightfall, they stopped at a lonely spot where their animals could be fed and sheltered for the night. When the animals became hungry one of the brothers opened his sack to feed the animals. First thing he saw in the sack was a bag of coins—the exact amount he had paid for the grain he was carrying!

"It's the money I paid for my part of the grain!" he exclaimed to his surprised brothers.

"This is not good," one of them said. "It could be a plot to arrest you for not paying for the grain."

"They could arrest all of us if they could prove that one of us is a thief," said another. "I can't help feeling that God is beginning to deal harshly with us because of the wrong things we have done, especially for what we did to Joseph!" (Verses 25-28.)

The rest of the trip was not a happy one, because with each step the brothers feared that Egyptian soldiers would appear on the horizon behind them. But they returned to their father safely.

Jacob was happy to receive the grain. But he was most unhappy to learn, when his sons told him what had happened, that Simeon was being held prisoner and that the Governor of Egypt demanded to see Benjamin.



When the brother looked in his travel sack, he found a bag of coins—the exact amount he had paid for his grain!

CHAPTER TWELVE

“I AM JOSEPH”

JACOB'S sons had happily returned loaded with grain from Egypt. But suddenly a worrisome thing happened.

When the sons began to take the grain out of their sacks, each one was shocked to find a bag of money in the very top of his sack—the same amount each had paid the Egyptians for his part of the grain. When Jacob saw this, he was worried lest all the brothers be branded as thieves and taken as prisoners back into Egypt.

“I have already lost two sons—Joseph and Simeon,” said Jacob. “Now you want me to hand Benjamin over to you. I won't do that because I don't trust you to return him to me.”

Reuben, the brother who had wanted to spare Joseph from his brother's cruel plans, spoke out to his father:

“Let me take Benjamin to Egypt so that we may prove ourselves and rescue Simeon from prison,” he said. “If I don't return with Benjamin, you may kill my two sons.”

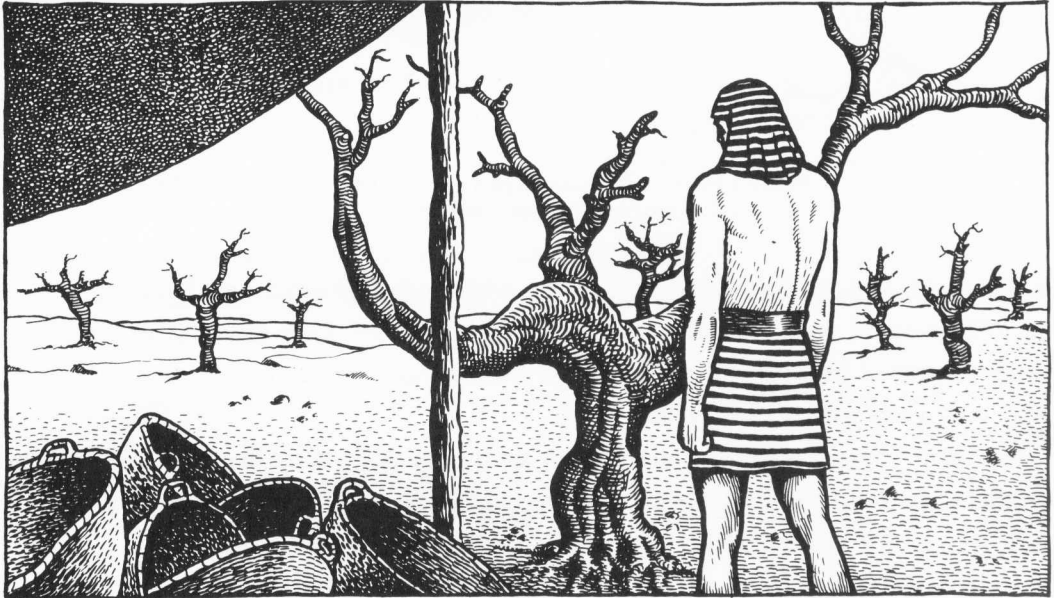
“Do not make foolish promises,” said Jacob. “I do not intend to send Benjamin away. If anything should happen to him, I would die of sorrow.”

The Famine Grows Worse

Months passed, and the famine became worse. Like most other people, Jacob didn't know that there would be seven years without enough rain to make good crops. Every day he prayed for rain, and each day he looked forward to a weather

change that would bring fresh, green grass and good crops. But God had a plan in mind, and He set about carrying it out, even though those who followed Him prayed for a change.

At last the food supply which they had bought from Egypt became very low. Then Jacob could do only one thing—tell his sons that they should return to Egypt after more grain. (Gen. 43:1-2.)



Dry east winds blowing steadily year after year turned the once green fields and orchards into vast areas of yellow despair.

"There is no use returning for more grain unless we take along our brother, Benjamin," said Judah respectfully to Jacob. "We were told by the governor that he would not see us unless we could prove that we were not spies by bringing our youngest brother to him." (Verse 3.)

"You should never have mentioned Benjamin," Jacob said.

"We had to do it to answer the questions asked of us," replied the brothers.

Then Judah said, "Now if you want grain, let Benjamin go with us. If anything happens to him, you can blame me for it." (Verses 8-9.)

"If it must be like that, then take him," Jacob finally agreed. "But take also some gifts for the governor of Egypt. My servants will prepare packages of honey, spices, ointments, perfumes, and the very best dates and nuts from our country. Then also take back the money that was returned to you in your sacks as well as a sum with which to buy more grain. Offer all of it to the governor. I trust that God



Ten of Jacob's sons again journeyed across the parched land to the capital city of Egypt.

will be with you, and that you will return with both Benjamin and Simeon.”

Once again ten of Jacob's sons went to Egypt, and once again, after certain arrangements had been made, ten of Jacob's sons stood before the governor of Egypt, who was really another of Jacob's sons.

When Joseph, governor of the land under the Egyptian Pharaoh, saw that his brothers had returned at last with a young man who might be his young brother, he was very happy and excited. However, he didn't show his true feelings.

“Bring these men to my house and prepare a very special noon meal for them,” he told his chief servant. (Verse 16.)

The servant took the ten sons of Jacob to Joseph's house. But they weren't sure why they had been brought to such a fine place, and they began to think that they were there to receive some sort of punishment for the things they had done that were wrong.

Therefore they told Joseph's chief servant all about their first trip to Egypt for grain, and how their money had mysteriously been returned to them. They showed this chief servant that they wanted to return the money that had somehow been returned to them, and that they had more money with which to buy more grain. (Verses 20-22.)

“Don't worry about these things,” said Joseph's chief servant to them. “Make yourselves comfortable until my master comes.”

Simeon Released From Prison

While the brothers waited, they were given the chance to bathe, and their animals were fed. Then, for a pleasant surprise, their brother Simeon, who had been a prisoner

in Egypt for about a year, was brought in to them. (Verse 23.)

About noon Joseph arrived at his house with some high-ranking Egyptians. The brothers were presented to him according to the Egyptian rules of etiquette of those times. The brothers bowed low to him, and humbly presented to Joseph the gifts they had brought from Canaan. Joseph thanked them and asked about their father.

"He is still alive and well," was the reply.

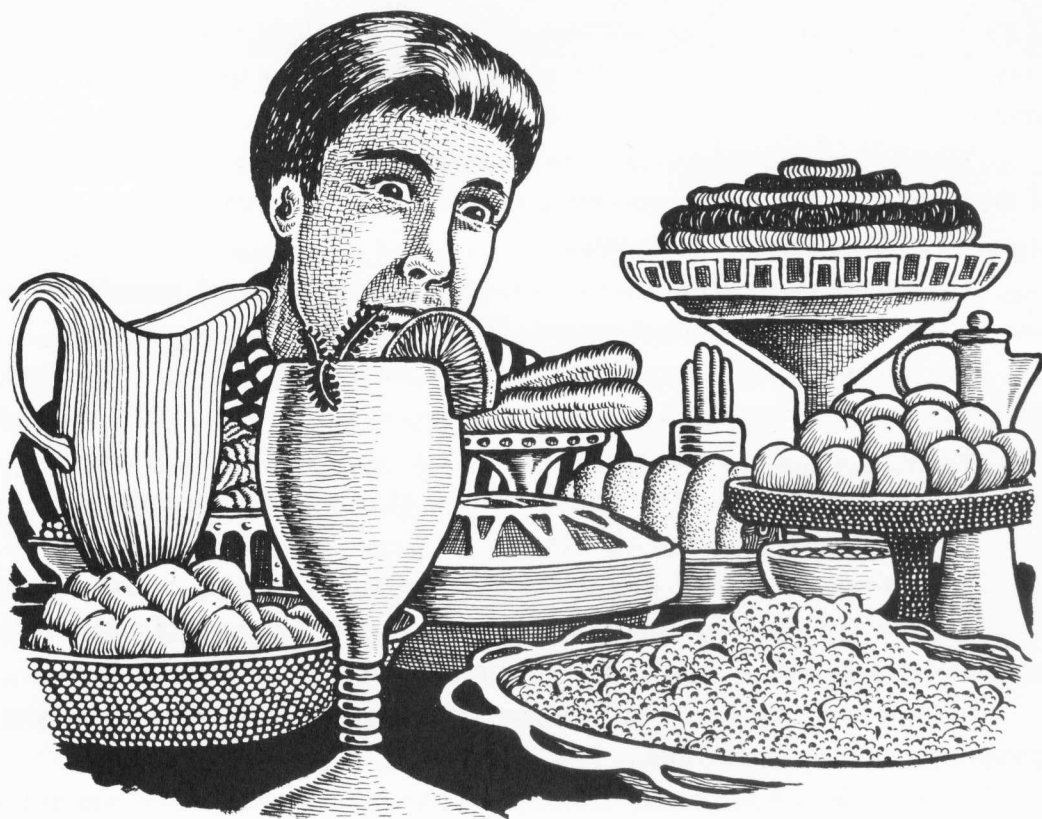
"And is this the brother you told me about?" Joseph asked, looking at Benjamin.

"It is," they answered. "This is Benjamin, the young brother who should help prove that we did not come to Egypt as spies."

Joseph was so glad to meet Benjamin that he almost wept. In fact, he had to excuse himself and go to another room, where he broke out in tears. He returned shortly. No one could know how he felt in standing before eleven brothers who did not know that he was their brother. (Verses 29-31.)

Joseph then ordered the meal to be brought in for all. With so many good

Having just come through the famine-stricken land, Benjamin stared with wonderment at the many kinds of food placed before him.



things to eat and drink before them, the brothers felt greatly honored, and forgot their fears and worries. Young Benjamin was more honored than anyone, however. Joseph secretly gave orders to his servants that Benjamin should receive special treatment. As a result, the servants who served brought five times as many kinds and amount of food to Benjamin's table as were brought to the tables of any of the Hebrews and Egyptians gathered in the great dining room. (Verse 34.)

Of course Benjamin couldn't eat nor drink all that was set before him. But he did look with wonder at this governor of Egypt who gave him such special favor. No doubt Benjamin would have been much more awed if he could have learned that this governor was his brother!

Brothers Prepare to Return to Canaan

Very early next morning the brothers set out for Canaan with as much grain as their animals could carry. They were happy with the way things had turned out. Simeon had been let out of prison to come home with them, they had enjoyed a meal with the governor of the land and now they were on their way home with grain after proving that they weren't spies.

Later in the morning they noticed a cloud of dust off to the south. As it grew larger, they could see that a band of men on camels was swiftly coming their way. They were surprised when the leader of the band turned out to be Joseph's chief servant.

"Why have you treated your host, the governor, so badly?" the chief servant asked of the brothers as they halted, wondering why they had been overtaken.

"What do you mean?" they asked.

"The governor's special silver cup is missing—the one he used yesterday when you ate with him," said the chief servant. "He thinks one of you has stolen it."

"But that isn't so," the brothers argued. "We are not thieves. We brought back the money that was returned to us on our first trip to Egypt. Why should we steal now? Search us, and if you find your master's silver cup in our belongings, we promise to become your servants. What's more, the one of us who is hiding the cup you speak of should die for stealing it." (Verse 9.)

The brothers meant what they said, but at the same time they felt that there was no chance that the silver cup would be found on them. Not a one of them would have dared to take such a valuable article from the powerful governor of Egypt.

"So let it be as you have said," said the chief servant, and he ordered his men to search the brothers' belongings.

To the unpleasant surprise of the brothers, the money for the grain was again



Joseph's servants looked into Benjamin's sack, and there was the missing silver cup!

found in their sacks! And, what was worse, the valuable silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack! (Verse 12.)

In miserable silence the brothers packed their belongings back on their animals, mounted their donkeys, and escorted by those who pursued them, rode back to meet Joseph again. When Joseph appeared, they fell down before him.

"What are you trying to put over on me?" Joseph sternly asked. "Don't you know that I have the power to see into the evil deeds of men?"

"What can we say?" asked Judah, the brother who had told his father that he would surely look out for Benjamin.

"There is no way of proving to you that we are not guilty," Judah went on. "The truth is that we are not guilty of these things you point out to us. But we do now admit that we have done some wicked things in the past, and we feel that it is now God's will that we be punished for those things. If that punishment means that we become your slaves, so be it." (Verse 16.)

"I don't think it need be that way," Joseph said. "I ask only that Benjamin become my servant. The rest of you may return to your father."

Perhaps some of the brothers thought of this as a very fair way of settling matters. But Judah felt that he should make a last great effort to get the governor to set Benjamin free. He reminded Joseph of all that had happened. He pointed out that Jacob had almost died of sorrow when his son Joseph had become lost, and that Jacob was certain to die of sorrow if his youngest son, Benjamin, failed to return to Canaan.

Joseph was so moved by Judah's plea that he could no longer keep his feelings under control. From the very first, Joseph had treated them harshly because he knew of their sins, and he wanted them to know that they would have to suffer because they had acted wickedly. He had returned their grain money twice to keep them in a sober state of mind. Lastly, he had the silver cup put in Benjamin's sack for the same reason—and also so that Benjamin would have to be returned to him—at least for a while. (Gen. 44:1-2.)

Joseph Reveals Who He Is

Now, at last, Joseph was overcome, and could no longer act the part of a stern ruler. He ordered the Egyptian officers from his house so that he could be alone with his brothers. (Gen. 45:1.)

"I am Joseph, your brother," he tearfully told them, speaking in his native Hebrew language. "Is Jacob, my father, still alive and well?"

Instead of answering him, the brothers only moved backward, staring in surprise and unbelief.

"Come near me," Joseph said. "Look at me closely, and you should recognize the young brother you sold to Arabian slave traders years ago." (Verse 4.)

The brothers kept on staring in unbelief. Perhaps some of them remembered Joseph's dream of their bowing down to him.

"Don't be unhappy or angry because I remind you of the things you have done," Joseph said. "God caused these things to happen. He opened the way for me to be taken to Egypt and gave me wisdom to see into the future. It was for the good of many people, including you and our father, Jacob, that God directed me to prepare for a famine. Five years without harvest are yet to come. Now, as one who has power even to tell Pharaoh what to do in these matters, I want you to go back to your father and tell him all that has happened. Tell him that I am governor of all Egypt under Pharaoh, and that I want him and his family and his flocks and all of you and your possessions to come down to Egypt to live while the famine lasts. If all of you don't come down here, you will probably lose all that you have.

Joseph then lovingly embraced his young brother Benjamin and after that all

of his other brothers. This caused his awe-struck brothers to lose their fear of this man they had thought of only as the stern governor of Egypt. They began to talk as only brothers talk among themselves. It turned out to be a happy time for all of them—especially because Joseph was so willing to forgive them for the wrong things most of them had done to him.

It wasn't long before Pharaoh heard about Joseph's brothers. Because of his great regard for Joseph, Pharaoh was pleased to tell him to tell his brothers that the king also wanted them to return to Egypt, but that first he wanted them to return to Canaan in grander style than that in which they had arrived.

Pharaoh told Joseph to give them carriages to take back to Canaan. It was Pharaoh's idea that the mothers and children would be much better off riding in the carriages than they would be riding on swaying camels or jogging donkeys.

Joseph then saw that his brothers received a number of carriages and plenty of donkeys to pull them. Also he gave them new clothes. To his brother Benjamin, whom he especially favored, he gave many more clothes and quite a sum of money. To Jacob, his father, he sent ten donkeys loaded with good things to eat from Egypt, including corn, preserved foods and fancy breads. (Verses 22-23.)

Besides these things, Joseph's brothers took the bags of grain they had been sent for in the first place.

"Don't let your good fortune get you into any trouble on the way back home," Joseph warned. "Go straight back to Canaan and bring my father back down here."

With this advice, the governor of Egypt sent his brothers away to Canaan.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SEVEN YEARS OF FAMINE

SEVERAL days after leaving Egypt, Joseph's brothers arrived safely at their father's home in Canaan. When the people of the household saw the caravan approaching, some of them rode out to meet it. Jacob waited at his tent, hopeful that he would have the strength to bear up if news were brought to him that any of his sons had failed to return.

Suddenly he was aware of an excited group of men approaching his tent. One by one he recognized their faces. There was his beloved youngest, Benjamin! And there was Simeon, free from the Egyptian prison after two years!

All eleven sons had returned!

"Thank God for bringing you back!" Jacob exclaimed. "But there is still one of you I shall never see again."

Joseph Is Alive

"You will see him, father!" one of the sons shouted. "Joseph is alive! We found him in Egypt!"

Jacob heard the words, but they were too much to believe.

"Don't make up cruel lies like that," he frowned.

"But it is true," the other sons chorused. "Our brother, Joseph, is none other than the governor of Egypt, next in power to Pharaoh!"

Jacob gazed unhappily at his sons, disappointed that they would approach him, after their long journey, with such ridiculous tales. But as he looked from one eager

face to another, something startled him. He knew his sons, and he began to see now that they were speaking the truth. It was too much for poor old Jacob, and he fell in a faint.



When Jacob finally realized that his son Joseph was alive, he fainted before his other sons.

After he felt better, his sons told him all that had happened to them on their trip to Egypt, and how they had brought wagons with which to take Jacob and his family back to Egypt. (Genesis 45:27.)

"I just can't believe it," Jacob said. "It is too much to ask me to believe."

"Would you believe we are telling the truth about Joseph if we show you the Egyptian carriages?" the sons asked.

"I would," Jacob replied.

They had the brightly painted carriages pulled up before Jacob's tent. When he saw them, he was almost speechless. To most of the people in those days, something with four wheels was as amazing as a rocket ship would be to people in these last days.

Then, when Jacob saw the bags of precious grain and the gifts sent to him by the king of Egypt, he no longer doubted his sons.

"I want to see my son, Joseph," he said. "Let us prepare to go to Egypt."

Jacob was one hundred and thirty years old at the time, but the mere thought of seeing Joseph again, whom he had thought of as dead, renewed his strength.

Jacob Journeys to Egypt

Before long Jacob and his sons and all their families and their servants and their herds were moving southward. The carriages Pharaoh had sent were of great help. It was much easier for the older people and the children to ride in them than it would

have been for them to walk or to perch on the swaying backs of camels.

On the way to Egypt the caravan came to Beer-sheba, where Abraham and Isaac had encamped many years before, and where they had been in touch with God. Jacob remembered that God had told Abraham not to go down into Egypt. Therefore Jacob wondered if God would frown on this trip to Egypt. Trusting that he would be shown what to do, Jacob offered sacrifices to God. That night God spoke to Jacob in a vision.

"Don't be afraid to go into Egypt," a voice said. "As I promised before, a great nation will come from you. I will protect you on this trip to Egypt. You will meet your son, Joseph, and you will be with him for a time. Then I will bring you back to the land of Canaan." (Gen. 46:1-4.)

After that, Jacob knew it was right to proceed to Egypt. If God had warned him not to go, probably he would have turned back, even though it might have meant that he never would have seen Joseph again. Also, it would have meant facing great famine in the next five years. But Jacob had learned that the best way, no matter how bad it might look at times, was to obey God.

On entering Egypt, Jacob sent Judah on ahead to announce to Joseph the arrival of the caravan from Canaan. When Joseph heard that his father was approaching, he summoned some



Jacob stared in awe at the sturdy wheels of the brightly painted Egyptian wagons.

of his men and set out in his horse-drawn chariot to meet Jacob's approaching caravan.

It is not easy to imagine the joy of a father when he meets a favorite son whom he has not seen for many years—especially a son he has given up for dead. It was a tearful meeting, but the tears were of happiness.

"I have at last seen you again," Jacob told Joseph. "Now my life is so full that I am ready to die."

But Jacob was to live for several more years.



On the way to Egypt, Jacob received word from God, in a vision, that it was right to make the trip.

Joseph Tells Pharaoh

"I shall send word to the king that you are here," Joseph told his father and his brothers. "Pharaoh will want you to appear before him. When you do, and when he asks you what you do for a living, tell him that you tend cattle and sheep. Most Egyptians do not like those who herd flocks because cattle and sheep are sacred to Egyptians, and shepherds often come from tribes of other lands where men sacrifice these animals."

Joseph went to Pharaoh to tell the king about the arrival of his father and brothers. Pharaoh had five of the brothers brought before him. When he found that they were herders of cattle and sheep, he told Joseph to let them settle in a good part of the nation known as the land of Goshen. This was just what Joseph hoped would happen. Goshen, by which they had entered Egypt, was in a region where there was ordinarily good pasture land, and where there weren't many Egyptians who might trouble outsiders who weren't of their religion.

Joseph later brought his father before Pharaoh, who treated Jacob with royal honor and respect. When Pharaoh asked his age, Jacob replied, "I have been moving about over the land for one hundred and thirty years. Even so, I am not old compared to my fathers before me. Their lives were much longer."

After the meeting with the king, Joseph saw to it that all his people who had come down from Canaan with their servants and all of their flocks were settled in the land of Goshen, which was the rich region of Egypt nearest Canaan.



Joseph went before Pharaoh to tell him that his family had arrived in Egypt.

Meanwhile, the results of the famine became worse. People had to pay for the grain they got from the storehouses, and before long they had no more money. The people had spent all their savings in luxurious living in the seven years of plenty!

Joseph sent out word to the nation that all kinds of farm animals—cattle, horses, goats, sheep, donkeys and camels—would be accepted by the king instead of money. Thousands of flocks were brought in to exchange for grain. Then it was up to Pharaoh's men to take care of the animals, many of which were returned to their owners after the famine.

But before long the people were again begging for grain with which to make bread. This time, they had no way of paying for it except by turning their lands over to Pharaoh or by becoming his slaves. Joseph therefore ordered that all of the lands of the people of Egypt be bought to become the property of Pharaoh. In return, the people were brought to live in the cities where the grain was stored, and were given grain to last them through the lean years. The only land that wasn't bought was that belonging to the priests of the Egyptian pagan religion.

The problem of food became greater with each passing day. But Joseph believed that each day meant they were that much nearer the end of hard times. At last he made

arrangements to return the people to their farms.

"Pharaoh now owns your lands," Joseph told the people. "But we will give you seed with which to plant those lands. Out of all your crops, you must give the king one fifth. The other four parts will be yours."

The people were very happy with this plan. They were thankful that they had been saved from starvation, even at the cost of losing all their possessions.

At last the ground was seeded for the crops the people hoped would come up well after seven years of famine. And just as Joseph had foretold, the famine ended in seven years, and in the eighth year abundant rains came to bring on much good grain from the land again.

Jacob lived seventeen years in Egypt. During that time his sons' families greatly increased in number. These people became known as Israelites, because God had given their forefather Jacob the name Israel.

When it seemed to Jacob that his time had come to die, he called Joseph to him and asked Joseph to promise that he would bury him in Canaan rather than in Egypt. Joseph promised, and this helped Jacob to see that God would carry out His promise that Jacob would return to Canaan.

Jacob Adopts Joseph's Children As His Own

Joseph's duties as governor of the land took him from his father. Later, word came to Joseph that Jacob might die at any time. Taking his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph hurried to him.

"I have something very important to tell you before I die," Jacob told Joseph. "God spoke to me in Canaan long ago. He told me that a great nation would come from me, and that the land of Canaan would be given to those of my family who live after me. I want your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to be included with my sons in the promises God made to me. I want to adopt them to make sure that they remain part of our family instead of mixing with the Egyptians."

Joseph brought his two sons in before the bed where Jacob lay. But Jacob's sight was so dim that he didn't know who the two sons were until Joseph told him.

"Little did I know that I would ever see you again," Jacob said to Joseph as he fondly hugged his two grandchildren. "But God has treated me with great mercy, and now I am seeing even your children."

Jacob asked God's blessing on Joseph. Then he put his left hand on Manasseh's head and his right hand on Ephraim's head, and was about to ask God's blessing on the young men. Thinking that Jacob was too blind to see what he was doing, Joseph removed his father's left hand from Manasseh's head.

"Manasseh is the older," Joseph said, "and it is the custom that the right hand should be upon the first-born."

"That is ordinarily so," replied Jacob. "But I am putting my right hand upon the younger one's head. A great nation will come from Manasseh—the greatest on earth. But a commonwealth of nations will come from Ephraim."

Jacob then asked God to bless his grandsons by causing mighty and wealthy nations to come from them—nations that many centuries later would bear the name of Israel. (Genesis 48:10-19.)

Knowing that his death was near, Jacob called all his sons to him.

"I want you to know about the kind of nation each of you is starting," he told them.

A Prophecy for Today!

Jacob was inspired by God in what he said, for he told each son a little of what each vast tribe would be like in the far future.

He had the most to say about Joseph, whom he said would spread out into the wealthiest nations in the world. Now, thousands of years later, we learn through the Bible that Joseph was the father of our own English-speaking nations. When we read what is foretold to happen to Ephraim, we know that it means Great Britain. And when we read what is to happen to Manasseh, we know it means our nation—the United States of America! However, these are facts that God hid from us for a long, long time. Only in recent years, just as He said He would do, has He let us understand these things.

Jacob died right after speaking to his sons. Joseph ordered Egyptian physicians to prepare his father's body for burial by an Egyptian method known as embalming. This took many days. Then followed a long period of mourning by the Egyptians.

At last Joseph and his brothers and their families, except their very young children, along with a great number of Egyptian officials, soldiers and servants started off with Jacob's body for Canaan. It was a trip of three hundred miles, and therefore this must have been one of the greatest funeral processions in history. (Gen. 50:7-13.)

This great ceremony for Jacob wasn't just because the Egyptians held Jacob in such high regard. It was mostly because they thought of his son, Joseph, as a national hero because he had saved their nation from starvation.

The Egyptians traveled along with the procession except for the last part of the trip, which was into a mountainous region where was the field of Machpelah. It was here that Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah were buried in a cave.

Jacob lived one hundred and forty-seven years. Some might have thought of him

as a very plain, unimportant man. But he had a very necessary part in God's plan to bring into being the great nation of Israel, the nation God chose to help Him in a wonderful plan.



Jacob asked God to bless his grandsons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

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